

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Zhaskairat Nurmukhambetov
Project Title	Monitoring of specially protected species of birds of prey and mammals using camera traps at feeding sites in the Ustyurt State Nature Reserve, Kazakhstan
Application ID	36712-B
Date of this Report	24 June 2023

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Monitoring of terrestrial and avian predators at feeding sites and waterholes using camera traps				At the territories of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve and projected new cluster South Ustyurt, 19 camera traps operated during the year and thousands of photos of 15 mammals and 42 bird species were obtained. New data was collected on the distribution of specially protected species: the Egyptian vulture, black vulture, caracal, Ustyurt urial and goitered gazelle.
Assessment of birds of prey mortality from electrocution				Two counts were conducted on the approximately 120 km along lines grid (6-10kV) in Karakiya district. Unfortunately, due to small number of rodents for the 3rd year, numbers of birds of prey are extremely low. For this reason, we were not able to identify any new bird kills under power lines.
Assessment of the impact of the border fencing on populations of ungulates				With our participation and the support of colleagues from the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK), an agreement was reached with the management of the Border Guard of Kazakhstan on the possibility of modifying the border wire fences to provide passages for ungulates. In May 2023, we were directly involved in opening the first 18 wildlife passages in the border fences.
Establishment of a new southern cluster of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve on 600,000 ha near the state border of Kazakhstan with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan				This work was initiated in 2017 as part of a Central Asia Desert Initiative (CADI) project with our involvement. Currently Zhaskairat Nurmukhambetov who has taken up the position of director of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve is personally involved in the final stage of approving the necessary documents.
Media coverage of the project results				Information about the project is available on the Ustyurt Nature Reserve

			website and social media. Scientific article published in Raptors conservation magazine.
Printing and distribution of pocket calendars with photos of Ustyurt protected species and the Rufford Foundation logo			500 calendars for 2024-2025 with photos of the project's protected species have been printed and actively distributed among the local population.
Local community participation in the project			Mutual cooperation has been established with the Kyzylsai Regional Nature Park staff, who also participated in the monitoring of the project's protected species outside the Ustyurt Nature Reserve. As a result, it was they who confirmed the presence of the Persian leopard at their territory in August 2022 and in April 2023. Unfortunately, a new leopard that has appeared in Mangistau region, was observed in the Ustyurt Nature Reserve only in February 2022 - before the official start of the Rufford Foundation project.

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). Using 19 camera traps in two clusters of Ustyurt Nature Reserve (existing and projected), extensive data on distribution and numbers of 57 mammals and bird species, including specially protected model species (Egyptian vulture, black vulture, caracal, Ustyurt urial and goitered gazelle) were collected.

b). As a result of long interactions (since 2019) with the management of the Border Guard Service of RoK, the process of modification of the border fences to enable cross-border migration of Ustyurt urial and goitered gazelle was finally initiated in May 2023. This important development is not solely the result of the efforts of the project team; however, we have initiated and been directly involved in all stages of the problem solving. Among other things, we directly participated together with border guards in the creation of the first 18 animal passages on the border between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan with Turkmenistan. We hope to continue this process in the future.

c). Currently the multi-year process (since 2017) of designing and creating a new cluster of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve on about 600,000 ha near the state border of Kazakhstan with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is coming to an end. As with the border fence issue, various partners were involved in this process, launched by the Central Asia Desert Initiative (CADI), but our team was actively involved at all stages. In particular, it is project coordinator Zhaskairat Nurmukhambetov who is currently

dealing with the necessary paperwork and approvals as director of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve.

The most significant and long-awaited achievement is the actual opening of the first 18 passages for ungulates (urials and gazelles) in the border wire fences as a result of successful cooperation with the Border Guard Service of RoK.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

In the Mangistau region of Kazakhstan, a steep decline in the rodent population continues for the 3rd year, which resulted in very low numbers of most birds of prey, for which rodents are the main food objects. In this connection, during our April and September 2022 double-checks of about 120 km of overhead power lines, we didn't find new facts of death of birds of prey from electrocution.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.

The most important indication of the involvement of local communities in the project has been the successful cooperation with the Kyzylsai Regional Nature Park staff, which has enabled us to significantly extend the project's species monitoring area beyond the Ustyurt Nature Reserve. Kyzylsai Park staff are now able to receive prompt advice and methodological support from our team members. In addition, local communities were regularly informed about biodiversity conservation issues through the Ustyurt Reserve website and social media.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Studying of wildlife in Mangistau region, with the use of camera traps, will definitely continue. At present, our project team has started the implementation of the new international project "Core corridors for cats in Central Asia" with the support of National Geographic, which provides extensive long-term use of camera traps in all specially protected natural areas of the Mangistau region. The task of our team is to manage and coordinate the efforts of different partners.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

Information on the progress of the project is posted on the website and in social media of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve. The scientific article has been published in the journal "Raptors conservation". At the end of 2023, the publication of summary of the project results is planned in the Kazakh zoological journal "Selevinia".

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Over the next 3 years we will continue our work on monitoring wildlife in Ustyurt Nature Reserve and other specially protected areas in the Mangistau region of Kazakhstan as part of the new international project "Core corridors for cats in Central Asia" supported by National Geographic. By the end of 2023, we hope to complete

the work on establishment of new cluster of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve, which we will definitely announce on our page at the Rufford Foundation site. Work will also be continued on increasing the number of wildlife passages in the boundary fencing.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The Rufford Foundation logo was placed on pocket calendars with images of the project's model species (Ustyurt urial, goitered gazelle, Persian leopard and caracal). The Foundation's role as a source of funding for our project was highlighted in our interviews and publications.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Zhaskairat Nurmukhambetov - Project Coordinator. Since 2022 - acting director of the Ustyurt Nature Reserve. He is responsible for the implementation of the project as a whole, including contacts with state environmental organisations and the media.

Akniyaz Pulatov, project participant from scientific section at the Ustyurt Nature Reserve, is responsible for the collection and storage of data from camera traps.

Zhalgas Ustadoev is from scientific section at the Ustyurt Nature Reserve. He took part in field work.

Sapargali Turmagambetov is from scientific section at the Ustyurt Nature Reserve. He took part in field work.

Talgat Daribayev is from scientific section at the Ustyurt Nature Reserve. He took part in field work.

Vladimir Terentyev project participant, freelancer, responsible for translations into English and contacts with foreign partners.

Mark Pestov is project scientific adviser, Ph.D. in Biology, freelancer. He is responsible for analysing obtained information and preparing reports, scientific and popular science publications on the results of the project.

10. Any other comments?

We sincerely thank the Rufford Foundation for its long-term (2016-2017, 2018-2019 and 2022-2023) support for our work on the study and conservation of the biodiversity in the Ustyurt Nature Reserve and Mangistau Region of Kazakhstan as a whole. It was thanks to this support that we gained very important experience with camera traps and, among other things, for the first time in Kazakhstan we obtained photographs of the living Persian leopard in 2018 and achieved the inclusion of this species in the Red Book of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Since then, we have had new contacts with big cat experts from other countries and have been invited to participate in the new long-term international project "Core corridors for cats in

Central Asia" supported by National Geographic in 2023-2026. Participation in this project will allow our team to successfully continue the work that has been started with the support of The Rufford Foundation.