

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2009)

Project Ref. No.	EIDP0035
Project Title	Tracking the Sociable Lapwing: conservation beyond the breeding grounds.
Country(ies)	Kazakhstan, Russia, India, Syria, Iraq, Sudan & Turkey
UK Organisation	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Collaborator(s)	ACBK, RBCU, BNHS, DD, NI, SWS, AEWA & Birdlife International
Project Leader	Rob Sheldon (HYR written by Maxim Koshkin, ACBK)
Report date	31 st of October
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 1
Project website	www.acbk.kz

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

Starting with the middle of April 2009 the project team undertook monitoring of Sociable Lapwing breeding colonies at the project's core study area in Tengiz-Korgalzhyn region. The team located and monitored total of 121 nests. In 2009 nest success appeared to be quite low – 60 nests predated, 11 trampled and 40 nests hatched. A total of 133 chicks and 15 adult birds were colour-ringed. More than 20 Sociable Lapwings ringed in previous years were re-sighted in Kazakhstan, mainly in Korgalzhyn area. One bird, marked in Central Kazakhstan earlier, was seen by a Kazakhstani ornithologist in April 2009 in Southern Kazakhstan, more likely being on migration from wintering grounds in India.

By May 2009 only one satellite tag of the five used in 2007 and 2008 was still active and transmitting. Signals suggested that the male bird fitted with satellite tag at the core project site in may 2007, spending two winters in Sudan, returned to breed in Korgalzhyn area, where it was recorded in the second half of May. Another interesting finding of this season was relocation of a satellite tagged bird satellite tagged in 2008, which lost the tag in Turkey and was successfully breeding in a village where she was ringed in the previous year.

In April 2009 the project team organised a Student Workshop 'Estimating numbers of wild animals' for the most enthusiastic and active biology students from 6 largest universities in Kazakhstan. Two previous trainings in 2006 and 2008, run by the project, were great success and the ACBK's Student Birdwatching Clubs were organizing the 3d one this year. This year's training was a great opportunity for 18 first/second year students to receive theoretical and practical up-to-date information on survey strategies and methods, bird identification and monitoring during the intensive 5 day course, based at the research campus of the Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve. Training was provided by Maxim Koshkin, the local Sociable Lapwing Project coordinator and one of the organizers of the first two similar trainings.

Total of 8 students took part in 2009 fieldwork activities. Four students joined the team for the second or even 3rd time and Madina Machmetova, as one of the most experienced students, was leading one of the project teams.

Sociable Lapwing project staff actively participated in the 3rd Summer Camp for around 20 biology students from 5 different universities of Kazakhstan. It took place in August 2009 and was organized by ACBK with support from Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve. This was another great opportunity for students to be introduced to nature conservation and to share their enthusiasm and knowledge with each other.

In July a survey expedition to southern part of Kostanaj region of Kazakhstan was conducted, aiming to assess the importance of the area as stopover site, to clarify migration routes and to collect data to improve the world population estimate for the species. This area is located 300-500 km to the west of the main project site and was considered to be an important stopover site for migrating Sociable Lapwings, based on signals received from satellite tagged birds, which suggested they were using the area during autumn migration. However the area was hardly visited by any ornithologists before. Between 23.07 and 02.08 two project teams were able to discover a total of over 2700 Sociable Lapwings, including large flocks of over 500 birds – biggest congregations of Sociable Lapwings in Kazakhstan since 1939.

The second international expedition to Kumo-Manych Depression in South Russia (Stavropolskij Krai and Republic of Kalmykia) was organized by the project in September 2009. The main aim of this expedition was to refine the numbers of Sociable Lapwing using this area and to collect data on habitat use and possible threats to the species. Satellite tagged Sociable Lapwings have used this area in previous years.

From 3 to 16 of September 2009 large territories of potentially suitable habitat were surveyed by 5 independent field teams, consisting of representatives of RSPB, ACBK, Stavropol State University and local ornithologists. A total of more than 4000 Sociable Lapwings were recorded with up to 1500 of them potentially being different individuals. The highest single day count reached 1087 birds. With most of the birds being checked for rings only one was found to be colour-ringed (marked as a juvenile in Kostanaj region of Kazakhstan in July 2009).

These counts once again confirmed the importance of this area for Sociable Lapwings as a major stopover site along the western migration route, crucial for their refueling before heading towards wintering grounds in north-eastern Africa. Important information on habitat use, numbers, spatial and temporal distribution of bird was collected. A publication is being prepared.

Plans are well underway with project partners to undertake survey work on the wintering grounds. Contracts and work programmes are currently being agreed for survey work and the development of information materials in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Sudan and India. In addition the Sociable Lapwing project has agreed to work with new partners in Eritrea – the Darwin project will jointly fund (with the African Bird Club) some survey work in areas where there are historical records of Sociable Lapwing.

The Darwin Project Team have supported the concept of an AEWA high level delegation being sent to Syria to discuss the hunting issue which contravenes AEWA agreement. Terms of Reference are currently being consulted on and the logistics of meeting high level representatives of the Syrian Government and Ministries being discussed. A member of the Sociable Lapwing team is expected to be invited for the visit sometime in spring 2010.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The project team were unable to attach satellite tags this breeding season due to not catching birds of sufficient weight. However, new lightweight tags (5g) are being developed and we are currently testing these on captive waders at Whipsnade Zoo. These lighter tags will be able to be attached to any Sociable Lapwing that we catch in 2010, including large chicks – this will provide us with a much larger sample size to work with in future years. These lightweight tags are a massive breakthrough, and whilst it was disappointing to not get any tags fitted this year, there is no reason why we can't get all tags fitted in 2010.

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

No, these changes won't make any difference to the eventual project outcome as we are confident we can satellite tag more birds next year and get even better quality data given the technological advance.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no/yes, in.....(month/yr)

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

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with the Darwin Secretariat directly.

Please send your **completed form email** to Eilidh Young, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme at Darwin-Projects@ectf-ed.org.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 14-075 Darwin Half Year Report**