

Darwin Initiative Main Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources-for-projects/information-notes-learning-notes-briefing-papers-and-reviews/>).

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum** of 20 pages in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2022

Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	DI 28-006
Project title	Protecting Mongolia's Gobi Desert for wild camels and herder communities
Country/ies	Mongolia
Lead partner	Zoological Society of London, Outer Circle, NW1 4RY, UK
Project partner(s)	Ministry of Environment and Tourism Mongolia (MET) Gobi 'A' Strictly Protected Area (GGASPA) Administration Office (GGASPA) Collaborative Management Council (CMC) Secondary schools of GGASPA buffer-zone soums Soum Buffer-zone Councils/Citizen Representative Khurals National University of Mongolia (NUM) UNDP/GEF ENSURE project
Darwin grant value	£ 497,048.00
Start/end dates of the project	Start date: 01/06/2021 End date: 31/03/2024
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2021 – Mar 2022) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	01/06/2021 to 31/03/2022 Annual Report 1
Project Leader name	Dr. Tungalag Ulambayar ZSL Mongolia Country Director ████████████████████ ████████████████████
Project website/blog/social media	www.zsl.org/mongolia
Report author(s) and date	Tungalag Ulambayar (Mongolia Country Director), Bolor Radnaabazar (Programme Officer), 30th April 2022.

1. Project summary

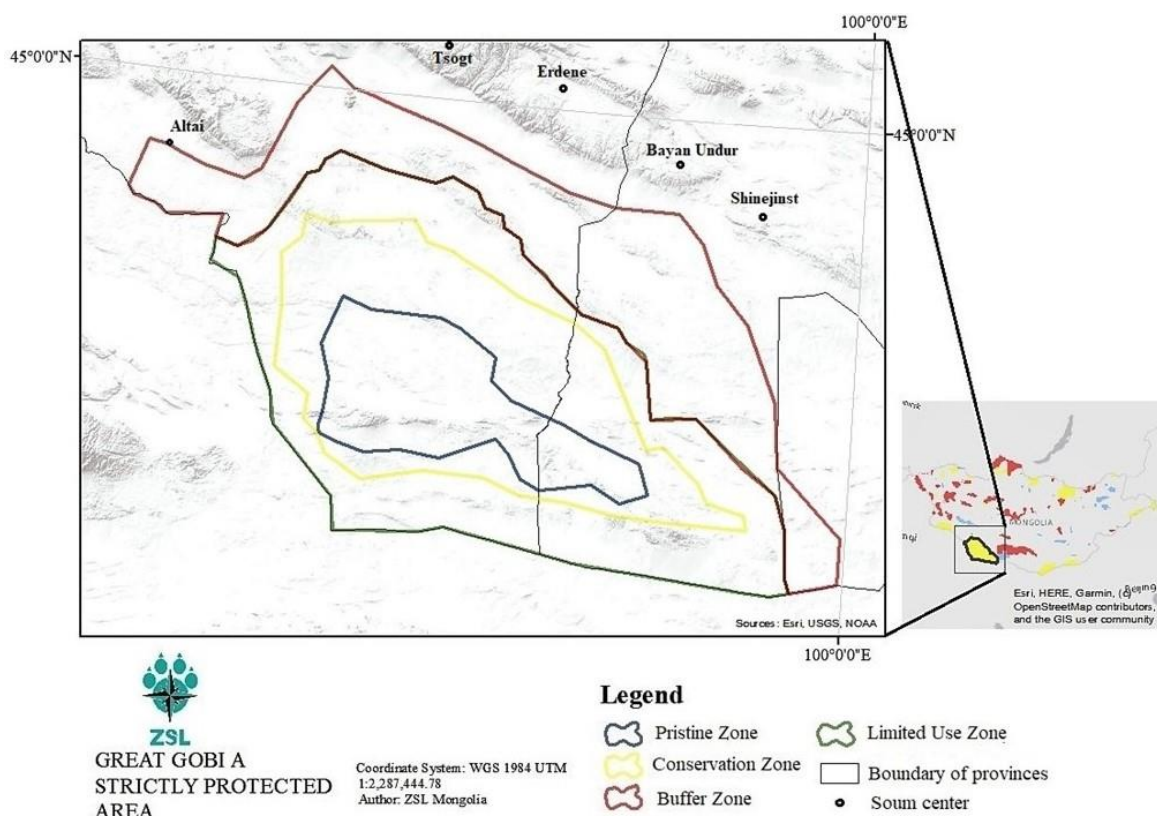
The project’s overall goal is to conserve globally important wildlife, including the Wild camels in the Mongolian Altai-Gobi, with the welfare and socio-cultural traditions of herder communities secured through sustainable use of the fragile desert ecosystem.

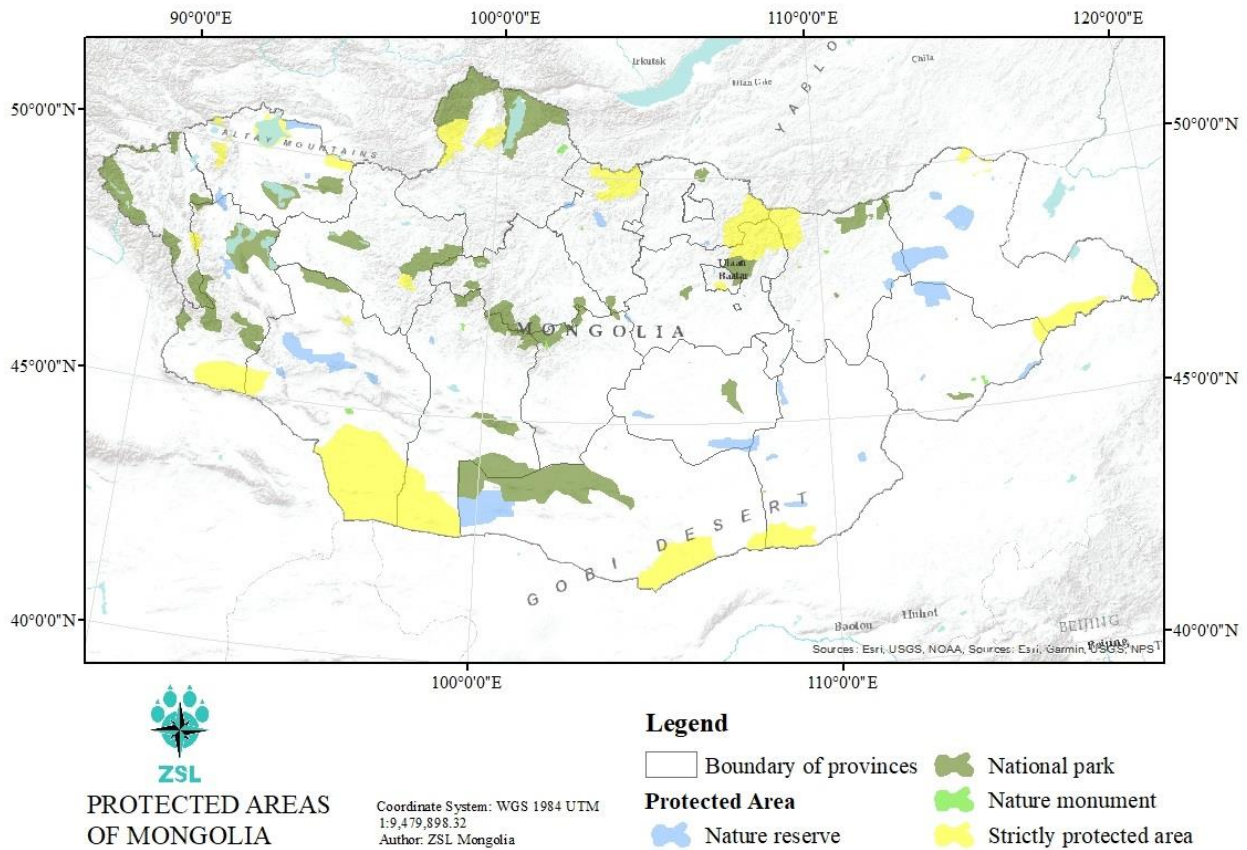
The project started in June 2021 to help address the population decline of the last remaining wild camel in the Great Gobi ‘A’ Strictly Protected Area ([GGASPA](#)). The [GGASPA](#) encompasses 44,630 km² of desert steppe and was created due to its populations of rare species, including Critically Endangered species such as Wild camel (*Camelus ferus*), Asiatic wild ass (*Equus hemionus*), Argali sheep (*Ovis ammon*), and Gobi Bear (*Ursus arctos*) (Clark et al., 2006). Much research conducted on Mongolia’s mammal communities centres on population size estimates, which all signal species under serious threat of extinction. Plant communities comprise species resilient to extreme drought, commonly including *Haloxylon ammodendron*, *Ilijina regelii*, *Anabasis brevifolia* and *Ephedra przewalskii*.

The Great Gobi is not only home to wildlife but also pastoral communities that carry over nomadic traditions and cultural values of co-existing with nature. Therefore, the project aims to support local communities and GGASPA stakeholders in conserving precious species and Gobi ecosystems important to people’s livelihoods in GGASPA buffer-zone *soums* (districts) – the Altai, Erdene, and Tsogt *soums* of Gobi-Altai *aimag* (state) and the Bayan-Undur and Shinejinst *soums* of Bayankhongor *aimag* (Fig 1.).

Tackling the wild camel population decline requires addressing multiple other factors that contribute to it. These include weak biodiversity monitoring capacity for monitoring wildlife populations and the condition of their habitats; water scarcity; the lack of coordination among buffer-zone stakeholders to undertake integrated landscape management (ILM); competition with domestic livestock for forage; and overgrazing in buffer-zone and limited-use zone areas. These socio-ecological issues have been exacerbated by climate change. Unfortunately, the local government and communities lack mechanisms and resources to tackle these threats collaboratively. Thus, the project seeks to institutionalize robust evidence-based environmental management, implement scalable waterhole habitat management, strengthen collaborative governance, enable community-led awareness-raising, and improve sustainable rangeland management and herder livelihoods.

