Sustaining NGO Capacity to Conserve Nature during the Global Economic Downturn

Annual Progress Report to the

AAGE V. JENSEN CHARITY FOUNDATION

REPORT PERIOD

January – December 2012

NCE Desert “Iftar”: NCE’s first desert trip into the sand-dunes of Qataneyya, located on the outskirts of Giza

Updated: January 2013
Project Background

This project was designed to ameliorate the effects of the global economic downturn on BirdLife Partner NGOs. As a result of the recession, funding streams to some NGOs were significantly reduced and important conservation work was severely curtailed. In response, the NGOs took corrective action including introducing staff pay cuts or scaling back activities. This response was partially effective, but there were still core funding gaps to be filled. This project was meant to help fill these gaps through awards of a series of “small” grants funds to selected NGOs.

Four grants were awarded in 2011 to BirdLife NGOs in the Cook Islands; Uruguay; Vietnam and Egypt. Three NGOs completed and reported on funding contracts at the end of 2011. There were delays in Egypt because of fragile security and a report on Egypt is included in this 2012 report. Five grants were approved and awarded in 2012 to: Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS), Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS), Wildlife and Environment Society of Malawi (WESM), Palau Conservation Society (PCS), and Palestine Wildlife Society (PWS). We provide reports on these grants in this 2012 report. An additional grant has been approved for award to The Armenian Society for the Protection of Birds but disbursement has been linked to a BirdLife network review requiring improvement in management. This grant will be disbursed as soon as these conditions are met and a report will be provided in 2013 as part of the Project’s Final Report. As a result of the above-mentioned unavoidable delays, a six month no-cost extension is therefore being requested to the project duration – to end in June 2013.

The Aage V Jensen Charity Foundation granted BirdLife International €100,000 towards the project in December 2010. The funds were provided as annual grants of €9,000 to each of 10 BirdLife partner NGOs and €1,000 per grant to BirdLife International for supervisory costs and monitoring. Four grants were approved in 2011 and six grants in 2012.

A unique feature of this project is that it provides funding for the development of NGO stability and sustainability and does not fund direct “Conservation Action”. Indicators of Stability and Sustainability include governance, membership base, volunteer base, overall income, staff levels, donor diversification planning systems etc. Improvements in these indicators are expected to have a positive effect on conservation action.

Project Goal

- To help deserving partners survive the global recession and undertake good conservation work during tough economic times.

Updated: January 2013
Main achievements for the reporting period: January to December 2012

The Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS) has developed a Youth Nature Watching network as a component of the organization with initial branches in the two largest cities in the country – Baku (with more than 2 million people) and Ganja.

Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE) has tripled the number of paid staff from one to three; and moved toward becoming a larger and more sustainable entity.

The Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS) has restructured the Society’s membership scheme; increased efficiency in governance and enhanced conservation delivery.

The Wildlife Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM) has financed a new Business Plan; and improved coordination between the WESM Secretariat and its branches.

The Palau Conservation Society (PCS) has developed a fundraising plan; improved the capacity of key finance management staff, and strengthened key institutional mechanisms to make the organization more viable.

The Palestine Wildlife Society (PWS) has developed and trialled a new membership strategy; enhanced staff capacity in fundraising and marketing; and covered key gaps in the PWS core budget.

Project progress during the reporting period: January to December 2012

The project was scheduled to be implemented from January 2011 to December 2012. Due to unavoidable delays as a consequence of insecurity in Egypt and the desire to link management improvements to disbursement of grants to the NGOs in some countries, a six month extension is being requested to June 2013. A progress report has been provided for the period January to December 2011 and progress from January to December 2012 is detailed below. A final report will be provided in July 2013.

The Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS)

Background
The Azerbaijan Ornithological Society is the leading bird conservation NGO in the country. It has about 700 members and supporters and four branches in various regions. However until now, AOS did not have a youth network to attract aspiring young conservationists and the organisation was not represented in the western region which includes the second largest city in the country - Ganja.

Objectives
- Develop a network of Youth Nature Watching Clubs (YNWC).
• Create a new branch of AOS in Azerbaijan’s second largest city - Ganja (GBAOS)
• Provide equipment for functioning of both new entities - YNWC and GBAOS
• Involve members of both entities in nature conservation work at IBAs
• Increase conservation impact of AOS in Azerbaijan through enhanced membership and awareness-raising.

