



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/resources/information-notes/>).

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum** of 20 pages in length, excluding annexes)

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IWT Challenge Fund Project Information

Project reference	IWT089
Project title	Building effective responses to illegal wildlife trade across Central Asia
Country/ies	Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan
Lead partner	Fauna & Flora International (FFI)
Project partner(s)	TRAFFIC International, Institute of Zoology (National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan), Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity Kazakhstan (ACBK), The Institute of Zoology and Parasitology (Biological Division of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan), State Customs Service (Kyrgyz Republic), Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision (Kyrgyz Republic)
IWTCF grant value	£556,998
Start/end dates of project	01/10/2021 – 31/03/2024
Reporting period (e.g. April 2021-Mar 2022) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	October 2021 – March 2022 Annual Report 1
Project Leader name	Matthew Lowton
Project website/blog/social media	
Report author(s) and date	Matthew Lowton, Sarah Gluszek, Akylai Kabaeva, Madina Tauykelova, Elena Bykova, Louisa Musing 09/05/22

1. Project summary

A great diversity of fauna and flora species are trafficked, some in large quantities, across porous international borders in Central Asia every year. Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies (LEAs) lack sufficient data, resources and trained personnel to mount an effective response. The drivers of illegal wildlife trade (IWT) vary by species and country across Central Asia, but common factors include its proximity to major consumer geographies, such as China, Russia and the Middle East; the vast international and porous borders (>21,000km for our target countries) within the Eurasia Economic Union (with free movement of goods between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia), limited funding for wildlife management, and low prioritisation given to IWT among non-environmental LEAs.

This project is supporting national and regional efforts to tackle the trafficking of species along key trade routes and exit points in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Figure 1). This is done by identifying trade hotspots and routes; improving understanding of key traded species; strengthening inter-agency communication and capacity to intercept trafficked wildlife products in strategic transboundary locations; and reducing wildlife trafficking through effective and deterrent criminal justice pathways.



Figure 1. Map of Central Asia, shows the 4 countries covered by the project; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Source:www.uzngos.uzsci.net

This project is working to build and support effective responses to IWT, promoting a transboundary approach, targeting strategic locations to be identified through activities under Output 1, namely 1.2 and the collection of preliminary baselines of IWT data and the subsequent production of national reports on key hotspots and trade routes across the region. Future reports will show in detail areas identified as hotspots for trafficking and trade. These trade maps will be produced by FFI and project partners.

It is hard to accurately ascertain the extent of wildlife trafficking in the region. This is due in part to a lack of systematic data collection and sharing policies/protocols for IWT incidences by LEAs across the region. However, the small amount of available evidence (including anecdotal accounts), highlights illegal trade in a number of high value Endangered and Vulnerable Species, such as Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) and Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*) respectively, as well as species that have historically occurred at high densities but which now are being traded at large quantities, legally and illegally, such as the Steppe tortoise (*Testudo horsfieldii*).

By working closely with LEAs and government ministries, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) is engaging with key decision-makers, promoting formal and informal communication between agencies, nationally and at a transboundary level. Work across agencies, including the provision of training and mentoring, will promote greater, more coordinated proactive responses against IWT, informed by systematically collected and analysed IWT data.

2. Project partnerships

Throughout the project FFI is working closely with the following national and international partners:

TRAFFIC: FFI worked with TRAFFIC on the design of the project and in the first 6 months has had a close working relationship with FFI designing and helping deliver the workshop conducted in Bishkek in March 2022. TRAFFIC presented to attendees at this workshop. FFI and TRAFFIC have regular meetings, both in person and online, to discuss project deliverables and adapting the project workplan where needed.

Institute of Zoology (IoZ), Academy of Science of the Republic of Uzbekistan: FFI has met with IoZ in person in Tashkent and Bishkek and has frequent online meetings to talk through current and future workplans for the delivery of activities within Uzbekistan. FFI and IoZ are in the process of designing and delivering the national workshop in Tashkent to take place in Q1 Y2

Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan: ACBK is a long standing in country partner having worked with FFI on a number of projects over the past 10 years. FFI and ACBK have regular calls to discuss on going activities and plan future deliverables. FFI will be meeting ACBK in Q1 Y2 in Almaty.

The Institute of Zoology and Parasitology, Biological Division of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan

FFI have met with the Vice President of the Academy of Science of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Institute of Zoology and Parasitology under the Academy to introduce them to the project's work plan. A memorandum of understanding was signed between FFI Tajikistan and the Academy of Science with the Academy of Science being appointed as a Focal Point in Tajikistan to help facilitate delivery of activities nationally.

State Custom Service, Kyrgyz Republic

The State Custom Service have been supportive of the project and agreed to partner on activities in Kyrgyzstan. Attended the workshop conducted in Bishkek in March 2022.

Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision, Kyrgyz Republic

The Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision (MNRETS) are aware of projected project activities and outputs within Kyrgyzstan, and have been designated as national focal point by the Administration of the President to help coordinate agency and Ministry engagement with the project. MNRETS attended the workshop in Bishkek in March 2022.

Committee for Environmental Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan

FFI have engaged the Committee for the Environmental Protection outlining the project and planned activities to be delivered in Tajikistan. A representative has been assigned as a member of the technical working group for Tajikistan.

Institute of Biology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic

The Institute of Biology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic are long term partners in Kyrgyzstan working on previous projects. Meetings have been conducted with representatives from the National Academy of Sciences who are aware of projected project activities and outputs within Kyrgyzstan. The national Academy of Sciences attended and presented at the workshop in Bishkek in March 2022.

