

The Sociable Lapwing Project: Steppe Biodiversity Conservation in Kazakhstan



Project report

A project supported by:



and implemented by:



Almaty and Astana, Kazakhstan, 2007

Project Title	The Sociable Lapwing Project: Steppe Biodiversity Conservation in Kazakhstan
Country	Kazakhstan
Main funder	A Rufford Small Grant (received in 2006, approved in 2005, see comment below), contributing to the implementation of a larger UK Darwin Initiative Project approved in 2005
Co-funders / Project partners	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), UK (to the UK Darwin Initiative project)
Host country Partner Institution(s)	Kazakhstan: The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK) Project Implementer: Maxim Koshkin, Sociable Lapwing Project Officer
Grant Value	£ 4930,00
Start/End dates of Project	1 st April 2006 / 31 st March 2007
Reporting period	1 st April 2006 / 31 st March 2007
Project Leader Name	Maxim Koshkin, ACBK Sociable Lapwing project
Project website	www.acbk.kz (soon to be opened)
Author(s), date	Maxim Koshkin 22 nd November 2007

Key note: Due to a technical failure in e-mail communication between the Rufford Small Grant Programme and the applicant Maxim Koshkin the latter only in late 2005 received the information of the approval of the application. Hence the money could only transferred with this delay and the project implemented in the 2006 field season

1. Project Background

The Sociable Lapwing project aims to develop effective mechanisms and capacity to improve the conservation status of the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* across its range, but particularly in its stronghold in Kazakhstan. The population has fallen by as much as 90% during the past two decades and may now number fewer than 1000 pairs; the reasons for this decline are poorly understood. The project is initially concentrating on research and monitoring to understand the causes of the observed population decline.

The wintering range and migration routes are poorly known and the project aims to work with range states to identify key sites and implement conservation measures as appropriate. By the end of the project the International Species Action Plan will be revised and the conservation status of the species clarified.

A large component of the Sociable Lapwing project work has been funded by a grant to the RSPB and ACBK from the UK Darwin Initiative that was approved in spring 2006.

An important component of the project from the very beginning was training and involving young ornithologists and conservationists from Kazakhstan. This component was predominantly funded by this

Rufford Grant. Through the course of the project up to 4 students regularly take part in fieldwork and already independently lead field work teams. In Addition to this in summer 2006 20 students have been invited to a one week training seminar in Almaty/Kazakhstan for a theoretical training in fieldwork.

Extensive training was given on monitoring and survey methods, bird handling, taking biometrics and general ornithological research techniques. Additionally, two local students were also trained along similar lines to further increase the capacity for the local partner to undertake scientific research independently. Local project awareness was furthered by a series of joint presentations (R Sheldon from RSPB & M Koshkin) to key Kazak government departments and agencies (including CBD focal points). ACBK are already seen as the leading organisation in Kazakhstan on Sociable Lapwing research and other potential steppe related projects are starting to be considered for the near future.

As part of the overall project ACBK have been developing links and working closely with other partner organisations across the species' range particularly in Russia, and indirectly through the AEWA (Asian-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement) secretariat representative who is now based in the ACBK head office. These rapidly developing links will further improve ACBKs capacity to deliver high quality conservation measures to enhance the conservation status of Sociable Lapwing across the species' range.

Figure 1. The location of the Korgalzhyn area within Kazakhstan. The shaded area represents the projects core study area.

