

THE OSME CONSERVATION FUND, 2017-2018

Prepared by Maxim Koshkin, on behalf of the OSME Conservation Fund Sub-Committee

Introduction

The OSME Conservation Fund (CF) was established at the 14th Council meeting in 1982 and awarded its first grant in 1983. Since then, the fund has continued to support a wide range of projects annually and a total of £125 640.00 had been awarded by the end of 2018. Encouragingly, the CF provided record annual amounts to projects in both 2017 and 2018 awarding £15 792 and £17 349 respectively. We are currently forecasting continued growth, with record expenditure expected in 2019 and 2020.

The criteria for funding have been consistent over the years with a focus on the following areas:

- Investigating the status of Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable or Near-threatened bird species
- Attempting to further the knowledge of existing Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), for example by undertaking breeding censuses and conducting systematic counts
- Investigating potential new IBAs or ornithologically little known areas
- Conducting ecological studies of little-known species
- Studies related to illegal bird killing and unsustainable hunting
- Educational programmes, especially aimed at school children and youth

The addition of educational programmes was agreed by OSME Council in 2015 and has become a focus of many of the projects that we have supported in recent years, and some excellent examples can be seen in this report. Given the increasing emphasis in education programmes, OSME Council took the decision to change the name of the 'Conservation and Research Fund' to simply the 'Conservation Fund'.

In recent years we have specifically sought applications from countries that

the Conservation Fund had not previously funded. In 2016 we identified six OSME region countries where we have not provided any project funding (Afghanistan, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan). It is particularly pleasing to have awarded funding to projects in both Afghanistan and Tajikistan during the last two years, and we are currently working with contacts in the remaining four countries to support applications.

All applications are considered by an independent OSME sub-committee which recommends which projects should be supported. The final decision is approved by OSME Council and formally acknowledged in the official minutes. There are three application windows throughout the calendar year and we nearly always receive more applications than we can support. In 2017 and 2018, 19 projects were recommended by the CF Committee and funding was approved by OSME Council.

As of the end of 2016, the members of the Conservation Fund sub-committee are Maxim Koshkin (Conservation Fund Chairman), Nabegh Ghazal Asswad, Mick Green, Sharif Jbour and Richard Porter. OSME Council would like to acknowledge the significant time and effort that members of the sub-committee contribute to ensure the professional running of the Conservation Fund. This is reflected in the high quality of the applications and the positive outcomes of the supported projects.

Funders

We receive many donations large and small to our conservation funds from supporters across the world, all of which are used to further our aims and ambitions in the area. We are grateful for every donation, without which our work would just not be possible. There are too many individuals to name here but we would like to especially acknowledge Avifauna Nature Tours of Sweden, whose

donation in 2017 enabled us to fund two exciting projects, and the new and exciting partnership with the March Conservation Fund (MCF) of the San Francisco-based Tides Foundation. They wholly funded three projects in 2017 and doubled their involvement in 2018 to fund a further five projects. The MCF mission is to 'expand protected areas, support ecological research and empower the public to become stewards and advocates for the natural world', goals that fit so well with the awards made by OSME through its Conservation Fund. An anonymous donor provided additional funds in 2017 and 2018 that has enabled expenditure to grow faster than OSME Council initially envisaged.

Supported projects

Below we describe many of the projects funded in 2017 and 2018 in further detail, and present a summary of their outcomes. We are still awaiting reports from a few of the funded projects; these will be covered in the next update.

Project title: White-headed Duck conservation network in Turkey

Grant recipient: Doğa Derneği, TURKEY

Grant value: £1500

White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* populations in Turkey face a multitude of human induced threats which vary depending on site. The main threats are habitat loss and degradation, hunting, trapping in fishing nets, lead poisoning and competition with carp. Habitat loss and degradation occurs as a



result of the water policies, including wetland drainage and dam constructions.

In April 2016, Doğa Derneği organized a series of surveys in Central Anatolia at Lake Mogan, Lake Uyuz and the Sultan marshes, during the breeding season of the White-headed Duck. The goal of this project was to assess the population of the species in each of these locations to determine their importance in a conservation strategy as well as to assess the threat level to these populations. The field team consisted of three observers and after preliminary consultation with local birdwatchers and photographers was able to find the best sites for estimating the population sizes. Surveyors then spent several days observing these suitable areas for White-headed Duck activity and recorded the total number of individuals seen each day as well as their behaviour.

