



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



**UK International
Development**

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Darwin Initiative Main: Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:

(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/information-notes/>)

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 20 pages** in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2024

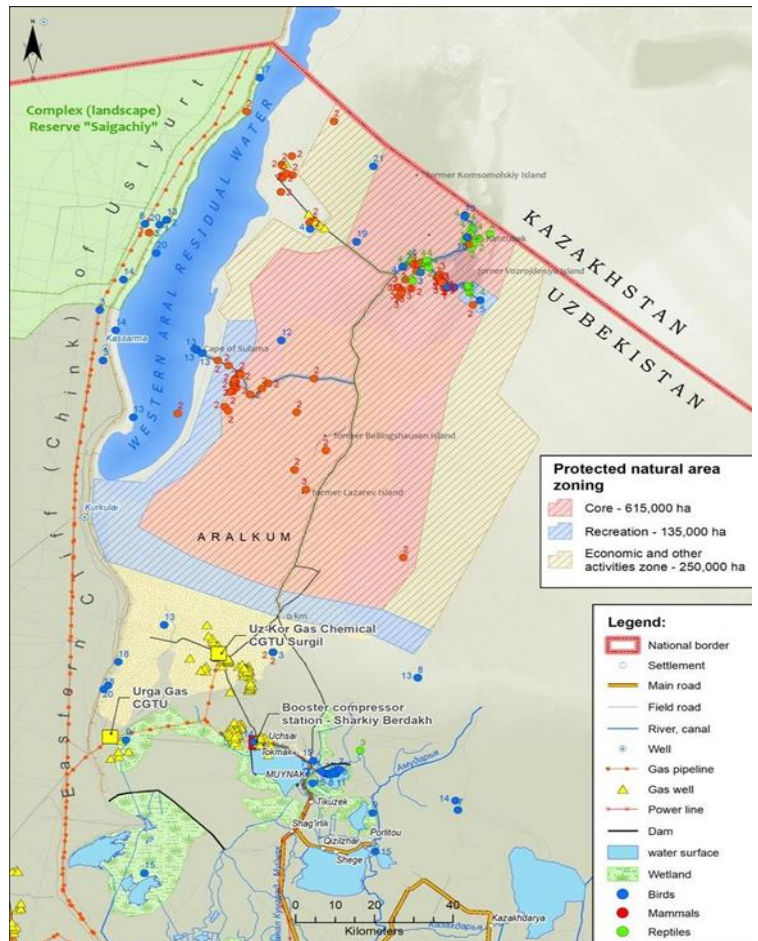
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Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	28-003
Project title	Resurrection Island: enterprise, conservation and development around the Aral Sea
Country/ies	Uzbekistan
Lead Partner	University of Oxford
Project partner(s)	Institute of Zoology of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences (IoZ); Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage (MTCH) replaces Goscomtourism (GCT) in original proposal); The Pearl Group (TPG); Ministry of natural resources (MNR) replaces GosComEcology (GCE) in original proposal); UzKorGaz; Saiga Conservation Alliance (SCA)
Darwin Initiative grant value	£399,326
Start/end dates of project	01 September 2021 – 31 August 2024
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2023 – Mar 2024) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	01 April 2023 – 31 March 2024 Annual Report 3
Project Leader name	Joseph Bull
Project website/blog/social media	www.resurrectionisland.web.ox.ac.uk https://www.facebook.com/ResurrectionIslandProject
Report author(s) and date	Joseph Bull, Shahzoda Alikhanova, Zebo Isakova, Elena Bykova April 2024

1. Project summary

Following Soviet-era irrigation for cotton, the Aral Sea region in Uzbekistan is ecologically and economically degraded but still holds substantial cultural, biodiversity and industrial value. This project laid the foundation for designating Resurrection Island (in the middle of the former Aral Sea) as a Protected Area, while developing sustainable income streams such as tourism that will benefit local people, and ensuring that industrial development results in 'no net loss' of biodiversity. Biodiversity challenges include poaching of threatened wildlife species (e.g. saiga antelope), which results in part from a lack of other livelihood options. This project has sought to both ensure greater protection for these species and to facilitate the creation of new opportunities for employment. Challenges also include clearance of desert and forest habitats for industrial activities (e.g. infrastructure construction and resource extraction); the project supports mitigation for these operations through 'no net loss' mechanisms. The problems that the project has sought to address are well established (as part of the body of research into the wider Aral Sea disaster), but the project also performed scoping studies in advance of securing project funding, to understand issues such as the current unemployment levels in the Uzbek Aral region. There is an ongoing programme of research, carried out by organisations (including partners IoZ and SCA) into the state of biodiversity in the Aral Sea region, which informed project strategies.



The project is focussing on a region located in the far west of Uzbekistan, specifically the Resurrection ('Vozrojdeniya') peninsula which is the site of the new protected area. The focal point for sustainable alternative livelihood activities is the town of Muynak; for 'no net loss' work with industry, the focus is the extractive sector activities of UKG. In summary, the original Outputs and Activities were as follows:

- businesses established by new, small-scale local operators based on regional cultural and ecological values, such that residents place increased value on sites of cultural and natural interest
- Resurrection Island on its way to becoming a fully resourced protected area
- industry and government ensure wider biodiversity impacts of new development projects are effectively mitigated, as part of a broader sustainable development agenda.

2. Project stakeholders/ partners

In September 2023 a series of project roundtables and meetings were held in Tashkent and Nukus with all official Darwin partners. These included our annual all partner in-person roundtable designed to retain high engagement, and deliver project planning, evaluation and decision making for the final year of the project. Beyond the annual in person meeting, we have had regular (at least every month) catch up calls with project partners, to ensure ongoing interaction and collaboration.

In addition, the project team has been in active consultation with SANEG, formerly Jizzakh Petroleum, a key player in the oil and gas industry in the project region; to develop and finalise the zoning maps for the Aralkum PA. Other local non-partner stakeholders, such as British diplomatic entities, local public institutions, and technical specialists, have been involved through informational seminars and roundtable discussions, like the one held in Samarkand on May 25-

26, 2023. These events served not only as platforms for disseminating project information and achievements but also for soliciting feedback and further engaging the community in biodiversity conservation efforts. Finally, we have continued to engage with the Uzbek embassy in London, and established novel connections with the office of the new British Ambassador to Uzbekistan.

The partnerships for this project were driven by demands from local communities and the government, ensuring that planning, monitoring, and decision-making processes involved all stakeholders significantly. This collaborative approach facilitated direct contributions to the conservation efforts and the integration of the national park within regional ecological networks.

Achievements from this collaborative effort include the advancement of ecological tourism and the implementation of conservation measures specifically tailored to the local biodiversity needs, such as the protection of endangered saiga antelope. However, challenges such as differing objectives among partners and managing multi-faceted project outcomes were met through open dialogue and regular stakeholder meetings, fostering a unified approach to addressing these issues.

Evidence: new map of the PA, roundtable and workshop agendas. NOTE minutes of meetings with SANEG (June 2023) are contain confidential information, so are not included here.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Output 1: *New small-scale local operators establish businesses based on regional cultural and ecological values, such that residents place increased value on sites of cultural and natural interest*

Number of households offering new homestay accommodations as a result of the project = 10. For example, in April 2023, Venera Sadullayeva (a participant of the RI project training sessions from Muynak district, Karakalpakstan), successfully launched her own homestay business. This development represents a promising initiative aimed at alleviating the prevalent unemployment and associated poverty within the project region. Notably, this venture capitalizes on existing skill sets and is meticulously tailored to leverage the natural and cultural allure of the region. There was less interest than anticipated initially partly due to financial challenges households faced in renovating their homes for homestay purposes. However, with the increasing interest in Muynak, partly linked to new events taking place there (e.g. Stihia festival), we anticipate further growing demand for homestays motivating more households to invest, enhancing the local tourism infrastructure and providing additional income opportunities for the residents.

