

Development of an IBA Caretaker Network in the Priority Corridors

CEPF FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT



The Alazani river and the great Caucasus. © Z. Javakhishvili

Caucasus Important Bird Areas Project



Compiled by
Dr. Umberto Gallo-Orsi
Luba Balyan
Şahin Isayev
Zura Javakhishvili
Bahtiyar Kurt

July 2008

CEPF FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

I. BASIC DATA

Organization Legal Name: BirdLife International, European Division Office (NL). Project coordinator Dr. Umberto Gallo-Orsi

Project Title (as stated in the grant agreement): Development of an IBA Caretaker Network in the Priority Corridors

Implementation Partners for this Project:

Armenian Society for the Protection of Birds (www.aspbirds.org)

Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (www.aos.az)

Georgian Center for the Conservation of Wildlife (www.gccw.org)

Doğa Derneği (Turkey) (www.dogaderneği.org)

Project Dates (as stated in the grant agreement): June 1, 2005 – June 30, 2008

Date of Report (month/year): July 2008

II. OPENING REMARKS

Provide any opening remarks that may assist in the review of this report.

Please ensure that the "Opening Remarks" section provides adequate detail for a non-CEPF audience to understand the importance of the grant. This section is very useful for describing the grantee's history of engagement in the region or with the issue, and for framing the problem in a wider context. This section sets the stage for the purpose and output indicators

Relation with the Ecosystem Profile

Building national constituencies for biodiversity conservation in the Caucasus directly contributes to the CEPF's mission of advancing "conservation of Earth's biodiversity hotspots by providing support to non-governmental, community and grassroots organizations. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation".

The Caucasus Ecosystem Profile noted that limited NGO presence and public involvement and awareness, lack of economic resources, insufficient conservation knowledge (incl. monitoring and research) and scarce communication were among the root causes of biodiversity loss in the Caucasus. The project contributed to the Strategic Direction 1. "Support civil society efforts to promote transboundary cooperation and improve protected area systems in five target corridors".

The project purpose

The project aimed at creating a coordinated network of people, living at or near 31 sites (20 sites [13 IBAs] in Azerbaijan, 5 sites in Armenia [7 IBAs], 5 sites in Georgia, one site in Turkey [7 IBAs]), identified for one or more globally threatened bird species within the priority corridors. The sites are Important Bird Areas (IBAs), identified by BirdLife International network on the basis of scientific criteria. The people or groups - BirdLife calls them 'IBA Caretakers' - are able to promote, carry out and/or contribute to the conservation and monitoring of globally threatened species and of the conservation status of each site.

BirdLife International (BirdLife) is the world's leading bird conservation organization, with specifically trained and experienced staff in all aspects of bird conservation.

Building capacity in civil society is fundamental to BirdLife, which is primarily a partnership of national NGOs: one per country designated as the official BirdLife Partner. In order to promote the direct involvement of civil society in the conservation of sites important for birds (Important Bird Areas – IBAs), BirdLife has been establishing national networks of Site Support Groups (IBA caretakers) for many years and in all continents. The development of IBA Caretaker Networks is an integral part of the IBA conservation program. The IBA Caretaker approach is a fairly flexible conservation tool and proved to be very effective in a variety of political situations. It is extensively used also in Africa, Asia and in Latin America where it is called Site Support Groups. However, it originated from Europe where the model has already been successfully implemented in 23 countries involving more than 1,500 groups covering about 1,000 IBAs. Each network is constituted by a national coordinator, based at the headquarters of the national NGO BirdLife works with, and by local caretakers living at or near each site.

The existence of like-minded organizations associated with BirdLife in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, provided a unique opportunity to increase civil society support to the 31 sites we worked on.

Over the last 10 years BirdLife has successfully expanded its network of national organizations in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The CEE Partners have increased their staff, total budget, and constituency and have become respected stakeholders in the decision-making process related to biodiversity conservation at national and international (EU and international conventions) levels.

The project involved four national NGOs with whom BirdLife had already ongoing co-operation:

Armenian Society for the Protection of Birds (ASPB),
Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS),
Georgian Center for the Conservation of Wildlife (GCCW) and
Doğa Derneği (DD) Turkey.

III. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT PURPOSE

Project Purpose: An effective network, based of local people, promotes the conservation of sites identified as site outcomes in priority corridors for globally threatened bird species.

Planned vs. Actual Performance

| Indicator | Actual at Completion |
|--|---|
| Purpose-level: | |
| Threats level decreased at 50% of project sites | Threats level declined at more than 50% of the sites overall. |
| Response level increased at 75% of project sites | Response level (by the presence of trained caretaker at or near the site). Armenia 80% of sites; Azerbaijan 95% of sites; Georgia 80% of sites; Turkey 100% of sites |

Describe the success of the project in terms of achieving its intended impact objective and performance indicators.

The Long-Term Goal of the project was to achieve *Improved conditions at 31 sites for globally threatened species* with a Purpose to create *An effective network, based*

on local people, promotes the conservation of sites identified as site outcomes in priority corridors for globally threatened bird species.

At the beginning of the project in July 2005 the four organizations were at different levels of development and capacity. DD and GCCW were already well established NGOs with a significant number of staff (>10 paid personnel each) a fully operational HQ, an existing network of local people (although not specifically trained on conservation of globally threatened species) and well defined conservation and development strategies. AOS had a smaller office and limited staff and a network of contacts not structured or coordinated at central level whose main task was to help in the logistics of monitoring and field surveys. ASPB was basically a group of volunteering scientists with no office and a few contacts in the country.

The capacity of national NGOs to identify and react to threats has increased dramatically through the establishment of the network of trained local people.

In the words of national coordinators:

“The project offered the opportunity for AOS and its local caretakers to create the network which allow them to use and exchange each others experience. It gives national and international recognition of their activities. Being part of a network doing the same work in different part of the country and even in different part of World motivates them and improves their profile among their communities. Beside the technical and financial support as a national NGO AOS profit from this project was the new experience of working with local people as a part of network, and the national and international recognition as the first NGO doing such kind of work in Azerbaijan. For the first time we wrote the Site Action Plans which is the working documents for caretakers and which is the main documents for AOS for the site strategy in next future. For the first time we participated in the preparation of Species Action Plans etc. All these provide for AOS to develop it is capacity for more effective nature conservation activities in country.”

