

Darwin Fellowship - Interim Report

(Please check guidance for submission deadlines, max 3 pages.)

Darwin Project Ref No	EIDPS024
Darwin Project Title	15-032: Conserving a flagship steppe species: The critically endangered Sociable Lapwing
Name of Darwin Fellow	Maxim Koshkin
UK Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) University of East Anglia (UEA)
Your Organisation(s)	Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK)
Your role within your Organisation	National 'Sociable Lapwing Project' coordinator, currently on sabbatical to obtain MSc in the UK
Start/end date of Fellowship	1 st September 2010 – 31 st August 2011
Location	School of Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK
Darwin fellowship funding (£)	£ 26,550
Type of work (eg research, training, other, please specify)	Research and training
Main contact in UK Organisation	Dr Paul Donald, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Author(s), date	Maxim Koshkin, 28.02.2011

1. Background

- **Briefly describe your involvement in the Darwin project before the start of your fellowship.**

In 2006, I started work on one of the first Darwin projects to run in Kazakhstan, when the team received a substantial award to RSPB for 3 years from the Darwin Initiative ('Conserving a flagship steppe species: The critically endangered Sociable Lapwing', ref: 15-032). I was involved in further work as National Project Coordinator. In 2009, a Darwin post-project award was received by the project team ('Tracking the Sociable Lapwing: conservation beyond the breeding grounds', ref: EIDPO035), for which I was acting both as National Sociable Lapwing Project Coordinator and Coordinator of the Sociable Lapwing International Working Group. My main responsibilities in these posts were the following: coordination of all Sociable Lapwing research related activities, leading field teams and overseeing data collection, public awareness raising, students training, developing contacts with local stakeholders and government and coordination of the working group.

- **Describe aim and objectives of the Fellowship, and programme of work**

The aim of the Fellowship is to help me to receive up-to-date training in ecology and conservation, which would help me in my future career as a conservationist in Kazakhstan. The following objectives are to be reached:

- To receive a high level formal qualification, in this case a MSc in Applied Ecology and Conservation, to be able to work more effectively in conservation and to be able to pass on the knowledge to colleagues and students in my home country
- To learn how to carry out my own research through field training and diploma research
- To develop links with leading conservationists and organizations

The study programme of the Masters course at UEA can be briefly described as follows: during the period between September 2010 and April 2011, taught courses are given on a number of modules, including Ecological Survey Methods, Issues in Conservation, Statistics and GIS. Following this, I will be undertaking a field-based research project in Kazakhstan, before returning to UEA to analyse the data and write up the results as a MSc thesis.

- **Briefly describe the roles of the UK and Fellow's institutions**

My co-supervisor Dr Paul Donald (RSPB), in collaboration with my academic supervisor from University of East Anglia, Dr Paul Dolman, have been supporting me logistically and academically throughout the MSc course. Both have been involved in discussing and planning my forthcoming thesis project.

I remained in close contact with my home organization, the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan and we recently agreed that they will support me technically and logistically, providing me all the equipment I need to carry my diploma fieldwork in Kazakhstan this year.

2. Progress

- **Provide a brief account of your work since the start of your fellowship, showing progress against the programme of work.**

From 23^d September 2010 to present I have participated in the taught courses on the Masters of Applied Ecology and Conservation, based at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. The MSc course includes 8 modules that total 180 credits, with 100 credits from the 7 taught courses while the remaining 80 credits come from a research project.

- **Provide an account of any problems encountered and how you have or are planning to overcome them.**

The only major problem encountered so far was related to opening a bank account for fellowship money transfers in the very beginning of the course, which took longer than expected. However, this problem was solved and the lesson was learned.

- **Are there any issues you would like to raise?**

3. Achievements and Outcomes

- **What have been the main achievements and outcomes to date, and how do they relate to the overall aim and objectives of the Fellowship.**

So far I have successfully passed 3 one-term modules and the results of the remaining modules are still to be announced. I have identified a suitable thesis project in Kazakhstan and have prepared a draft thesis proposal in consultation with my supervisors.

4. Next Steps

- **Briefly describe forthcoming activities, events, milestones**

After the last coursework deadline on the 9th of March, I am going to spend the remaining part of the month preliminary drafting the diploma dissertation and preparing for the fieldwork in spring. Individual meetings with both supervisors at UEA and RSPB are planned in order to discuss following fieldwork, following a joint meeting conducted recently in Cambridge. On the 5th of April I am planning to depart to Kazakhstan and after a preparation week I will conduct 6 weeks of fieldwork. This will be followed by data analysis and writing up of the diploma dissertation, which I am planning to do after going back to Norwich on first days of June.