Activity 1.1 and 1.6: A paper covering additional outcomes of the social survey in relation to people's use and perception of natural resources in the project area was published in January 2024 (in the journal *Land Use Policy*).

Activity 1.2. Skills training on ecotourism. The ecotourism skills training for stakeholders in the Aral Sea region, held from December 18 to 21, 2023, at Jipek Joli Hotel, Nukus, was conducted as planned. Organized by the Institute for Tourism Development and The Pearl Group, the training involved over 20 participants including representatives from protected areas, tour operators, museum guides, and tourism ministry officials of Karakalpakstan.

The training achieved its objectives by enhancing professional skills in ecological tourism, with activities focusing on designing eco-touristic routes, legal frameworks, and marketing strategies. Interactive methods facilitated active learning and problem-solving discussions, culminating in the development of a new ecological route and competitive analysis. Overall, the event was executed on schedule and met its intended goals effectively.

Activity 1.5: In May 2023, the tourism team and an international visitor piloted the tourist trail, which was developed in the framework of the project. An additional home in Muynak was registered as an official business unit to provide homestay for tourists visiting the region.

Output 2: *Resurrection Island on the way to becoming a fully resourced protected area*

Substantial progress has been made in the delineation and zoning of the Protected Area (PA) through collaborative efforts with our national partner (the Ministry of Ecology, Nature Protection,

and Climate Change). The delineation process culminated in the formal approval of the PA boundaries and zones by the Council of Ministers of Karakalpakstan. Subsequently, on 23rd February 2024, the official PA documentation was issued by the Cadastre Agency of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Furthermore, a dedicated consultant has been engaged in the development of the PA Management Plan (which is currently under review across partners), underscoring our commitment to comprehensive conservation strategies.

Activity 2.1b: A consultant was employed by the project to develop a Biodiversity Management Plan for the newly established Aralkum PA. The activity is in progress.

Activity 2.2: The project team has been in active consultation with SANEG, formerly Jizzakh Petroleum, a key player in the oil and gas industry in the region to develop zoning maps of the Aralkum PA. A roundtable to discuss the PA zoning/maps was conducted on the 5th May 2023 in Tashkent, following a number of consultations and meetings. As of today, zoning map of the PA has been updated and finalized.

Activity 2.3a: A number of biodiversity monitoring expeditions were conducted throughout April-September 2023 by partner organization, the Institute of Zoology.

Activity 2.3b: The RA has finished a land cover classification of the project area and change detection over the past decade. Two expeditions/field surveys were conducted throughout April-June 2023 for ground-truthing purposes. The associated scientific publications are in preparation.

Activity 2.4: (see 2.3a)

Activity 2.5. The Aralkum PA has been officially established, and final zoning now confirmed.

Output 3: *Industry and government ensure wider biodiversity impacts of new development projects are effectively mitigated, as part of a broader sustainable development agenda*

Initiatives to engage with key industrial stakeholders operating within the project region, such as SANEG (formerly Jizzakh Petroleum), are underway to ensure alignment with the principle of No Net Loss. Noteworthy collaboration includes the participation of SANEG representatives in the forthcoming May 5th roundtable discussion on protected area zoning and subsequent consultations regarding the delineation of the PA. This collaboration fostered synergy between nature protection endeavours and industrial activities on Resurrection Island, thereby ensuring sustainable development practices.

Activity 3.2: The UzKorGas Biodiversity Action Plan was reviewed, and comments/edits proposed. The project team also directly engaged with Surgil (UzKorGas) project auditors AECOM in the UK, to seek to further support efforts to bring no net loss / net gain principles into project activities. Meanwhile, project partners have been actively engaged in estimating biodiversity impacts of new wind farm developments adjacent to the project area, and offering to engage on the inclusion of no net loss / net gain principles into project activities there too.

Activity 3.3b: In September 2023, the PI delivered trainings to a group of professionals (UKG, GosComTourism, MEEP) in Nukus, Karakalpakstan.

Activity 3.5a, b: In late April 2024, the project delivered training and engagement sessions to Kazakh colleagues over two days, facilitated by Kazakh colleagues ACBK. The sessions – which explored transboundary activity in relation to the project area – were well attended, with excellent feedback afterwards (full report in preparation), and were recorded for uploading online by ACBK.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1: (“New small-scale local operators establish businesses based on regional cultural and ecological values, such that residents place increased value on sites of cultural and natural interest”).

Against the baseline in which the tourism offering around the Aral Sea had been limited or declining; during the reporting period, significant progress was achieved in the development of sustainable tourism initiatives within the project area. Notably, 10 new homestay accommodations were successfully registered, while several others have received mentorship.

In May, the first international tourist tested a newly established tourism trail which was developed by the project team.

Evidence: ecotourism and tour operator training agendas/participants, biodiversity impacts of tourism materials, new proposed eco-tour pilot routes

Output 2: (“Resurrection Island on the way to becoming a fully resourced protected area”).

Substantial progress continues to be made in relation to this output. The baseline state was that there was no protected area. Aralkum PA was established in Y1 according to the Presidential Decree, and zoning was completed and approved in the reporting period. The approval of the zonation plan signifies a key milestone in the journey towards effective management and conservation of Resurrection Island.

Evidence: official confirmation of status and zoning for new PA, summary reports of flora and fauna from surveys.

Output 3: (“Industry and government ensure wider biodiversity impacts of new development projects are effectively mitigated, as part of a broader sustainable development agenda”).

As a baseline, there is currently no national regulation on specific inclusion of measures to *fully* mitigate biodiversity impacts of development; Uzbekistan's Environmental Protection Act and related regulations highlight the necessity to consider environmental impacts during the planning stages of industrial and development projects. Although these do not yet specifically mandate comprehensive biodiversity mitigation measures, they provide a framework that encourages sustainable practices. Project partner UzKorGas mitigates impacts in line with Surgil project lender (ADB) requirements; but the project has collaborated with government partners to explore full biodiversity impact mitigation for other projects in the region too (the A380 highway upgrade, newly constructed oil and gas infrastructure in the project region, and potentially the emerging wind farm projects on the adjacent Ustyurt Plateau).

More broadly, the Uzbek Government has now committed to align emerging national biodiversity policy with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Policy (cf. the Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support (GBF-EAS) initiative), which supports full mitigation of biodiversity impacts towards nature recovery.

Evidence: report detailing proposed input to UKG BAP; letter concerning possible impacts of the new wind farm (from project partner). Meeting and press release on work towards integrating the GBF and Uzbek policy (featuring project partners).

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

Outcome: *Resurrection Island is on the path to protected status. New sustainable livelihood options have been piloted, aligning residents' wellbeing with biodiversity conservation. Regional industrial biodiversity impact mitigation practices have improved.*

Significant strides have been made towards achieving protected status for Resurrection Island. The project has been instrumental in facilitating the establishment of necessary zoning regulations and management plans, all essential components for protected area designation. In parallel with efforts to protect Resurrection Island, the project has piloted sustainable livelihood options for local residents. Through training programs, capacity-building initiatives, and the establishment of ecotourism ventures such as homestay accommodations, residents have been empowered to generate additional income. Based on the progress observed thus far, the project is on track to achieve the Outcome by the end, and indeed surpass it in terms of PA status.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Assumption 1: Any potential conflicts between protected area in the region and development priorities (e.g. resource extraction) can be effectively mitigated. Policy-makers are willing to engage with the project.

Comments: In the project area, the potential for conflict arose where an overlapping area was subject both to industrial interests and the original zoning of the new PA; the Government of Uzbekistan issued a decree approving oil and gas exploration activities in an area that was at one point within the zones planned for the core area of the PA. Through engagement with the private sector organisations involved (particularly SANEG), it was agreed that measures such as routing a new pipeline alongside the main existing access road would minimise negative impacts on biodiversity, and such areas could be incorporated into buffer zones/zones for economic activities within the wider protected area. SANEG's active involvement has played a pivotal role in fostering constructive dialogue and facilitating consensus-building between stakeholders.

