

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

Project Ref. Number	12/028
Project Title	Using saiga antelope conservation to improve rural livelihoods
Country(ies)	Russia & Kazakhstan
UK Organisation	Imperial College London
Collaborator(s)	Host country team leaders: Institute of Ecology & Evolution (Russia), Institute of Zoology (Kazakhstan). International partners: Fauna & Flora International, IUCN Antelope Specialist Group.
Report date	31 st October 2005
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 3
Project website	http://www.iccs.org.uk

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project.

Progress against the work plan

The work plan for the last 6 months, as laid out in our second Annual Report, was:

May 2005. Repeat monitoring of calving in the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve (CZBR)

May 2005. Return to calving areas in Ustiurt, Kazakhstan.

Throughout year. Continued monitoring by the rangers of the CZBR and Stepnoi Sanctuary.

May-June 2005. Launch of our electronic newsletter *Saiga News*.

May 2005. Project meeting in Almaty.

July 2005. Socio-economic survey in Saksaul village, Ustiurt.

August 2005. Project meeting, Moscow.

Calving surveys

The calving surveys took place as planned in the CZBR (Russia) and Ustiurt plateau (Kazakhstan). In the CZBR, the team included one researcher from Imperial College and Reserve staff. Between 28th April and 27th May, 98.9km of transects were walked, and data on sex, weight, twin status and position of 437 calves were taken. Preliminary analysis of the data from 2003 and 2004 had suggested scientifically important differences in weight between calves depending on their sex and twin status, which may indicate sex-biased maternal investment (see Annex 2 of the second Annual Report). The data from 2005 are now being added to the analysis, and a paper is being prepared for publication (submission expected by the end of December). As well as the scientific interest of our results, this third year of monitoring has shown continued healthy reproduction by saigas in the CZBR, and has demonstrated the robustness of our monitoring protocol. The CZBR staff are now fully trained and a long-term monitoring programme is in place. G. Erdnenov, a member of CZBR's scientific staff, is taking responsibility for the saiga monitoring programme, which it is hoped will form the basis for his PhD studies under the supervision of Dr A. Lushchekina (Institute for Ecology and Evolution, Moscow) and Professor Iu. Arylov (Centre for the Study & Conservation of Wild Animals of Kalmykia).

In Ustiurt, last year's calf monitoring showed worrying signs of reproductive collapse, with only scattered calves being found, and no calving aggregation. This year, a small aggregation was found, and data were taken from 109 ?? calves in the same area that was searched last year. This positive result, and the signs of active poaching encountered during our work, strengthen our position in calling for urgent and strong protection for the Ustiurt saiga population. The team included a researcher from Imperial College and was led by the Institute of Zoology, Kazakhstan.

Continued monitoring throughout year

Our relationship with the rangers of the Stepnoi Sanctuary continues to strengthen. Our training of

Sanctuary's rangers has enabled them to participate in the monitoring programme, and we have also contributed petrol, equipment and a high-speed motorbike for their anti-poaching work. Staff of the CZBR and Stepnoi Sanctuary are now routinely collecting information on sightings of saigas and poaching signs, including location, size and composition of herds. This monitoring is also now well integrated into the long-term work programme of the two protected areas.

Launch of Saiga News

Saiga News was launched in June, according to schedule (see Issue 1 attached). The aim of the newsletter is to reach all those interested in saiga issues, from international conservation policymakers to local villagers and consumers of saiga products, and to bridge the communication gap between these people. We have an editorial board with members from all saiga range states and China, and have already published the newsletter in Russian, Chinese and English. It is available online at three sites (www.iccs.org.uk/saiganews.htm, <http://www.saigak.biodiversity.ru/eng/publications/saiganewsengl.pdf>, www.wcschina.org) and has been widely distributed by us and our partners in hard copy to villagers and officials within the range states. The next issue is underway, and due to be published in December. We also have versions in Kazakh and Mongolian in production. This newsletter has been very well received, and we feel it is a major output from our project. We have funding for 2 years, and are actively working to ensure it is self-sustaining once this has finished.

Project meeting in Almaty

This project meeting was dependent on external funding paying EJMG's travel costs to attend a conference. The conference did not take place, and hence the meeting in its original form did not occur. However, substantial progress was made in another arena. In June, Imperial College researcher Aline Kühl attended a meeting in Almaty with representatives of WWF, FZS, Birdlife, our partners Institute of Zoology, and representatives of the Kazakhstan government and saiga management authority. Ms Kühl gave a presentation about our project, which was very well received. We are now in consultation with these organisations about strategies for major international investment in saiga conservation. These include a proposed GEF project in the Tugay region of Central Kazakhstan supported by UNDP.