Shahin Isayev, AOS, Azerbaijan

“ASPB now works as a fully fledged and independent organization of national stature with committed staff, solid working space and a created national network of caretakers working of the conservation of IBAs. And this has been achieved in just 3 years! During the project, ASPB improved its skills through trainings and on-site actions and has independently raised more funds to support conservation actions at sites. In two years time it became an official Affiliate of BirdLife in Armenia. It has developed contacts with several donors (FAO, WB, UN and Norway Embassy) and is currently developing its future fundraising strategy. ASPB has been successful in advancing its public outreach program and has launched a National IBA Newsletter and its own website”.

Luba Balyan, ASPB, Armenia

“The project itself and its training for the national coordinators has improved DD’s capacity in many ways. DD’s staff members have participated to the trainings that was held in Georgia. DD managers have joined to the management skills training in Istanbul and they benefited from it as they are managing staff within Doğa Derneği. The project has supported DD’s science team on establishing the monitoring system for Turkish IBAs. So, the project highly supported the increase of skills of DD staff. Furthermore, Doğa Derneği has taken one more step in the BirdLife International partnership and become the BirdLife Partner Designate during the project period”.

Bahtiyar Kurt, DD, Turkey

The project created national networks covering ~ 95% (29/31) of the project sites and further 15 sites (outside the priority corridors and therefore not directly covered by this project). All caretakers are members of the local communities and have received specific training on biodiversity conservation and monitoring. The caretakers are constantly in contact with the national coordinators and among themselves through national newsletters, telephone and e-mails and meet regularly.

The capacity and skills of the Caretakers differ. In some cases they are able to carry out accurate monitoring of the target species, in others they are very good in public awareness activities, but are not able to identify and monitor wildlife. In all cases they can report at least on general threats. This variability is a common feature of the Caretaker network in any country as it is based on volunteers, all motivated toward the conservation of their sites but with different approaches, interests and skills.

At the beginning of the project, the main limit to the conservation work was the limited knowledge about the population sizes, trends and threats of the target species both at local and national levels. The development of regional Species Action Plans and the Site Action Plans where a turning point; through the engagement of the regional and international experts the species action plans gathered all the available information, identified the real knowledge gaps, the threats and the actions needed to address both. Those documents have provided guidance in the work at national and local level.

The surveys carried out at each site improved our knowledge about the presence, and size of the populations of the target species. In few cases the presence of the species could not be confirmed (e.g. Imperial Eagle in the East Black Sea Mountains, Turkey or Dsegh-Haghartsin-Pambak Chain and Dilijan NP, Armenia). On the other hand the Azerbaijan national population of the Imperial Eagle has proven to be far bigger of the 20-25 pairs estimated and possibly be over 100 pairs. Where the presence of target species could not be confirmed, the actions address other globally threatened species (Wild Goat in Turkey and bats in Novarank, Armenia) or a flagship species (Caucasian Black Grouse and Snowcock) whose protection would benefit other globally threatened species (e.g. Wild goat) which share the same habitat (alpine meadows and rocky slopes) and threats (habitat loss, disturbance, illegal hunting).

One of the main threats and the most widespread identified during the planning phase of the project, was the lack of knowledge among local populations, hunters, and local authorities of the conservation status of the target bird species and the importance of their country and site for them. To address this problem a range of public awareness materials were produced. Four posters were prepared by the project team: each national partner developed one poster and all posters were produced in four national versions. The posters promoted the conservation of (1) Imperial Eagle, (2) Lesser Kestrel, (3) Wetlands and threatened waterbirds, (4) Threatened and endemics birds of the Caucasus. Furthermore each partner developed other public awareness tools such as calendars (Armenia and Azerbaijan), IBA leaflets and billboards (Armenia), IBA Newsletters. Public meetings were organized in all sites (and sub-sites) in order to engage locals and raise awareness. Although we did not measure directly the impact of these activities we have anecdotic indications from local caretakers who have reported in several cases a reduction of illegal hunting as a result of improved awareness among hunters and law enforcing agents from all countries.

The small grants not only allowed the implementation of direct conservation actions (such as the conservation of Lesser Kestrel in two sites by providing nest boxes or the removal of disturbance to bats by limiting the access to a cave), but create the capacity of several caretakers to plan, fund-raise for, implement and report conservation actions. Furthermore managing the small grants helped the national NGOs to improve their skills in project assessment and evaluation, as for the first time they were selecting proposals rather than submitting them.

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

The national organizations took the opportunity offered by this project to develop their network also beyond the target sites. In all countries the Caretaker network grew beyond the set of sites covered by the CEPF grant to cover other IBAs.

The National NGOs capacity to fund-raise improved significantly and all national partners are now able to maintain the staff and the level of activities they were able to develop through this project. This indicates the level of sustainability reached by the national Partners.

In the Caucasus, largely through the involvement of the German Government a number of new protected areas are being created and the regional network improved. A number of the sites in Azerbaijan are or will benefit from this process. Ismailly and Babadagh are now part of a new National Park. Samur Delta will soon be declared a national park. The work carried out by AOS will certainly contribute to the development of the management plans and the work of the local caretakers will contribute to the acceptance of the protected areas by local communities. The new protected areas may (and should) represent opportunities for income generating activities linked to nature-based tourism and nature conservation and the local caretakers are in the best position to benefit of these opportunities.

One of the sites in Azerbaijan (Krasnoye Lake - Red lake) was largely destroyed in summer 2007. 60% of it was filled and a large shopping center was built. AOS had lobbied since 2006 for its protection and supplied scientific evidence of the importance of the site to the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR). The developers were quicker. Apparently as a result of the intervention of the MENR part of the lake was spared and AOS is monitoring the situation carefully. Nevertheless this negative experience provided AOS with the opportunity to raise the issue with the media and the international community. A media event was organized at the site and was attended also by the German Ambassador, along side a number of newspapers. Trying to find a positive aspect, the development also filled two other large water bodies which were highly polluted by oil and that most probably represented a deadly trap for migrating waterbirds.

