

	<p style="text-align: center;">Feasibility study in Georgia to put Avian Biodiversity on the Map</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and stimulating Georgia to increase participation in GBIF</p> <p>Comment: This is phase 1 of Dutch – Georgian cooperation in preparing Georgia for EU application in 2024, with respect to nature- and bird-conservation.</p>
2. Project Group:	<p>The project group involved consists of three boardmembers of the Dutch-Georgian Ornithological Foundation (DuGOF):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gernant Magnin (project leader) <i>Former director of WWF in Turkey; experienced and professional field-worker on avifaunistic and ecological topics; regular visitor to Georgia;</i> • Folkert de Boer <i>One of the first core members of Batumi Raptor Count (BRC); experienced field-worker in Georgia; expert on data-processing;</i> • Peter Lina <i>Expert on systematics and ecology of bats; experienced researcher on birds; for many years involved in bat-research in Georgia and Ukraine; guest-researcher for Naturalis BC. Expert in European nature conservation policy.</i>
3. Background:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Dutch Georgian Ornithological Foundation (DuGOF) was founded in 2015, and principally aims to ‘further and support ornithological research in Georgia’, and to ‘further and stimulate the protection and conservation of wild birds in Georgia’. In recent years some projects were executed as collaborations between the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (the Ministry) , Georgian Universities and NGOs, and DUGOF. 2. The European Union and Georgia have maintained relations since 1996 in the INOGATE framework, and in 2006 a five-year "Action Plan" of rapprochement was implemented in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). A more comprehensive Association Agreement entered into force on 1 July 2016, providing Georgia with access to some sectors of the European Single Market, as well as visa-free travel to the EU. Georgia does not have an official status as a candidate for future enlargement of the European Union, but in 2011 Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili expressed a desire for his country to become a member state of the EU. As of January 2021, Georgia is preparing to formally apply for EU membership in 2024. From 1 December 2009 there has been an office of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia. 3. As a lead up to formal EU application in 2024, Georgia may decide to start laying the foundations of its own rules and regulations in such a manner that compliance with the EU is easier at a later stage. 4. In an assessment of the state of biodiversity of the entire Caucasus region, WWF wrote in 2020 <i>“The biodiversity of the Caucasus is being lost at an</i>

	<p><i>alarming rate. Nearly half of the lands in the Ecoregion have been transformed by human activities. The plains, foothills, low-mountain and subalpine belts have been the most heavily impacted. Native floodplain vegetation has been badly affected: only two to three percent of original riparian forests remain in the South Caucasus. Most natural old growth forests have been fragmented into small sections, divided by areas of commercial forests or plantations, as well as agricultural and developed lands. A study in 2017 inspired by the Nature Needs Half Coalition found that nature is imperilled in more than half of the Caucasus. Only about a quarter of the region remains in reasonable condition and no more than 12% of the original vegetation, including forests, can be considered pristine. Nowadays the major proximate threats to biodiversity in the ecoregion are infrastructure development, unsustainable and illegal logging, overgrazing, poaching, overfishing, mining and climate change. These threats, which affect the Caucasus' various ecosystems at different scales, lead to habitat degradation and fragmentation, decline of species populations and disruption of ecological processes – all amplifying the overall loss of biodiversity.”</i></p> <p>5. The Birds & Habitats Directives form the cornerstone of the EU’s nature conservation policy. It is built around two pillars: the Natura 2000 Network of protected sites, and the strict system of species protection. The Natura 2000 Network is the centerpiece of EU nature policy. The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. Within the EU, over 25,000 sites have already been designated, covering more than one million km2.</p> <p>6. During 2021, the DuGOF Board has decided to offer its services to the Ministry, especially regarding the Bird & Habitat Directive, to help preparing for formal EU application by the Georgian government in 2024,. In November 2021 this offer was supported by the Georgian Embassy in The Hague, and formally accepted by the Ministry in Tbilisi. This support was needed before starting a new long term process, including this project. Now the timing is right. Recent changes in the board of DuGOF guarantee that the current project team could be formed with all needed expertise.</p>
<p>4. Project description</p>	<p>The project is in accordance with the theme “participation”.</p> <p>A large number of topics could be considered relevant (*see footnote page 3), but it is clear that to map out where which data are held, to retrieve these data, validate these date, and to make them publicly available is one of the first priorities, as there is no centralised database on biodiversity in Georgia and open data-policy is not common in practice.</p> <p>To illustrate this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently, during the writing of the European Breeding Bird Atlas (2021), attempts to describe the status of breeding birds in Georgia were hampered by the fact that Georgia does not have one single port of call for data, and that existing data are often not validated and/or sufficiently open. This situation holds true for most other taxa. • The Ministry informed DuGOF on several occasions that for nature- and bird-conservation there is a sincere lack of data in Georgia.

- SABUKO, the Society for Nature Conservation in Georgia informed DuGOF that historical data on the birds of Georgia are only partly accessible; some data-sets are in need of rescuing them from being lost for current research!

DUGOF is keen to investigate the feasibility of bringing relevant players together to reach the goal of **PUTTING GEORGIAN (AVIAN) BIODIVERSITY ON THE MAP**. This goal is a long term effort which will require all stakeholders to sign up to a long term strategy, as well as long term funding. To create the best possible starting point in this process, the discussions between DuGOF and the Ministry in Tbilisi make clear that a feasibility study is needed as a basis for actual implementation of an effective strategy, including coördinated application for future funding.

