

Conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia

LIFE Project No.: LIFE05 NAT/SK/000115



FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT covering the project activities from 01/08/2005 to 31/12/2009

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**Poľovnícke
zdrúženie
Lehnice**

Data Project

Project location	Slovak Republic, Administrative region(s) Bratislava, Dunajská Streda, Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs		
Project start date:	08/01/2005		
Project end date:	31/12/2009	Extension date:	not applicable
Total Project duration (in months)	60 months	Extension months:	not applicable
Total budget	2,040,000 €		
EC contribution:	1,500,000 €		
(%) of total costs	73,53 %		
(%) of eligible costs	100 %		

Data Beneficiary

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2 List of key words and abbreviations

Key words:

Slovakia, *Otis tarda*, Great bustard, Syslovské polia SPA, Lehnice SPA, restoration, conservation, habitat management, Natura 2000, Birds Directive, LIFE - NATURE

Abbreviations:

A	Austria/Austrian
AC Dunaj	Agricultural Cooperative Dunaj managing majority of Syslovske polia SPA land
AES	Agro–environmental scheme
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ER	Extraordinary Report
FR	Final Report
FinR	Financial Report
HA	Hunting Association
HU	Hungary/Hungarian
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture of Slovak Republic
NSRDP	National Strategic Rural Development Programme
RDP	Rural Development Plan
PR	Progress Report
RPS	Raptor Protection of Slovakia
SNC	State Nature Conservancy of Slovak Republic
SOS/BirdLife Slovakia	Slovak Ornithological Society/BirdLife Slovakia (till August 2006 SOVS)
SOVS	Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia, since August 2006 SOS/BirdLife Slovakia
SPA	Special Protection Area

3 Executive Summary

A decline of *Otis tarda* populations in Europe is caused by human activities. In Slovakia, rapid decline in population was recorded in past years caused mainly by significant changes in the habitat structure. To enable *Otis tarda* population recovery in Slovakia and to ensure the long term protection of the species it was necessary to implement various conservation measures, habitat restoration and management in particular.

This effort was supported through the project "LIFENAT05/SK/000115 Conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia", which was co-financed by the European Union through its Financial instrument for Environment – LIFE. The Project was implemented by the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic and its project partners: SOVS, RPS, Municipality of Lehnice and Lehnice Hunting Association. The Project started in January 2005 and was closed in December 2009.

The project objective was to improve conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia through securing appropriate key locations, reducing main causes of disturbance and mortality and enhancing capacities at system, institutional and individual levels to ensure appropriate protection. The project focused on the two Special Protection Areas designated pursuant to the Birds Directive, namely Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA. While Syslovske polia SPA featured a continuous presence of the Central European population of *Otis tarda*, which Slovakia shares with Hungary and Austria, and had a particular importance as the winter roosting area, Lehnice SPA represented the most prospective location for re-introduction of the species.

Most important achievement of the Project at the system level was launching the agro-environmental scheme for protection of endangered bird species, including *Otis tarda*, as a part of the Rural Development Plan for Slovakia. The scheme represents important incentive for the protection of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia. As at December 2009, 1679.88 ha of land in Lehnice SPA and 379.14 ha of land in Syslovske polia SPA were managed under the scheme. These along with 47 ha of land acquired within a framework of the Project for the protection of Great bustard represents 50% of the area of both SPAs.

In order to minimise threats to *Otis tarda* originated from predators and agricultural works in Project area, the project team entered into formal cooperation with 3 hunting associations and two farms. In Lehnice SPA, installation of warning devices on power lines aimed at decreasing mortality of flying birds was successfully completed on 12 km sections of 110 kV and 400 power lines. In the same site, insulators were installed on 18 km of 22 kV power lines. Thereby, Lehnice SPA became the first SPA in Slovakia with power lines completely treated.

Management plans were drafted for both SPAs. They have added value of demonstration plans for other SPAs in Slovakia. Extensive monitoring activities provided important data on *Otis tarda* population, and impact of its predators and overall disturbance, and allow for informed management of *O. tarda* population in Slovakia. Data were processed into SNC database and summarised in the Final Monitoring Report. Monitoring at national level was complemented with total of 48 monthly joint counts of the Bustard with Austrian and Hungarian experts. Numerous meetings were organised with local stakeholders in villages in the vicinity of the project sites to discuss the need for and importance of implementing conservation measures for *Otis tarda*. The Bustard and the Project has been extensively promoted also through media and through distribution of various information materials, including posters, stickers, brochures, etc. Project results were summarised in popular form into the Layman's Report printed at the end of the project.

Despite considerable achievements of the Project, the project was confronted with serious challenges that resulted in few failures. Only some 33 % of the original target of 150 ha of acquired land was accomplished. This happened owing to various circumstances, including complicated land ownership and land - use agreements, and, as a paradox, partly due to increasing awareness of land owners on agro environmental schemes which generated expectations for reasonable sustainable income to owners at more favourable terms than under then existing land use arrangements or one-off payments if selling they land to the Project. The project failed to establish comprehensive information and

logistic centre for the *Otis tarda*, due to failure to complete legal transfer of building targeted for reconstruction from Regional Police Forces (Ministry of the Interior) to State Nature Conservancy (Ministry of the Environment) and absence of suitable alternative solution. In 2008, the Project experienced serious cash flows problems due to failing to ensure timely co-financing and consequent delayed possibility to submit Interim Payment Request. European Commission responded to the situation by launching a process of early termination of the Project in 02/2008, which was stopped after the SNC delivered a Recovery Plan acceptable to the EC in summer 2008. Slovak MoE, in 2008 made a special allocation in support of the Project and actual disbursements as at December 2008 allowed for requesting the second pre-financing payment.

Despite the above failures, it has to be stressed that the Project delivered full results in Lehnice SPA, while in Syslovske polia SPA it facilitated establishment of long term cooperation with key stakeholders that give a prospect for continuous conservation of *Otis tarda* beyond the project end. Even not reaching all the targets, without doubts, the Project met its original objective and moreover contributed to increasing trend in West pannonian population of *Otis tarda*.

Financially, the project was closed at 61,88 % of its original budget, which represent actual disbursement of 1,262 452,93 EUR.

Below table presents summary of results by the project Actions:

Action (Number and name)	Status	Description
A1 Elaborate management plans for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs	Completed	<p>Draft management plans for the Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA elaborated at early stages of the project and used as guidance for implementing management measures in the project areas within the project span, particularly actions funded by the Project</p> <p>Final (updated and revised) drafts of the Management plans for Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA submitted to the MoE with a request for approval</p> <p>Informal consultations with stakeholders held</p> <p>Management measures for <i>Otis tarda</i> discussed internationally</p> <p>7 meetings with stakeholders, owners and land users held at the early stages of the project</p> <p>1 meeting at the SNC level held at the early stages of preparation of management plans, several internal working meetings held in 2009 for updating and revisions of draft management plans</p> <p>1 meeting with participation of MoE and land users organised</p> <p>1 meeting with Hungarian and Austrian experts organised</p> <p>Management plans for SPAs discussed internationally</p> <p>Cooperation with Austrian and Hungarian organisations established and maintained</p>
A2 Elaborate and promote agri-environmental scheme for <i>Otis tarda</i>	Completed	<p>Agro-environmental scheme drafted and included into Slovak RDP</p> <p>3 contracts on implementation of pilot agro-environmental schemes closed with 1 farm in the Lehnice SPA</p> <p>Meetings with Ministry of Agriculture in order to lobby for inclusion of the scheme into agri-environment programme for the period 2007-2013</p>
A3 Elaborate and agree with hunters on a strategy that reduces mortality caused by predators and that avoids disturbance	Completed	<p>MoUs and Strategies with 3 hunting associations on reduction of mortality caused by predators and prevention of disturbance elaborated and agreed</p> <p>Meeting with land users organised</p>

		Meeting with Nature protection authorities organised 15 meetings with hunters organized
A4 Elaborate and agree strategy with farmers to reduce mortality caused by agricultural works and avoid disturbance	Completed	11 meetings with farmers Strategies with 2 Farms signed Cooperation Agreement with one farm signed
A5 Elaborate a project for reconstruction and operation of an information and logistic centre	Terminated	
A6 Prepare tenders, select contractors and suppliers	Completed	Procurement of required services and goods implemented. Consultants and suppliers selected on the most cost-effective terms
B1 Purchase and lease of core areas for <i>Otis tarda</i> in Syslovske Polia and Lehnice SPA	Completed	In total 47 ha of land purchased 7,5 ha of land acquired in Syslovske polia SPA 39,6 ha of land acquired in Lehnice SPA
C1 Restore grasslands on purchased land	Completed	Meeting with Hungarian experts organised Restoration Study Completed Meeting with land users organised 39,6 ha of purchased/swapped land restored into grasslands
C2 Restoration of windbreaks regarding the <i>Otis tarda</i> requirements	Completed	100 trees planted in SPA Syslovske polia 970 trees/shrubs planted in Lehnice SPA The area of both SPAs become more suitable for the regular occurrence and breeding of <i>Otis tarda</i> and other steppe species
C3 Take measures to prevent mortality resulting from the collision with power lines	Completed	Warning marks and insulators purchased Marking of 12 km of 110 kV power lines in Lehnice SPA Insulating of 18 km of 22 kV power li-nes in SPA
C4 Install infrastructure to improve control of the sites and allow regulated access of public	Completed	Syslovske polia: 2 observation towers 5 ramps (closing road) 5 "access banned" signs 9 information signs Lehnice: 1 observation tower
C5 Establishment of an information and logistic centre	Terminated	
D1 Maintain favourable habitat conditions on purchased and leased land	Completed	39,6 ha of purchased/swapped land in Lehnice managed for grasslands for <i>O.tarda</i> 7,5 ha of purchased land in Syslovske polia SPA managed for crops for <i>O.tarda</i> 10 ha of feeding strips (oil seed rape, cabbage) established in Lehnice machinery necessary for management of the project sites purchased including: 1 tractor, mulch machines, 2 bush cutters, and used for managing the acquired land
D2 Implement and test agro-environment scheme for <i>O.tarda</i>	Completed	0 ha under pilot scheme in Syslovske polia managed for <i>O.tarda</i> 307,41 ha under pilot scheme in Lehnice managed for <i>O.tarda</i> agronomic and technical data on the application of the pilot scheme

		1679,80 ha of land under formal AES in Lehnice SPA 379,14 ha of land under formal AES in Syslovske polia SPA
D3 Ensure accessibility of food in winter	Completed	Snow plough purchased Food supply purchased Snow removal at Lehnice SPA in winter 2009 Additional feeding in winter season provided as needed
D4 Control predators to prevent mortality of eggs, chicks and females	Completed	Predator pressure on the <i>O. tarda</i> population reduced. Hunting of foxes increased
D5 Protect nests in emergency situations	Completed	After LIFE Conservation Plan delivered with the final report Verbal commitment on cooperation gained from Hungarian experts
E1 Prepare and update project web site	Completed	multilingual web-site in operation from 07/2006 till – 08/2008 After Life web-site established as a part of the SNC web-site
E2 Prepare and distribute information and promotion materials on the project	Completed	2000 pcs. of poster A2 format, full-colored 500 pcs. of puzzle A5 format 6000 copies of brochure, A5 format, full-colored, 12 pages 380 T-shirts 1000 pcs. of badges 10 000 pcs. of stickers 1000 copies of popular project report, full-colored, 16 pages
E3 Organise guided tours on sites	Completed	10 guided tours to the project areas 196 visitors 10 volunteers trained as voluntary guides
E4 Keep regular contacts with media and promote the project	Completed	the conservation problems of <i>O.tarda</i> and the action and results of the LIFE project were brought to the attention of the general public, decision makers and interest groups via various media public awareness on conservation needs of <i>Otis tarda</i> has been raised
E5 Prepare and present video on <i>Otis tarda</i> protection	Completed	2 copies of 26 minutes long video in TV quality (betacam) 1 premiere in National TV (2 nd channel) 2 subsequent broadcastings in National TV (2 nd and 1 st channel) 105 DVD copies in 4 languages 5 CD copies in 4 languages 4 VHS copies in 4 languages 95 public presentations
E6 Erect and maintain information signs with project logo	Completed	2 information signs erected in the strategic place visible for the public.
E7 Schedule regular meetings with stakeholders (farmers, hunters)	Completed	18 collective meetings with stakeholders organised 18 lectures and similar events/min 555 participants 1 excursion/50 participants 97 individual meetings with land owners (B1) 15 meetings with hunters (A3)

		11 meetings with farmers (A4)
E8 Disseminate scientific results and conservation experience	Completed	1 scientific report 3 scientific articles 4 articles in professional journals
F1 Plan, manage and report project	Completed	Continuous project management ensured.
F2 Manage, monitor and audit finances	Completed	Transparent recording of project finances Auditor's report.
F3 Maintain intensive co-operation and exchange of experience with other <i>Otis tarda</i> projects in the region (HU, A, CZ)	Completed	Contacts among Projects Managers of LIFE projects established Regular communication among Project Managers and staff of Life projects Common meetings organised 48 common counts of <i>O.tarda</i> in the period 12/2005 – 12/2009
F4 Monitor the population and habitats of <i>Otis tarda</i>	Completed	Information in the form of data or analysis outcomes stored in the database connected with GIS on: Age and sex structure of the Slovak <i>O.tarda</i> population, its dynamics and preferred habitats; Preferred areas within both SPA sites and their habitat usage patterns. Importance of mortality factors at each site 2005 technical report, 2006-2007 technical report, cumulative monitoring report covering period 01/2005 - 09/2008, Final cumulative report on monitoring, predators and disturbance covering period 2005 - 2009
F5 Monitor predators and disturbance	Completed	Regular monitoring system of predators established at the early stages of the project Data on predators, agricultural works and negative impacts stored at the Information system for taxons and habitats operated by the SNC 3 technical reports on predators and disturbance compiled: 2005, 2006-2007 and one cumulative report covering period 01/2005-09/2008 Final cumulative report on monitoring, predators and disturbance covering period 2005 - 2009
F6 Schedule regular Steering Committee meetings	Completed	7 formal Meetings of the Steering Committee held numerous meetings of the representatives of project participants and/or beneficiary and MoE held
F7 After-LIFE Conservation Plan	Completed	After LIFE Conservation Plan delivered with the final report

4 Introduction

A decline of *Otis tarda* populations in Europe is caused by human activities. In Slovakia, rapid decline in population was recorded in past years caused mainly by significant changes in the habitat structure. Original steppe habitats were in the large scale converted into intensively farmed agriculture land. Owing to changes in the habitats and intensification of agriculture in the second half of the 20th century, at present time *O. tarda* inhabits only secondary habitats in Slovakia. It prefers wide-open, pseudo-steppe-like habitats, characterised predominantly by grasslands intermixed with low crops such as wheat, barley and alfalfa.

Changes in the crop structure, however, decreased the area of grasslands and significantly affected the breeding success and population density of *O. tarda*. They also seriously affected the feeding opportunities for the species with specific requirements as to the diversity of the food. *Otis tarda* feeds on both animal and plant food according to its accessibility in particular seasons. Leaving out the ploughed land without cover creates sterile habitat without any feeding opportunities. At the same time, *O. tarda* avoids large areas of monocultures with high rate of crops reaching more than 1.2 m such as maize, tobacco or sunflower.

Unsuitable methods of harvesting and mowing, above all moving fodder crops and alfalfa during the breeding period and harvesting during the season of bringing up chicks, and uncontrolled activity of the predators affect the efficiency of the *O. tarda* population and represented another significant threats, and in case of under-population, could have particularly negative impacts.

Collisions of Otis with power lines were also frequent. Aerial wires of power lines create barriers in the flying corridors of *O. tarda*. If birds collide with wires, they may be killed by electrocution. The aerial wires are usually placed at the same height at which *O. tarda* flies around, so the chance to hit wires is higher. Males are particularly prone to collide with power lines, while marking their defending area by flying around it in the display season, in winter, especially when flocks are disturbed, and in foggy weather. Reduced manoeuvrability of the flying bustards results from their high weight, and this is why they often become the victims in the follow-ups of the hits of wires.

The opinion and support of the public concerning conservation of *Otis tarda*, is very important, particularly when utilisation of the SPA areas by various entrepreneur companies is considered. Local inhabitants from the settlements located close to the SPA sites belong to the most relevant target groups in this respect. However, interest and support from the public have been, generally, not satisfactory. Probably the most important insufficiency in the past was the lack of available information for farmers and hunters, who can significantly influence status of the *O. tarda* habitats. More efficient use of public media – television, radio and press generally and various awareness events with the public, was necessary for increasing of public interest in the Great Bustard conservation.

In order to address aforementioned challenges in a complex manner, and to enable *Otis tarda* population recovery in Slovakia, State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic and its partners: SOVS, RPS, Municipality of Lehnice and Lehnice Hunting Association implemented Project "LIFE NAT 05/SK/000115 Conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia". The Project started in January 2005 and was closed in December 2009.

The project objective was to improve the conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia through securing appropriate key locations, reducing main causes of disturbance and mortality, and enhancing capacities at system, institutional and individual levels to ensure appropriate protection. The project focused on the two Special Protection Areas designated for the *Otis tarda* conservation in Slovakia, namely Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA.

This ambitious project complemented and reinforced the on-going national and international efforts for improving conservation status of West Pannonian *O. tarda* population. Last but not least, the project served as best practices demonstration for (i) management of other SPAs in Slovakia, and (ii) integration of EU agriculture and nature conservation policies.

This is the Project Final Report presenting the final Project results and plans for after life period.

5 LIFE –project framework

5.1 Project Sites

The project focused on the *Otis tarda* conservation in the two Project Sites: Syslovske polia SPA near Bratislava and Lehnice SPA that constitutes surroundings of the Lehnice village.

At the time of the project preparation both SPAs were enjoying interim protection according to the Slovak Law on Nature and Landscape Conservation No. 543/2002. Later on, Lehnice SPA was legally designated through Regulation of the Ministry of the Environment issued on 8 August 2005 and effective since 1 September 2005. Syslovske polia SPA was designated through the Regulation of the Ministry of the Environment issued on 12 April 2006 and effective since 1 May 2006. In the later case the designation process had been delayed for the reason of conflicting development efforts over the SPA promoted by local interest groups.

Both SPAs represents Pannonian lowland type of ecosystem with agrocenoses and tenuous bands of windbreaks and bushes, predominantly of secondary origin, xerothermic up to semixerothermic, rich in grass species, minority of which is native for the area. Bunchy grass species and connected vegetation cover create a biotope which on the fallow lands resembles the biocenoses of a meadow. The bulk part of the territory is intensively utilized by agriculture, the target products being mostly the cereal cultures, vestures of alfalfa, sunflower and cole.

The arable fields in the Syslovske polia SPA provide important winter roosting and feeding area for 10% of the Central European population of *Otis tarda* (100% of the national population), which has been confirmed through recorded regular winter presence of relatively high number (more than 200) of individuals of *Otis tarda*. Furthermore, the Syslovske polia SPA, are the last remaining nesting area of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia, with most recent nesting in 2005 and in 2010. It is also the most important nesting site for *Falco vespertinus* and provides both regular winter roosting and feeding areas for geese and some raptor species as well. Although the land ownership structure in the area is quite complicated, the agricultural land is managed by major user – AC Dunaj that leases the land from individual owners.

Lehnice SPA is the last site in the territory of Žitný ostrov (southern Slovakia) where *Otis tarda* had been occasionally observed before the project started. The last breeding at the site was recorded in 2001. The importance of the locality for *Otis tarda* species is increased due to the growth of the neighbouring Hungarian *O. tarda* population with potential to expand northwards to historical localities at the Slovak territory. Lehnice SPA is approximately only 20 – 22 km from the closest breeding population on Hungarian – Slovak border and the individuals from the border population might fly over to Lehnice SPA to find irregular breeding place there. Accordingly, it has been the most prospective site in Slovakia for re-introduction of this species. The agricultural land at the site is managed by the two Farms, namely Agripent and Agrolens.

5.2 Project participants

The **Project beneficiary was the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic** It is a public agency for nature and landscape protection supervised by the Ministry of the Environment¹. The SNC is the principal agency entrusted with coordination of NATURA 2000 network in Slovakia. It contributes to setting national environmental standards and policies, co-ordinates the protected area network, performs biodiversity monitoring and assessment, operates information system on taxons and habitats, maintains information networks, and organises environmental events. It also contributes to the preparation of State of the Environment reports in Slovakia. The SNC is widely involved in various forms of international co-operation within nature conservation sector and, inter alia, performs responsibilities of the Scientific Authority of CITES - Convention on International Trade with Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora.

¹ At the time of the FR preparation, MoE competencies were transformed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Regional Development.

Since 2008, the SNC also manages the caves opened to public. The SNC operates through regional units coordinated by the headquarters located in Banska Bystrica.

The SNC had the following partners in the project.

Slovak Ornithological Society/BirdLife Slovakia, for the purpose of this project referred as SOVS, is a national non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation, founded in 1993 as “Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia” with a scope of activities covering the whole area of Slovakia. It is registered with the Slovak Ministry of Interior as Civil Society under the number VVS/1-900/90-7511-3. The mission of SOVS is to protect birds and their habitats and in wider sense to protect biological diversity. Since 1994, SOVS have been representing Slovakia in the world-wide organisation BirdLife International. In August 2006, the Society merged with Slovak Ornithological Society and started to use a new legal name Slovak Ornithological Society/BirdLife International. The registration number and legal status of the organisation remained the same. SOVS took active part in development of international network of Important Bird Areas (IBAs), preparation of the scientific proposal of SPA network in Slovakia, establishment of Criteria and Indicators for assessment of Conservation Status of birds listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive and monitoring and preparation of action plans for endangered bird species. SOVS has been taking active part in formulation of national environmental policy through commenting on draft legislation, strategies and programmes related to nature conservation, agriculture and other sectors significantly influencing conservation status of birds and its habitats. Its expert activities include monitoring of endangered species, conservation management of Important Bird Areas and coordination of practical conservation actions.