A minimum of 20 breeding pairs were recorded across different locations, however the true number is likely to be higher as some individuals were likely to have been missed. Unfortunately there are no historical records from these sites to see if these populations have declined but it is safe to assume that this is the case based on the species' trends across the region and their confinement to smaller, less disturbed areas.

Useful links:

Links to Facebook posts on project activities and results (TK):

<https://www.facebook.com/DogaDernegi/posts/10155513682576591>

<https://www.facebook.com/DogaDernegi/posts/10155514730321591>



Project title: Identifying and planning for protection of Great Bustard breeding grounds in Kazakhstan

Grant recipient: Mimi Kessler, Eurasian Bustard Alliance, KAZAKHSTAN

Grant value: £1500 (funded by the March Conservation Fund of the Tides Foundation)

Asian populations of Great Bustard *Otis tarda* are thought to be rapidly declining due to poaching and habitat loss, but the current status of many of these populations is unknown due to lack of research. Research and conservation of the Great Bustard in Kazakhstan in the 21st century has largely focused on wintering grounds. Although the Great Bustard returns to specific breeding spots (leks) each spring, the locations of remaining leks are less well identified.

In spring 2017 Great Bustards were surveyed by team of local experts, accompanied by a principal investigator, in three regions of Kazakhstan: south (Jambyl and South Kazakhstan Provinces), northwest (West Kazakhstan and Aktobe Provinces), and east (East Kazakhstan Province). Most Great Bustards were observed in the south of the country, however, even in this region, a total of only 11 individuals was recorded, spread between four locations. Little Bustards were also present at sites where Great Bustards were observed. Local residents in the south were typically familiar with the Great Bustard and frequently recounted incidents of poaching. The team directly observed poaching of a Little Bustard by an official vehicle. Though an equivalent amount of time was spent surveying in north-western Kazakhstan, only three Great Bustards were located there at a single site. Younger people in this region are now generally unfamiliar with the species, though older people commented that the species had disappeared

due to over-exploitation. No Great Bustards were observed in eastern Kazakhstan, but discussions with local people led to an estimate of 14-20 Great Bustards breeding in Chiliktinskaya and Zaisanskaya valleys. Local residents report that this represents an increase in the number of Great Bustards in the region in recent times.

Across the three regions, it appears that breeding populations of Great Bustards are critically small, separated by large distances, and in danger of disappearance. Threats to the species, including collision with power lines and poaching, were noted. Great Bustards were most frequently associated with active wheat farming regions, including some sites where eggs and chicks may be crushed due to agricultural schedules that are not compatible with Great Bustard reproduction.

Project title: Bar-tailed Godwit spring surveys at newly discovered stopover sites in Western Kazakhstan

Grant recipient. Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan, KAZAKHSTAN

Grant value: £2250

Recent satellite tracking revealed that Bar-tailed Godwits of the little known *Limosa lapponica taymyrensis* subspecies make a long stop at a previously unknown site on Caspian Sea in Kazakhstan on their way from Oman to their breeding grounds in Siberia. These sites are key for the species to fuel energy-demanding migration and subsequent breeding. In view of rapid declines of western and particularly eastern subspecies due to habitat degradation at stop-over sites there is a need to identify key sites and main threats to the *taymyrensis* subspecies. The Caspian Sea stopover site has never been surveyed for Bar-tailed Godwits and the team spent two weeks in May 2017 surveying the species and assessing its habitat and threats. Five of the eight key sites were surveyed, as it was not possible to access the other three. Bar-tailed Godwits were found in highly mobile and small flocks. The main feeding sites were medium to large shallow pools of sea water, sometimes adjacent to reeds. Potential human-induced threats to the species were identified, including habitat degradation and





disturbance due to oil extraction activities, direct threat to birds and its prey through oil-related pollution and hunting at sites with easy access.