Committee of Forestry and Wildlife of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Project partner ACBK met with the Vice Minister of Ecology who was made aware of the project and the planned delivery of activities and outputs under the project regionally and within Kazakhstan.

State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Ecology and Environmental Protection (SCEEP)

SCEEP has provided support and guidance to the project from inception ensuring FFI is complying with national protocols in relation to formal engagement with law enforcement agencies and Ministries. FFI and SCEEP have had 4 meetings in the first 6 months of the project and are in the process of formalising this relationship with an MoU. SCEEP are aware of projected project activities and outputs within Uzbekistan and are ready to help with the delivery of project activities.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

The first six months of this project have seen work conducted within all four partner countries, with a focus on introducing key LEAs and government ministries to the activities under this project and building positive working relationships. Weekly online meetings have been held with and between project partners to set out roles and responsibilities under the workplan and lay the foundation for collaborative working with new partners. All sub-agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoU), as well as seven contracts, were formalised and signed with project partners, providing all participants with clear roles and responsibilities. An MoU with the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Ecology and Environmental Protection (SCEEP) is currently being finalised.

1.1 Host one regional training workshop for 20 law enforcement officers (LEOs) from all four countries on IWT data collection, management and analysis.

This activity was postponed to Y2 following the significant restructuring of state agencies in Kyrgyzstan, high turnover of law enforcement personnel in Kazakhstan, socio-political unrest in Kazakhstan earlier in the year, and recent military skirmishes resulting in sustained gun battles between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan forces along the border near Vorukh, the latter two of which created restrictions to individuals travelling between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. After significant consultation between partners in the buildup to the planned regional workshop, it was decided that this activity should be postponed to Yr. 2 with national workshops conducted in the interim. This change in planned activities was submitted within a change request submitted on the 31st of March 2022. National workshops are now planned to take place in Q1 and Q2 of Y2 for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan respectively. Preparations for the national workshop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan have already begun this year through meetings organised online and in-person between FFI, IoZ, TRAFFIC, SCEEP and Ekomaktab. From these, a provisional agenda, attendees' list and workplan have been drafted, and the venue has been confirmed.

FFI organised with project partners the first national workshop in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on 30th March 2022 (see additional Annexes) with 43 participants (33 male; 10 female) in attendance from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision; Custom service, Specialized Customs (Cynological centre); Border service; Ministry of Internal Affairs; National Academy of Science; Prosecutor's Office and national NGOs working on IWT, Ilbirs, Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) and Snow Leopard Trust. Project partners from Ekomaktab, IoZ and TRAFFIC, also presented during the workshop. TRAFFIC presented information on the importance of wildlife trade data, data collection, and data sharing, as well as an introduction to the Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange (TWIX) platforms. TRAFFIC introduced to agencies present why illegal wildlife trade data collection and data sharing are vital mechanisms to help improve national and regional efforts to combat wildlife trafficking and how the TWIX platform can facilitate this. IoZ shared experience of Uzbekistan's efforts in curbing illegal trade in wildlife.

The objectives of this national workshop were to:

- Introduce the project and the issue of illegal wildlife trade nationally, regionally and globally
- Raise awareness of national and regional case studies of illegal trade
- Facilitate informal dialogue between agencies
- Conduct a needs assessment of agencies and ministries in attendance
- Convene National IWT technical working group members
- Understand how each agency currently processes a seizure incident by working through a fictional case study in breakout groups

Likert questionnaires with 15 questions to ascertain current comprehension, confidence and experience with IWT were undertaken with attendees (see additional annexes). 29 out of 43 attendees filled in the questionnaires anonymously. Over 80% of the people said they lacked a good understanding of IWT, and 73% said they have received little or no training on IWT within the curricula and training for their position.

The workshop was productive and provided an opportunity for robust discussions between agencies and individuals. Support for previously identified issues, prior to project inception, were highlighted, such as the lack of a centralised database for wildlife trafficking incidences and poor communication between agencies. New unknown issues were also raised that impact national responses to IWT and ability to comply to CITES. This includes lack of knowledge of inter-agency agreements from participants and that seizures of trafficked fauna and flora fall under new legislation and are currently prosecuted as economic contraband offences, requiring the value of any seizure to meet a monetary threshold before it can be prosecuted.

1.2. Collect preliminary baseline IWT data and produce a report on key hotspots and trade routes across the region.

Collection of preliminary baseline IWT data has begun, however, after consultation with all project partners, this activity will continue in Y2 due to unforeseen challenges in the hiring process of in-country personnel from one of the project partners leading this activity. TRAFFIC is in the process of recruiting personnel in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and have recently employed a Regional Project Coordinator, Bakytbek Tokubek uulu, who is coordinating activities regionally for TRAFFIC. The recruitment of the remaining project support staff roles has continued during this reporting period, with interviews scheduled for the end of April 2022/early May 2022, with a view to have key staff in place by early June 2022.

Outreach with LEAs in each of the four countries and the formation of the technical working groups in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and preliminarily in Uzbekistan, has led to initial meetings and discussions around where data on wildlife trafficking incidences and seizures could be located and accessed. The sensitivity of the information and in the instance of Kyrgyzstan, the inability to search by crime type on the existing LEA database, has made the collation of IWT incidences challenging.

FFI has previously conducted research into the illegal trade in Saker Falcons in Kyrgyzstan and Steppe tortoise regionally, which have informed baseline data of IWT incidents and seizures and will be used to guide the national reports. IoZ, in partnership with Ekomaktab and building on historical work on IWT within Uzbekistan, have started collecting and collating IWT data for Uzbekistan.

In Tajikistan, FFI has started preliminary work with the National Academy of Sciences, looking into which species within Tajikistan are commonly traded, both legally under CITES, and illegally.

