

Monitoring and conservation of globally threatened species in Azerbaijan

Project Report



Submitted by:

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1. Brief background of the project

Azerbaijan is one of the biodiversity hotspots in Europe but is also a country struggling with the processes of both political and economical transformation. The richness in biodiversity is mainly a result of a high variety of landscapes that range from alpine high-mountain areas to steppes and semi-desert in the arid lowlands.

A high number of incredibly important sites for biodiversity, in particular for birds, are found within the country. Its importance is outstanding as breeding site for globally and near threatened bird species (according to BIRDLIFE 2000) such as Dalmatian Pelican, Pygmy Cormorant, Ferruginous Duck, Black Vulture, Imperial Eagle and as a wintering site for a number of highly threatened species breeding in Siberia and northern Central Asia (e.g. Siberian Crane, Dalmatian Pelican, Sociable Plover, White-headed Duck and Lesser White-fronted Goose). Additionally it forms part of the Caucasian Endemic Bird Area (BIRDLIFE 1998) and thus holds bird species not existing anywhere else in the world like the Caucasian Black Grouse and the Caucasian Chiffchaff. Within the Eurasian-African Migratory Bird Flyway Azerbaijan plays a key role as a major crossroads area. This is why it possesses a high responsibility for a large proportion of the Eurasian bird biodiversity (HEATH & EVANS 2000, SULTANOV 2000, NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE 1997).

Research and conservation science have been heavily affected by the Soviet Union collapse. A major lack of data and knowledge is probably the main obstacle for nowadays conservation activities. In addition to that comprehensive and modern conservation methods that are applied effectively in other countries are almost not known and implemented in Azerbaijan. The loss of qualified people and in particular the lack of young local researchers and conservationists have tightened the situation in the past years (BROMBACHER 2003).

Universities in Baku still educate a number of enthusiastic students in nature science but due to a lack of finances are not in the position to offer practical field work or the transfer of modern research and conservation methods.

This project aims to overcome the mentioned constraints by training a significant number of young dedicated researchers and conservationists in basic field and conservation methods. The methodological approach of this project includes theoretical and practical training on field identification and census methods and the use of standardized monitoring methods. Data will be administered centrally and by this project the basis for further conservation action will be laid: the development of adequate conservation measures for species and habitats of the project sites as a main result of the project will contribute to practical action to safeguard the biodiversity of these sites.

2. The objectives are:

1. To establish a regular monitoring of bird species and Important Bird Areas (IBA) with a focus on globally and near threatened species. This will be done by developing a survey and monitoring approach following key species and key sites that can be followed after the termination of this project without large technical or financial efforts
2. To collect, evaluate and publish data and information to provide a basis for prioritising and improving conservation action
3. To involve young specialists in nature conservation activities and promote and train field practice
4. To promote awareness among the local population and to enhance them to take over responsibility for safeguarding biodiversity

3. The expected results of this project are:

- ✓ A detailed and updated information is collected and a data base on the status of breeding, migrating and wintering bird species and the status of their habitats in selected sites in Azerbaijan is put together.
- ✓ A standardized and comprehensive monitoring method is applied by local scientists, data is professionally and well managed.
- ✓ Sustainability of monitoring activities in the project region is promoted by training and supporting young local researchers.
- ✓ The conservation outputs of the surveys find their way into national conservation strategies and priorities on a governmental (Protected Area Programmes etc.) and NGO-level (IBA inventory).

4. Measurable outputs of the project which has been achieved:

-1 training visits by German team member/trainer

Co-leader of the project, German biologist Jonathan Etzold arrived Baku at the end of July 2004. Initial training for local students-biologist started in July and was organized in the office of Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS). Within 28/07 – 31/07/2004 students attend training with the main aim of preparation for future field work. Training include such subject as:

- Presentation of BP Conservation Programme and main tasks of this project
- Introduction in general nature conservation problems both in the world and in Azerbaijan
- Presentation of BirdLife International work and it's partners (RSPB, NABU, AOS)
- Presentation of IBA programme and introduction in IBA net-work in Azerbaijan
- General introduction in the field-work technique
- Main methods of birds identification (shape, color, songs etc.)
- Different methods of counting birds in the nature conditions (water-birds in the open landscape, flying flocks, forest birds etc.) with using of field equipment
- Distribution of field equipment and study of using it
- Practical work with identification and calculation of numbers of birds with slides
- One-day of the field practice on the Red Lake site
- Preparation for future 2-week training camp



Theoretical training in AOS office

Training was conducted with participation of employers and volunteers of AOS.

two-week training camp

Two-week training camp was divided into 2 parts.

First 13 days (04/08/2004 – 11/08/2004) were spent in surrounding of Sudur village (high mountain of the Greater Caucasus), which is one of key sites for this project. Practical work for birds identification and counting, determine one's position in the field conditions with topographical maps and indication of key spots for birds (like important nests, leks or colonies) with GPS was done during this part of camp.

Study of the ...



maps using



GPS using



leks identification

Second part of the training camp (28/08/2004 – 31/09/2004) was conducted in Shirvan National Park by the main reason of the same time group of German specialist and students work for the birds ringing at this place. Within this part of camp students visited museum of the park, watched many different species of water and semi-desert birds as well as population of Globally Threatened Persian Gazelle. Very important part of this training was study of methodology of catching and ringing of earlier migrant species of birds. This gave interesting and important results like determination of new species for study area in migration period and even new species for country.