Raptor Protection of Slovakia /RPS/ is a non-profit non-governmental organization concerned with research and conservation of birds of prey in Slovakia, founded in 1974. It is registered at the Slovak Ministry of Interior as Civil Society under the number (VVS/1-900/90-15979). The mission of RPS is to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity through protection of birds of prey and their habitats. To achieve this, RPS carries out monitoring programmes for the endangered species, significantly contributes to addressing electrocution of birds on power lines, implements nature conservation programmes, co-operates with other state and non-governmental organizations on preparation of Action plans for endangered species, management plans and other strategic documents and on addressing the birds crime. RPS also contributed to the scientific proposal of SPA network and definitions of Favourable Conservation Statuses of birds listed in Birds Directive in Slovakia.

Municipality Lehnice is an administrative unit within the Slovak Republic administrative system. It is financed primarily by its own funds and also by national subsidies. The municipality has the right to form associations with other communities in matters of common interest. Municipal authorities include the municipal office and the mayor's office. The municipal office consists of local elected representatives. The mayor is the executive officer exercising executive powers and representing the municipality in all matters and is elected by the local citizens. It is all surrounded, by the Lehnice SPA, and thus it is an important stakeholder in the SPA conservation.

Lehnice Hunting Association is a Civil Society, founded in 1973. It manages hunting ground on area of 1958 ha in cadastre of Lehnice. Beside the game management, the association implements various measures for a benefit of the game species and biodiversity generally. This includes restoration and maintenance of windbreaks, establishment of feeding strips, etc. The Lehnice HA has a good knowledge of the site and in control of predators. The HA also implements exhibitions and other activities for general public in close cooperation with the Lehnice municipality.

5.3 Project management

The SNC coordinated the Project through its Project department. At the early stages of the Project, the SNC entered into formal Cooperation Agreements with all the four Project partners.

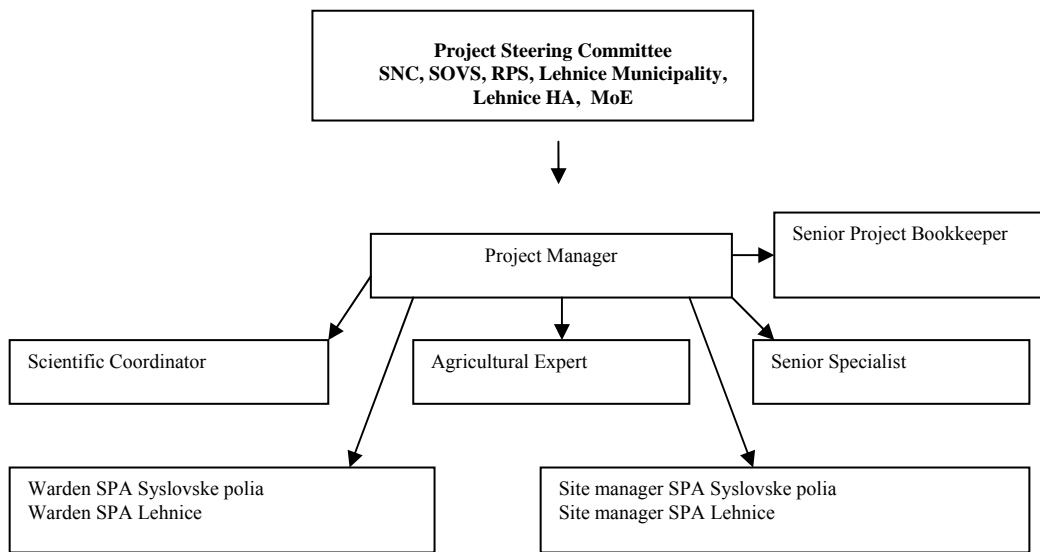
The project team was composed of personnel appointed by the SNC, SOVS and RPS. Everyday activities of the project team were coordinated by the Project manager appointed by SOVS. Composition of the project team is presented in below table:

Position	Name /institution	Period
Project Manager	Mr. Rastislav Rybanič/SOVS	12/2005 – 01/2008
	Mrs. Zuzana Guziva /SOVS	02/2008 – 12/2009
Scientific Advisor	Mr. Jozef Chavko/RPS	2005 – 12/2009
Agricultural Expert	Mrs. Tatina Sutiakova /SOVS- interim	02/2005-07/2005
	Mr. Boris Maderic/SOVS	09/2005-12/2009
Senior expert	Mrs. Slávka Siryová/RPS	02/2006 – 09/2007
	Mrs. Eva Stanková/RPS	since 10/2007
	Mrs. Lucia Matejovičová/RPS	2008 – 02/2009, 12/2009
Site Manager for Syslovske polia SPA	Mr. Peter Krempasky /SNC - interim	01/2006-08/2006
	Mr. Marek Šádovský/SNC	09/2006-12/2009
Ranger for Syslovske polia SPA	Mr. Radovan Michalka/SNC - interim	01/2006-08/2006
	Mrs. Katarina Videkyova/SNC - interim	01/2006-08/2006
	Mr. Ján Tóth/SNC	09/2006 -10/2009
Site Manager for Lehnice SPA	Mr. Donald Allo/SNC -interim	01/2006-08/2006
	Mrs. Valeria Szomolai/SNC	09/2006 – 12/2008
Ranger for Lehnice SPA	Mr. Ignác Vincze/SNC-interim	01/2006 – 03/2007
	Mr. Joef Lengyel/SNC - interim	
	Mr. Vojtech Szucs/SNC	04/2007 – 09/2009
Senior Bookkeeper	Mr. Peter Brnák/SNC – interim	01/2006-08/2008
	Mrs. Helena Čarska/SNC	09/2008-12/2009

There were changes on some positions, when experts could not continue working further on the project, mostly for the family reasons. In 2009 capacity of the project personnel was reduced in consideration of the actions that remained for implementation.

The project was overseen by the project Steering committee composed of representatives of the five project participants and MoE - Nature Conservation Department, and Life National Contact Point (at Environment Projects Department. Originally, it was foreseen that representative of MoA would be in the Project Steering Committee, as well, however, it was not possible to achieve regular representation of any MoA representative at the SC. The SC held its formal meetings once or twice a year. In addition, numerous ad-hoc meetings of high-level representatives of SNC, SOVS and RPS, in 1-3 months intervals, often with participation of the MoE, were held since the beginning of the Project to seek solutions to numerous challenges the Project was facing to, particularly problems with land acquisition and land management for *Otis tarda* at Syslovske polia SPA, insufficient funds to ensure smooth co-financing of the project, termination procedure initiated in 2008, etc. These were not called as formal SC meetings since it was beyond capacity of the two Project partners – Lehnice village and the Lehnice Hunting Association to address the respective problems. However, they were regularly informed on the agreed steps and measures.

The project management structure



5.4 Project challenges

The Project was facing to numerous challenges. The most serious are listed below.

- problems with acquisition of land according to the project proposal
- problems with key stakeholder at Syslovske polia SPA – AC Dunaj, that for quite a long period was not willing to cooperate with the project and in general to implement measures for conservation of *Otis tarda*
- failing to establish Information centre according to the Project proposal
- serious problems with the project cash flows due to failing to ensure timely co-financing of the Project and consequent delayed ability to submit Interim Payment Request
- failing to establish effective project financial management at the early stages of the Project

Below, the individual problems are described in more detail.

Problems with acquisition of land according to the project proposal

The Project, through its Action B1 was originally focused on purchase of land in those parts of targeted SPAs, which were considered to be of utmost importance for the conservation of *Otis tarda* in consideration of then long-term leased land by the SNC at Syslovske polia SPA and transboundary aspects of overall conservation of Western pannonian population of *Otis tarda*.

However, two problems emerged that challenged implementing this action as originally foreseen in the Project proposal, namely:

- (i) favouring land-lease against land purchase by majority of land owners in target areas as result of raised awareness on agro-environmental schemes and other incentive measures proposed for nature protection in NATURA 2000 sites in Slovakia in the programming period 2007 -2013

Since the beginning of the Project, numerous meetings with different owners of land in Syslovske polia SPA took place. The major issue in discussions was purchase of land by the SNC for nature conservation purposes and terms and conditions thereof.

After the meeting with owners held on 24/08/2006 in Rusovce, it became already evident that majority of owners would not anymore consider selling their land at all. They became aware about AES and other incentives schemes proposed for inclusion into the Rural Development Plan for Slovakia, and also inspired by relatively high financial support for Great Bustard protection measures that Austrian farmers were receiving, they started to favour long-term leasing the land for conservation purposes as a more beneficial solution to them from the long-term perspective than selling the land against one-off payment.

However, immediate leasing of land by the SNC, was not possible because (i) the owners then were leasing their land to major land user in the area - Agricultural Cooperative Dunaj, and (ii) leasing was only possible subject to formal project modification. Addressing both assumptions seemed then feasible.

Consequently, it was assessed that only some 5 – 20 ha of land at Syslovske polia would be possible to purchase by the State Nature Conservancy.

Details of possible solutions were described in the project Modification Request submitted in May 2007, taking into consideration of actual records of *Otis tarda* occurrence.

(ii) rapid increase in market prices of land parcels in vicinity of Bratislava,

Formal Expert Certificate of the price of land parcels targeted by the Project – 520 ha in Syslovske polia that was attached to original project proposal confirmed that average price per hectare was 150,332 Slovak crowns, i.e. 15 SKK/ m² in 2005. However, the land was to be purchased or long-term leased towards actual market prices of the land. These had significantly increased compared to presented certified price of 2005, owing to entering of Slovakia into EU and consequent general rapid increase of real estates prices in the country, and in Bratislava and its close vicinity in particular. In 2007, actual market prices for purchase of land varied from 35 to 120 SKK/ m² (350,000 – 1,200,000 SKK per ha).

On the other hand, prices for long-term lease (for 25 years period) varied between 3,500 to 4.000 SKK/ ha per annum (87,500 – 100,000 SKK/ha per 25 years) and could balance extremely high market prices of land.

For the above reasons, the SNC submitted a formal Modification Request asking for the EC agreement with combination of purchase and long-term lease of land in the SPAs in order to get 150 ha of land under control of the SNC by the end of the Project. The Request was submitted on 21/05/2007. Additional information was prepared upon the Commission request and sent on 07/01/2008. Due to launching a termination procedure of the Project, evaluation of the modification request was ceased by the EC. The modification request was finally withdrawn by the SNC on 03/08/2008 following submission of the project Recovery Plan to the EC and after it had become evident that neither long term lease from individual land owners was feasible due to legal arrangements between the owners and the AC Dunaj.

Problems with key stakeholder at Syslovske polia SPA - AC Dunaj, that for quite a long period was not willing to cooperate with the project and in general to implement measures for conservation of *Otis tarda*

It was assumed that a major stakeholder and land user in Syslovske polia SPA Agricultural Cooperative Dunaj had become associated with developers who were interested in developing golf course or in other developments in the vicinity of the Rusovce village, including within an area of the SPA. The Farm unilaterally terminated its agreement with the SNC concerning leasing the land for conservation purposes and illegally ploughed the concerned area, previously managed for *Otis tarda* in the period 2000-2005. In 2005 and 2006, the AC Dunaj also refused participation in pilot agro-environmental schemes proposed to them in a framework of the present project.

Moreover, despite the continuous effort of the SNC and the MoE, to resume cooperation in conservation of *O.tarda* at Syslovske polia SPA no progress and change in the position of the AC Dunaj was achieved until early 2008. All documentation concerning this effort was provided with previous Progress Reports and therefore is not attached to the present report.

In early 2008, negotiations concerning conservation measures in Syslovske polia SPA started with new owners and management of the AC Dunaj. Confidence building between the two parties and the agreements on conservation measures have been evolving since that time, however, the progress was not that rapid as needed for the full completion of the project.

Failing to establish Information centre according to the Project proposal

Originally, through Actions A5 and C5, the Project foresaw establishment of the Information and Logistic Centre for Syslovske polia SPA by reconstruction of the building of Regional Police Forces. The building was located on the edge on the SPA nearby the Jarovce village. At the time of preparation of the project, the building was considered for transferring from Regional Police Forces (Ministry of the Interior) to State Nature Conservancy (Ministry of the Environment). However, the process of transfer was interrupted due to some legislative obstacles and claims of the property users that had lease agreements with the Regional Police Force.

For this reason, a new solution for establishment of the Information and Logistic Centre was seeking (linked with Action A5).

Project modification request submitted in May 2007, suggested flexibility in establishment of the centre. Suggestions included the establishment of the centre through the construction of the small new centre (within a limits of the existing budget) or reconstruction of premises, other then originally considered, that would be long-term leased or otherwise acquired by the State Nature Conservancy in the vicinity of the SPA (preferably in one of municipalities of Rusovce, Jarovce or Čunovo, all being a part of Bratislava Capital City). Due to launching a Project termination procedure in February 2008, evaluation of the modification request was ceased by the EC. The modification request was then withdrawn by the SNC on 03/08/2008.

In the meantime, the SNC and project partners were continuously seeking for an adequate alternative solution for the Centre. One of the important requirements for the selection of the new premises was possibility to ensure the planned financial support for the Centre from the state budget through annual allocations to the SNC as stated in the project document, and as confirmed in the official letter from the director of the SNC, annexed to the project application. Another challenge was to ensure establishment of the Centre that would provide comprehensive logistic functions as described in the original project proposal.

The last try was made in October 2008 when the SNC formally requested municipality of Rusovce for long term leasing of a communal building that served previously as fitness-centre. The request was, however, refused by the municipality.

Serious problems with the project cash flows due to failing to ensure timely co-financing of the Project and consequent delayed ability to submit Interim Payment Request

Serious problems with the project cash flows occurred in early 2008 due to:

- (i) problems with ensuring timely co-financing of the Project, and consequent
- (ii) disbursements below threshold of 900,000 EUR, not allowing to request timely the 2nd prefinancing payment of the EC contribution /LIFE grant through Interim Payment Request

In response to the situation, the EC launched the Project termination procedure and requested the SNC to present the Project Recovery Plan. Project Recovery Plan was presented to the EC on 18/07/2008. The EC agreed with continuation of the project in accordance with the Recovery Plan, without requesting a formal project modification.

The SNC made substantial co-financing commitment at the time of Project preparation totalling to 526,000 EUR. However, that time it was an organisation that was completely dependent on annual allocations from the MoE. The project was developed and submitted with full support from the MoE and the financial consequences of the project on the SNC budget were consulted with MoE prior to the submission of the Project. Therefore, the SNC management expected that the annual allocations would be increased in order to ensure smooth project co-financing. This, however, did not happened and consequently project was confronted with serious financial insufficiency, in spite of that the SNC made effort to support the project at least at a modest level from its regular budget.

Only in 2008, following the launching a termination procedure, the MoE allocated 287,275² EUR to the SNC to support implementation of the Project. State Environment Fund³ contributed with additional 63,068 EUR. This made it possible to progress the disbursements over threshold of 150 % of the first pre-financing payment and start preparation of the Interim Financial Request.

Failing to establish effective project financial management at the early stages of the Project

The SNC not properly estimated capacity of its regular staff member who was appointed as responsible for the project financial records. Although he ensured proper record keeping in the SNC accounting system and compliance of the accounting documents with the standards, it was beyond his capacity, in consideration of his other duties, to make more detailed financial analyses of the project disbursements and needs for all the project participants. Therefore, a full time financial manager was appointed in September 2008, to prepare, *inter alia*, Interim and Final Payment Requests, to consolidate all the project financial documentation and to work with the Project auditor.

5.5 Project modifications

No formal project modification was completed in the project span. However, the following changes happened:

1/ Change in the Legal Name of the Partner: Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia

The Project Partner Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia, representing Slovakia in BirdLife International since 1994, merged with the Slovak Ornithological Society in August 2006.

The change occurred at discretion of the project Partner concerned. However, its legal status of non-governmental and non-profit organisation referred as “Civil Society”, its mission, scope of activities, technical role in the Project and its financial commitment remain unchanged.

Only its legal name has changed. The new legal name of the Project Partner has been Slovenská ornitologická spoločnosť/BirdLife Slovensko (Slovak Ornithological Society/BirdLife Slovakia).

It would be illegal for the Project Partner to use its previous name for the purpose of project operations. However, it has been agreed that the original abbreviated name “SOVS”, will be used farther for reference for the Project purposes. The re-naming was reported to the Commission by an email correspondence immediately after the change came into force.

2/ Change in the economic status of the SNC

The changes occurred at discretion of the MoE.

The economic status of the SNC, based on the decision by Minister of the Environment No 2007 č.73/2007 – 1.8., from 05/12/2007, was changed from budgetary organisation (i.e. funded in full from the state budget) to a „contributory“ organisation (i.e. one receiving only certain contribution from the state budget for its statutory activities, and generating income from services for funding its additional activities).

The SNC was merged with the Administration of the Slovak Caves, based on the decision of Minister of the Environment No 2007 č.74/2007 – 1.8., from 05/12/2007. Both decisions become effective on 01/01/2008.

Its status of public institution remained unchanged. Scope of its activities was extended to cover administrations of caves opened to public. Focus and scope of its “conservation” activities remained unchanged. The changes were reported to the Commission by an email correspondence.

Overall, the above changes had no influence on any aspect of implementing the project.

² The allocation from MoE was not disbursed in full since it included also long-term lease of land, which was not possible to complete.

³ State Environment Fund within a jurisdiction of the MoE.

5.6 Review of the important dates influencing the Project

The project started on 08/01/2005. In response to circumstances occurred in the course of implementing the project and well as in response to letter from the European Commission No. ENV.E4/AK/ml D(2006) 24243 dated 04/12/2006, in which it proposed beneficiary to consider modification of the project, Project Modification Request was submitted on 21/05/2007. Additional Information was prepared upon the Commission request and sent on 07/01/2008. The Modification request was withdrawn by the SNC in 08/2008.

In February 2008, the EC through its letter ENV/E-4/MP/KS (2008) 2625 dated 18 February 2008 (1st Termination Letter) launched an early termination of the project according to Art 14 of the Common Provisions and invited the SNC to submit proper evidence of allocation of financial resources allowing for continuation of the project.

The EC considered response from the SNC to the 1st Termination Letter insufficient and through its letter ENV/E-4/MP/KS (2008) 8216 dated 16 June 2008 (2nd Termination Letter) invited the beneficiary to submit the Project Recovery Plan. The SNC submitted the Recovery Plan through its letter No. ŠOP SR 1827/2008, dated 26/06/2008. Based on the presented Recovery Plan the EC agreed with continuation of the project.

The Project was closed on 31/12/2009. Audit was finalized in 06/2010. Final Report sent to the EC in 07/2010.

6 Technology

In order to achieve strengthening and re-expansion of the *O. tarda* population in Slovakia, the Project applied a comprehensive approach to conservation of the species, and at the same time provided model for and sustainable solution to *O. tarda* protection. All project activities were directly targeting the identified threats and addressing priority actions listed in both the European Action Plan and Slovak National Action Plan for *O. tarda* protection.

The basic assumption for strengthening and re-expansion of the *O. tarda* population was creation of the suitable structure of habitats and introduction of incentives for their long-term management *as per* biological requirements of this species. The interventions towards these objectives were implemented on various levels - including system level, institutional and site levels.

In order to ensure creation and maintaining favourable habitat conditions in the most effective way, effort was made to purchase land in both SPAs targeted by the Project and restore the grasslands there or manage the land for other crops providing suitable feeding basis and breeding sites for *Otis tarda*.

Suitable crop structure and proper agricultural techniques were negotiated with land users/owners for areas that were not possible to purchase. This effort was accompanied with development, testing and launching of incentive schemes - argoenvironmental scheme integrated in the Slovak Rural Development Plan - accessible on voluntary basis to farmers managing land in the SPAs targeted by the Project.

To ensure the long term protection of the target species, project also included elaboration of management and cooperation tools namely management plans for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs and Memoranda of Understanding with strategies for farmers and hunters to reduce mortality and avoid disturbance of Great Bustard. Already within the project, pilot activities covered by these documents were implemented, such as measures aimed at improving accessibility of food in winter, restoration of windbreaks with regards to *Otis tarda* requirements or hunting restrictions to avoid hunting in Great bustard breeding season and to control populations of Great bustard predators.

Warning marks and insulators were installed on power lines in Lehnice SPA to prevent mortality resulting from the collisions of flying birds with power lines. To avoid disturbance, infrastructure improving protection of the site and limiting its accessibility to public was installed in Syslovske polia SPA. At the same time, number of tools produced under the Project ensured improvement of public awareness of the importance of and need for *O. tarda* protection, what was crucial for the overall Project success. A

comprehensive monitoring programme initiated under the Project, allowed for taking informed decisions in both SPAs.

7 Results

Project Results are presented according to individual project actions.

ACTION A.1: Elaborate management plans for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPA

Expected results:

- Management plans for the Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA elaborated
- 4 meetings with experts and stakeholders organised
- 4 meetings with landowners and land users organised
- Meeting with hunters organised
- 5 meetings with Hungarian and Austrian experts organised
- Management plans for SPAs discussed internationally
- Cooperation with Austrian and Hungarian organisations established and maintained

Actual Achievements:

- Draft management plans for the Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA elaborated at early stages of the project and used as guidance for implementing management measures in the project areas within the project span, particularly actions funded by the Project
- Final (updated and revised) drafts of the Management plans for Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA submitted to the MoE with a request for approval
- Informal consultations with stakeholders held
- Management measures for *Otis tarda* discussed internationally
- 7 meetings with stakeholders, owners and land users held at the early stages of the project
- 1 meeting at the SNC level held at the early stages of preparation of management plans, several internal working meetings held in 2009 for updating and revisions of draft management plans
- 1 meeting with participation of MoE and land users organised
- 1 meeting with Hungarian and Austrian experts organised
- Management plans for SPAs discussed internationally
- Cooperation with Austrian and Hungarian organisations established and maintained

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2005

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Formal – administrative completion of the action was pending due to delay in establishment of methodology for development of MPs/agreement on relevant methodological approaches, and unclear approach of the MoE to approval of MPs for SPAs. That was a reason why draft management plans were not submitted by the SNC to MoE immediately after they were technically completed. Since the management plans were drafted at the early stages of the project they needed to be up-dated and revised (in terms of removal/modification of actions that became obsolete) prior to submission for the approval to the MoE.