In Uzbekistan, IoZ has begun consultations with TRAFFIC on how to collect data for the development of an IWT national report and has identified several databases that contain IWT information, including CITES reports, customs records, prosecution records, open-source research and IoZ's own records. IoZ

has written to the Prosecutors Office and Customs for incidences relating to IWT over the past decade (2012-2022).

Initial contacts and conversations will be used to catalyse this activity in Yr 2 by TRAFFIC, the project partner lead for this activity. Collation of known IWT incidences from previous reports and historical work in the region for Steppe Tortoise, Saiga and Saker falcon, among other species, will be included in the preliminary analysis of IWT hotspots. Analysis of CITES trade data will also be used to understand key demand markets.

1.3 Mentor four national focal points to analyse IWT data, and support them to update annual reports produced under 1.2

Due to the challenges outlined under 1.2, this subsequent activity has also been moved to be initiated in Y2. Identification of and communication with individuals from LEAs across the four countries, and the formation of the technical working groups in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and preliminarily Uzbekistan, means that initial steps have been made to identify individuals who could be mentored in Y2. Similarly, potential mentees have been identified by IoZ following their attendance at the Bishkek workshop. In addition to fulfilling duties revolving around IWT data collection and analysis, these individuals will act as points of contact and help promote the attendance of individuals for future workshops and training sessions.

1.4 Support LEAs (including prosecutors) to implement existing inter-agency agreements in place in Kyrgyzstan (in collaboration with Panthera)

It became apparent at the national workshop in Bishkek that any existing inter-agency agreements in Kyrgyzstan, especially those concerning tackling IWT, are either not utilised or not known. FFI is aware of a "Decree on the interaction of state bodies to combat violations of environmental legislation" signed in 2017 between the State Agency of Environmental Protection and Forestry, Customs, Border Services, Prosecutor Office, State Committee on National Security, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Service for Combating Economic Crimes, State Inspectorate for Environmental and Technical Safety. However, there is little evidence that this decree has facilitated closer inter-agency collaboration and communication. In light of the findings from the workshop and the knowledge of the 2017 decree, FFI set up a meeting with the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision (MNRETS) on April 15 to discuss existing inter-agency agreements. During this meeting, it became apparent that there are no agreements between MNRETS and other agencies concerning IWT. Communication and data sharing between other agencies in relation to IWT are limited, and where they do happen, they do not occur in a systematic and formalised manner. FFI has agreed to support MNRETS in setting up a high-level ministerial meeting, provisionally in Q1 Y2, between Customs, Border service, the Prosecutors Office, and MNRETS to develop and sign a new binding inter-agency agreement on IWT data sharing and collaboration to address wildlife crime. FFI has started the process of identifying a lawyer to draw up a draft agreement for the meeting. This interagency agreement will specifically relate to collaboration and data sharing in relation to tackling IWT, which is different from the wider scoping Decree which was signed when MNRETS was the State Agency of Environment Protection and Forestry.

1.5 Facilitate bilateral IWT data sharing between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (in collaboration with Panthera) over the course of three meetings/workshops.

Due to the socio-political unrest in Kazakhstan at the beginning of the year, the significant overhaul, turnover and loss of key staff within ministries and government agencies in Kazakhstan as a result of the uprising. Coupled with the closure of the land border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and upon advice of our long term in-country partners ACBK in Kazakhstan, it was decided to commence this activity from the middle of Y2.

Within Kazakhstan, ACBK organized and attended a meeting with the Vice Minister of Ecology with the Executive Director and Deputy Director of ACBK in attendance. The Minister was made aware of the project and the planned delivery of activities and outputs under the project.

2.1 Establish and facilitate technical working groups in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to develop calls to action on IWT.

Outreach and engagement with relevant agencies, ministries, and national IWT experts have been ongoing since the project's inception to identify individuals to invite to the technical working groups within Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, this was collaboratively done with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with outreach conducted to identified LEAs to gauge their interest in partnering with FFI under this project and ascertaining their availability to attend the IWT technical working group for Kyrgyzstan. With support from the Administration of the President, the national focal point has been designated to the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision and will be responsible for convening these high-level working group meetings. Members of the technical working group in Kyrgyzstan will include LEAs, government authorities, academic institutions and national and international NGOs. Representatives of these agencies had a chance to meet each other at the national workshop hosted in Bishkek in March 2022. Provisional plans have been made for the next meeting to be held in June to discuss the development of a centralised database and creating a formal data-sharing agreement between Customs, Border Services the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Prosecutors Office.

Within Tajikistan, FFI has held meetings with the Vice President of the Academy of Science of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Institute of Zoology and Parasitology under the Academy to introduce the project and workplan. Following this meeting, the Academy of Sciences has been designated as the national focal point for Tajikistan for the technical working group. Official letters have been sent, received and responded to by four LEAs, including:

- National Security Committee (KGB)
- Department of State Control over the use and protection of plants and animals, Committee for the Environmental Protection
- Customs Services
- Department of Ecology and Tourism of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Alongside FFI and the National Academy of Sciences, these agencies form the IWT technical working group in Tajikistan. The first meeting of this technical working group is planned to coincide with the national workshop to take place in Q1 of Y2.