The size of the East Black Sea Mountains site in Turkey (1.7 million ha!) proved to be a source of difficulties. Although the site covers a mountain range, representing an ecological unity, its size and the limited network of roads and transportation means, made it very difficult for DD to establish a well integrated network of caretakers. The communities on the two sides of the mountains are separated for several months during winter (the mountain pass are closed) and the habitats are quite different. Also on an east-west axis the road system is limited. While identifying the Key Biodiversity Areas for Turkey DD split the site in 7 sub-sites. DD has established

caretakers in 4 sub-sites and has identified contact persons in most of the towns and in all 7 sub-sites. Despite this and the good work of the existing caretakers DD feels that the local caretakers do not represent a functional network within the area: they all report to the Ankara HQ but do not interact among themselves as hoped. DD is still implementing other projects in the region (Brown bear protection, Ecotourism development, etc) and therefore will continue work to improve the effectiveness of the network.

IV. PROJECT OUTPUTS

Project Outputs: Enter the project outputs from the Logical Framework for the project

Planned vs. Actual Performance

| Indicator | Actual at Completion |
|--|--|
| <p>Output 1: Existing NGOs have the capacity to deliver effective conservation of sites and species working through network of local people</p> | <p>Achieved. The capacity of the national NGOs to deliver conservation has increased. The national partners improved their knowledge and skills by receiving the following trainings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training workshop on Project Management & Fundraising (Tbilisi, GE on 18-19 Oct 2005). • Training workshop "Introduction to Integrating Conservation and Development" (Batumi, GE 13-14 February 2006) • Training workshop "Site Management" (Batumi, GE on 15-18 January 2006). • IBA monitoring Workshop (Lisbon, Portugal on 12-17 March 2006) <p>DD (Turkey) and AOS (Azerbaijan) received a further training on Staff Management (Istanbul, TR on 16-17 April 2008). Each organization has a fully operational office, a vehicle (specifically acquired in AR, AZ and GE) and field equipment (binoculars, scopes, GPS, etc). Furthermore AOS received support in the development of its Strategic Plan.</p> |
| <p>1.1. Outputs 2 and 4 achieved in each country</p> | <p>Both achieved, see details below</p> |
| <p>1.2. Project partners meet the organizational criteria set for moving to the next step in BirdLife compared with their status at the beginning of the project.</p> | <p>Achieved. All national organizations have improved their status in BirdLife network. ASPB became Associate, AOS moved to Partner Designate, GCCW became full Partner and DD was upgraded to Partner Designate.</p> |
| <p>Output 2. Network of local people at site level (IBA Caretakers) is established and trained across priority corridors.</p> | <p>Achieved. The skills and knowledge acquired from the training and the action planning were transferred to the caretakers through specific training events, 1:1 support. Networks established or strengthened in all countries.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>2.1. All sites have an active IBA Caretaker directly involved in conservation actions in the field and in advocating adequate management of the site</p> | <p>Caretakers active at 29/31 sites (93.5%). Armenia 4/5 (+1 at IBA not in priority corridor). Azerbaijan 19/20 sites (+13 at IBAs not CEPF priority sites or outside priority corridors). Georgia 5/5 sites (+ 2 at IBAs not in priority corridors). Turkey 1/1 (4 local caretakers groups).</p> |
| <p>Output 3. Conservation needs of Globally Threatened Bird species are addressed through site actions across the region.</p> | <p>Regional Species Action Plans (SAPs) have been developed for globally threatened bird species occurring in the region: Imperial Eagle and Lesser Kestrel had individual documents, while Dalmatian Pelican, Lesser White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Marbled Teal and White-headed Duck have been covered by a single action plan. The documents were developed through three workshops facilitated by international species experts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterbirds action plan workshop was held in Baku, AZ on 24-27 January 2006 and facilitated by Mr. Baz Hughes of Wetland and Wildfowl Trust (UK) and Dr. Szabolcs Nagy of BirdLife International. • Imperial Eagle action plan workshop (Tbilisi, GE) 7-8 March 2006 was facilitated by Mr. Marton Horvath and Mr. Andras Kovacs (MME/BirdLife Hungary). • Lesser Kestrel action plan workshop (Tbilisi, GE 8-9 March 2006) was facilitated by Ms. Rita Alcazar (LPN, PT). <p>Priority actions identified by the SAPs have been implemented through the small grants, and through additional work funded by successful fund raising efforts of national partners. Based on these regional documents 24 Site Action Plans have been developed for priority sites plus 9 for sites outside the priority corridors. Azerbaijan - 13 Site Action plans (+7 for sites outside the priority corridors) Armenia - 4 Site Action Plans Georgia - 3 Site Action Plans (+2 for sites outside the priority corridors) Turkey - 4 sub-Site Action Plans The documents are in local language and represent a written agreement between the national organization and the local group/caretaker on what the local groups can and should do to remove the identified threats.</p> |
| <p>3.1. 75% of the population of threatened</p> | <p>Since the most common threat was identified as the fact that local communities and authorities were not aware of the</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| species in all project sites covered by conservation actions identified by the Regional Species Action Plans | <p>conservation importance of their sites and the status of the target species, awareness raising activities were carried out at all sites.</p> <p>Some threats present at several sites were addressed through advocacy work carried out at national or regional (sub-national) level by the national organization.</p> <p>Threats affecting globally threatened species and that could be addressed locally were dealt with through the small grants. Actions were implemented at 14 sites</p> |
| <p>Output 4. Information on conservation status of sites is available at the appropriate political / decision-making level (local, national or international) to promote the sites' conservation</p> | <p>Achieved. IBA monitoring scheme implemented at all priority sites and data incorporated in the BirdLife World Bird Data Base. Georgia IBA book completed, Armenian IBA book will be ready by the end of 2008. All Mid winter counts shared with local authorities and international organizations (BirdLife International, Wetlands International). Breeding birds monitoring and survey data are being published and shared as appropriate.</p> |
| <p>4.1. 31 (1/site) monitor reports sent to National coordinators</p> | <p>95% success. IBA monitoring following the BirdLife monitoring strategy implemented at all sites with caretakers.</p> |
| <p>4.2. National monitoring report sent to relevant Agencies</p> | <p>Fully implemented. All monitoring data collected during the project were shared with national and regional authorities as appropriate.</p> |
| <p>Output 5. The project is well managed by the BirdLife International European Division</p> | <p>Successfully implemented. Good communication with CEPF staff (C. Holtz and T. Schneider) and several face to face meeting with C. Holtz and WWF Caucasus assured that specific issues were openly discussed and solutions identified and agreed.</p> |
| <p>5.1. All funds spent on agreed purpose at end of the project</p> | <p>100% of funds spent with minor budget changes required during the project.</p> |
| <p>5.2. Outputs and reports delivered in time</p> | <p>Achieved. No significant delays in submitting interim Performance and Financial reports.</p> |

Describe the success of the project in terms of delivering the intended outputs.

