

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

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	26 October 2004
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 2
Project website	Being developed but project news items posted/hosted regularly on www.stri.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).

The project is running as planned. Darwin Fellow No.1 (Beatriz Medina) completed the taught component of the MSc course in Edinburgh and returned to Panama on 30 April to undertake dissertation research work on local scallop fishery in Las Perlas. Dissertation successfully completed in September and student recommended for MSc award (Graduation - November 2004). A revised manuscript of this work is being prepared for submission for journal publication. Darwin Fellow No. 2 (Jose Miguel Guevara) selected and appointed (in advance of Year 2 start) and from April 2004 has worked full time on project research before travelling to Edinburgh at end of September to undertake MSc course. One UK PhD student (Sarah Benfield) and two other MSc students travelled to Panama in May 2004 (external funding) to take part in survey work in Las Perlas with STRI co-ordinator and Darwin Fellows Nos. 1, 2 and 3 (No.3 – Inez Campbell, identified in advance and was assisting voluntarily on project). Results go towards students' PhD thesis, MSc dissertations and Darwin project outputs – one of the MSc dissertations was gathering background information to help prepare suitable awareness/educational leaflets for Darwin project. The other MSc project and PhD studies were researching fish assemblages on Las Perlas reefs. Three UK personnel - UK project Leader (James Mair), Susan Chambers (National Museums of Scotland – project collaborator) and Sarah Benfield (PhD student) travelled to Panama and took part in 10-day research cruise with host co-ordinator and Darwin Fellow No. 2 on STRI vessel as planned in August 2004 – in addition to another Heriot-Watt University PhD student (EU Alban-funded Lina Barrios – looking at polychaete diversity) and MSc student (NERC-funded Jade Berman studying sponge diversity). During this research cruise the Darwin team were joined for a day by the British Ambassador to Panama, Mr Jim Malcolm, and he discussed with the project co-ordinators ways of obtaining additional money from companies in Panama for furthering Darwin work. These leads are being followed up currently. Samples and information collected from the cruise have started to be worked up and processed along with Year 1 results. Contact with potential network partners are now well established with a view to formalising network – initially involving personnel from Costa Rica, Colombia and Ecuador to visit STRI Panama to work on the benthic samples collected from around Las Perlas in August 2003 and August 2004 surveys. Some samples will be taken back to their home countries to continue the identification work. The Costa Rican biologist has already visited STRI Panama in September to work on the collection and plans for the work-up involving other network partners over the next few months are in place.

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. Due to elections and the change in government and President of Panama earlier this year, 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 is 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). 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) has already been identified and was working voluntarily on aspects of the project. A secondary plan was, before she started on the Darwin project in Year 3, to have her do the MSc course this year (though an EU ALBAN funding application – www.programalban.org). However, this application was unsuccessful and with this news, and the urgency to have more Darwin Fellows working on the project now that the protected status of Las Perlas is 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 apace 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 full time on Darwin project and supporting the co-ordinators.

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?

Same observation as made last year (see below), and noting that you indicate many new 2004 projects started later than April, it might be worth bringing the proposal deadlines forward so that new approved Darwin projects can hit the ground running and start projects from 1st April:- *“Delays in project approval, contract signing, etc., with DEFRA and then setting up MOUs with Partner make it difficult to start a project in full swing in April of the financial Year 1. If project approval timing remains similar in the future, it may be advisable to recommend to project leaders to allow a month or two at the beginning for set-up activities and not plan major, important project activities right at the very beginning which might need to be delayed for these reasons.”*

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.**