



Large Carnivore Education Centre, Bulgaria

Project 14-021

Annual Report

April 2005 to March 2006

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and Elena Tsingarska, Bulgaria

April 2006

Darwin Initiative

Annual Report

1. Darwin Project Information

Project Ref. Number	14-021
Project Title	<i>Large Carnivore Education Centre – Bulgaria</i>
Country(ies)	<i>Bulgaria</i>
UK Contractor	<i>Education 4 Conservation Limited</i>
Partner Organisation(s)	<i>Balkani Wildlife Society / BBPS Semperviva</i>
Darwin Grant Value	<i>£95,210</i>
Start/End dates	<i>April 05 to March 08</i>
Reporting period (1 Apr 200x to 31 Mar 200y) and annual report number (1,2,3..)	<i>1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006</i>
Project website	www.education4conservation.org
Author(s), date	<i>Denise Taylor, April 2006</i>

2. Project Background

The project is based in Bulgaria. The aim is to build, refurbish and equip a Large Carnivore Education Centre in the Pirin Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Bulgaria has a rich diversity of species, including large carnivores. The socio-cultural climate is such that large carnivores and wolves in particular have a negative image in Bulgaria to the extent that wolves still carry a bounty equivalent to two weeks wages. Hunting is a strong tradition, and farming is still pastorally based. The aim of the project is to provide education and to raise awareness about large carnivores. The Centre also aims to raise the profile of the region, and is in an ideal location in a small village called Vlahi, which is seen as the gateway to the national park area. The Centre will be open to all comers, but school children in particular will be encouraged and invited to spend time there.

Through links with other NGOs, the project is also involved with other practical conservation strategies such as providing livestock guarding dogs to farmers with the aim of increasing tolerance towards large predators.

3. Project Purpose and Outputs

To build, develop equip and run a Large Carnivore Education Centre (LCEC) in the Pirin Mountains, Bulgaria, which aims to provide education and awareness to a national and international audience about large carnivores, regional and national biodiversity, and conservation and environmental issues in general, in accordance with Article 13 of the CBD.

To train project staff on the delivery of environmental and conservation education initiatives through self-directed learning, attendance at seminars, conferences and workshops both in the host country and in the UK (in accordance with Article 12 of the CBD).

To attract visitors to the project, which in turn will have an impact on the local economy, and will help to foster self-sustainability, and improve the quality of life of local people. This will also help to retain traditional knowledge and practices in the region in accordance with Article 8J of the CBD.

To strengthen existing partnerships and foster new ones with organisations and institutions with a stakehold or interest in the biological diversity in Bulgaria.

The outputs or proposed operational plan have not been modified over the last year.

4. Progress

During the first year work was mostly focused on investigation, preparation, planning, organising the work, designing and making materials.

Staffing

One of the key areas of the project is staffing. Many conservation education projects face difficulties through a lack of funding and a lack of human resources, with much education work being undertaken by the biologists and researchers themselves (Jacobson 1991, Taylor 2006).

The project leader, Elena Tsingarska, and assistant, Nina Kirova have been working on the project from the beginning. Later in the year, a centre manager, Kamen Krastanov, was recruited. Kamen already has excellent experience on developing project of this nature. Since being in post, he has been instrumental in co-ordinating and developing a lot of the refurbishment work on the new Centre building.

A centre guide has also been appointed, Sider Sedefchev, who has indepth experience in nature conservation and education, and also in the design and implementation of education programmes and public awareness campaigns. Sider has been contacting schools, advertising the Centre, organising school group visits. As a professional artist, Sider is also involved in the preparation and development of education materials.

Training

Staff from Bulgaria visited the UK in the first year with the purpose of spending time at a number of different environmental education centres. The visitors comprised:

Project Leader: Elena Tsingarska

Assistant: Nina Kirova

Guide and Designer: Sider Sedefchev

Graphic Designer and Artist: Filip Sedefchev

The Field Studies Council Environmental Education Centre was used as the base for the visit, and the FSC also acted as co-ordinators and training providers.