The four national NGOs have increased their capacity to address threats affecting globally threatened species by working at the appropriate level (local, national). They improved their technical skills in conservation planning, fundraising, public awareness and communication as well as on working with local people.

Training workshops were developed and delivered by BirdLife staff: Project Management & Fundraising by Dr. S. Nagy (Conservation Manager for Europe) and

Dr. U. Gallo-Orsi (Caucasus Projects Manager and previously Funding Development Manager for Europe); Site Management by G. Welch (International site management advisor at RSPB); Introduction to Integrating Conservation and Development by Dr J. Barnard Programme & Projects Manager; IBA monitoring by Dr. I. Burfield European Research & Database Manager and Dr. L. Fishpool, Global IBA Coordinator. The staff management training (offered to staff members of AOS and DD) was delivered in Turkish in Istanbul by a professional training company.

The national organizations skills, experience and profile has improved nationally and internationally.

All project partners have improved their status within BirdLife International. To become part of the BirdLife Partnership each national NGO needs to follow a path: from collaborating organization (not part of the BirdLife Network) to Associate (part of the Network), to Partner Designate (member of the Partnership) and finally to full Partner. Each step is linked to clear criteria (technical, organizational and financial) and is spaced by 2 years. Therefore within the project period each organization could not improve its status by more than one level.

Nationally all NGOs became or improved their role as stakeholders for the relevant ministries about nature conservation. At local and regional level their activities has being supported or acknowledge by regional governors and city mayors.

The project offered the opportunity to national NGOs and their local caretakers to establish networks which allow the members to use and exchange each others' experience, national and international recognition of their activities and provide them the feeling of belonging to a group of people doing the same work in different part of the country and even in different part of world.

The national networks of local caretakers has been established and cover ca. 95% of the target sites. The capacity created at national level has allowed the national organizations to engage local communities also in other sites not directly covered by this project (e.g. Arpi lake in Armenia, Goychay and Turyanchai in Azerbaijan, Kazbegi in Georgia).

A wide range of techniques were used to identify potential caretakers, from informal talks and PPT presentations featuring IBA program and other conservation issues, and some activities including, but not limited to, documentary film shows, contests in village schools, quiz sessions, etc. However, site visits and personal contacts have proved most effective. Training sessions (IBA monitoring, Grant writing & fundraising, Environmental Legislation) were delivered to local caretakers to strengthen their capacity.

All caretakers received training in baseline IBA surveys and were involved in other field work (mid winter counts and / or field survey) and educational activities, particularly in schools. Small grant projects have been a tremendous benefit to caretakers in many ways. Through the work on the project they acquired a lot of practical skills, got into the core of conservation issues, encountered real-life conservation challenges and fully understood the concept and objectives of IBA program. Practical skills and knowledge gained on the project raised caretakers' profile in the area and opened new opportunities for them for further growth.

List of the 31 sites covered by the project.

| Corridor | Country | Site Outcome Name | IBA Name |
|-------------------------|----------------|--|------------------------------------|
| West lesser Caucasus | Georgia | Meskheta | Meskheta Erusheti |
| West lesser Caucasus | Georgia | Trialeti Range | Trialeti Ridge |
| West lesser Caucasus | Georgia | Batumi | Batumi |
| West lesser Caucasus | Georgia | Kolkheti | Kolkheti |
| Greater Caucasus | Georgia | Lagodekhi | Lagodekhi |
| Eastern lesser Caucasus | Armenia | Dsegh-Haghartsin-Pambak Chain and Dilijan NP | Dsegh |
| | | | Haghartsin |
| | | | Pambak |
| Eastern lesser Caucasus | Armenia | Lake Sevan | Sevan |
| Eastern lesser Caucasus | Armenia | Djermuk | Djermuk |
| Eastern lesser Caucasus | Armenia | Gorike | Gorike |
| Eastern lesser Caucasus | Armenia | Noravank | Noravank |
| Greater Caucasus | Azerbaijan | Ismaily | Ismaily |
| Greater Caucasus | Azerbaijan | Babadag Mountain | Babadag Mountain |
| Greater Caucasus | Azerbaijan | Shakhdag Mountain (1) | Shakhdag Mountain |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Samur Delta | Samur Delta |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Akzibir Lake | Akzibir Lake |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Kargabazar and Gush-Gaya Mountains | Kargabazar and Gush-Gaya Mountains |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Krasnoye Lake and Absheron Waterbodies | Red Lake and Absheron Waterbodies |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Alat Bay-Baku Archipelago (1-9) | Alat Bay |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Shirvan NR / Shorgel Lakes | Shorgel lake |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Kura Delta | Kura Delta |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Gyzyl-Agach Bay | Gyzyl-Agach Bay |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Mahmud-Chala Lake | Mahmud-Chala Lake |
| Caspian | Azerbaijan | Hadjikabul Lake | Hadjikabul Lake |
| Lesser Caucasus | Turkey | North-eastern Black Sea Mountains | North-eastern Black Sea Mountains |

Seventeen small grants were distributed to selected caretakers. Calls for proposals were launched to all caretakers and the national selection panels included the national coordinator, local WWF staff and the project coordinator.