In Uzbekistan, an informal working group on IWT has been set up, including representatives of IoZ, Ecomaktab and SCEEP with the plan to include designated focal points from LEAs, preliminary identified through initial outreach meetings. This technical working group has developed a workplan outlining tasks, responsibilities and delivery timeline. It will be expanded to include representatives from LEOs after the national workshop. Ekomaktab, with the Institute of Zoology of Academy of Sciences, are taking preparatory steps having hosted 3 meetings in collaboration with SCEEP, the General Directorate for Combating Smuggling and Customs Audit and the Department of Bioresources under the State Committee to create a technical expert working group with these agencies to help with the development and delivery

3.1 Creation of IWT training modules and refinement following delivery and participant feedback.

Due to challenges outlined under 1.2 and 1.5, and the finalization of Terms of Reference (ToR) for the consultants planned to lead development of the modules this activity will be implemented in Y2. FFI is in the process of developing ToRs for the regional IWT experts to be hired as consultants to lead the creation of these modules. Building on previous work, ACBK has hired a consultant to prepare a draft report outlining the national needs for the development of training modules on addressing IWT. It has become apparent that there is a critical need for the inclusion of CITES specific training modules within some law enforcement academies.

3.2 Creation of a facility in Uzbekistan dedicated to the storage of CITES specimens and IWT specific training for LEO's

IoZ has been working on securing a site to store confiscated CITES specimens and for IWT specific training for LEOs. Permission has been granted for the use of rooms for the purposes of the IWT training centre. Consultations with IoZ and SCEEP on the legal pathways to enable the transfer of CITES specimens from customs to the training centre have been conducted. A formal process requiring the submission of justification for the creation of the centre has started.

3.3 Train 150 frontline officers (50/country in Kyrgyzstan Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) in detection of traded species and enforcement of CITES legislation; distribute IWT messaging (e.g. posters) to 75 checkpoints

This activity will begin in Y2.

3.6 Support training in IWT detection of 9 sniffer dog teams based at strategic checkpoints across the region (Y2-3).

FFI has had meetings with Specialised Customs and the Head of the Cynology Training Department, Mr Mashenko, to discuss the logistics of procuring six sniffer dogs for deployment in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. From initial discussion, it has been decided that it is best for the sniffer dogs to be procured from Kazakhstan and transported over land from Almaty. FFI is also in the process of drafting an official MoU with the Kyrgyz Cynology department. During the meetings with the Head of the Cynology Training Department, the issue was raised that Kyrgyzstan currently does not have the capacity to place three - four new sniffer dogs and that, depending on what is possible in Tajikistan, some of the funding for new dogs might be better reallocated to improve the current capacity of sniffer dogs to detect trafficked parts and products of fauna and flora. FFI is working with Mr Mashenko on reviewing the current needs of existing sniffer dog units in Kyrgyzstan to ascertain how best to support sniffer dog deployment and use to address IWT. This could potentially include the purchase of scent imitator boxes and investment in a facility to store seized specimens and train dogs in scents of commonly trafficked species in Kyrgyzstan.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1: Law enforcement response to IWT in Central Asia is informed by data, analyses and knowledge shared between agencies both in country and between range states.

Indicator 1.1: Preliminary analysis of key regional IWT hotspots and routes identified by end of Y1, further developed in Y2 and Y3 through trained focal points.

- Due to the delayed funding of this project and subsequent difficulties in the hiring process of in-country personnel for the project partner leading this activity (TRAFFIC), the preliminary analysis of regional IWT hotspots and routes will begin in Y2. Initial conversations around accessing wildlife crime data for this activity have been had with the National Academy of Sciences in Tajikistan and with Customs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Kyrgyzstan.

ACBK, in Kazakhstan, have reached out to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Committee of Forestry and Wildlife, Border Service of the Committee of National Security, Agency of Finance Monitoring and the General Prosecution Office for records of IWT incidences and received responses from all government bodies, which have been added to ACBK's existing database. In Uzbekistan, work has started on looking at species traded legally and illegally within the country with a preliminary list outlining common species found in these trades.

Indicator 1.2 Four national focal points (one per country) demonstrate ability to collect and analyse IWT data by end of Y2.

- This output will be achieved in Y2. There are no known designated focal points within agencies and ministries in the four countries charged with collecting and analysing IWT data. With the formation of technical working groups in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and preliminarily Uzbekistan, potential focal points for the collection and analysis of IWT data have been identified. National focal points in each country will be identified and trained in Y2.

Indicator 1.3 Existing inter-agency data sharing agreements in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are actively used by end of Y2.

- This output will be achieved in Y2. Outreach and desk-based research into existing data-sharing agreements between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has been conducted by FFI and ACBK. Due to recent socio-political unrest and, until April 2022, the closure of the land border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, collaborative inter-agency work on data sharing has been restricted.

Indicator 1.4 LEAs in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan agree in principle to promote inter-agency collaboration on IWT by end of Y3.

- Work towards this indicator will take place in Y2. There is no known formalised inter-agency collaboration on IWT between these two countries.

Indicator 1.5 Bi-lateral cooperation (in addition to data sharing in 1.3) between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrated through at least two bilateral meetings/workshops and ongoing communications by end of Y3.

- Due to reasons outlined under 1.3, no meetings have been held between these two countries in Y1. In May 2022, FFI and the Head of Cynology Training Department, will be attending a sniffer dog workshop under a separate project, where meetings are scheduled to develop work plans to deliver meetings and workshops in Y2 to facilitate closer bilateral cooperation.

Output 2: Greater priority is given to addressing IWT at a national and regional level.

Indicator 2.1 Number of LEAs in each country that commit increased staff or resources to IWT activities (including data sharing) over the course of the project.

- None to date. Baseline will be established early in Y2

Indicator 2.2 Increased mentions of IWT in national media pre- and post- project.

- Not measured in Y1. Baseline will be established early in Y2.

Indicator 2.3 Feasibility to incorporate IWT into CARICC (or other relevant regional law enforcement initiatives) evaluated by end of Y2.