Visits were organised to the following environmental and conservation education centres:

- Field Studies Council Centre, Shropshire
- Worthing Eco School, Shropshire
- Bishops Wood Environmental Education Centre
- Wolf Watch UK, wolf education centre
- UK Wolf Conservation Trust, wolf education centre
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust Centre, Shropshire
- Natural History Museum

The Bulgarian team were able to observe education activities taking place at the eco school and at the various centres. They had the opportunity to speak with staff and students at the centres, and also to look around all the displays. The team were particularly keen to see a variety of education displays, and to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of these ie the nature of the education message, whether this was effective, etc. The team were also given materials from all of the centres to take away with them.

Visit to Bulgaria

A trip to Bulgaria was organised towards the end of the first year, but because of time restraints for the staff involved the trip itself took place in April 06.

Three members of the UK team spent six days in Vlahi. The team observed the work being carried out on a day to day basis which included biological research, animal care and welfare, education and planning.

Whilst there, the team participated in the capture and radio-collaring of a wild wolf. This was a significant breakthrough for the project as Elena and her team have been trying to achieve this goal for some years. They managed to capture a wild wolf last year, but sadly he was very old and died not long after being radio-collared. The team were able to take a large number of photographs of the whole process of capture and radio collaring and the processing of the wolf in terms of data needed for the research. The team subsequently also went out radio-tracking the wolf and plotting her movements on the map. This is vital research in Bulgaria and accurate information is desperately needed about wild wolf populations to counter the misinformation that is generated by the hunting community, forestry departments and by the media.

During the week, the team also participated in the transporting of a brown bear from Sofia Zoo to his new enclosure at the Centre. The bear had previously been rescued from a circus, and spent a year in the zoo whilst the enclosure was being built.

Other activities included taking tissue samples from a dog that had been fatally wounded after being knocked down by a car. This research data adds value when coupled with the DNA data recorded of wolves, hybrids and dogs in Bulgaria, and again helps to provide accurate information.

Difficulties

There were no significant difficulties, but the completion of the building works has been delayed for a number of reasons. Funding was delayed and was not in place for commencement as per the timeframe originally anticipated. However, work has started on the building, and anticipated completion is early 2007.

Despite the delays on the main Large Carnivore Education Centre building, this has not halted progress of the development of the site and the promotion of it. The project already has a well established base in Vlahi, and now has two substantial enclosures which house wolves and a bear. Schools and other groups are now visiting the centre, and the work with schools continues to be developed.

5. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Not applicable for this report.

6. Partnerships

There has been a longstanding collaboration between the UK and host partners, and this continues to be extremely positive. The relationships developed extend into other networks which benefit the host country project. The UK Wolf Conservation Trust, of which the UK Project Leader is also a director, is supportive of the LCEC, and carnivore conservation in Bulgaria. Funding has been donated to Balkani Wildlife Society from the UKWCT, and an international student exchange is currently being set up and implemented which will support biology and veterinary students from colleges and universities both in the UK and in Bulgaria.

Contact has been made with another Darwin Initiative project in Bulgaria (TIME) co-ordinated by the Field Studies Council.

The Project Leaders from the UK and Bulgaria also have a shared network of contacts throughout the world engaged in wolf conservation. A trip is currently being planned to the Biological Station in Russia which is run by Vladimir Bologov. This project has been running for 30 years and concentrates on wolf conservation in a country where a bounty is still awarded for wolf kills, similar to that operated in Bulgaria. The Russian project has had considerable success with international interns who help with much-needed research.

7. Impact and Sustainability

The impact and sustainability of the project is significant. A lot of work is undertaken by the Project Leader and her team in the host country to raise the profile of the LCEC and the work surrounding it. Elena sits on a number of panels, including one run by a hunting organisation in the region. This is in a cultural climate where wolves in particular are still seen in a very negative light, with a lot of misinformation spread about the ecology and their behaviour. The project attracts significant interest from local people. Residents in the nearest town, Kresna, which is 9 km from the project base in the Pirin mountains are fascinated by the LCEC, and although there is much rumour, there is also an increasing level of support. This was seen by the UK Project Leader on her recent visit when a brown bear was transported from Sofia Zoo to its new enclosure at the project. The local residents were keen to help with this process to see the bear safely installed. This was a difficult task given that access to the LCEC is a forest road, and the latter part of the journey from the village of Vlahi (where the LCEC building itself is based) to the enclosures and project house is impassable without a four-wheel drive vehicle or large truck. This meant moving the bear's transportation cage, which was extremely heavy, from the van to a large truck for the final part of the journey. This required the efforts of at least half a dozen.