Armenia. Small grants completed at 4 sites:

Sevan (2 grants) – Disturbance from fishermen to 90% of wintering and breeding birds at sites removed. Most of wintering and breeding waterbirds are concentrated in the southern part, where disturbance by local fishermen is a main threat reducing breeding and feeding habitat and causing the wintering birds to spend extra energy and jeopardizing their survival or forcing them to move to smaller wetlands open to hunting. The caretakers met several times with the fishermen and the National park to agree on a reduced number of landing sites to reduce disturbance. These were properly sign-posted. In early November 2007 (start of the project) ca. 30 motor boats were documented to access the lake from 10 different points along the entire segment of the shoreline (from village Tsovak to Geghamasar), by the end of 2007 a total number of motor boat stations reduced to 5. Surveys held throughout the reporting period have shown and it was lately reported by caretakers that the number of the parking stations in the southeastern segment of the lake (from villages Tsovak to Geghamasar) has reduced even further and there is only 1 motor boat station left today. The official installation of these signs has been fully attended by the Park administration, the entire event was videotaped and broadcast on the local TV channel (at Marz level). Interviews of ASPB staff and the Deputy Director of the National Park have been broadcasted repeatedly during the past months.



Gorayk – Artificial nests for Lesser Kestrel installed. 100% of local population has access to new nest sites. Presentations about Lesser Kestrel were carried out at the local school in Tsghuk (the village near the colony) and its conservation actions were delivered both to local school and the TV tower crew (where the colony is located). Additionally, a day full of quiz-shows and contest for the best knowledge of birds was organized in the school. The winners schoolchildren of the competition were involved in the construction of artificial nest boxes for Lesser Kestrel. 18 artificial nest boxes were made by the children under the guidance of the teachers of biology and labor. The nests were installed by mid March. Monitoring indicated that 7 nests have been used by the species.



Novarank - Disturbance to the cave used by 100% of known local population of bats removed by placing a gate at cave entrance. A sign at the entrance of the cave explains why the gate has been installed and a billboard along the road informs visitors to the area about the importance of bats. Finally a leaflet in Armenian and in English introduces the tourists to the rich biodiversity of the IBA.





Dsegh - Threats to natural habitat (main hunting habitat for Imperial Eagle and breeding habitat of Caucasian Grouse) assessed and information shared with local communities, decision makers and shepherds. Multiple meetings with local shepherds, hunters and other individuals contacting the area revealed, that not such a long time ago the Black Grouse used to occur in "significant numbers", but the species has declined in the recent past. Field surveys identified overgrazing and rhododendron

collections (as fire-wood) and disturbance by dogs as the main threats. Meetings were held with local hunters, shepherds to discuss the finding. Also talks were given at many schools about the nature of the area and its wildlife.

Haghartsin/Dilijan NP - Surveys revealed that high mountain pastures are sparsely used by shepherds and that the Caucasian grouse is only encountered by locals in autumn when the birds move to the upper limit of the forests and the herds move to the lowlands. No obvious threats have been identified but interviews with locals indicate the species is declining. Public awareness was raised through a number of meetings involving the National Park, local authorities and communities. Also an art competition between three local schools raised a lot of attention to the nature of the site and the final ceremony was broadcasted by local TVs and articles appeared in the local newspapers.



Azerbaijan: Small grants successfully implemented at 6 sites.



Ismailly & Badadag – Surveys in the area resulted in an improved knowledge on status and consistency of local population of Imperial Eagle. Nests are located in the lower part of the forest or in isolated trees, closer to the fields where the birds hunt. This exposes them to disturbance by farmers and shepherds unaware of the presence of the species nests.

Therefore awareness raising activities were carried out among farmers and schoolchildren. These included meetings, talks and excursions in the forest. This resulted in improved respect to the target species. One nest prone to disturbance was successful in the last year.

Red lake – Following the loss of 40% of the lake, AOS organized a media event to raise public awareness about the loss of such an important site, not only as a staging site for the globally threatened White headed Duck, but also, due to its proximity to Baku, as a site for environmental educational activities and potential tourist attraction.

Education activities have been carried out at two schools



near the lake to raise awareness of the environmental problems and improve information flow from the local community to AOS.



Shirvan NP - 100% of local population of Lesser Kestrel has access to 15 Nest boxes installed. The next boxes were installed in the National park. At least 1 already used. The occupancy rate is likely to improve in the next years as the nest boxes were installed after the start of the current breeding season. Other activities by the caretakers include meeting with shepherds and farmers to reduce illegal grazing and hunting in the park.

Hajigabul – 2 seminars and several excursions were organized by the caretaker with the Regional Ecological and Environmental Education Centre. A drawing competition was organized with the schools of the town of Shirvan (formerly known as Ali-Bayrami) the final ceremony raised a lot of attention among local media. The caretaker, with the support of AOS staff, also met with local hunters, fishermen, the lake owner and the Regional Ecological Inspectorate to promote the development of a proper management plan. Illegal hunting has significantly declined as a result of improved awareness of the inspectorate and the local community.



Kizil-Agach (2 grants) – First ever exhaustive survey of Lesser Kestrel carried out in the area (6 colonies located, for a total of 45 nests) The species seems to be increasing, but this may lead to raising the curiosity of the local kids (the nest are on houses in the villages). Talks and excursions were organized to inform the pupils and local communities about the importance of the species and the schools committed themselves to respect and protect the species. As a result a chick which fell from the nest was recovered by the pupils and saved with the help of the Caretaker.

Georgia. Small grants completed at 3 sites.

Batumi – Falconry is very popular in Batumi. Thousands of Sparrowhawks are captured by local falconers and trained for quail hunting. The practice was recently declared illegal, but the poor law enforcement and the popularity of the activity results in the law being not implemented. While capturing sparrowhawks with nets many other raptors are captured and killed to be fed to the captive sparrowhawks. GCCW and Site Support Group "Fsovi", believe that the licensing system implemented across the border in Turkey, and the promotion raptor friendly falconry methods proper capture and handling and feeding the birds (releasing the not target species) would be a better way to address the issue. "Fsovi" and Ajarian Falconers association was organized Falconers fair. During the fair special awards were awarded to the falconers who were practicing historical and more environmentally friendly falconry, also at the fair local association of falconers



together with "Fsovi" organized an educational workshop on sustainable falconry where everybody could get information and advice on how to practice it. Decision makers from local government were present at this event. Local government decided to collaborate with NGO "Fsovi", to support and contribute in organizing the future Falconers fears. A survey was carried out to map all catching stations and assess, through interviews the extent of illegal catching of migratory raptors was assessed. A dialogue was established with local falconers by participating to their regional competitions and introducing the concept of licensing and proper keeping. This will lead to reduced number of Globally Threatened migrating raptors being shot and fed to Sparrowhawks.

