



## Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2014)

<b>Project Ref No</b>	19-011
<b>Project Title</b>	Conserving the critically endangered Bengal Florican – a Terai flagship species
<b>Country(ies)</b>	India and Nepal
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	RSPB
<b>Collaborator(s)</b>	BNHS India & Bird Conservation Nepal
<b>Project Leader</b>	Ian Barber (RSPB)
<b>Report date and number (eg HYR3)</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2014 – HYR2
<b>Project website</b>	

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) 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 to end September).**

**1.3 - Undertake Bengal florican population survey in at least 3 areas in India and at least 4 areas survey in Nepal, using standardised and repeatable survey methods**

The survey work for the 2014 breeding season started in early April and continued through to June in Assam, NE India. The data are still being collated at the time of this report but once that is completed we will re-run the MaxEnt model to refine the areas predicted to have the potential to support Bengal floricans. Using the 2013 survey data, the MaxEnt model revealed several potential new sites which were assessed before the survey season started and those that were considered to be suitable were surveyed in 2014. At the Kankai site east of Koshi Tappu, Nepal the presence of the species was confirmed through the discovery of a footprint although no sightings of the bird were recorded. Likewise a bird was reported by the Forest officers at the Surai Range of Terai East Forest Division in Uttar Pradesh India. These sites and any others from the refined model will be a priority for survey work in 2015.

**1.4 - Undertake satellite-tracking studies. Quantify habitat condition in places used by Bengal florican and unused control sites, catch birds and attach radio satellite tags.**

Satellite tagging was undertaken in both countries during April/May. In April a team went back to Koshi Tappu, Nepal and attempted to catch birds using the same method as last season. This involves slowly driving birds into preset nets and a female was caught on the very first day, a first for the Subcontinent. Unfortunately, the team did not catch any more birds over the following 7 days, despite several close encounters, and so moved to Chitwan National Park. Here they found one bird but again were unsuccessful in their efforts at catching. At Pilibhit, India in early May, two traditional Indian bird trappers successfully caught and tagged three males in the space of 8 days. They initially used specially made dummy birds but later just used the simple nylon leg nooses attached to small bamboo sticks. After observing the birds' behaviour the trappers set the nooses in areas where the males displayed and waited for them to walk into the traps. This proved to be a more successful and less laborious method and so we utilised the same trappers at Suklaphanta, Nepal in late May. Here they caught a male and female in the space of an hour giving a total of 6 birds caught this season. The total number of tagged birds so far is 5 in Nepal and 3 in India.

Considering the difficulties encountered in catching and fitting the tags and with 8 satellite tags still to be deployed we have not attempted to deploy any radio tags.

### **1.5 - Download satellite data and measure distribution, population, movements and habitat requirements Bengal florican. Produce map of areas of existing and potential Bengal florican habitat.**

All eight tags deployed (2 from April 2013 and 6 from April/May 2014) transmitted satisfactorily until mid Aug 2014 when one of the tags on a male bird in Pilibhit, India stopped transmitting. The tag has not been recovered due to difficult field conditions during the monsoon, so the exact reason why it stopped is not known but it is likely that it either became detached from the bird or the bird died and the tag did not recharge. The remaining seven tags are still transmitting at the time of this report.

The initial movements of the three birds tagged at Koshi Tappu, Nepal were similar to last year as they remained on the island where they were tagged and then moved a few kilometres away onto the banks of the mainland. However, in September the female moved approximately 30km south along the Koshi river and crossed into India. Here she stayed for a few days before returning to the same area where she was originally tagged and has remained since.

The birds either side of the border at Suklaphanta (Nepal) and Pilibhit (India) initially stayed in and around the grasslands where they were tagged. However, in August birds started to move from both sites and occupied areas just south of the international border. From website maps, the areas appear to be agricultural so post-monsoon, when access is easier, we will endeavour to locate and analyse the habitat in the areas. We will also try to discover why the birds left their breeding grounds early as it is of some concern that the birds left the relative safety of the protected areas and have settled on what appear to be a largely agricultural landscape.

### **2.4 Measure changes in habitat condition at trial sites**

Successful trial plots were only established at Koshi Tappu, Nepal and at Pilibhit, India. At Koshi, the habitat plots were designed and monitored regularly while at Pilibhit we came to know late on that the Forest officials had undertaken different management techniques in different areas which could serve as trial plots. The latter however were not regularly monitored.

### **2.5 Monitor Bengal florican usage of trial sites**

Bird usage of the trial plots at Koshi was monitored and birds were observed on several occasions at specific sites. The tagged birds did not visit the trial plots although did occupy an area between two plots on occasions. At Pilibhit, the trial plots themselves were not directly monitored but we will analyse the movements of the tagged birds to see if they visited the trial plots.

### **2.6 Produce report on habitat usage of Bengal florican and disseminate to key stakeholders**

Data from the trial management areas will be analysed and a reported back to key stakeholders during the workshops due later this year.

### **4.1 Workshop with PA staff and other key stakeholders to develop habitat management strategy for at least 4 Protected Area sites**

With the impediment of not having enough trail management areas we plan to closely monitor the areas where the tagged birds are located. This will have to take place after the monsoon from October onwards. Consequently, it is too early to hold workshops to develop a habitat management strategy.

### **4.2 National scientists and PA staff agree implementation of ongoing survey protocols**

In Nepal, Govt field staff accompanied the surveyors at all PA sites to better understand the survey technique. While in India this only happened as some sites. The protocols will be agreed during the workshops later this year.

### **4.4 Hold workshop with relevant stakeholders in India and Nepal and the wider scientific community to develop a National Bengal florican Species Recovery Plan for Nepal and update/amend Species Recovery Plan for India**

The delay in producing sufficient information regarding habitat usage has had a knock on effect with regard to holding workshops and to develop management strategies and national action plans.

**2a. 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.**

Although the project has generated a lot of useful data relating to the movement of the satellite tagged birds it has been more difficult to convert this into habitat usage and management practices that will benefit the species. This has meant delays to holding workshops and developing management strategies and national action plans. To compensate for this we are planning to increase fieldwork to locate and monitor the habitats in the areas where the tagged birds are found. This will likely increase field costs and also delay the workshops and production of guidelines and action plans. Consequently, we have enquired about the possibility of extending the end of project date by a minimum of 6 months and received a positive response.

**2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with LTS: Yes

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £10,000

**3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully as it is unlikely that any requests to carry forward funds will be approved this year.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project and would like to talk to someone about the options available this year, please indicate below when you think you might be in a position to do this and what the reasons might be:

By the end of 2015 we will have a better idea of the possible underspend which is due to the difficulty in catching and tagging birds and the knock on effect this has had in generating enough data to develop management guidelines and Action Plans.

**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 can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at [Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk](mailto:Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk) . The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 20-035 Darwin Half Year Report**