

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2007)

Project Ref. No.	14-021
Project Title	Large Carnivore Education Centre, Bulgaria
Country(ies)	Bulgaria / UK
UK Organisation	Education 4 Conservation Ltd
Collaborator(s)	Education 4 Conservation / Balkani Wildlife Society / UK Wolf Conservation Trust
Project Leader	<i>Denise Taylor (UK) / Elena Tsingarska (Bulgaria)</i>
Report date	<i>30 October 2007</i>
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	<i>HYR 3</i>
Project website	www.education4conservation.org

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) 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).

Visitors to the LC centre and the Large Carnivore Project

After the first phase opening of the LC centre, in May 2007, there have been a number of groups of visitors. Throughout May and June five groups of pupils visited the centre and the ambassador animals. These were pupils aged between 8 and 11 years. The number of children in those groups was 96 in total.

At the beginning of July another large group of children (34) visited the Centre. This was organized by friends of the Project Leader, Elena Tsingarska). The friends run an organization which offers alternative “green” tourism. The children who attended were from a summer school in Sofia. They visited the Pirin Mts. for three days to experience hiking, mountain biking, bird watching and they spent one day in Vlahi where they saw all the animals in the rare breeds’ centre of SEMPERVIVA Society. Some of the children rode the Karakachan horses at the Centre, but the most exciting moment for them was to touch the ambassador wolf Vucho and to throw some apples to Medo the rescued brown bear.

Other visits included:

- Visitors to Vlahi who were on the way to the National Park – around 100 people;
- Young people who volunteered in the Eco-centre of CVS organization – around 75 people;
- Tourists who started from Vlahi a horse-riding trip in Pirin – around 40 people;
- Foreign tourists who had heard about Vlahi and the LC centre and came specially to see it – 14 people;
- Foresters and national park rangers from neighboring countries, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia – 40 people, who were in Bulgaria for experience exchange with their Bulgarian colleagues. In these cases the local foresters and the Pirin NP administration included a visit to our centre and the ambassador animals as a whole day in the program of the guests;
- Local people from the region, who visited our project in Vlahi in weekends, 60 – 70 people.

Workshops

In mid July, the first workshop was held in the seminar room of the LC centre. The participants were representatives of BALKANI Wildlife Society, SEMPERVIVA Society, Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and two German organizations ENEA and BUND. ENEA and BUND are the German partners of BALKANI in their project to the German foundation DBU for the building of the LC centre and for field analysis on the brown bear population in Bulgaria. This workshop was one of the several which are planned for DBU/FZS.

Balkani Wildlife Society invited their German partners to arrange the workshop in the LC centre in order

to see the progress that has been made. When the FZS and the ENEA representatives saw the progress made on the construction of the LC centre, they decided during the workshop that the building work will be supported by FZS and DBU with additional funding to purchase materials for the roof.

Although the LC centre building is still not complete, there is already a great deal of interest from different organizations who wish to hold meetings and workshops at the Centre. A trade company for vet products asked to organize a seminar for promotion of different new generation vet products. They rented the seminar hall for one day seminar. A number of livestock breeders were invited on this seminar. As hosts, Balkani were given the opportunity to present their activities and used this to introduce information about large carnivores in Bulgaria and the best damage prevention methods. This seminar was the first practical step towards establishing activities which will help with self-financing for the LC centre.

Media coverage

After the first phase opening of the LC centre in May 2007 a large article about this event and about the LC centre in general was published in the main daily newspaper for Blagoevgrad region, "Struma" newspaper. This region covers all the South-west Bulgaria.

A team of one of the three National TV channels, BTV, visited the team in Vlaha at the beginning of July. They gave wide coverage about the Large Carnivore work and the centre in particular. The report was broadcast twice and at peak viewing time around 19:30.

Other Promotional Activity

E4C and the UKWCT have publicized and promoted the Large Carnivore Education Centre and the work being undertaken. More recently the International Student Exchange Programme was publicized at the UKWCT Annual Seminar in September 2007. The seminar is run on an international basis with guest speakers from around the world. The students gave a poster presentation at the seminar and were on hand to talk about their experiences during their exchange visit. (See below for further details on the International Student Exchange Programme). The programme has also been publicized on the UKWCT website.

Development of special education program for schools

In August, the project leader, Elena Tsingarska, and a new assistant developed a range of education programmes for pupils visiting the LC centre. The plan was to start contacting schools in September, and invite them to attend these programmes.

It was planned to have a schedule for one-day and two-days visits for the different schools groups in agreement with the teachers. However, a week after the school term started on 15th of September the teachers went on strike. Pupils have not gone to school since then, which has obviously had an impact on the programme. The team is waiting until the strike is over, and hope to start the planned education activities with school groups as soon as possible and continue with these upto the end of 2007. After this new programmes and education activities will be organised.

International Student Exchange

In September two students from the UK Wolf Conservation Trust spent a week at the Large Carnivore Education Centre. This was a pilot project that was organised to implement the long term International Student Exchange Programme between Balkani Wildlife Society and the UKWCT. Also that month, the Centre hosted a visit from Education Centre Manager, Zegeye Kimbet, from the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme. This was organised with the help of E4C, the UKWCT and WildCRU at Oxford University. Zegeye spent ten days at the Centre learning about the education programmes and the running of the Centre.

For both visits, there was an exchange of ideas and knowledge that will benefit all the collaborative partners involved.

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.

Building the roof

The shortage of funding for the construction work forced the team to find alternative ways of completing the construction of the roof. The construction of the concrete and wall building work went over budget and used up all the funds available at the time. In addition, the team discontinued their agreement with the building company who had not performed well. Fortunately, the team in Bulgaria is skilled in building and construction work, and have called in a team of volunteers to help with the work. This means that the roof will soon be completed (anticipated completion end November 2007).

Although the construction work has been a lot slower than originally anticipated, it has not totally hampered progress with regard to visitors to the centre and the hosting of workshops and seminars. Clearly there will be some impact from the delayed full opening of the Centre as not all the facilities are yet available. However, what must be borne in mind is that this is a massive project orchestrated by a very small team. When put in this context, the achievements are enormous by any standards, and the legacy the Centre will have in the long term will be far reaching.

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

Progress reports have charted the development of the building of the Large Carnivore Education Centre and the delays that have been experienced.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no/yes, in.....(month/yr)

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

There are no other issues relating to the project. Despite the delays in the building work on the Centre, the programme is still managing to progress extremely well with visitors to the Centre arriving in greater numbers, and workshops and seminars already being hosted. In addition, the Centre and the overall project is receiving a lot of media attention. There have been some additional activities to the original programme such as the International Student Exchange which will also help with the self-sustainability of the Centre in the future.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with the Darwin Secretariat directly.

Please send your **completed form email** to Eilidh Young, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme at Darwin-Projects@ectf-ed.org.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 14-075 Darwin Half Year Report**