

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2010)

Project Ref No	EIDPO-040
Project Title	The Assam Haathi Project
Country(ies)	India
UK Organisation	North of England Zoological Society (Chester Zoo)
Collaborator(s)	EcoSystems-India
Project Leader	Alexandra Zimmermann
Report date	October 2010
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 1
Project website	www.assamhaathiproject.org

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up).

This Darwin Post Project started on 1 October 2010. The previous project (16-007) ended on 31 May 2010. Between June and September 2010 we began some preparations for the new project.

Implementation of crop protection methods in 8 new project villages (activity 1.1)

A project planning meeting for the new phase with both Goalpara and Sonitpur field staff was conducted. The agenda included identification of new villages, review of activities in existing sites, and possible withdrawal strategy for old project villages. A new watchtower (wooden and concrete) at Rikamari village, Sonitpur was erected with contribution in kind from the villagers. Regular inspection of existing watchtowers is also being continued. The beneficiary households of Rupajuli, Sonitpur are raising money to add to the corpus of maintenance fund for the electric fencing. The energiser in Bengkanda, Goalpara was replaced, with inputs from the community managed maintenance fund. Existing project communities continue to undertake regular maintenance of the electric fencing. Installation of solar fencing (2 km) in Bamungopa, Goalpara is planned for November 2010. Modalities of cost-sharing for installation and maintenance are being discussed with the villagers. 10 spotlights were distributed to 6 villages in Goalpara and the project is planning to provide solar lighting to 13 households of HEC affected isolated hamlet in Goalpara. Consultations with Vodafone to provide warning (*elephant crossing*) signboards in Goalpara are underway.

Hands-on training and workshops to be held in the project villages (activity 1.2)

We have had participation of 20 farmers in training session for chilli smoke and chilli rope in Goalpara. Increased awareness about elephant behaviour and interventions for tea garden communities has been facilitated by demonstrations in four select tea gardens at Thakurbari, Sonitpur. On request of Divisional Forest Officer, Jorhat, Assam Forest Department, 14 demonstrations for chilli smoke, chilli rope and tripwire as well as awareness about HEC mitigation methods were held in Jorhat, a potential new district for project expansion.

Development of livelihood ideas and business planning (activity 2.1)

Following the success of the cooperative food preservation venture started by members of self help groups in Sonitpur, project staff helped to build the market linkages with vendors, retail outlets, sourcing of packaging material and publicity for the sale of food preserves. This has helped the cooperative to almost break even within the first year of their operation.

Disseminate further copies of 'living with elephants' handbook (activity 3.1)

Around 70 copies of the handbook "Living with Elephants in Assam" were distributed. The

recipients included HEC affected villages in non-project villages, Forest Department officials, visiting NGO members, tea garden managers, researchers and practitioners.

Background research and demarcation of potential replanting areas (activity 4.1)

Eco-restoration protocol training: Two project field staff visited Nature Conservation Foundation's field station in South India to undertake training on eco-restoration protocols such as establishment of nursery, selection site, selection of native plants, and monitoring.

Establish nursery and plant out (both for reforestation and firewood) (activity 4.2)

150 chilli plants were distributed from the chilli nursery in Sonitpur. Another 1000 plants are being raised for coming HEC season. In Goalpara, land preparation for a chilli plantation is underway.

Assam-wide HEC survey (activity 5.2)

As a prelude to expansion of project areas under AHP, an assessment of presence of wild elephants and HEC incidences in all the districts of Assam has been initiated. The methodology, protocol, data collection sheets have been developed and the survey is about to begin.

Other activities:

The host country project manager, Nandita Hazarika, visited Bangladesh on the invitation of Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB), Dhaka in October 2010. She delivered three talks on HEC and Assam Haathi Project at the University of Dhaka, WTB, and the Forest Department, Govt. of Bangladesh. The Forest Department and WTB are keen to collaborate with us for HEC mitigation in their country.

Elephant corridor identification: in an attempt to collaborate with tea gardens in Sonitpur, an elephant corridor demarcation exercise was conducted along with tea garden management in 4 tea gardens (Dhulapadung, Ghoirali, Borjuli and Sesa).

Maan Barua, an Assamese PhD student at Oxford is undertaking his fieldwork in our project villages in Sonitpur, to investigate the social impact on people affected by crop-raiding elephants. This is a follow-up to one of the recommendations made to us in the mid-term review of our previous project.

Publications:

T. E. Davies, S. Wilson, N Hazarika, J Chakrabarty, D Das, D. J. Hodgson, A. Zimmermann. (in press). Effectiveness of intervention methods against crop-raiding elephants. *Conservation Letters*.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

No problems.

Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? n/a

Discussed with LTS: no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Formal change request submitted: no/yes, in.....(month/yr)

Received confirmation of change acceptance no/yes in.....(month/yr)

3. Do you expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes **No** As this project is only 1 month old at the time of this report, it is very difficult for us to foresee whether we may have any underspend, since plans and progress at this time are as set out in the application and its budget.

If yes, and you wish to request a carryforward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible. It would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication of how much you expect this request might be for.

Estimated carryforward request: £

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with LTS International directly.

Please send your **completed form by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**