- A meeting has been set up between FFI, ACBK, and CARICC to be held on the 26th of May to discuss the possibility of incorporating IWT into CARICC.

Indicator 2.4 Declarations and commitments made to increase action on IWT at national (Y2) and regional meetings (Y3).

- This output is planned to be achieved by Y3.

Output 3: 150 LEOs at critical trade routes in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have improved capacity to detect and respond to IWT.

Indicator 3.1 IWT training modules developed and available in four languages by end of Y1.

- With the delayed start to the project, changes to activity 1.1 to better understand national requirements through national workshops, challenges outlined under activity 1.2 and the finalisation of ToR's for consultants that will lead on the training module development this will take place in Y2.

Indicator 3.2 Documented increase in knowledge of LEOs to detect and respond to IWT, as assessed by pre- (Y2) and post-training testing (Y3).

- This output will commence in Y2. The Likert questionnaire created at the Bishkek workshop in March 2022 (Activity 1.1), will inform the creation of pre- and post- training surveys for LEOs.

Indicator 3.3 Number of IWT-trained sniffer dogs in service in strategic checkpoints across Central Asia increase from 25 to 34 by end of Y3, with commitments made in 3 countries to increase deployment post-project.

- FFI is currently working with the Head of the Cynology Training Department on the current needs of the Department and the capacity for new dogs. This will help guide and inform distribution, nationally and regionally, of new sniffer dogs to be purchased under this project. Interest has been expressed in Uzbekistan by the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Ecology and Environmental Protection for the rollout of IWT specific training and capacity development for existing sniffer dog units.

Indicator 3.4 Increased number of IWT items intercepted and investigated by trained officers at end of Y2 and Y3.

- Baseline will be established in Y2 once officers have been identified for the training.

Indicator 3.5 Increased number of examples of effectively reporting and sharing IWT data from LEOs to their superiors / other agencies by end of project compared to Y1 baseline.

- Initial research and meeting have shown that there are few examples of IWT reporting and sharing from LEOs to their superiors or other agencies in Kyrgyzstan, and low levels from LEOs in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Indicator 3.6 At least 12 government officials have improved capacity to develop and roll-out SMART in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

- This output will commence in Y2. A SMART workshop for Uzbekistan LEOs will be held in Q3 by IoZ and ACBK. In Kyrgyzstan, FFI, Ilbirs (a local national NGO), and the Snow Leopard Trust discussed the rollout of SMART patrols with Ilbirs serving as a national SMART expert and training organisation. SMART patrolling was raised with attendees at the Bishkek workshop (Activity 1.1) and identification of suitable national sites for implementation is ongoing.

Output 4: Crime prevention strategies are understood and valued as an additional approach to tackling IWT by relevant stakeholders across all four countries.

Indicator 4.1 Local knowledge and attitudes on IWT, law enforcement and wildlife guardianship is available to inform application of crime prevention approaches.

- This output will commence in Y2.

Indicator 4.2 20 decision-makers, NGO staff and PA managers have better knowledge and positive attitudes towards use of crime prevention strategies by Y3.

This output will commence in Y3.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

Outcome: Law enforcement agencies from four countries across Central Asia are demonstrating improved capacity to detect, respond to and prevent IWT and are collaborating to counter IWT on a regional scale.

In the first six months of the project, only slight progress has been made toward the project outcome. The workshop in Bishkek (Activity 1.1) provided a good opportunity to sensitise attendees and heads of Ministries and LEAs about the importance of addressing IWT, with an evident lack of awareness from some participants. It also highlighted critical gaps in current inter-agency efforts to tackle this crime type which will inform design of IWT training modules. Outreach to LEAs in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan has engaged critical government partners in the desired outcome of this project and

garnered high-level support for the implementation of planned activities. This has increased attention on IWT and started informal cross-agency dialogue on the issue.

0.1 Annual records of IWT data and outcomes are more comprehensive and systematically collated across all four countries by end of Y3 compared to baselines collected in Y1.

- There are currently no known accessible records on IWT data for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. ACBK currently maintains a database on poaching and IWT incidences within Kazakhstan, but there is no known equivalent managed by a government LEA. Baseline IWT data collection and collation is due to continue in Y2, building on preliminary work conducted in all four countries to ascertain available existing data on IWT and access to this information.

0.2 At least 20 law enforcement agencies (LEAs) across all four countries are increasingly collaborating on IWT by end of Y3.

- National workshops, replicating the hosted event in Bishkek in March 2022, along with other project activities, will advance work towards this indicator in Y2

0.3 Learning from Kazakhstan on collecting IWT data is shared with Kyrgyzstan and leads to regular transboundary collaboration by end of Y3.

- With the relaxing of border controls between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and planned activities that will work towards this indicator will occur in Y2 onwards.

0.4 At least 150 law enforcement officers (LEOs) (>10% women) at critical trade routes / hotspots across all four countries routinely search and record. Instances of IWT by end of Y3.

- FFI has ensured to invite female representatives of agencies and Ministries, where possible, to all activities, including the workshop hosted in Bishkek, where 17% of attendees were female.

0.5 Profile of IWT and novel strategies (i.e. crime prevention) increases among decision-makers across all four countries by end of Y3.

- Work on crime prevention strategies will take place in Q3 Y2.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Outcome Assumptions:

One assumption that was not made that has become evident not to be the case was the continuing socio-political security and stability within the countries within which the project operates. The recent, ongoing and well documented geopolitical situation in relation to the war in Ukraine and socio-political issues experienced in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, have impacted the project's activities and deliverables. FFI and partners are monitoring these situations closely and continue to employ an adaptive management approach to update the project workplan when necessary. This includes moving and changing activities to ensure the safety of all staff and partners.