Useful links:

Link to a website with details on Bar-tailed Godwit research project in Oman, which includes information on migration of tagged birds through the stopover sites on Caspian Sea in Kazakhstan:

<http://www.omanbarralhikman.org/>

Project title: Monitoring Sociable Lapwing migration through Kumo-Manych depression, SW Russia

Grant recipient. Viktor Fedosov, RUSSIA

Grant value: £1000 in 2017 and £1000 in 2018 (funded in 2018 by the March Conservation Fund of the Tides Foundation)

Monitoring of Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* migration has been carried out by the applicant for 10 years in a row. As a result, key staging areas for this species in Russia

have been identified. Migration phenology, changes in numbers of migrating birds and of their site preferences have been recorded. Autumn surveys were undertaken along driven routes, and scanning suitable habitat in search of migrating Sociable Lapwings. When located, flocks were approached and checked at closer range using telescopes. For each group of birds time of observation, GPS coordinates, number of birds, number of birds checked for colour-rings and colour ring combinations were recorded. Continuation of this long-term monitoring of this key staging area for Sociable Lapwings migrating along the western route has been hugely important, and has revealed an ongoing decline in the use of this staging area. Results from this work have shown that the number of Lapwings recorded during 2017 and 2018 have continued to decline. During the last two autumns only 58 and 11 Sociable Lapwing were recorded, compared to counts of more than 1000 birds annually between 2006 to 2009, and a peak of 4929 in 2010. A scientific paper is currently being prepared for publication.

Project title: Besh Barmag Bird Camp and Migration Count, Azerbaijan

Grant recipient: Besh Barmag Bird Migration Count Initiative, Nature Friends, AZERBAIJAN

Grant value: £2000 in 2017 and £2000 in 2018 (funded in 2018 by the March Conservation Fund of the Tides Foundation)

The bird migration project at Besh Barmag, Azerbaijan, first started as bird migration monitoring in 2011-2012, then turned into youth *Bird Camps* in 2016-2017. Besh Barmag is situated on the Caspian Sea coast around 90 km north of the Azerbaijani capital Baku. Here, the Greater Caucasus mountain chain almost reaches the vast Caspian Sea, leaving only a narrow, 2 km-wide coastal plain. This bottleneck has emerged as a major bird migration concentration area. Discovered as recently as 2007, it has now been confirmed to be of outstanding importance; 2.86 million birds were counted from 1 September to 7 December 2018 and more than 300 species have been recorded here. A high proportion of the world populations of such species



as Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* and Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* pass through, as well as substantial numbers (over 100 000) of Calandra Larks *Melanocorypha calandra* and Rosy Starlings *Pastor roseus*.

Currently the area is under no protective legislation and is under immediate and severe threat from a highway construction along the entire coast. Aside from showing site's ornithological value, the team has also invested in building local capacity and awareness by training young Azeri students in field, hosting local groups of interested people and creating local jobs (around accommodation, food and transport for participants), as well as holding seminars and presenting papers to state officials and authorities.

The project has a very active and attractive presence online with thousands of followers, using both the *Birding Azerbaijan* blog and its Facebook "twin". Several guest blogs have also been published on OSME website.

Useful links:

www.birdingaze.blogspot.com

A documentary about the Bird Camp in 2017 (in English):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZf6-mPuXD&t=17s>

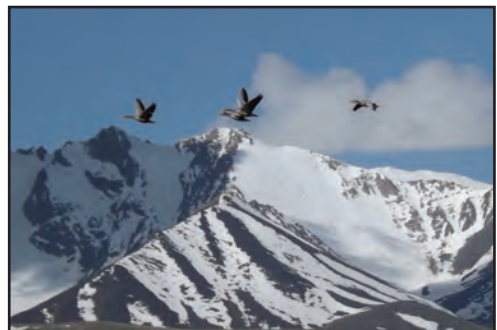
A video about BBC Azerbaijan visit to the project's field site in 2018 (in Azeri/English): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53id2G1nvFI#action=share>

Project title: Bar-headed Goose in the Pamirs, Tajikistan

Grant recipient: Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan, TAJIKISTAN

Grant value: £1542 (funded by the March Conservation Fund of the Tides Foundation)

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* is a vulnerable endemic species of Tajikistan, inhabiting only high altitude lakes of the Pamirs. Some 30-40 years ago, its population in the Pamirs was estimated to be in the range of 1200-1400 individuals, with breeding on Zorkul, Rangkul and Karakul lakes. Since the end of the 1990s, the situation in the Pamirs has changed dramatically. The area of glaciers has decreased by 30-40%, many small rivers and streams have almost disappeared, and some lakes have dried up - all probably related to global climate change processes. These changes have directly affected the local population of Bar-headed Geese. Due to drying up of Rangkul lake, a large colony of



the species on its island became extinct. Weak control by border guards, environmental agencies, and poaching raids on the islands of Zorkul and Karakul lakes brought the populations in the Pamirs to a critical point.