Description:

Management plans were included in the Project preparatory activities since they represent unavoidable tools for establishment the overall protection strategy and definition of conservation measures for SPAs aiming at achieving or maintaining the suitable conditions in SPAs and favourable conservation status of qualifying species. The content and structure of management plans in Slovakia are established by the Regulation by the MoE No 24/ 2003.

Management plans for both project sites (Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA) were developing in parallel since May 2005. Already in 2005, two expert meetings were organized by the SNC with the aim to discuss the approach to and methodology for drafting management plans.

Inventories of vegetation, small rodents and insects at Syslovske polia SPA were undertaken at the early stages of the project, however, funded out of the scope of the present project. They were complemented with data from birds monitoring. The inventory and monitoring data were analyzed in order to define the conservation objectives in the respective management plans.

Special attention was given to using of the SPAs for agriculture, since it represents main land use in both areas. Furthermore, at both sites, big pressure for other uses (sport and recreation in particular) emerged. Their impact, if not regulated, could be over the ecologically acceptable capacity of the targeted species. This was taken into account when formulating management measures, and partly also when drafting legal regulations concerning both SPAs that were adopted respectively on 8 August 2005 (Lehnice SPA) and 12 April 2006 (Syslovske polia SPA).

Reference definitions of favourable and unfavourable conservation statuses of Great bustard and other SPAs qualifying species as well as the assessment of actual conservation status for species in questions, were also included in the management plans.

The whole process of developing management plans involved discussions and negotiations with key stakeholders and nature conservation authorities (see Annexes A.1.1.- A.1.10 to ER) in order to incorporate their comments to the documents already in the drafting phase and to minimize conflicts in the phase of management plan formal approval and implementation. Actual numbers of respective meetings under this action A1 differ from foreseen numbers of respective meetings in the project proposal because numerous meetings were organized also within frameworks of Actions A3, A4 and F3, where management issues were also discussed. Thus overall, implemented consultations were deemed to be sufficient for the purpose of drafting management plans and the project team did not consider practical to call more meetings that would be actually redundant. Furthermore, there will be additional mandatory consultations of the management plans within a framework of the formal approval process.

Technical drafts of management plans for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs were completed in June 2006 and attached to PR1 as respective Annexes 1 and 2.

Within the project span, they served as guidance for project activities in both Project sites. For instance, they were used as reference when agroenvironmental schemes for *Otis tarda* and strategies with hunters and farmers were formulated, as well as when technical options for installation of warning devices on power line wires in Lehnice SPA were consulted with producers/suppliers. Small infrastructure and public awareness activities were also implemented in accordance with the draft plans.

As stated above, 2006 technical drafts of the MPs were not submitted for a formal approval, since MoE constantly signaled a need for adoption of the methodological guidance to elaboration of MP plans for SPAs prior to launching a formal approval process of any management plan. In 2009, the SNC and its project partners could not further continue in waiting for methodological clarifications. They started reviewing and updating draft MPs. At the time of preparation of the present Final Report, both plans were submitted to MoE with request for a formal approval and for a commitment on their implementation. (See Annexes A.1.1 and A.1.2 for draft MPs and Annex A.1.3. for a copy of the letter, through which the SNC requested the MoE for launching a formal approval process and for the commitment concerning implementation of draft MPs through the annual work plans of the SNC until their official approval.) Required commitment was not received until the date of the submission of the Final Report.

Lately, MoE was in the process of merging with former Ministry of Agriculture. Since 01/07/2010 its competencies were transferred to a new Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Regional Development. However, a new Government resulting from Parliamentary elections in June 2007, signals further radical changes in organization of Ministries, including renewal of MoE. Therefore, timing of issuing any high-level commitments in this situation can hardly be predicted. As soon as the SNC receives a required commitment, the EC will be informed accordingly.

When drafting management plans for Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA, effort was made to harmonize conservation measures with those applied at neighboring SPAs in Hungary and Austria. Experiences of Hungarian and Austrian experts from similar projects aimed at *O. tarda* protection in respective countries were taken into account, when appropriate. One meeting specifically aimed at discussing proper management measures internationally was organized within a framework of this action A1. Management measures were also discussed on the occasion of meetings organized within a framework of Action F3. Consultations with respective Hungarian and Austrian experts also included possibilities for future common or coordinated projects aimed at effective management of the West- Pannonian population of *Otis tarda* in the frontier area of the three countries.

ACTION A.2: Elaborate and promote agro-environmental scheme for *Otis tarda*

Expected results:

- Contracts on implementation of pilot agro-environmental schemes closed with all important agricultural holdings in the SPAs (3 contracts)
- Regular meetings with farmers on the implementation of the scheme 2x year
- Draft scheme prepared including calculations of payments
- Meetings with Ministry of Agriculture in order to lobby for inclusion of the scheme into agri-environment programme for the period 2007-2013

Actual Achievements:

- Agro-environmental scheme drafted and included into Slovak RDP
- 3 contracts on implementation of pilot agri-environmental schemes closed with 1 farm in the Lenice SPA
- Meetings with Ministry of Agriculture in order to lobby for inclusion of the scheme into agri-environment programme for the period 2007-2013

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 06/2006

Actual completion date : 06/2009

Reasons for delay:

Delay in completion of the action occurred due to prolonged negotiations and approval process of the Slovak RDP between the EC and the Slovak Government.

Former management of PD Dunaj managing agricultural land in Syslovske polia SPA was resistant to participation in pilot AES.

Description:

The proposal for agro-environmental scheme for *Otis tarda* was elaborated in March 2005 in consideration of the experiences with similar schemes in Hungary and Austria and in consideration of the measures envisaged in management plans prepared under Action A1. The proposed scheme took into account lek, breeding and wintering needs of *Otis tarda*.

In August 2005, SNC established a working group for elaboration of agro-environmental schemes for the programming period 2007 – 2013. The working group included Project Agricultural Expert from SOVS.

The group met 4 times in 2005. In December 2005, the group finalized formulating of the package of new measures including special schemes for all globally threatened bird species occurring in Slovakia, species listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive and other bird species.

One of these measures was agro–environmental scheme: „Habitat protection of endangered bird species“, which included a measure for habitat protection of the Great Bustard in consideration of its ecological needs.

The scheme suggested the following measures for *Otis tarda* protection:

- min.70% share of winter wheat, oilseed rape, fodder crops (e.g. alfalfa, clover), grass on arable land, intercrops (in combination or solo) in arable land included into the scheme
- no irrigation
- limited use of fertilizers
- mowing from the centre of the land parcel to the parcel edges
- use of warning chains
- no use of rodenticides and insecticides
- use of permitted plant protection chemicals only
- protective zone establishment around breeding locality of *Otis tarda*

Moreover, it was then expected that proposed Natura 2000 payments for the programming period 2007 – 2013 would be also applicable to *Otis tarda* in Syslovske polia and Lehnice project sites.

The MoE officially submitted proposed package of measures for RDP 2007–2013 (including NATURA 2000 payment schemes, agro–environment and forest environment schemes, and non–productive investments) to the Ministry of Agriculture at the end of April 2006.

In order to promote the scheme, project participants (SOVS through Agro-Eco Forum - an informal association of 18 NGOs dealing with agriculture, and the SNC) became also active members in the Working Group at Ministry of Agriculture on EAFRD and Rural Development Program 2007–2013. Several meetings took part at the Ministry of Agriculture during the year 2006. The second meeting of Working Group for Axis 2 (for agricultural land only) of EAFRD regulation took part in February 2006, the meetings of Working Group for all EARDF regulation (Axis 1, 2, 3 and Leader) took part in February 2006 and July 2006. The particular aim of those meetings was preparation of the National Strategy Plan for Rural Development (NSP).

Apart from the formal meetings, project partners took part at three informal meetings (in January, March and April 2006) with Rural Development Department director of the Ministry of Agriculture to explain him the reasons for and discuss proposed environmental measures for RDP 2007–2013.

The result of that advocacy activities was, that several strategic targets and priorities - NATURA 2000 payments and agro-environmental schemes were included into the NSP (approved in March 2006). Although NATURA 2000 payments were accepted as one of the measures in the NSP, financial share for Axis 2 (NATURA 2000, agro-environmental schemes and LFA payments) remained at the same level i.e. 50 % of the available funds. However, increase to 62 % of the available funds was considered as optimal.

Further, the process of preparation of the whole RDP was influenced by the change in the National Government after Parliamentary elections in summer 2006. The MoA headed by the new minister of Agriculture decided to change the NSP, already approved by the previous Government.

Consequently, in the frame of the project numerous unexpected lobbying initiatives were organized such as preparation of official comments on the changed NSP draft on 17/10/2006 and 31/10/2006, organization of public comments to the draft of modified NSP on 31/10/2006, variance proceedings with MoA on 01/12/2006; personal negotiations with Agriculture Minister on 13/11/2006, consultations with director of Rural Development Department of MoA on 30/10/2006 and Prime Minister’s advisors for Agriculture on 06/12/2006, call addressed to the Prime Minister and all Slovak government members on 04/12/2006 to discuss the issue and meetings at the European Commission on 04/12/2006, 08/02/2007 and 25/09/2007 (DG Agri, DG ENV) with request to intervene at Slovak Government.

The amended NSP was approved by the new Slovak Government on 06/12/2006. Process of official consultation of the first Slovak RDP draft, proposed by MoA, was consequently running from 26/01/2007 to 08/02/2007. The draft in question did not contain provisions for NATURA 2000 payments, neither it contained agri-environment scheme aimed at conservation of birds from Annex 1 of the Birds Directive (including *O. tarda*), nor forest environmental schemes.

In January 2007, Slovak Ministry of Agriculture organised meeting of Working Group members for Axis 2. During the meeting, disagreement was formally expressed with non-inclusion of NATURA 2000 payments, agro-environmental and forest environmental schemes into the first draft of RDP.

On 15th January 2007, SOS/ BirdLIFE Slovakia sent a letter, addressed to Mr Jean-François HULOT, Head of Unit – Rural Development Programmes, DG Agriculture) in the European Commission and requested him to ensure during the approval phase of the Rural Development Programme for Slovak Republic, that the RDP was not approved unless support to all the relevant EU priorities and objectives, including biodiversity conservation and the financing of the NATURA 2000 network is integrated in it.

Opportunity of mission to Slovakia of Mr. Ladislav Miko, Director of Directorate B: Protecting the Natural Environment of the DG Environment (01/02/2007) was also taken to inform him about weak coverage of Natura 2000 priorities in the RDP.

Despite the initial reservations from the Slovak MoA, concerning this particular AES, the scheme was finally included into the RDP 2007-2013. The steps taken in the lobbying for the AES for *Otis tarda* were summarized in the Annex A.2.1 to the PR3.

The Slovak RDP 2007-2013 was approved by the European Commission on 04/12/2007 and includes several measures for biodiversity protection. The AES for *Otis tarda* constitutes a sub scheme No. 5.3.2.1.3.3.2 in the AES for threatened bird species. The approved document is presented at the website of the Slovak MoA (<http://www.land.gov.sk>). The AES is applicable in Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs. For details of the Slovak RDP measures for biodiversity protection and the AES for *Otis tarda* please refer to Annex A.2.2 to the PR3.

Detailed conditions for application for participation in AES were regulated through “Regulation by the Slovak Government No. 160/2008 from 16 April 2008 establishing conditions for selection of applications for participation in agro-environmental schemes and conditions for provision of agro-environmental payments” (provided as Annex A.2.3 to the PR3). This was later substituted with the “Regulation by the Slovak Government No. 499/2008 from 26 November 2008 establishing conditions for providing of financial support according to rural development program (Annex A.2.1.e).

From combined AES for protection of habitats of endangered bird species, more bird species have been benefiting like, for instance, Imperial Eagle and Saker Falcon. That was why in reports and documents of respective LIFE projects for Imperial Eagle (LIFE03NAT/SK/000098) and Saker Falcon (LIFE06NAT/H/000096) the approval of this particular AES in Slovak RDP 2007-2013 was welcomed. However, there was no overlapping of these projects with the present Project in terms of supporting the elaboration of the scheme.

Payments under the existing AES for the protection of *Otis tarda* are lower compared to ones originally proposed for AES and applied in the pilot AES within a framework of the Project. This may result in lower interest in participation in the scheme by concerned agricultural entities (for details see Annex A.2.4 to the PR3).

During the elaboration of AES for *Otis tarda*, project staff was involved in consultation with farmers, particularly with farmers at Agripent s.r.o., in Lehnice SPA, who then were implementing pilot AES. Economic data from the pilot AES in Lehnice SPA were used as a reference when calculating proposed payment schemes for the formal scheme. Farmers from AC Dunaj in Syslovske polia SPA refused discussing of payment schemes giving the reason of incorrect approach to formulations of farming conditions and related subsidies calculation. This happened in spite of that agro-environment payment schemes in question were primarily designed by the Research Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics. The SNC and SOVS (SOS/BirdLife Slovakia) were only cooperating in this effort.

Thus pilot AES were only implemented at Lehnice SPA. The first contract for pilot AES for *Otis tarda* in Lehnice SPA was closed on 8/12/ 2005 with Agripent Farm and covered 67,35 hectares. Two additional

contracts (submitted as Annexes A.2.1 – A.2.3 to ER) for pilot AES were signed with Agripent Farm respectively on 10/08/2006 and 18/09/2006 for the total of 201 ha. In 2007, 307,41 ha of land was put under pilot AES in Lehnice SPA.

AC Dunaj was several times approached to take part in pilot AES. On 19/04/2006 meeting with AC Dunaj representatives was held to consult their request for the financial compensation. However, it rejected the cooperation again. On 11/07/2006 another meeting of the project team and AC Dunaj was organised at the premises of AC Dunaj with aim to facilitate cooperation with the project. External Monitoring team was present at the meeting. As the result of the meeting, the workshop for stakeholders was organised in 08/2006. However, AC Dunaj finally did not take part at the workshop. Another try to meet AC Dunaj and agree on some form of the scheme for *O.tarda* was made by MoE on 10/01/2007. At the meeting it was agreed that the project team would prepare a proposal for pilot AES for Syslovske polia. The proposal of the AES for AC Dunaj was prepared (see Annex D.2.1 to the PR2), however, AC Dunaj again did not agreed with the proposal and asked for a one week period for drafting their own proposal. On 08/02/2007 AC Dunaj sent a letter to MoE, in which rejected further discussing of pilot AES for *O.tarda* (See Annex A.2.1 to the PR2 for notes from the meeting and letter from AC Dunaj to MoE).

Agripent Farm and Agrolens Farms, both managing land at Lehnice SPA applied for participation in official agro environmental scheme in 2008 (and up to 2012) with 1184,4 ha and 374,22 ha respectively. (Annex A.2.1 to the Interim Report). Thus as of 31/12/2008, total of 1558,62 ha of land was managed under AES, which represented 37 % of the area of both project sites.

In January 2008, ownership and management of AC Dunaj has been changed. The SNC with project partners started dialog with new owners and management concerning, *inter alia*, their participation in agri-environmental schemes since 2009 and up to 2013. They had committed themselves to apply for participation at the scheme by 15 May 2009.

In 2009, Agripent Farm and Agrolens Farms, both managing land at Lehnice SPA applied for extended participation in official agrienvironmental scheme with 1 305,66 ha and 374,22 ha respectively. (Annexes A.2.3_a and A.2.3_b to the present report).

AC Dunaj, managing land at Sysľovské polia SPA, met its commitments and applied for participation in official agro-environmental scheme in with 379,14 ha (Annex A.2.3_c to the present report).

Overall, as of 31/12/2009 (Project closing date), in total 2059,02 ha of land was managed under AES, that represents 50 % of the area (4119,79 ha) of the project sites.

Annexes A.2.2_a, A.2.2_b and A.2.2_c contain maps with distribution of land under AES in the project sites in 2008 and 2009.

ACTION A.3: Elaborate and agree on a strategy with hunters that reduces mortality caused by predators and that avoids disturbance

Expected results:

- Strategy for hunters on reduction of mortality caused by predators and prevention of disturbance elaborated and agreed
- Meeting with land users organised
- Meeting with Nature protection authorities organised
- 4 meetings with hunters organised

Actual Achievements:

- MoUs and Strategies with 3 hunting associations on reduction of mortality caused by predators and prevention of disturbance elaborated and agreed
- Meeting with land users organised
- Meeting with Nature protection authorities organised
- 15 meetings with hunters organised.

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan:

Planned completion date: 06/2006

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Delay in completion of the action occurred due to prolonged negotiations of MoUs with concerned hunting associations.

Description:

The strategies for game management in the project areas and memoranda of understanding were negotiated and agreed at meetings with representatives of three hunting associations operating in the project areas: Lehnice HA in Lehnice SPA, and Lucka HA and Jarovecka HA in Syslovske polia SPA. Other hunting associations that operate in Lehnice SPA were not interested in cooperation and/or areas of their hunting grounds were negligible. Furthermore, hunting rights were ceased on part of the area of hunting ground of Lesana HA (See Annexes A.3.3 and A.3.4 to the Interim Report for maps of hunting grounds in targeted SPAs).

Some 15 formal meetings and numerous informal meetings/contacts were held prior and after signing of MoUs – in the period 2005-2009 (See Annexes A.3.1 - A.3.7. to the ER for details on selected meetings under this Action A3. and Annexes A.3.1-A.3.2 to the Midterm Report).

Below table present an overview of the meetings under Action A3.

Date	Place	Present HA	Meeting topic
15.04.2005	Cunovo	Rusovce HA	- restrictions relating to hunting practices in Syslovske polia SPA - elimination of impact of predators on Great Bustard by increasing effort to predator hunting
20.07.2005	Rusovce	Rusovce HA	- restrictions relating to hunting practices in Syslovske polia SPA - elimination of impact of predators on Great Bustard by increasing effort to predator hunting - strategy for hunting management in Syslovske polia SPA in consideration of the Great Bustard conservation
04.03.2006	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	strategy for game management in Lehnice SPA in consideration of Great Bustard conservation
14.05.2006	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	- strategy for game management in Lehnice SPA in consideration of Great Bustard conservation
14.07.2006	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	- preparation of MoU
16.07.2006	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	- preparation of a strategy for cooperation with Lehnice HA in the project in Lehnice SPA
18.07.2006	Rusovce	Lucka HA	- preparation of MoU and a strategy for cooperation with Lucka HA in the project in Syslovske polia SPA
15.8.2006	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	Signing MoU
18.8.2006	Rusovce	Lucka HA	Signing MoU
19.09.2006	Rusovce	Lucka HA	- discussing evaluation activities for the cooperation strategy with Lucka HA in accordance with the terms of the Project in Syslovske SPA
28.10.2006	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	-Implementation of activities under MoU
13.02.2007	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	-discussing implementation of of MoU
07.04.2008	Jarovce	Jarovecka HA	- discussing comments on the provisions of the MoU and Strategy for cooperation in Syslovske polia SPA
20.05.2008	Jarovce	Jarovecka HA	Signing MoU
03.03.2009	Lehnice	Lehnice HA	-discussing implementation of MoU

In introduction, the process of elaboration of SPA management plans was introduced to hunters with special focus on management measures necessary for maintaining favourable conservation status of

targeted/qualifying species, *Otis tarda* in particular. These involved restrictions related to hunting practices and elimination of impact of predators on species of conservation importance, *Otis tarda* in particular.

The MoUs and strategies for game management in respect to conservation of *Otis tarda* were signed as follows: with Lehnice HA in Lehnice SPA on 15/08/2006, with Lucka HA in Syslovske polia SPA on 18/08/2006 (see Annexes A.3.8 and A.3.9 to the ER for details), with Jarovecka HA in Syslovske polia SPA on 20/05/2008 (see Annex A.3.1 to the PR3 for the MoU).

It has been agreed that foxes and feral dogs will be more intensively hunted, as these are the predators with most significant impact on *Otis tarda* population.

As regards avoiding disturbance, consensus was gained on the prohibition of *Anser sp.* shooting as well as on the restrictions to constructing hunting facilities in Syslovske polia SPA. In both SPAs shooting of all game species is prohibited during the breeding period.

The Nature Conservation Department at MoE was consulted about the preparation of the strategy for hunters and on its format/content. The MoUs present model approach to cooperation between nature conservation institutions and hunting associations, in due consideration of fauna protection. Such approach may be replicable in other Slovak SPAs in the future.

Effort shall be made to transform MoUs, which all were signed for the project team by the project manager to cooperation agreements between the SNC and respective Hunting associations. Such agreements will represent sustainable tool of cooperation in conservation of *Otis tarda*.

ACTION A.4: Elaborate and agree strategy with farmers to reduce mortality caused by agricultural works and avoid disturbance

Expected results:

- 4 preparatory meetings
- Strategy discussed and agreed with farmers

Actual Achievements:

- 11 meetings
- Strategies with 2 Farms signed
- Cooperation Agreement with one farm signed

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 06/2006

Actual completion date : 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

The reaching of agreement on strategy with PD Dunaj was delayed due to resistance of previous owners and management of PD Dunaj to enter into cooperation with the SNC.

Description:

Initial meetings with farmers were held in 2005 in both SPA sites in order to define and agree on a common strategy to reduce mortality and disturbance caused by agricultural works. During the discussion with farmers it came out that some of the measures were already implemented (chain scare away equipment on mowing machines), but there was no information on the effectiveness of these measures. In Lehnice SPA it was possible to agree with Agripent Ltd on a “good” farmer’s performance during agricultural works that should avoid mortality and disturbance at the early stages of the project (See Annex A.4.1. to the ER for the Strategy).

