

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 2023

Project reference	IWT089
Project title	Building effective responses to illegal wildlife trade across Central Asia
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan
Lead partner	Fauna and Flora
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)
Project leader	<i>Matthew Lowton</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31/10/23 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	

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).

Activity 1.2 The Regional Workshop on Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade was held between 4-6 July 2023 for the governmental agencies. This workshop brought together relevant governmental stakeholders from the project countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to present some of the project’s results, raise awareness of the relevance of combatting wildlife trafficking in the region and support the efforts through technical training and practical tools. Over the three days, alongside presentations on current information and discussing challenges in combating illegal wildlife trade, the 60 participants received technical knowledge and practical tools to counter illegal trade effectively. Participants included key governmental organisations from Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, as well as from neighbouring China, the UK, the USA, the European Union, CITES, and conservation NGOs. TRAFFIC organized key speakers for the workshop, including UK Border Services, China Customs Services, CITES Secretariat, Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), and Ibirs Foundation. The involvement of these experts was planned under another regional IWT meeting - **activity 2.4.**, however, the regional meeting itself will take place in February 2024. Embassies and International organizations were also invited for the first day of the event and governmental organizations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan with local partners were invited for the entire workshop. **Activity 1.3:** TRAFFIC and project partners continue to develop an analytical report based on the information gathered over previous reporting periods, with support and feedback from the partner organisations. The first report, *A Rapid Assessment of the Wildlife Trade Dynamics in Central Asia*, sets out to establish a benchmark assessment of the levels and dynamics of wildlife trade—both legal and illegal trade—within the target Central Asian countries. This will enable future studies to assess the changes in wildlife trade dynamics over time, which species

are being traded in increasing or declining quantities and why. The study also aims to identify the common challenges and what solutions are available to assist national agencies within each of the study countries to manage and regulate the dynamics of wildlife trade within the region in a coordinated manner. Much of these data were derived from the information gathered from government agencies within the region carrying out their national government's international obligations as a Party to CITES. This report will be published openly in November 2023. In addition to this project partner ACBK, in conjunction with Panthera, have collected data on online reports of IWT incidences. 105 media news on poaching cases for the period 2019-2023 have been collated, with 47 cases of rare animal species derivatives being sold on OLX platform, 9 appeals were sent to the Police Department of the relevant area via eOtinish (electronic document system). ACBK supported the Administrative Authority to submit a report on illegal trade to the CITES secretariat. **Activity 1.4:** TRAFFIC invited the CITES Secretariat to the Regional Workshop on 4-6 July 2023. During the regional meeting, an Enforcement Support Officer, CITES Secretariat, provided two presentations during the meeting, one on an introduction and an overview of CITES, and the second on CITES Reporting and Requirements, Annual Reports and Illegal Wildlife Trade Report and Using the CITES Trade Database. These presentations and the attendance of the CITES Secretariat provided the participants, particularly the national government agency representatives, with the opportunity to discuss CITES reporting requirements and any challenges authorities faced with the Enforcement Support Officer. During the workshops in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (11 September 2023) and in Astana, Kazakhstan (19-20 September 2023) TRAFFIC presented on illegal wildlife trade dynamics and what governmental agencies, such as customs and border services should pay attention to combat the illegal wildlife trade. **Activity 1.5:** With co-financing from INL grant, on September 19-20, 2023, ACBK held an International Roundtable in Astana with the participation of 52 environment prosecutors and representatives of environmental agencies and Academies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The participants of the round table exchanged experiences on the implementation of CITES in Central Asia and discussed gaps in national legislative acts. The overview of the modules on CITES (developed under INL) was presented along with the presentation from Sean Robinson the project manager of the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment (ENPE). **Activity 2.3.** TRAFFIC was invited to present the outcomes of the report *A Rapid Assessment of the Wildlife Trade Dynamics in Central Asia* at the BOMCA (Border Management Programme in Central Asia) Workshop for investigators of cross-border crimes such as trafficking of firearms, their parts, explosives, ammunition, currency and other goods, which took place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on September 11-12, 2023. The workshop was attended by the Ministry of Internal Affairs; State Security Service; Border Guard Forces of the State Security Service; Customs Committee under the Ministry of Economy and Finance; General Prosecutor's Office, including Academies of these agencies. IOZ, **activity 3.2**, has repaired a storage facility for CITES specimens which can be further used for training on IWT. Now the procurement of furniture and technical equipment is underway to finish setting up the IWT training centre. The training planned under **activities 3.3. and 3.4.** was delivered successfully in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan under the co-financing project INL. Project partners in Uzbekistan – IOZ and Ekomaktab prepared the modules and materials for training on species identification: 3 types of posters on natives, exotic species and derivatives (600 copies were printed – 200 of each poster), and CITES guidelines, 1000 copies printed in Russian and Uzbek. These materials were presented and distributed on July 19-20, 2023 during the 2-day training on species identification, which was attended by Customs officers from the different sub-divisions of the Customs Committee, Custom Institute, Regional customs offices across all Uzbekistan, Custom office of Tashkent city and Toshkent-AERO, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, 56 people in total (50 men and 6 women). All participants were awarded with Certificates and those who passed the tests were awarded with prizes as per **activity 3.7**. The press coverage of the training can be found here: <https://eco.gov.uz/ru/site/news?id=3380>. The materials from the training in Uzbekistan were adapted and have been used for the LEOs training in Kyrgyzstan and will be used in Tajikistan. The modules created in Uzbekistan to train on species identification have been requested for incorporation into national training curricula, **activity 3.9**. In Kazakhstan, ACBK together with a group of experts (Institute of Zoology of Kazakhstan, Academy of Law Enforcement Agencies under the General Prosecutor's Office), developed a training course on the Implementation of CITES for law enforcement officers and border guards for incorporation into national curricula under **activity 3.9**. The course consists of a syllabus, 4 modules, testing and recommended reading: 1. CITES Convention. Basic concepts; 2: Implementation of CITES in the Republic of Kazakhstan; 3: CITES objects, and their identification; 4: Features of working with CITES objects. The course was coordinated with the Customs and Border Service. It is planned to deliver more training based on these modules for the Academies. Following the SMART workshop in Tashkent in 2022, under **activity 3.5**, Saigachiy Reserve has now formally adopted

