

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form

Project Title	Steppe Forward Programme: Training Conservationists for Mongolia's Future
Country	Mongolia
Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Project Ref. No.	162/12/029
Report date	31 October 2003

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months 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).

The programme began on 1st May 2003, with progress as follows against original output timetable:

Apr 03

Agreed outputs:

- 1 national and 1 local press release and 1 local radio interview moved to May 03 due to late start of project.

Other progress:

- Talk given at Oxford University Edward Grey Institute/British Ornithologists Union conference to advertise the programme. Poster presentation also made.

May 03

Agreed outputs:

- 1 national press release in UK, but resulted in no articles; local press releases in UK resulted in 4 local newspaper articles; 1 local radio interview on BBC Hereford and Worcester.
- Steering committee formation and meeting with academics from Mongolian National University (n=7). Very positive meeting.

Other progress:

- Project Leader moved permanently to Mongolia
- Provision of room and computing equipment in National University of Mongolia

June 03

Agreed outputs:

- Meeting with other organisations in Mongolia to publicise project. This was carried out individually with the following organisations given the difficulties in getting everyone together for a common lecture. The following meetings explained our programme aims and activities and reviewed potential collaborations:

- Mongolian Ministry of Nature and Environment
- World Bank GEF Biodiversity project, to collaborate on field courses 2004 onwards
- WCS, just setting up country office in UB
- IPECON community-based conservation consultancy working in Gobi
- GTZ German development agency working particularly on desertification
- WWF
- World Bank Biodiversity Director for Asia, Tony Whitten (visiting)
- Dalanzadgad (Gobi) local national park office,

Other progress:

- Meeting with Gobi National Park Director Monkhjargal to collaborate on field courses and in community project development in Gobi
- One week trip to 2003 Gobi field site to meet local herders, clean well (water supply), take digital photos for UK lecturers and assess general area for project ideas
- Selection of national park staff to attend courses by national park director
- Acquisition of free first aid kits through British Embassy from DFID
- Text-editing and voiceover for Mongolian National University promotional video to encourage foreign collaborations

Jul 03

Agreed outputs:

- 3.5 week field course at Lake Hovsgol was not held due to unavailability of plane seats to get UK lecturers to Mongolia, following late decisions about Darwin grants. Instead we are running a course for post-graduate students over the winter teaching ecology and ecological terms in English, 6 hours a week for 20 weeks, beginning 11 November 2003.
- Associated community meeting with students presenting work to local community therefore also not held.

Other progress:

- One week trip to Lake Hovsgol to meet national park director and staff, view field site and meet World Bank GEF researchers with whom we will collaborate in 2004. The field courses in Hovsgol will run next to the GEF project, with students learning from co-operative field exercises with GEF researchers. Digital photos for UK lecturers taken and general assessment of area for project ideas carried out.
- Agreements made for exchanges of Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences with Oryx, TRAFFIC bulletins and newsletters, Australian National Parks Journal, World Working Groups on Birds of Prey and Owls conference proceedings, Peregrine fund publications

Aug 03

Agreed outputs:

- Community meeting with Gobi locals: Signing of co-operative agreement with Gobi national park staff for community projects and biological training of park staff and locals in Gobi
- Meeting with local administration authorities in Gobi about potential work and conservation activities
- Completed one 3.5 week field course in Borzongiin Gobi with 2 foreign lecturers, training 18 undergraduates and 4 national park rangers in ecological field techniques and experimental methods – report in post. 1 volunteer staff arrived to help on field course at no cost: zoology graduate from Edinburgh University
- Student presentations at Nomgon village school to demonstrate field course activities and present their project work. Also involved interactive sessions with children from the school discussing ecology and protection of wild plants, animals, water resources and soil protection
- Student field course reports from Hovsgol course not collected since the course did not take place

Other progress:

- Appointment of one counterpart for administration functions with on-the-job training
- Agreement with Peace Corps for volunteer to work with SFP to run Undergraduate Conservation Club at no cost
- Agreement with VSO volunteers to teach English for 4 days before field course to field course participants at no cost
- Official agreement from Cambs Uni Press to use Sutherland's Ecological Census Techniques to translate into Mongolian, with a print run not exceeding 500 copies

Sep 03

Agreed outputs:

- Ranger training and practical work was not carried out because of problems detailed in section 2 of this report with training rangers. Instead we are running a workshop in November to train all secondary school teachers in South Gobi province in ecology and ecology teaching methods,

including lessons within school and extra-curricular activities

- Student project write-ups completed (see field course report in post)
- Biannual publication of Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences. The steering committee decided to change publication dates for the MJBS from Mar/Sep to Jan/Jun, given the difficulties in collecting and refereeing articles over the summer period for the Sept issue, when most biologists are in the field. Hence, the next publication will be printed for Jan 04. This will not affect the number of publications supported by the Darwin grant.