However, in the Syslovske polia SPA, in the period 2005 – 2008, local farm the AC Dunaj, which managed the majority of the SPA's area (98%), was not willing to agree on any measure neither on any kind of common strategy to contribute to conservation of targeted species.

The strategy was thus elaborated and agreed only with farmers in Lehnice SPA (Agripent and AGROLENS, both limited liability companies).

When developing the Strategy with farmers, Project participants also explained to farmers restrictions coming up from respective decrees establishing the SPAs. Besides this, they give to farmers several recommendations relating to chemical treatment of crops (including concerning “the List of forbidden chemicals in SPAs”, elaborated by National Reference Centre for Chemical Compounds working under MoA) and environmentally friendly way of mowing and harvesting, which should be performed during the breeding season.

Management of AC Dunaj was changed in December 2007. Consultations with new owners and representatives of AC Dunaj started in early 2008. MoE representatives and high level representatives of the SNC occasionally participated at the meetings along with the Project staff. Minutes from those meetings, however, were not taken, neither lists of participants are available since AC Dunaj did not agree with such formal course of meetings.

Finally, on 15/10/2008 Cooperation Agreement was signed between the SNC and the AC Dunaj (See Annex A.4.1 to the Interim Report for the Cooperation Agreement). While the Agreement is a framework document, it provides for developing Implementation protocols regulating in detail particular subjects and related terms and conditions of cooperation. The SNC will offer Cooperation Agreements for indefinite period also to the farms managing land in Lehnice SPA. These in the future will replace existing strategies under the Action A.4.

Below table presents an overview of the meetings under Action A4.

DATE	VENUE	PARTICIPANTS	FOCUS OF THE MEETING
17.03.2005	Lehnice, seat of Agripent	SOVS (Rybanič), RPS (Chavko), Agripent (Karika, Szcuby)	Implementing of the strategy aiming at favorable conservation status of <i>Otis tarda</i> and its habitats
17.03.2005	Čenkovce, seat of Agrolens	SOVS (Rybanič), RPS (Chavko), Agrolens (Németh)	Implementing of the strategy aiming at favorable conservation status of <i>Otis tarda</i> and its habitats
05.04.2005	Rusovce, seat of AC Dunaj	SOVS (Rybanič), RPS (Chavko), PD Dunaj (Nagy, Matúš)	Implementing of the strategy aiming at favorable conservation status of <i>Otis tarda</i> and its habitats
28.04.2005	Rusovce, seat of AC Dunaj	SOVS (Rybanič), RPS (Chavko), PD Dunaj (Nagy)	Implementing of the strategy aiming at favorable conservation status of <i>Otis tarda</i> and its habitats
31.01.2008	Rusovce, seat of AC Dunaj	PD Dunaj (Szabo, Matus ŠOP SR (Baláž, Krempaský, Guziová), SOVS(Maderič)	Possibilities/opportunities for conservation management of Syslovske polia SPA by AC Dunaj
24.04.2008	MoE, Bratislava	PD Dunaj, ŠOP SR	Cooperation in conservation of <i>Otis tarda</i> in Syslovske polia SPA
03.07.2008	Rusovce, seat of AC Dunaj	PD Dunaj (Szabo, Róka), ŠOP SR (Baláž, Krempaský, Guziová)	Improvement of sowing procedure in Syslovske polia SPA, preparation of Cooperation agreement
08.2008	AC Dunaj	MoE, Environment Office, SNC, AC Dunaj	Conservation management of Syslovske polia SPA, preparation of Cooperation Agreement
09.2008	AC Dunaj	SNC, AC Dunaj	Finalising the Cooperation Agreement
21.01.2009	Lehnice, seat of Agripent	Agripent (Karika), SOVS (Maderič)	Sowing procedure for 2009, participation in AES for conservation of <i>Otis tarda</i> , implementing of Memorandum of Cooperation
23.01.2009	Čenkovce, seat of Agrolens	Agrolens (Németh), SOS (Maderič)	Sowing procedure for 2009, participation in AES for conservation of <i>Otis tarda</i>

ACTION A.5: Elaborate a project for reconstruction and operation of an information and logistic centre

Expected results:

- Project of reconstruction and renovation of buildings
- Project of landscape architecture
- Business plan for information and logistic centre

Actual Achievements:

- No results were achieved in this Action

Action status: terminated

Modification of the activity against the plan: The action failed to be implemented.

Planned completion date: 03/2007

Actual completion date: N/A

Reasons for failure:

Action failed to be implemented as foreseen in the original proposal due to changed circumstances regarding foreseen ownership by SNC of building that was intended for restoration to information and logistic centre. No alternative solution proved to be feasible for establishment of such comprehensive Information and logistic centre as foreseen in original project proposal.

Description:

Action failed to be implemented as foreseen in the original proposal due to changed circumstances regarding foreseen ownership by SNC of building that was intended for restoration to information and logistic centre. The building in question was a former custom office, owned by the Regional Police Forces (supervised by Ministry of Interior). It was expected that the ownership of the building will be transferred to the SNC. However, the process of transfer was interrupted due to legislative obstacles and claims of the property users that had lease agreements with the Regional Police Force.

After consulting this problem with the External Monitor, the SNC and the Project partners were seeking an adequate alternative for the Centre. Considerations were given to several opportunities for long term renting and restoration of premises in municipalities of Rusovce, Jarovce or Cunovo, that are located in the vicinity of the Syslovske polia SPA and all are part of Bratislava Capital City. At the same time, European Commission in the letter No. ENV.E4/AK/ml D(2006) 24243 dated 04/12/2006 proposed beneficiary to consider modification of the project, including, *inter alia*, the action A5 a related Action C5.

Modification request for alternative location and way of establishment of information and logistic centre in Bratislava city quarters of Rusovce, Jarovce or Cunovo was prepared and sent to the Commission on 21/05/2007. Additional information to the Modification request was prepared upon Commission request and sent on 07/01/2008. Due to launching a termination procedure for the Project in February 2008, evaluation of the modification request was ceased by the EC. The original modification request was then withdrawn by the SNC on 03/08/2008.

In the meantime, the SNC and project partners were continuously seeking for an adequate alternative solution for the Centre. One of the important requirements for the selection of new premises was the possibility to ensure planned financial support for the Centre from the state budget through annual allocations to the SNC as stated in the project document and as confirmed in the official letter from the director of the SNC, annexed to the project application. Another challenge was to ensure establishment of the centre that would provide comprehensive logistic functions as described in the project proposal.

The last try to establish a Centre within a framework of the project was made in October 2008 when the SNC formally requested municipality of Rusovce for a long term leasing of a communal building that served previously as fitness-centre. Unfortunately, the request was refused.

ACTION A.6: Prepare tenders, select contractors and suppliers

Expected results:

- Tenders are prepared.
- Contractors and suppliers providing the most cost-effective services are selected.

Actual Achievements:

- Procurement of required services and goods implemented.
- Consultants and suppliers selected on the most cost-effective terms

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

The project procurement plan was prepared by authorized procurement expert from SNC in accordance with the Slovak legislation (Act No. 25/2006 on Public Procurement) at the early stages of the project and was attached as Annex A6 to the ER). Beneficiary and partners were observing procurement plan when relevant in the course of project implementation.

ACTION B.1: Purchase and lease of core areas for *Otis tarda* in Syslovske Polia and Lehnice SPA

Expected results:

- In total 150 hectares of arable land in core areas purchased
- Approximately 100 hectares purchased in Syslovske polia SPA
- 50 hectares purchased in Lehnice SPA.

Actual Achievements:

- In total 47 ha of land purchased
- 7,5 ha of land acquired in Syslovske polia SPA
- 39,6 ha of land acquired in Lehnice SPA

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 03/2008

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Delays in implementing Action B1 occurred because

1/ land owners, after becoming aware of AES, started to prefer long-term lease of land. This caused slowing down implementing the action according to original plan and required preparation of the project modification request in order to make possible alternative ways of land acquisition for the conservation purposes

2/ land prices had increased rapidly and it was another reason for preparation of the project modification request in order to make possible alternative ways of land acquisition within a framework of available budget

Description:

The activity started at the early stages of the Project, when in the period 04/2005 – 06/2005 the information on land parcels and related land owners was collected from the Cadastre. Later, the information from the Cadastre was updated according to the project needs.

Land ownership was quite complicated in Syslovske polia SPA. This was a result of historical development in this area and heritage models with distribution of inherited property among all children. Consequently, land parcels become shared by numerous owners. Furthermore, Jarovce, Rusovce and Čunovo villages (in which cadastres the Syslovske polia SPA is located) were after the Second World War placed in Hungary and later, in 1947, this area was returned into Czechoslovakia and thus many of the current owners then become Hungarian citizens and continued living in Hungary. Records of them were poor and it was difficult to find and contact them. Some owners have been even living in other countries. Last but not least challenge with land at Syslovske polia SPA was that nearly all land in SPA was actually in use by a local farm - AC Dunaj on the basis of land lease agreements.

Working with owners was mainly based on individual meetings. Since the beginning of the project, some 97 meetings took place. At each meeting, the targeted owner was informed on the project, its objectives and expected results. Purchase of land and the terms and conditions thereof were then discussed. Land lease was also discussed, particularly at later stages of the project. Due consideration was given to the status of land-lease agreements between the individual owners and the AC Dunaj. Some owners become aware of the effort of the Project to buy land in the SPAs from public informative meetings organized by the Project.

The main issue in discussions was the price of land. The Project has to consider a price of 15 SKK/m² (cca 50 Eurocents) stated in the Expert Price Certificate submitted with the project proposal. However, that time (shortly after entering Slovakia to the EU) price of land (and real estates in general) was experiencing a rapid increase in Slovakia, and particularly in the Capital city of Bratislava and its surroundings (for more details please refer to the Project Modification Request).

Furthermore, as the land owners were becoming aware of AES and possible NATURA 2000 payments (then available in Austria and in preparation in Slovakia), gradually they started to prefer long term lease of land against selling the land against one-off payments. It became evident that the majority of owners would not consider selling their land anymore.

However, even land-lease by the SNC for conservation purposes was a challenge. It was only possible subject to (i) termination of land lease agreements with AC Dunaj and (ii) approval by the EC of the modification of Action B1.

Project Modification Request was submitted in 05/2007 and complemented with Add-Info in 01/2008. Due to launching a termination procedure of the Project in 02/2008, evaluation of the modification request was ceased. The Project Modification Request was then withdrawn by the SNC in 08/2008, when it became apparent that even long-term lease was not feasible to complete in the project span due to land –lease arrangement between the AC Dunaj and owners.

Overall, within a framework of the Project, cca 300 ha of land were negotiated with land owners. In addition, in 2008, after the new owners and management took over the AC Dunaj, the SNC explored possibility of leasing 50-100 ha of land in Syslovske polia SPA from the farm for indefinite period, but without success.

Therefore, overall only 47 ha of land were acquired in both Project sites for the conservation of *Otis tarda* by means of purchasing or land swapping. Below tables show review of acquisitions:

Syslovske polia SPA

Land Owner	Original Owner	Type of contract	Land Parcel No	Area in ha	Ownership certificate
SNC	Iveta Egerszegiova	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V- 14616/2007 of 31.7.2007	1265/34	0,17985	
SNC	Irma Bartalošova	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V- 14619/2007 of 31.7.2007	1265/34	5,3955	
SCN	Jaroslav Weinhandl	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V- 14612418/2007 of 31.7.2007	1265/34	0,17985	
			Subtotal	5,7552	2023
SNC	Matilda Potznerova	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V-2806/08 of 13.3.2008	1249/74	0,2491	2023
SNC	Matilda Potznerova	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V-2806/08 of 13.3.2008	1252/11	0,4473	2023
SNC	Matilda Potznerova	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V-2806/08 of 13.3.2008	4321	0,0179	2023
SNC	Matilda Potznerova	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V-2806/08 of 13.3.2008	4322	0,0034	2023
SOS/BirdLIFE	Rozália Horvathova Judita Tothova	Purchase Contract/ Kupna zmluva V-1736/09	1277/248	1,0000	2120

Lehnice SPA

Land Owner	Original Land Owner	Type of contract/Reference	Land parcel No	Area	Ownership certificate
SNC	Agripent, spol.s.r.o	Land Swap Contract ⁴ /SOPSR/27/2009	171/62	2,1550	976
SNC	Agripent, spol.s.r.o	Land Swap Contract/SOPSR/27/2009	171/63	2,3220	976
SNC	Agripent, spol.s.r.o	Land Swap Contract/SOPSR/27/2009	171/64	2,0590	976
SNC	Agripent, spol.s.r.o.	Purchase Contract/Kupna zmluva V-3457/06 30.6.2006	193/2	15,3749	976
SNC	Agripent, spol.s.r.o	Land Swap Contract/SOPSR/27/2009	193/3	10,7328	976
SNC	Agripent, spol.s.r.o.	Purchase Contract/Kupna zmluva V-3457/06 30.6.2006	130/15	6,9809	538

⁴ Annex B.1.3 contains also copy of land purchase contract through which the SNC acquired 15,2 ha of land for swapping.

Annexes B.1.1_a and B.1.1_b contain maps showing final distribution of land acquired within a framework of the Project in Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA.

Annexes B.1.2_a and B.1.2_b contain declarations by Director of the SNC and Executive Director of SOS/BirdLIFE Slovakia that acquired land will be managed for *Otis tarda*.

Annex B.1.3 contains copies of all ownership certificates with conservation clause, contracts and land price certificates (Hard copies only).

ACTION C.1: Restore grasslands on purchased land

Expected results:

- Meeting with Hungarian experts organised
- Consultations with Slovak expert organisation undertaken
- Meeting with land users organised
- 150 ha of purchased land restored into grasslands

Actual Achievements:

- Meeting with Hungarian experts organised
- Restoration Study Completed
- Meeting with land users organised
- 39,6 ha of purchased/swapped land restored into grasslands

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 09/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Action was delayed due to problems with acquisition of land by the SNC for the purpose of conservation of *Otis tarda*.

Description:

The implementation of action started with contracting Daphne- Institute of Applied Ecology for elaborating methodology for grasslands restoration in both SPAs (see Annex C.1.2 to the ER for the Contract details, and Annex C.1.3 to the Interim Report for a Restoration Study Summary). Study was completed in 12/2006. (see Annex C.1.1 to the PR2). The Study contains assessment of ecological conditions in both project sites and proposes methods for restoration of semi-natural steppe grasslands. Restoration of grasslands was also consulted in 11/2006 at technical meeting with Hungarian experts and with Agripent Farm in Lehnice in 2007 (See Annexes C.1.1 a C.1.2 to the Interim Report).

Restoration of grasslands under the project was implemented in accordance with the study. By the end of the project all land acquired in Lehnice SPA – 39,6 ha – was restored to grasslands.

Restoration was implemented in 2 phases. By the end of 2008, 22 ha of land were restored. Another 17, 6 ha were restored in 2009 after completion of land swap (15,2 ha was swapped for 17,6 ha in Lehnice SPA). See map in Annex B.1.1_b for location of grasslands in Lehnice SPA.

Restored grasslands will be maintained in Lehnice SPA in the future.

Land purchased in Syslovske polia SPA (7,5 ha) in 2007 – 2009 was not restored to grasslands. Land is managed for various crops favored by *Otis tarda*.

ACTION C.2: Restoration of windbreaks regarding the *Otis tarda* requirements

Expected results:

- Approximately 580 m of windbreak stripes will be cleaned from the lower bush etage in the Syslovske polia SPA
- Minimum of 60 shrubs and trees planted in Syslovske polia SPA
- Minimum of 70 shrubs and trees planted in Lehnice SPA
- The area of both SPAs become more suitable for the regular occurrence and breeding of *Otis tarda* and other steppe species

Actual Achievements:

- 100 trees planted in SPA Syslovske polia
- 970 trees/shrubs planted in Lehnice SPA
- The area of both SPAs become more suitable for the regular occurrence and breeding of *Otis tarda* and other steppe species

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Restoration of wind breaks in consideration of *Otis tarda* requirements was delayed in Syslovske polia SPA due to resistance of former owners and management of PD Dunaj to enter into cooperation with the SNC.

Description:

The Action started with a detailed survey of species composition of existing windbreaks and their location in both SPAs (See Annexes C.2.1 and C.2.2 to the ER for results of survey). In Lehnice SPA, restoration was carried out during October 2007 through plantation of 70 new trees (autochthonous tree species like oak, ash, wild cherry, wild pear were planted). Agripent Farm was subcontracted for this purpose. Project partners Lehnice Village and Lehnice HA oversaw implementing of the Action at Lehnice SPA. For details refer to a map of location of planted trees in Annex C2.1 to the PR 3.

In addition to the planting trees at the Project costs, project partner Lehnice HA planted more than 900 trees at their own costs at Lehnice SPA.

Restoration of windbreaks at Syslovske polia SPA, owing to persisting problems with cooperation with the land user – AC Dunaj, was only agreed in 2008 and implemented in 11/2008. Some 100 new trees were planted (See Annex C.2.1 to the Interim Report for a map showing restored sections of windbreaks at Syslovske polia SPA).

ACTION C.3: Take measures to prevent mortality resulting from the collision with power lines

Expected results:

- Warning marks and insulators purchased
- Marking of 12 km of 110 kV and 400 kV power lines
- Insulating of 18 km of 22 kV power lines

Actual Achievements:

- Warning marks and insulators purchased
- Marking of 12 km of 110 kV power lines in Lehnice SPA
- Insulating of 18 km of 22 kV power lines in SPA

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2007

Actual completion date: 08/2009

Reasons for delay:

Action was delayed due to:

(i) need to harmonise dates for installation of devices with dates for maintenance of power lines by electric companies, when lines are power-free during installation

(ii) project cash flow problems

Description:

Favorable status of habitats depends, *inter alia*, on the elimination of impact of the dangerous open-wire power lines. In Lehnice SPA there are 400 kV and 110 kV power lines in total length of 12 km and 22 kV power lines in the total length of 18 km. In order to explore most convenient technical solutions, a survey of suppliers of warning marks for wires of 400 kV, 110 kV and 22 kV power lines was undertaken at the early stages of the project. Only one acceptable supplier was identified – company Raichen Tyco Electronics, which offered more types of warning marks. Two meetings with the company took place, during which the company presented relevant documentation and catalogue of products to the project team. However finally, it became clear that offered products did not have required technical parameters and thus were not proper for the purpose of the Project.

Generally, warning marks available on the market at the early stages of the Project (red plastic balls) and installed on power lines in the past were primarily intended to eliminate collisions of aircrafts with power lines and were not sufficiently effective in eliminating collisions of birds with power lines.

At the beginning of 2006, German company RIBE designed a product, which makes the wires well-visible for birds and thus can eliminate their collisions. Therefore, RIBE became a supplier of devices to the SNC for the project purposes.

110 and 400 kV lines

110 and 400 kV lines are operated by Slovenská elektrizačná prenosová sústava, a.s. (SEPS). It financed costs of installation (cca 30 000 EUR) and determined dates for installation according to the schedule of maintenance of the power lines, when the power lines were power free.

Elektrovod Holding, a.s. was contracted for drawing up installation schemes for both 110 and 400 kV power lines.

Devices for the first phase of installation were delivered to SNC in 09/2006 and installed in 04/2008 on 6 km section of 110 kV power lines in Lehnice SPA.

Devices for the remaining section of 110 kV lines and for 400 kV lines were delivered to the SNC in 10/2008. Installation took place on the 21st of August 2009. On this occasion media were invited to Lehnice SPA (Slovak TV, Markiza TV). For details on media reports please refer to the Report on ecologisation of electric lines in Annex C.3.1.

Thus Lehnice SPA becomes the first SPA in Slovakia with power lines completely treated.

22 kV lines

22 kV lines are operated by Zapadoslovenska energetika, a.s. Insulators on 22 kV lines were purchased installed by the company at its own costs (cca 20 000 EUR) in two phases: in July 2007 – on 8 km section of power lines and in March 2008 – on cca 12 km section of power lines.

Excursion for both SEPS and Západoslovenská energetika a.s. to Austria was organised on 15/02/2007.

Monitoring

Monitoring of dead birds found under power-lines in Lehnice SPA was implemented by the project team. Cumulative Report on effects of installing warning marks on power lines (referred as “ecologisation of power lines”) is included as Annex C.3.1 to the present report.

For more details see Annexes C.3.1.- C.3.4 to the ER (Technical Specification of Warning Marks and Spirals and for minutes of the meeting with Elektrovod Holding a.s. and SEPS).

ACTION C.4: Install infrastructure to improve control of the sites and allow regulated access of public

Expected results:

Syslovske polia:

- 3 observation towers
- 1 observation tower for public
- 5 ramps (closing road)
- 13 information signs
- 5 “access banned” signs
- 3 rests (including shelter, benches and table)

Lehnice:

- 1 observation tower
- 3 information signs

Actual Achievements:

Syslovske polia:

- 2 observation towers
- 5 ramps (closing road)
- 5 “access banned” signs
- 9 information signs

Lehnice:

- 1 observation tower

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2006

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

(i) resistance of former management of PD Dunaj to cooperate in conservation of *Otis tarda* in Syslovske polia SPA

(ii) project cash flow problems

Description:

One monitoring tower was installed in Lehnice SPA in 2007 (See Annex C 4.1 to the PR3 for map showing location of the monitoring tower in Lehnice SPA).

Two monitoring towers were produced in 2008 for Syslovske polia. Their location was consulted with AC Dunaj and land owners concerned. Furthermore, in 2008, 5 ramps were produced and installed on access roads to Syslovske polia SPA. Access banned signs were procured and installed in accordance with approval plan for transport organisation in the SPA approved by municipal office of Bratislava. These measures significantly contributed to decreasing illegal movement in SPA, particularly by cars.

In December 2008, production of 9 information boards for instructional trail was contracted. Various options for the route of interpretation trail were considered in 2009 order to minimize impact of tourists on SPA qualifying species, Great Bustard in particular and to harmonize it with bicycle trail planned in SPA under the Interreg project run by Rusovce and Jarovce villages. Consultations were also held with EC on the alternative routes compared one originally proposed. Decrease in number of information boards from 13 to 9 was as well consulted with EC. Information boards were produced and installed in 2009 (Annex C.4.1.)

