

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

Project Ref. No.	15-024
Project Title	Quantification and elimination of threats to the Caspian seal
Country(ies)	Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Turkmenistan
UK Organisation	Institute of Integrative and Comparative Biology, University of Leeds
Collaborator(s)	Paul Jepson and Andrew Cunningham, Institute of Zoology Zoological Society of London; Ailsa Hall and Callan Duck, Sea Mammal Research Unit, University of St. Andrews; Tero Harkonen, Swedish Museum of Natural History, Stockholm, Sweden
Report date	October 2006
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 1
Project website	www.caspianseal.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).

The first six months of this project has largely been a phase of initiation and consultation with project partners and key stakeholders such as Ministries of partner country governments and the Caspian Environment Programme. The initiation activities are on schedule, with research assistants for each country identified, work programmes developed and equipment procurement underway. A project initiation meeting and the first training workshop on seal ecology, health and diet took place in Baku, Azerbaijan over two weeks in September, with up to 6 participants from each country attending. Local population monitoring has begun at appropriate sites in partner countries after workshop participants returned home, so at the present time research activities are also on schedule.

The project principal investigators and leaders from each country agreed on a draft framework for a conservation action and management plan at the initiation meeting. This was subsequently presented to representatives of the regional governments at a meeting of the Caspian Environment Programme in Baku which followed the workshop. The document now awaiting formal approval by the regional governments at the next CEP meeting towards the end of this year.

Dr Asadi, the project leader for Iran has begun consultation with government organisations and fishermens' representatives on measures to reduce fishing bycatch in Iranian waters. Several workshops for fishermen at different locations on the Iranian coast are now scheduled.

The Baku workshop was well covered by the local media with Dr Goodman giving an interview for television news, and several newspapers. Our existing footage of Caspian seal natural history and research has been compiled by in to a DVD with 3 short films (~20 mins total) for distribution to partners and local media in the region. Results from our earlier aerial survey work were presented at the Marine Mammals of the Holarctic conference in St Petersburg, Russia (September 10th-14th).

The Caspian Environment Programme awarded us an additional \$14,000 to support studies of seal health, and we are currently negotiating with Agip KCO for support for a further 3 years of aerial surveys. We have made contact with WWF in Azerbaijan who are interested in funding additional activities in Azerbaijan.

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.

There have been no difficulties that are expected to affect the implementation of the project.

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

NA

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 issues to report at this time.

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 by 31 October each year per email** to Stefanie Halfmann, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme, stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk. The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message.**