

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2013)

Project Ref No	19-011
Project Title	Conserving the critically endangered Bengal Florican – a Terai flagship species
Country(ies)	India and Nepal
Lead Organisation	RSPB
Collaborator(s)	BNHS India & BCN
Project Leader	Ian Barber (RSPB)
Report date and number (eg HYR3)	1 st April 2013 to 30 th Sept 2013 – HYR1
Project website	

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) 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).

1.3 - Undertake Bengal florican population survey in at least 3 areas in India and at least 4 areas survey in Nepal, using standardised and repeatable survey methods.

The survey work in both Nepal and India was undertaken successfully but got underway later than was ideal. It is difficult to accurately predict the ideal period to undertake survey work as the birds return to the breeding grounds is dependant on the grass structure. This in turn is dictated by management practices and rain. In Nepal, the Project Co-ordinator was involved in the catching and tagging at Koshi Tappu so he was only available from mid-April and in India because permission to survey inside protected areas did not come through until late April. Consequently, the field teams found it difficult to make all three visits to the sites before the grass had grown too tall to easily observe and record the birds.

Another issue in some areas was the presence of dangerous mammals (elephants, tigers, rhinos) which for safety reasons prevented the surveyors from walking through the grassland to preselected points as recommended. To overcome this, teams established an observation point that gave an unrestricted view of the grassland area and observed for any activity for up to 3hrs at a time.

Despite these drawbacks, enough data was gathered to run the GIS model and both teams will be prepared to go into the field earlier in 2014.

1.4 - Undertake satellite-tracking studies. Quantify habitat condition in places used by Bengal florican and unused control sites, catch birds and attach radio satellite tags.

The first Bengal floricans in the Sub-continent to be tagged were caught on 1st and 2nd April 2013. Both birds were males and their tags have been transmitting successfully to date. The catching team felt they were probably a little too early going into the field as there were relatively few birds around. Therefore, they are planning to delay catching by a couple of weeks later next season and will rely on the survey team to inform them when is the best time to go. Given that only 2 birds were caught, no radio tags were fitted and the team will look at the feasibility of this during the next catching season.

1.5 - Download satellite data and measure distribution, population, movements and habitat requirements Bengal florican. Produce map of areas of existing and potential Bengal florican habitat.

After an initial period of movement 2-3km away from the catching area, when presumably the birds were prospecting for the best grassland sites and a potential mate, both birds have largely stayed around the original area where they were caught. There has been limited overlap of the territories of the two birds. With the end of the breeding season approaching we might expect the birds to move further afield in the coming weeks and months and will provide information on where the birds go outside of the breeding season when historically very few birds are recorded.

The teams gathered enough data on the location of birds and the habitat they were utilising to enable a Maximum Entropy (Maxent) analysis to be undertaken. Maxent is a predictive model of occurrence based on relatively small sample size. The model has generated maps of potential habitat revealing large unexplored areas in both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. These will be ground-truthed over the coming weeks and if found to be suitable will be surveyed in 2014.

2.1 - Engage key stakeholders (eg. landowners/ local communities /Protected Area staff/ local government) to identify methods to recreate habitat conditions identified for Bengal florican under objective 1.

Initial discussions with relevant land managers has helped to identify areas for trail plots and further engagement with will take place in the coming weeks.

2.2 - Identify at least three suitable sites for habitat restoration trials and negotiate participation in trials of key stakeholders (eg. landowners/ local communities/ pastoralists /Protected Area staff/ local government).

Two areas in India and two in Nepal were identified during the survey period as suitable for restoration trial plots. Over the coming weeks the teams will be visiting these areas to discuss the options for management trials in time for the birds return next February or March.

2a. 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.

2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: Yes/No

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

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

Yes No

3b. If yes, and you wish to request a carryforward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible through the formal Change Request process. However, it would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication now of how much you expect this request might be for.

Estimated carryforward request: ~£7,000

4. 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.

The following comment was from the first annual review:

“Indian bureaucracy is a concern expressed under Activities 1.3/1.4, and is again referred to in Sections 8 and 9. It would be useful to clarify when these problems have been overcome.”

Permissions to survey birds inside protected areas in Uttar Pradesh have been granted for the next survey season. In Assam, we are contracting a local NGO well connected with Govt officials to undertake survey work so we do not anticipate the same issues next season. Permissions for catching and tagging birds have still not been granted and Dr Rahmani from BNHS India is in active dialogue with Government officials in both Uttar Pradesh and Assam

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with LTS International through a Change Request.

Please send your **completed report 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**