In accordance with the Project Recovery Plan, some of originally foreseen infrastructure not directly contributing to the Project objectives, namely observation tower for public, shelters and 1 monitoring tower, were not produced for the reason of shortage of funds.

ACTION C.5: Establishment of an information and logistic centre

Expected results:

- A reconstructed information and logistic centre including:
 - seminar venue
 - accommodation facilities
 - office for warden and the site manager
 - facilities for storing abandoned eggs and rehabilitation of injured individuals
 - room for garaging of machinery and storing of the equipment
 - store room for feeding mixtures

Actual Achievements:

- no results were achieved in this Action

Action status: terminated

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2006

Actual completion date: N/A

Reasons for delay:

See explanation under above action A5.

Description:

See description under above action A5.

ACTION D.1: Maintain favourable habitat conditions on purchased and leased land

Expected results:

- 100 ha of purchased land in Syslovske polia SPA managed for *O.tarda*
- 75 ha of leased land in Syslovske polia SPA managed for *O.tarda*
- 50 ha of purchased land in Lehnice managed for *O.tarda*
- 10 ha of feeding strips (oil seed rape, cabbage) established in Syslovske polia
- 10 ha of feeding strips (oil seed rape, cabbage) established in Lehnice
- machinery necessary for management of the project sites purchased including: 1 tractor, 2 mulch machines, 6 bush cutters

Actual Achievements:

- 39,6 ha of purchased/swapped land in Lehnice managed for grasslands for *O.tarda*
- 7,5 ha of purchased land in Syslovske polia SPA managed for crops for *O.tarda*
- 10 ha of feeding strips (oil seed rape, cabbage) established in Lehnice
- machinery necessary for management of the project sites purchased including: 1 tractor, mulch machines, 2 bush cutters, and used for managing the acquired land

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Delays in implementing of D1 Action occurred because

1/ delays in/impossibility to purchase the land as planned in the LIFE application

3/ complicated procedure for swapping of 15,2 ha of land purchased in Lehnice SPA at early stages of the Project

Description:

SNC purchased 22.35 ha of land in Lehnice SPA on 30/06/2006 (see Annexes B to the ER for details). Purchased parcels were situated near the area where pilot agri–environmental scheme was implemented by Agripent Lehnice. Restoration of grasslands on the purchased land started under Action C1.

The SNC started procurement of machinery for management of habitats for *O.tarda* in 09/2006. It was purchased in December 2007 (see Annex D.1.1 to the PR 3 for photos of machinery). Since then it has been used when necessary for management of purchased land. Before, arrangements for managements were made with Agripent Farm.

Total of 10 ha of feeding strips (5 ha oil seed rape and 5 ha cabbage) were established in Lehnice SPA in 2008. For establishing of these feeding strips, machinery of Agripent Farm was used because machinery purchased in a frame of the project was not suitable for this activity (SNC tractor is less efficient, it is suitable only for mowing and mulching; land preparation for sowing of oil seed rape and cabbage and sowing itself require a tractor with bigger efficiency and special adapters).

Management of purchased land aimed at development of suitable habitats for the Great Bustard. Success in doing that was confirmed very soon by presence of one Bustard hen, which has been recorded at this area regularly since 10/07/2006 (see Annex F.4.3 to the PR3).

Until the summer of 2009, remaining 15,2 ha of land purchased by the SNC in Lehnice SPA, were managed for crops suitable for *Otis tarda*. Conversion of this land to grasslands was implemented in autumn 2009 after completion of land swap. Since then 17,6 ha of land acquired by swapping of 15,2 ha has been regularly managed for grasslands.

Land purchased in Syslovske polia SPA (7,5) was managed for suitable crop for *Otis tarda*, such as oil seed rape, winter wheat, etc.

Note:

Initiated few years before the project started, land lease of 70 ha at Syslovske polia SPA by the SNC, which was managed for grasslands for *Otis tarda* protection, was unilaterally terminated by the previous management of AC Dunaj in 2005. The suspected reason for the termination of the lease was that leased area was overlapping with the area for planned golf course development. Environment Inspection was extensively involved in addressing the case. The AC Dunaj brought the case to the Court. Decision by the Highest Court of the SR definitely confirmed that the case was illegal destruction of Great bustard habitat (See Annex F5.3 to the Interim Report).

ACTION D.2: Implement and test agro-environment scheme for *O.tarda*

Expected results:

- 520 ha under pilot scheme in Syslovske polia managed for *O.tarda*
- 300 ha under pilot scheme in Lehnice managed for *O.tarda*
- agronomical and technical data on the application of the pilot scheme

Actual Achievements:

- 0 ha under pilot scheme in Syslovske polia managed for *O.tarda*
- 307,41 ha under pilot scheme in Lehnice managed for *O.tarda*
- agronomic and technical data on the application of the pilot scheme
- 1679,80 ha of land under formal AES in Lehnice SPA
- 379,14 ha of land under formal AES in Syslovske polia SPA

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: no pilot AES were implemented at Syslovske polia SPA

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Former owners and management of AD Dunaj managing agricultural land in Syslovske polia SPA were not willing to participate in pilot AES.

Description:

Pilot agroenvironmental schemes aimed at testing feasibility of the scheme proposed for inclusion to the RDP for Slovakia were implemented only in Lehnice SPA on area gradually increasing up to 307,41 ha. Currently, the area of pilot AES has been managed under formal AES for *Otis tarda*. Funds budgeted for AES in Syslovske polia SPA remained unspent.

Details on both pilot and formal agro environmental schemes are described under above Action A2.

For more details on this Action D2 see Annexes D.2.1 – D.2.5 to the ER.

ACTION D.3: Ensure accessibility of food in winter

Expected results:

- Snow plough purchased
- Food supply purchased
- Repeated snow removal from minimum of 2% of the SPA area each winter
- Minimum of 20 days of additional feeding in winter season each project year

Actual Achievements:

- Snow plough purchased
- Food supply purchased
- Snow removal at Lehnice SPA in winter 2009
- Additional feeding in winter season provided as needed

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

In 2005, in Slovakia the winter was not severe. Continual snow cover was recorded only for a short period in December. Due to this fact the natural food sources were easily accessible to wintering individuals of *O. tarda* and there was no need for removing snow cover. The monitoring results show that the wintering population of *O. tarda* was then vital and did not starve due to lack of food.

Winter feeding operations for winter 2006/2007 were agreed with hunters in Syslovske polia SPA and with farmers and hunters in Lehnice SPA. However, due to unusually warm winter, without snow cover in lowlands, there was good access to natural sources of plant and animal food resources for *O. tarda* and no additional winter feeding was needed in the winter season of 2006/2007.

Operations for additional winter-feeding were again agreed with hunters in Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs for winter season 2007/2008. That season, additional winter-feeding was applied in Syslovske polia SPA (See Annex D.3.1 to the Interim Report for photos).

Snow plough for removal of snow in case of severe winters was purchased in 2007 (Annex D.3.2 to the Interim Report).

Operations for additional winter-feeding were again agreed with hunters in Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs for winter season 2008/2009. In this season winter feeding was applied by hunters and additional feeding was provided by the project team only in a limited extent because winter conditions were not that critical.

ACTION D.4: Control predators to prevent mortality of eggs, chicks, and females

Expected results:

- Predator pressure on the *O. tarda* population reduced.
- Hunting of foxes in winter season increased.
- Minimally 50 % of individuals of fox population at the SPA trapped.
- Eggs from nests of minimally 80% of *Pica pica* and *Corvus corone* populations at the target area removed

Actual Achievements:

- Predator pressure on the *O. tarda* population reduced.
- Hunting of foxes increased

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

All activities for predator elimination were based on the strategy agreed with hunters and signed Memoranda of Understanding with concerned hunting associations. The strategy included eliminating of predators and cooperating in monitoring of predators (see Annexes A.3.8 and A.3.9 to ER and Annex A.3.1 to the PR3).

In accordance with the above, major effort was focused on the capture of raptors. This activity was also attractive to the hunters and the established cooperation was optimal. The project team agreed with hunters that primarily Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Magpie (*Pica pica*), which were considered the main threat for *Otis tarda* in the project areas, would be eliminated. Despite the low numbers of Foxes in 2005, there were 25 foxes shot in Syslovske polia SPA and 27 in Lehnice SPA. As a result of this intensified hunting pressure, less individuals were observed in both areas in 2006.

In 2006, 28 foxes in Syslovske polia SPA and 27 foxes in Lehnice SPA were shot. In 2007, 24 foxes in Syslovske polia SPA and 29 in Lehnice SPA were shot. In 2008, 23 foxes in Lehnice SPA and 16 foxes in Syslovske polia SPA were shot. In 2009, 20 foxes in Lehnice SPA and 28 foxes in Syslovske polia SPA were shot.

For the more effective Fox elimination, production of special traps was organized. Production was not paid by the project. These traps were given to Lucka HA in Rusovce. Two traps were installed in Sysľovské polia SPA on 24/09/2006. According to information from Mr. Kelemen (from Lucka HA) other two traps were installed in autumn 2008. In 2008 and 2009 respectively 6 and 7 foxes were trapped in Syslovske polia SPA.

Exceptional wariness of Magpie made hunting of this species difficult. However, hunters managed to eliminate 44 individuals in 2005, 71 individuals in 2006 and 73 individuals in 2007 in both sites. In 2008, 28 magpies were shot in Lehnice SPA and 5 magpies were shot in Syslovske SPA. In 2009, 148 magpies were shot in Lehnice SPA and 6 magpies were shot in Syslovske SPA. Main focus on the Magpie elimination was at Syslovske polia SPA, where thoroughly monitored reproduction parameters of the species were available. All findings of nests in Syslovske polia SPA were recorded. The nests were classified into 3 categories: old nests, one-year-old nests and new nests.

In 2006, 117 Magpies' nests were recorded. Of them 75 were old nests, 30 were one year old nests, and 13 were new nests. In 2007 monitoring of magpie nests wasn't performed. In 2008, 88 Magpies' nests were recorded: of them 57 were old nests, 19 were one year nests, and 12 were new nests. In 2009, 71 Magpies' nests were recorded. Of them 48 were old nests, 12 were one year old nests, and 11 were new nests.

Sustainable level of Magpie population is very important also for *Falco vespertinus* – another priority species of SPA because nests of Magpie are used for reproduction of this species.

Below tables present number of predators hunted from bag statistics in both project sites:

Number of predators hunted in 2005

Predator	Sysľovské polia SPA	Lehnice SPA
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	25	27
<i>Corvus corone</i>	0	2
<i>Pica pica</i>	9	35
<i>Felis catus</i>	19	20
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	2	6

Number of predators hunted in 2006

Predator	Sysľovské polia SPA	Lehnice SPA
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	28	27
<i>Corvus corone</i>	0	0
<i>Pica pica</i>	3	68
<i>Felis catus</i>	15	22
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	0	15
<i>Martes sp.</i>	0	2

Number of predators hunted in 2007

Predator	Sysľovské polia SPA	Lehnice SPA
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	24	29
<i>Corvus corone</i>	0	0
<i>Pica pica</i>	3	70
<i>Felis catus</i>	23	21
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	2	17
<i>Martes sp.</i>	0	2

Number of predators hunted in 2008

Predator	Sysľovské polia SPA	Lehnice SPA
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	22	23
<i>Corvus corone</i>	0	0
<i>Pica pica</i>	5	28
<i>Felis catus</i>	9	19
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	1	5

Number of predators hunted in 2009

Predator	Sysľovské polia SPA	Lehnice SPA
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	35	20
<i>Corvus corone</i>	0	0
<i>Pica pica</i>	6	148
<i>Felis catus</i>	10	21
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	2	10
<i>Martes sp.</i>	0	3

Number of predators hunted in the period 2005-2009

Predator	Sysľovské polia SPA	Lehnice SPA
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	134	126
<i>Corvus corone</i>	0	2
<i>Pica pica</i>	26	349
<i>Felis catus</i>	76	103
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	7	53
<i>Martes sp.</i>	0	7

More details is included in the Report on Predators and Disturbance attached as Annex F.4.1. to the present report.

ACTION D.5: Protect nests in emergency situations

Expected results:

- 3 incubators purchased
- Meeting with Hungarian experts organized
- Commitment on cooperation gained from Hungarian experts

Actual Achievements:

- 3 incubators purchased
- Meeting with Hungarian experts organized
- Verbal commitment on cooperation gained from Hungarian experts

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 06/2009

Actual completion date: 06/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

In Slovakia, there is no ex-situ facility for treatment of abandoned eggs of *Otis tarda*. At the meeting on 20/03/2006 with Austrian and Hungarian *Otis tarda* LIFE projects managers, an emergency operation plan for cases of findings of abandoned eggs in Slovakia was agreed. It was agreed that such eggs would be transferred to Dévaványa Great Bustard Rescue Centre in Hungary immediately when the need arises, subject to obtaining necessary permits. The exception clause from the provisions of Nature and Landscape Conservation Act was issued by the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic for the eggs transfer to Hungary together with other exceptions on 05/09/2006 (see Annex D.5.1 to the ER).

The Project team kept contacts with Slovak and Hungarian CITES Management Authority, Hungarian Chief Inspectorate and Hungarian experts from Dévaványa Great Bustard Rescue Centre. Despite intensive monitoring of potential nesting sites in both project sites, no nests were observed in years 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009⁵. Accordingly, no nests were in emergency situation in the project span.

One portable and two still incubators were purchased as a precautionary measure. The incubators were placed to the SNC premises in Bratislava and Dunajska Streda to be available for emergency situations. Incubators were also offered for use to HU and A Otis projects.

ACTION E.1: Prepare and update project web site

Expected results:

- easy to access up to date, informative web site about the project activities and *O.tarda* in general
- over 25,000 visitors are expected to visit web site during the project period

Actual Achievements:

- multilingual web-site in operation from 07/2006 till – 08/2008
- After Life web-site established as a part of the SNC web-site

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

The project web site www.dropy.sk was launched on 10/07/2006 in SK and En versions. It was updated once a month. The website was designed in publishing system, so more authorized persons could update the website. Mainly, it was responsibility of site managers. The German language version was added in 09/2006 and Hungarian version of the website was prepared in 10/2006. A short training on web site management and updating in the publishing system for project staff was held by the web-site provider on 18/01/2007.

The project web site was updated regularly until summer 2008. Then the site experienced serious technical problems within a responsibility of web-site provider. Therefore, transfer of website to the SNC server was considered. However, all the process was delayed due to problems in communication with web-site provider. The project team failed to access the content of original web-site. Modest “after-life” web page was established as a part of the SNC web page. It gives information on the project, its objectives, and results.

Screenshots of the website were provided as annexes E.1 to the ER and E.1.1. to the PR2.

⁵ In the time of preparation of the present Final Technical Report, one hen nesting at Syslovske polia SPA was recorded. Protection - no activity zone was designated around each nest for their protection by the Regional Environment Office.

ACTION E.2: Prepare and distribute information and promotion materials on the project

Expected results:

- 1000 pcs. of poster A2 format, full-colored
- 500 pcs. of puzzle A5 format
- 6000 pcs. of brochure, A5 format, full-colored, 12 pages
- 100 pcs. of popular project report, A4 format, full-colored, 16 pages
- 200 pcs. of T-shirts
- 1000 pcs. of badges
- 10 000 pcs. of stickers

Actual Achievements:

- 2000 pcs. of poster A2 format, full-colored
- 500 pcs. of puzzle A5 format
- 6000 copies of brochure, A5 format, full-colored, 12 pages
- 380 T-shirts
- 1000 pcs. of badges
- 10 000 pcs. of stickers
- 1000 copies of popular project report, full-colored, 16 pages

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

The A2 poster in 2000 copies with appeal on *Otis tarda* conservation was printed in 09/2006 (see Annex E.2.1 to the ER). Badges (1 000 pcs.), T-shirts (380 pcs.), stickers (10 000 pcs.) and Puzzle (500 pcs.) were produced. (Annexes E.2.1 – E.2.4 to the PR2).

Full colored brochure -6000 copies was printed in 2008 (see Annex E.2.1 to the Interim Report). Layman's Report was prepared and printed in 12/2009 (see Annex E.2.1 to the present Final Report). The informational and promotional materials have been distributed to various stakeholders. Distribution lists are included in Annex E.2.1.

ACTION E.3: Organise guided tours on sites

Expected results:

- 5 guided tours per year, at least 25 guided tours in total during the project
- At least 500 visitors
- At least 10 volunteers will be trained as voluntary guides

Actual Achievements:⁶

- 10 guided tours to the project areas
- 196 visitors
- 10 volunteers trained as voluntary guides

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

Guided tours were organised subject to interest from various groups since the beginning of the project. Project team members or SOVS members were guides in these tours. Details of guided tours were described in previous progress reports. Annex A.7.1. contains, *inter alia*, a review of the guided tours with respective numbers of participants.

On 28 September 2008, 10 guides were trained ⁷ (See Annex E.3.1 to the Interim Report for the names and addresses of guides and participants list from the training) for guiding various groups in Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs. It is expected that interested individuals/groups will be visiting particularly Syslovske polia SPA due to winter concentrations of *Otis tarda* as well as due to close distance of the SPA from Capital City of Bratislava. Lehnice SPA might be of interest particularly for university students and professionals.

As at 31 December 2008, 196 persons participated at guided tours to Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs.

ACTION E.4: Keep regular contacts with media and promote the project

Expected results:

- the conservation problems of *O.tarda* and the action and results of the LIFE project will be brought to the attention of the general public, decision makers and interest groups
- public awareness on conservation needs of *Otis tarda* will be raised through publishing information in media

Actual Achievements:

- the conservation problems of *O.tarda* and the action and results of the LIFE project were brought to the attention of the general public, decision makers and interest groups via various media
- public awareness on conservation needs of *Otis tarda* has been raised

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

⁶ In the Interim Report, number of events and respective participants was reported together with excursions under Action 7, for the purpose of this FR events were divided by Actions.

⁷By mistake, in Interim Report, 8 trained guides were reported.

Description:

The project and issues related to the conservation of *Otis tarda*, were presented through printed and electronic media since its beginning. At the early stages of the project, especially problems occurred at Syslovske polia SPA in relation to golf course development and illegal ploughing of the habitat of *O. tarda* were presented to the media. Later on, the focus was on the challenges with securing suitable habitats for *Otis tarda* in Slovakia, and in Project sites in particular. Positive messages, for instance, on adoption of AES for *Otis tarda*, return of Great Bustard to Lehnice SPA or ecologization of power lines were also communicated to the public.

Assistance was provided to the BBC team, when preparing a programme on the green belt initiative along former "Iron curtain". The programme was broadcasted on BBC radio.

Media monitoring results were presented in Annex 3 to the PR1, Annex E.4.1 to the ER, Annex E.4.1 to the PR2 and Annex E4.1 to the PR3. Additional results of media monitoring for 2008 -2009 (beginning of 2010 is also included for information) are presented in the Annex E4.1 to the present report.

ACTION E.5: Prepare and present video on *Otis tarda* protection

Expected results:

- 2 copies of 26 minutes long video in TV quality (betacam)
- 1 premiere and 2 reprises in National TV (2nd channel)
- 10 copies for lectures and presentations
- Presented in 100 presentations and/or lectures

Actual Achievements:

- 2 copies of 26 minutes long video in TV quality (betacam)
- 1 premiere in National TV (2nd channel)
- 2 subsequent broadcastings in National TV (2nd and 1st channel)
- 105 DVD copies in 4 languages
- 5 CD copies in 4 languages
- 4 VHS copies in 4 languages
- 95 public presentations

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 03/2008

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Delay of action was caused by delayed production of video (shooting took longer then expected, terms of co-production negotiated longer then expected, etc.).

Description:

The video movie "The Country of People and the Bustard" that presents conservation activities for *Otis tarda* within SK, HU and A LIFE projects was produced in the four languages - Slovak, English, German and Hungarian. 2 copies of video in TV quality (betacam) were acquired together with 105 DVD copies, 5 CD copies and 5 VHS copies in all four languages. It was produced, inter alia, for broadcasting in Slovak TV, for public and school presentations and as a reference documentary material for authorities and stakeholders. The Movie was attached as Annex E.5.1 to the Interim Report.

Co-oproduction Agreement by the 5 project participants was signed. Agreement between Slovak TV and the SNC for broadcasting on Slovak TV (2nd channel) was signed.

The following three broadcastings were performed in the Slovak TV in the project span:

Premiere broadcasting:

13/04/2009 – STV2 Channel (<http://www.stv.sk/relacieaz/dvojka/krajina-ludi-a-dropa/>)

Subsequent broadcastings:

21/11/2009 – STV2 Channel (<http://www.stv.sk/relacieaz/dvojka/krajina-ludi-a-dropa/>)

23/06/2010 – STV1 Channel (<http://www.stv.sk/relacieaz/jednotka/krajina-ludi-a-dropa/>)

After premier broadcasting, it was possible to start with public presentations of video. Until the end of the project 95 public presentations took place, mostly for students (See Annex E.5.1. for copies of the participants lists).

ACTION E.6: Erect and maintain information signs with project logo

Expected results:

- 2 information signs erected in the strategic place visible for the public.

Actual Achievements:

- 2 information signs erected in the strategic place visible for the public.

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 09/2006

Actual completion date: 07/2009

Reasons for delay: Failure to schedule the project action properly

Description:

Two information signs informing on the project were produced in late 2008. In 2009, they were installed in Lehnice and Jarovce villages, in both cases in front of the municipality office.