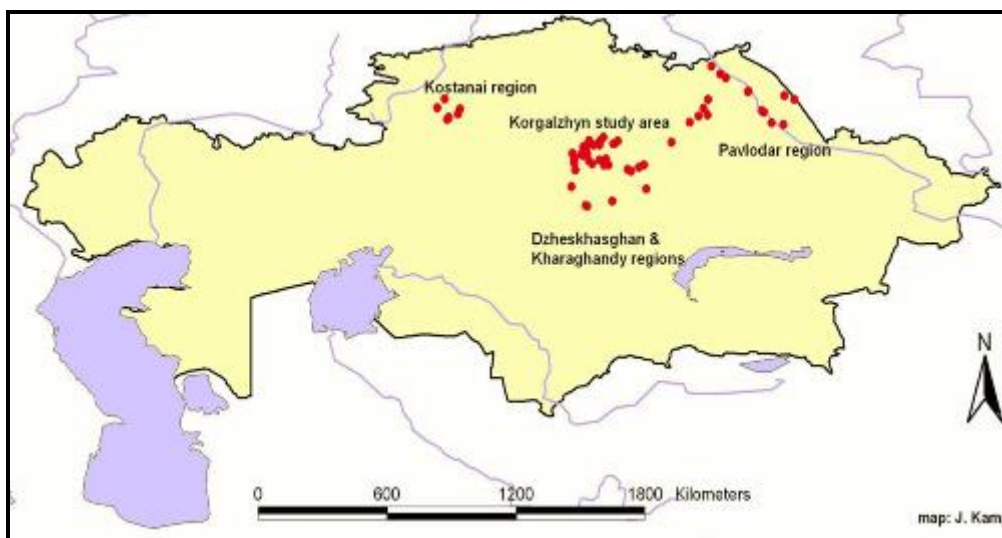
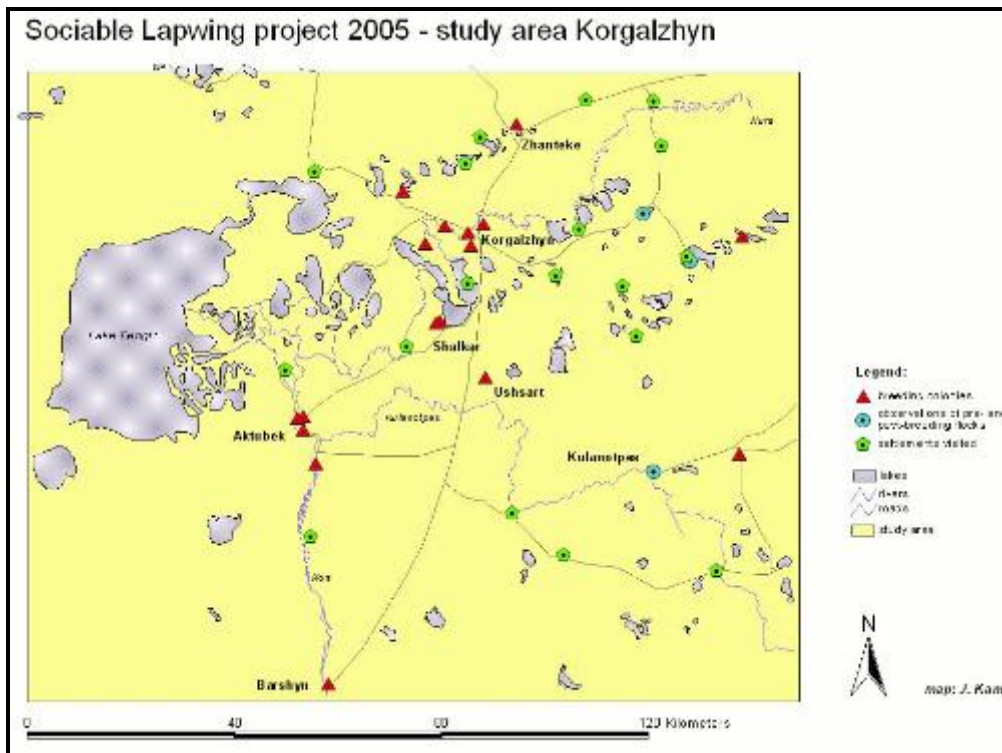


Figure 2. The core study area for fieldwork in 2005 and 2006.



