



Darwin Fellowship - Interim Report
Due within one month of the half way point of your
Fellowship, *maximum 3 pages*)



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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| Darwin Fellowship Ref No. | EIDPS041 |
| Name of Darwin Fellow | Ahmad Jamshed Khoshbeen |
| Host organisation | Centre for Middle Eastern Plants Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, UK |
| Fellow's organisation(s) | United Nations Environment Programme |
| Fellow's role within the organisation (prior to Fellowship) | National Project Coordinator |
| Start/end date of Fellowship | 1 July 2015 – 30 September 2016 |
| Location of Fellowship | Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh & Afghanistan |
| Darwin Fellowship grant value (£) | £20,700 |
| Type of work (e.g., research, training, if other please specify) | Training, knowledge provision, capacity development |
| Main contact in Host organisation | Dr Alan Forrest A.Forrest@rbge.org.uk |
| Author(s) and date | Ahmad Jamshed Khoshbeen & Alan Forrest 4 March 2016 |

1. Background

A team from CMEP have been involved in extensive discussions in Afghanistan and in the UK in the past 4 years, starting with IUCN Red Listing actions in 2009 in which the proposed fellow participated, and followed by engagement with students at Kabul University through in country and online courses in biodiversity and conservation. A Darwin Scoping Mission in Afghanistan in spring 2014 further cemented links between UNEP, national agencies, environmental NGOs and CMEP/RBGE.

Plans for collaboration during the Fellowship involve both CMEP and UNEP assisting the fellow and his colleagues in carrying out dedicated efforts to integrate fellowship study objectives directly into the work on the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, and the National Climate Change Strategy. Afghanistan will be developing its new 5 Year Development Plan in Spring 2015 onwards. Continued collaboration in these national processes, and engaging CMEP experts in the processes, directly by supporting the fellow is planned.

The main objectives of this proposal have been designed and presented by the proposed candidate, with discussion directly with CMEP regarding the specific skills and objectives to be attained. UNEP experts have provided strategic support, helping to frame the proposed actions in a national context.

Aim and objectives of the Fellowship, and the programme of work

The primary objective of the 2015-2016 Darwin Initiative fellowship is to increase the capacity, knowledge and ability of the Fellow to deliver high impact environmental advice to local, provincial and national actors, impacting positively on policy development, biodiversity conservation assessment and restoration of ecosystems in support of international conventions.

The fellowship will help Afghanistan by ensuring that policies for biodiversity and climate change are both in line to international agreements, and that both contribute to enhancing capacities of government, NGOs, private sector and NGOs through trainings provided, publications distributed, and policies developed and integrated by Mr. Khoshbeen.

Specific objectives while the fellow is in Edinburgh will include:

- (a) Preparation of a taxonomically accurate database to hold information about the flora of Afghanistan, with available data held in Edinburgh and Kabul and other key institutes used as an exemplar for study and constructed by the proposed fellow (including training in geo-referencing techniques)
- (b) Training in the acquisition, handling and use of plant distribution data for conservation and restoration purposes, including local and national analyses
- (c) Acquisition of knowledge about the plant communities of Central Afghanistan, how these have been affected, and how they might be restored
- (d) Design of monitoring tools to enable communities and provincial partners to identify indicators, to be trialled in field operations in Bamyan
- (e) Understanding of the basic links between plant diversity, climate change, watershed management and poverty alleviation
- (f) Training in the design, implementation and delivery of knowledge products at the community, provincial and national level
- (g) Training in writing funding proposals to a range of international agencies focusing in sound scientific principles

Roles of the Host and Fellow's institutions

CMEP are providing a focus for all training and knowledge acquisition in the UK, specifically relating to the plants and vegetation of Afghanistan and the integration of knowledge gained into national planning.

UNEP are providing flexibility in the Fellow's working schedule that will allow him to take time to build his personal and professional tools and skills in environment and climate management with a botanical focus. They are also advising and supporting the Fellow in the implementation of knowledge to national actors and stakeholders, for his continuing position.

2. Progress

Progress against the programme of work

- a) Database has been created, and the majority of plant species taxonomy and nomenclature has been input using Breckle, Hedge & Rafiqpoor (Vascular Plants of Afghanistan: an augmented checklist 2014) as a reference.
- b) Fellow has received basic training on the acquisition, handling and use of plant distribution data for conservation and restoration purposes, including local and national analyses. This will result in a first map of endemic plant species richness in Afghanistan.
- c) The Fellow is currently reviewing scientific literature and other publications in order to summarize and publish a review on the relationships between climate, vegetation and adaptation in Afghanistan
- d) As part of an upcoming project funded through the Darwin Initiative, the Fellow has started designing monitoring tools for specific plant species that will be monitored as they are woody shrubs currently collected unsustainably for fuelwood in mountain communities in Bamyan.
- e) This will form part of the publication mentioned in (c)
- f) This goal will be addressed towards the end of the fellowship once information gathering and training is complete
- g) The Fellow played a key role with CMEP and UNEP in developing a successful application to the Darwin Initiative (resulting in a funded programme "Reducing Environmental degradation through sustainable fuel interventions in Afghan communities").

In addition to the proposed workplan, the Fellow has attended a strategic English language course on professional writing and speaking at a British Council accredited language school in Edinburgh, for which he received an excellent report. He has also attended M.Sc. lectures and workshops at RBGE that have increased his understanding of international conservation frameworks such as CBD, CITES, CMS and GSPC.

The fellow attended the World Forum on Natural Capital (Edinburgh) and the 2nd Annual Science conference on Ecosystems Services and Poverty Alleviation (ESPA).

Through the fellowship, the Fellow has played an active role in developing a roadmap towards developing a botanic garden in Afghanistan, including using his developing skills to engage with stakeholders and the preparation of draft documents. This has also involved discussions with a range of experts in the design and management of botanic gardens.

Problems encountered and how you have or are planning to overcome them

The main problem faced was obtaining an appropriate UK visa, which prevented the Fellow from coming to UK and working with CMEP (host organization). The visa was issued in October 2015 and the Fellow visited UK for first time in November 2015.

Are there any issues you would like to raise?

None.

3. Achievements and Outcomes

main achievements and outcomes to date

- Attended and finished a professional English language course in Edinburgh.
- Supported the development of two new proposals for upcoming conservation projects.
- Obtained training on CBD.
- Attended the World Forum on Natural Capital and ESPA Annual Science Conference and made networks.
- Observed and learned from global ex-situ conservation initiatives.
- Acquisition of working knowledge of the plants and vegetation of Afghanistan, working with botanical, conservation and data experts.

4. Next Steps

- Further trainings on acquisition, handling and use of plant distribution data for conservation and restoration purposes.
- Design and implement the field activities in Bamyan Afghanistan on plant communities of the province using the available data as well as collecting new data.
- Attend the summer school on Ecosystem Services and Poverty Alleviations.
- Develop knowledge products on CBD, CITES, CMS and other global conservation initiatives such as Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GPSC).