Assumption 2: Saiga antelope will not be extirpated from Uzbekistan, either through human activities or mass die-off. Saiga antelope will return to the area and rebound in population size if given the right support (including that the transboundary migratory pathway across Aral Sea bed remains open). Saiga population on Resurrection Island requires protection, and our project's activities will lead to that protection being given.

Comments: As before, all of the above are consistent with findings from our research in the region. The assumption that the Saiga antelope will not be extirpated from Uzbekistan is optimistic but plausible if continuous and effective conservation efforts are maintained. The projection hinges on the maintenance of a transboundary migratory pathway and effective protection measures on Resurrection Island and surrounding areas. This assumption is in line with previous research findings that suggest with adequate support and environmental management, the Saiga population can rebound. It's critical, however, that conservation strategies are robust and adaptive to address both human activities and natural threats like mass die-offs, which have historically impacted Saiga populations significantly

Assumption 3: Industrial private sector partners remain willing to engage on project work. Private sector development will continue, an appetite for biodiversity impact mitigation exists, and decisions can be made on a timescale that will allow meaningful progress on this over the timescale of the project.

Comments: The assumption that the private sector, particularly SANEG, will continue to engage actively in the project is well-founded. SANEG's ongoing involvement in negotiations for delineating protected areas indicates a strong commitment and an existing appetite for mitigating biodiversity impacts. This active participation suggests that private sector development will progress in a manner conducive to achieving the project's environmental goals within the expected timeline.

Assumption 4: Small local businesses existing or there is willingness to initiate them. People willing to engage with project. Market potentially exists for international eco-tourism to the region and purchase of crafts from the region. Uzbekistan remains economically and politically stable.

Comments: The assumption is realistic given the presence of small local businesses and a willingness to engage with the project – including new businesses set up, with the support of the project specifically – and indicating a potential market for international eco-tourism and regional crafts. This, combined with Uzbekistan's ongoing economic and political stability, supports the viability of these initiatives.

Assumption 5: Ustyurt residents willing to participate in repeated attitude surveys. Residents do not currently consider living biodiversity to have economic value (i.e. if they do already, then they are unlikely to place *increasing* value on biodiversity). Residents are positively disposed towards in-country researchers, and are willing to engage.

Comments: Ustyurt residents seemed positively disposed, and were willing to participate in 2024 repeat attitude surveys, carried out by partners SCA (report under development now). This builds on the previous surveys, including those for which results were recently published in the peer reviewed literature (*Land Use Policy*, 2024).

Assumption 6: Council of Ministers of Karakalpakstan remains keen to engage and implement our findings.

Comments: The Council of Ministers of Karakalpakstan has been supportive throughout the project implementation period. They were closely and actively involved in facilitating and approving the zoning maps and cadastre for the new Aralkum PA.

Assumption 7: There is willingness and potential to scale-up project to transboundary level; this is expressed in ADCI's Letter of Support.

Comments: In late April 2024, the project delivered training and engagement sessions to Kazakh colleagues over two days, facilitated by Kazakh colleagues ACBK. The sessions – which explored transboundary activity in relation to the project area – were well attended, with excellent feedback afterwards (full report in preparation), and were recorded for uploading online by ACBK. This suggests a degree of willingness for transboundary action on the part of colleagues in Kazakhstan.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and poverty reduction

The intended Impact cited on our original application was: “Sustainable economic development of the Aral region is being realised via collaboration between residents, government, and industry; positively transforming residents’ wellbeing, whilst protecting highly threatened Uzbek biodiversity”.

Our project is contributing towards higher level biodiversity conservation through both traditional approaches (support for protected area establishment covering a region featuring conservation priority wildlife species) and more contemporary approaches (bringing emerging best practice in biodiversity impact mitigation for economic development activities). The result is to seek to ensure that development in the Aral region proceeds in line with the relevant SDG (#15), and helping Uzbekistan contribute towards the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (noting that the Uzbek Government has now committed to align emerging national biodiversity policy with the Framework (cf. the Global Biodiversity Framework Early Action Support (GBF-EAS) initiative).

Evidence: indispensable support from our project to the establishment of a new protected area, direct engagement with industry on biodiversity impacts mitigation in the Aral region.

The relevant mechanism for improving human wellbeing in the Aral region is not only large- scale development bringing improved infrastructure (in a way that is sensitive to potential biodiversity impacts), but also small-scale development of businesses built upon cultural and ecological values e.g. eco-tourism. These are central goals for our project.

Evidence: the progress that we have made in supporting development of new eco-tourism goods and services, with positive feedback from participants.

4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

CBD:

National biodiversity strategy for Uzbekistan’s under the CBD emphasises conserving and restoring biodiversity in the Aral Sea region; to which our project contributes directly. For instance, the CBD Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework includes Targets 2 and 3 on protecting 30% of the Earth’s surface, and restoring 30% of the surface: our project seeks (through protection and restoration) to maintain the area and integrity of critical habitat on Resurrection Island through enhanced protection, consequently enabling an increase in the population of threatened flora and fauna, and thereby contributes directly towards achieving the GBF.

Through our engagement with industrial projects and policymakers, we also work in a way that supports Target 14 (Integrate Biodiversity in Decision-Making at Every Level; “full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values into policies, regulations, planning and development processes, poverty eradication strategies, strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments and, as appropriate, national accounting,

within and across all levels of government and across all sectors, in particular those with significant impacts on biodiversity”).

CITES & CMS:

Though our project activities are designed to conserve the biodiversity of Resurrection Island in general, we use the saiga antelope as both an umbrella species to represent that biodiversity and a charismatic flagship species to draw attention to it. The saiga is a conservation target under both CITES and the CMS. Saiga antelopes are listed on CITES Appendix II, as illegal international trade in saiga horn represents a threat to their survival. Our project aims to reduce saiga poaching, supporting the CITES aim to “ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival”.

CMS-CITES MoU. The saiga is the subject of a CMS-CITES MoU between all saiga antelope range states, since 2006. This project has already begun to support achievement of several priority actions under the MoU, specifically:

- 1.11 (“all saiga populations have appropriate investment”)
- 4.1-4.7 (Section 4 “Work with local people”)
- 6.1-6.6 (Section 6 “Habitat and environmental factors”)
- 7.1-7.2 (“Expand and enhance national protected area networks”, particularly “trans-frontier protected areas where appropriate”)
- 8.1-8.3, 8.5 (“Monitoring”).

It should be noted that in the last reporting period, the saiga antelope was officially reclassified on the global IUCN Red List from Critically Endangered to Near Threatened; a huge success for the species. However, saigas remain on the Uzbek national Red List.

5. Project support for multidimensional poverty reduction

The key component of our project focusing on reduction in poverty is that on alternative sustainable livelihoods. By piloting different livelihood opportunities, and providing training to those interested in taking up those opportunities, we have sought to directly contribute towards (a) increased household/community income (b) opportunities that are more equitable by gender and (c) making up for a lack of training and skills in certain fields - in villages that are among the worst affected by the Aral Sea disaster (and where our social surveys at project outset confirmed unemployment to be exceptionally high, up to >65% of respondents). Expected beneficiaries are those with limited employment opportunities resident in the project region, especially in towns such as Muynak and Uchsay.

The expected beneficiaries of our project are the communities living in and around the project area, particularly those dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. These communities often face challenges such as limited access to economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and vulnerability to environmental risks. In the third year multiple training sessions were completed particularly on tourism livelihood options, and our project continued to work with promising providers to build capacity, as well as trialling new tourism routes with an emphasis on providing local employment.