The expedition conducted in June 2018 surveyed all historically known sites and established that currently the population of Bar-headed Goose is only 200-250 individuals. The number of nests found on Karakul island was 22 and on the islands of Zorkul lake 43. Large losses of clutches were attributed to natural predators: ravens, foxes and wolves. But the greatest harm comes from Afgan (Zorkul lake) and Tajik (Zorkul and Karakul lakes) poachers, who collect eggs during the breeding season. The total number of breeding birds, compared with the data of I.A. Abdusalyamov, has decreased by a factor of five or six and continues to decline. The hypothesis that the birds can nest in swampy areas, rocks and along river banks has not been confirmed in our studies, as the species still prefers to nest only on islands of large lakes of the Pamirs.

Project title: Steppe Eagle Conservation Network in Turkey

Grant recipient: Doğa Derneği, TURKEY

Grant value: £1000 (funded by the March Conservation Fund of the Tides Foundation)

The total breeding population of Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* in Turkey is officially estimated to be 2-5 pairs. However, recent studies indicate that Turkey hosts a larger breeding population of Steppe Eagle than thought previously. It is now thought that at least 10 pairs, and perhaps as many as 50 pairs, breed in insufficiently surveyed steppes of Central Anatolia. Limited studies show that the main threat to the species is conversion of breeding habitat from steppe to agriculture, while there are other threats which are less understood. With this project, Doğa determined the current status, threats and conservation opportunities in Tuz Lake KBA, the most important breeding site of the species. The project also worked to increase awareness of people living near breeding habitats through establishing Local



Conservation Groups. During fieldwork, three active Steppe Eagle nests were located in the Tuz Lake basin and a total of seven chicks were observed in these nests, FIVE of which successfully fledged. Additionally, a fourth pair was recorded in Akin Region but the nest could not be located. In Gölyazı ve Eskişehir region, adult Steppe Eagles with territorial behaviour were observed but neither active nor old nests were found.

Doğa actively interacted with local people through a team consisting of a bird and socio-economy experts. The socio-economy expert made a preliminary stakeholder analysis and created an engagement plan, while a bird expert involved local, particularly young, people into monitoring activities. Open-circle talks towards better understanding of Anatolia's steppes and their importance for Steppe Eagle and other threatened species were organized and an informative poster on the Steppe Eagle was printed, framed and placed in local public places. A number of local leaders and potential amateur conservationists have been identified and a network among these has been established. During the second phase of the project, local conservation groups

will be formed from these people, with more collaboration planned.

Project title: Ornithological survey of Bamyan Plateau, Bamyan Province, Afghanistan

Grant recipient: Wildlife Conservation Society, Afghanistan Programme, AFGHANISTAN

Grant value: £1000 (funded by Avifauna Nature Tours of Sweden)

Bamyan Plateau has no formal recognition as being of importance for birds and only part of it, Ajar Valley, has received some attention from zoologists mainly because of the presence of wild mountain ungulates. Any documented observation ceased between 1979 and 2002 due to the political situation. Since 2002, many *ad hoc* ornithological recordings have taken place in Band-i Amir, Ajar Valley, and to a lesser extent across the rest of Bamyan Plateau, as well as two systematic surveys of breeding species in Band-i Amir and Ajar Valley in Spring 2008. The present survey is to our knowledge the first systematic bird survey of Bamyan Plateau outside of Ajar Valley.



Bamyan Plateau was surveyed for breeding birds between 24 June and 6 July 2018. A total of 73 species was recorded, of which all were categorized as “possibly”, “probably” or “confirmed breeding”. Eighteen new species were added to the Bamyan Plateau list previously only thoroughly surveyed in Ajar Valley. Additionally, the Boreal Owl *Aegolius funereus* was recorded for the first time in Afghanistan and confirmed as breeding in Bamyan Plateau. Key species recorded as possibly, probably or confirmed breeding, were Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis*, Hume’s Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris*, Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*, Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus*, Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*, Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*, Afghan Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda theresae*, White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*, Pale Rosefinch *Carpodacus stoliczkae*, Blyth’s Rosefinch *Carpodacus grandis* and Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla*. Based on the results of the survey, Bamyan Plateau was identified as a potential IBA awaiting further studies on the distribution of biome-restricted species in this area. The canyon and associated ecosystems seem to be of primary importance for the set of priority species identified. These, often pristine, habitats are of great ecological value and deserve more research and protection.