Progress – Azerbaijan

• **Develop a Youth Nature Watching Club network (YNWC) and create a new Ganja branch of AOS (GBAOS)**

The Ganja branch of AOS and the Ganja Youth Nature Watching club have been established. The two new entities now have 43 members (GBAOS) and 20 members (YNWC - Ganja) respectively. In addition, a Youth Nature Watching Club has been established in Baku with 184 members. Baku is the largest city in Azerbaijan with a population of more than 2 million people.

• **Develop the YNWC as a sustainable organization.**
Regular meetings of YNWC were held in Ganja and Baku; management committees were elected and “Initiative Groups” put in place to develop annual Plans of Activity. Consultations were regularly organised between experienced ornithologists of AOS and active members of GBAOS and YNWC during meetings.

Two excursions were undertaken to IBAs in the vicinity of Baku city - IBAs AZ027 Altiagach and AZ028 Pirkuli - and one excursion in the vicinity of Ganja city to IBA AZ012 Goygol. There were 86 participants - 20 in Ganja and 66 in Baku. During each excursion, discussions were organized on conservation issues including - birds’ species list, hunting problems etc and printed materials on threatened species were distributed. In addition, seminars were conducted at the Biological Sciences faculties of Baku State University and Azerbaijan Agricultural University.

• **Provide basic equipment for normal functioning of YNWC.**
The following pieces of equipment have been purchased and arrangements made for their transfer to the new entities, regular use and safe-keeping:

  o Nine binoculars, two lanterns, and two tents for YWNC in Baku and Ganja
  o One PC with internet and Skype connection
  o 100 field guides in Azeri for YNWC and 40 Field guides in Azeri for GBAOS
  o Two field guides in English and some basic stationary for both entities.

• **Involve members of both entities in nature conservation work at IBAs; Increase conservation impact of AOS in Azerbaijan through enhanced membership and awareness-raising**

The development of Youth Nature Watching Clubs in Baku and Ganja has increased nature conservation activity and raised the profile of AOS in the largest cities of Azerbaijan. There have been regular excursions to Important Birds Areas with the involvement of various levels of Azeri society. The mass media has been involved and posters and other printed materials on threatened species of birds and their habitats...
(IBAs) distributed. Surveys of birds species were conducted and recorded in the AOS Data base. A conservation presence has been established in the Western region of Azerbaijan for the first time. Equipment has been provided to enhance participation in nature conservation work in Azerbaijan and mechanisms established to attract young conservationists.

**Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE)**

**Background**
Many important habitats and species are disappearing rapidly in Egypt and are under threat primarily as a consequence of the impact of relatively high population growth and poorly planned infrastructural economic development. These problems are compounded by the fact that there are few local or international conservation NGOs in Egypt. Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE) – BirdLife Affiliate - was established in 1988 to fill this void. However, it has remained a relatively small organisation and has struggled to make the transition from a voluntary to a professional NGO. This transition has become even more difficult in the face of the global economic downturn. NCE is using the grant from the Aage V Jensen Charity Foundation to help the organisation move to a more professional footing.

**Objectives**
Overall objective: to enhance the capacity of the BirdLife Affiliate in Egypt (NCE) by recruiting new competent staff.

Specific Objectives:
- Recruit professional staff for NCE
- Outline Terms of Reference, and Job Descriptions for the newly recruited staff
- Ensure newly recruited staff undertake key tasks successfully to strengthen NCE

**Progress – Egypt**

**Staff Recruitment**
An Executive Coordinator and a Communications and Education Officer have been hired under the AVJCF Grant. This has tripled the number of paid staff at NCE from one to three. The selected candidates were highly qualified young Egyptian professionals with impressive records in activism. The recruited NCE Executive Coordinator– Noor Noor - was voted as one of the 10 most influential young Egyptians in the Middle East in 2012: http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/features/10-influential-young-egyptians_10722

**Staff Terms of Reference**
Contracts and Terms of Reference for these positions have been developed. The Communications & Education Officer has been tasked to organise a wide-array of events and activities, with the aim of increasing NCE’s outreach through “offline communications” and eventual conservation impact.

Updated: January 2013
The Executive Coordinator’s job is centred on overall coordination of NCE’s activities. Coordination between the board of directors and the staff is a key task. Working with senior NCE members, an advocacy agenda is being implemented to mainstream nature conservation into public policy through networking and media coordination.