2. Project progress

Progress in 2006 has exceeded all expectations. Fieldwork on the breeding grounds in Kazakhstan was hugely successful with 167 nests located and more than 375 birds fitted with colour rings. New breeding colonies were located and monitored. Additional areas away from the core study site were surveyed in Kazakhstan and further colonies located. The project worked closely with colleagues in Russia (RBCU) and funded survey work in the south west of the country, which located very few birds. Survey work on migration routes (Syria, Turkey and Azerbaijan) were supported by the project (through the UK Darwin Initiative grant)

Training has been particularly successful. Following a training workshop for 20 students in March, two local students were recruited to the project and received high quality formal and experiential training in a variety of field techniques. One of the students was subsequently recruited to take part in an international expedition to south-west Russia to survey staging areas of Sociable Lapwing. One of the students was returning to work on the project in April 2007, and the second student may return in the future after completion of her university studies. Maxim Koshkin receives regular training from the RSPB Darwin Project Leader (Dr. Rob Sheldon) and is now fully competent in all the necessary field techniques required for a project of this nature. Maxim will now (2007 and subsequent years) be responsible for transferring this knowledge to others involved in the project and will be directly responsible for training local student researchers. In 2007 already 4 students regularly worked in the project (and were paid the UK Darwin Initiative grant).

Three members of The Sociable Lapwing research team, Maxim Koshkin (ACBK), Rob Sheldon (RSPB) and Johannes Kamp (University of Oldenburg) attended the International Wader Study Group Conference in Sweden and presented one talk and three posters of our work (see Annex 3):-

- Talk presented by Maxim Koshkin – “Breeding biology of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in central Kazakhstan and implications for conservation management.”
- Two posters presented by Rob Sheldon – “Revising the breeding population estimate and distribution of the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*” & “Preliminary surveys of Chagraiskoje Reservoir, south-west Russia, for Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*.”
- A third poster presented by Johannes Kamp – “Population numbers and habitat use of the Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* in Central Kazakhstan.”

Additionally, Maxim Koshkin, Johannes Kamp and Valery Khrokov (Director of ACBK) attended the VII International Conference of the Russian Wader Study Group in Michurinsk, Russia, in February 2007. Two talks were given by M Koshkin (Sociable Lapwing) and J Kamp (Black-winged Pratincole), and the abstracts will be published in the conference proceedings (in Russian).

Finally, Maxim Koshkin attended the Student Conservation Conference at Cambridge University in February 2007 and presented a talk on the breeding biology of the Sociable Lapwing.

The Sociable Lapwing project was officially launched as part of the Queen’s birthday celebrations at an event organised by the British Embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan. The event was attended by Maxim Koshkin and Dr Rob Sheldon. At the event the British Ambassador, Paul Brummell, supported the project by taking part in an official press release. The Ambassador also visited project staff in June 2006 to see how the project was progressing.

2.1 Progress towards Project Outputs

Training of local staff exceeded expectations, with two students selected from a group of twenty that attended a training workshop in March 2006. Both students were successfully integrated into the project and received intensive high quality experiential training. Two other local ornithologists were trained by the project team in a variety of ornithological techniques. The majority of this experiential training was overseen by R Sheldon (RSPB – Darwin Project leader) during a three month visit to the central Kazakhstan study area.

One short scientific paper has been submitted to the Wader Study Group Bulletin and is due for publication in the April 2007 issue (see Annex 3). Additionally, we are on course to submit a paper on historical distribution of Sociable Lapwing by the end of 2007. The production of the paper has been slightly delayed due an increased level of collaboration with partner organisations in researching the historical data. We’ve

worked particularly closely with our Russian colleagues at RBCU (BirdLife Russia) to track down a wide variety of Russian literature.

Substantial progress has been made towards identifying the causes of the population decline in the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing. Prior to the start of the project it was widely expected that the principal cause of the decline would be associated with factors on the breeding grounds. However, two years of high breeding success suggests that the main causes may be associated with factors on the wintering grounds and/or migration routes. This has opened up a new avenue of potential research that will prove challenging over the next two years of the project. Planning with a number of the partner organisations is already underway to meet these challenges.

