

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2008)

Project Ref. No.	14-061
Project Title	Important Bird Area Conservation and Capacity Building in Central Asia
Country(ies)	Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan
UK Organisation	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), UK
Collaborator(s)	Kazakhstan: The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK) Uzbekistan: The Uzbekistan Zoological Society (UZS) Turkmenistan: Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan / Turkmenistan Society for Nature Conservation
Project Leader	<i>Michael Brombacher</i>
Report date	31 st October 2008
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 3
Project website	www.acbk.kz and www.iba.uz

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up).

The period from April to September 08 was characterized by the completion of the IBA book publications in English and the national languages. Prior to this, the inventory in the project countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan was completed with 219 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified covering more than 21 Million hectares of steppe, semi-desert, deserts, large wetland systems and mountains important for many globally threatened and near threatened bird and other taxa species. The publications have been produced as high quality and comprehensive books featuring not only site descriptions and maps but also general information about the conservation situation of the countries and also the general conservation strategy to sustainably protect IBAs. Each book is available in a Russian and English version. They have been presented to the public during BirdLife's Global Partnership meeting in Buenos Aires/ Argentina, which was held recently from 22nd to 27th September 2008 and were well received since one of the most significant gaps of the global IBA map now is closed.

The books will now be launched nationally and talks with governments and other national partners on the long-term protection of the sites have already started. The project partner in Kazakhstan the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) already managed to get the first IBA with more than 50,000 hectares into the governmental Protected Areas Development Plan with the site expected to be designated as Nature Reserve in 2010/2011. The IBA is part of a network of proposed Protected Areas of the ACBK-led Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (ADCI) which is aimed to long-term protect the world's least protected habitat – steppes and has only just recently received funding from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) worth 2.2 Million USD.

Another success was the designation of two of the most important IBAs in the whole of Central Asia -the Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve and the Naurzum State Nature Reserve in Kazakhstan- as a UNESCO natural World Heritage Site this summer. As part of the Darwin funded IBA project the RSPB and the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK) have played an active and crucial role in the submission of the nomination

documents by the government of Kazakhstan. This decision by UNESCO is a crucial step towards the conservation of these IBAs and Protected Areas in the future.

ACBK itself has undergone a major growth on the back of the IBA inventory work. Founded only in 2004, they now have more than 27 full time-staff and are the leading conservation non-governmental conservation organisation in Kazakhstan. In 2007, ACBK applied to become a BirdLife Partner. Even more impressive is the network of now 6 students conservation/birdwatching clubs established as part of the Darwin project regularly reaching more than 100 students with some of them already working in professional conservation positions.

Since its foundation at the end of 2007, the co-project partner in Uzbekistan, the Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds (UzSPB) (which emerged from the Uzbekistan IBA Project) has undergone rapid growth and by September 2008 already has in excess of 100 members and 5 local groups. During the launch of the IBA books in Buenos Aires in September 2008, UzSPB also applied for BirdLife Partnership. A formal cooperation currently is underway with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Uzbekistan to assist with the management of a Protected Area in the Aral Sea region. This was discussed during a visit of the Uzbek delegation (UNDP, governmental representatives and UzSPB) at the RSPB in July 2008. Five Student clubs are supported throughout Uzbekistan.

The Turkmenistan IBA project, undertaken jointly with the RSPB and the Ministry of Nature Protection, has successfully developed a funding application to a new GEF/UNDP Programme which funds the implementation of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA). With 146,000 USD, two model Protected Areas will be further examined for their potential for sustainable resource use to generate income mechanisms for local communities - both of these sites are IBAs.

In addition to this, two new student birdwatching clubs have been established and the government has signalled that they would permit the registration of a non-governmental conservation organisation with the completion of the Turkmen language IBA book in spring 2009. This would be a huge success for conservation in general in this country.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Since the project was planned 3.5 years and commenced 3 years ago, the governmental language policy of the post-soviet state of Turkmenistan has formally changed. Then the most widely and common language used for any publication, and in particular in conservation and science, was Russian; this was the case until the beginning of 2008. Russian is still the most widely used language among the target group of the IBA books, and as such, the Russian language version is essential for the application of the book. Nevertheless, the project partner, the Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan, has asked for a Turkmen language version to also be produced. This will ensure the necessary political support required for long-term IBA conservation. Since a third language version (apart from Russian and English) is not budgeted the Ministry has offered to co-fund the production (translation costs) and the RSPB will cover the additional printing costs if third party sources cannot be secured. The Ministry ensured a high level launch of the book (involving the country's president) for April 2009. The book will also include a foreword of the president. All this together will increase the chances for future IBA conservation and will help the RSPB and the national project partners on the policy and advocacy level.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have

changes been made to the original agreement?

This has been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and the project has been extended for 6 months to complete this activity.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: yes , in...Oct./Nov.08

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: yes, in...Oct. 08

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

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If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half-year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with the Darwin Secretariat directly.

Please send your **completed form email** to Eilidh Young, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme at Darwin-Projects@ectf-ed.org.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 14-075 Darwin Half Year Report**