

# Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

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

<b>Project Ref. No.</b>	162-15-024
<b>Project Title</b>	Quantification and elimination of threats to the Caspian seal
<b>Country(ies)</b>	Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Turkmenistan
<b>UK Organisation</b>	University of Leeds
<b>Collaborator(s)</b>	Sea Mammal Research Unit, University of St Andrews, UK; Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London, UK; Swedish Museum of Natural History, Stockholm, Sweden
<b>Report date</b>	31/10/2007
<b>Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website</b>	<a href="http://www.caspianseal.org">www.caspianseal.org</a>

### **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).**

Essentially all project activities are progressing according to the baseline time table for the project. Notable achievements include the following:

1. The preliminary Seal Conservation Action and Management Plan (SCAMP) drafted at our September 2006 regional workshop, was signed and accepted by all the Caspian countries under the auspices of the Caspian Environment Programme. Following this ratification and publication by the CEP (see <http://www.caspianenvironment.org/autoindex/index.php?dir=NewSite/DocCenter/reports/2007/Caspian%20Seal%20Conservation%20Action%20Plan/>) this document now forms the officially accepted plan for the development of the conservation strategy for the species, and will be updated in the light of the research outcomes from the Darwin project. This output was achieved significantly earlier in the project than anticipated and demonstrates acceptance of the work by key regional stakeholders.

2. Visits to Iran and Azerbaijan in May 2007 provided opportunities to meet with high level government officials (deputy ministers and chairs of parliamentary committees) responsible for environmental issues, who stated their commitment to supporting the project. This was especially evident in Iran where negotiations are close to securing additional support during and beyond the duration of the Darwin project. The chair of the Iranian parliamentary environment committee (His Excellency Mr Sadat Mousavi) is now lobbying for implementation of the action points from the SCAMP at a national and international level. The visits also established closer links with the University of Guilan in Iran, conducted surveys of seal distribution in Azerbaijan, and further training of project partners in Azerbaijan in necropsy techniques.

3. Our Iranian partners were successful in obtaining additional funding of ~\$3500 from the CEP to support additional educational workshops with local communities, including a one day 'seal festival'. We are obtaining excellent engagement of fishing communities in Iran in the project.

4. Local population monitoring is beginning to clarify the status of seals in the 4 main partner countries (Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan). Unfortunately the work in Azerbaijan indicates that a once key haul out site on the Apsheron peninsula close to Baku, where several hundred seals were recorded regularly up to 2004 has been completely abandoned, and the species is now effectively absent

from this country. This driver of this decline appears to be intense disturbance from illegal fishing activity.

5. Our Kazakh partners led the investigation in to a mass mortality of ~1000 Caspian seals in the Mangistau region of Kazakhstan in late spring, and their diagnostic tests showed that this was due to a further outbreak of canine distemper virus (CDV). We facilitated the visit of collaborators from the Kazakh Institute of Virology to the UK in order to receive training in virology, molecular epidemiology and pathology, using additional funds obtained from the Kazakh government.

7. Application for £600,000 was submitted to the oil company Agip KCO in August 2007 to support 3 years of winter aerial surveys and satellite telemetry studies. The results are key to guiding the development the SCAMP, while Agip will use the outputs in the environmental impact assessments. The final decision is expected in mid-December 2007.

8. A journal paper detailing the pup production in the Caspian seal population based on our 2005 and 2006 surveys has been accepted for publication in Ambio, and will appear in print in the first 3 months of 2008. Analysis of the results and involvement of the project partners in the work was enhanced by the Darwin funding. The results of the paper will also be presented at the Biennial conference on Marine Mammalogy in Cape Town South Africa, December 2007, and will form the basis of the assessment of the status of Caspian seals by the IUCN pinniped specialist committee, also in December 2007.

**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.**

Identifying good students in some countries to participate in the programme, especially Kazakhstan, has proved more difficult than expected. This appears to be because most young people see the financial rewards from studying biology as too limited. Although this has caused some delays in the establishment of student projects, we do not anticipate that this will have a significant impact over the lifetime 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?**

Issues in section 2 were not deemed significant enough to warrant discussion with the Darwin Secretariat.

**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? No**

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](mailto: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**