In this feasibility study the project group will conduct the following activities:

- I. Devising of a networked strategy in Georgia;
- II. Making initial assessments in Georgia of the quantity, quality and ownership of historical and recent data;
- III. forming the outlines of Dutch-Georgian partnership and assessing the added value of such a partnership in preparing for EU application of Georgia (including the role of open data and GBIF);
- IV. assessing the feasibility of introducing Georgian versions of digital platforms like iobs and Obsmapp

In these activities all main Georgian organizations (in the field of bird-conservation and European integration are involved, all situated in Tbilisi:

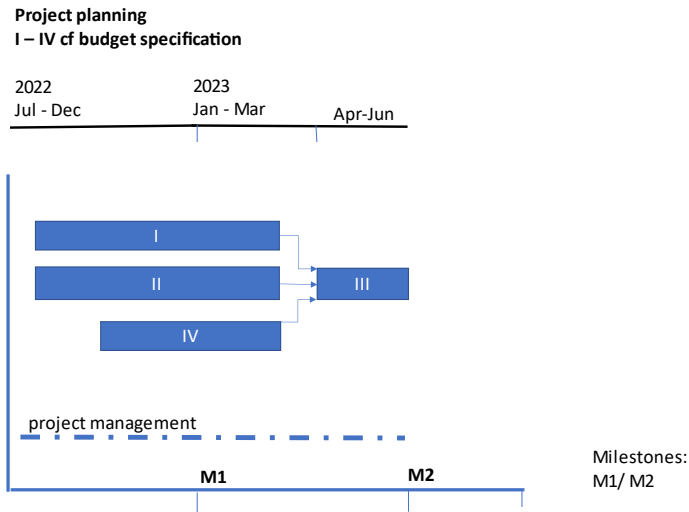
- The Ministry, department of Forestry and Biodiversity;
- The Ministry, department of European integration;
- Ilia State University and Javakhishvili State University
- SABUKO, society for nature conservation;
- Flora & Fauna International;
- WWF-Georgia and Nature Conservation Georgia
- Embassy of the Netherlands in Tbilisi

The outcome of the project-activities will be used for decision-making by the Ministry, Ilia State University and NGO's. Our assumption is that this project will result in decisions as a basis for open data policy in Georgia, with a positive stimulance to using GBIF in the practice of ornithological research.

**This is in line with GBIF strategic Plan 2017 – 2022, priority area number 1 : strengthening the global network.
Especially 1a: Lower the threshold for participation in GBIF.**

* Topics which seem relevant in the context of preparing for EU candidacy include *inter alia*:

- a) Updated listing and detailed description of Important Bird Areas/Key Biodiversity Areas;
- b) Updated listing and detailed description (incl socio-economic factors) of all wetlands and rivers;
- c) Listing of all animal and plant species relevant with regards to the Birds & Habitats Directive
- d) Analysis of challenges in achieving effective bird and habitat conservation, such as balancing economic and environmental priorities;
- e) Investigations of globally threatened bird species (*and subspecies*) in Georgia so that Species Action Plans can be launched swiftly in due course;
- f) Assessing the present formal protected area coverage and effectiveness in Georgia.

<p>5. Planning</p>	<p>Turnaround time of the project: 12 months (Due to unforeseen circumstances the planning has been extended to 1st October 2023)</p>  <p>Project planning I – IV of budget specification</p> <p>2022 Jul - Dec 2023 Jan - Mar Apr-Jun</p> <p>Milestones: M1/ M2</p> <p><i>Comments:</i> M1: progress report; M2: final report</p>
<p>6. Project criteria and priorities</p>	<p><u>Strategic plan:</u> (see also ad 4, project description)</p> <p>The project is in line with GBIF strategic Plan 2017 – 2022, priority area number 1 : strengthening the global network. Especially 1a: Lower the threshold for participation in GBIF.</p> <p><u>Working programme 2022:</u> According to the working programme 2022 the project meets priority 1 and 3. Priority 1: Empower Global Network Activity 1e: Expand national participation (of Georgia)</p> <p>Priority 3: Fill Data Gaps Activity 3d: Rescue datasets (especially historical datasets; Activity 3a: Identify priority gaps (see ad 4, project description, sub II of project activities)</p> <p><u>Requirement 2:</u> In our opinion the <u>added value</u> of the project is that it is the start of an intended long term relationship with Georgia. We expect this will lead to the adoption (in Georgia) of open data policy which in turn will have two effects: (a) stimulate the use of GBIF, and (b) will improve the quality of publications, which is relevant for Georgian researchers to meet the standards of scientific Journals like ARDEA.</p> <p><u>Requirement 3:</u> about <u>efficiency and cost-effectiveness</u> in the project. The members of the project group know Georgia for many years. On this basis it was possible to select the organizations we really need (see the project-description). With all of these organizations (except the Dutch Embassy in Tbilisi) we have personal contact on a regular basis. Knowing them makes the project efficient.</p>

	<p><u>Requirement 4</u>: about <u>permanence</u> of results. Because this project is phase 1 of a long term effort (see project-description), the intended permanence is incorporated.</p> <p><u>Requirement 5</u>: about managing project risks.</p> <p>Doing “business” in Georgia is not always easy because of (1) difference in culture, (2) a very hierarchical (top-down) organization of public institutions, and (3) the rather weak position of NGO’s. But we have experience. Therefore the preparation of this project took about a year. Now we have support from the Ministry (in two departments) and from the Georgian Ambassador in The Hague. The Dutch Ambassador in Tbilisi is “on the list” in the project. All this support in the top guarantees willing cooperation from Universities and NGO’s. And the project team is highly motivated.</p>
7. Budget	We ask NLBIF to contribute with an amount of €11.000,- (Which was granted in June 2022)