

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2010)

Project Ref No	17-001
Project Title	Conserving Eden: participatory forest management in the Tien-Shan region, Kyrgyzstan.
Country(ies)	Kyrgyz Republic
UK Organisation	Bournemouth University
Collaborator(s)	Fauna and Flora International Botanic Gardens Conservation International BioResources
Project Leader	Prof. Adrian Newton
Report date	October 31 st 2010
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR2
Project website	http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/cceec/conserving-eden/index.html

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).

Progress is summarized below in relation to the relevant Milestones listed on the original proposal (which are italicised):

First exchange visit of Kyrgyz staff and students to UK partners

In the original proposal, the first exchange visit of Kyrgyz staff and students was planned for the first year of the project. However, owing to the delayed first visit of Kyrgyz partners to the UK (as explained in the Annual Report), this took place during the current reporting period. The first visit by Dr Almaz Orozumbekov of Kyrgyz National Agrarian University (KNAU)/ BioResources took place from 26 April to 8 May 2010. This visit provided specific training in GIS techniques and project management discussions with the UK partner organisations. Several meetings were held with key project staff including visits to FFI and BGCI. Planning for the UK visit to Kyrgyzstan in May-June 2010 was also undertaken. According to original plans, a second Kyrgyz national should have visited at the same time, but his visa application was refused, therefore this did not take place.

Second training visit by UK staff to Kyrgyzstan, and in-country training course held

This took place between 27 May – 22 June 2010. The UK visiting team consisted of four postgraduate students from Bournemouth University, accompanied by Jenny Birch, Researcher at Bournemouth University. Dr. Almaz Orozumbekov (KNAU / Bioresources) was the host-country co-ordinator. Six research assistants from Kyrgyzstan universities took part in the field work and received training in field survey techniques over a period of 14 days. 32 field plots in different forest stands were established throughout the reserve. In addition, socio-economic surveys of 45 households were conducted. Additional visits of UK staff to Kyrgyzstan took place as follows: Liesje Birchenough (FFI) 26 July – 7 August 2010, Joachim Gratzfeld (BGCI) 4 – 17 September 2010. A further visit of two UK project staff is planned for October 2010.

Development of interpretation facilities and educational materials initiated

Joachim Gratzfeld, BGCI attended an International Seminar on biodiversity conservation and plant introductions at the Gareev Botanical Gardens (7 – 9 September 2010). The seminar was attended by over 40 national and international participants, notably by Prof Toktoraliev Biymyrza, Director State Agency Environment Protection and Forestry, Kyrgyz Republic. At this

event he provided an overview of the international botanic garden community, the work of BGCI, the Darwin Initiative project, and the particular role of Gareev Botanical Garden in the project. BGCI produced a poster as well as a more detailed informational leaflet that was distributed at the meeting. The poster and the leaflet are in the process of being translated into Kyrgyz and Russian, and are planned to be made available at the forthcoming project stakeholder meeting planned for October, 22 – 24th, 2010 in Bishkek.

The production of 10 – 15 high quality interpretation panels was discussed that feature project target species. These will ultimately be displayed in both Kyrgyz and Russian languages at a prominent location at the entrance of the national botanic garden, and/or next to the respective species growing in the garden following an organised trail. BGCI will also aim to mobilise further financial resources for the creation of the panels. It is planned to have the interpretation panels in place latest by early 2012.

Season of field research completed, and analysis of results completed

A field campaign was successfully held in May-June 2010, involving both Kyrgyz and UK staff and students. This produced in a large dataset on the distribution and status of threatened fruit and nut tree species in the Sary Chelek region, and information on stand structure and composition. In addition a socio-economic survey was completed, focusing on how local people use the forest, the values derived from it, what impacts such activities have on it, and how these are monitored.

Owing to the political unrest in Kyrgyzstan that began in April 2010, the UK visit was cut short by two weeks, which reduced the amount of data that could be collected. However, additional fieldwork was completed following this period by the Kyrgyz team, including targeted surveys of threatened fruit and nut tree species in Sary Chelek, and an additional socio-economic survey conducted in Kara Alma.

