

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2023

Project reference	28-003
Project title	Resurrection Island: enterprise, conservation and development around the Aral Sea
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Uzbekistan
Lead partner	University of Oxford
Partner(s)	Institute of Zoology of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences; Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage (MTCH; replaces GCT in original proposal); The Pearl Group; Ministry of ecology, environmental protection and climate change (MEEP; replaces GCE in original proposal); UzKorGaz; Saiga Conservation Alliance
Project leader	Dr Joseph Bull, University of Oxford
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://resurrectionisland.web.ox.ac.uk/home (Project website) https://www.facebook.com/ResurrectionIslandProject (Facebook page)

Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Progress described by project outputs that were relevant over the last 6 months

Activity 1.1 and 1.6: The Research Assistant completed a scientific manuscript covering outcomes of the social survey in relation to people's use and perception of natural resources in the project area, which was submitted for peer review at a good journal. This is in addition to the social survey report completed by multiple members of the project team near the start of the project. Note that plans are currently being made for the year 3 social surveys.

Activity 1.3: project partners (MTCH, TPG) delivered further coaching to those piloting homestays in the project region. The same project partners piloted new tourism trails in the region with some external participants in order to inform further skills/capacity development. Finally, the PI provided 'tourism opportunities' training to a range of relevant stakeholders in Tashkent.

Activity 1.5: As above: project partners piloted new tourist trails, which was developed under the framework of the project. Multiple households in Muynak have been trained to provide or enhance homestay accommodation services, and one new starter has already begun.

Activity 2.1b: A consultant was employed to develop a Management Plan for the newly established 'Aralkum' protected area. The activity is in progress.

Activity 2.2: The project team has been in active consultation with SANEG (formerly Jizzakh Petroleum), a key player in the oil and gas industry in the region, to develop zoning maps of the Aralkum PA. A roundtable to discuss the PA zoning/maps was conducted on the 5^h May in Tashkent. As of today, zoning maps of the PA have been finalized.

Activity 2.3a: Multiple biodiversity monitoring expeditions have been conducted throughout April-September 2023 by partner organization the Institute of Zoology, capturing updated information on fauna and flora.

Activity 2.3b: The RA is currently conducting a land cover classification of the project area and change detection over the past decade. Two expeditions/field surveys were conducted throughout April-June for ground-truthing purposes. The comprehensive analysis is due to be finalized in 2024.

Activity 2.4: (see 2.3a)

Activity 3.1: project partners from the Institute of Zoology continue to stay up-to-date with new development projects in the region (e.g. plans for major wind farms in the Ustyurt, as well as oil exploration in the Aralkum), so understanding of spatial development patterns are current

Activity 3.2: project partner (UzKorGas) Biodiversity Action Plan was reviewed, and comments/edits proposed. The project team are now seeking to provide input to the same plans for SANEG and their activities in the region

Activity 3.3a: the core project teams continues to identify and engage the group which forms the basis of the CoP, through project meetings and training sessions – and will seek to bring them together once again at the end of the project in Karakalpakstan

Activity 3.3b: In September, the PI and project partners delivered training on management of specific biodiversity impacts to a group of professionals (UKG, GosComTourism, MEEP).

Activity 3.5a/b: The PI is undertaking active engagement with Kazakh partners (ACBK and ADCI), and planning training sessions and a workshop in Kazakhstan in spring 2024.

2. 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.

An interesting challenge that has arisen in the last few months has been additional language barriers: previously, for many years, the project team have primarily worked in Russian (including roundtables, training sessions, etc.), which has been sufficient. But in recent sessions we have found an increasing issue with participants not being able to speak Russian, whilst translators cannot cover all of the languages required in a session to the level required (e.g. Uzbek, Karakalpak, English and Russian). Whilst this is positive perhaps (a sign of wider engagement, and of individuals working in national languages), this will be considered in future project activities in the region, particularly around budgeting for more extensive translation costs.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance n/a

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: ██████████

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. 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.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

n/a

Please send your completed report by email to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**