

# Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

## Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

<b>Project Ref. Number</b>	12/028
<b>Project Title</b>	Using saiga antelope conservation to improve rural livelihoods
<b>Country(ies)</b>	Russia & Kazakhstan
<b>UK Organisation</b>	Imperial College London
<b>Collaborator(s)</b>	Host country team leaders: Institute of Ecology & Evolution (Russia), Institute of Zoology (Kazakhstan). International partners: Fauna & Flora International, IUCN Antelope Specialist Group.
<b>Report date</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2004
<b>Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)</b>	HYR 2
<b>Project website</b>	<a href="http://www.env.ic.ac.uk/research/rrag/Darwin.htm">http://www.env.ic.ac.uk/research/rrag/Darwin.htm</a>

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

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

*April 2004. Aerial survey of saiga population (BD).* Aerial surveys were carried out by our partners from the Institute of Zoology and Okhotzooptom in Kazakhstan. These surveys reported an overall population size of 30,700 in Kazakhstan (up from 21,000 in 2003), of which 6,900 were reported from Betpak-dala (1,800 in 2003), 15,000 in Ustiurt (12,800 in 2003) and 8,800 in Ural (6,500 in 2003). Despite the positive trend suggested by these results, the project team has grave doubts about the validity of drawing any inferences from the apparent improvement in saiga numbers. This is because of changes in coverage and survey methods between years (for example 1,800 in Betpak-dala is likely to have been an underestimate, and 6,900 an overestimate, while an accurate count in Ustiurt was hampered by the cold winter meaning that a substantial proportion of the population was still in Uzbekistan at the time of the count). Our ground-based monitoring in Ustiurt (see below) also painted a less positive picture than the population monitoring suggests. On the other hand, the Kazakhstan government has invested in anti-poaching patrols over the last year, and it feels that this may now be paying dividends through a reduction in poaching pressure.

*May 2004: Repeat saiga birth area monitoring procedure, assess its effectiveness and revise as necessary (KM & BD). Continued monitoring of saiga population status by rangers (KM).*

The saiga birth area monitoring was carried out in Kalmykia and in Kazakhstan. In the Kalmykian population, the work was carried out by the staff of the Chernye Zemli Biosphere reserve, with the participation of a member of the Imperial College team (N. Bunnefeld). Over 300 calves were weighed, measured, and their position recorded. This will provide a second year of valuable data on saiga reproductive biology from Kalmykia. The methods developed in 2003 were tested by the team, and a report submitted on potential refinements for future monitoring. The saiga population in Kalmykia appeared to be in a similar condition to last year, with similar calf numbers and juvenile/adult ratios recorded, which is a positive sign. Our Russian partners have established close contact with the Stepnoi sanctuary, adjacent to the Chernye Zemli reserve and gave their staff some training. With our financial support the staff of this sanctuary were able to improve their equipment and implement their anti-poaching patrols more effectively (as result they were able to catch a team of poachers, who are now being processed). The long-term saiga monitoring programme in Kalmykia is now well underway, and is being carried out by the staff of both the Chernye Zemli biosphere reserve and the Stepnoi Sanctuary.

In Kazakhstan, we made the decision (see 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Report) that the saiga population in Betpak-dala was too low for monitoring birth areas to be worthwhile attempting. The Ustiurt population was a higher priority because it had been healthy relatively recently, had not been monitored in the birth period for

several years, and is the focus of international interest in a possible transboundary GEF project. We have co-funding from INTAS for monitoring in Ustiurt. The expedition was organised by the Kazakhstan State Hunting Organisation *Okhotzooptom* with scientific leadership from the Institute of Zoology, and participation by two members of the Imperial College team (A. Kuhl, M. Fry). A film crew from Marathon Productions accompanied the expedition. We found that the birth aggregation was very low density, and calving rates were much reduced. The team managed to obtain data from only 13 calves (compared to over 600 in 1998). Our expedition has shown that the Ustiurt saiga population is in critical need of conservation action if it is to remain viable. The project's monitoring protocol, which is working well in Kalmykia, was not feasible in Ustiurt because of the very low calf densities. Vehicle transects were required in order to locate calves, which is also a cause for concern.

*June-Nov 2004: Consultation of local people and officials on alternative income-generating activities (KM & BD). Public awareness and education activities, at all scales of society from ministerial to schools (KM & BD).*

Kalmykia Several articles have appeared in local newspapers on saiga conservation and the Darwin project. Local team members have given 2 interviews to local TV, explaining the work being done by the project. The team has been active in education, with team members Anna Lushchekina (Institute of Ecology & Evolution, Moscow), B. Ubushaev (Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve) and Iu. Arylov (Saiga Breeding Centre) giving lectures to students at the Kalmykian State University on biodiversity and saiga conservation. These activities have led to the formation of a team of students to work with us. Our student Nadja Arylova (Kalmyk State University) submitted a thesis on saigas. Some lectures have been given at the local schools in Elista and Yashkul (Chernye Zemli region) about the project's work and importance of saiga conservation. In cooperation with PTES we conducted a children's competition and winners have been awarded books, T-shirts etc. We also prepared a full colour book with poems and drawings for younger children which will soon be published in Elista and widely distributed. Another full color book (with poems and stories written by children) will be published at the end of this year. We are preparing a 2005 pocket calendar. We established close contacts with Yashkul school, and its pupils have formed a team to work together at the Saiga Breeding Centre. Results of this work were presented at the UNESCO International meeting. Members of our team have participated in a number of international meetings and given talks on the project. With the cooperation of IFAW, a Russian film crew has made a film about saiga, poachers, anti-poaching teams and the Chernye Zemli reserve. We are planning to show this film in Kalmykia and throughout Russia, and translate it into English for wider dissemination.

