

Darwin Initiative

Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

Project Ref. No.	162/12/021
Project Title	Marine biodiversity assessment and development in Perlas Archipelago, Panama
Country(ies)	Panama
UK Organisation	Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh
Collaborator(s)	Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Panama
Report date	4 October 2005
Report No.	HYR 3
Project website	http://striweb.si.edu/darwin_initiative/ – currently still under early development

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project.

The project is progressing as planned. Darwin Fellows 2&3 (Panamanians Jose Miguel Guevara & Inez Campbell) completed the taught component of the MSc course in Edinburgh and returned to Panama in May to undertake dissertation research work. The MSc dissertations were successfully completed in September and students were provisionally recommended for MSc award (Graduation - November 2005) subject to formal Examinations Board meeting. Draft manuscripts of the work from these dissertations are being prepared for submission for journal publication. The topic of the research by Darwin Fellow 2 is on using satellite data and GIS techniques to study changes in land cover since 1975 and identifying the land usage on the largest islands of the archipelago in order to assess potential sedimentary or runoff impact on the marine environment as well as to propose best terrestrial areas for future managed protection. The topic of research by Darwin Fellow is "*The role of local communities in the designation of a marine protected area in Las Perlas Archipelago, Panama*" and is a sociological study important to the management of stakeholder participation. UK project Leader (James Mair) travelled to Panama for a 4-week visit in May/June (2 months earlier than initial timetable) and took part in 10-day research cruise of Las Perlas. He was accompanied by STRI personnel, Darwin Fellows 2&3, two Colombian PhD students and two UK MSc students. The PhD and MSc students were independently funded (EU Alban, NERC, HWU Scholarship & Alumni grants). All Fellows and students were carrying out separate but related research relevant to the Darwin Project aims and were supervised and guided by the UK Project Leader and STRI personnel. In addition to the Darwin Fellow dissertation projects other research included a study of the important Red Snapper Fishery by the Esmeralda community in the south of the Archipelago; a baseline assessment of sediment metal contamination around the islands (relatively pristine) compared to Panama City Bay (polluted); continued PhD studies on the ecology of vermetid molluscs and sabellarid polychaete reefs around the islands; and initial PhD studies on sociological data to build into an assessment of Decision Support Systems in the management of the proposed Protected Area. All these research topics are planned to be published, some are in initial manuscript form already. Other research involved the identification of the benthos samples collected from the Archipelago in 2003/2004 surveys. This involved the use of two Ecuadorian Darwin Fellows (from project 162/06029 – Daisi Merino and Maria Arroyo) and two taxonomists from the University of Costa Rica (Jeffrey Sibaja and Rita Vargas) who worked on the samples at STRI in May/June. During this same period another former Darwin Fellow/Scholar (Mr Anthony Mitchell – Colombia – 162/07/147) also visited STRI to collaborate on GIS work with Panamanian Darwin Fellow 2. In addition to these direct and active involvements in the Networking activity of the Project, further links were made with other Darwin projects and Latin American researchers with a view to involvement at the Darwin Project concluding conference stage. It was decided that the Darwin Conference should be held in Panama in March 2006 instead of August 2005 (as in the original timetable). During the 6 months Dr Guzman (STRI Darwin Project co-ordinator) continued discussions and negotiations with the Panamanian authorities and stakeholders on zoning, management plans and designations of the protected areas. He and the Darwin UK Leader have also made plans for applications for further joint work on establishment of protected areas in Las Perlas.

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 notable problems have arisen but there has been an unexpected development. As previously reported (Year 2 Annual report), due to elections and the change in government and President of Panama in 2004, the new regime is very keen to press ahead with Protected Area status for Las Perlas. The Darwin project host co-ordinator (Dr Hector Guzman) at STRI has been involved in discussions with the Vice-President and the government regulatory authorities on area designation. This started occurring earlier than anticipated and some of the host co-ordinator's time is being diverted away from the planned scientific work towards the negotiation processes involved in area designation (he has prior experience of this from the previous designation of the Coiba Marine National Park). Despite earlier expectations of full Protected status being designated in mid 2005 there have recently been some protracted final negotiations and now it would appear probable that designation will take place late 2005/early 2006 – still much earlier than originally anticipated in the initial project timetable. The reason for the delay is based on an unexpected decision to work what previously was drafted as a Presidential Decree, to be submitted as Law throughout the National Congress. Associated with this, in the original Darwin project plan we did not have Fellow No. 3 starting until Year 3 (April 2005) but a good local biologist (Ms Inez Campbell) was already identified and was working voluntarily on aspects of the project. With the urgency to have more Darwin Fellows working on the project now that the protected status of Las Perlas was accelerating, it was decided to approach the Darwin Secretariat to request some transfer of Year 3 budget into Year 2 to enable project work to proceed more quickly and keep pace with the new developments. This was designed mainly to bring forward the employment of Darwin Fellow 3, get her through the taught component of the MSc course before April 2005, and have her work after that on the Darwin project and supporting the co-ordinators. The Darwin Secretariat agreed to these changes (see below) and therefore there were some amendments to the original timetabling of Years 2&3 and some budget transfers between years.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Darwin Secretariat approached on this 9/7/04 and changes approved 13/7/04 (email from C.Haloun).

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: YES, in... Month 4 of Project Year 2..... (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: YES, in Month 4 of Project Year 2. (month/yr)

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

A request has been made to the Darwin Secretariat to consider the general possibility of an alternative use of some of the unspent programme budget money (as happened in March 2005 when there was a considerable shortfall of spend on the 2004/2005 Darwin Initiative programme budget). If this is likely to happen again in future years I suggested that some money be made available to a Network of Darwin Fellows to assist in attendance at Conferences or Workshops of other relevant Darwin projects where the individual project had no spare funds for such additional networking. More specifically, this would be a useful aid to enable more attendees at our own Panama Darwin Project Conference in March 2006.

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.

NO RESPONSE REQUESTED

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

Please send your completed form by 31 October each year per email to Stefanie Halfmann, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme, stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk. The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message.