Lagodekhi – The local Site Support group "Mlokosievichi society" collected the baseline information on Imperial Eagle nesting population in Lagodekhi IBA and Eastern part of Alazani IBA. They also produced a booklet highlighting the importance of those IBAs and provided nature tourism options to promote the conservation of the sites. During the field work local people were interviewed about environmental issues and basic monitoring information about IBA was collected. Nests of 2 Imperial Eagle, 1 White-tailed Eagle, 3 Lesser Spotted Eagle were found and mapped. A brochure was prepared about Lagodekhi IBA. Negotiations were initiated with Polish embassy (which is running a project on development of tourism in Lagodekhi) to collaborate in nature tourism development.



Mesketi – the local Site Support group "Orbi" Akhaltsikhe received funding to create non timber forest product processing facility for communities living in and nearby Meskheti, Ajara-Imereti and Trialeti IBAs, to increase the value of the forest and help generating some income from non-timber forest products for local communities. They involved marketing specialists and decided to focus on dry forest product production and Natural honey production

Turkey. 3 Small grants completed.

Rize / İkizdere – Illegal hunting in the region is an important threat to the Caucasian Black Grouse, Wild Goats, Brown Bear and other species. In particular opening seasonal roads to the highlands provides opportunities for illegal hunting. Because of the size and the remoteness of the area control mechanism as well as early detection are limited. When the Eastern Black Sea Bird Watching Group started working in the region some of these problems were solved. The caretaker group started monitoring of the Caucasian Black Grouse in İkizdere region. They have involved the local branch of Ministry of Environment and Forestry to the studies. They have informed the Governorship of Rize and İkizdere on all the actions they have carried out. As they became a leading stakeholder for the nature of the region decision makers started to act in collaboration with caretaker group. Last year İkizdere Governor didn't open some of the seasonal roads to the highlands. Similarly,





the attention of the Ministry representatives in the project area has increased especially where the grouses are living. Lastly, the Rize Governor has declared the importance of Caucasian Black Grouse as a biodiversity value as well as economic value as it is an attraction point for nature tourism in the region.

Ispir (2 grants) – The local Site Support Group, the Çoruh Nature Association is very active in promoting nature-based tourism for the area. This also reduces illegal hunting by attracting non-nature consuming users. Decision makers and general public understanding of the importance of the conservation of high mountain environment improved through public awareness activities including a large sign promoting conservation of the area. Also, in this case a flagship species (the Snowcock) has been used as its habitat is shared with the Globally Threatened Wild goat. Two photo traps to monitor Wild goats and other large mammals (Brown Bear, Lynx) were installed by trained caretaker.



The main threat in the East Black Sea Mountains site is the planned destruction of the Çoruh river by a number of large dams which will transform the local ecology and economy and will require the re-location of several villages and many thousands of people. Local caretakers and SSGs were also involved in this issue and the damages that the dams will bring were discussed during the public awareness raising activities. This is among the most devastating threat to a vast part of the site, but it cannot be addressed only through local actions, demonstrations and local advocacy. DD has joined a growing international campaign started by a number of local associations and actively lobbied national government and international organizations against this useless destruction. The information gathered during the project through the local caretakers and the surveys are and will be used in trying to stop the dams.

BirdLife International launched during the lifespan of this project the IBA monitoring framework and trained the European national IBA coordinators (thus including those from the Caucasus) at a workshop in Portugal in 2006. All partners were asked to implement it by 2008.

The CEPF project offered the opportunity to implement the scheme in the region. The IBA monitoring framework provides a standardized way to assign scores for the threats to IBAs ('Pressure'), the condition of IBAs ('State') and conservation actions taken at IBAs ('Response'). The scoring system makes it possible to integrate a wide range of information, which may often be qualitative rather than quantitative. The implemented monitoring has set a benchmark to measure the changes over time of the condition of each IBA and of the network at different geographical scales (national, regional, continental, global). Each partner will be therefore able to share the information with the relevant authorities and promote effective conservation of each site.

The Georgian IBA inventory (updating the list published by BirdLife in 2000 and the summary information available on line) has been produced based on the field work carried out by GCCW and the caretakers. Similar inventory is being finalized for Armenia and is scheduled for Azerbaijan in 2009. These publications, in national

languages with English summaries, will be widely distributed to make available the most up-to-date information at the appropriate decision making level.

The project has successfully delivered all outputs and achieved the project purpose and built a solid basis of knowledge and capacity to effectively contribute to the conservation of globally threatened bird species in the region.

Were any outputs unrealized? If so, how has this affected the overall impact of the project?

During the project one site (Red lake, Azerbaijan) was seriously damaged by the construction of a large shopping center. Works took place in August 2007 and AOS immediately tried to intervene. AOS provide the Ministry of Ecology all available data on the ornithological importance of the site and met the Minister, Dr. Bagnio and released interviews and press releases. The Ministry stopped the works and 60% of the lake is still in place. As the work around the lake continued the ongoing monitoring by AOS registered a strong decline in wintering birds.

The national IBA inventory book for Armenia could not be completed within the time frame of the project. The book is scheduled for publication by the end of the year. This delay has not affected the main outputs and purpose of the project.

V. SAFEGUARD POLICY ASSESSMENTS

Provide a summary of the implementation of any required action toward the environmental and social safeguard policies within the project.

N/A

VI. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT

Describe any lessons learned during the various phases of the project. Consider lessons both for future projects, as well as for CEPF's future performance.