ACTION E.7: Schedule regular meetings with stakeholders (farmers, hunters)

Expected results:

- A minimum of 20 meetings with stakeholders organised.
- 5 lectures undertaken
- 10 common field trips organised

Actual Achievements:

- 18 collective meetings with stakeholders organised
- 18 lectures and similar events/min 555 participants
- 1 excursion/50 participants
- 97 individual meetings with land owners (B1)
- 15 meetings with hunters (A3)
- 11 meetings with farmers (A4)

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

Number of meetings and presentations were held with various stakeholders (public concerned with SPAs targeted by the Project, hunters, farmers, landowners,) since the early stages of the project. Attention was paid also to school children/students, for which lectures, photo-workshops, competitions and excursions were organised.

Measures for more effective protection of *Otis tarda* were in the centre of discussions in the course of those meetings. Meetings provided forum for discussions and negotiations, standpoint clarification and patient explanation of nature conservation needs and principles to the participating audience/stakeholders. Participants were mostly from villages that are located in the vicinity of the project areas, i.e from Rusovce, Čunovo, Jarovce and Lehnice.

Meetings were organised, for instance, in the process of drafting management plans for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs (Action A1), participation in AES (A2), Regarding the aims of the project, hunters and farmers represented the most important groups directly influencing conditions of SPA protection, therefore these have been identified as the key stakeholders (Actions A3 and A4). Other important target group was landowners. With them land purchase in the SPAs was negotiated (Action B1).

Under present Action E7 more communication and cooperation events are reported, including public meetings, lectures and similar events for children, excursion, etc. Review of events is in Annex E.7.1 to the present Report.

ACTION E.8 Disseminate scientific results and conservation experience

Expected results:

- 1 scientific report
- 2 Scientific articles (printed in Ochrana prirody, Tichodroma)
- 4 articles in farmers' and hunters' magazines

Actual Achievements:

- 1 scientific report
- 3 scientific articles
- 4 articles in professional journals

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 09/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay:

Delay in action was caused by ambitious of the project team to base scientific articles on data gathered through monitoring within a span of the project. Therefore project team started to prepare articles only in 2008, when data from three years of monitoring were already available.

Description:

The expert report "Integrating NATURA 2000 requirements into the National Rural Development Programme 2007- 2013" (Annex E.8.1.to the ER) suggesting AES for the RDP for the period 2007 – 2013 was prepared by SOVS in cooperation with Birdlife International and RSPB and presented to the MoE and

MoA. The report was addressing conservation of all endangered bird species listed in the Annex I of the Bird Directive, including *Otis tarda*, and based on analysis of ecological requirements of bird species concerned.

Findings from common collection of data on *O.tarda* in SK, HU and A were presented during conference of European Ornithologist Union in Vienna on 08/2007.

In 2008, scientific article "Occurrence of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) in Slovakia during 2000-2008" was published in Ornithological Journal Tichodroma 20/2008. Tichodroma is journal published by the SOVS (SOS/BirdLife Slovakia) and the Institute of Forest Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Articles published in Tichodroma are registered in international database *Zoological Record*® and ornithological reference journals *Recent Ornithological Literature* a *Ornithologische Schriftenschau*. (Annex E.8.1 to Interim Report). Another article for Tichodroma was completed in 2009.

In addition to scientific articles, popular ones were published in professional journals "Nase Polovnictvo" (Our Game Management), Farmar (Farmer) (Annex E.8.1 to the Interim Report) and magazine Quark.

Development of western Pannonian population of *Otis tarda* from 1900 until 2008-2009 was described in Article published in scientific journal Egretta. The Article was prepared jointly with experts from neighboring countries.

Some articles drafted in 2009, were published in 2010. Otherwise, data from monitoring 2009 could not be considered. Articles drafted/published in the project span are included in Annex E_8_1_el to the Present report.

ACTION F.1: Plan, manage, monitor and report project

Expected results:

- Reports from Steering Committee Meetings provided.
- The smooth and effective proceeding of the project is ensured.

Actual Achievements:

- Continuous project management ensured.

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

At the early stages of the project - in the period 01/2005 - 11/2005 the project was coordinated through the SNC Regional office in Bratislava. Full time project manager was appointed in 11/2005.

Planning, management and monitoring of the project implementation was done through regular working meetings of project team, usually once per two weeks. The tasks for project team members were planned for one-month period and the performance and the implementation of tasks were regularly monitored. The timesheets of the Project staff were produced and certified regularly once a month.

Change in the position of Project Manger occurred in 02/2008.

Project management was facing to numerous challenges. The most serious are listed below.

- serious problems with the project cash flows due to failing to ensure timely co-financing of the Project and consequent delayed ability to submit Interim Payment Request
- problems with acquisition of land, as foreseen in the project proposal

- problems with resistance of AD Dunaj, one of the key project stakeholder, to cooperate with the project and in general to implement measures for conservation of *Otis tarda*
- failing to establish Information centre as foreseen in the Project
- failing to establish effective project financial management at the early stages of the Project
- steep reduction of the capacity of the project staff in 2009, in order to keep disbursement of Personnel costs at reasonable level in consideration of the status of the Project

Due to insufficient level of co-financing and consequent delay in compiling the Interim Payment Request, the project was facing financial insufficiency. In response to the situation, the EC launched project termination procedure and requested the SNC to present the Project Recovery Plan. Project Recovery Plan was sent to the EC on 18/07/2008. The EC agreed with continuation of the project in accordance with the Recovery Plan, without requesting a formal project modification.

See above chapter Life – project framework for more details on the project management.

ACTION F.2: Plan, manage, monitor and audit finances

Expected results:

- Transparent recording of project finances.

Actual Achievements:

- Transparent recording of project finances
- Auditor's report.

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 06/2010 (Audit)

Reasons for delay: failure to ensure effective project financial management at the early stages of the project

Description:

The system for managing finances was developed by the Project Participants at the early stages of the project. Cost reporting structure was prepared and rules for recording, accounting and presenting costs were agreed. The partners were sending lists of expenditures to the interim project financial manager of the beneficiary in the three months period. He was compiling short cumulative reports on the project expenditures on the occasion of presenting the Project reports to the EC or when requested by the Project manager. However, in consideration of his other regular responsibilities within the SNC, it was beyond his capacity to ensure detailed recording and analyzing of the Project expenditures. His work was in-kind contribution by the beneficiary; no costs were charge to the project.

Individually, the Project participants duly recorded project costs in their respective accounting systems in accordance with national accounting standards (harmonised with EU standards).

In order to ensure proper preparation of interim and final payment requests, detailed and timely analysing of Project expenditures and due cooperation between the project and project auditor, full time project financial manager was appointed in September 2008.

In early 2008, serious problems occurred with the project cash flows. This happened due to:

(ii) problems with ensuring timely co-financing of the Project, and consequent

(ii) disbursements below threshold of 900 000 EUR (i.e. below 150% of the 1st installment), not allowing to request timely the 2nd pre-financing payment.

This was finally overcome by increasing financial allocation to the SNC by the MoE in 2008. Then status of disbursements as of 31/12/2008 allowed for preparation the 2nd payment request.

INTERAUDIT Group, s.r.o. was appointed by the beneficiary as the project auditor in November 2008. and performed initial project in December 2008. The final audit was completed in June 2010. The Auditor's report (Sk and En versions) are attached to the Final Report.

Auditors details :

INTERAUDIT Group, s.r.o.
Sancova 102/A
831 04 Bratislava
Slovakia
Tel/fax: 421 2 555 658 96
e- mail : ia-group@iag.sk

ACTION F.3: Maintain intensive co-operation and exchange of experience with other Otis tarda projects in the region (HU, A, CZ)

Expected results:

- Contacts among Projects Managers of LIFE projects established
- Regular communication among Managers and staff of Life projects
- Working visits of staff (5 persons) two times in Austria, Hungary and Czech Republic
- Workshop on Habitat Management for *O.tarda* in 2006 (30 participants)

Actual Achievements:

- Contacts among Projects Managers of LIFE projects established
- Regular communication among Project Managers and staff of Life projects
- Common meetings organised
- 48 common counts of *O.tarda* in the period 12/2005 – 12/2009

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 09/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

At the early stages of the project a methodology for joint counts of *Otis tarda* population was agreed with Hungarian and Austrian experts. The counts were undertaken monthly, each first Tuesday in a month during morning hours. The aim of these counts was to record the real abundance of the species in the border territories of all the three countries. The results of the joint counts are presented in Annex to the "Final Monitoring Report" summarizing results of monitoring under Actions F 4 and F5 and attached as Annex F.4.1 to the present report.

Regular monthly coordination meetings were held after common *O.tarda* monthly counting. They were usually organized as field meetings. At these occasions, representatives of all the three projects for *Otis tarda* from Slovakia, Austria and Hungary discussed all ongoing issues related to the respective projects and conservation of the Great Bustard.

Few larger meetings with experts participating in *Otis tarda* projects in A and HU took place, usually in Rusovce. Special one day meeting with A and HU projects was held in Deutsch Wagram, Austria in 08/2007 (see Annex F.3.1 to the ER for details). Another special one day meeting of the *O.tarda* LIFE

projects from A, HU and SK was held in Slovakia in Bratislava on 17/01/2007 (see Annex F.3.1 to the PR2 for details).

In addition, numerous informal meetings and contacts were made with HU and A projects. Foreseen contacts with Czech experts at the project level were not established since finally there was no LIFE project in the Czech Republic that would target conservation of *Otis tarda*.

Representatives of the three projects in question also met few times on the occasions of common presentations for the media (i.e. interviews for TA3 TV and BBC 4).

Occasionally, cooperating project managers or contact persons from the neighboring country were present at project monitoring mission.

International workshop "Conservation and management of the Great Bustard in transboundary context was held in Bratislava on 27/11/2009. Presentations and discussion were focused on results of the three LIFE projects implemented in last years in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia and on cooperation in conservation and management of western Pannonian population of *Otis tarda* in the near future. Agenda and Participants lists are included in Annex F_3_1. Presentations are included in Annex E_3_2_el. Press release was issued prior to the workshop (Annex E_3_3).

ACTION F.4: Monitor the population and habitats of *Otis tarda*

Expected results:

- Information in the form of data or analysis outcomes stored in the database connected with GIS on:
 - Age and sex structure of the Slovak *O.tarda* population, its dynamics and preferred habitats;
 - Preferred areas within both SPA sites and their habitat usage patterns. Reasons for habitat preference and impact of habitat restoration at each site;
 - Importance of mortality factors at each site
- 5 technical reports summarizing information gathered during monitoring will be prepared on annual basis

Actual Achievements:

- Information in the form of data or analysis outcomes stored in the database connected with GIS on:
 - Age and sex structure of the Slovak *O.tarda* population, its dynamics and preferred habitats;
 - Preferred areas within both SPA sites and their habitat usage patterns.
 - Importance of mortality factors at each site
- 2005 technical report, 2006-2007 technical report, cumulative monitoring report covering period 01/2005 -09/2008,
- Final cumulative report on monitoring, predators and disturbance covering period 2005 - 2009

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

Regular monitoring of *Otis tarda* population in Sk was implemented since the early stages of the project with the intervals of 10 up to 14 days in the period 01/2005 – 12/2005, the intervals 1-3 days in the period 01/2006 – 05/2009 and intervals 2-4 days in 06-11/2009. Main focus of monitoring was on gathering information on the *Otis tarda* population status and trends. Monitoring was performed particularly by Project wardens. Other members of the project team were collecting data on irregular basis, when they visited the Project sites.

All collected data were processed into the SNC database. The report from monitoring covering the period from 01/2005 till 12/2005 was prepared in 07/2006 (see Annex F.4.1 to ER for details). Monitoring report covering period 2006 and 2007 was completed in 06/2008 and presented as Annex F.4.1 to the PR3. In 2008, cumulative monitoring report (2005-09/2008) for more convenient reference was compiled and presented as Annex A.4.1 to the Interim Report. Final cumulative report on monitoring, predators and disturbance covering period 2005 – 2009 is attached in Annex F_4_1 to the Present Report.

In 2005, no case of mortality and no decreasing trend in population abundance were recorded. In 2005, the successful reproduction of *Otis tarda* in key part of Syslovske polia SPA was recorded. Concerning the wintering population, in 2005 approximately 130 up to 180 individuals were observed at the Syslovske polia SPA.

In the year 2006 and 2007 Syslovske polia SPA were still key site for *Otis tarda* wintering population in both years – the most numerous flock was recorded there on the 12th of February 2007 – 224 specimens. After wintering period, presence on this site was occasional in both years because of inappropriate habitat – corn grows. Population number increased again in autumn periods because of winter concentration. Large areas of monoculture were preferred by *Otis tarda* specimens because of low level of disturbance for spending the nights here and also for resting. Because of lack of food they were daily mowing into nearby sites in Austria. Breeding in Syslovske polia SPA was not recorded in any of the years. No case of mortality was recorded.

In the year 2008, about 2/3 of West - Pannonian population was wintering at Syslovske polia SPA and on nearby sites in Hungary and Austria. Breeding in Syslovske polia SPA was not recorded because of corn planted on prevailing part of the site, which is unsuitable habitat for *Otis tarda* breeding. No case of mortality was recorded.

In the year 2009, the highest number of individuals per day in the project span was recorded – 246, on 01/12/2009.⁸ Breeding in Syslovske polia SPA was not recorded. No case of mortality was recorded.

Overall, the Western–pannonian population shows increasing trend in the period 2005_2009.

Besides the population monitoring, the habitat data were also collected. Main focus was given to the comparison of the conditions in intensively utilised fields and fallow lands. It was obvious, that the permanent meadows and fallow lands had the highest biological value, what was confirmed by high preference of these habitats by the target species. On the fallow land in the key part of Syslovske polia SPA, the most frequent presence of the target species and the highest diversity of animal species were recorded. On 08/11/2005, fallow land in Syslovske polia SPA was ploughed by AC Dunaj in Rusovce. This case was investigated by the Slovak Environment Inspection and breaking the Act on Nature and Landscape protection was confirmed by Inspection and also by trial. Habitats were substantially improved in 2008 and 2009, following participation of concerned farms in the formal AES.

In 2006, *Otis tarda* was again after 4 years recorded in Lehnice SPA. The majority of observations confirmed one *Otis tarda* hen. Presumed observation of *Otis tarda* cock wasn't finally confirmed. Similarly as in 2006, one female of *Otis tarda* was regularly observed and recorded in Lehnice SPA in 2007 -2009. (Annex F.4.2 to the PR 3 presents media responses towards press release concerning return of *Otis tarda* female in Lehnice SPA, Annex F.4.3. to the PR 3 shows photos of *Otis tarda* female at Lehnice SPA taken in summer 2008). Majority of records were at the area of pilot AES or in the neighboring areas with oil-seed rape, which is the most suitable winter crop for *Otis tarda*. This confirms a vital importance of status of habitat for *Otis tarda* occurrence also in historical sites.

Monitoring of historic sites was done in western Slovakia - Podunajska rovina, Trnavska pahorkatina, Nitrianska pahorkatina, Zitavska pahorkatina, Hronska pahorkatina, Ipelska pahorkatina and eastern Slovakia – Vychodoslovenska rovina, Vychodoslovenska pahorkatina in the years 2006 – 2008. RPS members and staff participated in this monitoring also before the project started. Monitoring results, including from the period before the project started, were summarized in the scientific article “Occurrence of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia in the years 2000 – 2008”.

⁸ A month later, on 12/01/2010 as much as 269 individuals were recorded at Syslovske polia SPA.

ACTION F.5: Monitor predators and disturbance

Expected results:

- Monitoring system (who, when and where) of predators established
- Database of predators, agricultural works and negative impacts of human disturbance (the same database used as developed under F.4)
- 5 technical reports on predators and disturbance caused by agricultural works and visitors prepared on annual basis.

Actual Achievements:

- Regular monitoring system of predators established at the early stages of the project
- Data on predators, agricultural works and negative impacts stored at the Information system for taxons and habitats operated by the SNC
- 3 technical reports on predators and disturbance compiled: 2005, 2006-2007 and one cumulative report covering period 01/2005-09/2008
- Final cumulative report on monitoring, predators and disturbance covering period 2005 - 2009

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

Monitoring of predators and disturbance was established at the early stages of the project. Primarily wardens hired through the Project were assigned responsibility for day-to-day gathering data on predators and disturbance. Hunters and farmers that concluded MoUs with the project team were also involved in the monitoring. Data were gathered also by the Project team and regular staff of beneficiary on the occasions of their visits to project areas.

The following was monitored:

1. Presence of corvids and birds of prey
2. Fox burrows and corvids nest
3. Bag statistics
4. Presence of visitors
5. Monitoring of date, time duration and method of agricultural works

Collected data on disturbance and predators were processed into the Information System on Taxons and Habitats operated by the SNC and have been analysed together with population and habitat data collected under Action F.4.

The first report on predators and disturbance covering the year 2005 was prepared in 07/2006 and attached as Annex F.5 to the ER. The second report on predators and disturbance was compiled in 2008 and covered period 2006-2007 and was attached as Annex F.5 to the PR3.

Data collected in both SPAs since the beginning of the project till September 2008 were processed and summarised in the Cumulative (2005-2008) report on Predators and Disturbance in Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs. The report was attached as Annex F.5.1 to the Interim Report. With the present Final Report the Final cumulative report on monitoring, predators and disturbance covering period 2005 – 2009 is

attached as Annex F.4.1. The Report presents and summarises results of monitoring under Actions F4 and F5 during the whole Project span.

Data were used in day -to-day management of the SPAs. When necessary, disturbance and predators were eliminated through actions agreed with various subjects.

In August and September 2008, two actions organized by Police in cooperation with hunters and SNC intended in reduction of disturbance took place in Syslovske polia SPA. Members of project team participated. Illegal bikers, tourists and drivers were reminded that they were in SPA, where entrance was restricted to tourist trails. (See Annex F.5.2 to the Interim Report for details).

Annex F.5.3 to the Interim Report contains decision of the highest court regarding Syslovske polia SPA.

ACTION F.6: Schedule regular steering committee meetings

Expected results:

- Regular, timely, scheduled meetings, held with good attendance, which will help secure the high priority of the project work for project staff and their leaders.

Actual Achievements:

- 7 formal Meetings of the Steering Committee held
- numerous meetings of the representatives of project participants and/or beneficiary and MoE held

Action status: on-going

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date: 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

The Project Steering Committee (SC) was overseeing the Project. It was composed of representatives of the five project participants and MoE. Originally, it was foreseen that a representative of MoA would be a member of the Project Steering Committee, as well, however, it was not possible to achieve regular representation of any MoA representative at the SC.

Project participants nominated their representatives to the SC at the early stages of the project. First meeting of the SC was held on 12/10/2005 in Bratislava. At the meeting, the selection procedure for the position of Project Manager was completed. Second meeting of the SC was held on 25/04/2006 in Bratislava. Third meeting of the SC was held as joint Steering Committee meeting with LIFE NATURE Project "Restoration of the Wetlands of Zahore Lowlands on 11/07/2006 at the MoE in Bratislava on the occasion of the EC representatives' mission (See Annexes F6.1–F6.3 to the ER for details).

Two formal meetings of the Project Steering Committee were held in 2008 and two meetings were held in 2009 (for later pls. refer to the Annex F.6.1).

Status of the Project actions, project achievements and challenges, measures for addressing respective challenges and plan for next period were regular items on the SC meetings agenda.

In addition, numerous ad-hoc meetings of high-level representatives of SNC, SOVS and RPS, occasionally with participation of the MoE, were held since the beginning of the Project to seek solutions to numerous challenges the Project was facing to, particularly problems with land acquisition and land management for the Great Bustard at Syslovske polia SPA, insufficient funds for co-financing of the project, resignation of the Project Manager in 01/2008, etc. These were not called as formal SC meetings since it was beyond capacity of the two Project partners – Lehnice village and the Lehnice Hunting Association to address the respective problems. However, they were regularly informed on the agreed solutions and measures.

ACTION F.7: After LIFE Conservation Plan

Expected results:

- After-LIFE Conservation Plan delivered with the final report.

Actual Achievements:

- After LIFE Conservation Plan delivered with the final report

Action status: completed

Modification of the activity against the plan: N/A

Planned completion date: 12/2009

Actual completion date : 12/2009

Reasons for delay: N/A

Description:

After LIFE Conservation Plan was elaborated by the Project participants at the end of the Project. It includes actions necessary for sustainability of the Project actions. After LIFE Conservation Plan was submitted to the Ministry of the Environment with a request for approval in May 2010. The SNC has not received a formal approval until the submission of the Final Report. Political situation concerning the MoE, its competencies and respective high-level commitments was described under Action A.1. As soon as the SNC receives relevant communication from the Ministry, the EC will be informed accordingly.

After LIFE Plan is included in ANNEX F.7.1

8 Dissemination activities and deliverables

8.1 Dissemination activities

No specific dissemination plan was produced for the project. However, individual Actions included also dissemination activities (See description of E Actions above).

The Project and *Otis tarda* were extensively presented in the media in the project span. Numerous events with the public, key stakeholders and students were organised, mostly in villages in the vicinity of Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs.

Information and presentation materials were distributed during the reporting period to various stakeholders. Video film produced within a framework of the project was broadcasted in the Slovak TV three times. Additional 95 presentations of video film, mostly for students, were organised.

The project web site www.dropy.sk was launched in 2006 and regularly updated with new information, until the summer 2008. Since summer 2008, the access to the website became problematic, problems were caused by the website provider. Modest after life site was established on the SNC web site summarising the Project results and allowing downloading Layman's report and brochure on *Otis tarda*.

The Project was presented at various technical events, even internationally, for instance at the conference of European Ornithologist Union in Vienna in 08/2007, where findings from common collection of data on *O.tarda* in SK, HU and A were presented through joint presentation of the three projects (See electronic Annex PR3_EL1).

8.2 Status of the fulfilment of the deliverable products and milestones.

Status of the fulfilment of the deliverable products and milestones as at closing date is presented in bellow table.

