



## Darwin Initiative Main Project Half Year Report (due 31 October 2015)

<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 (e.g., HYR3)</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2015 to 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2015 – HYR3
<b>Project website/Twitter/Blog/Instagram etc</b>	
<b>Funder (DFID/Defra)</b>	DFID

### 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).

#### 1.4 - Undertake satellite tracking studies

Further attempts were made by the Indian traditional trappers to fit the remaining 8 satellite tags on birds in Nepal (Suklaphanta) and India (Pilibhit and Dudhwa). The team caught 4 birds in total but unfortunately, 2 birds had previously been tagged and so only 2 additional birds were tagged, a female at Suklaphanta and a male at Dudhwa. It is however useful to know that the previously tagged birds are doing well and showing no sign of distress or injury, but disappointing that only 2 new tags were fitted. There remain a further 6 tags to deploy. The current number of working tags are summarised below:

Location	Total
Koshi Tappu WR, Nepal	2m + 1f
Suklaphanta WR, Nepal	1m + 2f
Pilibhit RF, India	2m (1m tag failed)
Dudhwa NP, India	1m
<b>Total</b>	<b>6m + 3f</b>

#### 1.5 - Download satellite data and measure distribution, population, movements and habitat requirements of Bengal florican

Downloading has continued and we now have the equivalent of 13.5 years of data from the various tagged birds. The pattern of movement was similar to previous years with birds remaining in the areas where they were initially tagged until around August/September and then they start to disperse to agricultural areas mainly adjacent to river courses outside of protected areas. The birds have moved no more than ~35km, which is also comparable to last season so it appears that a pattern of movement is beginning to emerge.

### **1.6 - Research findings published in relevant reports/journals disseminated to key stakeholders**

This will be undertaken towards the end of the project

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

This activity has fundamentally changed as we have only been able to establish one main trial management area at Koshi Tappu, Nepal and a smaller area at Pithauli in the buffer zone of the Chitwan NP, Nepal. These areas have been monitored but the main focus is now on monitoring the habitat where the tagged birds stay.

The data from both of these approaches will be analysed next year once we have a full year of data.

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

Data have been collected on bird usage of the trial plots at both sites. At Koshi, birds were observed on the various plots for a total of 46 days, while at Pithauli a bird was observed in the eastern part of the grassland where we have been removing scrub and small trees to open up the grassland. Again, once the birds return to these areas from around February/March we will continue monitoring their movements and have a better understanding of how the various management prescriptions are working or not. Again it would be useful to have at least a full year of data to give us more confidence while analysing the data.

### **3.2 - Train individuals from local communities to take part in habitat trial monitoring**

Members of the local communities through LCGs have continued to participate in the habitat management trials in Nepal. In India, participation has been through the NGO's in Assam

### **3.4 - Identify and establish contact with key national/regional decision makers and visit demonstration trials**

The in-country teams have maintained contact with key decision makers since the workshop in January. With the trial management plots both in Nepal and the focus switching to monitoring areas where tagged birds reside there is limited scope to show decision makers these areas. However, the results of the trials will be presented and discussed at the workshops to develop Species Action Plans.

### **3.5 Publish habitat management guidance and advocate to key stakeholders**

This will be done once we have analysed the results of the monitoring programme and established the optimal habitat requirements.

### **4.3 - Three local conservation groups participate in Bengal florican monitoring survey**

Three LCGs in Nepal and two NGOs in India have continued to participate in the monitoring surveys

### **4.4 - Workshops in India to review, and Nepal to develop National Species Recovery Plans**

The workshops were originally planned for October but circumstances have meant they have been put back until early in 2016. In Nepal, this was primarily due to the ongoing blockade at all border crossings with India. This has led to a chronic fuel shortage across the country and only essential vehicles have access to fuel.

In India, there has been another change in the Uttar Pradesh Chief Wildlife Warden the person essential to have on board to smooth the progress of the project. The post was left vacant for a while and although field activities continued, the workshop and Action Plan review has been delayed until January or February.

### **4.5 - Species Recovery Plans for Bengal florican endorsed and launched in India and Nepal**

This will take place after the workshops in early 2016

### **4.6 - Funding activities undertaken to support local conservation groups**

With the Darwin funded project due to finish in March 2016 we have been submitting proposals

to enable continuation of the work post Darwin. We have supported Jyotendra Thukari from BCN Nepal in submitting applications to the ZSL EDGE fund (£k) and the Whitley Award (£k). BirdLife, through their Preventing Extinctions Programme, have secured funding for Globally Threatened Species in India and Bengal florican is one species they are interested in supporting next year (max £k pa for 2 years) so we will work with BNHS to develop a proposal.

We have received positive feedback from our RSPB internal application for funding (£k) to fit the remaining tags and download data for another year (March 2016 – March 2017).

**2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt 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 unpredictability and occasional inertia of the Indian Government has generally not helped progress the project. Permissions to survey inside protected areas have been an issue at some sites and in August the Telecommunications Ministry issued a blanket ban on wildlife related telemetry studies in India! As we only managed to fit a further 2 tags last season and we have 6 more tags to fit this could adversely impact on the project, although our contacts in India are confident the ban will be lifted in the near future.

In Nepal, a blockade at all border crossings with India started in the third week of September when Nepal's parliament passed a new constitution. This has had a negative impact on the project with supplies running low and little or no fuel available making field work particularly difficult. The national workshop to develop the Species Action Plan has been postponed and hopefully will take place in late January or early February and has consequently delayed developing and rolling out habitat management prescriptions.

However, these delays could prove to be advantageous if we can extend the project for a further six months to September 2016. RSPB's additional internal funding will allow us to fit the remaining tags and download data for all tags for an additional year. The funding support we have for both BCN and BNHS will enable then to continue field work and work further with the grassland managers both inside and outside protected areas. This will greatly add to our databases of bird movements and habitat preferences giving us more time to analyse the data and make recommendation to support the development of the Species Action Plans.

The additional funding will also be reflected as co-funding when we come to the final project report.

**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: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**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:

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

One of the comments from the review of the last annual report suggested that in light of some of the changes it would be helpful to revisit the logframe, with a view to revising the Outputs and Activities. I can do that if necessary but due to the issues discussed in 2a, we will also be formally asking for a further six month extension to the project resulting in further changes to the logframe. Can you advise if we should wait for consent to the extension and make the logframe changes in one go?

**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 e.g., Subject: 20-035 Darwin Half Year Report**