Assumption 1: IWT continues to become a higher priority for governments in general and LEAs in particular in Central Asia.

Comments: Whilst this assumption does still hold true, recent geopolitical developments with the war in Ukraine, the socio-political unrest in Kazakhstan and a resurgence of border hostilities between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, have provided LEA's in Central Asia with more immediate priorities in the short term. With recent CITES decisions in relation to the cessation of trade in CITES-listed species for Kazakhstan and notification to Kyrgyzstan on compliance issues, wildlife trade remains a priority for the governments and respective LEA's of the countries covered by the project.

Assumption 2: Political will for collaboration on IWT issues does not diminish.

Comments: This assumption holds true. There is political will evident in engagement with government Ministries and agencies with which FFI and project partners have had meetings. This is especially true for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, where the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision and Customs and the State Committee for Ecology and Environment Protection, respectively, have actively reached out to FFI and project partners to develop work plans to help with the delivery of activities under the project. In the short term, this assumption may not be wholly accurate with priorities for collaboration between countries to be prioritised on socio-economic issues relating to the war in Ukraine and geo-political frictions between nation-states rather than IWT. This is not to say political will has diminished for collaboration on IWT issues but to be aware that there may be more significant priorities relating to national security and cost of living that impact collaboration on IWT.

Assumption 3: Corruption does not undermine ability of LEOs to make and report IWT seizures.

Comments: Whilst corruption remains a significant issue within Central Asia, FFI and project partners remain diligent with individuals and agencies engaged and routinely monitor open source and anecdotal evidence of corrupt practices within government agencies and Ministries. This assumption remains true.

Assumption 4: Funding for LEAs does not significantly decrease as a result of COVID-19 related economic downturns.

Comments: This assumption holds true. Although, it is not immediately easy to ascertain whether funding has decreased for LEAs due to Covid-19 related economic downturn. What may impact LEA funding more, either positively or negatively, are the sanctions being imposed on Russia due to their invasion of Ukraine and the wider economic and trade implications this is having on the Central Asia region, which is heavily reliant on neighbouring Russia economically not only as a critical trading partner but also as an important source of employment and revenue domestically through migrant workers pay.

Assumption 5: Application of capacity building and training leads to a measurable increase in IWT detection, and LEAs are able and willing to share information on detection success post-training

Comments: With project activities yet to concentrate on direct capacity building and training, it is difficult to say with any accuracy whether this assumption holds true beyond the initial confidence in the assumption at the time of grant proposal submission.

Output assumptions:

Assumption 6: LEAs are willing to allocate focal points to dedicate time on IWT data management and analysis.

Comment: This assumption has held true with the positive engagement from LEAs and Ministries in the creation of technical working groups in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and recognised focal points for these working groups, potentially also fulfilling the role as focal points on IWT data management and analysis.

Assumption 7: LEAs maintain interest in improved data sharing.

Comment: During the national workshop in Bishkek (Activity 1.1), discussion between agencies and attendees present made it clear, verbally, of the importance of interagency data sharing and communication, a position that was reinforced in the responses to the Likert questionnaire where 83% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that data sharing is essential to combat IWT. There are no reasons at this stage to say this assumption does not hold true for the agencies in project countries we have not had an opportunity to directly ask this to.

Assumption 8: Interest in bilateral collaboration between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is maintained.

Comment: The assumption remains true in that there is still interest in bilateral collaboration between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, this interest may not be reflected across all individuals within agencies and Ministries partnered with the project.

Assumption 9: IWT continues to increase as a priority for LEAs in Central Asia.

Comment: See response to Assumption 1

Assumption 10: Funding for LEAs does not significantly decrease as a result of COVID-19 related economic downturns.

Comment: See response to Assumption 4

Assumption 11: LEAs make this number of officers (and the target number of women officers) available for training.

Comment: This assumption holds true. There has been a very keen desire expressed for training opportunities by LEAs who have been engaged in meetings and workshops.

Assumption 12: Improved detection rate is sustained throughout project.

Comments: With project activities yet to concentrate directly on monitoring detection rates, it is difficult to say with any accuracy as to whether this assumption holds true beyond the initial confidence in the assumption at the time of grant proposal submission

Assumption 13: Corruption does not undermine ability of LEA officers to make and report IWT seizures.

Comments: See response to Assumption 3.

Assumption 14: Staff turnover of LEA officers is limited.

Comment: Unfortunately, with the unrest in Kazakhstan, there were wholesale changes in personnel in several agencies and Ministries. This has impacted, in the short term, working relationships that ACBK had with individuals in those agencies and Ministries. Likewise, in Kyrgyzstan there has been a significant restructuring of the State Agency of Environment Protection and Forestry, with which FFI has closely collaborated in the past, to form the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision with all new staff. This assumption remains true for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and will hopefully hold true in Y2-3 for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Assumption 15: National governments maintain interest in the rollout of SMART.

Comment: This assumption holds true

Assumption 16: Community members maintain the willingness to discuss sensitive topics with researchers.

Comment: This assumption holds true.

Assumption 17: Interest in learning and developing alternative approaches to traditional law enforcement remains high among decision-makers.

Comment: This assumption holds true.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on illegal wildlife trade and poverty reduction

Project impact: Populations of species threatened by illegal trade across Central Asia recover in response to reduced poaching and trafficking brought about by effective and coordinated law enforcement responses

It is too early at this stage to be able to report progress towards the higher-level impact on illegal wildlife trade and poverty alleviation. However, the project is set to compile data through which project impact on both poaching (*Outcome Indicator 0.1*), trafficking (*Outcome Indicator 0.1 and 0.4*) and inter-agency coordination (*Outcome 0.2*) can be measured. FFI's wider programme of work (including actions funded by Defra's Darwin Initiative) is working to support sustainable livelihoods and is facilitating community-based enterprises to generate measurable improvements in aspects of wellbeing.