Project title: For a brighter future of Sociable Lapwing - galvanizing local support for protection

Grant recipient: Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds (UzSPB), UZBEKISTAN

Grant value: £2000 (funded by Avifauna Nature Tours of Sweden)

In 2015, the largest congregation of Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was discovered on Talimarzhan reservoir in a cross-border area between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The number of observed individuals of this critically endangered species was estimated at 6,000-8,000, which amounts to almost half of its world population. Therefore, Talimarzhan is a high value priority site nationally, regionally and internationally.



In spring 2018, OSME supported the first steps towards practical protection of the staging sites in the Uzbek part of the site. A community-based approach applied at Talimarzhan allowed Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds (UzSPB) to raise awareness of local communities and engage them in monitoring and protection of Sociable Lapwings. A network of caretakers piloting a Sociable Lapwing Monitoring Programme together with actions towards strengthening of protection regime on Talimarzhan were main outcomes of the awareness raising, research, training and campaigning project components implemented here.

Additionally, from 2-12 October, the project team carried out surveys of Sociable Lapwing congregations, focusing on numbers, distribution, diet and threats. Sociable Lapwings were found to be concentrating at two sites: on the north-eastern shore of the reservoir and in the foothills 4-5 km away from the reservoir with numbers reaching a maximum of 4060 individuals on 10 October. Key caretakers participated in a short field training conducted during the surveys, where they could join the team in counting and observing the birds and learn why this species and this site are of international importance.

During the survey period, as in previous years, no evidence of direct threats to Sociable Lapwings was found, however birds are thought to be affected by untargeted disturbance from local fishermen and hunters. The project team is planning to address this issue in the future through improving the site's status and involvement of the newly established and trained network of caretakers.

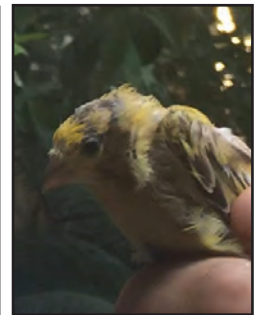
Project title: Syrian Serin: filling the knowledge gap for the species population in Syria

Grant recipient. Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW), SYRIA

Grant value: £1900

The Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* is classified as Vulnerable due to its small population, which was once thought to be stable. It appears to have declined at key sites, mainly owing to the effects of a drought exacerbating the threat from grazing pressure. Other threats to the Syrian Serin appears to be related to disturbance at its restricted range and breeding sites that are confined to the Levant Region (Syria, Lebanon and Jordan), making the species endemic to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Several visits were attempted to the targeted areas to record and monitor the occurrence of the Syrian Serin in these sites. Based on historical data and knowledge of the areas that may hold the bird within Syria, eight sites were surveyed during 20 visits. These were carried out from early May till the end of July 2018. Visits were made early in the morning and on some occasions late in the afternoon when the activities of birds were at peak. This initial survey with the limitation on some movements has resulted



in preliminary data to start working on future activities. More than 45 individuals were observed during 15 visits of the total visits from six out of the eight sites visited.

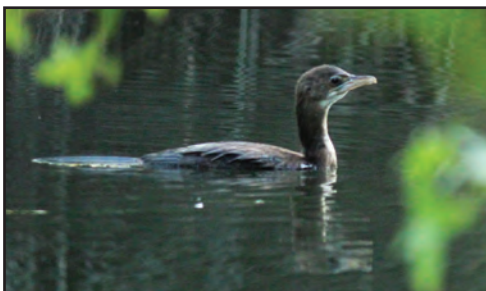
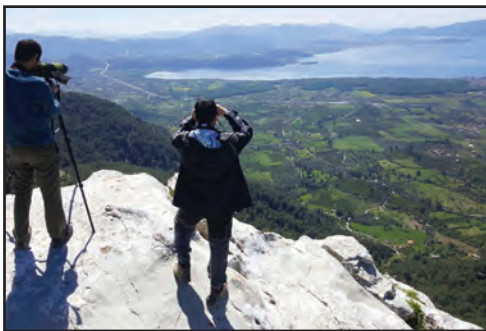
The threats that the species is facing were discussed through meetings with locals to plan advocacy actions as needed by the Society with policy makers and other stakeholders. A series of meetings has started on a small scale and SSCW will build on these to prepare for a local event to raise the awareness of the critical situation the species might face and to draw a draft for an action plan for conserving this species in line with other actions in neighbouring countries where the species occurs.