With cached bird near of the net



In the museum of Shirvan National Park



Identification and ringing of cached birds

-4 one to two weeks field excursions by total group

Starting from 28 of November 2004 all (or most of) the team students participated in weekly excursion to selected sites as well as to some additional important sites for wintering birds. All together 16 excursion was done within period of 28/11/04 – 13/03/05. Red Lake, Sahil Shelf, Hajigabul Lake, Makhmudchala Lake, Pirallahi Island and Shakh Dili spit were monitored within this period. Winter bird's populations on the pointed areas were monitor and collected dates were prepare for future analysis. Some analysis was already conduct together with AOS employers. Data were use for IBA database update and result was send to BirdLife International in May 2005.



Pygmy Cormorant (Kursangi Lake)



White-tailed Plover (Hajigabul Lake)



Imperial Eagle (Shirvan NP)



Dalmatian Pelicans (Kursangi Lake)



White-headed Ducks (Red Lake)

Monitoring of wetland sites was continue in October-November of 2005. Beginning of autumn birds' migration was study within this period to get full picture of distribution and numbers of species on important sites. It gave such important information as dates of beginning of autumn migration of White Headed Duck, Dalmatian Pelican, Imperial Eagle etc. as well as distribution of the birds between studied sites and their number dynamic. 6 separate field trips was conduct within this period (2 excursion to each of project sites – Red Lake, Sahil Shelf, Hajigabul Lake and additionally 2 trips to Makhmudchala Lake). Besides one important site – Kursangi Lake was first time described and identified as potential IBA.

Winter counts on the ...



Hajigabul Lake



Red Lake



Shelf factory

14 expedition days student group with co-leader of the project (Jonathan Etzold) spent in surrounding of Sudur village in time of 22/07/2005 – 04/08/2005. Many important species like Caucasian Black Grouse, Caucasian Chiffchaff, Lammergeier, Golden Eagle etc. as well as important nesting site of Griffon Vulture were found within this trip. Estimated density of Caucasian Black Grouse for this site is 0.12 individuals/ha. There 2 lecks were found on this site.

Studies of high mountain regions (in Shamaha upland and Zagatala State Reserve) were done by student group with co-leader of the project within 16 expeditions days (23/08/05 – 07/09/05). Searching of Caucasian Black Grouse lecks and probable places of its nesting, places of important concentration of Red Data species (as Lammergeier, Golden Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Caucasian Snowcock etc.) and “bottle necks” for autumn migrants were conduct during this trip.

Summer studies of ...



Shamaha upland



Sudur village surrounding

-4-5 talks to the public (one talk each at the project regions)

Meetings and conversations with local people around each of selected sites with the aim of public awareness were conducted. Additionally coloured bird's field guides on Azerbaijan language and other nature conservation production of AOS (posters, brochures, newsletters etc.) were distributed at the places for agitation. This was important part of this project as development of IBA caretakers network in Azerbaijan is one of priority nature conservation tasks here. Conversations with local people during this project' field trips let identify some caretakers which will be involved in future IBA

network. Talks with stakeholders (shepherds, hunters, fishers, farmers etc.) were conducted at each site as a part of each travel.



-4-5 open half-day excursions for the public (one excursion at each project region)

Public half day excursion to Red Lake, Shelf factory, Hajigabul Lake and Makhmudchala Lake (one trip to each site) were undertaken in September-November of 2005. Representatives of local NGOs and mass media participated in some of the trips.



-4-5 school talks (one at each project region)

Enlightenment work in different schools of Baku and Sumgayit was conducted. Three educational lessons were done in Baku schools №132, 134 and 30, and 3 lessons in Sumgayit school №3 and in gymnasia. As the study of Sudur site (as well as other mountain sites) was undertaken in summer time (time of school vacation) meetings with separate groups of children were conducted in parallel with the study of this area. In the border of these meetings presentation of the project, importance of bird's role in ecosystems and necessity of their conservation as well as distribution of colored field guide "Birds of Azerbaijan", different nature conservation posters, brochures etc. were undertaken.



-4-5 one half-day excursion for schoolchildren (one at each project region)

4 half-day excursions to the important sites were conducted in past winter. Schoolchildren groups visited Yashma Island, Hajigabul Lake, Shelf factory and Red Lake. For the first time children had seen how close to the human settlements could be such beautiful, interesting and important species of birds as egrets, herons, swans, geese, ducks, harriers etc. They study how to behave in the nature conditions to watch birds, how to identify species and how to do notes.



Shelf factory



Yashma Island

-one talk at Baku state university

Presentation of the project results for student-biologists ??????????

-2 articles in national conservation and scientific bulletins

-2 articles in international conservation bulletins

- 1 article was published in "Ekho" newspaper (23 November 2005), please see attached files
- 1 article was published in "Zerkalo" newspaper (3 December 2005), please see attached files
- 1 article was published in AOS newsletter (No 2, autumn 2005), please see attached files
- Information of project activity was published twice on web-site www.azertag.com (22 November 2005 – previous data and 25 November 2005 – full information), please see attached files

Scientific articles are on the stage of preparation now and will be present for publishing ?????????? However some information on distribution and numbers of wetland birds, which were received in results of conducted monitoring work within this project was present to AOS already. Partly update of Azerbaijan IBAs (Important Bird Areas) for World Bird Date Base was prepared on the base of these dates and sent to BirdLife International in May 2005.

-1 presentation and round-table discussion with project partners and conservation bodies at the end of the project

This work is planed to be done at December of 2005, on the final part of the project.

-1 poster for local public

1000 copies of informational poster (A2 format) were published. The information on key species and sites is given in the poster as well as main aspects of the project activity. Distribution of the poster conducted within project trips and will continued later by AOS employers on other important sites.



-1 project report

Please look to financial report in attached Excel file