The capacity of the key partners, particularly ACBK in Kazakhstan which is the host for this project and Maxim Koshkin has been substantially improved even at this stage of the project.

4. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

The results from the project year 2006 (and combined with the pilot work from 2005) suggest that the possible causes of the population decline may be associated with the migration routes and/or wintering grounds. Thus we may have to refocus some of our planned research work away from the breeding grounds and undertake more survey work in other range states. This is not an insurmountable problem and we are already planning to undertake a new direction for some of our work. We will be trialing the use of satellite technology and the use of dataloggers to learn more about the movements of Sociable Lapwing outside of the breeding areas. We are already co-operating with existing project partners, and possible new ones, to enhance the quantity and quality of the work undertaken in other range states.

Maxim Koshkin was awarded the Marsh Award for advances made in the understanding of Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* distribution, breeding ecology and conservation. Mr Koshkin received the prestigious award at a special ceremony at the BirdLife Secretariat office (UK) in late March 2007.

Whilst undertaking Sociable Lapwing fieldwork we (primarily J Kamp, University of Oldenburg, see above) have collected a large amount of data on the breeding biology of the near threatened Black-winged pratincole. This additional work has been presented at two international conferences and a peer-reviewed paper is in preparation. These findings will contribute to the work of the Threatened Steppe Waders Working Group and will be vital in the implementation of the International Species Action Plan. This work has enhanced the reputation of ACBK as the leading conservation organisation in Kazakhstan and further contributes to the capacity building underpinning the Sociable Lapwing Darwin funded project.

Members of the Sociable Lapwing project have liaised with Birdlife International to ensure the latest research findings on both Sociable Lapwing and Black-winged Pratincole are incorporated into discussions relating to updates and revisions of the species' conservation status.

5. Sustainability

The profile of the project within the local area where fieldwork is undertaken is very high. Local people benefit from providing fieldworkers with full board accommodation and we ensure that where possible local services are used. Within our study area we ensure that we liaise as much as possible with local villagers and many are showing a keen interest in the work.

More widely in Kazakhstan we have put in a lot of effort to ensure that the key government agencies and departments are updated on our work (see section 8). We will continue and enhance this level of project promotion in the second year through the employment of an advocacy officer.

Rob Sheldon and Maxim Koshkin gave a series of joint presentations to key Kazak government departments and agencies in August 2006. In the future these presentations will be undertaken annually by Maxim Koshkin.

The Sociable Lapwing project was officially launched as part of the Queen's birthday celebrations at an event organised by the British Embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan. The event was attended by Maxim Koshkin and Dr Rob Sheldon. At the event the British Ambassador, Paul Brummell, supported the project by taking part in an official press release. The Ambassador also visited project staff in June to see how the project was progressing.

6. Outreach activities:

Information about the Sociable Lapwing Darwin project was distributed through the following mass media in Kazakhstan:

Articles in the most popular Kazakhstani newspapers:

1. "Liter" – 21.06.2006
2. "Express K" – 22.06.2006
3. "Kazpravda" – 22.06.2006
4. "1+1" -23.06.2006
5. "Argumenty I fakty" - 28.06.2006
6. "Express K"-14.02.2007
7. "Info-tses" – 23.03.2007

Articles posted on web sites:

1. www.caresd.net (13.04.2007)
2. www.inform.kz (20.06.2006)
3. www.ecoport.ru (13.03.2007)

Interviews given by members of the project team to radio stations:

1. Kazakhskoje radio
2. Kazakh service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
3. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

News articles mentioned on the following Kazakhstani TV Channels:

1. Astana TV
2. Era TV

7. Summary

Significant advances have been made in 2006 in relation to understanding the breeding biology of this species and thus on the future development of conservation measures that will lead to the reversal of the population decline. Survey work has identified populations that have previously not been surveyed and quantified. This will contribute to a clearer understanding of breeding population size and distribution within Kazakhstan. In addition, collaboration with Russian colleagues has led to improved knowledge of the status and distribution within the only other country in which the species is known to breed. The collation of historical sightings throughout the species' range has led to increased collaboration between key partners, and will enhance the ability to the project team to develop effective targeted surveys on the wintering grounds and migration routes.