While some impacts are indirect, our project is expected to contribute to poverty reduction in the long term through: 1) Improved ecosystem services: By promoting biodiversity conservation and establishing a PA, our project helps maintain ecosystem services essential for livelihoods; 2) Increased awareness about the value of wildlife: Education and awareness programs aim to foster a deeper understanding of the importance of biodiversity conservation and its linkages to human well-being, thus promoting sustainable resource management practices.

6. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Please quantify the proportion of women on the Project Board ¹ .	66% of the individuals on the Project Board are female
Please quantify the proportion of project partners that are led by women, or which have a senior leadership team consisting of at least 50% women ² .	43% of the organisations which are project partners are led by women

GESI Scale	Description	Put X where you think your project is on the scale
Not yet sensitive	The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn't quite meeting the requirements of a 'sensitive' approach	
Sensitive	The GESI context has been considered and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities.	X
Empowering	The project has all the characteristics of a 'sensitive' approach whilst also increasing equal access to assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups	
Transformative	The project has all the characteristics of an 'empowering' approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change	

Our project has prioritized efforts to promote equity for women and marginalized groups. This has been achieved through targeted interventions aimed at promoting women's leadership and empowerment and providing equal access to project benefits and opportunities. For example, special training programs and support services have been implemented to enhance the participation and capacity of women and marginalized groups in project activities which include tourism training and homestays. Further, our project employed a female Uzbek research assistant who has used the associated opportunity to secure a PhD programme.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

We monitor activities and milestones regularly through monthly calls with the project team. Additionally, monitoring is performed during the annual roundtable meeting with the participation of all project stakeholders.

M&E is carried out by all partners together, and has been integrated into project activities via social and ecological surveys, which were carried out during from Y1 to now. Some analyses have been captured in project reports, others submitted for publication at peer-reviewed journals (there have so far been two peer reviewed publications associated with the project specifically). Information is shared between partners via secure central shared files, curated by project coordinators.

¹ A Project Board has overall authority for the project, is accountable for its success or failure, and supports the senior project manager to successfully deliver the project.

² Partners that have formal governance role in the project, and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities.

Additional M&E activities specific to our project outputs include records of training delivered to UKG/MNR and Kazakh collaborators (no net loss biodiversity approaches). Our expected timeline for protected area designation (see Output 2) changed considerably, meaning that we have revised the timeline now for monitoring purposes.

Ongoing progress monitoring has been supported by the explicit Theory of Change refined at the project roundtable in February 2022 (with critical milestones, roles and responsibilities and stakeholders mapped out). Progress against the Theory of Change and milestones is assessed on a regular basis by the project team during all-partner meetings; the last was in September 2023, which will be revisited during the 'end of project' meeting / roundtable in July 2024.

8. Lessons learnt

A key challenge in this final year has been the length of time it has taken to make payments to some project partners, for a combination of reasons: changing bank details/addresses in Uzbekistan resulted in payments not going through, and sanctions on Russian institutions due to the war in Ukraine may have led to cash transfer issues where Uzbek institutions use Russian intermediaries. These are not all issues that could have been foreseen, and are challenging to manage – but in future we will likely plan for longer payment times with partners (from the perspective of their own cashflow on project deliverables), as well as budgeting for a specific project management resource. Note that some Change Requests have been submitted and approved in relation to these issues.

9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Overall, the project partners were pleased with the review of the previous years' report (and that this "is an important and very worthwhile project that addresses ecological and economic degradation in the Aral Sea region of Uzbekistan"). The reviewer seemed to broadly agree with our assessment of the progress made, and we appreciated the score given (2, 'Likely to be largely achieved').

In terms of responding to specific requests raised by the reviewer:

1. The project provides some useful evidence, but evidence related to its ecological and biodiversity surveys would be welcome in the next annual report.

We include in the appendices/evidence some headline results from these surveys, which are also published in relevant publications (e.g. Saiga News).

2. The project reports that it is working increasingly closely with industrial and government partners, which is very important, given that development in the areas appears to be accelerating, for example new areas of gas exploration and new proposals for energy projects. Are there opportunities for more green energy alternatives in the area?

Yes this is all correct, and as discussed there is a movement now towards wind energy projects. These are a focus of our current engagement with industry and government for mitigation of biodiversity impacts, alongside energy transitions.

3. The project should comment on how its current work supports gender equality and social inclusion.

As stated above, our project has prioritized efforts to promote equity for women and marginalized groups. This has been achieved through targeted interventions aimed at promoting women's leadership and empowerment in the project region, and providing equal access to project benefits and opportunities. For example, special training programs and support services have been implemented to enhance the participation and capacity of women and marginalized groups in project activities which include tourism training and homestays. A majority of our professional project partners are female, including in academia and industry. Further, our project employed a female Uzbek research assistant who used the opportunity to secure a PhD programme.

- The reviewer urges the project to address risk management in its next report. Darwin encourages existing projects to develop a risk register for their project; the template can be found on the reporting page of the Darwin website.

Done, see section below ('no response needed' here)

- A change request submitted to Darwin still considers GosComEcology as part of the project, although the focus of their contribution has changed. This should be clarified.

We thank the reviewer for noting this, which has been clarified in subsequent reporting and Change Requests.

10. Risk Management

A new risk register has been developed for the project, and this accompanies the report.

10. Sustainability and legacy

As part of the project's open access plan, several actions have been implemented to ensure transparency and accessibility of project information and resources. These include the establishment of an online repository for project documents, reports, and data, accessible to stakeholders and the public on the RI project website hosted by the University of Oxford.

Key elements of securing legacy from the project are currently: sustainability of livelihood interventions (piloted, with technical support and coaching no in place); establishment of the new protected area (now complete, with the BAP being written); incorporation of NNL principles into major development projects (achieved for two, with others being engaged now); and, facilitation of a community of practice among environmental professionals in Uzbekistan (in progress; final meeting with community of practice has been designed into the project end meeting in July 2024). We continue to make substantive progress in all of these areas.

Finally, we have worked hard to further secure the transboundary relationship with collaborators in Kazakhstan, as an element of leaving a legacy from the project – technical meetings were completed in late 2023, and online training sessions in early 2024. Our colleagues in Kazakhstan have suggested further engagement sessions with practitioners, which we are considering for late 2024 (following the current Darwin project).

11. Darwin Initiative identity

The project consistently shares updates and events on its Facebook page, catering to a diverse audience by posting content in three languages: English, Russian (widely spoken throughout Central Asia), and Uzbek (the official national language of Uzbekistan, the project's implementation country). Furthermore, the project maintains an official website where all logos, including the Darwin Initiative logo, are prominently displayed.

The Darwin Initiative project and logo is also acknowledged in project technical outputs, which includes the peer-reviewed publications now available based on project activities.

12. Safeguarding

Has your Safeguarding Policy been updated in the past 12 months?	No
Have any concerns been investigated in the past 12 months	No
Does your project have a Safeguarding focal point?	No
Has the focal point attended any formal training in the last 12 months?	n/a

What proportion (and number) of project staff have received formal training on Safeguarding?	Past: 100% [12] (safeguarding session at previous roundtables) Planned: 0% [0]
Has there been any lessons learnt or challenges on Safeguarding in the past 12 months? Please ensure no sensitive data is included within responses.	No
Does the project have any developments or activities planned around Safeguarding in the coming 12 months? If so please specify.	N/A (project ends in July 2024)
Please describe any community sensitisation that has taken place over the past 12 months; include topics covered and number of participants.	N/A
Have there been any concerns around Health, Safety and Security of your project over the past year? If yes, please outline how this was resolved.	No

13. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2023/24 Grant (£)	2023/24 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs				Due to reductions in NI and internal pension contributions.
Consultancy costs				Increase agreed through Change Request and balances reductions elsewhere
Overhead Costs				Caused by the staff costs variance.
Travel and subsistence				Costs for field expeditions lower than anticipated
Operating Costs				Need for equipment lower than anticipated
Capital items				-
Others				Transaction costs I original budget (with Kent as lead), absorbed by Oxford
TOTAL	169,441.90	122,823.41		

11. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

N/A.

12. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes.

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds to edit and use the following for various promotional purposes.

Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against logframe for Financial Year 2023-2024

Project summary	Progress and Achievements April 2023 - March 2024	Actions required/planned for next period
<p>Impact</p> <p>Sustainable economic development of the Aral region is being realised via collaboration between residents, government, and industry; positively transforming residents' wellbeing, whilst protecting highly threatened Uzbek biodiversity</p>	<p>Zoning complete and official for the "Aralkum" protected area. PA management plan drafted and now in revision</p> <p>Extensive capacity building implemented on sustainable alternative livelihood options linked to biodiversity. New ecotourism routes developed and piloted</p> <p>Multiple training sessions on biodiversity impact mitigation measures for industry, including with collaborators in Kazakhstan.</p>	
<p>Outcome Resurrection Island is on the path to protected status. New sustainable livelihood options have been piloted, aligning residents' wellbeing with biodiversity conservation. Regional industrial biodiversity impact mitigation practices have improved</p>		
<p>Outcome indicator 0.1</p> <p>Official documentation submitted to the relevant authorities and under consideration, by the end of Y3, concerning awarding protected area status to Resurrection Island (with designation targeted for 2025), as part of a wider landscape-scale network of important cultural and ecological sites</p>	<p>Protected area zoned and finalised; PA management plan drafted and in revision</p>	<p>Finalise management and monitoring plan for PA</p>
<p>Outcome indicator 0.2</p> <p>Monitored Resurrection Island-associated saiga antelope population stable or increasing from a baseline of ~50 individuals, from 2021/22 onwards</p>	<p>Saiga antelope and other species surveys performed (May 2023, September 2023). Limited signs of poaching, and population appears to persist for now, likely >100 individuals</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Outcome indicator 0.3</p> <p>Two major economic development projects in the Ustyurt incorporate a 'no net loss or better for biodiversity' objective into biodiversity action plans</p>	<p>Consulted on biodiversity action planning with UzKorGaz. Collaboration with SANEG (O&G) on zoning for the PA.</p>	<p>Explore options to connect with new wind power development projects proposed in the region.</p>
<p>Outcome indicator 0.4</p> <p>Relevant local business development has been facilitated and novel livelihood opportunities focused on tourism and traditional craft production have been initiated (at least 4 distinct livelihood initiatives each piloted across multiple households by end Y3)</p>	<p>Developed, trialled, and promoted new eco-tourism routes in the Aral-kum. Continued with training programme, and supported household pilots</p>	<p>Continue to support and promote household pilots, including on legacy website</p>

<p>Outcome indicator 0.5</p> <p>Residents in Muynak and Kyrk Kyz report (through surveys of ~5% of the population of both towns) that they place a significantly increased value on regional biodiversity compared to Y1 baseline (Y3)</p>	<p>Outcomes of Y1 surveys now published in scientific literature. Final year surveys completed, data analyses underway.</p>	<p>Finalise survey analyses, complete report, make available online.</p>
<p>Outcome indicator 0.6</p> <p>Project outcomes incorporated in the regional strategy for Karakalpakstan Autonomous Region (end Y3)</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>Karakalpak regional government joining final project roundtable and community of practice.</p>
<p>Outcome indicator 0.7</p> <p>Landscape-level scale-up potential being realised through engagement with collaborators in Kazakhstan</p>	<p>Training sessions for Kazakhstan practitioners provided (and recorded) in early 2024.</p>	<p>Receive report on training sessions from partners, make recordings available online.</p>
<p>Output 1 New small-scale local operators establish businesses based on regional cultural and ecological values, such that residents place increased value on sites of cultural and natural interest</p>		
<p>Output indicator 1.1</p> <p>Cultural and ecological tourism opportunities and constraints, and market analysis, are described in a publicly available report (by end of Q2 Y2). Suggested business opportunities will be based partly on the results of Y1 social surveys (analysed and published), capturing approximately 5% of the population of the towns of Muynak and Kyrk Kyz (by end Y2)</p>	<p>Y1 social surveys completed, report finalised, related scientific study now published in the peer-reviewed literature.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Output indicator 1.2</p> <p>Skills training provided for at least 25 residents enabling work as tourism operators in the Aral Sea & Eastern Ustyurt region (end of Y2)</p>	<p>Multiple training sessions delivered in up to 2024, reports available on project website or being finalised. Final number trained over the course of project = 75</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Output indicator 1.3</p> <p>First tourists, engaged through project activities (and associated new operators) visit Resurrection Island itself (end of Y3). Overall target = during Y3, approximately double the average annual number of tourists to the Ustyurt between 2018-2020 (~3000 foreign, 7000 domestic) are recorded.</p>	<p>Comparable data not available, being sought for final project report. However, for foreign and local bookings through tour firms known to the project: (Before Last Info Tour) Foreign tourists=7 and Local tourists=16; (After the Info Tour) Foreign tourists=157 and Local tourists=325.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Output indicator 1.4</p> <p>At least 10 new households in the Ustyurt begin producing traditional crafts for sale (end Y3)</p>		<p>n/a</p>

	Total number = 3; but given the recent increases (see previous row) we expect demand for these services to increase.	
Output indicator 1.5 At least 20 households in the region begin offering new homestay accommodation (end Y3)	Total number = 10	
Output indicator 1.6 In surveys, residents report significantly higher evaluation of the social and economic value of regional biodiversity (Y3 compared to Y1)	Y3 survey completed, data currently being analysed.	Finalise and publish results to confirm progress against output indicator.
Output 2. Resurrection Island on its way to becoming a fully resourced protected area		
Output indicator 2.1. By the end of Y1, production of a detailed timeline capturing all steps required to designate the Island as a PA, alongside a similarly documented organogram (designated roles and responsibilities for project partners and other stakeholders). Timeline / organogram to include all relevant activities undertaken during the remainder of project (Y2-Y3) and those to be taken afterwards by collaborators, up to PA designation expected in 2025/26	Due to the creation of the Aralkum national park ahead of schedule, we have proceeded further than originally planned. Final zoning for PA now agreed. PA management plan drafted and being revised	Finalise PA management plan
Output indicator 2.2. Production of the specific set of proposal documents (= 7 required 'Appendices' on protected area establishment: GIS map on borders and zones; Regulations on the state reserve; Staff; Borders description; Regulations on nuclear zone; Regulations on buffer zone; and, Area of land plots provided for reserve) required to commence the formal application for protected area designation for Resurrection Island (end of Y2)	Final version of GIS map on borders and zones now complete. Relevant flora and fauna surveys have been carried out. Management plan being finalized.	Finalise PA management plan
Output indicator 2.3. Monitored saiga antelope population stable at ~50 animals (end Y3), on track to recover to >100 animals in Uzbekistan from 2026	Latest population estimates suggest recovery to >100 saigas in Uzbekistan	n/a
Output indicator 2.4. Two additional threatened species which are listed by CITES (1 x animal, 1 x vascular plant) selected, by project partners, to monitor at Resurrection Island alongside saigas (start of Y1).	Additionally monitored by project team and partners: globally threatened Imperial Eagle, Central Asian tortoise; nationally threatened Caracal, Golden Eagle and Flamingo; species	Finalise reports into status of all indicators.

Monitored populations of these two species also shown to be stable from Y1-Y3 (to test assumption that saigas provide a good umbrella species)	listed on CITES Asian steppe cat and Eagle owl; Asian badger and Tolai hare. <i>Calligonum aphyllum</i> + <i>Eromosporion aphyllum</i> and <i>Eromosporion aphyllum</i> + <i>Astragalus brachypus</i> plant communities selected for ongoing monitoring	
Output indicator 2.5. Protection of the Island commenced, and evidence of poaching reduced from baseline (pre-project) levels, over the course of the project (Y1-Y3)	Protected status implemented from 2022. Poaching being monitored, and remain low rates	Support efforts to finalise management plan for PA, then set up and resource it
Output 3. Industry and government ensure wider biodiversity impacts of new development projects are effectively mitigated, as part of a broader sustainable development agenda		
Output indicator 3.1. Two major ongoing development projects (UKG expansion activities, and the relevant section of the upgraded A380 highway) incorporate language of 'no net less or better for biodiversity' into action plans by end Y3	Both projects currently incorporate language of 'no net loss' into their respective biodiversity actions plans	Explore options to support NNL for third project (wind farm development)
Output indicator 3.2. Detailed Biodiversity Action Plans for those developments designed and implemented to meet 'no net less or better' commitment, including measures to support saiga antelope conservation (end Y3)	Both projects currently incorporate commitment to 'no net loss' into their respective biodiversity actions plans, and contain measures targeted at saiga antelope	Explore options to support NNL for third project (wind farm development)
Output indicator 3.3. Training in 'no net less or better' approaches delivered to at least 50 Uzbek professionals and materials made available to industry and government (Y1/2)	'No net loss' training now delivered to > 55 Uzbek professionals in this space. Materials translated into Russian, and shared with these stakeholders	Confirm availability of materials on legacy website at final meeting with community of practice (July 2024)
Output indicator 3.4. Biodiversity goals for industrial developments linked with other efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals at the Regional and National government levels (project end)	Project team members participating in national strategy to implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework	n/a
Output indicator 3.5. Training and materials regarding biodiversity impact mitigation towards 'no net loss or better' given in Kazakhstan (Y1) and landscape-level sustainable development plans under consideration (Y3)	Training for Kazakh colleagues delivered in early 2024, and well received.	Report on Kazakh training forthcoming, and recordings will be made available online.

Annex 2: Project’s full current logframe as presented in the application form (unless changes have been agreed)

Project Summary	Measurable Indicators	Means of Verification	Important Assumptions
<p>Impact: Sustainable economic development of the Aral region is being realised via collaboration between residents, government, and industry; positively transforming residents’ wellbeing, whilst protecting highly threatened Uzbek biodiversity.</p>			
<p>Outcome: Resurrection Island is on the path to protected status. New sustainable livelihood options have been piloted, aligning residents’ wellbeing with biodiversity conservation. Regional industrial biodiversity impact mitigation practices have improved.</p>	<p>0.1 Official documentation submitted to the relevant authorities and under consideration, by the end of Y3, concerning awarding protected area status to Resurrection Island (with designation targeted for 2025), as part of a wider landscape-scale network of important cultural and ecological sites</p> <p>0.2 Monitored Resurrection Island-associated saiga antelope population stable or increasing from a baseline of ~50 individuals, from 2021/22 onwards</p> <p>0.3 Two major economic development projects in the Ustyurt incorporate a ‘no net loss or better for biodiversity’ objective into biodiversity action plans</p> <p>0.4 Relevant local business development has been facilitated and novel livelihood opportunities focused on tourism and traditional craft production have been initiated (at least 4 distinct livelihood initiatives each</p>	<p>0.1 Protected area proposal documentation including justification, management plan and species/habitat distribution maps, made publicly available via project website</p> <p>0.2 Longitudinal saiga antelope monitoring data, published through reports in the SCA newsletter and in peer-reviewed analyses</p> <p>0.3 Stated in relevant project documentation (Biodiversity Action Plans) and on individual corporate partner project websites</p> <p>0.4 Contact database of individuals, register of relevant operators (at least 55 total), new websites to promote these goods/services to international markets, and photographs of pilot activities in action (published in the grey literature by project partners)</p> <p>0.5 Repeated social surveys of resident perspectives on biodiversity, data trends analysed and results published</p>	<p>Any potential conflicts between protected area in the region and development priorities (e.g. resource extraction) can be effectively mitigated. Policy-makers are willing to engage with the project. These assumptions all hold on the basis of discussion with relevant parties (see Letter of Support).</p> <p>Saiga antelope will not be extirpated from Uzbekistan, either through human activities or mass die-off. Saiga antelope will return to the area and rebound in population size if given the right support (including that the transboundary migratory pathway across Aral sea bed remains open). Saiga population on Resurrection Island requires protection, and our project’s activities will lead to that protection being given. All of the above are consistent with findings from our previous research in the region.</p> <p>Industrial private sector partners remain willing to engage on project work. Private sector development will continue, an appetite for biodiversity impact mitigation exists, and decisions can be made on a</p>

	<p>piloted across multiple households by end Y3)</p> <p>0.5 Residents in Muynak and Kyrk Kyz report (through surveys of ~5% of the population of both towns) that they place a significantly increased value on regional biodiversity compared to Y1 baseline (Y3)</p> <p>0.6 Project outcomes incorporated in the regional strategy for Karakalpakstan Autonomous Region (end Y3)</p> <p>0.7 Landscape-level scale-up potential being realised through engagement with collaborators in Kazakhstan</p>	<p>in the peer-reviewed scientific literature (at least 2 articles in review/in press by Y3)</p> <p>0.6 Mention of biodiversity impact mitigation for industry (towards 'no net loss') and sustainable nature-based tourism in the Regional Strategy (by end Y3)</p> <p>0.7 Training given in biodiversity impact mitigation in Kazakhstan (Y1/2), documentation of planning for transboundary protection and livelihood scale-up taking place between project team and ADCI (Y3)</p>	<p>timescale that will allow meaningful progress on this over the timescale of the project. Private sector partners have already committed to the proposed project, so we are sure these assumptions will hold.</p> <p>Small local businesses existing or there is willingness to initiate them. People willing to engage with project. Market potentially exists for international eco-tourism to the region and purchase of crafts from the region. Uzbekistan remains economically and politically stable. One local operator has already come on board as a project partner, and our pilot surveys, previous projects and discussions with stakeholders indicate a strong willingness to engage.</p> <p>Ustyurt residents willing to participate in repeated attitude surveys. Residents do not currently consider living biodiversity to have economic value (i.e. if they do already, then they are unlikely to place <i>increasing</i> value on biodiversity). Residents are positively disposed towards in-country researchers, and are willing to engage. All of the above are consistent with findings in the 2020 pilot surveys and with partners' due to their long engagement in the region.</p>
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<p>Outputs:</p> <p>1. New small-scale local operators establish businesses based on regional cultural and ecological values, such that residents place increased value on sites of cultural and natural interest</p>	<p>1.1 Cultural and ecological tourism opportunities and constraints, and market analysis, are described in a publicly available report (by end of Q2 Y2). Suggested business opportunities will be based partly on the results of Y1 social surveys (analysed and published), capturing approximately 5% of the population of the towns of Muynak and Kyrk Kyz (by end Y2)</p> <p>1.2 Skills training provided for at least 25 residents enabling work as tourism operators in the Aral Sea & Eastern Ustyurt region (end of Y2)</p> <p>1.3 First tourists, engaged through project activities (and associated new operators) visit Resurrection Island itself (end of Y3). Overall target = during Y3, approximately double the average annual number of tourists to the Ustyurt between</p>	<p>1.1 Specific market report (published document) into the feasibility and opportunities for tourism and traditional crafts in the Aral region provided to MTCH and published on the Darwin project website (Y2); survey analyses published in the peer-reviewed literature (Y3)</p> <p>1.2 Training materials, certified attendance, operator documentation, photographs of training in action – all included on operator project websites and an article in SCA newsletter (Y3)</p> <p>1.3 Photographs of first tourist trips to the Island published on operator websites and by the Uzbek Tourism Ambassador, and a story on the trips included in SCA newsletter as well as publicised through project team social media channels (Y3)</p> <p>1.4 A list of participating households and individuals, along with</p>	<p>Small scale tourism operators existing or in development. People willing to engage with project. Assumptions confirmed in 2020 pilot studies, and one such operator (MOO) already engaged.</p> <p>Market potentially exists for domestic and international tourism to the region. Sufficient market exists for Uzbek-produced small-scale cultural crafts. Evidence in both cases provided via previous projects and the pilot surveys, and through discussions with MTCH (Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage) and Uzbek Tourism Ambassador,</p> <p>Uzbekistan remains economically and politically stable. The country has essentially been stable since the fall of the Soviet Union and has recently been liberalising.</p> <p>Aral Sea and Eastern Ustyurt region residents willing to participate in repeated attitude surveys. Residents do not currently consider living</p>

	<p>2018-2020 (~3000 foreign, 7000 domestic) are recorded.</p> <p>1.4 At least 10 new households in the Ustyurt begin producing traditional crafts for sale (end Y3)</p> <p>1.5 At least 20 households in the region begin offering new homestay accommodation (end Y3)</p> <p>1.6 In surveys, residents report significantly higher evaluation of the social and economic value of regional biodiversity (Y3 compared to Y1).</p>	<p>photographs of sample products for sale, retained by the project team. Selected participant vignettes published online in designated website, along with a full list of products available for purchase (Y3)</p> <p>1.5 List of participating households provided through designated website, availability to book homestays online (Y3)</p> <p>1.6 Repeated surveys of resident perspectives on biodiversity, trends analysed and results published in the peer-reviewed literature (combined with 1.1 above), end Y3.</p>	<p>biodiversity to have economic value (i.e. if they do already, then they are unlikely to place <i>increasing</i> value on biodiversity). Residents have a good perception of researchers. These assumptions are all supported by the 2020 pilot studies and long-term previous engagement.</p>
<p>2. Resurrection Island on the way to becoming a fully resourced protected area</p>	<p>2.1 By the end of Y1, production of a detailed timeline capturing all steps required to designate the Island as a PA, alongside a similarly documented organogram (designated roles and responsibilities for project partners and other stakeholders). Timeline / organogram to include all relevant activities undertaken during the remainder of project (Y2-Y3) and those to be taken afterwards by collaborators, up to PA designation expected in 2025/26.</p> <p>2.2 Production of the specific set of proposal documents (= 7</p>	<p>2.1 Documented protected area designation timeline and organogram made publicly available through central project website</p> <p>2.2 All protected area proposal documents made available via central project website</p> <p>2.3 Saiga antelope monitoring data, published through SCA and in the peer-reviewed literature (as part of the broader Resurrection Island ecological surveys, and published separately to the social survey findings)</p>	<p>Conflicts between protected area in the region and development priorities (e.g. resource extraction) can be effectively mitigated. Policy-makers remain willing to engage with the project. This is borne out by our discussions with the relevant authorities, and Letter of Support.</p> <p>Saiga antelopes act as an effective and representative umbrella species for the broader biodiversity of the Ustyurt and Aral region (note: this assumption will be partly tested via indicator 2.4).</p> <p>Saiga antelopes not extirpated from the Ustyurt, either through human activities or mass die-off. Saiga</p>

	<p>required 'Appendices' on protected area establishment: GIS map on borders and zones; Regulations on the state reserve; Staff; Borders description; Regulations on nuclear zone; Regulations on buffer zone; and, Area of land plots provided for reserve) required to commence the formal application for protected area designation for Resurrection Island (end of Y2)</p> <p>2.3 Monitored saiga antelope population stable at ~50 animals (end Y3), on track to recover to >100 animals in Uzbekistan from 2026</p> <p>2.4 Two additional threatened species which are listed by CITES (1 x animal, 1 x vascular plant) selected, by project partners, to monitor at Resurrection Island alongside saigas (start of Y1). Monitored populations of these two species also shown to be stable from Y1-Y3 (to test assumption that saigas provide a good umbrella species)</p> <p>2.5 Protection of the Island commenced, and evidence of poaching reduced from baseline (pre-project) levels, over the course of the project (Y1-Y3)</p>	<p>2.4 Additional species monitoring data, published through SCA and in the peer-reviewed literature (as part of the broader Resurrection Island ecological surveys, and published separately to the social survey findings) (in review/in press by end Y3)</p> <p>2.5 Annual reports to project team by MNR of activities by their rangers and inspection teams on the Island and surrounding areas; reports of poaching signs, interceptions and any arrests from MNR rangers; SCA independent surveys of poaching signs and social survey results published as internal documents and in peer-reviewed paper (Y1,Y3).</p>	<p>antelope will return to the area and rebound in population size if given the right support (including that migratory pathway remains open). This is evidenced by recent (last 2 years) camera trap footage of saigas in this area.</p> <p>Saiga population recently observed by IoZ ecologists on Resurrection Island requires protection, and creation of a protected area will offer that protection.</p> <p>MNR willing and able to step up protection before full designation in order to protect the saiga population. Poaching rates decline based on this enforcement and based on improved valuation by local residents of the biodiversity of the Island (therefore shifting social norms). Assumption seems likely to hold because MNR are committed to this project and already have the authority to arrest potential poachers in the area (political will has not been there up until now; indications are that this project would galvanise them). SCA's experience with local residents has been positive and indications are that poaching would decline if alternative opportunities became available and if enforcement were put in place.</p>
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<p>3. Industry and government ensure wider biodiversity impacts of new development projects are effectively mitigated, as part of a broader sustainable development agenda</p>	<p>3.1 Two major ongoing development projects (UKG expansion activities, and the relevant section of the upgraded A380 highway) incorporate language of 'no net less or better for biodiversity' into action plans by end Y3</p> <p>3.2 Detailed Biodiversity Action Plans for those developments designed and implemented to meet 'no net less or better' commitment, including measures to support saiga antelope conservation (end Y3)</p> <p>3.3 Training in 'no net less or better' approaches delivered to at least 50 Uzbek professionals and materials made available to industry and government (Y1/2)</p> <p>3.4 Biodiversity goals for industrial developments linked with other efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals at the Regional and National government levels (project end)</p> <p>3.5 Training and materials regarding biodiversity impact mitigation towards 'no net loss or better' given in Kazakhstan (Y1) and landscape-level sustainable development plans under consideration (Y3).</p>	<p>3.1 Stated in relevant corporate project documentation (Biodiversity Action Plans) which is searchable in the public domain. Independent review of measures developed by member of the IUCN thematic group on Impact Mitigation and Ecological Compensation), and case study included on the 'Conservation Hierarchy' website.</p> <p>3.2 Stated in relevant case study project Biodiversity Action Plans, with specific mention of concrete (quantitative and timebound) measures for promoting saiga conservation</p> <p>3.3 The set of training materials developed for this purpose, the list of attendees at training sessions. Exit survey of attendees to judge their perceived utility of the training.</p> <p>3.4 Biodiversity conservation activities framed in relation to part of SDG 15 ('Life on Land') in case study project documentation and in regional and national government strategic documents</p> <p>3.5 The set of training materials developed for this purpose, the list of attendees at training</p>	<p>Industrial private sector partners remain willing to engage on project work. Private sector development will continue, an appetite for biodiversity impact mitigation exists, and decisions can be made on a timescale that will allow meaningful progress on this over the timescale of the project.</p> <p>Uzbek and Kazakh government officials, environmental consultants and planners remain keen to engage on no net less or better approaches, and will attend training sessions. Based on previous training sessions (given by PI and organised by UNDP in 2013) there is a strong unfulfilled appetite for this capacity-building.</p>
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		sessions. Exit survey of attendees to judge their perceived utility of the training.	
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Activities (each activity is numbered according to the output that it will contribute towards, for example 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are contributing to Output 1)

Output 1: Local businesses established based on cultural and ecological values

- 1.1 Social surveys performed to elicit resident livelihood preferences and attitudes to biodiversity, completed for ~5% of the population of Muynak and Kyrk Kyz
- 1.2a Quantitative market analysis carried out on the economic feasibility of different aspects of tourism expansion, accommodation provision, traditional craft, and other alternative livelihoods for the Ustyurt
- 1.2b Develop the technological infrastructure necessary to promote tourism, craft products and homestays (i.e. web presence, online shopping capability)
- 1.3 Skills training and coaching for at least 25 individuals to work in regional tourism as e.g. guides/operators
- 1.4 Drawing upon surveys and market analysis, work with at least 10 households to agree a shortlist of traditional craft products that those households can begin to produce. Identify logistical routes for taking those products to market
- 1.5 Identify and confirm a list of at least 20 Ustyurt households (with contacts) that will provide homestay accommodation to visitors, and provide coaching as part of agreeing the details of the homestay offer
- 1.6. Social surveys to assess changing attitudes to biodiversity and to sustainable livelihoods as a result of project activities

Output 2: Resurrection Island on its way to becoming a fully resourced protected area

- 2.1a Draft the set of documentation ('7 Appendices' listed in the log frame) legally required for the designation of a protected area in Uzbekistan, for Resurrection Island. Publish through our newly created central Darwin project website
- 2.1b Through project stakeholder consultation, draft a medium-term management plan for a protected area on Resurrection Island and include estimated costings
- 2.2 Submit necessary documentation, and agree timeline plus organogram (with roles and responsibilities) for the process towards designation of the protected area.
- 2.3a Flora and fauna field surveys of Resurrection Island, to map the distribution and abundance of multiple species, including saiga antelope and others (e.g. steppe tortoise)
- 2.3b Satellite imagery analyses to determine habitat and land use trajectories on the Island over the course of the last two decades
- 2.4 Camera trapping surveys of Resurrection Island, to capture presence/absence of any other low density and potentially threatened species (e.g. goitered gazelle)
- 2.5. Field surveys of poaching signs and social surveys on changing attitudes to poaching (amalgamated with activities 1.1, 1.6)

Output 3: Industry ensures wider biodiversity impacts of new development projects are effectively mitigated

- 3.1 Building on the high level (i.e. coarse resolution) mapping exercise performed via the separate Whitley Award project, and via stakeholder consultation (MNR, UKG and A380), create a detailed map and description of current and planned infrastructure development in the Ustyurt and Aral region

- 3.2 Review any current development case study project documentation including action plans relating to environmental impacts, and (drawing upon good international practice and project team technical expertise) propose a set of biodiversity impacts mitigation measures for inclusion – guided by a ‘no net loss or better’ principle
- 3.3a Identify a community of practice of at least 50 Uzbek environmental consultants, planners and impact assessors (including those who are seeking to enter this field)
- 3.3b Develop and provide training on biodiversity impact mitigation to this community of practice, illustrated using the case studies (see 3.2)
- 3.3c On our Darwin project website, include a page with information on those individuals trained in good practice biodiversity impact mitigation and available to consult on future development projects in Uzbekistan, for dissemination to the projects team’s professional network of international consultants advising on Uzbek developments
- 3.4 Technical input on the inclusion of ‘no net loss’ principles into the Karakalpak regional development strategy (see Letter of Support from the Karakalpak Council of Ministers)
- 3.5a Provide training to biodiversity impact mitigation practitioners in Kazakhstan
- 3.5b Workshop with ADCI collaborators on planning for transboundary scale-up of landscape-level sustainable development plans (including tourism, ecological connectedness, livelihood enhancement for residents, industrial biodiversity impact mitigation)

Annex 3: Standard Indicators

Table 1 Project Standard Indicators

Code No.	Description	Gender of people (if relevant)	Nationality of people (if relevant)	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
6A	Training on implementation of NNL biodiversity approaches	~50% M/F	Primarily Uzbek	34	128	30	192	50
7	Training on implementation of NNL biodiversity approaches. Lectures, handouts, slides, further reading materials	~50% M/F	Primarily Uzbek	4	4	2	10	~10
9	Biodiversity Action Plans	n/a	n/a	2	2	1	3	2
11b	Results of research activities (natural and social sciences)	Primarily F	Primarily Uzbek nationals as lead authors	0	2	1	3	3
14A	Annual project roundtable for wider stakeholders	n/a	n/a	1	1	1	3	3
14B	Presenting scientific outcomes at international conservation conferences	Primarily F	Primarily Uzbek nationals as lead authors	0	1	2	3	3
20	Field research equipment (camera traps, laptops, tents, sleeping bags)	n/a	n/a	tbd	tbd	tbd	tbd	tbd
23	In-kind support and co-funding (SCA, UoK, now UoO)	n/a	n/a	tbd	tbd	tbd	tbd	255286

DI Indicator number	Name of indicator	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
E.g. DI-A01	E.g. Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training	People	Men	20			20	60
E.g. DI-A01	E.g. Number of people in eligible countries who have completed structured and relevant training	People	Women	30			30	60
E.g. DI-B01	E.g. Number of new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed	Number	New	1			1	2
E.g. DI-B01	E.g. Number of new or improved habitat management plans available and endorsed	Number	Improved	1			1	3

Table 2 Publications

Title	Type (e.g. journals, best practice manual, blog post, online videos, podcasts, CDs)	Detail (authors, year)	Gender of Lead Author	Nationality of Lead Author	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. weblink or publisher if not available online)
SCA RI project flyer	Flyer	IoZ, SCA, DICE (2021)	F	Uzbek andUK	SCA, UK	
Project one-pager	One-pager	RI		Uzbek andUK	UK	
Market analyses report		B.Mammetova, N.Shaabasova	F	Uzbek	Market analyses report	
Social survey report		O. Esipova	F	Uzbek	Social survey report	
Other project reports?	Report on birdwatching development, Report on flora, RI	T. Abduraupov H. Shomuradov	M	Uzbek		
Review of NbS in the project area	Research paper	S. Alikhanova, 2023	F	Uzbek	<i>Environmental Management journal</i>	Weblink

Title	Type (e.g. journals, best practice manual, blog post, online videos, podcasts, CDs)	Detail (authors, year)	Gender of Lead Author	Nationality of Lead Author	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. weblink or publisher if not available online)
Social survey with respect to natural resources management	Research paper	S. Alikhanova, 2024	F	Uzbek	<i>Land Use Policy</i> journal	Weblink

Annex 4: Onwards – supplementary material (optional but encouraged as evidence of project achievement)

- 0.1 September 2023 project roundtable agenda
- 0.2 September 2023 project roundtable example materials
- 0.3 Draft July 2024 project roundtable agenda
- 0.4 Press for Uzbek GNB policy
- 0.5 Roundtable for Uzbek GNB policy
- 0.6 Journal article (Alikhanova et al) nature-based solutions in drylands
- 1.1 Ecotourism training program
- 1.2 Ecotourism training participation list
- 1.3 Eco-tour pilot programme
- 1.4 Ecotourism training program and agenda
- 1.5 Eco-tourism biodiversity impacts training agenda
- 1.6 Eco-tourism biodiversity impacts training materials
- 1.7 Ecotourism homestay training program
- 1.8 Journal article (Alikhanova et al) social survey outcomes
- 2.1 Approved PA including zoning
- 2.2 Summary information flora and fauna surveys
- 2.3 Summary information flora and fauna surveys
- 2.4 Internal report, RI ecology field trips
- 3.1 Industry biodiversity training agenda
- 3.2 Industry biodiversity training materials
- 3.3 Kazakh biodiversity training materials
- 3.4 UKG BAP comments
- 3.5 Letter concerning biodiversity and wind farm developments

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	✓
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to BCF-Reports@niras.com putting the project number in the Subject line.	✓
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please discuss with BCF-Reports@niras.com about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line.	✓
Have you included means of verification? You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	✓
If you are submitting photos for publicity purposes, do these meet the outlined requirements (see Section 16)?	✓
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	✓
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	✓
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	