

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

Project Ref No	18-015
Project Title	Addressing the illegal trade in the critically endangered Ustyurt Saiga
Country(ies)	Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan
UK Organisation	Fauna & Flora International
Collaborator(s)	Imperial College London; the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan; Institute of Zoology, Academy of Science of the Republic of Uzbekistan; State Inspectorate (Gosbiocontrol) under the State Committee for Nature Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan; Forestry and Hunting Committee under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
Project Leader	Paul Hotham
Report date	24 th of Oct 2011
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 2
Project website	n/a

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 time lost in the first project year caused by the need to get registered in Uzbekistan has been regained to a large extent. Both in-country project teams are now fully established and a contract with our main implementing partner in Kazakhstan, the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan, has been signed. A Researcher was recruited by Imperial College London to lead the socio-economic research component.

Socio-economic survey

From Jun to Aug 2011 the Researcher visited Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and trained local counterparts in conducting a socio-economic and demographic survey in the main settlements of the Ustyurt. Two six-week surveys were implemented in both countries applying a varied approach of using standardized household questionnaires, more informal focal group discussions and key informant interviews. Special attention was given to evaluating economic dependencies on natural resources and saiga in particular, socio-economic drivers of poaching and illegal saiga trade, organization of illegal trade and trade routes, and an assessment of alternative income/ livelihood opportunities. Preliminary data analysis has been completed, including a descriptive statistical analysis of household questionnaire data, a qualitative analysis of key informant interview, and the streamlining of focus group data towards recommendations for potential livelihood enhancement.

Our previous assumption on the different economic situation in both countries leading to a different poaching and illegal trade pattern has been confirmed. Living standards are far lower on the Uzbek side of the Ustyurt plateau; here it is mostly the poor and unemployed who are involved in saiga poaching and trade. In Kazakhstan illegal hunting and trade of the antelope is far more organized and controlled by outsiders. Final reports will be shared with the governments of both countries and will guide the design of our future anti-poaching and trade intervention strategy.

Law enforcement training

The training needs of law enforcement bodies were identified during the training and resource needs assessment in Uzbekistan and formal and informal planning and evaluation meetings in both countries. A law enforcement training of trainers for the customs service, the local,

transport and border police and ranger forces is currently under preparation. The training will focus on the importance of biodiversity conservation, anthropogenic threats to the Ustyurt environment, national and international red data books and species listed hereunder, national and international laws and conventions, transboundary agreements, and the identification of threatened species. Training materials are under development, including a poster which aids the identification of ungulate horn in Uzbekistan.

Saiga meat detection dogs

Whereas saiga horn is distinctive and easily identified, saiga meat is difficult to distinguish from livestock meat once it is cut into pieces. As the socio-economic surveys confirmed, saiga meat provides an increasing incentive to poach saiga. Initial discussions with the State Committee for Nature Protection of Uzbekistan were held to explore the use of dogs, which could use odour to detect saiga meat, at key locations along local smuggling transport routes. Contacts to WWF Germany have been established to learn from their current approach to using detection dogs at customs checkpoints across Europe to identify smuggled endangered animals and plants. A national assessment on using odour detection dogs in Uzbekistan is planned to be completed by the end of 2011.

Inter-departmental cooperation

Initial discussions were held on improving cooperation between the different in-country law enforcement agencies (rangers, customs service, local and border police) during formal and informal planning and evaluation meetings in both countries.

The planned training of trainers for law enforcement agencies will include a dedicated discussion session on identifying options for improving coordination and cooperation between the various law enforcement bodies.

Transboundary cooperation

In Aug 2010 Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed and ratified an international agreement on combining efforts for conserving the saiga on the Ustyurt. FFI is actively supporting the development of an action plan under this agreement through the provision of regular and often day to day support and advice to the State Committee for Nature Protection of Uzbekistan and the Forestry and Hunting Committee of Kazakhstan. Due to its good relationships in both countries FFI is well placed to act as a mediator should mistrust or conflict arise.

A high level formal transboundary political meeting is currently under preparation to bring stakeholders from both countries together to discuss the details of the action plan and foster its implementation. In parallel we are planning to facilitate a transboundary ranger meeting to improve coordination and cooperation between ranger forces.

Media campaign

We are in the process of developing a wider media campaign in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The campaign consists of a video clip that will be repeatedly shown on national television during peak viewing times. The video's message will be reinforced by a parallel posters campaign. The message of the media campaign is threefold: i) a homage to the saiga as an inherent part of the nomadic culture and a symbol of the Uzbek steppe, ii) emphasis on the severe reduction of saiga numbers in the past and particularly within the last year, iii) the prohibition of hunting and trade of the animal and the fines that await those who break the law. The video clip has been approved by the International Department of the State Committee for Nature Protection and will be currently in negotiation with television companies.

At the request of the Forestry and Hunting Committee of Kazakhstan, the video clip is also being adapted for a Kazakh audience. USAID Kazakhstan are supporting the broadcast of the video clip by exploring opportunities to show it at Air Astana flights and at local TV stations on the Ustyurt.

Saiga Day Celebration

Working in close cooperation with the Saiga Conservation Alliance, the annual Saiga Day was held in two major settlements on the Uzbek Ustyurt in April 2011. Organized by local schools and with the help of so called 'saiga friends' the awareness and outreach events were attended by representatives of the local administration, environmental and law enforcement agencies,

public organizations, local residents and the mass media. Heads of the village councils, school principals and representatives of the State Committee of Nature Protection gave welcome speeches, emphasizing the importance of nature conservation with a special focus on saiga. School children and parents were engaged in concerts, dances, plays, poetry and quizzes on saiga and environmental conservation.

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 time required to obtain official project approval and to register FFI in Uzbekistan was underestimated and has delayed project implementation particularly in the first project year. All relevant documents for registration have been submitted to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan in December 2010 and, as requested by the Ministry, a second and third set of documents were submitted in May and September 2011 respectively. It is now expected that we obtain full legal status by the end of 2011. While we have regained most of the lost time, some activities initially planned to be completed in the second project year will now only be completed in the early stages of the third project year. A revised budget and work plan together with a formal Change Request have been submitted to LTS.

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

A formal Change Request was submitted to LTS on 31st October 2011.

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

No.

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

Two formal Change Requests were submitted to LTS on 31st October 2010 and 28th January 2011.

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

Yes, both change requests were approved in November 2010 and February 2011 respectively.

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

Yes No

If yes, and you wish to request a carry forward 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 carry forward request: £6,174

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

No.