Capacity building within Kazakhstan is progressing well, with key personnel from ACBK (Kazakhstan partner) responding well to the experiential and direct training that the project has offered to date. A key indicator of this success is Maxim Koshkin being awarded the Marsh Award for conservation in March 2007. A greater proportion of the fieldwork and preparation is now being undertaken by Kazakh researchers which again highlights the success in one of the key aspects of the Darwin project – capacity building.

8. Financial Report:

Document number	Description	KZT	GBP	Salaries	Travel	Workshop	Office costs	Total 4930£
1	Tickets Astana-Almaty for Koshkin, Tokaeva	19297.00	85.91		85.91			
2	Tickets to Almaty for Kirkina, Kenzhin, Slipchenko	12367.00	55.86		55.86			
3	Tickets Petropavlovsk-Almaty for Gubin, Kucheryavaya, Zaripova	20043.00	90.53		90.53			
4	Tickets for Rogozhnikov, Chistyakov (Zashita-Almaty)	4864.00	21.97		21.97			
5	Tickets for Verbenkina and Sladkevich (Zashita-Almaty)	4064.00	18.36		18.36			
6	Tickets Kostanai-Almaty for Merkushev, Salemgareev	6282.00	28.38		28.38			
7	Tickets for Kamzinov (Zashita-Almaty-Zhengiz)	4429.00	20.01		20.01			
8	Tickets Karagandy-Almaty for Faustov, Grishina	4646.00	20.99		20.99			
9	Taxi payment for Shakule G (to Chimkent)	1000.00	4.52		4.52			
10	Mobile connecting services	10800.00	48.51				48.51	
11	Tickets Almaty-Karagandy for Faustov, Grishina	5846.00	26.19		26.19			
12	Tickets Almaty-Kostanay for Merkushev, Salemgareev	6282.00	28.14		28.14			
13	Tickets for the seminar Almaty-Chimkent for Saldatov, Metropolskii	6492.00	29.08		29.08			
14	Tickets for Shakula G (Chimkent-Almaty-Chimkent)	5664.00	25.37		25.37			
15	Payment for benzine to Shakula G	2085.00	9.34		9.34			
16	Tickets for the seminar Almaty-Chimkent for Atahodzhaev, Ten	6492.00	29.08		29.08			
17	Payment for the bed in the train (4x190)	760.00	3.40		3.40			
18	For the hotel services "Nauryz" (Seminar)	459150.00	2056.66			2056.66		
19	Tickets from Almaty for Kirkina, Kenzhin, Slipchenko	12411.00	55.60		55.60			
20	Tickets Almaty-Petropavlovsk for Gubin, Kucheryavaya, Zaripova	20175.00	90.38		90.38			
21	Taxi services for Shakula G (from Chimkent)	1000.00	4.48		4.48			
22	Tickets for Verbenkina and Sladkevich (Almaty-Zhengiz)	2782.00	12.46		12.46			
23	Tickets for Rogozhnikov, Chistyakov (Almaty-Zhengiz)	2782.00	12.46		12.46			
24	Salary for Koshkin M (April)	77250.00	348.85	348.85				
25	Income tax salary	8820.00	39.83	39.83				
26	Pension fee salary	9510.00	42.95	42.95				

