

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 2022

Project reference	28006
Project title	Protecting Mongolia's Gobi Desert for wild camels and herder communities
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Mongolia
Lead partner	Zoological Society of London, Outer Circle, NW1 4RY, UK
Partner(s)	Ministry of Environment and Tourism Mongolia (MET), Great 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 Representativ Khurals, National University of Mongolia (NUM), UNDP/GEF ENSURE project
Project leader	<i>Dr. Tungalag Ulambayar, ZSL Mongolia Country Director</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	01 April 2022 – 30 September 2022 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	www.zsl.org/mongolia https://www.facebook.com/ZSL.org

1. 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).

O1: GGASPA and CMC management

(1.1) A high-capacity computer for SMART data processing was provided to the GGASPA Administration in September 2022. (1.2) A SMART training workshop took place (17th June) in Ulaanbaatar City for 14 participants, including representatives from GGASPA Administration, Eco-police Department, Border Defense Unit in Altai soum of Gobi-Altai aimag and Gurvan Tes soum of Umnugobi aimag. (1.3) For rangeland carrying capacity estimation, NUM researchers sampled plant biomass from 22 GGASPA buffer zone sites. In total, 110 quadrats were sampled. The study obtained additional plant biomass data from 70 sites of the national rangeland monitoring network. This data will be used to validate a model of rangeland carrying capacity in the GGASPA buffer zone. Also, plant communities were determined in the randomly selected 22 points. (1.4) The first SMART database model was created in 2021, and the NUM team has been collaborating with the GGASPA Administration to improve the structure. NUM selected a student to support SMART data processing. (1.5) Following two SMART trainings (27/11/2021, 09/01/2022) for the GGASPA Administration Office and Border Defense Agency, rangers piloted the test data collection during patrols and a primary database created for the analysis. (1.6) For researching wild camel migration and behavior, the project deployed 40 camera traps at 13 water points across the GGASPA. In August, SD cards were collected containing 134,763 images and videos of Gobi species including wild camel, wild ass, argali sheep, goittered gazelle, ibex and some bird species. (1.7) The project will inform GGASPA management and other stakeholders upon completion of SMART patrol reports, the Rangeland study and 1st year camera data. (1.8) The NUM selected MSc student began research on rangeland study and collecting primary data. Another BA student was recruited to work on wildlife camera trap and SMART patrol data. (1.9)

Will be brought up upon completion of survey reports (see 1.7). **(1.10)** ZSL Mongolia organized online advanced SMART training for partners and stakeholders (24-28th October) led by SMART expert from ARTIO Conservation. Following this ToT, ZSL plans a follow-up training for GGASPA rangers.

O2: Restoration of GGASPA desert ecosystem

(2.1) GGASPA maps have been developed including GGASPA topography and waterhole locations **(2.2)** Four Solar-powered pumps were installed (20-25 October) at four boreholes to increase water access for wildlife At Buuriin Khyar waterhole, where a solar-powered pump was installed last year, a 30ton water reservoir and 45m canal were also constructed.**(2.3)** The NUM team conducted a field survey in the GGASPA (16th June- 3rd July), to sample rangeland plant biomass **(2.4)** Will take place in year 3.

O3. Collaborative and inclusive governance institutions in place.

(3.1) A CMC meeting took place in Ulaanbaatar (14th April) with over 50 participants, including representatives from government and donor projects operating in the area, where the CMC plan was presented and approved. The plan reflects roles and contributions of stakeholders, and serves as a tool for strengthening partnerships and effective cooperation. **(3.2)** The Buffer Zone Council of each soum organized meetings in parallel with the event “*Building a shared future for all life*”(7-22 May). The GGASPA Buffer Zone CMC chairwomen led the event and evaluated progress of each BZC workplanThe CMC chairwoman also participated in the Gobi Region Ranger Forum in August and presented the work of CMC to over 100 participants.