Vlahi is a very poor town economically. Attracting visitors to the Centre, will help the local economy and also raise the profile of both the village and the town of Kresna.

Already the work undertaken at the Centre has attracted media interest. National television companies have visited Vlahi three times in the past year and regional tv stations have visited once. There have also been a number of articles in the press. One interview with the project leader was reported in three papers. An interview with the project leader was also featured on the front page of the daily regional newspaper.

Exit Strategy

The Large Carnivore Education Centre, is a long-term project which will leave a legacy for the area. The exit strategy for the involvement of E4C is clear. Once the Centre is established and running smoothly and is supplied with the education materials and equipment, staffing resources, etc, then the project will be complete under the terms of the Darwin Initiative funding.

8. Outputs, Outcomes and Dissemination

Building work has started on the LCEC, but is not yet completed due to delays in funding provision.

Additional outputs achieved, include the building of a large enclosure to house a brown bear which was rescued from a circus last year. Since being rescued the bear was kept at Sofia Zoo, his welfare and maintenance was funded by Balkani Wildlife Society. This was an unexpected development, but one that was taken advantage of when the opportunity arose. The LCEC now has two enclosures that house wolves and bears.

Table 1. Project Outputs (According to Standard Output Measures)

Code No.	Description	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Year 4 Total	TOTAL
6a/6b	Up to 3 Centre staff to attend training programme in the UK	4 staff attended training				
15a/15b/ 15c/15d	At least 4 press releases to be distributed in both the host country and the UK prior to the centre opening	Frequent press releases – local, regional and national. National TV coverage x 3 Regional TV coverage x 1				

- Table 2, provides full details of all publications and material produced over the last year that can be publicly accessed, e.g. title, name of publisher, contact details, cost. Details will be recorded on the Darwin Monitoring Website Publications Database. Mark (*) all publications and other material that you have included with this report.

Table 2: Publications

Type *	Detail	Publishers	Available from	Cost £
(e.g. journals, manual, CDs)	(title, author, year)	(name, city)	(e.g. contact address, website)	

9. Project Expenditure

Table 3: Project expenditure during the reporting period (Defra Financial Year 01 April to 31 March)

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10. Monitoring, Evaluation and Lessons

The project staff in Bulgaria produce annual reports on the Wolf Education Programme. These reports detail all the work carried out with schools, interns at the project, seminars and exhibitions.

As part of the doctoral thesis of the UK project leader, Bulgaria is a case study in relation to comparative analysis of Wolf Conservation Education Programmes throughout the world. Questionnaire surveys and depth interviews have been conducted which relate specifically to the education work undertaken.

Pre and post education surveys are undertaken by the project on a regular basis with regard to the school education programmes undertaken.

Participant observation is undertaken when UK staff visit Bulgaria. The nature of the project is such that anyone who spends time there actively participates in the work. This includes getting involved in biological research, helping with delivering education, helping with the maintenance of the centre itself.

There is regular correspondence and telephone communication with the project staff, all of which is documented and recorded.

The achievements of the project are tangible in terms of outputs and can be clearly observed by any visitors to the centre. The dedication, commitment and sheer hard work that every member of the team in Bulgaria puts in is visible. Motivation levels are very high, and the desire to achieve the project goals and aims are evident. There is clear evidence of team-working, which is in part culturally and socially based, but also arises from the ethics and values of the team's individual and collective wildlife conservation ethic.

The development of the centre since the last visit to Bulgaria can also be seen. The project house now has bathroom, toilet and kitchen facilities which are sited in a new building which was erected by the project team and their family members.

A new bear enclosure has been built, and its resident bear installed.

11 OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum)

■ I agree for ECTF and the Darwin Secretariat to publish the content of this section

In a cultural, social and political climate where wolves have a negative image, are still hunted for bounty, the sheer volume of work undertaken and the undaunted enthusiasm of the Balkani Wildlife Society and BBPS Semperviva is quite simply amazing. Their outreach programme on carnivore education has been delivered to over 9,000 schoolchildren, they have hosted numerous exhibitions and workshops, and have implemented a livestock guarding dog programme that is bringing real benefit not only to wolf conservation but also to the community.