SMART patrolling after further engagement with the Reserve Management authorities and has developed their first quarterly SMART reports. This has been done in partnership with the SUCCOW foundation In Tajikistan under **activity 3.6** significant improvements have been made to the Cynology Centre in Dushanbe through the construction of better kennels to improve husbandry standards for existing sniffer dogs. F&F have also helped the Cynology centre obtain specimens from Customs and the Institute of Zoology Tajikistan of frequently illegally traded species to train existing sniffer dogs on new scents to strengthen interdiction capacity. In Kyrgyzstan planning is ongoing to support the Cynology Centre through the formalisation of an MoU. **Activity 3.8.:** The list of experts on wildlife trade from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan who could provide post-project consultation for LEAs and other concerning organizations, was created and shared along with the materials during the workshop for prosecutors in Astana on September 19-20. **Activity 4.2:** As part of modules on Wildlife Crime Prevention developed by Gohar Petrossian (developed under an INL grant) , the 2-day training for trainers was delivered in Kyrgyzstan on July, 7-8th, 2023 for the project partners. Later IOZ trained LEOs on Wildlife Crime Prevention during the 2nd day of species identification training that included theory and practical sessions. In total, 24 Customs officers (22 men and 2 women) have been trained in crime scripting and other crime prevention tools. More training on crime prevention in Kyrgyzstan are underway.

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.

No new problems specifically encountered in the past 6 months. However previously raised issues under prior reports continue to impact the project. Namely the continued border hostility between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan has made regional and bilateral trainings and workshops for LEO's and key government stakeholders between these two countries challenging requiring duplication of some activities in each country and the restriction of Tajik attendance in a number of activities. Similarly the wider socioeconomic and geopolitical ramifications of the war in Ukraine as well as continued heavy Government responses to civil unrest in 2022 in Karakalpakstan and the Gorno-Badakhshan has required an adaptive management response with the difficulty in contacting certain agencies and ministries. There is also a growing hostility towards civil society, especially in Kyrgyzstan, with the movement of a "Foreign Agents" bill through the law courts which has impacted receptivity of some government agencies and Ministries to engage with NGO's. F&F are closely monitoring the situation and are developing contingency plans should the bill be passed which will have ramifications on operating in Kyrgyzstan and consequentially the region more widely.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes/ No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/ No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/ No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

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4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. 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.

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

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