Field data analysed and pilot models constructed

Following the successful field campaign held in May-June 2010, initial analysis and presentation of the results obtained has been completed. Field data have also been used to parameterise the model of forest stand dynamics, which will be used to explore the sustainability of current forest use practices in the study area. These initial results will be presented at the stakeholder meeting planned for October 2010 in Bishkek.

Development of participatory approaches to forest management initiated involving partnership with local communities and other relevant partners

FFI have not been able to run the additional village seminars so far this year (reasons below), but have started to work with schools in two 'fruit & nut forest communities' to develop programmes including school nurseries of rare/ threatened tree species and associated environmental education activities such as field trips and eco-clubs. Activity is underway in one school so far. See below for further activities in this area.

Development of sustainable management plans incorporating participatory approaches

Some activity has been taking place on the participatory management planning in Kyzyl Unkor, led by a Kyrgyz organisation, JFJD (led by Prof Toktoraliev). A visit by Liesje Birchenough from FFI in July 2010 involved discussions on how to take this forward in the latter part of the year.

In April, JFDF made their first official visit to Kyzyl Unkor at which the initiative was launched, in collaboration with local stakeholders. Meetings were held with the local Forest Service team, local village government and representatives of local communities. In May, a two week visit was undertaken; five villages were visited and a socio-economic survey was undertaken involving semi-structured interviews. The forest was visited with the Forest Service, with the aim of ground truthing and assessing changes since the previous formal forest inventory undertaken in 2002-2003. A substantive report was produced based on this assessment, which has been provided to the UK project team. One key result was that efforts at tree planting have largely been unsuccessful, because they have been undertaken under the forest canopy. As the species involved are light demanding, trees should preferentially be established in the open, but here there is a conflict with other land uses (grazing). So, lessons need to be learned

from these previous tree-planting efforts. Further information was gathered from local government on socio-economic characteristics of the local communities. In May / June a participatory workshop was held in Kyzyl Unkor with the villagers and other stakeholders, involving about 40 people. A report of this workshop is in preparation. A working group involving a range of stakeholders has been established to take this work forward.

Ethnic violence occurred in the region in June. This delayed project activities. In addition the Director of the *leshoz* has been arrested and accused of illegal tree cutting. A new person has recently been appointed to this post, but this appointment process has impeded work on this component. The situation is now stabilising and a further workshop is planned before the end of the year.

Discussions have been held regarding sending a staff member from GBG to the International Diploma in Education in Botanic Gardens, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew & BGCI, 14 March – 15 April 2011, during meetings held between BGCI and GBG in September. Additional funding is being sought to obtain a full scholarship covering all related expenses of the participant. BGCI is in process of developing funding proposals to a number of potential sponsors, in particular the Bentham-Moxon Trust. The candidate has also been strongly encouraged to take advanced English language courses to enhance understanding and communication skills – an important eligibility criteria determining admission to the course.

A proposal for further work on participatory forest management planning was developed by FFI together with Kyrgyz partners, and submitted to the EC. However, the proposal was unsuccessful, probably because of shifting funding priorities resulting from the recent political unrest in the country.

Plans were also developed for organising a workshop to be held in Bishkek during October 2010. The aim of the meeting is to support knowledge exchange and dissemination of project results, and a large number of different stakeholders have been invited. A report on the workshop will be submitted with the annual report.

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.

- Visa problems

Owing to the recent tightening of restrictions for visa entrance to the UK, our Kyrgyz partners had great difficulty in obtaining visas to travel to the UK. One was refused entry on this occasion and the other required substantial additional supporting information from the UK partners before a visa was finally granted. This led to a delay in the first Kyrgyz visit to April, which was then subsequently delayed further by the volcanic ash cloud disruptions to incoming flights to UK airports. Advice regarding the visa problem was sought from both LTS and from other Darwin Initiative projects in the region, which have experienced similar problems.