A booklet reporting the results of the social surveys which we carried out in 2003 has been widely circulated both to villagers in the areas where we carried out the work, and to authorities and opinion-formers. This is important as a way of reporting back to the local people who participated in our work, and in paving the way for the next phase of the project.

We have established very close contacts with local NGOs such as the Public Foundation for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Kalmykia and the Centre for Ecological Projects, who are now actively participating in our projects. We had very fruitful consultations with the Head of Yashkul region (Mr. Telman Khaglyshev) on how to stop poaching and develop alternative livelihoods. Based on the opinions that local people gave us during our socio-economic surveys in 2003, we are preparing a plan for detailed village-level consultations over the next 6 months, which we expect to lead to the Darwin project supporting concrete actions for livelihood improvement in the Chernye Zemli region in year 3.

Kazakhstan In Kazakhstan, we have received co-financing of \$6000 from Chevron (via project partners FFI) to develop public awareness materials. FFI's partners in Kazakhstan and team members from the Institute of Zoology and Kazakhstan National Agricultural University met on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004 to discuss a strategy for developing and disseminating these materials. We also have co-financing from DGIS (via FFI) to carry out small-scale alternative income-generating projects in known poaching villages in Betpak-dala. This activity will immediately follow public awareness visits to identify these villages and discuss the projects with village officials, and is expected to start by the end of 2004.

*July 2004: Carry out attitude surveys and socio-economic research in Betpak-dala, followed by public awareness and education activities in these areas. In Kalmykia, we concentrated on the next stage of the*

project (public awareness, as detailed above) rather than carrying out further surveys. Having developed and tested methods for social surveys in two locations in Kalmykia in 2003, the project team extended its work to Betpak-dala, Kazakhstan. A team member from the Institute of Humanitarian Studies in Elista, Kalmykia (N. Balinova) worked in the village of Ulan-Bel' in southern Betpak-dala in July 2004 along with A. Kuhl (Imperial College). They worked together to train four students from the Kazakh National Agricultural University in survey methods, and then supervised their research over a 1 month period in the village. We are particularly pleased that Ms Balinova, the student who the project trained last year in Kalmykia, is now taking on a training role herself. Following the study in Ulan-Bel', the 4 students and their professor (team member V. Ukrainsky) then carried out an independent study in the village of Mointi in northern Betpak-dala. The data from the 2 studies are currently under analysis. As explained above, a public awareness programme is now underway, based on the results of the social surveys.

The project has also had a wider catalytic effect. Colleagues at the Institute of Zoology in Uzbekistan (not part of the Darwin project, but working with us on the INTAS project looking at the reproductive ecology of the Ustiurt saiga population in its winter range in Uzbekistan) received a grant from DGIS (via FFI) to carry out social surveys in July-Sept 2004. N. Balinova gave them training based on her experience in Kalmykia and Kazakhstan, and the Uzbek team will be using the Darwin project's questionnaires, and sharing their results with us. This will be a major addition to our understanding of the situation, because it is the first time that the status of saigas and local people has been investigated in Uzbekistan. This is a crucial area for saigas because it is feared that much of the poaching on the Ustiurt population occurs in Uzbekistan in the winter. We aim to complement this study by carrying out social surveys in the Kazakhstan part of Ustiurt in 2005.

*Aug 2004: Monitor and assess ranger training in KM.* This was carried out in May-June 2004, see above, and is also an ongoing priority for our Russian partners.

*Sept 2004: 18 month project progress meeting (Elista).* This meeting was held on 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> October 2004, and involved the Russian team. The team had an internal progress meeting and made a presentation on the project to representatives of the Kalmykia government. Members of the Imperial College team will hold a debriefing meeting with the team leader in Russia (A. Lushchekina) at the end of October, when they meet at an international symposium on saiga conservation in Mongolia. The Kazakhstan teams held a meeting with the FFI team representative in Almaty on 1<sup>st</sup> October, also to discuss project progress and future plans. Hence there has been a series of consultations at the 18 month stage, but we felt that the financial cost of getting all the teams together in one place was far too high to be cost-effective.

**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.**

We have not encountered any notable problems in the last 6 months. The work of the project has gone very smoothly. One potential issue is that there has been some restructuring in the Federal and local governments in Russia. We previously have had excellent relationships with Government in the region, but due to the restructuring we have met some problems in our regular communications with the authorities. Up to now we are unsure about the decisions that will be taken on the structure of the Chernye Zemli reserve and particularly concerning the its protection status. Given that the reserve has been such an active partner in the project, and a major factor in project success, there is clearly some concern here. There is nothing we can do at this stage, however, except continue to promote the positive influence that the project is having in the region, and wait for the outcome of the restructuring.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? No, no need as yet.

**3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No.**