**Capacity Development and Conservation Impact**
With the help of the newly hired staff:

- NCE held its first free and transparent election for its Management Board.
- NCE submitted the necessary papers to the Ministry of Solidarity to establish the new Board of Directors and “foreign currency bank accounts”.
- The organization has started having regular activities for the public including organising World Migration Day 2012; World Climate Impact Day 2012 and NCE’s first Desert “Iftar” or public event trip into the desert (Annexe 1).
- NCE’s presence in social media has been expanded and the organisation’s online following increased several fold.
- A volunteer program has been launched to increase involvement in NCE.
- The NCE partnership network with other stakeholders has been expanded.
- Funds have been raised for NCE to undertake vital conservation work. For example, newly hired NCE staff participated in submitting a successful proposal to the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) to conduct studies on establishing “no-take zones” in two Egyptian national parks located by the Red Sea.
- NCE’s role has been strengthened as a leading voice in nature conservation in Egypt and the region in influencing government policy and views of the general public. A striking example has been a successful dialogue and campaign which has seen conservation of protected areas and biodiversity proposed as an obligation in the upcoming new Constitution of Egypt. NCE is involved in a number of other campaigns including a battle against the Red Sea Bridge Project. This multi-billion dollar project will connect Egypt and Saudi Arabia by a bridge, endangering protected areas as well as threatening marine life and coral reefs. NCE is raising public awareness on the negative impacts of this project.
- NCE has continued to fulfill its obligations under the GEF UNDP BirdLife Migratory Soaring Birds project which seeks to protect millions of soaring birds migrating along the Africa – Eurasia Flyway.

**Ghana Wildlife Society**

**Background**
A key strategy of the The Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS) – BirdLife Partner in Ghana - is to build a constituency of environmentally conscious people through its education and public awareness programmes. To achieve this, the Society established a membership scheme in the 1990s. However, the original expectation that members would help to support the Society financially, unfortunately, did not work. There was a rapid decline in Society membership with the withdrawal of the external funding support for the membership scheme. The governance structure of the Society became inactive due to its strong link to the membership scheme. The global financial crisis deepened these problems, and the Society struggled to maintain its
financial strength. This led to reduced staff strength and decreased ability to deliver conservation.

**Objectives**
Overall objective: To support the institutional reform of GWS, with a focus on the restructuring of the membership scheme.

Specific Objectives:
- A revised membership scheme developed, approved and publicly launched.
- New Corporate Membership launched and functioning effectively.
- Increase engagement of Council members; updated GWS strategic plan implemented to increase conservation delivery.

**Progress – Ghana**

- *Review of GWS Membership Scheme and approval by Council*
  A consultant was contracted to undertake a review of the GWS membership scheme and recommend the most financially sustainable membership scheme for the Society within the Ghanaian context. The review has been completed and a new membership scheme proposed comprising several levels from Platinum corporate members, to Individual membership, and GWS supporters.

  The proposed membership scheme was approved by the interim Council of GWS at a meeting held on the 13th November 2012. Several recommendations for improvement were also made including expansion of the current Council to represent the various membership categories.

- *GWS Profile Brochure*
  A new profile brochure for GWS has been developed with more concise information on the identity of the Society, and expertise available at GWS. The brochure also highlights the strategic programmatic areas of the Society and its engagement in emerging environmental issues such as promotion of environmental safeguard standards in the oil and gas sector.

- *Outstanding activities*
  A Strategic Planning workshop and Retreat is scheduled for 18-19 January 2013 which will produce a revised strategic plan for GWS. A public launch of the new membership scheme is scheduled for 30th January 2013 and will bring together both corporate, and individual supporters of GWS to publicise the new membership scheme. These activities will be reported on in July 2013.

**Wildlife and Environment Society of Malawi (WESM)**

**Background**
WESM – BirdLife Affiliate in Malawi - depends on donor funding for its activities. But due to financial constraints, occasioned in part by the global economic downturn,
WESM secretariat has not been able to coordinate adequately with all its nine branches in implementation of its activities. It therefore sought financial assistance from BirdLife International to build and strengthen its capacity.