- Political unrest

Large-scale demonstrations took place across Kyrgyzstan, including in the capital Bishkek, on 6 and 7 April 2010, where armed clashes between protestors and security forces left more than 80 people dead. President Kurmanbek Bakiyev fled the country and the Prime Minister resigned. Further conflict occurred in the south of the country, particularly in the city of Osh, which lies near to the project's study areas. This was also associated with serious loss of life. A Provisional Government was established with interim leader Roza Otunbayeva, and further elections were scheduled for October 2010, but the political situation remains uncertain. Occasional sporadic incidents of violence continued to occur across Kyrgyzstan between April

and June 2010. This news affected planning for the UK field visit by Bournemouth University staff and students to Kyrgyzstan, which at all times followed advice provided by FCO. Fortunately the visit was able to take place, although a flare up of violence in the southern region of Osh on 10 June led to a decision that the field team should return to the UK earlier than planned, in accordance with FCO advice. The Kyrgyz team returned to the study area in September to gather further field data

In addition, work by project partners in Kyrgyzstan has also been restricted over the past few months. Field work in June had to be cut short and a planned visit by a representative from Fauna & Flora International in June was cancelled and postponed until end of July. A number of Kyrgyz partners have been unable to travel to the project sites and communication with those on the ground has been difficult. Also, progressing this project was not necessarily top of people's priorities when there were such terrible events taking place around them. Arrangements for participatory management workshops and educational seminars have been delayed owing to these unforeseen circumstances.

Travel restrictions for British nationals still remain for the southern city of Osh so the project stakeholder workshop in October had to be relocated from Osh to Bishkek, which was not ideal.

The main concern now is the continuing political uncertainty. The election scheduled for early October 2010 represents an important political development in the country (and in fact the region), as for the first time, it will (if successful) establish a parliamentary democracy. However, there is still a great deal of political tension; demonstrations have continued in relation to the election process. This uncertainty is hindering the development of links between the project and the national government. There is still no CBD focal point in place. Arrangements for project visits are going ahead as planned but with the knowledge that these may need to be postponed or cancelled. In-country work on all areas of the workplan may also be affected in future.

- Steering Committee

While the Steering Committee was formally constituted in 2009, at least two of these people have subsequently lost their positions as a result of recent political upheaval in Kyrgyzstan. There will therefore be a need to reappoint a Steering Committee once the political situation has stabilised. It was also agreed that the committee ought to have a representative from the southern region i.e. OshTU or Jala-Abad. It has been agreed that should the political situation permit it, BioResources will identify replacement members of the Steering Committee, and invite these individuals to act in this capacity later in 2010, including the addition of a member from the southern region.

- Promotion of project staff member

We received news in August news that Prof Toktoraliev (who is formally associated with the project) has been appointed Director of the State Agency of Environmental Protection and Forestry. This is a very senior appointment, which has both positive and negative implications for the project. On the positive side, this provides the project with a direct link into the national government, which will be of great value in developing policy recommendations, and in communicating these to the government. On the negative side, this appointment will reduce his ability to engage in project activities directly, although he intends to participate as much as he can. A meeting with Prof Toktoraliev and UK staff is planned for October 2010, and he has been invited to participate in the stakeholder workshop planned for October 2010.

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

Yes, as detailed below.

An email was sent to LTSI on 4 March to explain the difficulty in obtaining visas for Kyrgyz staff to enter the UK for the training visit. LTSI advised that we should contact some other Darwin recipients who had problems in the past. Resulting advice enabled us to submit additional documents to the embassy in Almaty, which resulted in the subsequent granting of a visa for the host country co-ordinator to visit in April 2010, some two months later than planned. However, this process was not successful in obtaining a visa for the other Kyrgyz national who intended to visit the UK for training purposes.

On the 23 July the above points in relation to the political situation were raised with LTSI via email with a response received on 28 July. It was agreed that the project leader would inform LTS of any further problems relating to the political situation and that another brief update should be included with the half year report. This is provided above.

Discussed with LTS: Yes, in March and July 2010

Formal change request submitted: No; no major amendments required, minor amendments as detailed above

Received confirmation of change acceptance Response received

3. Do you expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

No

If yes, and you wish to request a carryforward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible. It would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication of how much you expect this request might be for.

Estimated carryforward request: £

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

We would like to raise one issue: the future planned training visits to the UK by Kyrgyz staff. As noted above, we have encountered great difficulties in procuring entry visas to the UK for Kyrgyz counterpart staff, particularly those who are postgraduate students. We are therefore considering arranging training for one or more of the counterpart staff at another European country (eg Austria), rather than the UK, if these visa problems continue. We would appreciate feedback on whether this would be an acceptable approach. The costs would still be met out of our existing budget.

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 LTS International directly.

Please send your **completed form by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.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: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**