Socio-economic survey

A socio-economic survey was carried out in the village of Saxaul, Ustiurt plateau, in July using the methods developed in the first part of the project. This completes our collection of baseline data on the livelihood issues faced by people living in the study areas. We are now analysing the data and will be submitting a paper for publication by March 2006. The survey in Saxaul found a relatively well-off community compared to other areas, in which saiga poaching was occurring, but within a relatively diversified economy. As in the other surveys, our work also included education and outreach, with the researchers talking about their work at the local schools and community centres. Another important component of this work is the training of researchers. The research team included Imperial College researcher A. Kühl and Kalmykian researcher N. Balinova, who together act as the training team, and three students from the Kazakh National Agricultural University. In both Kazakhstan and Kalmykia, our social surveys have acted as springboards for active intervention to improve livelihoods (see below).

Project meeting, Moscow

The meeting was held in Moscow on 15th-16th August, and included leaders and key personnel from all participating teams. We had a useful discussion, in which the results from each country's activities were compared, and commonalities and differences evaluated. It was decided that the final meeting in March should follow a new format, given that we now communicate very effectively as an electronic network. We therefore plan to hold an e-conference in which teams present their final reports to the group for comment and discussion, after which they will make individual presentations to government of our results and recommendations.

Additional progress made

Visit to Kalmykia

Following the project meeting, E.J. Milner-Gulland (IC), David Mallon (IUCN ASG), A. Lushchekina and V. Neronov (IEE) visited Kalmykia, where they had fruitful discussions with the Vice-Premier of Kalmykia, and with the head of the local government of Yashkul Region. They visited the CZBR and Stepnoi Sanctuary, and also had discussions with the teachers and children of Yashkul school, which has

formed particularly close links with our local partners. There is much potential for development of our work with schools in the region, and it was agreed that our project would further support the ecological education programme at the school. They visited project partners CSCWAK, CZBR and Stepnoi Sanctuary to discuss ideas for future work, and investigated the potential for ecotourism as a component of sustainable livelihoods in the region. Observations of saiga behaviour during the visit confirmed the security of the population in the area, with plentiful sightings of saigas which were relatively unafraid of the vehicle. The visit was well reported in the local newspaper.

Education and dissemination

In Kalmykia a number of articles on our project's work have been published, and team members have given 2 interviews on local TV. We also give lectures at the Kalmykian State University and have formed an undergraduate club there for saiga conservation action. Talks were given on our project at local schools throughout Kalmykia and in Ustiurt. A film by Russian filmmakers on saiga conservation and its cultural importance to the Kalmykian people, which was supported by our project team, was shown at primetime in Kalmykia on 27th August, and has been distributed to schools.

Honours and awards

In August, Anna Lushchekina, project coordinator in Russia, was given the status of Honoured Scientist of the Republic of Kalmykia for her dedicated work for saiga conservation. Nadia Arylova, who works for the project in Kalmykia, was given an award from the President of the Republic of Kalmykia for the best undergraduate dissertation of the year.

Launching livelihood alternatives

In both Kalmykia and Kazakhstan, we have moved on from gathering baseline data and building an understanding of local peoples' needs and aspirations, to implementing livelihoods alternatives. In Ustiurt, the Darwin project's social surveys in Saksaul village laid the foundations for project partner FFI's DGIS-funded small grants programme, which began in July-August. Darwin project team members trained representatives of a local NGO in our research methods, and this NGO is now acting as the local implementer of FFI's project. In Kalmykia, we heard in August that the Centre for the Study and Conservation of Wild Animals of Kalmykia had been awarded a grant under the British Council's Small Environmental Project Scheme (SEPS), for a project entitled "Rotating cows as a tool for saiga conservation". This project started on 10th October, follows on from our consultation with villagers, and has been very well received in the local area.

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. N/A.

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

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures? We feel that our project has catalysed a major shift in attitude and action towards saigas, internationally and within the range states. We have a number of ideas for ways in which the work could continue and expand. Given this huge potential, and the strong team we have built up, we would very much welcome the opportunity to bid for follow-up funding.