Fig 1. The project site: GGASPA and its buffer zone





2. Project stakeholders/ partners

ZSL is leading the overall project management, including financial management and liaison with partners. Formal partners that are in close cooperation with ZSL and are mentioned in the project documents are the Ministry of Environment and Tourism Mongolia ([MET](#)); the [National Focal Point](#) of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) [GGASPA Administration Office](#); the Collaborative Management Council (CMC) overseeing buffer zone management; five soums' Buffer-Zone Councils (BZCs), represented by the Citizen Representative Khurals; and the National University of Mongolia ([NUM](#)). The secondary schools of each soum in the buffer zone participate as part of each soum's BZC. The project collaborates with the [UNDP/GEF ENSURE project](#) to strengthen school Eco-Clubs. The following are brief profiles of project partners.

GGASPA. The GGASPA Administration was established in 1975 under the Protected Area Department of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). It was designated as a World Biosphere Reserve in 1991 by the United Nations. Encompassing 44,630 km², the GGASPA is Mongolia's largest contiguous protected area, and preserves Mongolia's most intact 'true desert' ecoregion. The GGASPA Administration has 34 employees including 21 rangers and 9 officers based in Bayantooroi, Gobi-Altai, 1300 km from the capital city. The GGASPA will support all aspects of the project, managing camel research and conservation components (Output 1 and 2), while participating in buffer-zone management as a member of the CMC (Output 3) and in community outreach with Eco-Clubs (Output 4).

The Collaborative Management Council (CMC) is a new institution established in May 2019 to bring together stakeholders of the GGASPA buffer-zone. The first stakeholder workshop, held in April 2019, identified threats to camel conservation and sought to approve and implement the GGASPA Camel Conservation Action plan. The council includes representatives from the GGASPA Administration, the governors of each of the five soum BZCs, two Border Defense Units, and the Environment Department of Bayankhongor and Gobi-Altai aimag, and ZSL's representative office in Mongolia. The CMC and its constituent BZCs oversee a population of 3,700 households, including 2,198 herder households across five soums adjacent to the GGASPA. Of these communities, 1272 households in seven *bags* (county) within the

buffer-zone boundaries participate in public awareness, camel conservation and buffer-zone management activities. In this project, the CMC will meet, coordinate and oversee five *soum* CRKs/BZC's to implement their respective *Soum* Buffer-zone Management Plans. With ZSL oversight, the CMC will support Eco-Clubs to raise environmental awareness, implement the Responsible Rangeland Management Regulation (RRMR), and establish a community banking fund in each BZC. The CMC will collaborate closely with the GGASPA on buffer-zone conservation management.

The National University of Mongolia (NUM), established in 1942, is the oldest university in Mongolia. NUM has played a fundamental role in creating, promoting and strengthening Mongolian capacity in contemporary scientific research. ZSL's collaboration with NUM includes successful initiatives for the development of Mongolia's first comprehensive IUCN Regional Red List; extensive, ground-breaking biological monitoring, such as camera trapping at Gobi oases; and wild Bactrian camel population surveys. NUM will support the project's research and conservation outputs (1 and 2) in collaboration with the Institute of Zoology (LoZ) and Wild Camel Protection Foundation (WCPF), contributing expertise to biodiversity and rangeland monitoring and methodological design for GGASPA's habitat restoration work. NUM will oversee data analysis sourced from camera traps, SMART patrolling, and rangeland survey to inform conservation decisions of GGASPA and CMC.

The National Focal Point (NFP) for CMS is a senior officer of the Department of Climate Change and International Cooperation, Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). The NFP is assigned to (a) receive and disseminate Convention information; (b) ensure that Mongolia is represented at CMS meetings; (c) identify experts to participate in technical expert groups and assessment processes under the Convention; (d) respond to other requests for input by Parties from the Conference of the Parties and the Secretariat; (e) monitor and promote the national implementation of the Convention; and (f) collaborate and coordinate with NFPs for other related Conventions to facilitate implementation of the Convention. As such, the NFP supported the proposal and will contribute to the implementation of the project by representing the CMS at project events, coordinating with NFPs for CBD and UNFCCC, liaising with other national CBD and CMS projects, briefing MET and CMS Secretariat on the project progress and incorporating the project results into the national report.

UNDP/GEF ENSURE project. The UNDP Mongolia Representative Office is based in Ulaanbaatar and has an Environment, Energy and Disaster Risk Reduction portfolio with a focus on enhancing Mongolia's ability to conserve and protect its environment for resource-efficient development; empower local communities; and enhance institutional capacity for sustained environmental management, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Within this program, UNDP implements a GEF-funded "Ensuring Sustainability and Resilience of Green Landscapes in Mongolia" or ENSURE project (USD 7.5 million), which targets the Sayan and Khangai Gobi landscapes, overlapping the ZSL project's four Gobi soums. The ENSURE project will run from 2019-2025 with the objectives of conserving rangeland, forest, and wildlife in the target sites by improving the legal environment, empowering local communities, increasing their awareness, and supporting livelihoods. ZSL Mongolia had several communications with the UNDP Program Officer on the proposed activities to avoid overlaps and coordinate efforts. These communications resulted in the co-funding of USD 12,000 for herder environmental education through Eco-Clubs in the GGASPA buffer zone. The project agreed to coordinate other relevant activities in the four Gobi soums with ENSURE through regular communication and exchanges.

Buffer-zone Councils (BZCs) under Citizen Representative Khurals (CRK) are the legal institutions that oversee environmental conservation and livelihood development within each *soum*. To reduce the negative impact of humans on the Inner-Altai ecosystem, the project aims to strengthen the BZCs' governance approach by providing training and supporting evidence-based decision-making, utilising data and materials from the project. BZCs will capitalise on regular citizen meetings such as Bagh and Soum Citizen Khurals, and other cultural events, including Naadam and Lunar New Year (Tsagaan Sar), as awareness-raising opportunities.

Secondary school Eco-clubs. The project will support Eco-Clubs, proven awareness-raising local institutions currently limited by financial shortages and lack of educational materials. New outreach materials include the creation of a children's textbook using scientific information on Great Gobi biodiversity combined with traditional herder knowledge on sustainable resource management. Eco-Clubs and teachers will receive training on public outreach and communication and peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing between clubs. Eco-Clubs will then design and undertake communication tours to herder households in summer camps to raise awareness through plays, folk performances, and other engaging platforms. Additional products include video content of their campaign with herders, and online media platform promotion involving the best-performing Eco-Clubs.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project activities

OUTPUT 1: *GGASPA monitoring programme is informing effective GGASPA and CMC management, and future-proofed by building the capacity of Mongolia's future conservationists*

Activity 1.1 Procure field equipment for ongoing camera-trap surveys and SMART patrols, including necessary office equipment for the research programme (year 1) (ZSL):

The project completed the planned procurement from October 2021 to March 2022, including procuring camera-trap batteries and 18 smartphones (Doozee s58 pro) with an installed SMART app for PA rangers and border guards. The total cost was MNT 43,188,800 (GBP 12,520) (Annex 4: Photo [1](#), [2](#)).

Activity 1.2 Organize GGASPA and Border Defence Agency annual training on camera-trap and SMART monitoring and co-develop GGASPA monitoring plan (ZSL):

The first training on camera trap and SMART monitoring for officers and rangers of the GGASPA was held on 27th November 2021 with 19 participants. As a result of the training, they have a manual, and have installed the SMART app software on their mobile phones and practiced using the app ([Annex 4: Photo 3](#)). The project organized another training for the GGASPA Administration Office and Border Defence Agency on 9th January 2022 with 32 participants. During the SMART app training, volunteer rangers, who are mostly herders, had a lively practice session, with everyone checking, discussing, and practicing the new app. Some of them received a new smartphone to use the app, leading to quite a lot of excitement (please see this [link](#)).

Activity 1.3 Conduct rangeland health survey (aboveground biomass, species richness, soil stability) inside SPA (5 plots) vs Bufferzone areas 5 plots (year 1 and 3) (NUM):

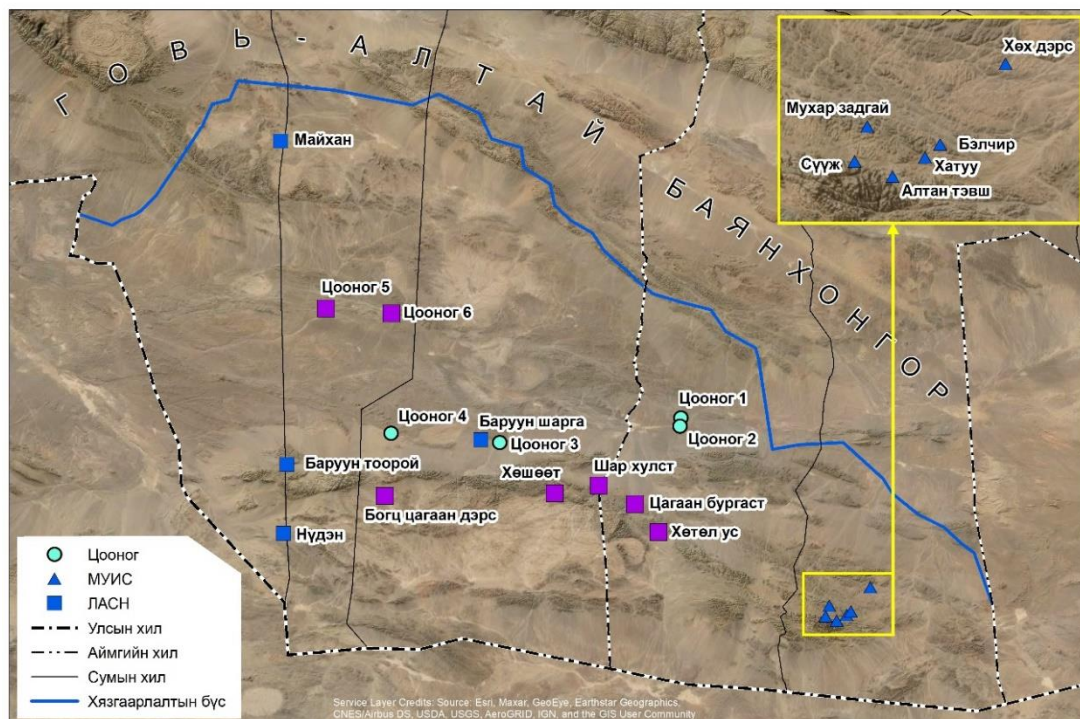
The project signed a contract on 29 October 2021 with the NUM to conduct biodiversity monitoring and rangeland survey using field sampling and SMART data collection and training of the GGASPA stakeholders; provide a scientific basis to the herders' activities for addressing rangeland degradation; and help Eco-Clubs with awareness-raising. The survey will be conducted in 5 plots inside the SPA and 5 plots in buffer zone areas in spring-summer of Y2.