Objectives

- To enhance the governance and planning functions of WESM.
- To provide critical seed funding to improve management effectiveness of WESM Secretariat and its branches.
- To share experiences in wildlife and natural resource management with other BirdLife partners and use the new knowledge in management of existing conservation projects.

Progress – Malawi

- To enhance governance and planning
  An Annual General Meeting (AGM) and a Board meeting for WESM were held on 15 December 2012. The meetings aimed at consolidating the “One WESM” unification process that seeks to improve coordination between the WESM Secretariat and its branches. Branch members, board members, trustees, corporate members and the media attended.

  A local consultant has been recruited to produce a Business Plan for WESM as a fundraising strategy. The final document will be ready and presented for adoption in the first week of January 2013.

  A uniform template for reporting has been developed across WESM branches. Each branch now has an IBA and WESM Strategic Plan with an Action plan and Work plan produced.

- Improving Management effectiveness of WESM Secretariat and its branches
  Using funds from the AVJCF grant, the WESM Secretariat Director was able to travel and visit six branches namely: Blantyre, Mulanje, Zomba, Balaka, Monkey Bay and Lilongwe Branches. Planning meetings with WESM branches were held during these visits. At the time of writing, a further three branches were scheduled to be visited.

- To share experiences in wildlife and natural resource management with other BirdLife partners
  A joint experience exchange workshop was held between WESM (members from the Secretariat and the branches) and the Africa Regional Committee (ARC) of BirdLife International. The ARC is the highest policy-making body of the BirdLife Africa Partnership (comprising 24 countries). Discussions focused on the unification of WESM. WESM members learned from BirdLife colleagues about how similar organisations (with branches and devolved governance) are successfully run in Kenya and in the Republic of South Africa. Prior to the workshop, WESM together with the CEOs of the BirdLife Partners from Kenya and South Africa visited conservation projects in the Dzalanyama area dealing with reforestation, community alternative livelihoods (Beekeeping and tree nurseries) and bird conservation.
• **Impact of activities**
  Coordination of WESM Secretariat and its branches has remarkably improved. The WESM Secretariat is now able to keep track of all branch activities. WESM is almost getting to a stage of self-financing and the Business Plan will help get the organization to the next level.

• **Outstanding activities**
  - Production of a Business Plan document for fundraising
  - Production of promotional material for fundraising
  - Director of WESM to visit remaining branches

Reports on these activities will be provided in the Final Report to the AVJCF in July 2013.

**Palau Conservation Society (PCS)**

**Background**
The Palau Conservation Society is the leading local non-government organization in Palau dedicated to preserving Palau’s natural resources. In 2008 and 2009, PCS was forced to reduce its staff and operations because of a lack of sufficient funds to support the organization’s daily operations precipitated by the world-wide financial crisis that caused a reduction of funding streams to PCS. PCS is therefore keen to increase its financial stability and flexibility; and applied for the AVJCF Small Grant to help it achieve its aims.

**Objectives**
- Building key staff capacity in fundraising.
- Support some of the Administration and Development activities that will help strengthen the institution’s stability.
- Diversify PCS’s donor portfolio.

**Progress – Palau**

**Building key staff capacity for fundraising**
A mentorship program has been established. In this program, two key PCS staff – the Administrative and Finance Manager and Development Coordinator were mentored by the PCS Executive Director who had previously worked as the Minister for Finance in Palau for a period of 8 years. He is now the Executive Director of PCS. Staff gained valuable skills regarding financial management in a global recession and effective local fundraising strategies. A fundraising plan has been developed for both PCS’s Finance Program as well as for the PCS Board of Directors.

Key staff training was undertaken: including attendance at an Asia Pacific Association of Fiduciary Studies (APAFS) workshop in the Philippines and training in investment stewardship. This has provided a better understanding of PCS’s investment portfolio and how to manage and communicate the portfolio to the Board, staff, members and the donor community.
Support administration and development activities that will help strengthen the institution’s organisational stability activities

The PCS website has been updated and the PCS’s membership database system improved. Another key activity was to distill the essence of PCS into an easily identifiable, coherent and recognizable brand. These efforts included discussions amongst PCS program managers and PCS board members. PCS also purchased merchandise that were printed with key environmental messages associated with the mission and vision of PCS. These promotional items will be used to promote PCS to the more than 100,000 visitors who come to Palau annually, partners locally and internationally and will be featured on PCS’s website. Funding for these branding efforts was provided by the Packard Foundation complemented by the AVJCF/Birdlife grant.

