

Darwin Fellowship - Final Report

(Please check guidance for submission deadlines, max 6 pages.)

Darwin Project Ref No.	EIDPS024
Darwin Project Title	Darwin Initiative Fellowship: Maxim Koshkin
Name of Darwin Fellow	Maxim Koshkin
UK Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) University of East Anglia (UEA)
Your Organisation	Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK)
Your role in 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 (e.g. 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	M. Koshkin, P. Donald, October 2011.

1. Background

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

In 2006, I was involved into 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 then 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
- raising public awareness
- student training
- developing contacts with local stakeholders and government
- coordination of the Sociable Lapwing International Working Group

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

The aim of the Fellowship was 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 from the University of East Anglia, 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 and to undertake a programme of field research in Kazakhstan on the distribution of steppe birds
- To develop links with leading conservationists and organizations

The study programme of the Masters course at UEA can be briefly described as following: 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 undertook a field-based research project in Kazakhstan entitled "...", 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.*

The University of East Anglia (UEA) hosted the MSc and academic supervision, and provided me with some additional equipment and insurance for the fieldwork period.

My co-supervisor Dr Paul Donald from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (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 thesis project and advised on data analysis.

The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK) gave me all needed technical and logistical support for my fieldwork in Kazakhstan, providing me all the equipment I need to carry my diploma fieldwork in Kazakhstan this year. My work contributed to an ongoing Darwin-funded project in Kazakhstan, "Altyn Dala: supporting ecosystem-scale conservation in Kazakhstan".

- *If you have undertaken a formal course of training, please provide a brief explanation of the course and a link to the course website if available.*

The MSc Applied Ecology and Conservation provides a flexible course structure suitable for students who wish to acquire the skills necessary for a range of careers in conservation and applied ecology. The programme aims to provide students with interdisciplinary training forming an ideal platform either for continuation to doctoral research or for direct access into conservation related employment.

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/bio/courses/msc-applied-ecology-and-conservation>

2. Achievements

- *Summarise the work undertaken during your Fellowship. What were the main activities undertaken. Highlight any work undertaken but not originally planned and explain why this happened. Highlight any problems encountered and how they were overcome.*

23^d September 2010 to 22^d of September 2011:

I participated in the taught courses of the Masters course "Applied Ecology and Conservation", based at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. The MSc course consisted of 9 modules that total 180 credits, with 100 credits from the 8 taught courses and 80 credits from a research project.

4th April 2011 to 8th June 2011:

I conducted fieldwork in Central Kazakhstan, collecting data on habitat use by breeding steppe birds.

9th June 2011 to 2^d August 2011:

Data collected were analysed and results were written up as MSc thesis/dissertation.

1st September 2011:

I received an offer of a place to do PhD at the School of Environmental Science at the University of East Anglia. After discussion with my original employer I accepted the offer to do a PhD on Houbara Bustard research and conservation in Uzbekistan.

- *What have been the main achievements of your fellowship? Key documents should be annexed to this report.*
 - Completion with Distinction of the taught courses on MSc in Applied Ecology and Conservation.
 - Successful completion of field research project and submitting MSc thesis as part of the course program. (The MSc thesis is attached)
 - Establishing new contacts with academics, researchers and conservationists in the UK.
 - My general knowledge on current conservation issues, global threats to biodiversity and up to date professional survey techniques
 - These all contributed to my being offered, and accepting, a PhD scholarship at the University of East Anglia

3. Outcomes, lessons and Impact

- *Do you feel that the work undertaken during your Fellowship has improved skills that are relevant and important for your work in your organisation? How are you planning to apply those skills in future work?*

During my studies at the UEA I have significantly improved my skills required for my further work in nature conservation, in particular in research design and implementation of research projects, data collection and analysis. I will intensively use and develop these skills during my planned PhD and will pass them to students in Uzbekistan, where my main research will be based, and in Kazakhstan, where I plan to participate in a number of training workshops (including one on data collection and analysis I helped to facilitate in Kazakhstan in September 2011), remaining in close contact with ACBK until my return.

- *What arrangements have been made for your future involvement, what more could be done, what discussions have taken place with your original employer to ensure that your new skills are utilised?*

My original employer, The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK, the national BirdLife Partner) asked me to participate in a student training course 'Statistics and Experimental Design for Biological Monitoring and Conservation', organized by Conservation Leadership program (UK). This two-week long intensive course was held from 17 – 28 September 2011 in Astana, Kazakhstan and was supported by local ACBK. I assisted the trainer with group exercises and interpreting and led the students during data collection in the field.

My involvement in training young local specialists and students for the next 3 years will be mainly through organizing various training courses and assisting with grant proposals and diploma research.

- *Has the Fellowship helped to improve your capacity to solve practical problems related to the sustainable use and/or conservation of biodiversity in your country?*

The Fellowship helped me to receive my first formal qualification in conservation science, directly linked to my current occupation and interests. Even just having this qualification will increase my chances in providing bigger input into biodiversity conservation in Kazakhstan and

other countries of Central Asian region through participation in large-scale and high impact projects. The knowledge I gained from the MSc course have established an excellent basis for my further involvement into conservation and research through a PhD in Uzbekistan. I will study a globally threatened bird species and look into conservation potential of its wild population in that country. I am one of very few conservationists from Central Asia to receive a higher degree from a British university.

- *Have you had the opportunity to make contacts with other UK biodiversity institutions, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs or the private sector during your fellowship? Will these contacts be useful for your future work, and how are you planning to maintain them?*

During the fellowship I had opportunity to make or strengthen contacts with:

- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- BirdLife International
- British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)
- Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP)
- Zoology Department of Cambridge University
- World Land Trust (WLT)
- University of East Anglia

I am planning to stay in contact with most of the above mentioned organizations and with some of them I have rather longer lasting relationships, which I am sure will continue in the future. RSPB and BirdLife International are still keen to work in Central Asia and as local ACBK is a current BirdLife partner this collaboration will continue. I have been a member of two CLP funded projects, I am an advisor for another student project in Kazakhstan at the moment and assisted in statistics training for biology/ecology students in September 2011.

- *Any other issue emerging from your experience as Darwin Fellow that you would like to raise, or suggestions for improvements to the Darwin Initiative Fellowship scheme.*

Although initially I planned to resume working for ACBK in Kazakhstan immediately after finishing my MSc studies, I was offered a scholarship for a PhD by the University of East Anglia. Taking into account the research and conservation potential of the proposed PhD project and that work is going to take place in a neighbouring country, with similar ecosystems and conservation problems I decided to accept this offer. This decision was agreed with colleagues at ACBK to ensure that my further leave is acceptable. At the moment ACBK has enough staff to maintain current projects, mainly through training and employing young enthusiastic people and through support for the Altyn Dala project from the Darwin Initiative. I am planning to rejoin ACBK upon my return from PhD leave, staying in close contact during this period.