

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report (3)

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)	HYR3 (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).

In April 2008 the project team started the new fieldwork season in the core project area – Tengiz-Korgalzhyn region, south west of the capital of Astana. The team located and monitored total of 138 nests – adding up to a total of 720 nests during the 4 project year. In 2008 nest success was high with about 53% of all nests successfully hatching. Total of 173 adult birds and chicks were colour-ringed, which makes a total of 989 birds ringed within 4 project years. Out of all birds colour-ringed during the period 2005-2008, 81 were re-sighted in Kazakhstan, 2 – in south-western Russia and 5 in Eastern Turkey.

Two expeditions were conducted to areas not previously surveyed. The first survey trip to the Aktobe region was devoted to the search of a male bird, fitted with satellite tag in May 2007. The signals received from the tag during it's autumn migration helped to find important congregations of sociable lapwings in Eastern Turkey and to identify the actual wintering areas of this species in north-eastern Sudan. After spending winter there, the satellite-tagged male migrated back to Kazakhstan, crossing countries of Middle East, Turkmenistan and deserts of southern Kazakhstan, flying along the eastern bank of Caspian sea. Unexpectedly, the bird returned to Mugodzarskoje village, which is in Aktobe region, about 800 km to the west of the area where it spent the previous summer. The bird was highly mobile and couldn't be located, however new breeding colonies were located at both Mugodzarskoje and surrounding villages, proving that this part of the breeding distribution is still occupied by the species.

A second survey trip to Eastern Kazakhstan was undertaken to an area surveyed in 2006. Breeding was confirmed for territories around villages located to the west of Zaisan lake in East-Kazakhstan region. A number of adults were caught and colour-ringed and a female was fitted with a satellite tag here, but unfortunately the signal was lost before it started it's migration. Interestingly, during survey work Central Kazakhstan, one of the birds, colour-ringed in the east, was discovered. This means, that at least some of the birds from eastern Kazakhstan use the Caspian Sea migration route into Middle East and North Africa.

Much effort and time were devoted to the capacity building component of the project. Students of the local universities, which were trained by the project team during the previous years, had a chance to take part in fieldwork of 2008. 3 biology students received further training, in addition 4 new students from 3 different local universities participated in the project for a period of about one month.

Prior to the beginning of the fieldwork season, on the 21-26 of April a second Sociable Lapwing Project Student Training Workshop was organized by the project team in collaboration with the local network of bird-watching clubs, supported by ACBK's IBA project. A team member and an

experienced trainer, who was giving the first training to students in 2006 – Dr Paul Donald from RSPB - gave to 20 biology students of local universities a series of theoretical sessions on “Estimating numbers of wild animals”.

The national project coordinator, Maxim Koshkin and 3 students, trained in field by the project team in 2008, were invited for participation in the second summer camp for local students of biological faculties, organized by ACBK in August 2008. The representatives of the project team shared with students their knowledge and experience which they received participating in Sociable Lapwing project work.

As the project enters its final year we have begun a programme of disseminating our results more widely through the popular media and the scientific press. Three major popular articles have been published in RSPB's Birds magazine, Der Falke (German birdwatching magazine), and Tengri (Air Astana's in-flight magazine). The Darwin Initiative has been cited in each of these articles. Johannes Kamp gave an invited talk at the annual conference of the German Ornithological Union (DO-G) about Sociable Lapwing wintering distribution and migration routes, mostly based on results from colour ringing, satellite tracking and the growing Sociable Lapwing World Database (currently 1,300 data entries). A first peer-reviewed paper on Sociable Lapwings habitat selection and population trends is due to be submitted by the beginning of November. Analysis of nest and chick survival is progressing well, and the submission of a peer-reviewed paper planned for early 2009.

Importantly at the Birdfair in August, RSPB were announced as the Sociable Lapwing Species Champion with Swarovski. This commits both RSPB and Swarovski to financially support Sociable Lapwing conservation for the next three years. Much of this money will be targeted at additional survey work on the migration routes and wintering grounds, as well as the provision of local language publicity material in Kazakhstan, Iraq and Syria.

The project is now moving into a new phase and building on the excellent work to date on the breeding grounds in Kazakhstan. We are currently building good relationships with new partners in Sudan and Iraq. Survey work is planned for this winter in India and Sudan as well as in Turkey, Syria and Iraq in the spring (2009).

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 remains to be completed. The completion is in its final stages and should be on-line in the coming month. The problem is linked to a redevelopment of the ACBKs complete web-site which has encountered technical problems. These have been resolved.

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?

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**