



Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project Half Year Report (due 31st October 2018)

Project reference No:	4198
Project title:	Steppe up: Community-led recovery of Mongolia's iconic species and forest-steppe ecosystem
Country	Mongolia
Lead organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partners	Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Mongolia's National Police Agency, Mongolian State Inspection Agency, National University of Mongolia (NUM), Arig Bank, Spirit Mongolia, Independent Research Institute of Mongolia (IRIM), Governor Office of Arkhangai, Arkhangai Province Forest Unit
Project leader	Dr Gitanjali Bhattacharya
Report date and number	HYR1 31 st October 2018
Project website	https://www.zsl.org/conservation/regions/asia/mongolia

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).

The project has made good progress over the past 3 months and is on track to meet its milestones for Year 1. The project grant agreement was signed on June 8th, with the project commencing on July 1st 2018. Notable progress includes:

- Arkhangai Project Officer, E. Ganbaatar was recruited on September 10th (CV attached).
- ZSL held meetings with project partners (Spirit Mongolia, Arig Bank), contractors (IRIM, pasture and forest experts) and other experts (e.g. Swiss Agency for Development, Green Gold/Animal Health Project); signed contract with IRIM; and currently reviewing agreements with Spirit Mongolia, Arig Bank, forest and pasture contractors.
- In September ZSL visited the Local Protected Area (LPA) to introduce the project and form partnerships with local government agencies and communities (94 meeting attendees). This allowed for in-depth analysis of the current state of the area including pastureland, forest condition, biodiversity, community structure and illegal activities.

Output 1 – Focal Species Recovery.

Activities 1.1 – 1.2: The expert workshop is on track for early November, with experienced taxonomic experts invited to develop the LPA biodiversity monitoring plan. Project Advisor Prof. Gombobaatar Sundev (NUM), has been advising on focal species survey methodology, and will visit the LPA in November to conduct surveys of steppe eagle, Saker falcon, and musk deer.

Activities 1.3 – 1.4: The team discussed the preliminary biodiversity monitoring plan with community members, encouraging their participation in annual monitoring surveys. The current plan is to train community members and pilot biodiversity surveys from November onwards.

Output 2 – Sustainable Forest Management.

Activities 2.1 – 2.3: ZSL held meetings (August 6th and September 16th) to discuss the implementation of above-ground biomass (forest) surveys, defining suitable test plots and producing methods for the forest management plan. The forest expert has been selected and the contract is currently being reviewed. Plans for piloting of forest plot surveys are on track for November, including the co-development of the forest management plan with local communities.

Activity 2.4: Once the forest surveys are completed and test plots defined, the project officer will support community members to implement forest management activities defined for each test plot in accordance with the recommendations.

Activities 2.5 - 2.6: On September 12-13th ZSL project staff attended a WCS-led SMART workshop in the Small Gobi B Strictly Protected Area to learn from Mongolia's only SMART implementation site. WCS's regional SMART trainer led this workshop, and ZSL developed a preliminary LPA SMART Protocol. During the subsequent LPA visit, the project team delivered presentations on SMART to local authorities, and community stakeholders. The team also delivered SMART training and piloted the data model with local rangers, and forest specialists.

Output 3 – Sustainable Pasture Management.

Activities 3.1 - 3.2: Following meetings with Prof. N. Soninkhishig (NUM), ZSL and NUM are developing a contract and workplan for soil nutrient and compaction surveys, defining suitable test plots and producing methods for the pasture management plan. Unfortunately, unusually early snow across the LPA in September will prohibit Year One pasture surveys, however, Prof. N. Soninkhishig has collected soil samples and vegetation records at three sites of the South Tamir river basin within the LPA. These surveys will be used as a proxy for Year 1 pasture surveys, with two additional sites chosen for Year 2 pasture surveys.

Output 4 – Sustainable and Equitable Livelihoods.

Activities 4.1 & 4.5: ZSL held a series of meetings with the sustainability team of Arig Bank in Ulaanbaatar and in the LPA. In September, ZSL and Arig Bank visited the LPA and presented to local government and communities on their project involvement, including eco-tourism and other small-business opportunities. Their grant agreement and three-year plan are currently being drafted. The establishment of VSLAs is expected to start from November onwards, as planned.

Activities 4.7 & 4.8: ZSL has held ongoing meetings with IRIM to design the questionnaire, wellbeing index, and survey tools. ZSL signed a contract with IRIM (August 20, 2018) and IRIM conducted the baseline socioeconomic survey covering 100 households and four focus group discussions. Currently IRIM is analysing the data and writing the baseline report.

Output 5 – Effective LPA Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation.

Activity 5.1: Initial meetings (nine in total) with project partners and beneficiaries (LPA communities, Aimag (Arkhangai province) and Soum (administrative divisions within aimag) Governors, Head of Aimag Police, Head of Aimag Forest Unit, Head of Aimag Environmental Agency, Local Rangers, Environmental Inspectors, Forest Unit Specialists) was conducted during the visit to the LPA from September 25th – October 4th. Presentations and discussions on the project and LPA management reached approximately 50% of communities in the LPA. These meetings focussed on establishing an LPA management structure, encouraging individual participation, developing community groups, and establishing forest/pasture-user groups .

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.

Mongolia's summer holidays and the National festival (Naadam) occurred during the project launch. As a result, it was very difficult to communicate with project stakeholders during much of July and August as most Mongolians are on holiday and are uncontactable. Initial meetings with project stakeholders therefore began in mid-August.

Extreme weather conditions, including unusually early snow and storms throughout September caused significant disruptions to project activities. During the initial meeting with LPA community members, only a subset of the population was able to attend due to heavy snow. As a result, the team had to visit communities independently over the following week. Early snow also prohibited the Year One pasture surveys (Output 3), and biodiversity surveys (Output 1) of some species (Siberian marmot). Fortunately, our forest expert has existing pasture surveys to serve as a proxy for Year 1, and the community have confirmed the reintroduced marmot population to be c. 40.

During project development, data from Spirit Mongolia indicated that there were c. 100 households in the LPA. Following the initial site visit and discussions with local authorities we

now estimate there to be c. 500 households. Spirit Mongolia indicated that the LPA was originally established to represent households of the Mogoin River community group, however during the LPA boundary drafting with The Nature Conservancy the boundary was significantly increased to encompass more biodiversity important area, and more communities than originally planned. Although the LPA was established with consensus amongst communities, many households still have misunderstandings of the LPA's purpose, regulations and boundary (Output 5). To mitigate this, as a priority, the ZSL team with government officials visited communities across the LPA to ensure they understood its purpose and the goal of the project. It is expected that this increased LPA population will make the delivery of some project activities and indicators more difficult (e.g. VSLA participation), however, steps are being taken to ensure a representative LPA management structure and equal community participation in project activities.

The incorrect household population assumption impacted the total number of households surveyed by IRIM (Output 4), however, discussions are in process to conduct more household interviews across the LPA to ensure survey representativeness.

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. 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, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary.

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

Recruitment of a country manager is in progress. ZSL in-country and UK-based staff are working together to minimise impacts on project delivery.

Project leader Gitanjali Bhattacharya has moved department within ZSL and is now Head of International Fundraising. As a result, Monica Wrobel (Head of Asia) will be changed to project leader in the interim until the country manager is hired (expected in early 2019). ZSL is planning to submit a change request to LTSI this November to confirm these changes.

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. Additionally, if you were funded under R24 and asked to provide further information by your first half year report, please attach your response as a separate 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 . 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: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report**