

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2010)

Project Ref No	Ref.: 18-004
Project Title	Altyn Dala: supporting ecosystem-scale conservation in Kazakhstan
Country(ies)	Kazakhstan
UK Organisation	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Collaborator(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK)• Karaganda State University• The North Kazakhstan State University of Petropavlovsk• The Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan• Frankfurt Zoological Society
Project Leader	<i>Michael Brombacher</i>
Report date	29 th October 2010
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	<i>HYR1</i>
Project website	<i>www.acbk.kz</i>

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 project generally is well on track and no changes to the objectives and activities have to be made. Project management structure was set up in April 2010, all equipment necessary for the first year of project implementation could be purchased in time.

A 5-day training seminar in Karazhar (Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve) on quantitative survey methods and sampling design has attracted a good number of high caliber students.

The 2010 field season could be used extensively: A botanist and two ornithologist teams conducted fieldwork in three survey areas of the Altyn Dala project territory.

Around 350 equally spaced line transects of 500m length were walked by two teams around eight settlements and in the centre of the Saiga calving area to evaluate the impact of livestock and Saiga grazing on bird and plant species abundance and distribution. Every individual of all bird species was counted, and Distance Sampling used to correct abundance estimates for varying detection probability and influence of varying observer skills. Vegetation was recorded in a sample area of 10x10 m centred on every bird transect. A complete species list was compiled and coverage estimated for every species separately. Additional parameters on vegetation structure, geomorphology, soil, livestock grazing, fire etc. were collected in a standardized way. Data on Saiga density in the calving areas were collected by counting all Saiga dropping and birth-places using Distance sampling along the 80 transects of 500 m length used to record birds.

In order to gather data for spatial modelling of distribution and abundance of key species in the Altyn Dala area, a long distance transect survey was conducted in June, intersecting the Altyn Dala area N-S and covering most ecozones. 10 study areas were selected equally spaced along the 400km-transect, and a total of 158 bird and vegetation transects was covered.

A further 117 transects in arable habitat (stubble and abandoned have been covered in early October to evaluate the impact of changes in farming on steppe bird populations.

A preliminary data screening suggests that

1) Grazing by domestic livestock has a strong impact on plant and birds species, with the current grazing practices leading to overgrazing around villages. The radius of the massively overgrazed area is however small (around 4-5 km around villages and 0.5-1km around livestock station), and given the extremely sparse human population in the ADCI area, any influence of grazing on wild plant and animal populations currently seems small.

2) There is a row of bird species profiting from overgrazing, such as Sociable Lapwing, Steppe Eagle. There are also a couple of examples of species driven out of heavily grazed areas, such as Calandra and Black Lark.

3) Saiga grazing seems to have a very moderate impact on plant species richness and abundance, and probably no influence on bird species richness and abundance. However, large raptors and vultures are present in higher densities in Saiga calving areas than in areas without Saiga.

The implementation of objective 1 "Status and trends of land use in all vegetation zones of the Altyn Dala established and socio-economic drivers of land use changes established" has also been started: In September, interviews were conducted with staff of regional governmental agencies, the directors of farming enterprises and small-scale animal husbandry stakeholders in order to evaluate future trends in arable farming and livestock breeding. First results suggest an intensification of agriculture over the next years, an ongoing increase in reclamation of abandoned land and a stagnation of the currently increasing trend in livestock numbers.

The project contributed to saiga satellite tracking (in collaboration with a number of other donors due to high costs of this work) by funding 20 neckcollars, which were attached in October. Using satellite telemetry will help to project to understand migration and significance of the species for the steppe/semi-desert habitat.

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.

The project has encountered a delay with starting research on small mammals since the proposed UK research counterpart had to withdraw from a trip on short notice due to health reasons. It is anticipated to conduct first surveys on small mammals in the next field season which should produce sufficient research results.

All field teams were set up in a way that an experienced researcher worked with 1-2 undergraduates which maximised training effects. Due to the start of the project just before the field season and huge logistical preparations needed, more formal and theoretical trainings (GIS, data analysis and statistics) will be conducted a bit later than planned originally over the winter season.

Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Formal change request submitted: no/yes, in.....(month/yr)

Received confirmation of change acceptance no/yes in.....(month/yr)

3. Do you expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No

If yes, and you wish to request a carryforward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible. It would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication of how much you expect this request might be for.

Estimated carryforward request: [REDACTED]

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

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 LTS International directly.

Please send your **completed form by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.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: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**