A research team from the State University of Science and Technology (SUST) conducted a preliminary desk review to establish a baseline for the current rangeland carrying capacity and a forecast for future trends (as BAU) towards 2030/2040. This system dynamics approach is used to determine the rangeland carrying capacity and future trends across the five project target soums ([Annex 4: Grap.1](#)). The team will finalize their report in Y2.

Activity 1.6 Deploy camera-traps and maintain camera-trap grid (SD cards and batteries), for a total of two field trips each year (6 times) (ZSL + WCPF +GGASPA):

The project methodology of the camera trap research in GGASPA was reviewed and updated in October 2021. The project selected five water points (Bogts tsagaan ders, Khoshoot, Khotol us, Tsagaan burgas, Shar khuls, Tsagaan tohoi - Annex 4, Photo 4) to represent permanent water sources encompassing different habitat types and regions of the SPA that may be affected by varying anthropogenic pressures and climate change (Fig 4). In each waterhole, five cameras (in total 25 camera traps +1 for video capture) have been deployed with new batteries and SD cards (camera sensitivity programmed to high with a time interval of 30 seconds) during the field trip of 20-30 November 2021. The camera data will be collected twice yearly: November and April.

Fig 4. Location of the waterholes with camera traps deployed for GGASPA monitoring



Цооног 1: Нарийн хөх-1; Цооног-2: Нарийн хөх 2; Цооног 3: Зүүн шарга; Цооног 4: Чонын дов; Цооног 5: Гантөмөрийн сайр; Цооног 6: Буурын хяр

Activity 1.8 Two Mongolian MSc students will work on research of rangeland survey and wildlife camera trap study, and defend by the end of year 3 (NUM):

Mongolian MSc students applied to NUM to work on research based on rangeland survey and wildlife camera trap study, and two will be recruited through competitive selection by ZSL, the GGASPA Administration and NUM in May-June 2022.

Activity 1.10 Camera and SMART data analysis training online, data collection design and data analysis (IZ + ZSL UK):

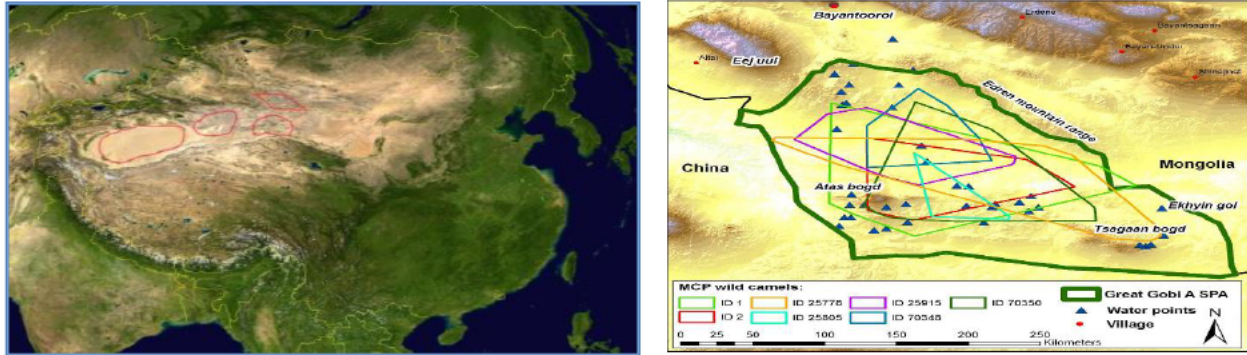
The project held an initial online meeting with the ZSL London SMART expert regarding the methodology for SMART training at the end of March 2022, and has agreed to have a SMART implementation plan including Training of Trainers from the GGASPA Administration and NUM researchers in June-July 2022.

OUTPUT 2: Scalable habitat management and waterhole restoration model areas are demonstrating effective conservation interventions to restore the GGASPA desert ecosystem, to support the recovery of wild camel species and biodiversity

Activity 2.1 Map GGASPA camel habitat, waterholes and oases and prioritise habitat management intervention sites (ZSL):

NUM produced a map of the GGASPA and its buffer-zone that defines the priority habitat management intervention sites. This map will be used to develop a pasture management plan for buffer-zone soums. The project organized a meeting involving GGASPA, ZSL, NUM, and the UNDP/GEF-funded ENSURE project, where the latter agreed to share photo monitoring data and remote sensing data for the mapping. During the reporting period, a grazing capacity assessment model for the GGASPA buffer-zone was completed and its field validation will be performed during a field survey planned for June 2022.

Fig. 5. Baseline map of the Wild camel habitat



5.1 Habitat of the Wild camels

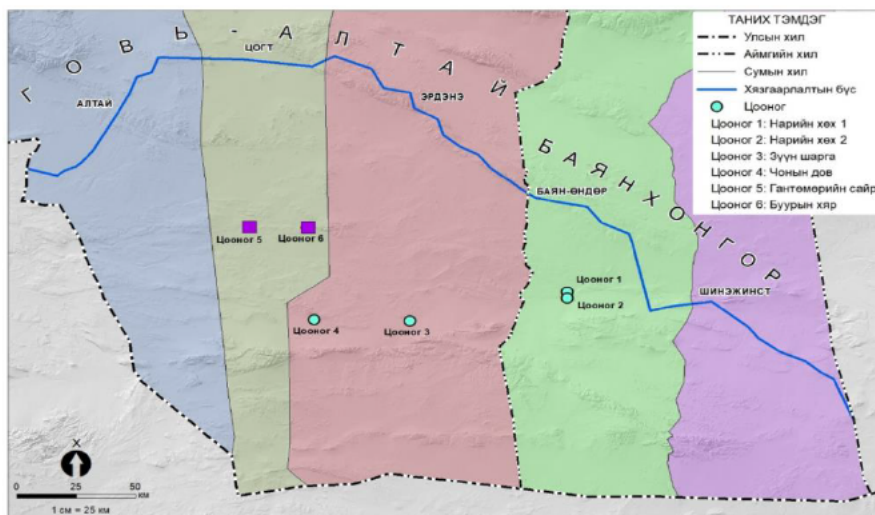
5.2 Movement of collaring Wild camel

Source: GGASPA Administration Office

Activity 2.2 Restore two priority waterholes with a small reservoir for wildlife (through a bid):

Two waterholes were selected in GGASPA - Zuunsharga and Choniin dov to install a solar-powered pump using the participatory matrix ranking method conducted by experts, including GGASPA, Mongolian WCPF, the Institute of Biology, and ZSL. This assessment in 2020 included seven boreholes made in GGASPA and used criteria for a number of species potentially accessing water, distance to the closest water source, location on migration routes of camels, water-charging capacity, and suitability for building a small pond for wildlife. With NGS funds, ZSL installed solar-powered pumps in 2020 at the two highest-scored waterholes from the seven boreholes. The project plans to install solar-powered pumps at two selected waterholes in the summer-fall of 2022.

Fig 6. Location of selected two waterholes (hole #3 and #4)



Source: GGASPA Administration Office

Activity 2.3. Support GGASPA Administration Office to implement habitat management interventions at least at three sites: fence poplar patches and natural springs, preventing browsing of young trees and protecting water recharge points, and plant native grasses in oases (GGASPA+NUM):

Research to test the feasibility of rehabilitating and expanding a Gobi oasis is underway. If successful, the research will create a scalable restoration approach to contribute to addressing the water scarcity issue in the GGASPA as part of Mongolia’s climate change adaptation agenda. The NUM team developed a research plan for the rehabilitation of the Baruun Sharga – one of the selected sites for further rehabilitation demonstration. This work in Y2 will support the GGASPA Administration Office to implement habitat management interventions, including fencing young poplar patches and natural springs to protect young trees and water recharge areas, and planting native grasses in oases surrounding.

Fig 8. The selected site to rehabilitate – Baruunsharga oasis



Source: ZSL Country Office in Mongolia

OUTPUT 3: Collaborative and inclusive governance institutions are in place and making coordinated, landscape-level management decisions, employing adaptive management approaches informed by robust ecosystem monitoring

Activity 3.1 Support CMC during annual meetings to ensure smooth function of a democratic and representative buffer-zone management institution (6 workshops, 3-year plan and 3 reports) to plan (GGASPA MP) and review the progress (CMC+GGASPA):

The ZSL team made a round trip visiting the target five buffer-zone soums (including Bayantooroi village, where the GGASPA Administration Headquarters are located) on 17-23 October 2021. The mission conducted the project kick-off meeting at each of the six locations. The conference brought together 198 people, including soum CRK, soum Governors, relevant government officers (rangers, environmental inspectors, land specialists, food and agriculture specialists, social welfare workers, and rangeland officers) and Eco-Clubs. Following the local election in the summer of 2021, local government authorities were changed, having newly elected individuals. Therefore, the ZSL team met these new government representatives, introduced the project, and discussed integrating project activities into the soum buffer-zone management plan. The ZSL team also learned about ongoing activities and agreed to draft an MOU with soum BZCs.