Diversify PCS donor portfolio

This project allowed the PCS Board of Directors, the Executive Director and the Administration and Finance Program to assess, develop a plan of action and to take steps to diversify PCS donor portfolio and ensure that the organization becomes a more sustainable organization. This is a long term strategy but the following initial steps have been taken:

- PCS’s Chairman of the Board and Executive Director went to Guam to build new and strengthen existing partnerships with Guam based companies operating in Palau. This resulted in an increase in the organisation’s Corporate Partners for their Conservation Program donations.
- PCS’s website has been enabled to accept donations via pay-pal. Support for PCS at the individual level can now occur in an easy and safe manner and PCS is actively promoting this feature of its website to increase membership as well as donations.

Palestine Wildlife Society (PWLS)

Background

Due to political instability, many international and national organizations have ceased making donations to Palestinian organisations. Organizations that continue to provide funding for field activities impose stringent restrictions which ensure funds cannot be used for supporting NGO core operations. Despite these difficult conditions, PWLS – the BirdLife Partner dedicated to saving Palestine’s Wildlife - continues to operate but is finding it increasingly difficult to do so. PWLS continues to work to fundraise for projects to both implement its activities and maintain its operations but there is huge uncertainty in securing funding to maintain the Society’s core operations. The AVJCF funds have been very useful in stabilising the PWS budget, covering key gaps and ensuring PWLS continues to lead on the development of environmental conservation in Palestine.

Objectives

- Strengthen the Financial Situation of PWLS.
- Expand and increase contributing membership.
- Enhance Staff capacity.
Progress - Palestine

Strengthen the Financial Situation of PWLS.

PWLS has created a new improved compensation program for full time staff employees. PWLS has four full time and two part time employees plus two other volunteers. Full time staff members are now responsible for paying 5% of their salary toward a compensation program with PWLS contributing another 10%. In addition, a situation in which employees faced delays in salary payments at the end of each month has now been corrected. These measures, made possible by the AVJCF funding, have improved staff morale significantly and boosted productivity.

Expand and increase contributing membership.

PWS has developed a new membership strategy in consultation with BirdLife International. New criteria for membership are being established as well as a sliding scale of membership at different levels - local, national and international. A new membership list is being developed and a data base for its maintenance established. Other aspects of the membership strategy are now being trialled.

Prior to this project, the PWLS Web site Pages (www.wildlife-pal.org and www.psec.ps) had not been updated for two years. AVJCF funding through BirdLife International has made it possible for PWS to obtain specialist equipment and take on a new volunteer specialist in web design and IT to start working on and further developing the PWLS web pages. A revamped website will allow improved marketing and outreach by PWLS which will in turn improve funding sustainability. As part of this drive, PWLS staff is now marketing PWLS activities on Facebook by downloading pictures of the organisation’s activities.

Enhance Staff Capacity.

The PWLS Secretariat has initiated development of a new strategy for the period 2013-2015 with the Board. The strategy should be ready for the next general assembly in 2013. The strategy will include plans for diversifying fundraising and enhancing staff capacity.

PWLS developed and is implementing a training program for staff and board members in Fundraising and in marketing PWLS activities. As part of this program, four PWLS staff participated in a workshop on fundraising for NGOs and in proposal writing. In addition these staff helped in writing and developing new ideas for conservation project implementation activities.

PWLS staff implemented a number of conservation and awareness-raising activities with AVJCF funding that improved their capacity and knowledge as well as having an impact on the ground. These included:

- Working with public, private and UN schools in Palestine, through ECO clubs, to raise local biodiversity awareness for students by providing basic concepts on how to protect local nature and habitats. PWLS staff visited about 10 schools in the Bethlehem Area.
Visiting the farmers in the Rift Valley and Jericho (a prime agricultural region) and making available concepts and notes on agriculture problems and using pesticides and organic fertilizers.

Are there any potential changes required to the project design?
No design changes are required but a six month no-cost extension to the project has been requested as a consequence of civil insecurity that has delayed project implementation in Egypt and the need to link requested improvements to NGO management in some countries to disbursement of funds. It is anticipated that a final report on outstanding activities will be provided in July 2013. This will not involve any re-allocation of project funds.