

## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020)

<b>Project reference</b>	25-012
<b>Project title</b>	Steppe-up: Community-led recovery of Mongolia's iconic species and forest-steppe ecosystem
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Mongolia
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), Governor Office of Arkhangai, Arkhangai Environmental Department (AED), Arkhangai Police Agency (APA), National University of Mongolia (NUM), Independent Research Institute of Mongolia (IRIM), Arkhangai Forest Unit (AFU), Union of Conservation Communities (UCC) of the LPA.
<b>Project leader</b>	Monica Wrobel (Head of Asia, Conservation and Policy)
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)</b>	01 April 2020-30 October 2020, HYR3
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.zsl.org">www.zsl.org</a>

### 1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Following AR2, the project is on track to meet Year 3 milestones. Some notable events included:

- The project supported waste cleaning at the LPA's critical water sources, involving 80 members of Community-based Organizations (CBO). The action collected 45 tons of waste across the Tamir river mobilizing volunteer labour and time while raising awareness for waste management and preventing water and soil pollution.
- The project handed over £worth of equipment to CBOs to run small businesses, including dairy production, vegetable growing, community-based ecotourism, and forage planting. The beneficiary CBOs earned approximately £ last summer using these tools.
- The eight VSLA groups collected around £in their funds. Three VSLAs, including Bayanbulag, Tekhkhariakh, and Bugat, completed the first-year cycle with 22-45 percent profits per member.
- The project, jointly with CBOs, identified new tourism routes, developed an information leaflet, promotional videos, and created a UCC Facebook page. CBOs earned having five domestic tourists last summer.

#### **Output 1 – Focal Species Recovery.**

**Activity 1.3:** During the scheduled biodiversity monitoring in June, the project conducted a refresher training on bird species identification and survey methodology for the twelve community volunteer rangers (VR) from six CBOs.

**Activity 1.4:** The year three annual biodiversity monitoring was conducted between 25 June - 03 July 2020. During the fieldwork, community VRs were trained on target bird species (saker falcon/steppe eagle), survey methodology (line transects), and species identification. Rangers have been conducting fortnightly bird species monitoring. Since June 2019, the project has

been using 23 camera traps for biodiversity monitoring in the LPA involving community VRs. June survey results showed that the number of each target species has increased by at least 50 percent from the first year survey. The project will conduct the last line-transect survey in January 2021.

### **Output 2 – Sustainable Forest Management.**

**Activity 2.1:** Year three forest monitoring survey has been scheduled for November 2020.

**Activity 2.3:** In October the project ran forest management training, including topics of forest fire-insect prevention methods of deadwood removal, and CBO-relevant environmental regulations, jointly with the local Emergency Management Agency, Aimag Forest Unit, Aimag Environmental Department and the Ecological Police.

**Activity 2.4:** On the World Environment Day 2020, the project organized a reforestation event and planted 1,500 aspen branches in 0.5 hectares of LPA riparian area. This was the first time riverbank reforestation had taken place using one-year aspen branches in Mongolia.

Last spring was challenging with a week-long forest fire unfolding in the LPA from Apr 28 to May 4. The CBO members proactively engaged in fighting the fire. In May, Naranbulag CBO fenced a mother spring using their social fund. The CBO also planted 50 elm and willow trees along the river and fenced for protection. The LPA CBOs will conduct the year three forest cleaning in November 2020.

**Activities 2.6, 2.7 and 2.9:** Community VRs have been SMART patrolling in their respective CBO territories within the LPA twice a month. The good performance of the VR SMART patrolling unit is seen in the fact that there were zero cases of illegal collection of pine nuts until September 10 (the date is legally allowed as per the Decree of the Minister of Environment)

**Activities 2.10-2.11:** A year three forest management workshop is planned for late November.

### **Output 3 – Sustainable Pasture Management.**

**Activity 3.1:** On 6-13 September 2020, the contracted rangeland expert from the National Agricultural University conducted a soil and vegetation survey across 37 plots located in ten CBOs' areas. During the survey, the rangeland expert conducted a pasture management training for ten CBOs, involving 171 member herders. They learned about how to make a pasture management plan, monitor implementation, identify plant species, conduct photo monitoring and define soil quality in their pastures.