In January, the project supported the second CMC meeting, bringing together all representatives of buffer-zone stakeholders ([Annex 4: Photo 4](#)). During the meeting, the CMC updated its regulations, elected new members due to changes in local governments following the election, and discussed the CMC Plan for 2022-2023. The draft plan was based on the discussions during the field mission in the fall of 2021, incorporating proposals from each soum (Shinejinst and Bayan-Undur soums of Bayankhongor aimag, and Erdene, Tsogt, and Altai soums of Gobi-Altai aimag).

Besides the CMC meeting, the project organized three simultaneous trainings for the participants, covering: 1) Rangeland management and VSLAs, 2) SMART patrolling, and 3) Eco-clubs. On 14 April, the project organized an extended CMC meeting in Ulaanbaatar with over 50 participants, including representatives from the government and donor-funded projects and programmes operating in the GGASPA and its buffer-zone. The CMC finalized its plan and approved it. The updated plan clearly defined the roles and contributions of parties resulting

from exchanges among the stakeholders. The meeting contributed to strengthening the relationship between partners and laid the basis for further effective cooperation ([Annex 4: Photo 5, 6, 7, 8](#)).

Activity 3.2 Oversee by CMC the formulation, approval, and implementation of Soum Buffer-zone management plans based on GGASPA BMP (CMC+GGASPA):

The CMC plan approved by the April meeting provides the basis for the development of BZC plans. In summer 2022, the soum BZCs will complete their plans that integrate soum-level activities and support the implementation of the GGASPA CMC Plan.

Activity 3.3 Conduct social surveys using representative samples of buffer-zone communities across five buffer-zone soums to collect baseline data in year 1 and at project end in year 3 (ZSL):

The ZSL team conducted a baseline social survey, including a focus group and questionnaire survey of 76 herders after the CMC meeting in January 2022 (please visit this [link](#)).

In January-March 2022, the ZSL team designed and collected data for a baseline social survey involving 69 herder households from the target five soums to determine the socio-economic status of herders in the GGASPA, and to identify their knowledge and attitudes towards nature and their perceptions of rangeland degradation. The Independent Research Institute of Mongolia conducted the analysis of these data and produced the study report. The results will help plan activities to improve rangeland management to comply with the Responsible Rangeland Management Regulation.

OUTPUT 4: Ground-up awareness-raising about Great Gobi uniqueness by environmentally conscious GGASPA communities that are empowered with the skills and knowledge to improve livestock management and comply with the Responsible Rangeland Management Regulation (RRMR)

Activity 4.1 Develop Eco-Club capacity building programme through BZC to awareness-raising implementation plan (including training, exchange workshops, annual Eco-Club forum, and development of Gobi biodiversity textbook as part of buffer-zone school curricula) (BZC/CRK):

One of the goals of visiting the GGASPA buffer zone soums (Activity 3.1) was to meet with the Eco-Clubs of the soums' secondary schools. In October 2021, the ZSL team met the school directors, Eco-Club teachers, and Eco-Club pupils, and learned about Eco-Club activities and plans. The team introduced project activities related to awareness-raising and planned work with Eco-Clubs. In Bayantooroi village, where the GGASPA Administration office is located, the team met the Eco-Club of the village school at their request and agreed to collaborate with them. Therefore, the project now works with 8 Eco-Clubs from 7 schools instead of planned 5 Eco-Clubs. The Eco-Clubs have 20-30 members each, and the team met 86 pupils from 6 schools.

The series of events for teachers and pupils of 8 Eco-Clubs included training with practice sessions, and teaching methods for influencing the local community. Over 280 Eco-Club members participated in these events from 26 February to 7 March 2022 ([Annex 4: Photo 9](#)).

The most successful event was the children's field training in the Great Gobi using the "Nomadic Trunk" approach jointly organized with the CMC, the GGASPA Administration, and the secondary school of Bayantooroi Village, and Nomadic Nature Conservation NGO, during 24-31 March 2022. The training involved over 40 Eco-Club pupils and teachers from Bayan-Undur, Shinejinst soum, and Bayantooroi village. A video report of the eco-trip is available at this [link](#).

Activity 4.2 Oversee the design of a public awareness package and campaign by each soum Eco-Club to advocate GGASPA biodiversity conservation as part of GGASPA BMP (Eco-Clubs/CRK+CMC):

Teachers of Eco-Clubs participated in an e-training on planning at the end of 2021. They developed a draft plan to reach herder communities in the buffer-zone through public awareness activities, which the school principal approved. School principals actively participated in the planning and supported the educational activities of the Eco-Clubs. For example, Mr. Batzorig, the principal of the secondary school of Bayantooroi village, provided

dormitory accommodation for 37 pupils from Shinejinst and Bayan-Under soums of Bayankhongor aimag during the pupils' eco-trip in March. The secondary school principal of Shinejinst soum attended this event, learned new teaching methods, and became an Eco-Club trainer.

Activity 4.3 Implement Eco-Club public awareness campaign (i.e. field trips, festivals, SMS/MMS text campaign) to targeted households as part of GGASPA BMP (Eco-Clubs + BZC/CRK):

The project is planning the first public awareness campaign for local communities jointly with the CMC, GGASPA Administration and ENSURE project in the second half of May 2022.

Activity 4.4 Support CMC-level planning and enforcement strategy for RRMR and get approved Soum Pasture management plan by each CRK (CMC+ZSL+CRK):

A rangeland management training to support the implementation of RRMR is planned in Y2. The project provided necessary information about the RRMR to the buffer-zone herders who participated in the training mentioned in 4.5.

Activity 4.5 Train BZCs and target herder households on sustainable rangeland management, including basics of ecosystem management, reduction of risks of zoonotic diseases and household financial management (CRK+ZSL):

The project conducted a participatory workshop two times among buffer-zone herder households in January and March 2022. The VSLA methodology training reached 140 herders (102 men and 38 women) from 102 buffer-zone households. Herders learned about the importance of having social and loan funds, ways to establish the funds, and the use of social funds for rangeland management and environmental conservation. The project organized a training session on rangeland management, involving 80 herders from 62 households in the buffer-zone (62 men and 18 women). The topics included rangeland degradation and desertification (such as indicators for healthy rangeland, plant species and signs of degradation), ways to reduce them, and managing collaborative activities. The workshops resulted in establishing two pasture user groups (PUG) with 24 members (20 men, four women) in Shinejinst and Altai soums. Each group formed a VSLA (with both Loan and Social funds) ([Annex 4: Photo 10, 11](#)).

OUTPUT 5: Remote rural herders have improved wellbeing and financial stability built through a successful and sustainable community banking model that supports sustainable resource use efforts e.g. through rangeland management actions and Eco-Clubs.

Activity 5.1 Support CRKs to implement RRMR by assessing pasture conditions in buffer-zone bags and mapping grazing areas under RRMR and establishing pasture use contracts with herder households (NUM+ZSL+CRK):

NUM, research partner of ZSL Mongolia, is producing the GGASPA rangeland map (including the buffer-zone) that defines the priority habitat management intervention sites to help in pasture management planning for the buffer-zone soums. The ENSURE project agreed to share its photo monitoring and remote sensing data for the mapping, since the two projects have the same target area in the Gobi.

According to the Integrated Legal Information System of the Government of Mongolia, only Shineshinst soum's Citizen Representative Khural (CRK) in Bayankhongor had adopted a soum RRMR as of 12 January 2020 (please see this [link](#)). The project will encourage other soums to approve their RRMR.

Activity 5.2 Facilitate formation of VSLAs among herders sharing seasonal pastures to increase herder access to financial services to support long-term livelihood development (i.e. livestock migration and fodder support, and accessing veterinary services) (ZSL+BZC+CRK):

For the objective of building a banking model for the well-being and financial stability of the remote Gobi herders, the project facilitated two consecutive workshops, combined with training sessions, mentioned in 4.5 ([Annex 4: Photo 12](#)). The herders understood the benefits of

financial collaboration and learned the methodology of the sustainable community banking model. As a result, two VSLAs (as mentioned in 4.5) were established with a Loan Fund of MNT 480,000 (GBP 135.40) and a Social Fund of MNT 240,000 (GBP 67.70). Thus, group members can access the Loan Fund when needed, and benefit from the Social Fund to carry out environmental conservation activities they initiate themselves. So far, two members have received 200,000 MNT (GBP 51.50) in credit from the Loan Fund.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

OUTPUT 1: GGASPA monitoring programme is informing effective GGASPA and CMC management, and future-proofed by building the capacity of Mongolia’s future conservationists.

Indicator 1.1: GGASPA monitoring programme established (baselines set by camera-trapping, rangeland health surveys and SMART by the end of Y1).