Other progress:

- Appointment of second counterpart for biological work and translations, grant applications
- Draft co-operative agreement with Central University administration (rather than Biology Faculty) to enhance support for programme. Having the programme linked to central admin can allow funding of Mongolian staff and items of field equipment (see section 2)
- Obtained \$600 funding from British embassy to support ecology teacher training workshop
- Detailed course planning for secondary teacher ecology training in Gobi first week Nov 03
- Meeting with Ivanhoe Mining Environmental Consultant regarding private sector funding for community conservation/livelihood improvement projects in Gobi.
- Editorial meeting for Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences
- Poster exhibition on Darwin Initiative at British Embassy, Ulaan Baatar
- 2 Media articles in national Mongolian newspapers, 1 English, 1 Mongolian

Oct 03

Agreed outputs:

None

Other progress:

- Attendance at 2 day workshop organised by Wildlife Conservation Society on sustainable hunting and commercial harvesting of Mongolian gazelle
- Attendance at 2 day meeting organised by National University Mongolia and University of Goettingen on 'Ecological Research in Mongolia'
- Approval to carry forward funding between years from DEFRA (see section 2)
- Steering committee meeting (was planned for November, brought forward)
- Presentation at 2 day biology student conference about how to get ahead in biological sciences – areas for improvement for Mongolian students
- Submission of grant application to support Gobi community projects to Whitley Laing Foundation
- Submission of tender to carry out ranger training in Little Gobi protected areas with funding from Ivanhoe Mines, private company
- Development of project website
- Submission of article on Protected Area Status in Mongolia by Mongolian counterpart J Jamsranjav

May – Oct 03

- 62 weeks of work on the project by UK staff (2 permanent staff for 52 weeks, 2 visiting lecturers for 7 weeks, 1 volunteer for 3 weeks)
- 24 items posted on MongolBioweb e-newsletter
- Ongoing work on primary school children's book, undergraduate/ranger ecology textbook and Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences.

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 effect the budget and timetable of project activities. Have any of these issues been discussed with the Department and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Generally progress has been very good and a positive relationship been forged with many organisations

and institutes working in biology in Mongolia. Outputs are achieved as planned, however some flexibility is required working in Mongolia regarding the timetable for execution of activities. All project objectives will be achieved regardless of modification of timing of activities, resulting in same or improved project impact. The points below represent small adjustments to the schedule, with the only significant problems outlined in points 2/3 and 8 below.

1. **Counterpart.** It has been extremely difficult to find a suitable counterpart with good level of English and biology background. Hence, we have hired 2 counterparts, one biologist and one administrator. To meet new salary requirements this change imposes, we will carry forward underspend from year 1 (£5,000) to years 2 and 3 of the project. This change has been explained and approved by the DI.
2. **Ministry of Nature and Environment.** Text withheld
3. **Ranger training.** We have been unable to carry out ranger training. The local Gobi park director is reluctant to go ahead with any training without central MNE support. He did agree for rangers to participate on field courses. Please understand that this man is a pleasure to work with and is extremely happy we are operating here, but is in a very difficult position. Funding to his office has been cut because GTZ (German NGO) are operating in his province. We wait for elections next June.
4. **Dates for production of Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences.** Changed to Jan and Jun since it is more practical to collect and referee papers outside summer months when biologists are in the field.
5. **Lack of field course in July.** This was a result of the delay in DI decision-making. There are only two flights a week to Mongolia and a short summer tourist season, hence tickets for Jul/Aug are sold out in Mar/Apr. Since we did not receive a formal grant offer until the 20 April rather than beginning of March as stated in DI materials, we were unable to purchase tickets for UK lecturers to teach on courses. The first available tickets were 18 August, hence we had to run the second course only and this ran into the first week of term time.
6. **Field course dates.** These will now all be run in the summer rather than one at easter and two in summer due to semesterisation at the university.
7. **Lack of Mongolian lecturers on field course.** Teaching on each field course should be carried out by 2 UK and 2 Mongolian staff. However, it has become evident that lecturers use their summer months to make extra money. Hence, they are reluctant to attend field courses during which they are not paid. This problem was overcome in the last steering committee meeting, where it was decided that field courses be made an official part of the curriculum. Following, staff on field courses will be financially supported by the university and also receive teaching credits for attending the course.
8. **General standard of student knowledge.** Both UK lecturers were impressed by the level of student knowledge and noted on appraisal forms that students were at a higher level than they expected. However, although students' taxonomic and identification skills are very good, their ability to design experiments, analyse and interpret data and to write in a scientific style are very poor. None have ever read a scientific reference and have no idea about scientific methods or writing, with all biology being descriptive. It is possible that students may improve in the next couple of years, however it is unlikely that their field projects will be of a publishable standard.
9. **Timing of careers course.** This has been changed from Nov-Feb to Feb-May to fit in with the University curriculum, but will not change outputs/no. students attending etc.
10. **Gobi community surveys.** We will carry out surveys of herding families in south Gobi in December this year. Surveys will be used to collect data on herd sizes and changes to livestock numbers/herd composition, changes to nomadic movements, livestock insurance, wild plant and animal use, hunting, fuel use and livelihood improvements.

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

The delay in the result of the Darwin grant significantly impacted on this project's outputs. Having refereed other Darwin projects I know that this has caused problems for other DI recipients also, particularly those with a growing/breeding season in spring/summer. It would be helpful if a note therefore is included on the DI website explaining that although a decision about DI funding might be made in March, the results of the decision will not actually be made public until end of March and actual funding will be available from such-and-such a date. This will allow better planning of start dates and activities by project leaders, regarding their projects activities. Thank you for considering!

For publicity dept: you sent four great posters which we have used in exhibitions to publicise DI work here, but we cut text from two of them since it tells of how ££ millions have been spent on DI projects. This is great for publicity in the west, but in small villages etc. on the ground here it's not really appropriate because it gives the impression that we have millions to spend! Perhaps posters for use within host countries could be made that don't stress the large financial investment?

Please send your **completed form by 31 October each year per email** to Stefanie Halfmann, Darwin Initiative M&E Project Manager, Email: stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk