Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Aibat Muzbay
Project Title	Research on vegetation composition and biomass production in the Ural (Kazakhstan) steppe ecosystem for the solution of Human-Wildlife conflict
Application ID	39938-1
Date of this Report	25.12.2024

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

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
To study the ongoing conflict between humans and saigas			+	Ongoing conflict between the farmers and the saiga antelope has been assessed. Reasons why local communities are complaining to saigas and their view on the carrying capacity of the regions were taken into an account during the development of recommendations to decision makers. **Focus on chapters: 6.1**
To determine the causes of the conflict/complaints from the local population regarding saigas			+	To identify the causes assessment of the conflict several interviews were done with the local communities. Also, questionnaires were developed and delivered to local administrations **Focus on chapters: 7.2**
To identify areas with an available biomass as a fodder source for the saiga and livestock		+		Unfortunately, due to increasing numbers of the livestock and uncontrolled grazing it was not possible to collect the biomass at the second year. However, with the initial data vegetation map of the region was produced. It is planned to collect biomass production data next year. **Focus on chapters: 6.4**
To identify primary data materials for developing recommendations for decision-makers in the Republic of Kazakhstan			+	Despite to the failure in biomass assessment there were enough data collected to develop initial recommendations for decision makers in Kazakhstan. **Focus on chapters: 8**

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

a) First, we observed the ongoing human-wildlife conflict in the Ural region and assessed complaints from local communities. Using their feedback, we developed strategies to guide further research implementation. Additionally, we amplified the voices of local farmers by presenting their concerns at the highest level, specifically at CMS COP 14. During a side event organized at CMS COP 14 in Uzbekistan, we successfully engaged experts from both the scientific and governmental sectors in developing effective solutions.

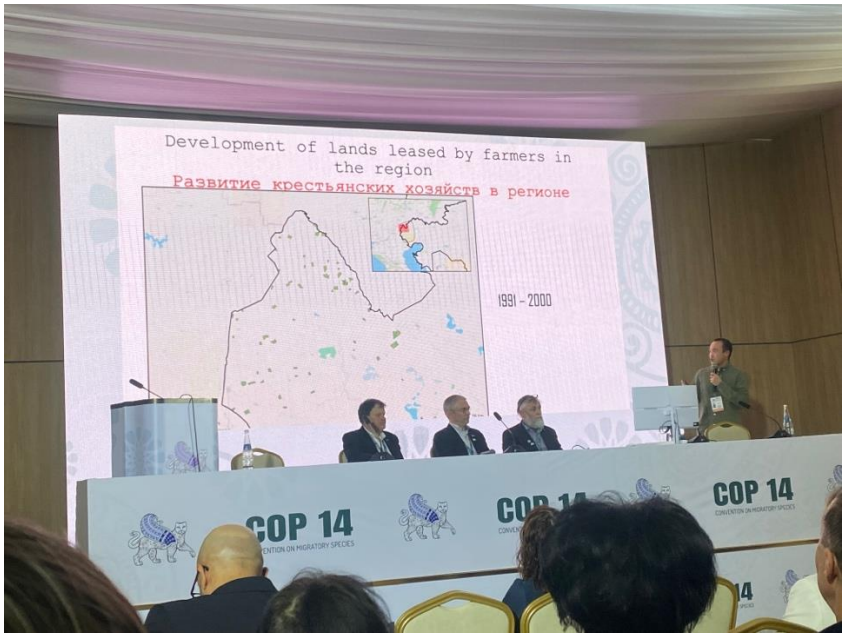

Figure 1. Presentation of the project interim results at the CMS COP 14 in Samarkand with the NABU team (from left: Thomas Tennhardt, Stefan Michel, Til Dieterich, Aibat Muzbay)

b) We demonstrated to both local and state decision-makers how ineffective management practices contributed to the escalation of human-wildlife conflict. On one hand, the local administration sought to boost the region's agricultural capacity, allocating significant portions of land to local farmers for use as pastures. However, this strategy overlooked the ongoing recovery of the Ural saiga antelope population, which became a primary source of conflict. With existing maps, we illustrated the consequences of these decisions, making the situation clear.

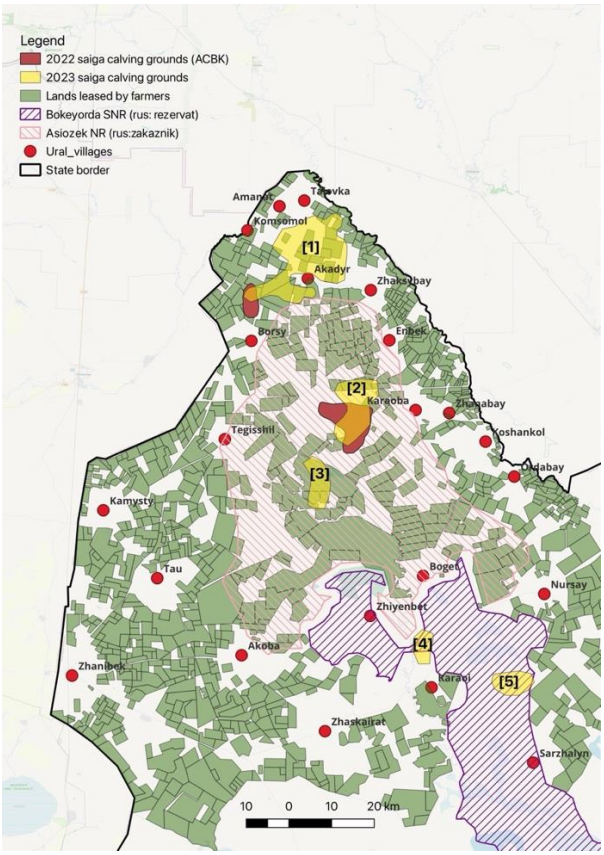

Figure 2. Map of the saiga calving grounds on leased lands.

c) The recommendations we developed were acknowledged by the government, leading to the inclusion of research team members in the expert commission tasked with resolving the conflict.

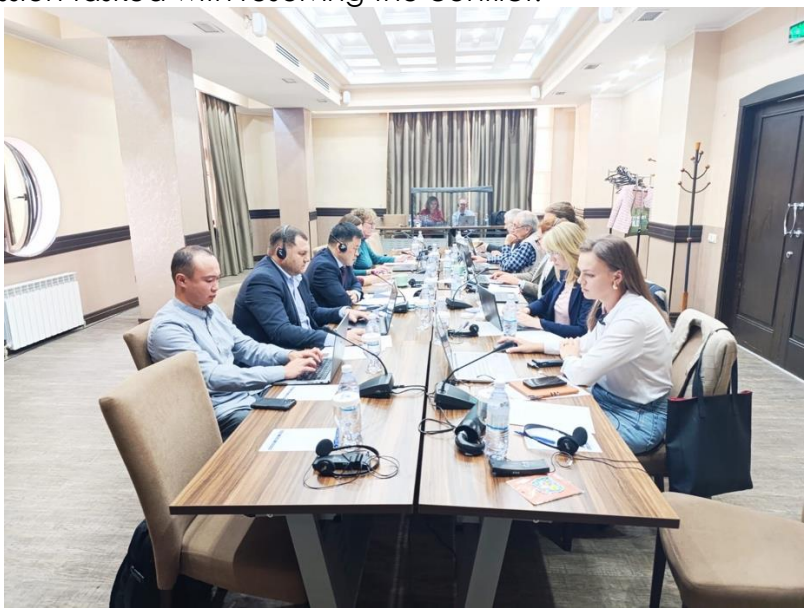

Figure 3. Meeting of the international saiga experts group in Almaty (September 9, 2024)

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

During the project implementation we have faced with two major problems:

- At first, the local communities were hesitant to welcome the project team. Their scepticism stemmed from past experiences with representatives from international organizations, scientists, and government officials who had made promises to resolve the conflict but failed to take action. We were able to clearly communicate our goals and earn their trust. However, at the beginning we had to spend major part of our time for this action. Ultimately, the local people accepted and actively supported the project team.

Figure 4. Meeting with the local farmer

- Despite the fact that our biomass production assessment plots were installed in areas remote from the villages, all of them were destroyed by livestock. Even the fact that local herders were informed about them, cows managed to destroy all posts and fences. This showed that cattle can graze at larger distances from settlements than I had anticipated. The poles erected are attractive to cows as they scratch on such structures to get rid of parasites, dead skin and mud. The mistake has been addressed and new pyramidal shaped plots were installed in October 2023. Data from these sites will not be available until October 2025 and will serve as a source of data for future studies.

Figure 5. Plots destroyed by cows. The second photo shows the ear tags of cows lost while scratching against a fence. Photo: Aibat Muzbay.

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

Local communities are the primary beneficiaries of the research outcomes, as our recommendations focus on the sustainable management of the saiga antelope. We advised the government to prioritize incorporating local opinions into saiga management strategies and actively involve these communities in future sustainable use practices. Additionally, the maps developed during the project will assist local communities in identifying areas without saiga calving grounds. By directing livestock grazing to these sites, daily interactions between livestock and saiga will be minimized, reducing competition for pastures.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Given the ongoing human-wildlife conflict, we are committed to advancing our recommendations to ensure their implementation. Recognizing the initial challenges with biomass collection, we are determined to refine our research and improve the effectiveness of our solutions. To this end, we have established new biomass collection plots and plan to harvest them in October 2025, allowing us to enhance the recommendations based on more comprehensive data.

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

I have developed a scientific paper based on the research (attached) and publish it on the researchgate.net online platform.

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

Looking ahead, the important next steps involve building on our progress and addressing ongoing challenges. First, it is crucial to continue advocating for the implementation of our recommendations on sustainable saiga antelope

management, emphasizing the inclusion of local communities in decision-making and sustainable use practices. Strengthening collaboration with both government representatives and scientific experts will be key to ensuring these strategies are practical and effective.

Additionally, advancing our research efforts is vital. Despite the initial setbacks with biomass collection, we have already established new collection plots, which will provide valuable data for refining our recommendations. This will not only improve our understanding of the interactions between saiga and livestock but also help mitigate human-wildlife conflict by identifying and promoting solutions, such as guiding livestock grazing away from saiga calving grounds.

Finally, maintaining strong engagement with local communities is essential. By continuing to listen to their concerns and involving them in conflict resolution, we can build trust and foster long-term support for sustainable wildlife management practices. These steps will collectively contribute to a more harmonious coexistence between people and wildlife in the region.

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

Yes. The logo was used at the **CMS COP 14** presentation in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) in the **Acknowledgement** section as the main sponsor of the research.

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

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