Deliverable or Milestone	Reference Action	Deadline in the proposal	Status	Description of deliverable/ evidence of reaching milestone	Deliverable sent to Commission – reference to Report/Annex
1 st Meeting with experts and stakeholders	A1	31/05/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER/ A1.1
2 nd Meeting with experts and stakeholders	A1	31/05/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER/ A1.2
1 st Meeting with land users and owners	A1	31/07/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER / A1.3
2 nd Meeting with land users and owners	A1	31/07/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER / A1.4
Meeting at State Nature Conservancy level	A1	31/07/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER / A1.5
Meeting with nature protection authorities	A1	31/07/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER / A1.7
Meeting with hunters	A1	31/07/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER /1.8
3 rd Meeting with experts and stakeholders	A1	30/09/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER / A1.6
4 th Meeting with experts and stakeholders	A1	30/09/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER / A1.9
3 rd Meeting with land users and owners	A1	30/09/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	
4 th Meeting with land users and owners	A1	30/09/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	
1 st Meeting with Hungarian and Austrian experts	A1	30/11/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER / A1.10
SPA Management plans elaborated	A1	30/11/2005	Completed	Draft management plans for SPAs	1 st PR, Annex 1,2 FR A1.1,A1.2
Contracts on Pilot AES closed	A2	30/09/2005	3 contracts completed and submitted	Contracts with land-users	ER – A 2.1 – A2.3
Draft AES submitted to Ministry of Agriculture	A2	28/02/2006	Completed	Draft AES. process of revision of NSRDP letters comments Final AES	ER 2.4 2 nd PR A2.1- A2.5 3 rd PR A2.2.
1 st Meeting with hunters	A3	31/05/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER - A3
2 nd Meeting with hunters	A3	31/07/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER – A3
3 rd Meeting with hunters	A3	30/09/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER –A3
Meeting with land users	A3	31/10/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting	ER –A3
Meeting with nature protection	A3	31/10/2005	Completed	Minutes from the	

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authorities				Meeting	
4 th Meeting with hunters	A3	31/10/2005	Completed	Minutes from the Meeting 3 Memoranda of Understanding	ER – A3 ER - A3.8,A3.9 3 rd PR – A3.1
Strategy agreed with farmers	A4	01/03/2005	Completed	Strategy with Agripent Lehnice, Cooperation Agreement with AC Dunaj	ER – A4.1 IR – A4.1
Project for reconstruction of info-centre ready	A5	30/06/2006	Terminated	-	-
1st draft of Business Plan for info-centre ready	A5	31/03/2007	Terminated	-	-
Tenders prepared, contractors and suppliers selected	A6	31/12/2009	Completed	Project Procurement Plan Developed	ER – A6
Land purchased, continuous land lease	B1	31/12/2007	Completed partly 1/3 of original target reached, land lease initiated before the project terminated by AC Dunaj	Land Purchase Contracts, Land Swap contract, Ownership certificates with conservation clause, Expert price certificates, Maps	ER - B 2 nd PR B 3 rd PR B FR B1.1.-B1.3
Meeting with land users	C1	31/08/2007	Completed	Minutes from the meeting	IR C1.1
Meeting with Hungarian experts	C1	31/08/2007	Completed	Minutes from the meeting	IR C1.2
Consultations with expert organisation	C1	31/08/2007	Completed	Contract signed with Daphne, Restoration Study	ER – C1.2 2 nd PR C1.1
150 ha of grasslands restored	C1	30/09/2008	Completed partly, 39 ha of grasslands restored	Map of parcels and restored grasslands	ER- C1.1 FR B1.1_b
580m of windbreaks cleaned in SPA Syslovske polia	C2	30/04/2007	Completed	A detailed survey of windbreaks species composition.	ER – C2.1 – C2.2
60 trees planted in Syslovske polia SPA	C2	30/04/2008	Completed	Map	IR C2.1
70 trees planted in Lehnice SPA	C2	30/04/2008	Completed	Map of trees planted in Lehnice SPA	3 rd PR C2.1
Purchase of warning marks and insulators	C3	28/02/2006	Completed	Minutes of Meetings Technical Specifications of Warning Marks Draft Contract for warning marks with Fy RIBE	ER-C3.1-C3.4 3 rd PR C3.1
Marking of 12km power lines 110kV and 400kV	C3	31/08/2006	Completed	Report on ecologisation of electric lines in Lehnice SPA	3 rd PR C3.2 FR C3.1.
Marking and insulating of 18km power lines 22kV	C3	31/08/2006	Completed	Report on ecologisation of electric lines in Lehnice SPA	3 rd PR C3.2 FR C3.1.
Site infrastructure installed	C4	30/6/2007	Completed partly, 3 monitoring towers, 5 Rams, access banned signs,	Map of location of monitoring tower in Lehnice SPA	3 rd PR C4.1 FR – E6.1

			9 information boards		
Information and logistic centre reconstructed	C5	31/12/2006	Terminated		-
Machinery purchased	D1	30/06/2007	Completed	Technical specifications photos of purchased machinery, invoice	ER – D1.1 3 rd PR D1.1 FR - FR 8
820 ha under the pilot scheme	D2	31/10/2005	Completed partly	3 Maps 3 Minutes of the meetings	ER-D2.1-D2.5 2 nd PR D2.1 – D2.2 3 rd PR D2.1
Purchase of food supply	D3	31/12/2005	Completed	Photos	IR D3.1
Exception clause for eggs transfer obtained	D5	31/10/2005	Completed	Exception clause issued by MoE	ER – D5.1
Web site established	E1	30/11/2005	Completed	Web site established www.dropy.sk , after life web site at www.sopsr.sk	ER – E1 2 nd PR E1.1
Promotional materials prepared	E2	30/06/2006	Completed	Puzzle Sticker T-shirts Badge	2 nd PR E2.1 – E2.4
Brochures and posters prepared	E2	30/06/2006	Completed	Poster Brochure	ER – E2.1 3 rd PR E2.1 IR E2.1
Layman's report prepared	E2	30/06/2009	Completed	Layman's Report	FR – E2.1.-el, E2.2
Guided tours prepared, voluntarily guides trained	E3	15/03/2006	Completed	Minutes and photos from the tour	ER - E3.1 2 nd PR E3:1, E3.2
Keep regular contacts with media and promote the project	E4	31/12/2009	Completed	Review of media articles	ER – E4.1 2 nd PR E4.1 3 rd PR E4.1 IR E4.1 FR E4.1
Video on Great Bustard prepared	E5	31/01/2007	Completed	Contract Draft co production agreement Movie on CD	2 nd PR E5.1 3 rd PR E5.1 IR C5.1
Video presented on national TV 2nd channel	E5	31/05/2007	Completed	FR with links to SVT Archive	FR
2 Information signs erected	E6	31/07/2007	Completed		
1 st Lecture	E7	31/10/2005	Completed	Records from 1 st lecture for public.	ER – E7.1
1 st Meeting with stakeholders	E7	30/11/2005	Completed	Record from the meeting	ER – E7.2
2 nd Meeting with stakeholders	E7	30/11/2005	Completed	Record from the meeting	ER –E7.3
3 rd Meeting with stakeholders	E7	30/11/2005	Completed	Record from the meeting	2 nd PR E7.1
4 th Meeting with stakeholders	E7	30/11/2005	Completed	Record from the meeting	2 nd PR E7.2 - E7.5
1 st Common field trip	E7	30/11/2005	Completed	Record from the field trip	2 nd PR E7.6
2 nd Common field trip	E7	30/11/2005	Not completed	-	-
2 Scientific articles and 4 articles in magazines printed	E8	30/06/2008	Completed	Published or completed articles	IR E8.1 FR E8.1_el
Scientific report about pilot agro-environmental scheme prepared	E8	31/12/2005	Completed	Report on Integration NATURA 2000 into RDP	ER – E8.1
Plan, manage and report project	F1	31/12/2009	Completed	The project manager has been appointed in 12/2005, change	PR1, ER, PR2, PR3, ITR Recovery Plan

				in the position in 02/2008. Project management structures were set-up .	Project Modification Request FR
Manage, monitor and audit finances	F2	31/12/2009	Completed	The system for managing finances was developed among Project Partners. Financial Manager hired Interim Financial R Final Financial R	IR FR Audit Report
Maintain intensive co-operation and exchange of experience with other <i>Otis tarda</i> projects in the region (HU, A, CZ)	F3	30/09/2008	Completed	Record from the meeting Workshop held	ER – F3.1 2 nd PR F3.1 FR F3.1-3
1 st Technical annual report from population monitoring prepared	F4	31/03/2006	Completed	2005 Monitoring Report	ER –F4.1
2 nd Technical annual report from population monitoring	F4	31/03/2007	Completed	Joint 2006-2007 Monitoring Report	2 nd PR F4 .1, F4.2 3 rd PR F4.1
3 rd Technical annual report from population monitoring prepared	F4	31/03/2008	Completed	Joint 2006-2007 Monitoring Report	3 rd PR F4.1
4 th Technical annual report from population monitoring prepared	F4	31/03/2009	Completed	Joint 2005-2008 Monitoring Report	IR F4.1
5 th Technical annual report from population monitoring prepared	F4	31/12/2009	Completed	Final 2005-2009 Monitoring Report	FR F4.1
1 st Technical annual report from predator monitoring prepared	F5	31/03/2006	Completed	2005 Report on Monitoring of predators	ER – F5
2 nd Technical annual report from predator monitoring prepared	F5	31/03/2007	Completed	Joint 2006-2007 Report on Monitoring of predators	3 rd PR F5.1
3 rd Technical annual report from predator monitoring prepared	F5	31/03/2008	Completed	Joint 2006-2007 Report on Monitoring of predators	3 rd PR F5.1
4 th Technical annual report from predator monitoring prepared	F5	31/03/2009	Completed	Joint 2005-2008 Report on Monitoring of predators	IR F5.1
5 th Technical annual report from predator monitoring prepared	F5	31/12/2009	Completed	Final 2005-2009 Monitoring Report	FR F4.1
Schedule regular Steering Committee meetings	F6	31/12/2009	Completed	Minutes of the meetings	ER – F6.1-F6.3 FR F6.1
After-LIFE conservation plan together with final report delivered	F7	31/12/2009	Completed	After LIFE conservation plan	FR F7.1

9 Evaluation and Conclusions

9.1 The Process

The Project was implemented in the two project sites, Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA. By implementing activities of the LIFE project, good co-operation and communication with local stakeholders was established in Lehnice SPA. Particularly good relationship was maintained with local farmers, who supported key project activities, including restoration and maintenance of habitats for *Otis tarda*. The project received a positive responses also from the two electric companies Zapadoslovenská energetika, a.s. and Slovenská elektrizačna prenosová sústava, that have installed the warning marks purchased by the SNC in a framework of the project, at its own costs totalling to respectively 47,000 and 18,000 EUR.

The process of implementation of the project in Syslovske polia SPA was challenged with not willingness of the local farm – AC Dunaj to cooperate in the Project owing to suspected linkages of former management with developers with interests in the SPA area. Furthermore, due to increasing awareness of the land owners about the AES and rapidly increasing prices of land it had become impossible to buy land in Syslovske polia SPA in the extent foreseen in the LIFE Application. This along with legal obstacles to complete transformation of the building of Border Police from the Interior Ministry to the SNC, for the purpose of its reconstruction to the Information and Logistic Centre, made the SNC to submit a project Modification Request in May 2007 and Add-info to the Modification Request in January 2008.

In the meantime, the project was confronted with a serious financial insufficiency, and the EC started a process of the early termination of the project in February 2008. The termination process was however stopped after the SNC submitted a Recovery Plan acceptable to the EC. Subsequently, the SNC withdrew its Project Modification Request.

9.2 The project management, the problems encountered, the partnership and its added value

Project management

The project management was described in the above section 4.3. It can be concluded, that for most of the project span project management was implemented as it was planned. Absence of the MoA representative at the Steering Committee had no negative influence on the Project - the project achieved launching the AES for endangered species, including *Otis tarda*. Similarly, reduced number of the formal meetings of the Steering Committee compared to planned had not influence on the Project results.

Problems encountered

The project experienced numerous problems the most serious were the following:

- problems with acquisition of land according to the project proposal
- problems with key stakeholder at Syslovske polia SPA – AC Dunaj, that for quite a long period was not willing to cooperate with the project and in general to implement measures for conservation of *Otis tarda*
- failing to establish Information centre according to the Project proposal
- serious problems with the project cash flows due to failing to ensure timely co-financing of the Project and consequent delayed ability to submit Interim Payment Request
- failing to establish effective project financial management at the early stages of the Project

They are described in more detail in the above section 4.4. Therefore, only short final evaluation is presented in this section,

These problems, except for last stated, were out of the control of the beneficiary and project partners. The SNC and its partners were taking steps to address them and mitigate its impact on the Project, however, it was not always possible.

Problems with acquisition of land as foreseen in the project proposal resulted in low area purchased by the project participants, particularly in Syslovske polia SPA. Overall, only some 33 % of the original target was met. Consequently, possibility to control land management in Syslovske polia SPA was limited. No grasslands were possible to establish there. Participation of AC Dunaj in AES, however, balances in part this failure and there is a good prospect for growing beneficial crops for *Otis tarda* in this area in medium terms. Positive trend started by the project is confirmed through increasing transboundary population of *Otis tarda* and recorded nesting of *Otis tarda* in Syslovske polia in 2010, i.e., in 5 years since the past nesting.

Problems to cooperate with key stakeholder at Syslovske polia SPA – AC Dunaj – the problem persisted particularly in period 2005-2007. Since 2008, after new owners and management took AC Dunaj over, certain level of cooperation was possible to establish and even confirmed through a formal cooperation agreement between the SNC and the AC Dunaj. The most positive result of established cooperation has

been participation of AC in AES with 379 ha of land. Prior absence of pilot AES in Syslovske polia SPA, overall had not a significant impact of the conservation status of transboundary population of *Otis tarda*. Budget allocated for the purpose of pilot AES in Syslovske polia SPA remained unspent.

Failing to establish Information centre as foreseen in the Project – it can be concluded that the opportunity to establish information centre under the present project was lost, however, this had no impact on the key project objectives. Budget allocated for the purpose of investments into infrastructure and related external assistance remained unspent.

Serious problems with the project cash flows due to failing to ensure timely co-financing of the Project and consequent delayed ability to submit Interim Payment Request – this problem has caused delay in many project actions, and even some infrastructure was not possible to complete in the project span. The situation also resulted in substantial reduction of capacity of the Project team, particularly in the last year of the project implementation. This, however, had no influence on achieving the project major objectives.

Absence of effective project financial management in early stages of the Project contributed to delay in submission of Interim Payment Request, however, had no direct influence on the project objective.

Partnership

The SNC created effective partnership with the Project partners. While RPS and SOVS significantly contributed to the project with technical knowledge and expertise, the importance of participation of other two partners – Lehnice village and Lehnice Hunting Association was, above all, in building their strong commitment to conservation of Lehnice SPA. Since they are important stakeholders in this SPA, such commitment is specifically important for the long conservation of the area beyond the Project end.

9.3 Technical and commercial application (reproductibility, economic feasibility, limiting factors)

The project included numerous activities with replicability potential for the protection and management of other SPAs in Slovakia or for nature conservation approaches in general.

1/ Management plans for SPAs

The project provided for drafting pilot management plans for SPAs in Slovakia. They followed formal content established by the MoE Regulation applicable universally to all types of protected areas. SPAs are specific protected area category in Slovakia, established as result of entering Slovakia into EU. They are mostly larger areas extending beyond conventional protected areas network. Drafting exercise disclosed certain methodological issues that need to be clarified for the future. Furthermore, it became clear that presentation of information and data in management plans for SPAs should be more simplified and focused.

2/ Land purchase by the SNC

Land purchase – as a conservation practice - it has a broad potential for replicability in other protected areas in Slovakia. The project, however, disclosed that currently there are capacity and logistics limits of the SNC that unfortunately do not allow for its broader application in the near future. However, subject to strengthening and modest restructuring of capacities of the SNC might be feasible solution to effective conservation of the habitats and species of highest conservation importance.

3/ Treatment of power lines with warning marks and insulators.

Lehnice SPA became the first SPA in Slovakia with power lines completely treated with insulators and warning devices. Well cooperation has been established with “power” companies, thus for the future there is enormous potential for replicability this practice in other protected areas in Slovakia. The only existing limits include financial ones.

4/ Agro-environmental schemes

The project successfully tested application of AES tailor made for *Otis tarda* in Slovakia and contributed to launching a formal scheme for this species. Response to AES in terms of status of the Great Bustard population was positive. Replicability of the scheme is possible in next programming period.

In general, it confirmed the importance and effectiveness of well designed incentive schemes in nature conservation practice. In this respect, replicability in other areas is possible subject to economic capacity of the state and environment political priorities of the Government.

5/ Long-term institutionalised cooperation with the stakeholders

The project demonstrated feasibility of long-term, institutionalised cooperation with key land users in projected areas. This practice is generally well replicable in other protected areas, however, its effectiveness might be depending on existence of proper incentives framework.

9.4 Comparison against the project objectives

The project objective was to improve the conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia through securing appropriate key locations, reducing main causes of disturbance and mortality and enhancing capacities at system, institutional and individual levels and thus ensure appropriate protection. The project focused on the two Special Protection Areas designated pursuant to the Birds Directive, namely Syslovske polia SPA and Lehnice SPA.

The project delivered full results in Lehnice SPA, and the conditions for conservation for *Otis tarda* there have been significantly improved. As much as 71.57% of the SPA is managed under the AES. Major source of mortality in the area – the power lines - have been completely treated with warning devices and insulators. 39,5 ha of grasslands were established there. Regular occurrence of the Bustard hen in last three years confirms capacity of the area to attract the Bustards individuals in the future and thereby to meet re-introduction vision of this Project for the Lehnice SPA.

In Syslovske polia SPA it has been less successful in terms of full implementation of the project actions. The project participants failed to acquire land as foreseen in the proposal. Only 7,5% of the target for this area was met. And the conservation status of *Otis tarda*, also in consideration of absence of nesting hens from 2006 until 2009 has was evaluated as being not favourable.

Nevertheless, the SPA remains important winter roosting area and overall, the size of population shows slightly increasing trend. Nowadays 21,39% of the SPA area is managed under AES, i.e. crops beneficial for *Otis tarda* is grown there. Disturbance by illegal crossing the area by cars was excluded through installation of the ramps and access banned signs on the access roads to SPA. Last but not least, it is necessary to mention that the project finally succeeded establishment of long term cooperation with key stakeholders that give a well prospect for continuous conservation of *Otis tarda* beyond the project end at this particular SPA.

9.5 Effectiveness of dissemination activities

No special monitoring of effectiveness of dissemination activities was established. Therefore, the assessment can only be based on numbers of implemented events, media contacts and participants at specific events or approached public. Even this is not precise, since there was no information, for instance on number of persons watching video film in Slovak TV, etc.

Details are described above under actions E and in E_actions related Annexes.

In general, the Project developed a broad scope of dissemination activities, and made use of various media and modes for communicating information on the project, *Otis tarda* and its conservation.

9.6 Environmental benefits

The project, although it did not reach all its original targets stated in the LIFE application, has delivered significant environmental benefits, which as at 31/12/2008 were the following.

- Project contributed to stabilising and slightly increasing of Western- Pannonian population of *Otis tarda*
- Project improved status of habitats for *Otis tarda* in Slovakia,
 - 39.9 ha of totally acquired 47 ha of land for conservation of *Otis tarda* in Lehnice and Syslovske polia SPAs was converted to grasslands
 - windbreaks at both project areas were restored by planting, in total, more than 1000 trees
 - 1679.80 ha (71,57 %) of land has been managed for *Otis tarda* in Lehnice SPA under AES
 - 379.14 ha (21,39%) of land has been managed for *Otis tarda* in Lehnice SPA under AES
- Project improved conservation status of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia, although overall it is still assessed as unfavourable⁹
 - population was slightly increasing in the project span
 - return of *Otis tarda* to Lehnice SPA was initiated
 - re-nesting of *Otis tarda* in Syslovske polia SPA (in 2010) was facilitated
- Project contributed to decreasing mortality of *Otis tarda* by respectively installation of warning devices and insulators on 110 kV, 400 kV and 22 kV power lines in Lehnice SPA, and by controlling *Otis tarda* predators
- Disturbance of the Great Bustard by public was decreased through installation of ramps and access banned signs at Syslovske polia SPA
- Regular monitoring of the Great Bustard and its disturbing factors allows for informed management of the species in the long term

It is assumed that the measures implemented for the conservation of *Otis tarda* have positive effects on other species occurring in SPAs as well.

9.7 Socio-economic effects

Few Project actions were designed to support attitude of the public to conservation of the Great Bustard in general and in Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPA in particular.

The project did not contain actions directly targeting employment opportunities or revenue generation mechanisms for local population. However, presence of SPAs in vicinity of villages may attract visitors and the local people can benefit indirectly through provision of services to tourist in villages.

9.8 Innovation and demonstration value

Innovation and demonstration value of the project was in demonstrating new approaches to nature conservation in Slovakia – e.g. by purchasing of land by the SNC for the first time and its intended restoration to tailor made habitats for species of conservation importance, e.g. the Great Bustard in the present project. The project also allowed for developing of pilot management plans for SPAs in Slovakia and for full treatment of power lines in Lehnice SPA with insulators and warning devices. Another important feature of the project is institutionalising of the long term cooperation between nature conservation institutions and major land users in targeted protected areas through formal cooperation instruments such as MoUs or cooperation agreements. Last but not least the project promoted and tested feasibility of application of AES in conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia, which – in Lehnice SPA – even gives prospect for the reintroduction of the Great Bustard to the area.

⁹ For details please refer to the management plan for Syslovske polia SPA in Annex A_1_1.

9.9 Sustainability

Sustainability of main activities of the project and the extent to which various project actions/results continues beyond the scope of the project will be measured by project sustainability indicators. Sustainability indicators are described in following table. The most critical indicators include adoption and due implementation of management plans for SPAs in the future.