**Activity 3.4:** In April, the project team facilitated the development of nine CBOs' five-year pasture management plans in order to reduce overgrazing and negative impacts on the rangeland and forest ecosystems. All nine CBOs approved the pasture management plans and commenced implementation. The project supported the implementation of the pasture management plans by supplying fencing materials, covering some transportation costs and providing management oversight. In July and August, four CBOs protected critical springs using fences, six CBOs fenced essential patches at winter camp areas (preserving winter foraging), and three CBOs managed to rest winter grazing areas during the summer.

**Activity 3.5:** The annual community workshop will be conducted in late November.

**Activity 3.6:** LPA pasture management handbook will be developed in January 2021 based on the results.

### **Output 4 – Sustainable and Equitable Livelihoods.**

**Activity 4.1:** The project recruited a short-term business consultant who facilitated discussions among members of each ten CBOs about livelihood diversification options. A total of 134 member herders participated in SWOT analysis and a planning process. The discussions resulted in the small business plans that were approved by the members. Based on the discussions, the consultant also identified each CBO's needs for basic equipment and tools to kick off the businesses. On 15 May, 14 members of Undurkhutul CBO had the SWOT analysis exercise, and 14 members of Buuralkhangai CBO received training on greenhouse vegetable growing.

**Activity 4.2** On 8-21 June, the project office contracted a local photographer to document the most picturesque landmarks of the LPA which served as material for developing awareness-raising and tourism promotional short videos and four brochures.

**Activity 4.5 & 4.6:** The UCC's executive director has been delivering monthly VSLA workshops for eight VSLA groups with 183 members. These VSLA groups have collected £ for saving and

social funds since September 2019.

**Activities 4.7-4.8:** The terminal assessment will be conducted by IRIM consultancy company in January-February 2021.

**Output 5 – Effective LPA Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation.**

**Activity 5.1:** 10-24 June, the project conducted action plan development workshop for ten CBOs with 102 community members covering pasture, forest management and VSLAs as part of the approved LPA management plan 2018-2023.

**Activity 5.2:** Year three annual community forum will be organized in March 2021.

**Activity 5.3:** Between 13–23 August, the project jointly with UCC and aimag soum stakeholders, organized an exchange trip to Western aimags of Mongolia. The trip team included 12 community members representing 8 CBOs and officers from AED and Bulgan soum government. The objectives of the trip were to learn from the best experiences in community-based ecotourism and LPA management in the Western region. The team visited CBOs engaged in community-based natural resources management and cooperating for livelihood diversification. As a result, participants agreed to improve the LPA management under local government leadership. The budget support will be sought from Soum Citizen Representative Khural in December 2020.

**Activity 5.4:** The project is compiling LPA management results and documenting the process. ZSL shared the initial results through Arkhangai local TV and the UCC Facebook page. During the exchange trip to the Western aimags, the trip team also presented the Khoid Mogoin gol-Teel LPA management results to the local CBOs and cooperative members. The project plans to organize a knowledge-sharing trip to the LPA, including representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in late 2020 or early 2021, depending on their availability.

**2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, some community activities had to be postponed and delayed, but the project team has been catching up since the restrictions lifted. ZSL has been taking necessary preventive measures, including wearing face masks during community events, keeping physical distancing, and maintaining hand hygiene.

**2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

Due to Covid-19 pandemics, the Government of Mongolia restricted public gatherings until October 1st of 2020; thus, some community events had to be postponed. For instance, the annual LPA community forum planned in June was delayed until late November 2020. Nevertheless, the project strives to complete all planned activities by mid-March 2021. Due to the state border closure, Chinese cashmere merchants did not come, causing a sharp fall in cashmere price. This, in turn, resulted in a decline in herders' income, including the project herders. There were a couple of illegal logging cases in the LPA, which were quickly detected and reported to Police. Although the cases are still under investigation, the incidence might be associated with herders' reduced income. Lastly, the international travel ban due to Covid-19, caused the unexpected rise of domestic tourism, which had a negative consequence of mass littering and pollution in rural areas in the absence of necessary infrastructure.

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

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance      No

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

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

**If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**4. 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 can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to [Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk](mailto:Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**