The social and political environment is very different in the four countries: the acceptance of the role of NGOs by the general public, the local and national authorities differs widely. In some cases the NGOs are considered suspiciously in particular when they want to have a say in the decision making process. The deep knowledge of the national NGOs on how to approach the stakeholders has been fundamental in planning and implementing how to promote our views.

Below some of the lessons learnt by the partners during the implementation of the project:

Partners

- The differences in the level of development of the partner organizations requires extra work in making sure everybody is able to understand and absorb the information and skills offered and implement the actions required.
- Threats can develop very rapidly and communications with the relevant authorities (however difficult) need to be established.

Political/cultural factors

- The political situation in some countries and in the region is very volatile and complex. This is always to be kept in mind while organizing events and promoting the project. Travel options between countries are limited in order to assure the participation of all partners most meetings were organized in Georgia. In the case of the Waterbirds Action

- Plan the workshop took place in Azerbaijan to assure the participation of more experts from this country, which hosts the most wetlands. This was discussed with the Armenian partner and their input was gathered alongside the workshop.
- NGOs are very often seen as a funding opportunity for local communities and decision makers, not as a tool to achieve commonly agreed goals. This results in a low level of faithfulness. It is therefore fundamental to keep constant contact with the caretakers and visit regularly the sites to reinforce their commitment through showing interest in them, their area and their activities.
 - The relationship that the national NGO can establish with the civil servants is also a crucial factor: if the NGO and its representative(s) are perceived as trustworthy and useful (providing data on request) and non-confrontational, the cooperation can be extremely fruitful.
 - Decision makers can have a very different role in different places: while in one city they seem to be directly involved in poaching, in the next city the mayor and the head of the city police are directly involved in conservation work as volunteers.

Caretakers

- Availability of potential caretaker is limited and their identification and capacity building takes longer than expected at the start of the project. This is caused by the socio-economic situation, the lack of culture of volunteer work.
- The visits by 'foreigners or city people' raise also the recognition of the caretakers among local population.
- Conservation issues at local level (in particular in AZ, AR and GE) are quite low in the agenda of local people and authorities.
- The presence of tourist attracted by the beauty of the landscape or the presence of certain habitat or species has raised the awareness of locals about their environment.
- Having caretakers with different interest and background is very important since each represents and can reach different stakeholder groups.
- To approach different type of potential caretakers different methodologies are needed. Biology students or Protected Areas staff may have the technical skills to monitor diversity but not interested in educational or direct conservation work, which may be attractive to people with much limited technical knowledge.
- Local knowledge is fundamental to identify threats, their driving forces and solutions.
- Local hunters are important for their knowledge about local biodiversity and often the 'Conservationists v Hunters' confrontational attitude is not (yet?) there.
- The level of caretakers differs despite the uniform training they were exposed to. This has lead to the development of national networks with stronger and weaker members. This is not unexpected but a uniform network would be more effective. The national coordinators had to spend more time with the weaker caretakers.
- Relationship with the Caretakers needs to be continuous and even if the contacts are regular some caretaker may drop out of the system in pursue of their interest (career, personal life changes).

Management

- Paper work always takes much longer than expected.
- The Mid term Evaluation carried out in May 2007 was extremely useful for several reasons:
 - Allowed a frank self assessment of all project partners' work and their working relationship;
 - The facilitator was external so the whole team was free to concentrate on the scope of the evaluation which was not perceived as a exam carried out by the donor or the main project leader.
 - Assessed very positively the progress so far although identified some weakness and further training needs;

- Help focus the Project Partners on their activities vs. the project targets, goal and purpose;
- It's a good tool for developing proposals for the continuation of the work on the Caretaker network.

Project Design Process: (aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/failure)

The project was developed since its first concept paper with the full involvement of all project partners. The project planning workshop held in Tbilisi, GE in May 2004 (supported by a separate grant from CEPF) was a fundamental step in creating a common understanding of the project goals, purpose and planned activities. The clear logframe and simple project structure were certainly a good starting point.

The original plan did not include a Mid-term Evaluation. Savings achieved during the training workshops due to good planning (reducing the travel and accommodations costs) allowed for the implementation of a Mid Term Evaluation in May 2007 in Tbilisi. WWF Caucasus kindly offered the venue and logistic support.

A final meeting with the participation of all caretakers would have been very useful to share regionally the experiences gained by the members of the national networks and foster trans-boundary cooperation. This activity, included in an earlier proposal, had to be scratched from the final project design.

Project Execution: (aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/failure)

The project team was composed of gifted and committed national coordinators. They immediately put into practice what they learnt through the training courses and were able to transfer their knowledge to the local caretakers.

Regular and frequent reporting facilitated the project monitoring at national and regional level. Regular visits (on average 2/year) by the International Project Manager (IPM) allowed issues to be discussed face-to-face. The presence of IPM was also useful to introduce the project and the national partners to authorities at national level and to international donors (European Governments, International organizations such as EU, OSCE, UNPD, REC, etc).

E-mail, skype and telephone maintained communications open (in both directions) during the entire project period.

VII. ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.

During the implementation of the project further ca. \$ 245,000 were raised from a range of different donors by the local partners for work directly related to the CEPF project, in particular for the implementation of the Species Action Plan and of the Site Action Plans or for further awareness raising activities often, but not always with the support of BirdLife Secretariat and other BirdLife partners.

All funds reported here have a direct link with the CEPF project; they allowed extra work to be carried out outside the target sites or for activities not foreseen in the workplan.

NABU (BirdLife in Germany) is the 'supporting partner' of AOS providing unrestricted funds) and involved ASPB in a project in Armenia. RSPB (BirdLife in the United Kingdom) is the 'supporting partner' of DD. SVS (BirdLife in Switzerland) has decided to offer its financial and technical support to ASPB as per the second half of 2008.

Other BirdLife Partners have been involved in projects, providing technical support: LPO (BirdLife in France) build ASPB capacity to conserve the Lesser Kestrel. Vogelbescherming Nederlands (BirdLife in the Netherlands) shared with AOS its experience in building a caretakers' network. MME (BirdLife in Hungary) taught AOS staff how to survey and monitor Imperial Eagle's breeding population and contributed as experts to the Species Action Plan.

