

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2007)

Project Ref. No.	15-032
Project Title	Conserving a flagship steppe species: the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing
Country(ies)	Kazakhstan, Russia, India & Turkey
UK Organisation	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Collaborator(s)	ACBK, RBCU, BNHS, DD, AEWA & Birdlife International
Project Leader	Rob Sheldon
Report date	31 st of October
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR2 (this report has been produced by Maxim Koshkin – project leader in Kazakhstan).
Project website	Under development

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).

Fieldwork continued in April 2007 and built on the previous excellent field season. Fieldwork continued in the core project area, Korgalzhyn, south-west of Astana. The field team located and monitored 192 nests. Thirty four adults and 188 chicks were fitted with unique colour-rings. Nest survival was less than in previous seasons and results from nest cameras appear to show an increase in predation by mammalian predators – two foxes and one polecat were filmed taking eggs. This differs from data collected in 2006 (and the pilot study in 2005). We are considering the hypothesis that mammalian predators were preying on ground-nesting birds due to low numbers of voles. Baseline data on vole abundance was collected to investigate this in the future. Despite the lower nest survival, overall productivity was still reasonably high, with approximately 0.7 fledged chicks fledged per nesting female.

Following the conclusions of last years fieldwork season, the Sociable Lapwing project team decided to put more effort in to the study of the species migration routes and identification of the currently unknown wintering sites. One of the most important tasks for the past fieldwork season was to fit satellite tags on 3 adult birds on the breeding grounds, which was successfully done in July. The sociable lapwing is the lightest bird to be satellite tagged and is only possible due to the recent development in 9.5g tags. Once the tags were fitted we regularly observed the birds to check for any adverse reaction, none were observed, and indeed the 3 tagged birds all went on to successfully complete incubation and fledged young. Satellite data is downloaded every 5 days. The birds have all moved east as expected and by the end of September were in eastern Kazakhstan and south-west Russia. (In October, outside the scope of this reporting period, one bird was located in Turkey, a survey team subsequently visited the area and located 3200 individuals – the largest flock for over 100 years).

One of the students trained during the fieldwork of 2006 joined the team in 2007 and showed excellent results in fieldwork activities and in leading of her own sub-team. Two more local students were recruited for participation in fieldwork and were trained in a variety of field techniques. Led by an experienced fieldworker, Johannes Kamp, an additional project team was carrying out an intensive survey and monitoring work in Pavlodar region in northern Kazakhstan throughout the whole fieldwork season. The data collected on a different project site is very important for comparison of the breeding success data between different parts of the Sociable Lapwing's breeding range

The work on the Sociable Lapwing records database is continued and close to completion now. Most of the data on records have been collected from different publications, reports, through experts from most of the countries of the species distribution range. We expect to publish this work in early 2008.

In August 2007, Maxim Koshkin, Johannes Kamp, Project team members and Stuart Butchart, representative of BirdLife International, took part in organization and carrying out of the first summer

camp for young bird watchers - around 30 biology students gathered in a tented camp on the bank of Shalkar lake, located within the project's territory. Bird watching clubs have been opened by the initiative of one of the project partners, Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK) in most of largest Universities of Kazakhstan. The project team members were invited to take part in introductory training as experienced experts on local birds and territory. Sociable Lapwing Project was presented to all the participants.

In 2007 we participated in fundraising process for survey work on Russian breeding grounds and provided the teams working there with both technical advice and financial support. The Russian team, led by Dr Vladimir Morozov are currently writing up the project reports. However, their surveys of southern Russia revealed very few Sociable Lapwings, and it is becoming increasingly clear that Kazakhstan holds the key breeding populations of Sociable Lapwing.

A small group of ornithologists met at the UK BirdFair at Rutland Water to discuss future collaborative work in Syria. The short meeting was attended by, amongst others, Osama Al-Nouri of the Birdlife partner in Syria and Remco Hofland one of the survey team that located the flocks of Sociable Lapwing in March 2007. A number of collaborative projects were discussed, including Dr Rob Sheldon visiting Syria in spring 2008 to attend a workshop on Sociable Lapwing.

In September 2007 two members of the Sociable Lapwing Project research team took part in International Wader Study Group Conference held in La Rochelle, France. Johannes Kamp gave a talk on habitat selection of sociable lapwing using data collected as part of the Darwin project. Johannes has also recently submitted his dissertation for his diploma in Germany. Dr Rob Sheldon was a joint supervisor for this work.

Preparation has begun for a small workshop in January 2008 which will bring the Sociable Lapwing project team to discuss findings to date and to finalise fieldwork plans for 2008.

Collaborative work with the AEWa coordinator of the recently established Threatened Steppe Breeding Waders Working Group (TSBWwG) is continued and the web page on the TSBWwG website (<http://tsbwwg.org/>) is regularly updated with news and photographs.

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.

The project web-site has fallen behind schedule and will not be on-line until January 2008. This is a short-term problem and is related to lack of capacity within ACBK (the main project partner). We want to use the ACBK web-site as the focal point for the Sociable Lapwing project web-site to help raise awareness of the project in Kazakhstan and to make the link between the project and ACBK. This has now been rectified and the development of the web-site will be given top priority.

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

These changes have not been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat as we see them as minor and will be rectified within the next few months.

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?

The Darwin project continues to develop as planned and exceeds all expectations.