4. Thematic focus

This project directly contributes to the IWTCF theme of "Strengthening law enforcement". This project will strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to protect populations of threatened species by providing training to law enforcement officers (LEOs) at priority trade hotspots and routes and through setting up mechanisms to continue capacity building post-project. Law enforcement is also being improved by enhancing collaboration and information sharing between LEAs beyond the wildlife sector across the countries covered by the project. Cross-border and regional cooperation is strengthened through the delivery of regional and national workshops attended by representatives from countries connected through IWT and through efforts to promote formal bi-lateral collaboration. Representatives from all countries will be brought together at the end of the project to develop a roadmap for increased action for IWT, which we anticipate will be the first step towards a formalised network for regional enforcement. Recent engagement with the Prosecutor Offices, initially in Kyrgyzstan, to sensitise LEAs to the current and new legislation, will aid capacity along the criminal justice chain. The project will also expose LEAs to different approaches to law enforcement, such as by raising awareness of crime prevention methods.

5. Impact on species in focus

It is too early in the project to be able to report specific positive impacts on species in focus. By taking a high-level, regional approach to addressing IWT, we will benefit several species, including those less traditionally targeted by IWT projects in the region, for example, raptors, reptiles and plants.

6. Project support to poverty reduction

It is too early in this project to adequately assess the impact on the alleviation of poverty.

7. Consideration of gender equality issues

It is early in the implementation of this project. However, FFI have made conscious efforts to ensure women representatives for meetings and activities that have already been undertaken. In Central Asia, LEAs are traditionally male-dominated, particularly on the frontline; and women are under-represented in governmental and policy-making roles concerning IWT. Despite this, within the workshop hosted in Bishkek, FFI invited, where possible, female representatives from the agencies and Ministries in attendance which meant that 17% of the 43 attendees, excluding FFI staff, were women.

This project will consider gender in all aspects of project implementation. We will request LEAs to put forward women personnel (target >10% for frontline officers; >30% for higher-level officials) for all training events and meetings; support women to play leading roles in events (e.g. as trainers, facilitators, speakers); and incorporate women's perspectives and experiences in the design of training materials and approaches. Our review of the impacts of IWT on local communities will include a specific focus on understanding the role of women in IWT and impacts on women by IWT and LEA efforts, directly and indirectly.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

Measuring direct impact of project activities on improved conservation, and population, status of species can be challenging with results inherently requiring long term investment and engagement, not only with enforcement but also with the monitoring of trafficked species abundance and population range changes. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) have been central to the project design with engagement ongoing through frequent consultation with an FFI M&E specialist during the first year, a relationship that will be maintained in subsequent years. Through this relationship the Likert questionnaire (see additional Annexes) was developed for utilisation with attendees for workshops and training events to help evaluate impact of these events on participants understanding, confidence and experience of working on IWT. These will be used not only at the beginning of workshops and training sessions but followed up and repeated during project delivery.

Under output 1 activity 1.2, and subsequently 1.3, the research and analysis of historic and current IWT data the projects M&E framework aims to validate the effectiveness of training and awareness raising activities under outputs 2 and 3. Positive changes in the number and frequency of IWT incidences from the baseline created under 1.2 will enable cautious causational attribution to activities delivered to strengthen national capacity to detect, deter and interdict IWT.

With a significant focus on capacity building the selected indicators are designed to measure the follow-on application of training and the continued utilisation of data produced by the project. The effectiveness of trainings will be measured through approaches such as the Kirkpatrick Training Evaluation Model. With activities relating to direct training to take place in year 2 and 3 the projects M&E process is collecting baselines of existing policy and procedures currently used by LEAs, in relation to tackling illegal wildlife trade, as well as IWT related knowledge, understanding and practice of individual LEOs engaged with the project. These baselines will provide the ability to measure individual and agency indicators.

Monitoring and evaluation will depend on a degree of self-reporting from participating LEOs and will rely on the project team maintaining good relationships and communications with participating LEOs to ensure that data on capacity and practice is maintained throughout the project.

Production of IWT specific modules for law enforcement academies and their subsequent embedding within the standardised training curricula is measurable against the output. More challenging is being able to measure how these directly deliver outcome 3 in the lifetime of the project depending on where an individual is deployed and how long an individual takes to be fully trained before placement. Likewise measuring the number of LEOs, 150, at critical trade routes in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to have received training requires a level of assumption that this training will directly improve capacity to detect and respond to IWT.

To support the collection of data needed to measure progress against each indicator, the project is working closely with the FFI Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team to deliver the M&E plan, detailing, and adapting, the quantitative and qualitative information needed to establish baselines, the frequency of data collection and developing frameworks to verify progress against indicators and outputs. A project M&E tracker is being developed and will be routinely updated, with summary reports of progress made available to all project team members.

The M&E tracker will be reviewed by the project steering group during bi-annual meetings with any major concerns, successes, and learning discussed. These meetings provide a platform for formal adaptive management and for decision making on any required changes in project direction

9. Lessons learnt

Knock-on effects of delays: The postponement of activities under Output 1, which was necessary to accommodate hiring of staff in country for project partners, has had knock on effects to activities which logically were to follow the collection and publication of preliminary baseline IWT data and key hotspots and trade routes across the region. This has been mitigated through the adaptive management approach taken to instead deliver activities in Y2 and focussing on activities that would not be reliant on the delivery of activity 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. FFI and project partners are taking steps to ensure robust planning for Y2-Y3.