Project title: Primary bird surveys on a tertiary relic, endemic and vulnerable living fossil forests, the Anatolian Sweetgum forests

Grant recipient: Doğa Derneği, TURKEY

Grant value: £1000

Anatolian Sweetgum forests are part of a rare and endangered forest ecosystem endemic to the Levant. The Anatolian Sweetgum *Liquidambar orientalis* is a relict endemic species that occurs in the south-western part of Turkey and partly on Rhodes. The species occurs in



healthy forest and coppices around the coastal districts of Mugla Province, Turkey. The Koycegiz-Dalyan Specially Protected Area (it also has IBA and KBA status) represents the forest's greatest unbroken expanse and the best opportunity to establish a healthy sweetgum forest area.

With support from OSME, a research project was initiated to identify bird diversity and abundance in the threatened Anatolian sweetgum forests. Five surveys were organized in three different sweetgum forest patches which are Kavakarasi, Karabatak and Kersele located around the Koycegiz Lake between March 2018 and January 2019. Line transects, random surveys and night surveys have been used during these surveys.

As a result, 76 bird species had been recorded in all study sites, 14 of them were recorded as breeding species, while 34 of them are suspected to be breeding, with no physical evidence found. The rest were recorded as passage or wintering species. Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* and Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (Vulnerable) have been selected as indicator species for sweetgum forest patches. Both species are highly dependent on this forest patches, while the surrounded habitats are also suitable for feeding and breeding. Green Woodpecker was found to be present in all study sites with significant number and activity, while Turtle Dove was more abundant in mature and larger forest patches, such as Kavakarasi. Additionally, Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* selects sweetgum forest for breeding and wintering. All these findings show that endemic Anatolian Sweetgum forest is an important habitat for many birds species and requires conservation.

Project title: Assessing status of scavenger birds in Kyrgyzstan

Grant recipient: Ivan Turkovsky, KYRGYZSTAN

Grant value: £2000

Data on status of scavenger birds in Central Asia are outdated and sparse. However it is known that this group of birds is currently suffering dramatic declines in southern Asia and Africa, due to persecution and use of diclofenac in veterinary medicine. Anecdotal



information suggests that Kyrgyzstan may host substantial numbers of four species of scavenging birds: Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*, Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* and Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*.

The project focused on assessment of scavenger bird populations in two regions of Kyrgyzstan, Naryn and Jalal-Abad, with significant parts of their territory occupied by mountains, inhabited by Argali *Ovis ammon* and Asian Ibex *Capra sibirica*, and with large numbers of domestic livestock, providing food for scavengers. All known and potential nesting sites of these birds were surveyed and the team conducted interviews among the local population of these regions to identify people's attitude to the study species and potential threats.

As a result of the surveys, a total of 262 individual scavenger birds of all four species were observed on 88 sighting occasions and 35 active nests were located. Egyptian Vulture appeared to be the rarest species during this survey trip, with single individuals encountered more frequently than small groups.

According to our informal surveys among local shepherds and livestock owners, many

of them observed scavengers regularly and in good numbers. Residents of Naryn region most regularly see Himalayan Griffons and Bearded Vultures, residents of the Jalal-Abad region see Griffon, Bearded and Egyptian vultures. During each conversation with locals we explained the important role scavengers play in disposal of dead animals, preventing soil contamination and epidemics. When asked whether diclofenac was used for livestock vaccination, most said they do not use this drug, some of the shepherds said they don't know, since they are only employed workers for livestock grazing. The educational part of our work has resulted in a cooperation with a network of private schools "Bilimkhana" that are located in all regions of the Kyrgyz Republic, where we gave talks to high school students, their parents and teachers, on the importance and value of scavengers and shared our photos of these magnificent birds.

Project title: Investigation on breeding success of the Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* in Dörtdivan-Gerede (BOLU) Region

Grant recipient: Cansu Özcan, TURKEY

Grant value: £2000 (funded by the March Conservation Fund of the Tides Foundation)

This project was funded in late 2018 and fieldwork will be undertaken in spring 2019.

The Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* is a globally threatened species, classified as 'Vulnerable' by IUCN. Many of the diurnal raptor species are declining in Turkey, including the Imperial Eagle. Total numbers are estimated at 42-180 pairs in Turkey. The Dörtdivan-Gerede (BOLU) Region is known to hold the second largest population in Turkey. Previous work by Birdlife Hungary located 15 active nests in the region, and further work by the project applicant in 2015-16 monitored breeding success, habitat and prey preference of the Imperial Eagle. There may now be as few as 10 nests and this project aims to assess numbers and breeding activity of the eagles. In conjunction with the research work will be a programme of awareness raising activities for local communities in Dörtdivan.

Project title: Vulture and bird of prey awareness day on Socotra

Grant recipient: Ali Yahya and Ahmed Saeed Suliman, YEMEN

Grant value: £500

Due to communication problems a project report has yet to be received but the following is adapted from the project application.

Socotra has a population of 1900 Egyptian Vultures, in probably the highest concentration of this Endangered species in the world; they are non-migratory, very tame and not threatened on the island. To celebrate this important population a series of activities were planned as part of the International Vulture Awareness Day, including a vulture/bird painting event with the pictures displayed in public places e.g. football stadium in Hadibu, schools and streets; preparing and designing wall posters with some pictures of the Egyptian Vulture and other endemic bird life of Socotra with information text (these posters will be displayed in the key stakeholders' offices e.g. airport, hotels, local authority and EPA offices etc.); and delivering number of awareness lessons, lectures and presentation on the Egyptian Vulture and birdlife on Socotra (using the PowerPoint lectures developed under the UNEP/GEF programme that BirdLife has supported).

Project title: The SunChild Eco Club project, Armenia (follow up grant)

Grant recipient: World Land Trust on behalf of The Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC), ARMENIA

Grant value: £5000

A project report for 2018 has not yet been received but is expected shortly. A summary from 2017 is included here for information:

The SunChild Eco Club project is aimed at raising children's awareness of environmental issues, at the same time providing them with tools to tackle them. Working with professional film-makers, photographers, journalists and environmentalists, who appear as mentors rather than trainers, children identify environmental and social issues specific to their communities, and learn to

make visual stories out of them. The students learn the importance of civic voice, and start to believe in their ability to make a change. They are grounding their study of large-scale issues in a solid and personal understanding of how things work in their own community. More than 80 children from two districts participated in the SunChild Eco Clubs project, co-funded in 2017 by OSME and the US Forest Service. The 6-month curriculum comprised workshops on environmental photography and film-making, citizen reporting and social media, and sustainable lifestyle. For the first time since SunChild Eco Clubs creation, Project Development course was integrated in the curriculum, and mini-grants were allocated for implementation of the projects developed by children. The peak point of the course was the Summer School on 8-15 August, organized in the Eco Lodge in the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge for 20 students having showcased the best achievements throughout the year. For seven days of fun and learning the students participated in interactive workshops and games, green talks, film screenings and discussions, as well as an exciting scavenger hunt hiking trip.

Project title: Modelling populations of White-headed Duck in the socioeconomic context of carp farms of Armenia

Grant recipient: Karen Aghababayan of Towards Sustainable Ecosystems (TSE), ARMENIA

Grant value: £1977 (funded by the March Conservation Fund of the Tides Foundation)

A project report is due shortly, in the meantime this interim update is provided for information:

White-headed Duck breeds in non-intensively used fish farms of Ararat Plain; however recently, all carp farms of Armenia started expanding their production area and clearing the shoreline vegetation, which poses a threat to White-headed Duck. To protect White-headed Duck, there is a need of an alternative business model, which will consider both the requirements of White-headed Duck and interests of farm owners. The objectives of the project were the development of a

habitat model for White-headed Duck based on its ecological preferences; the development and comparison of two business models of the fishfarm: (a) based on aquaculture only; (b) combining aquaculture and alternative income from birdwatching. The methodology included field data collection with further statistical analysis, and spatial modelling of White-headed Duck habitat, and economic

modelling of two types of business. The results include better understanding of requirements of White-headed Duck and alternative business model. These results will contribute to an update of conservation status and species account of White-headed Duck for Red Book of Armenia and Atlas on Birds of Armenia and also for development of management plans for two Emerald Sites.