O4. Ground-up awareness-raising

(4.1) The project organized a study tour for eco-club teachers from GGASPA secondary schools who visited the Conservation Center of Nature and Fresh Water Resources under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and “Mother Nature” High School - Ecology and Nature Conservation Center under Mongolian National University.. Two eco-club teachers also participated in a study tour to the Gulzat Local Protected Area (LPA) in Uvs aimag (11-22 August), where they shared what they learned from eco-clubs of different aimags as well as best practices in Gulzat LPA with soum citizens. **(4.2)** ZSL Project Local Coordinators supported soum eco-clubs to develop their annual workplan and agree ZSL Mongolias input for implementation. **(4.3)** The project supported a campaign to celebrate International Day of Biological Diversity under the slogan: “*Building a shared future for all life*” (17-22 May) across GGASPA buffer zone soums. All partners, including GGASPA Administration, Buffer Zone CMC, 5 soums’ Citizens’ Representative Khurals, soum secondary schools, ENSURE project and Border Defense Units cooperated in the campaign and the event attracted over 400 locals.The project introduced a “Nomadic Trunk”, a package of environmental training to participants alongside teachers and eco-club pupils at the GGASPA Eco-clubs’ conference in September. ZSL provided rewards to the best performing eco-club teachers and students**(4.4)** The summer and autumn of 2022 have been very dry causing intensive out-migration of Gobi herders to areas with better pastures, influencing planned work with herders, including VSLAs, rangeland training and planning. The Project Local Coordinators have been collecting information and data on herders in the target BZ areas **(4.5)** Due to the drought, herders were largely absent, delaying this activity. Training will commence when herders return in winter. Two representatives of the target bag herders participated in the ‘Eco-Herder’ conference in Ulaanbaatar (26-28 October).**(4.6)** ZSLs Mongolia Country Director and Local Coordinators participated in the Gobi Region Ranger Forum organized by the GGASPA Administration **(9-12 August)**. **The conference, held in Bayantooroi village, brought together 130 people including representatives from the MET, 13 PAs across the Gobi region, environmental state inspectors, rangers, conservation societies and international projects. ZSLs Country Director presented on “Ranger methods to collaborate with community members” and talked about ZSLs conservation work. ZSL also organized game-based nature conservation sessions using the ‘Nomadic Trunk’ZSLs Country Director also presented ‘Who is the eco-friendly herder’ to over 70 herders at the ‘Eco-Herder’ conference.**

O5. Improved wellbeing and financial stability of rural herders.

(5.1) A list of herder households in the GGASPA buffer zone (5 soums of 2 aimags) is ready for further action.**(5.2)** The project jointly organised a study tour “Herder to Herder” (12-17th June) from Gobi to Khangai Region,. In total 40 representatives of the projects target herders in the GGASPA BZ visited the LPA “Khoi Mongolia Gol-Teeliin” in Bulgan soum, Arkhangai aimag. They travelled 2,500km through Zahui Zarman Gobi and Ulaan Shall Valley which is a main migration route of iconic species of the Great Gobi – goitered gazelle, wild ass, and saiga antelope etc. During the tour, herders from the Great Gobi learned from herders in the LPA that have been working steadily since establishment as a community organization. After the tour, Project Local Coordinators organized a meeting to discuss the VLSA model among herders of 5 soums in the GGASPA Buffer Zone. 98 herders participated (34 women and 64 men). As a result of the meeting and study tour, 8 herder groups were formed **(5.3)** The project selected two waterholes in the buffer zone jointly with CMC, respective soum authorities and the GGASPA Administration to increase water for livestock Solar-powered pumps were installed (20-25th October).

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.

Inflation and price increase. In September 2022, the consumer price index at the national level decreased by 0.2% from the previous month and increased by 9.5% from the end of the previous year and by 13.8% from the same period of the previous year. Inflation was 10.2% in September 2021 and reached 13.8% in September 2022, increased by 3.6 percentage points from the same period of previous year (<https://www.1212.mn/>). Therefore, there is a risk that the original budget may no longer be enough. For example: “Tariff of expenses for working on official assignments” increased in accordance with the Order No.120 dated June 2, 2022 of the Minister of Finance (<https://mof.gov.mn>).

The project is submitting a Change Request regarding the Project Local Coordinators’ salary being charged as a National Consultant’s fee during the transition period.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Not yet, but will
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/No

Change request reference if known:

4a. 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: £

4b. 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. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

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

No specific comment here.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

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**