Concerning area managed under AES, the project delivered good results as at closing date. Some 50 % of the area of both SPAs will managed under the AES until the end of 2013. Long term sustainability is however dependent on the successful inclusion of comparative AES into the RDP for the Programming period 2014-2020.

Project sustainability indicators:

Project action / Results	Verifiable Indicator (s)	Source of Verification	Status at the closing date
Elaboration of Management plan for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs	Adoption of Management plans for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs	Decision by relevant body, annual reports of MoE, SNC	Not adopted yet
Implementation of Management plans for Syslovske polia and Lehnice SPAs	Number of activities successfully implemented	Annual reports of SNC-Regional Centre in Bratislava	Assessment possible subject to adoption of management plans Interim implementation feasible through the Annual Work Plans of the SNC
Restoration of habitats	Number of hectares of restored	Project reports, other project documentation	39,5 ha restored to grasslands Declarations on management of acquired land by statutory representatives of respective owners – SNC and SOVS issued
Implementation of agroenvironmental schemes	Number of ha under AES	Communication with of respective farms with APA	1679.88 ha of land in Lehnice SPA 379.14 ha of land in Syslovske polia SPA were managed under the scheme, making together some 50% of the area of both SPAs
Land purchase	Number of purchased hectares of land	Ownership certificates	47 ha purchased
Installation of small infrastructure to improve control of the sites and allow regulated access of public at SPAs	Number of infrastructure Number of cases of violation	Project documentation and project reports Police and Inspection records	Ramps and related access banned sites installed in Syslovske polia

Long term indicators of the project success

Long term indicators of the Project success are defined by main objective of the project what was to improve conservation of *Otis tarda* in Slovakia through securing appropriate key locations, reducing main causes of disturbance and mortality and enhancing capacities at system, institutional and individual levels to ensure appropriate protection. Specific long-term indicators to be used in project success assessment in the future are described in following table. Indicative assessment of the status as at closing date is presented in the last column. It is important to note that, even when status of certain indicators is not ideal at the project closing date, the project results give good prospect for their improving in the future.

Project long term indicators:

Long term indicator	Verifiable Indicator	Source of Verification	Status at the closing date
Conservation status of habitats of <i>Otis tarda</i>	% of area covered by beneficial crop (target 40-60)	Habitats monitoring reports, project reports, agricultural production plans, game management plans	50 % of the area of SPAs designated for <i>Otis tarda</i> protection covered by beneficial crops Windbreaks restored in both SPAs
Conservation status of <i>Otis tarda</i>	Nationally established Criteria and Indicators for assessing the conservation status of habitats and species of European importance (published by SNC in 2005)	Monitoring Reports, SNC database, Reports to EC on the conservation status of species habitats of European importance	Conservation status <i>Otis tarda</i> remains unfavourable ¹⁰
Conservation status of Syslovske polia SPA, Lehnice SPA	Designation status and scope of use regulations	Designation instruments issued by competent authority	Legal protection of areas in effect Designation instruments issued and effective
Public awareness support to Lehnice and Syslovske polia SPAs	Number of press conferences, press releases, media releases, articles and various initiatives supporting conservation of targeted SPAs	Various - project documents, annual reports of SNC, annual reports of SOS/BirdLife Slovakia	Numerous media outputs and events in the project span
Mortality of adult and subadult birds	% (target - below 5%)	Monitoring Report, SNC Database	Mortality below 5%
Regular breeding of <i>Otis tarda</i> in Slovakia	Number of breeding females (target 1-5)	Monitoring Reports, SNC Database	No breeding in 2009 Overall irregular breeding – 1-3 females

10 After-Life Communication Plan

Layman's report summarising project results in popular form was printed and distributed. Distribution list is included in Annex E_2_1. Modest after LIFE web site was established as a part of the SNC website. It provides access to the project results, and allows downloading Layman's Report and brochure on the *Otis tarda*.

11 Comments on Financial report

As of December 31, 2009 1,262,452.93 EUR (i.e. 61,88 % of the original Project budget) was disbursed. Of that, 600,000 EUR represent the first pre-financing payment and 250,000 EUR represent the second pre-financing payment of the LIFE Grant to the present Project.

The disbursements according to budget categories are presented in the below table.

¹⁰ For details please refer to the management plan for Syslovske polia SPA in Annex A_1_1.

Categories of expenditures	Provisional budget € A	Expense incurred € B	Overspending eligible costs in € B-A	Expenditures in % (B/A*100%)
1. Personnel	458 250.00	399 415.46	-58 834.54	87.16
2. Travel	48 691.00	33 073.65	-15 617.35	67.93
3. External assistance	346 286.00	149 378.90	-196 907.10	43.14
4. Durable goods			0,00	
4.1. Infrastructure	118 826.00	42 903.20	-75 922.80	36.11
4.2. Equipment	199 909.00	181 220.14	-18 688.86	90,65
5. Land purchase / lease	630 525.00	273 872.19	-356 652.81	43,44
6. Consumables	146 519.00	95 463.91	-51 055.09	65.15
7. Other costs	6 579.00	24 182.13	17 603.13	367.57
8. Overheads	84 415.00	62 943.34	-21 471.66	74.56
TOTAL	2 040 000.00	1 262 452.93	0.00	61.88

Detailed list of Project Expenditures is attached in the Final Financial Report that is attached to the present Final Technical Report.

VAT

For all the project participants, VAT was non-recoverable in the whole duration of the Project. There are respective Statements from Tax Authorities concerning SOVS and RPS attached with the Final Financial Report. Tax Authority Statements for Municipality of Lehnice and Lehnice Hunting Association have not been attached, since only small expenditures were incurred by these two partners. Furthermore, interpretation of the VAT Act, that is described below and in the FinR in respect to the SNC expenditures, applies to both this subjects as well (to all entities operating in the Slovak Republic) and in accordance with VAT Act they were not entitled to recovery of the VAT for expenditures incurred under the Project (particularly because these respective project partners do not perform business activities and furthermore, the project activities were not business activities).

SNC, through the letter re: ŠOP SR/198/08 dated 12/02/2008 addressed Tax Directory of the Slovak Republic and requested interpretation of the application of Value Added Tax to the State Nature Conservancy. Tax Directory provided interpretation through a letter re 1/242/7524-38725-A/08, dated 25/08/2008 that was included in the Interim Financial Report. The Tax Directorate confirmed that VAT paid in the project expenditures was not refundable to the SNS. Applicable VAT Act was attached electronically in the ANNEX FR.1 to the Interim Financial Report.

The below explanation summarizes application of the VAT Act to the SNC:

VAT Act, in its Article 3, defines that VAT payer is a person that independently perform business activities that generates income (Paras 1 and 2 of the Act). Business activities are defined in Art 2 as activities performed towards payments from the third persons (and on the basis of contracts/orders).

The SNC was performing no business activities until 31 December 2007, accordingly was not a VAT payer and was not eligible to VAT recovery at all (Only "VAT Payers" can claim VAT recovery).

After merging with the Slovak Administration of Caves, the SNC received an official status of VAT Payer, since the institution, since merging, has been generating income from entrance fee to the caves that are opened to public, and possibly from other activities that are provided as a service to the third parties and towards payments.

However, in Paragraph 4 of the same Article 3, VAT Act states that state and public institutions are not treated as VAT payers (i.e., *inter alia*, persons eligible for recovery of VAT) when implementing their main (statutory) activities.

The activities, which SNC implemented within a scope of LIFE project:

1/ were all within a scope of it's a statutory activities, and were financed from LIFE grant or from the state budget contribution, that the SNC receives through the MoE (both sources not considered as income from bussiness activities)

2/ did not generated income to the SNC and thus applicable VAT (i.e. VAT paid along with payments for goods, services and works, was not recoverable under the Slovak VAT Act.

Interests declared in Final Financial Report

Statement of Project Income presents the same income from interests - 660,67 EUR as in the Interim Financial Report. It is because the second pre-financing payment of 250 000 EUR was credited to the beneficiary account (account with State Treasury not generating interests) just before the Closing Date and was further used for reimbursement of the expenditures already advanced by the Project Participants.

Overspending in cost category "Other costs"

Cost category of "Other costs" was overspent. Request for the Project Modification according to Article 13 of CP was not submitted. Therefore we understood that only 16 579.00 EUR (original budget of 6,579.00 + 10,000 EUR) can be considered eligible under this category and remaining 7 603.13 EUR is ineligible

EXPLANATIONS TO THE ISSUES RAISED IN THE COMMISSION LETTER RE: ENV/E-4/MP/SEB/NB ARES (2009) 375 193 FROM 11 DECEMBER 2009

Personnel

"Jozef Chavko"

As reported also under project LIFE 03NAT/SK/000098, Mr. Chavko had two external subcontracts with the SNC in July 2006 under that Project. These subcontracts covered the work on taking blood samples of *Acquila* individuals for genetic analyses. It was mostly field work that was not possible to carry out in different time of the year and required extreme working effort, without any consideration to holidays, weekends or so. Furthermore, as a subcontractor he had not legal limits on number of hours worked per days and no legal limits for working during the weekends. Therefore, respectfully arithmetical calculation of working hours per working days does not reflect properly a real situation. Furthermore, for nature experts, even working 14 hours per day on field missions (for instance from 6.00 a.m. to 20.00 p.m.) in respective peak seasons is not an exception.

Furthermore, Jozef Chavko had a formal unpaid leave from RPS under the OTISSK project for the working days he spent on taking blood samples for *Acquila* project and only 88 hours was charged to the OTISSK Project for days that he actually spent working on OTISSK Project. There was nothing illegal in that arrangements and we see no legal reason for costs for 88 hours in July 2007 being pronounced ineligible.

Annex FR.1 contains copies of salary slips, timesheets and social security charges for Mr. Chavko, only for 2006, for the reason of saving environment. However, if EC requires so, copies of documents for other years can be further provided.

Respective roles of Jozef Chavko - Personnel versus External Service – under the *Acquila* Project were explained in communication under that Project, including one from RPS to the EC dated June 22 2009.

Under OTISSK project, Josef Chavko was working as Scientific Adviser with RPS and in the premises of the RPS on external and internal contracts for the whole duration of the Project and accordingly he was charged to the Project as Personnel. In 2005, when he was employee of the SNC he charged only 160 hours to the OTISSK project. That year he had external contract with RPS, therefore no legal obstacles to working on the project out of "usual" working hours existed. He terminated his employment contract with the SNC in February 2006.

"1760/ hours per year "

Respectfully, please refer to planning calendars 2006-2009 in Annex FR.2 for information on numbers of working hours for Slovakia in respective years. These are legal reference for employment contracts in Slovakia. Employer has even a legal right to request overtime work up to 150 hour per year. Therefore, we kindly request the EC to reconsider this unilateral reduction of eligible working hours.

“Slavka Siryova”

Deviations between the planned rates and actual rates are partly caused by the changes of the exchange rate of the Slovak crown towards EUR that exceeded 20 % in the period 2005 - 2008 (Source: <http://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/eurofxref/eurofxref-hist.xml>). This applies to all the Project expenditures incurred between the Starting date until the date of conversion to Euro -01/01/2009.

Actual rate of Ms. Syriova, when she started to work on the Project was 12,5 Eur /hour (75 Eur per day divided by 6 hours). Kindly refer to a copy of her contract in Annex FR.3. All payments were made in SKK and later, for the purpose of Financial Reporting had to be recalculated into EUR in applicable exchange rate. This resulted in “artificial” significantly higher hourly rate.

Ms. Siryova, when she was appointed a Senior Specialist in the Project, was experienced conservation expert with particular focus on the conservation of birds. Higher hourly rate was therefore agreed with her based on her qualifications and previous experiences.

She completed her university studies with thesis focused on the conservation of *Aquila pomarina*. Lot of experience she accumulated during her PhD studies at University of Natural Sciences. However, of particular contribution to the project team, was her extensive knowledge gained from her involvement in the preparation and implementation of several large-scale projects. The following are such examples:

- “*Falco vespertinus* - state and habitat requirements of breeding population and the effect of increased nesting opportunities on population size and productivity” supported by Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association USA

- project supported by PHARE Access Networking facility 2000 - “Life-history traits as predictors in assessing risks of non-native fishes” supported by NATO.

Furthermore, Ms. Siryova was a principal member of the preparation team that submitted, in 2003, one of the first three successful LIFE projects to be carried out in Slovakia. The project on the conservation of Imperial Eagle and the successful implementation of it, aided in no small part by Ms. Siryova’s activities, confirmed the vital importance of her involvement also in this particular project.

Copies of salary slips, timesheets and social security charges are provided only for 2006 in Annex FR.1 for the reason of saving environment. They are organised along with ones of Jozef Chavko, because certain documents are applicable to both personnel. However, if EC requires so, year 2007 can be provided upon request.

Please note that in the period 02/2006 – 10/2006 she was working with RPS (and at the premises of the RPS) on the two LIFE projects based on external contracts and therefore she had no legal limits on the number of hours worked per months.

Travel

Few people that were not a project personnel got reimbursement of the travel costs and are referred in the Financial Report because they were working with Project participants under Project related Agreements. Respective roles of those questioned by the EC, i.e. Mr. Petrzilka, Ms. Deutschova, Mr. Sokol and Mr Blaskovic are explained below.

“Karol Petrzilka” – get reimbursement of the travel costs on the basis of the Agreement on travel costs reimbursement (copy attached as Annex FR.4). He was involved in monitoring under Action F5.

“Lucia Duetschova” – she was involved in monitoring (Action F4) as a volunteer and on the basis of a formal “Volunteer agreement” between the RPS and herself. According to the Agreement she was entitled to reimbursement of travel costs. See Annex FR.4 for a copy of the Agreement.

Pavol Sokol– he was involved in monitoring (Action F4) as a volunteer and on the basis of a formal “Volunteer agreement” between the RPS and himself.. According to the Agreement he was entitled to reimbursement of travel costs. See Annex FR.4 for a copy of the Agreement

Tomas Blaskovic - he was working with SOVS and occasionally driving the Project Manager, Rastislav Rybanic, who did not have a Driving Licence. His name was transferred to Financial report from log book, where he was signed as “driver” for the mission. When he was accompanying the project manager, he also assisted in technical tasks, but his working time was not charged to the project.

External Assistance

Costs of 15 789 EUR and 15 789 EUR for external accounting fees of partner (2) and partner 3 are included in the Financial Form F6 of LIFE Application. Maybe it was overlooked.

Costs claimed in the Financial report for accounting services are those incurred by SOVS (SOS) – i.e. partner 2 and by RPS – i.e. Partner 3.

Clerical error occurred in costs reporting for trees plantation. It was corrected in the Final Financial Report. As requested, invoices and contract are attached for your information as Annex_FR.5.

Durable goods

“Digital Camera”

This was misunderstanding. Four digital cameras were planned for the project, and only four cameras were purchased. One camera was purchased by SOS (provisionally declared by the EC as not eligible) and three cameras were purchased by the RPS (2 of the three cameras were formally transferred to the SNC). In Annex FR.6 there is (i) a copy of the invoice paid by the RPS where items that are 2 cameras are highlighted, and (ii) purchase contract for 1 camera. Therefore, in our opinion the costs for camera purchased by SOS is eligible, since it was not additional one.

“Navara cars”

The costs of the two Navara cars presented in the Final (and Interim) Financial Report(s) is 81 471,82 EUR. The presented costs were calculated from the original costs of 2 454 420,22 SKK by application of exchange rate of 1 eur = 30,126 SKK (reference rate for Euro-conversion in Slovakia).

However, at the time of evaluation of the offers for the two Navara cars - 05/12/2006, the exchange rate SKK/EUR was 35,535 SKK/EUR (Source: <http://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/eurofxref/eurofxref-hist.xml>) and the price, calculated in EUR, was 69 070,50 EUR, i.e. within limits of the original budget of 69 200 EUR. Annex FR.7 contains the invoice showing original price in SKK and Minutes from the Procurement Commission meeting on 05/12/2006.

“Tractor and adapters”

The costs of tractor, snow plough and 2 mulch machines presented in the Final (and Interim) Financial Report(s) is 63 489,58 EUR. The presented costs were calculated from the original costs of 1 912 687 SKK by application of exchange rate of 1 eur = 30,126 SKK (reference rate for Euro-conversion in Slovakia).

However, at the time of evaluation of the offers for Tractor and its adapters - 11/09/2007, the exchange rate SKK/EUR was 33,637 SKK/EUR (Source: <http://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/eurofxref/eurofxref-hist.xml>) and the price, calculated in EUR, was 56 862,59 EUR. The original budget for the tractor, mulching and snowplough adapters was 50 102 EUR. Annex FR.8 contains the invoice showing original price in SKK and Minutes from the procurement Commission meeting on 11/09/2007.

Furthermore, technical requirements for tractor was kept at a minimum level giving the consideration only to its ability to carry adapters. Supplier with lowest evaluated offer was accepted for delivery of the goods. Increase in prices in the project span was generally higher than expected. The preparation of the project started before Slovakia entered EU and was completed soon after that date. A rapid increase in prices affected also other project actions, particularly Action B1.

“VAT declared separately”

The VAT in question relates to incubators. These were imported from the Czech Republic and the invoice did not include VAT. The SNC had to pay VAT separately to the Slovak Tax Authorities on the basis of submission of VAT Declaration. Since the tax was paid to different subject than net price for warning devices, we reported VAT as a separate item. Documents are attached as Annex FR.9.

Land purchase

All documents required by the EC are provided in Annex B_1_3.

Consumables

“Meetings costs”

Costs incurred for various meetings/workshops with land users, stakeholders, etc., were mostly refreshments, or meals. In few cases they were room renting costs.

“Project for installation of warning marks”

Costs for project for installation of warning marks were costs for elaboration of project containing necessary details for installation of warning devices.

“VAT declared separately”

The VAT in question relates to warning devices. These were imported from Germany and the invoice not included VAT. The SNC had to paid VAT separately to the Slovak Tax Authorities on the basis of submission of VAT Declaration. Since the tax was paid to different subject then net price for warning devices, we reported VAT as a separate item. Documents are attached as Annex FR.10.

“Seed purchase”

Amount of 9 684 EUR was originally budgeted under the External assistance for purchase of seeds on Financial Form F5. However, we reported it under consumables because it was deemed more proper classification of costs.

“Financial documentation”

Expression “Financial documentation” was used in respect to buying folders for organising copies of project related accounting and procurement documentation. Since it were direct costs related to implementing Action F2, we considered it as eligible. We accept if considered otherwise by the EC, even after this explanation.

Other costs

“Novelties”

Items presented as “novelties” (maybe not the proper translation) at the Interim (and Final) Financial Report were used for insulation of the observation tower. Insulating the tower was inevitable and made it possible to use the tower also in severe weather conditions (strong winds, low temperatures). In this respect, it is our opinion that the costs should remain eligible, as they are direct costs relating to observation towers. If EC requires so, we can present related documents.

“Audit”

We understand that provisionally – at the phase of second pre-financing payment requests audit costs were not eligible. However, we understood that such costs (i.e. costs for interim or annual audits) are eligible at the phase of the Final Payment Request and upon submission of Audit Report to the EC.

This was clarified so previously with the EC. Furthermore, the EC itself requests beneficiaries to appoint auditor and report on it at the phase of the Midterm Report. Items audited at the midterm phase were not audited at phase of the Final Report, so the auditor was not paid twice for the same job.

12 ANNEXES

- ANNEX A_1_1 Management plan for Syslovske polia SPA
- ANNEX A_1_2 Draft Management plan for Lehnice SPA
- ANNEX A_1_3 Letter from SNC to MOE
- ANNEX A_2_1_el Government Regulation N 449_2008
- ANNEX A_2_2_a Map showing AES in Lehnice SPA in 2008
- ANNEX A_2_2_b Map showing AES in Lehnice SPA in 2009
- ANNEX A_2_2_c Map showing AES in Syslovske polia SPA in 2009
- ANNEX A_2_3_a Application for participation in AES in 2009_Agripent
- ANNEX A_2_3_b Application for participation in AES in 2009_Agrolens
- ANNEX A_2_3_c Applications for participation in AES in 2009_AC Dunaj
- ANNEX B_1_1_a Map showing land acquired in Syslovske polia SPA
- ANNEX B_1_1_b Map showing acquired land in Lehnice SPA
- ANNEX B_1_2_a Declaration by Director of SNC
- ANNEX B_1_2_b Declaration by Director of SOS/Birdlife Slovakia
- ANNEX B_1_3 Ownership certificates and contracts (Hard copies only)
- ANNEX C_3_1 Report on Ecologisation of power lines in Lehnice SPA
- ANNEX C_4_1 Information boards
- ANNEX E_2_1_el Layman's Report
- ANNEX E_2_2 Layman's Report – hard copies
- ANNEX E_2_3 Distribution lists
- ANNEX E_4_1 Media monitoring 2008-2009
- ANNEX E_5_1 Participant 's lists from public presentations of video (hard copies only)
- ANNEX E_6_1 Information boards
- ANNEX E_7_1 Overview of events with the public
- ANNEX E_8_1_el Scientific and popular articles
- ANNEX F_3_1 Agenda for the International workshop
- ANNEX F_3_2_el Presentations from International workshop
- ANNEX F_3_3 Press release on the International workshop
- ANNEX F_4_1 Final report on monitoring of *Otis tarda*, its predators and disturbance
- ANNEX F_6_1 Steering committee meetings

ANNEX F_7_1 After-Life conservation plan

ANNEX FR_1 Documentation concerning remuneration for Jozef Chavko and Slavka Siryova in 2006

ANNEX FR_2 Planning calendars 2006-2009

ANNEX FR_3 Contract with Slavka Siryova in 2006

ANNEX FR_4 Documentation concerning travel costs of persons that were not project personnel

ANNEX FR_5 Documentation concerning tress plantation

ANNEX FR_6 Documentation concerning cameras

ANNEX FR_7 Documentation concerning Navara cars

ANNEX FR_8 Documentation concerning Tractor and its adapters

ANNEX FR_9 Documentation concerning VAT for incubators

ANNEX FR_10 Documentation concerning VAT for warning devices