27	Social tax	12603.00	56.91	56.91				
28	Social insurance	1766.00	7.98	7.98				
29	Salary for Koshkin M (May)	77250.00	339.22	339.22				
30	Income tax salary	8751.00	38.43	38.43				
31	Pension fee salary	9450.00	41.50	41.50				
32	Social tax	12538.00	55.06	55.06				
33	Social insurance	1755.00	7.71	7.71				
34	Salary for Grishina K V(July)	31259.00	142.05	142.05				
35	Income tax salary	1591.00	7.23	7.23				
36	Pension fee salary	3650.00	16.59	16.59				
37	Social tax	6570.00	29.86	29.86				
38	Social insurance	657.00	2.99	2.99				
39	Salary for Kucheryavaya N (July)	35106.00	159.53	159.53				
40	Income tax salary	1794.00	8.15	8.15				
41	Pension fee salary	4100.00	18.63	18.63				
42	Social tax	7380.00	33.54	33.54				
43	Social insurance	738.00	3.35	3.35				
44	Salary for Iskakov (July)	70838.00	321.90	321.90				
45	Income tax salary	3925.00	17.84	17.84				
46	Pension fee salary	8000.00	36.35	36.35				
47	Social tax	14600.00	66.35	66.35				
48	Social insurance	1840.00	8.36	8.36				
49	Trip costs to Gulvira (per diems)	15450.00	69.93		69.93			
50	Tickets for Gulvira	49500.00	223.46		223.46			
	Total	#REF!	#REF!	1851.13	965.89	2056.66	48.51	4922.19

a) a detailed list of all project related expenses that occurred at ACBK

b) an overview on expenses by budget category

Annexes:

Annex 1: images from the project in 2006



Foto.1 Adult male Sociable Lapwing



Foto.2 Colour-ringed female Sociable Lapwing



Foto.3 Sociable Lapwing's chicks



Foto.4 Sociable Lapwing's nest



Foto.5



Foto.6



Foto.7



Foto.8

Fotos.5,6,7,8 Students receiving training on taking biometrics measurements.



Foto.9 Nest cameras were used for monitoring breeding success.



Foto.10 Team searching for well-camouflaged Sociable Lapwing chicks



Foto.11 Students workshop, summer 2006



Foto.12 Students working on a practical exercise



Foto.13 Young participants of the workshop



Foto.14 Sociable Lapwing team members, and the British Ambassador at the official project launching ceremony during the Queen's birthday celebration event, Astana

Annex 2: programme of student training workshop held in March 2006 with 20 participants

**Estimating numbers of wild animals:
an introduction to survey and census methods**

Day 1

Tuesday 28 March 2006

09.00 - 09.30

Introductions and workshop aspirations

09.30 - 10.00

Session 1. An introduction to surveys, censuses and monitoring

10.00 - 10.30

Coffee

10.30 - 11.30

Session 2. Sampling strategies

11.30 - 13.00

Exercise: The power of random sampling

13.00 - 14.00

Lunch

14.00 - 15.30

Session 3. Precision, accuracy, bias and sample size

15.30 - 16.00

Coffee

16.00 - 17.30

Session 4. Survey methods (1): simple assessments, mapping and specialist techniques

Day 2

Wednesday 29 March 2006

09.00 - 09.15

Recap of Day 2

09.15 - 10.30

Session 5. Survey methods (2): transects and point counts (PD/DP/AN)

10.30 - 11.00

Coffee

11.00 - 12.00

Session 6. Counting colonial and flocking species (PD)

12.00 - 13.00

Lunch

13.00 - 14.00

Session 7. Habitat measurements and calculations of habitat use (PD)

14.00 - 16.00

Group exercise: designing and running a survey

16.00 - 17.00

Questions and discussion

Day 3

Thursday 30 March 2006

09.00 - 12.00

Field visit to test different methods

12.00 - 13.00

Lunch

13.00 - 15.00

Analyse field data

Day 4

Friday 31 March 2006

09.00 - 10.30

Session 8. Catching and marking birds

10.30 - 11.00

Coffee

11.00 - 12.30

Session 9. Estimating diet, productivity, nesting success and survival

12.30 - 13.30

Lunch

13.30 - 15.00

Session 10. Biometrics and habitat use

15.00 - 15.30

Coffee

15.30 - 16.30

Session 11. Radio and satellite telemetry

16.30 - 17.30

Final conclusions and workshop evaluation