



Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	IWT082
Project title	Combating poaching and trafficking of Critically Endangered sturgeon
Country(ies)	Georgia
Lead organisation	Fauna & Flora International
Partners(s)	High School of Justice (HSoJ) School of Natural Sciences and Engineering, Ilia State University (ISU) Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia Ministry of Finance of Georgia, Revenue Service, Customs Department
Project leader	Fleur Scheele
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	

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 the end September).

Rather than at the beginning of Q1 on 1st April 2020, this project started in Q2, on 2nd August 2020 – a four month delay.

Upon project start, we immediately started activities under Output 1: Local citizens protect sturgeons against poaching for illegal trade and support legal fishing activities, on the Rioni River spawning migration route. FFI's Citizen Inspectors monitored the Rioni River between the cities of Poti and Samtredia fulltime throughout August and September, and continued monitoring into October. Various law enforcement officers received instructions from the team (2.1). The coordinator of our poaching monitoring team has collected SMART patrolling records from all inspectors and is currently preparing our poaching monitoring report (1.1.1). The team is also in the process of developing training materials for fishers,

and is currently finalising the monitoring and evaluation plan that designs our knowledge and awareness level tests that are used pre and post training activities (1.2.1.1). Due to high levels of COVID-19, we decided in September 2020 to postpone the actual training activities until case numbers will drop, as the fishers trainings do require physical presence of participants and trainer. The coronavirus prevented us from organising festivals, meetings, and discussions with the local citizens and local teenagers of the Rioni River Council and the Rioni Youth River Council. We have, however, been discussing alternatives with schools and municipalities and are planning to create sturgeon wall art and disseminate sturgeon educational materials to schools in November (1.3).

Under Output 2, Increased capacity of law enforcement and government agencies to enforce laws on poaching and trafficking of sturgeon in Georgia (Rioni River and Black Sea), we have been providing field support to local enforcement officers in the project region (2.1) and been taking the first steps to developing materials for the training programme for law enforcement officers with geneticists of Ilia State University (2.2 and 2.3), which will be further developed in Q3.

Under Output 3, Increased capacity of prosecutors and judiciary to interpret wildlife laws and effect increased successful prosecution and sentencing of wildlife crime cases, we have had strategy development discussions with the High School of Justice with regards to the organisation, programme and approach for the wildlife crime platform meetings between judiciary, enforcement, and policy makers (3.4) as well as for the development of a wildlife crime training module for judges (3.1). For this we have also approached the US Department of Justice at the US Embassy in Georgia for collaboration and support. These strategic discussions will be continued in Q3.

Under Output 4, Increased coordination and action by key actors within Black Sea range states to address IWT, we have had to hold on for a while due to the timing not being opportune: project start was in August, when traditionally most Georgian nationals are taking a month off. Combined with COVID-19 and the fact that from project start, the Georgian authorities have been preparing for the October parliamentary elections, the timing was not right for the organisation of high-level meetings. We have however been networking more informally and are hoping to be able to work more on national exchanges (4.1) after the October elections. As due to COVID-19, we are not able to travel, and little is happening internationally with regards to regional Black Sea conferences, we have not been able yet to make significant steps on 4.2 and 4.3. We have been working with Black Sea fishers throughout Q2 to obtain access to fishing vessels during the Black Sea fishing season in Q3 and Q4, so that we generate the necessary data that will serve as input for our discussions on Black Sea fisheries.

No activities were planned under Output 5: Evidence-based behaviour change strategy developed to tackle demand post project.

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.

The project started with a four month delay. This means that we did not conduct any of the planned activities for Q1 – we missed a few months of the sturgeon spawning season that cannot be compensated for later in the year. However, when the project finally started we still could cover the last months of the spawning season with our poaching monitoring activities. For other activities, this means that we had a bit less time to work on them, but we are now working to compensate with the delays and still feel we can deliver the results that we want to deliver for this year. For example, we were planning to organise our first wildlife crime platform meeting (2.3) in Y1Q2. This is an activity that needs preparation (programme design, networking, strategic decision-making; selecting participants; sending invitations to participants), which would have otherwise taken place in Q1. Instead, we have now started this in September and are expecting to organise the first platform meeting in Q3.

One staff member who was described in the project proposal left the team (Elisa Dierickx, Conservation Genetics expert, 2% of time on the project) and we are currently seeking advice from scientists abroad and are working with a geneticist at our partner Ilia State University to compensate for this loss.

The above-mentioned changes have been communicated with LTS in an email in September 2020 and as agreed with LTS they will be described in a Change Request Form once we have a full picture of changes we would like to make to the project and logframe this year.

As we started four months later than planned, this also means that core staff on the project (Fleur Scheele, Mikheil Potskhishvili, Janeli Rogava, and our local Finance Officer) could not spend time on the project for 4 months, which reduces the spend on staff with approximately GBP [REDACTED]. We also spent less money on fuel and fieldwork accommodation, for an estimated GBP [REDACTED]. These are rough estimations; the exact figures will be calculated later and will be submitted to LTS in a Change Request Form.

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.

Until Summer, the coronavirus had not hit Georgia very hard, but this changed by the beginning of September. COVID-19 cases have been on the rise since then. Although government restrictions are not very strict, and would still allow us to organise quite a number of field activities, we have had to decide to strongly reduce our travel. Poaching monitoring continued as usual, but fishers training events have been postponed. We are hopeful that we may organise them later during project year 1, and will do so if the number of cases will drop sharply, but we will need to wait to see what will happen.

For activities with Youth River Council and River Council, we have had to keep our communication to a minimum. We are now frequently sharing information through our local Facebook page and are raising awareness through alternative methods (e.g. mural paintings) so we expect to be able to use all budget for this activity and achieve results, although the methods are different than they were planned.

With regards to national-level policy work, lobbying at regional fora, and research and lobbying with regards to the Turkish fisheries (Output 4 activities), the COVID-19 has significantly reduced opportunities for us to do networking, meet relevant policy makers, do the necessary advocacy and lobbying, and obtain relevant information. It is not possible yet to predict how the situation will develop over the next few months, but we are actively seeking alternative networking and lobbying strategies and we will communicate with LTS over the next months to show how we are dealing with this challenge.

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: Yes

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 IWT Challenge Fund management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No, thank you.

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.

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 IWT-Fund@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: IWT001 Half Year Report.