

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	28-003
Project title	Resurrection Island: enterprise, conservation and development around the Aral Sea
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Uzbekistan
Lead partner	University of Kent (transferring to University of Oxford in Q3)
Partner(s)	IoZ - Institute of Zoology, GCT - Goscomtourism, TPG - The Pearl Group, GCE - GosComEcology, UKG - UzKorGaz, SCA - Saiga Conservation Alliance
Project leader	Dr Joseph Bull, University of Oxford (formerly University of Kent)
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	“ResurrectionIslandProject” (Facebook) www.resurrectionisland.web.ox.ac.uk (under construction)

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).

Progress described by project outputs that were relevant over the last 6 months

1.1 Analysis of the data collected during the social surveys in early 2022 have been completed over the last 6 months. The **associated report** from the SCA has almost been completed, and will be published via the project website as soon as that is operational (it is currently under construction). In addition, the Research Assistant has completed a **scientific manuscript** reporting some of the outcomes of the social surveys in relation to people’s use of natural resources – this is to be submitted for peer review imminently.

1.2a The **market analysis report** was completed by project partners GCT and TPG, and has been reviewed and **translated into English** by UoK. Both versions will be published via the project website as soon as that is operational.

1.3 Skills training in the provision of homestays in the Aral region for visiting tourists was identified as a priority for development during the Y1 social surveys and market analyses. This training was consequently provided by partners GCT and TPG over the summer 2022 – the outcomes are captured in the form of a full **training report** and **participants list**.

2.1a As outlined in the previous annual report, excellent progress has been made in terms of the Aral-Kum protected area, which has already been legally created via Presidential Decree. Project partners IoZ and Dr Sherimbetov (GCE) have been preparing the **zoological and botanical justifications** for the precise zoning of the protected area (the next step in the process in Uzbekistan). In keeping with the original proposal, UoK has drafted a **timeline and organogram** outlining the process for establishing and resourcing protected areas in Uzbekistan (although this is now more for information, given the progress made by the project).

2.1b The project team are in a process of active consultation with key players (project partners UKG and GCE, also new collaborators GosComLes and Jizzakh Petroleum) about the development of a draft management plan for the Aral-Kum protected area. Given both the accelerated process made towards designation of the protected area, but also the increasingly rapid development of the Aral region by the extractive sector, the project has put in a **change request** to move some budget from the lead organisation to a new budget line for collaboration/data exchange with GCL – this will greatly support efforts to zone and establish an effective management plan for the protected area.

2.2 In keeping with the original proposal, UoK has drafted a **timeline and organogram** outlining the process for establishing and resourcing protected areas in Uzbekistan (although this is now more for information, given the progress made by the project). This will be published via the project website as soon as that is operational.

2.3a Further ecological expeditions were completed (IoZ, GCE) to the Aral region and Resurrection Island in February 2022 and May/June 2022. These were performed to (a) carry out presence observations of animal and plant species, (b) record any potential disturbance to habitats and wildlife caused by economic development activities, in comparison to 2021 surveys, (c) collect the camera trap data and replace batteries. A **qualitative report** on findings has been written, and the data collected are in the process of being analysed by the IoZ in collaboration with UoK to inform a **cadastre for Karakalpakstan**.

2.3b The project RA at UoK has been seeking remote sensing training and expert guidance, and has begun to explore satellite data products available and relevant to analyses of vegetation and water resources for the project area.

2.4 See (2.3a) above.

3.1 Industrial development activities in the region had been mapped at the project outset, however, the situation is changing rapidly (particularly in terms of extractive sector activity). As a result, UKG has carried out additional surveys of emerging sectoral activity in 2022, and has provided a **report on their findings**.

3.3 To provide technical support on No Net Loss biodiversity measures, the UoK delivered multiple sessions on biodiversity impact evaluation and mitigation (including sessions on biodiversity action planning, and meeting biodiversity safeguards enforced by lenders including the Asian Development Bank) to a community of practice in Uzbekistan. The community of practice included representatives from project partners (IoZ, GCE, GCT) as well as representatives of other important stakeholders (e.g. the Institute for Ecological Expertise, Kungrad Soda plant, Jizzakh Petroleum).

3.5 Discussions have begun with collaborator the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative (Kazakhstan) about the arrangement and delivery of workshops and training on biodiversity impacts mitigation and No Net Loss.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt 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.

A potentially serious disruption to the project almost occurred in the summer of 2022: the Uzbek Government moved to change rules around the autonomous governance of Karakalpakstan (the jurisdiction in which the project area is situated), which led to major protests and the declaration of a state of emergency in Karakalpakstan. This almost caused project activities to be paused. However, the situation has calmed down substantially since, the state of emergency lifted, and normal travel has resumed – such that September activities could proceed. The project team will continue to monitor the situation closely, in case there is any sign of the issues arising again.

A previously unexpected development: the project PI (J Bull) has moved from the lead organisation (the University of Kent) to a comparable role at the University of Oxford. As a result, it has been agreed that the project 28-003 itself (along with the full-time researcher, Shahzoda Alikhanova) will also move to the University of Oxford as lead organisation from Q3

(October 2022) onwards. Though this move creates no problems in principle, it does involve substantial administrative effort on the part of UoK, UoO, and the PI.

The UoK limited international travel for the fulltime project researcher S Alikhanova, which slowed project progress – however, the researcher has now been told by UoO that she can resume travel to Uzbekistan. Similarly, the UoK had less options available than suggested for training in remote sensing analyses, which slowed progress for the researcher on output 2.3b.

An emerging issue which we are observing closely is transport costs: the project made estimates at the application stage of budget required for flights (both international and domestic), but the costs for these have risen dramatically globally since then.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: Yes

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known:

4a. 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: £

4b. 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget 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.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

n/a

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response 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 NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**