Baseline:

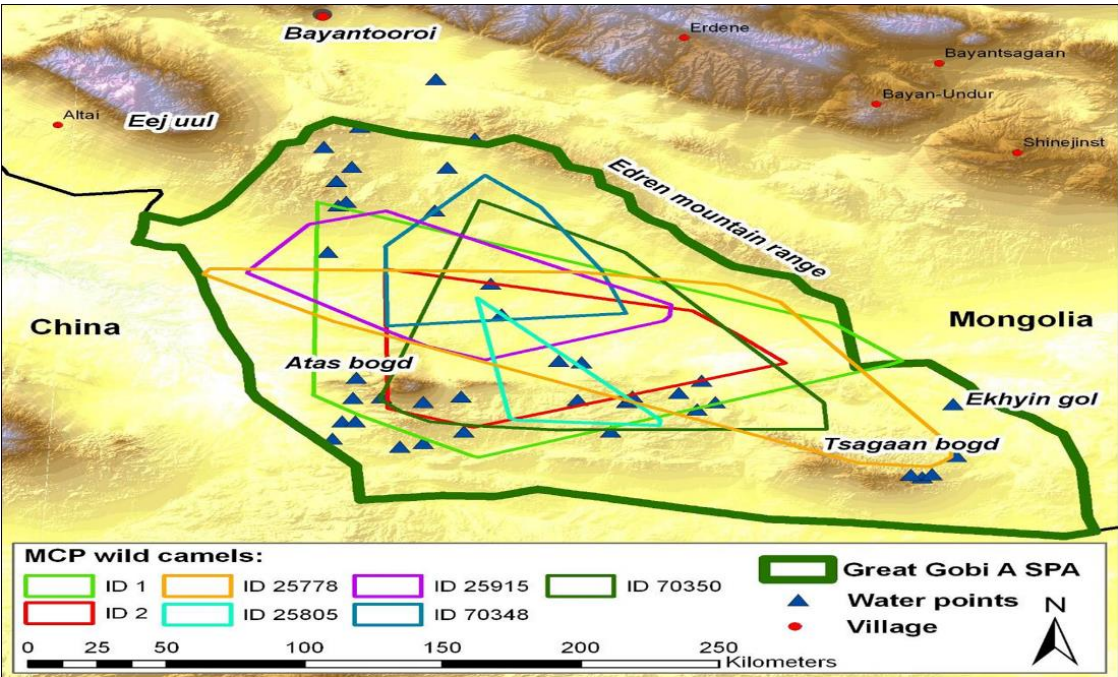
The GGASPA Administration developed its Annual Monitoring Plan and got the approval to implement it from the Minister for Environment and Tourism. According to the plan, a total of 21 rangers (in pairs) conduct monitoring patrols in 3 sections through a 650-850 km area twice a month. It usually takes 5 days to complete the inspection. A review of progress against the plan is conducted twice yearly in June and December. Ranger performance is evaluated based on this review.

SMART - No prior SMART practice.

Camera-traps - As of December 2021, the GGASPA deployed a total of 161 camera-traps to study Snow leopard and Gobi Bear at 35 water points and the mountain range of Atas, Tsagaan Bogd and Shar Usnii Nuruu.

Rangeland study - No rangeland health surveys conducted recently. The project plans to start the survey in May 2022, during the plant growing season.

Fig. 9 Location of camera-trapping (at 35 water points)



Source: GGASPA Administration Office

Progress:

SMART - ZSL developed a GIS platform for SMART patrolling and adjusted it to the GGASPA’s specific features (wildlife, plant species, ecology and specifics of environmental violations). Also, the project equipped rangers from the Administration Office with smartphones (10 units), installed the SMART app on these phones and trained rangers to use it for patrolling/data collection. The Border Authorities (border defense units in Altai soum, Gobi-Altai aimag and in Darwin Initiative Annual Report Template 2022

Gurvantses soum, Umnugobi aimag) also received smartphones (8 units) and were trained on SMART patrolling (Annex 4: Photo 13).

Camera-traps - In November 2021, the project deployed 26 camera traps in five waterholes in the GGASPA to study wildlife visits and behaviour.

Rangeland study - A desk review and model of assessment of rangeland carrying capacity in the GGASPA buffer-zone was completed in March-April 2022. The on-site assessment will take place on 13-27 June 2022.

Indicator 1.2. % of improved health status (current ecosystem health defined by NUM-led rangeland surveys) in 5 rangeland sites in GGASPA and 5 buffer-zone sites at end of Y3

Baseline: No baseline set yet – this is planned for summer Y2.

Progress:

ZSL and NUM mutually agreed on the methods for implementing the biodiversity and rangeland monitoring programme and signed the contract. The parties, including the UNDP/GEF ENSURE project, agreed to share available data and co-create the GGASPA biodiversity database.

NUM completed the research design for the rangeland health survey (carrying capacity) in the GGASPA. The SUST team completed the desk review to assess rangeland carrying capacity in buffer zone soums and define future trends for 2030 and 2040 using a system dynamics approach (Annex 4: Fig 1.). Field validation of the models will be conducted in June 2022.

Indicator 1.3. GGASPA management actions are being informed by quarterly SMART patrols; six-month camera-trap surveys of priority waterholes and rangeland sites, by the end Y2.

Baseline: Zero SMART patrolling in 2021.

Progress:

ZSL reviewed and updated the methodology for camera trap research in the GGASPA. Five water points were selected to represent annually permanent water sources encompassing different habitat types and regions of the park that may be affected by varying anthropogenic pressures and climate change. At each water point, five cameras (in total 26) were deployed in November 2021. The camera data has begun to be collected twice yearly: November and April/May.

Indicator 1.6. Two NUM postgraduate students achieve MSc after working closely with the GGASPA to generate data from rangeland health and camera trap surveys, to support effective management of GGASPA and CMC by Y4.

Baseline: 0

Progress: Three Mongolian MSc students applied to NUM to work on rangeland survey and wildlife camera trap study research.

OUTPUT 2: Scalable habitat management and waterhole restoration model areas are demonstrating effective conservation interventions to restore the Great Gobi 'A' Strictly Protected Area (GGASPA) desert ecosystem, to support the recovery of wild camels species and biodiversity

Indicator 2.1. GGASPA and its buffer-zone are delineating degraded and priority habitats, critical waterholes and oases identified by end of Y1.

Baseline: As part of the NGS-funded project, ZSL conducted a telephone survey in November 2020 among 303 Gobi herders. The survey found that 31% of the herders reported that they know about wild camels, and 98% think that wild camels have a negative impact on their livelihoods. About 2% said that during the mating season, wild camels join domestic camel herds and attack and bite them and chase away females. Newborn hybrids are very wild, and difficult to tame (please visit this [link](#)).

Progress: The research model has been developed for the rehabilitation of the selected oasis - Baruun Sharga.

Indicator 2.2. Two key waterholes' water supply restored

Baseline: There were seven boreholes in GGASPA that need a pump installed, of which ZSL installed two pumps with funds from NGS and Gaia Nature Fund (Gantumur valley and Buuriin khyar).

Progress: Two waterholes (Zuunsharga and Choniin dov) have been selected in the GGASPA for solar-powered pump installation in summer 2022.

2.3. Three oases (identified in Y1) demonstrating recovery:

Baseline: No recovery work.

Progress: Research for the oasis restoration pilot was designed to test the feasibility of rehabilitating and expanding a Gobi oasis. This work will create a scalable restoration approach to contribute to addressing the water scarcity issue in the GGASPA. Also, the NUM will complete a rangeland health assessment within the GGASPA and its buffer-zone with field validation in June 2022.

OUTPUT 3: Collaborative and inclusive governance institutions are in place and making coordinated, landscape-level management decisions, employing adaptive management approaches informed by robust ecosystem monitoring.

Indicator 3.1 Three-year Buffer-zone Management Plans designed and agreed upon using participatory approaches are in place by end of Y1

Baseline: One-year Buffer-zone Management Plan plan was implemented from 2019-2020.

Progress: Three-year Buffer-zone Management Plan (legal document) designed and approved for implementation by the CMC members starting from May 2022.

Indicator 3.1.1. GGASPA management level agreement of the plans together with a Collaborative Management Council (CMC), led by Citizen Representatives Khural (CRK)

Baseline: No formal agreement

Progress: An agreement to implement plans drafted and presented to the relevant stakeholders. It will be signed by all relevant stakeholders in May 2022.

Indicator 3.1.2. Five Soum-level (100%) plans agreed by each Buffer-Zone-Council (BZC) by the end of Y1

Baseline: No plans in 2021.

Progress: Five soum-level draft plans discussed by each Buffer-Zone-Council on 14 April 2022. These will be approved following the approval of the CMC plan in Y2.

Indicator 3.2. Fully operational CMC meeting independently chaired by elected CRK representatives, meeting at least two times per year, with decision making and annual management plan development being informed by environmental results from GGASPA and BZC by end of Y2.

Baseline: CMC structure and constitution were discussed and approved in 2019.

Progress: The project supported two CMC meetings, one in Bayantooroi Village on 8 January 2022 with over 50 participants from among the GGASPA stakeholders and the second on 14 April 2022 in Ulaanbaatar with over 50 multilateral participants, including representatives from the government and donor-funded projects and programmes operating in the GGASPA and its buffer-zone.

During the meetings, the CMC updated its regulation, elected new members due to changes in local governments following the election, and discussed the CMC Plan for 2022-2023. The CMC Plan was finalized and approved with the joint participation of the relevant parties, and clearly reflects their roles and contributions while strengthening the relationship between them and laying the foundation for further effective cooperation.

Indicator 3.3. % increase of confidence in transparent and equitable BZC governance report by women and men in herder HH by end of Y3.

Baseline: In answer to the question about “supporting the participatory governance in the implementation of the management of the GGASPA”, a third (34.8%) of respondents had heard

about the management of the buffer zones, while 65.2% had not. This indicates that local people living in the GGASPA had little knowledge about its management.

Looking at how satisfied the local people were with the implementation of activities in the GGASPA, 5.8% of the respondents said they were 'fully satisfied'. 15.4% said the implementation was 'satisfactory', 23.1% said 'fair', 19.2% said 'poor' and 5.8% said 'not satisfactory at all', while 30.8% said they 'did not know'. Efforts to strengthen the management of the GGASPA appeared to have not been effective. For example, 79% of respondents rated the management of the buffer zones as mediocre or below average. There were no significant differences depending on age, gender and educational attainment of the respondents (*source: IRIM report*)¹.