NOF (BirdLife in Norway) worked with AOS to monitor Lesser White-fronted Geese in Kizil-Agach.

The list below contains only the funds directly related to the CEPF-supported work. This is a sign of the success of the project in building the capacity of the partners to develop their own sustainability for the future.

| Donor | Type of Funding* | Amount (\$) | Notes |
|--|------------------|-------------------------|--|
| BirdLife and Dutch Government (TMF) | A | 47,000 | Georgia: Establishment of a small company transforming and marketing forest fruits. Project managed by local SSG "Orbi". |
| CLF (formerly BPCP) | B | 24,700 | Azerbaijan: Imperial Eagle and Lesser Kestrel, survey in key areas and capacity building. Involvement of MME (BirdLife in Hungary) |
| EU Twinning (DG Environment) | B | 26,384 | Armenia: Cooperation and know-how transfer from LPO (BirdLife in France) to ASPB on the conservation actions for Lesser Kestrel. |
| EU Twinning (DG Environment) and Vogelbescherming Netherlands (BirdLife in NL) | B | 18,000 | Azerbaijan: Capacity building and Site Action Plans in IBAs outside CEPF sites (but part of the critical network identified by the Ecosystem Profile). |
| NABU (BirdLife in DE) | B | 7,800 | Armenia: bird surveys in Arax valley (covers several CEPF sites outside priority corridors) |
| NABU (BirdLife in DE) | B | 70,000 (in three years) | Azerbaijan: core support for communication (incl. preparation of IBA newsletter sent to all caretakers). |
| Rufford Foundation | C | 10,000 | Azerbaijan: extra funds to collect hydrological data and carry out advocacy work at local level to develop a management plan for Hajigabul lake. |
| Royal Dutch Embassy (KNIP) | B | 2,685 | Armenia: birds (in particular Dalmatian Pelican) and mammals (Otter) surveys at Arpi lake (CEPF site outside the priority corridor) |
| Royal Embassy of Norway | B | 8,000 | Armenia: Strengthen the IBA network in Armenia |
| Royal Embassy of Norway | B | 10,000 | Azerbaijan: Monitoring and capacity building in Kizil Agach. Involvement of NOF (BirdLife in Norway) |
| UNDP Small Grants Programme | B | 19,500 | Turkey: Caucasian Black grouse monitoring and awareness raising project managed by local Bird-Watching club |

***Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:**

- A** *Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)*
- B** *Complementary funding (Other donors contribute to partner organizations that are working on a project linked with this CEPF funded project)*
- C** *Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF funded project.)*
- D** *Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)*

Provide details of whether this project will continue in the future and if so, how any additional funding already secured or fundraising plans will help ensure its sustainability.

BirdLife's Partner Support System in place for three of the 4 NGO (the system has completed its task in Georgia). Larger and more experienced partners (RSPB (UK), NABU (DE) and SVS (CH)) provide technical and financial support.

Profile of all NGOs improved (e.g. see their websites) and good fund-raising successes (see above). The project created the conditions for the NGOs to contribute to the main BirdLife programme (Important Bird Areas).

VIII. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project team wants to thank CI staff (and in particular Chris Holtz and Tina Schneider) for their understanding of the need for the small budget changes required and constant encouragement. Our thanks go also to WWF Caucasus (in particular Nugzar Zazanashvili) for their trust in the project and the logistical support for the Mid-term evaluation workshop. The colleagues at BirdLife International (Jonathan Barnard, Ian Burfield, Szabolcs Nagy¹ and Geoff Welch) have been an indispensable support to the IPM through their help in the trainings and with the useful discussion on site management, IBA monitoring and species conservation. A final thanks to Rita Alcazar, Marton Horvath, Baz Hughes and Andras Kovacs for their experience and enthusiasm in producing regional action plans that will be guiding the conservation work in the region for several years to come.

VIII. INFORMATION SHARING

CEPF aims to increase sharing of experiences, lessons learned and results among our grant recipients and the wider conservation and donor communities. One way we do this is by making the text of final project completion reports available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and by marketing these reports in our newsletter and other communications. Please indicate whether you would agree to publicly sharing your final project report with others in this way.

Yes

For more information about this project, please contact:

Name: BirdLife International, European Division
Mailing address: Avenue de la Toison d'Or 67, B-1060 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2280 08 30
Fax: +32 2230 38 02
E-mail: europe@birdlife.org

Name: Umberto Gallo-Orsi (International Project Manager)
Mailing address: Roghorst 145, 6708 KG Wageningen, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 317 417 599
Fax: +31 317 417 599
E-mail: umbertogo@gmail.com

¹ Now at Wetlands International, Wageningen, NL

Name: Şahin Isayev (National Coordinator,
Azerbaijan)
Mailing address: Azerbaijan Ornithological
Society, AZ 1001, M.Mukhtarov 13, apt.16,
Baku, Azerbaijan
Tel: +994 12 437 90 87 / + 994 55 657 41 59
Fax: + 994 12 421 6713
E-mail: Shahin_isayev@aos.az
<http://www.aos.az>

Name: Luba Balyan (National Coordinator,
Armenia)
Mailing address: Armenian Society for the
Protection of Birds, Aghbyur Serob 11/2, 10
Yerevan, 0026, Armenia
Tel: + 374 10 22 65 41
Fax: + 374 10 22 65 41
E-mail: armbirds@yahoo.com
www.aspbirds.org

Name: Bahtiyar Kurt (National Coordinator,
Turkey)
Mailing address: Doğa Derneği, Kennedy
Cad. No:50/19, Kavaklıdere, Ankara, Turkey
Tel: +90 312 448 0537 / +90 312 448 0956
Fax: +90 312 448 0258
E-mail: bahtiyar.kurt@dogadernegi.org
<http://www.dogadernegi.org>

Name: Zura Javakhishvili (National
Coordinator, Georgia)
Mailing address: Georgian Center for the
Conservation of Wildlife, Nutsubidze Plateau
3, 1-7-10, Tbilisi, Georgia
Tel: +995 32 32 64 96 / +995 32 53 74 78
Fax: +995 32 53 74 78
E-mail: office@gccw.org
<http://www.gccw.org>