Change from regional to national workshops: In the original project design a regional workshop was planned for 20 LEOs from all four countries on IWT data collection, management and analysis. Upon reflection, and for logistical and geo-political reasons outlined within this report, it was felt that this was too early to host without a comprehensive understanding of the current policies and procedures in place in each country on IWT data collection, analysis and management. It was decided that this regional workshop would be better placed in Y2 and to instead build momentum and buy-in by holding 3 national workshops. The national workshop hosted in Bishkek was incredibly informative on existing gaps in agency and interagency processes when addressing IWT and provided a fertile environment to build relationships with key individuals within Ministries and law enforcement agencies. Despite this success, to be replicated in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and the acknowledgement that these workshops are an effective way to raise awareness of IWT and build relationships in county this change has had significant impact on project expenditure and workload.

10. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

N/A

11. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

N/A.

12. Sustainability and legacy

The first 6 months of the project has had a low profile with FFI focused on project set up to effectively deliver outputs and objectives, finalising subgrant agreements and consultant contracts associated with in-country and international partners as well as recruitment for key positions to help ensure project delivery. Outreach has been conducted with government partners to secure support to enable effective implementation of activities on the ground. This included translation of all documents and formalisation through bureaucratic procedures to launch the project in all three partnering countries.

Significant engagement with relevant national authorities, LEAs and ministries has occurred across all four countries, which has increased the understanding of the project regionally amongst key stakeholders and decision makers.

Project outputs, including reports with sensitive data redacted, case studies, presentations made during workshops, communications materials and training modules will be made accessible to all relevant LEAs and NGOs working on IWT in Central Asia. This includes completing translations of all documents into local languages and storing all documents in an online storage facility with access granted to all LEAs in the region.

Non-sensitive reports relevant for wider learning among the global community will be freely available for download on FFI and TRAFFIC's websites.

The exit strategy remains valid and relevant.

13. IWT Challenge Fund identity

Within the first 6 months in meetings with government ministries and law enforcement agencies FFI and project partners have clearly outlined the project as an IWT Challenge Fund initiative. The recent workshop in Bishkek increased the profile of the project amongst attendees from national authorities in Kyrgyzstan as a distinct IWT Challenge Fund initiative funded by the UK Government. IWTCF logos were included on presentations given at the workshop and on materials handed out during the event. This will be replicated in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

During all in-person and remote meetings and events it has been made clear to stakeholders and partners of the UK Government sponsorship of the project through the IWT Challenge Fund.

FFI has met with UK Embassy Staff in Bishkek and had meetings with the UK Embassy in Tajikistan remotely, highlighting the IWTCF project activities within each country with. The embassies have been supportive offering to help add value and promote the projects nationally.

14. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

The land border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was closed during covid and remained closed until March 2022. This prohibited ease of travel between the two countries, which has impacted the ability to obtain representatives from Kazakhstan both at the originally planned regional workshop and to exchange learning via project partner ACBK at the national workshop in Bishkek. This has also impacted activities 1.4 and 1.5 which will now commence in Y2.

15. Safeguarding

Please tick this box if any safeguarding or human rights violations have occurred during this financial year.

If you have answered yes, please ensure these are reported to ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk as indicated in the T&Cs.

FFI's safeguarding policies include FFI's Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk Policy & Procedure; Anti-bullying and Anti-harassment Policy and Whistleblowing Policy. We monitor updates in Government and Charity Commission guidance and review our policies and procedures accordingly.

All project staff have been instructed to follow these policies. These policies are also included in FFI's sub-grant agreements with its project partners. No safeguarding issues have been reported during the reporting year for this project. FFI's staff are in close communication with project partners and are well placed to identify and report on any safeguarding issues occurring during or as a result of the project's activities.

In terms of **social safeguards**, FFI has publicly available position papers on our approach to **Free, Prior and Informed Consent Position, Gender in Conservation, Displacement and Restrictions on Access to Resources and Conservation, Livelihoods and Governance**. Our specialist Conservation, Leadership and Governance team support regional FFI staff and partners to take a holistic, people-centred approach to biodiversity conservation, and to ensure all project activity is strongly aligned with these principles

16. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (April 2021-March 2022)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2021/22 Grant (£)	2021/22 Total actual IWT Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)	██████	██████	██████	
Consultancy costs	██████	██████	██████	Underspend anticipated due to movement of recruitment of international consultants leading the development of modules to Y2. A change request was submitted on 31 st of March 2022 addressing this underspend.
Overhead Costs	██████	██████	██████	Underspend anticipated due to challenges associated with hiring in country staff for project partner TRAFFIC
Travel and subsistence	██████	██████	██████	Underspend anticipated due to alteration of activity 1.1 to deliver national workshops with the regional workshop to take place in Y2. A change request was submitted on 31 st of March 2022 addressing this underspend.
Operating Costs	██████	██████	██████	Underspend anticipated due to alteration of activity 1.1 to deliver national workshops with the regional workshop to take place in Y2. A change request was submitted on 31 st of March 2022

				addressing this underspend.
Capital items (see below)	██████	██████	████	
Others (see below)	█	█		
TOTAL	██████	██████		

*** These are provisional figures that may change**

17. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes

I agree for the IWTCF Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

<p>Do you have hard copies of material you need to submit with the report? If so, please make this clear in the covering email and ensure all material is marked with the project number. However, we would expect that most material will now be electronic.</p>	
<p>Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors</p>	<p>Partners provided activity reports for the first 6 months of the project but have not been involved directly in the writing of the report</p>
<p>Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?</p>	<p>x</p>
<p>Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.</p>	