Biology and ecology research is helping to establish accurate data and information on the countries large carnivores in order to better inform policy makers on wildlife management programmes and hunting.

With very few resources, the teams have built a substantial project house in the village of Vlahi together with two large enclosures. A rare breeds programme also operates from the centre which aims to protect and preserve the Karakachan way of pastoral life. The communist regime had a highly detrimental effect on the Karakachan breeds of sheep, horses and guarding dogs, which the project is now effectively reversing.

The vision and scope of the rare breeds programme and the large carnivore education programme is being achieved by a small but highly dedicated and effective team of people.

Annex 1 Report of progress and achievements against Logical Framework for Financial Year: 2005/2006

Project summary	Measurable Indicators	Progress and Achievements April 2005-Mar 2006	Actions required/planned for next period
<p>Goal: To draw on expertise relevant to biodiversity from within the United Kingdom to work with local partners in countries rich in biodiversity but poor in resources to achieve</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conservation of biological diversity, • The sustainable use of its components, and • The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources 			
<p>Purpose <i>(insert original project purpose statement)</i></p> <p>Long term and effective public education about large carnivore species and the ecosystems in which they exist in Bulgaria.</p>	<p><i>(insert original purpose level indicators)</i></p> <p>Large Carnivore Education Centre to be built and equipped by Year 2.</p> <p>Throughput of visitors (school groups and adults) to the Education Centre.</p> <p>Evidence of raised public awareness.</p> <p>Plans drawn up by architects, building and refurbishment work undertaken. Equipment put in place.</p>	<p><i>(report impacts and achievements resulting from the project against purpose indicators – if any)</i></p> <p>Refurbishment work on the new centre underway. Education materials and equipment designed, developed and some already produced. Photographs attached at Appendix A.</p> <p>Visitors to the centre taking place. Photographs attached of school visits at Appendix A.</p>	<p><i>(report any lessons learned resulting from the project & highlight key actions planning for next period)</i></p>

Outputs			
<i>(insert original outputs – one per line)</i>	<i>(insert original output level indicators)</i>	<i>(report completed activities and outcomes that contribute toward outputs and indicators)</i>	<i>(report any lessons learned resulting from the project & highlight key actions planning for next period)</i>
An old building is rebuilt and refurbished	Plans drawn up by architects, building and refurbishment work undertaken. Equipment put in place.	Building not yet completed, but a scale model can be seen in photographs at Appendix A. Refurbishment is underway. Visitors still able to visit the centre however, and lectures and workshops take place.	
Staff from the Centre attend professional development and training courses to equip them with the skills required to deliver conservation education programmes.	Up to 4 members of staff attend 2 workshops courses or seminars in UK during first two years of the project.	4 members of staff visited the UK at the end of the first year. Spent time at a number of different environmental education centres in order to learn about the design, implementation and delivery of conservation education programmes.	For two of the project team members this was their first visit to the UK, and therefore they were trying to learn in a cultural atmosphere that was new to them. The first visit was successful and feedback was positive about what had been learned. The next visit will focus a little more on the cultural and social differences and similarities.
Visitors attend the Centre – school groups and adults.	At least 25 groups of pupils (each group about 50 pupils) from different parts of Bulgaria and at least 300 other visitors have visited the LC by Year 3.	Schoolchildren and other groups have already started to visit the Centre. The arrival of a brown bear should help to stimulate interest in the centre's activities and encourage more visits as the project enters year 2.	(A bit tongue in cheek – my apologies) Wolves are easier to work with than bears. On a serious note, the practical aspects of keeping both these animals does highlight the attitudes and perceptions humans have towards large carnivores. Ambassador

			<p>animals provide children especially with the opportunity to see these large predators at close hand. The beauty of the Large Carnivore Education Centres is that although captive, the animals are in as natural a setting as possible. Interestingly, the wolves in the enclosure are also attracting the attention of the wild wolves in that area.</p>
<p>Different meetings, workshops and seminars on environmental and nature protection issues are held in the LCEC seminar hall.</p>	<p>At least 4 seminars/workshops held in the Centre by year 3.</p>	<p>Workshops and lectures have been delivered in the first year, but using local schools and facilities in the town.</p>	

Note: Please do NOT expand rows to include activities since their completion and outcomes should be reported under the column on progress and achievements at output and purpose levels.