Progress: The socio-economic baseline study was conducted from 15 February to 15 March 2022 and the baseline for Indicator 3.3 was set for further action.

Indicator 3.4: 50% of men and women in herder households (c. 1272) report greater access to and understanding of environmental data to support sustainable natural resource management decisions by end of Y3 (baseline set in Y1).

Baseline: Half (56.5%) of the respondents said that they had 'good' knowledge of the local wildlife and plants, 29% said 'moderate' and 14.5% 'did not know'. In terms of location, respondents from Idren, Bayantooroi and Urt baghs had higher levels of knowledge, while those from Ulziit and Urt baghs had lower levels of such knowledge (*source: IRIM report*).

Progress: The socio-economic baseline study of herders in the GGASPA investigated herders' knowledge and attitudes related to the use of natural resources, degradation, conservation issues, and wildlife. A baseline for Indicator 3.4 was set for further action and measurement.

OUTPUT 4: Ground-up awareness-raising about Great Gobi uniqueness by environmentally conscious GGASPA communities that are empowered with the skills and knowledge to improve livestock management and comply with the Responsible Rangeland Management Regulation (RRMR).

Indicator 4.1 Five Eco-Clubs (1/bufferzone soum) better resourced and re-activated

Baseline: According to the baseline study, there were a total of eight Eco-Clubs in the five target soums. During the data collection, it was observed that the activities of the Eco-Clubs had been reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the number of members had decreased.

Progress: The project had its first meeting with the Eco-Clubs of secondary schools in buffer-zone soums mentioned above in October 2021. Most Eco-Clubs had 20-30 members on average. The project meetings involved 86 pupils from 6 secondary schools. The second trip with a specific focus on the Eco-Clubs was held in February-March 2022 and registered 8 eco-clubs of 7 secondary schools, comprising 13 teachers and 243 pupils, in the buffer-zone (see table below). They participated actively in the educational events organized by ZSL Mongolia.

Table 1. Updated registration of Eco-Clubs in the buffer-zone in March 2021

Aimag	Soum	School	Eco-club	Teacher	Pupil
Gobi-Altai	Altai	12 years	Khavtgai (Wild Camel)	1 (woman)	22 (13 girls, 8 boys)
	Tsogt	12 years	Eej Uul (Mother Mountain)	2 (women)	26 (16 girls, 10 boys)
	Bayantooroi village	12 years	Byatskhan ecologychid (Little Ecologist)	3 (2 women, 1 man)	45 (21 girls, 24 boys)
	Erdene	12 years	Ikh gobiin bagachuud (Children of the Great Gobi)	1 (woman)	35 (27 girls, 8 boys)
	Chandmani*	12 years	Solongo (Rainbow)	1 (woman)	36 (23 girls and 13 boys)

¹ The Socio-economic Baseline Study of herders in GGASPA

Bayankhongor	Bayan-Undur	9 years	Mazaalai (Gobi Bear)	1 (woman)	24 (14 girls, 10 boys)
	Shinejinst	9 years	Shukher zuil (Umbrella Species)	3 (2 women, 1 man)	26 (18 girls, 8 boys)
			Darkhan mazaalai (Sacred Gobi Bear)	2 (retired, 1 woman, 1 man)	29 (12 girls, 17 boys)
Total	6	7	8	13 (10 women, 3 men)	243

Source: Each Eco-Club teacher; *Chandmani soum is not included in the buffer zone but is close and its Eco-Club is very active.

Indicator 4.1.1 100 children (representative of community demographics) trained and empowered to participate in the annual public awareness campaign by end of Y1;

Baseline: 243 members (+13 teachers) of 8 Eco-Clubs across the GGASPA buffer-zone in March 2022.

Progress: The project conducted a series of events for teachers and pupils of 8 Eco-Clubs from 7 secondary schools in 6 soums. Training with practice sessions were held from February 26 to March 7 2022, involving over 280 participants; this training taught the Eco-Clubs methods for influencing local communities.

The project, jointly with the CMC, the GGASPA Administration, the secondary school of Bayantooroi Village, and Nomadic Nature Conservation NGO, organized a children’s field trip to the Gobi from 24-31 March 2022, with training sessions using the “Nomadic Trunk” approach. The trip involved over 40 Eco-Club pupils and teachers of Bayan-Undur, Shinejinst soum, and Bayantooroi village. A video report of the eco-trip is available at this [link](#).

A public awareness campaign based on the tools learned during field trip/training in March 2022 is planned in May 2022, to be organised jointly with the Eco-Clubs/secondary schools, CMC, GGASPA Administration Office and ENSURE project.

OUTPUT 5: Remote rural herders have improved wellbeing and financial stability built through a successful and sustainable community banking model that supports sustainable resource use efforts e.g. through rangeland management actions and Eco-Clubs.

Indicator 5.1 Five community banking fund mechanisms in place with the constitution and environmental fund

Baseline: According to the socio-economic baseline study, participation in the community savings fund was very poor, with only 2.9% of all households reported. In addition, only one in five households recorded income and expenditure and made economic calculations. Urtyn Gol bagh (Shinejinst soum, Bayankhongor aimag) had the highest rate (35.6%), while Ulziit bagh (Erdene soum, Gobi-Altai aimag) had the lowest rate (13.3%).

A quarter (24.6%) of respondents reported being members of CBOs. These CBOs included Idren Zalan Jinst, Irves, Cashmere Cooperative, Khairkhan Ivel and Tsarmyn Tsagaan. The partnerships were usually working in the areas of environment, livestock production and small trade.

Progress: In general, there are Pasture Users’ Associations in 18 aimags, Herders’ Associations in 166 soums, 76 Herders’ Cooperatives, more than 100 Community Funds, and 44 Savings and Credit Cooperatives in Mongolia (source: <http://www.greenmongolia.mn/post/71269>). In the project’s target soums, there are 21 cooperatives and 75 herder groups as of March 2022 (Table 2).

The project has established the baseline of this indicator and is working on a strategy to implement the community banking fund mechanisms in buffer-zone soums based on the socio-economic baseline study.

Table 2. Cooperatives and herder groups in the buffer zone (March 2022)

Aimag	Soum	Bagh	Household	Population	Livestock number	Herder group		
						ZSL	CPR	WV
Gobi-Altai	Altai	4	567	2094	89879	2	0	0
	Tsogt	7	1046	3567	221842	2	20	3
	Erdene	4	659	2378	180266	1	11	6
Bayankhongor	Bayan-Undur	4	741	2633	117071	1	12	0
	Shinejinst	4	814	2514	125723	2	13	0
Total	5	23	3827	13186	734781	8	56	9

Source: Each soum authority in buffer-zone

Two VSLA groups with 24 member households (20 men and 4 women) were established in Shinejinst and Altai soums. These groups have a loan fund of MNT 480,000 (£135.40) and a social fund of MNT 240,000 (£67.70). This will allow members to have easier access to loans when needed, and enable use of the social fund to finance environmental conservation and other group activities.

Indicator 5.1.1 Developed and agreed by each of the 5 Buffer Zone Council (BZC) by the end of Y1

Baseline: Not yet set

Progress: The project presented about VSLAs to each soum BZC and agreed to cooperate on this mechanism at the CMC meeting in January 2022.

Indicator 5.1.2 25 BZC members trained on managing five community banking funds by end of Q2 of Y2

Baseline: Not yet set

Progress: The project facilitated two consecutive meetings in January and February 2022, involving 140 buffer-zone herders (102 male and 38 female). They learned about the benefits of collaboration and the methodology of the sustainable community banking model, and received peer learning from Arkhangai herders (another project site of ZSL Mongolia). The result of the meetings was mentioned above in part 5.1.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

OUTCOME: Conservation of wild camel and desert ecosystem enhanced in GGASPA through strengthened management and stakeholder collaboration, with communities empowered to improve rangeland management and herder well-being.

Indicator 0.1. Stable or increasing counts of representative populations of Wild camel species (*Camelus ferus*), and key indicator ungulate species e.g. Asiatic wild ass *Equus hemionus*, and Goitered gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa* by Q2 Y3 at sample sites.

Baseline:

Number of key species in 2021 (Wild camel *Camelus ferus* – 452, Asiatic wild ass *Equus hemionus* - 540, Goitered gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa* - 954) *source: GGASPA Administration*

According to the baseline survey on the socio-economic situation of herders in the GGASPA, herders mentioned that among wildlife species, the Black-tailed gazelle and the wolf (*Canis lupus*) were the most commonly seen, while Snow Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and wild ass (*Equus hemionus*) were the least common.

Progress:

21 rangers of the GGASPA and 8 officers of Border Defense Units have been equipped with SMART patrolling tools and trained, and have now been piloting SMART patrolling during their

regular monitoring since March 2022 and collecting data for further processing (Annex 4: Photo 14).

Indicator 0.2. At least 20% of poplar tree oases (c. 21) across key camel migratory routes are protected and demonstrating signs of rehabilitation by Y4.

Baseline: Selected one oasis for the restoration pilot.

Progress: The restoration will start in Y2.

Indicator 0.3. The collaborative participatory approach for buffer-zone management by the GGASPA and CMC is supported and promoted by the MET as best practice for other PAs by Y4.

Baseline:

As the Baseline Survey showed, one-third (34.8%) of respondents (69 HH of 5 baghs) had heard about the management of the buffer-zone, while 65.2% had not. This indicates that local people living in the GGASPA had little knowledge about buffer-zone management or that buffer-zone management has been weak.

Progress:

The CMC updated its constitution and elected new members due to changes in the local governments after the election in 2021. The yearly plan of the CMC was discussed at the CMC meeting and approved by all members. The role and contribution of donor-funded projects and programmes operating in the GGASPA were defined in the plan, which also strengthens the relationship between stakeholders.

Indicator 0.4. 20% increase in abundance of key plant species (indicators of rangeland health) in GGASPA buffer-zone by end of Y3

Baseline: Not yet set

Progress:

The research on rangeland health assessment has been designed, and its field validation is planned for June 2022.

Indicator: 0.5. 40% of herder households (c.1272) report changing grazing practices to adopt and comply with the Responsible Rangeland Management Regulation (RRMR) by end of Y3

Baseline:

According to the government's State Integrated Legal Information System, only one soum adopted its RRMR (Shinejinst soum, Bayankhongor aimag). The soum authority assessed its implementation status as "average".

In terms of local rangeland conservation activities, 96.8% of surveyed herders reported having seasonal movements, 46.2% reported reducing livestock numbers, 41.5% dug wells, 24.6% prepared fodder for livestock, and 13.8% participated in protecting springs and streams with fencing.

Progress:

The project defined the baseline for this indicator. Herders in the buffer-zone participated in workshops and training on VSLAs and received scientific information about the Gobi eco-system to help inform their collective actions for sustainable use of rangeland.

Indicator: 0.6. 10% improvement in the well-being of c. 318 households (25% of 1272) including vulnerable groups, with women and men benefiting equally, by end of Y3

Baseline:

A total of 69 households were surveyed as a sample for the baseline survey, with adults and/or persons with the most control over decision-making within the household invited to answer questions. 52 of the 69 respondents were heads of households, 14 were spouses, and three were sons or daughters. Fifty-two (75.4%) of the respondents were male and 17 (24.6%) were female. The youngest respondent was 20 years old, the oldest 79, and the average age was 41. On average, the households had four to five members, with 4-5 children, and the head of the household (or main income earner) lived in the area for an average of 38 years. All the respondents were Khalkhs. Of all household members, 12 (3.9%) were vulnerable, including one orphan, two widows/widowers, and nine people with disabilities.

Compared to 2020, household incomes had increased by 8.6% in 2021, but expenditures also increased by 7.7%. Idren bagh (Bayan-Undur soum, Bayankhongor aimag), and Urtyn bagh (Shinejinst soum, Bayankhongor aimag) had the highest growth of household incomes. In Urt bagh (Altai soum, Gobi-Altai aimag) incomes decreased by 4.6%. In Gobi-Altai baghs, household incomes were higher than in Bayankhongor households, and in Bayankhongor aimags, the daily incomes were higher compared to Gobi-Altai.

Livestock was the main source of income, including sales of dairy products, wool and meat. Compared to 2020, household incomes from wool and cashmere increased in 2021, while income from sales of livestock and meat decreased.

Only 31.9% of all households had savings, except in Urt bagh (Altai soum, Gobi-Altai aimag), and Ulziit bagh (Erdene soum, Gobi-Altai aimag) where more than half of households had savings.

Compared to 2020, the share of debt increased by 8.7% in 2021, and this increase was observed in all target baghs.

Progress:

The project has the baseline defined for planning activities to improve household well-being, including that of vulnerable groups, women and men.

3.4 Progress: Monitoring of assumptions

The project commenced in October 2021 because of the COVID-related delay in decisions. Thus, the Outcome- and Output-level assumptions still hold true without changes.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and poverty alleviation

IMPACT: *Globally important wildlife, including the wild camels, thrive in the Mongolian Altai-Gobi with the welfare and socio-cultural traditions of herder communities secured through sustainable use of the fragile desert ecosystem.*

The project is contributing inputs to conserve the unique and fragile ecosystem of the Gobi Desert in Mongolia, home to critically endangered species including Wild camel (*Camelus ferus*), Asiatic wild ass (*Equus hemionus*), Argali (*Ovis ammon*), and Gobi Bear (*Ursus arctos*), as well as endemic plant species, based on the rangeland health assessment.

As the project has just completed its first year, progress towards the impact is limited to date. However, a good start has been made to ensure future impact. A few important signs of progress can be cited: (i) Substantial changes were made in the composition of the CMC due to the election in the summer of 2021, creating a new, more dynamic CMC leadership; (ii) a baseline survey was conducted to determine the socio-economic status of herders in the GGASPA, and to identify their knowledge and attitudes towards nature and their perceptions of rangeland degradation, which will help to plan human development activities and improve herders' wellbeing for Y2 (iii) a novel approach to Eco-Club training was introduced using the concept of the Nomadic Trunk, a game-based training tool incorporating toys and fun play. It will be used for awareness-raising among all stakeholders via Eco-Clubs.

4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties, or Agreements

ZSL collaborated closely with the NFP of the CMS - Ms. Dorjsuren Ariuntuya, Senior Officer, Department of Climate Change and International Cooperation, MET - as the project covers essential habitat for Wild camel and other CMS species in GGASPA. The NFP fully supports this proposal and its significant CMS contributions in Mongolia.

The project is contributing to a range of biodiversity conventions and agreements mentioned in the following table.

Table 1. Project contribution to the major biodiversity conventions and agreements

#	Convention and agreement	What contribution the project is making to support Mongolia to meet its objectives under the convention?
1.	Aichi Targets	<p>This project supports CBD and Mongolia's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) (2015-2025) through collaborative ecosystem management, enabling sustainable resource use and protecting highly threatened biodiversity while developing ecosystem resilience.</p> <p>It contributes to Aichi Targets:</p> <p>1: Raising awareness of biodiversity values and conservation through community-led initiatives, e.g. training and Eco-Club empowerment. Supporting Buffer-zone Councils (BZCs) to implement the Responsible Rangeland Management Regulations (RRMR), which promote sustainable community buffer-zone pasture management. Community banking will invest in sustainable livelihoods initiatives, incentivising RRMR compliance.</p> <p>2: Integrating biodiversity into multi-stakeholder, landscape-scale planning by capacity building across a hierarchy of institutions to facilitate evidence-based decision-making, underpinned by a systematic, robust environmental monitoring programme. Local research expertise will be built to sustain comprehensive biodiversity gains to inform effective long-term planning and adaptive management.</p> <p>5 and 7: Reducing habitat loss and degradation through sustainable buffer-zone management (e.g. improved enforcement of RRMR).</p> <p>11: Supporting effective, equitable management of GGSPA and its biodiversity. Enabling collaborative governance in the buffer-zone, led by indigenous herders, to develop and implement management strategies that meet the needs of people and wildlife.</p> <p>12: Improving threatened species conservation, particularly Critically Endangered wild camels, which are a national and global priority.</p> <p>13: Maintaining wild camel genetic diversity by enabling range-wide migration and reducing opportunities for crossbreeding with the domestic camel.</p> <p>17: Implementing Mongolia's NBSAP goals:</p> <p>Goal 1: disseminating sustainable development information via education and mass media - enabling school-based Eco-Clubs and a public awareness campaign;</p> <p>Goal 2: creating a base of biodiversity data and ensuring its use in decision-making - supported by developing sustainable biodiversity monitoring and local research expertise;</p> <p>Goal 4: implementing the national programme on conservation of endangered animals – delivering the Wild Camel species action plan;</p> <p>Goal 5: improving the connection and management of protected areas - supported by building institutional capacity;</p> <p>Goal 9: reducing pasture degradation - supported by working with</p>

		<p>herders to improve livestock productivity, reducing the need for illegal grazing.</p> <p>18: The wild camel's long-distance migrations have special cultural significance for Mongolians. The project will integrate local traditional knowledge into conservation efforts to secure this knowledge for future generations, achieved through using existing community-level Eco-Clubs and participatory governance frameworks to engage herders.</p> <p>19: The project addresses critical knowledge gaps identified by the NBSAP (e.g. impacts of the increasingly impermeable Sino-Mongolian border, and human disturbance).</p>
2.	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)	For the highly mobile wild camel (CMS Appendix I, CMS Central Asian Mammals Initiative, designated by Resolution 11.13 -COP11, calling for Range States to implement provisions of the Convention to benefit the conservation of this species). The project will meet the CMS calls for conservation efforts to maintain landscape permeability, and reduce overgrazing/livestock competition.
3.	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	To improve the adaptive capacity of communities and habitats, creating resilience to climate-associated risks, supporting adaptive measures and reducing their vulnerability to the future impacts of climate change.
4.	Global Goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs)	<p>This project contributes to the following SDGs:</p> <p>1, 2 and 8 – VSLAs and small business increase herders' access to financial services (SDG 8.3, 8.10 and 1.4), contribute to improved income (SDG 1.1) and food production (SDG 2.4), promote sustainable rangeland management practices (SDG 8.4), and reduce remote communities' vulnerability to external shocks (SDG 1.5).</p> <p>4 and 5 – By implementing GESI principles in VSLAs, Eco-Clubs, and herder training, it promotes equal opportunities and participation of children, women, and the elderly (SDG 5.5) in community banking and livelihood development. Buffer-zone herders will increase their understanding of sustainable development through rangeland training, conservation actions, and Eco-Club campaigns (SDG 4.7).</p> <p>10 – By involving herder communities in PA management and aligning management policies to communities' livelihoods and finance access needs, it contributes towards reducing inequality between communities.</p> <p>13 – Through improved rangeland practices (carbon sinks); supporting livelihood alternatives that reduce risks from climate change; ensuring wider access to environmental information; and helping Gobi wildlife to cope with warming climate (waterhole and oases restoration), adaptive capacity to climate change is improved for communities and habitats.</p> <p>15 - Rangeland management, habitat rehabilitation, and promoting Gobi ecosystems and wildlife recovery will contribute to protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, and halting biodiversity loss. By strengthening the CMC, including GGASPA, it enhances national capacity (SDG 16.a).</p> <p>17 – By fostering North-South partnerships, it will increase Mongolia's access to science and knowledge-sharing (SDG 17.6), supporting the implementation of national commitments for CBD and CMS (SDG 17.9).</p>

5. Project support for poverty reduction

Expected beneficiaries of the project are 1272 buffer-zone households in 7 baghs. The project has been empowering them to have a stronger voice in conservation through five CRKs/ BZCs and the CMC, with women and vulnerable groups achieving greater representation (20-40%) in BZCs and VSLAs.

According to the baseline survey among 69 buffer-zone households conducted in January-March 2022, the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) was 0.114², indicating that 28.2% of the households were impoverished. Household property ownership and infant mortality rates were

² Multidimensional Poverty Index

low, but households were deprived of other indicators of living standards due mainly to limited access to drinking water, poor sanitation, poor flooring materials in homes, and lack of fuel for cooking. More than 90% of the households had limited access to adequate sanitation and fuel for cooking, while over 80% lacked reliable sources of drinking water and flooring in their homes.

To help address the limited access to financial services, the project had meetings combined with training for herders on the proven VSLA model. During the reporting period, over 102 households (a total of 140 individuals, 102 men and 38 women) from 5 buffer-zone soums learned about the VSLA model and its benefits. Two VSLAs with 24 members (20 men, 4 women) were established in Shinejinst and Altai soums. Having local project coordinators, the project will intensify engagement with herders in Y2 to encourage their collective action on rangeland management and improved access to loans.

6. Consideration of gender equality issues

The project has strategies for improved gender equality by facilitating increased participation of vulnerable social groups in VSLAs and Eco-clubs and cooperating with local authorities to promote women's and girls' roles. Since the start, the project has promoted equal participation of children in Eco-Clubs and equal membership in soum BZCs. ZSL follows Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy (GESI) principles in the project implementation that are relevant to local gender status within the CMC to provide entry points for greater female participation in BZCs, rangeland management training, and awareness-raising events. Currently, the CMC is led by a chairwoman, the CRK head of Altai soum. The project will make every effort to support her to make her term successful. Currently, Eco-Club membership is female-dominated (about 60-80%), so the project will work to encourage boys' participation.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

ZSL Monitoring and Evaluation systems: Project monitoring and evaluation is a critical process to ensure the project is on track to deliver its outcome and contribute to its impact. ZSL employs several internal M&E tools to track and adapt the project as necessary.

During the project, the ZSL team holds weekly meetings with ZSL Mongolia's Country Director, and also with the project coordinator in ZSL HQ to discuss progress towards achieving weekly milestones. Completion of these milestones is monitored through the project workplan and logical framework, and monthly reports are submitted using ZSL's web-based systems, including activity, indicator, and finance tracking. The project supplies half-year and annual reports and provides an important M&E benchmarking process.

8. Lessons learned

In order to strengthen a collaborative and inclusive governance institution to make coordinated and landscape-level management decisions among multiple stakeholders, the project supported the Collaborative Management Council (CMC), updated its constitution, and elected new members due to changes in local governments following the 2021 election. Through the process of joint planning, exchanges and training, the relationships between stakeholders have been strengthened and improved coordination has been established to avoid duplication of efforts among the projects and programmes operating in the GGASPA and its buffer-zone. In this way, the project addressed the concerns of the local authorities about overlapping activities among various projects. In Y2, the project will continue supporting the CMC, led by newly-elected chairwoman Ms. Ulziisaikha, to implement the approved CMC plan and sub-plans of the five soum BZCs.

To introduce the banking model for the well-being and financial stability of the Gobi herders, the project facilitated two consecutive meetings, combined with relevant training, involving 140 herders. However, the project succeeded in establishing only two VSLAs of the planned seven over the past six months. This was owing to two factors: first, herders were very careful about creating such funds due to lack of prior experience, therefore their decisions were slow.

Secondly, it was hard to gather herders from scattered households without a local project assistant in the spacious Gobi steppe. In some cases, herders did not gather, or forgot their agreed date to meet. Thus, ZSL decided to hire a Local Coordinator in the target area, who is responsible for on-site implementation and liaison with local authorities and target communities. Two competitively-selected Local Coordinators (in Bayankhongor and Gobi-Altai) started working on 26 April 2022. .

9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Not applicable

10. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

The project design has not been enhanced; not encountered significant difficulties, and not faced any particular risks during Y1.

11. Sustainability and legacy

The project is committed to building the capacity of the CMC and GGASPA Administration, Eco-Clubs, and buffer-zone herder communities while equipping them with the necessary skills to work more effectively together and take better-informed joint actions. For example, the stakeholders organized two CMC meetings and discussed and approved the CMC Annual Plan. Eco-Clubs learned the novel tool the “Nomadic Trunk” for ecological education and awareness-raising activities. Herder households learned about the VSLA approach in order to set up a community-banking win-win mechanism for more sustainable income generation and self-sustaining sources of nature conservation support.

GGASPA management is improving through training events under Output 1 for establishing its monitoring (camera-trapping and SMART patrol) capacity, which will be further strengthened by research results (rangeland survey/ SMART data analysis).

The CMC is expected to become a platform to support more evidence-based and representative decision-making, benefitting communities and the GGASPA ecosystem to oversee the integrated landscape management across the GGASPA.

12. Darwin identity

The project has consistently highlighted its funding source as the Darwin Initiative of the UK Government to project stakeholders and other collaborators at all the events. We placed the donor logo on project materials, including presentation slides, posters, and publications. For example, on World Wildlife Day (March 3), under the theme of ‘Recovering key species for ecosystem restoration’, the UK Embassy organized a virtual wildlife photo exhibition where the project provided wildlife images with captions.

ZSL’s social media pages reach 25,300 Twitter and 11,500 Instagram followers. ZSL Mongolia contributes project-related content monthly to ZSL’s press unit, including DI-funded activities.

On 16 November 2021, the ZSL Country Director and her team welcomed Mr.Philip Malone, Ambassador of Her Majesty, to the ZSL Mongolia office, informed him about the DI grant award, and introduced the project’s goals and key activities. The ambassador has strongly supported ZSL Mongolia's work since the first DI-funded project in Arkhangai Local Protected Area and through our recent IWTCF project (2018-2021). He talked about the project’s work in the Great Gobi during his meeting with the newly appointed Minister of Environment and Tourism of Mongolia on 19 February 2022. (Please see this [link](#).)

The Darwin Initiative funding was recognised as a distinct project with a clear identity among the project stakeholders at national and local levels.

The Mongolian conservation community (government organizations, CSOs, and INGOs) has a good understanding of the Darwin Initiative, the largest UK government fund that supports environmental conservation. A dedicated page on the ZSL website under the Mongolia projects

section provides key information on the project and its funding source. ZSL Mongolia also runs a Facebook page, which is becoming increasingly popular among social media users. For those without access to digital media, the project provides hard copies of training materials, reports, and guidelines in the mother language, including for local project partners, herder communities, and Eco-Clubs.

The project activities were reported on the ZSL London web page (c.326,000 users per month) and ZSL Mongolia Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ZSL.org>). The ZSL Mongolia Facebook page has 450 followers so far and 354 likes. The project posted a short video about eco-training for the Eco-Clubs, which reached to 5000 people in March-April 2022.

In addition, the news, with photos about the CMC meeting in Ulaanbaatar and posted recruitment announcements for local coordinators in the target soums, reached 7000 people.

13. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

Due to COVID restrictions in the UK, the final decisions on grant awards were delayed; thus, the actual project commencement was in October 2021, following the completion of the necessary paperwork in September 2021. This coincided with the post-COVID reopening in Mongolia. Therefore, the project has been under time pressure to deliver all the activities before the end of the financial year.

14. Safeguarding

Please tick this box if any safeguarding or human rights violations have occurred during this financial year.

If you have ticked the box, please ensure these are reported to ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk as indicated in the T&Cs.

ZSL has a “Global Safeguarding Policy” and “Global Code of Conduct” policy with associated documents and training to guide and inform staff about safeguarding. These policies outline ZSL and its staff’s responsibility to ensure sure their staff or other representatives, operations, and programmes do not harm children and adults at risk, nor expose them to abuse, exploitation, bullying or harassment. They also cover how ZSL safeguards its own staff and other representatives at all times, including protecting them from harm and inappropriate behaviour such as bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment. ZSL has and implements a safeguarding policy titled “Policy and procedure to safeguard children and adults at risk”, which provides guidance on how to establish local safeguarding links and how to deal with safeguarding concerns should they arise in overseas activities. Every employee of ZSL has access to and is familiarised with this policy. The ZSL has and implements a risk assessment procedure, and conducts risk assessments and prepares Emergency Response Plans prior to field trips. This is a vital part of safeguarding, which includes undertaking a risk assessment for each project or activity undertaken in project sites. ZSL staff are aware that if someone is at risk at a project site, they must report it after responding appropriately. ZSL has Code of Conduct in place and all staff are familiar with the Code of Conduct, on which they receive training from HR.

15. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022)

Project spend (indicative) since the last Annual Report	2021/22 Grant (£)	2021/22 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)	██████	██████	██████	We couldn't recruit the biodiversity officer until 21th of February 2022.
Consultancy costs	██████	██████	██████	
Overhead Costs	██████	██████	██████	
Travel and subsistence	██████	██████	██████	

Operating Costs	██████	██████	██████	
Capital items (see below)	██████	██████	██████	
Others (see below)	██████	██████	██████	
TOTAL	██████	██████	██████	

16. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes

I agree for the Darwin Initiative Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk putting the project number in the Subject line.	
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please discuss with Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line.	
Have you included means of verification? You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	
Do you have hard copies of material you need to submit with the report? If so, please make this clear in the covering email and ensure all material is marked with the project number. However, we would expect that most material will now be electronic.	
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	