

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

Project Ref. No.	163/13/007
Project Title	Taxonomic training for a neglected biodiversity hotspot within Lao PDR
Country(ies)	Lao PDR
UK Organisation	Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Collaborator(s)	Forest Research Center (National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute – NAFRI) National University of Lao PDR, IUCN Lao
Report date	31 October 2004
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	Year 1 Half Year Report (HYR 1)
Project website	<i>Under consideration</i>

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).

In the original timetable UK staff were to carry out the first training visit to Lao in June-July 2004. This was to be followed by a visit to the UK by Lao project staff between August and December 2004. Owing to the late start of the project, this was not possible. With the agreement of our project partners, and the approval of the Darwin secretariat, it was decided to delay the training visit until January 2005 (still within the first year of the project). The visit to the UK by Lao staff has been delayed until June July 2005 (in the second year of the project)

Dr Mark Newman (UK project leader) and Philip Thomas (project coordinator) visited Lao PDR 11th - 26th July to liaise with newly appointed staff from partner organisations, fine-tune the work programme and make arrangements for financial management within Lao PDR. A report on the visit was compiled and circulated to all project participants. Links were established with other complementary projects as well as with the CBD focal point and senior figures in the Prime Minister's Office involved in the Biodiversity Strategy. UK staff also visited Paris in July to meet EU counterparts involved in complementary projects in Lao PDR to ensure appropriate collaboration (see Section 2).

The general Memorandum of Understanding between RBGE and NAFRI that was in place at the time of the Stage 1 application has been renegotiated specifically to cover the work of this Darwin project.

Work has been initiated on the National Species database. It now holds records of 2000 taxa thought to occur in Lao PDR. Data from the National Herbarium in Leiden (one of the main centres for SE Asian floristic work) have also been incorporated. Work has also been initiated on the tri-lingual dictionary that is due to be published at the end of the second year.

A profile of the project has been published in the RBGE's newsletter (one of the stated outputs for the first year)

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.

In the period between the submission of the Stage 2 application and the notification of the award, staff from the Forest Research Center (the main partner in Lao PDR) who had been nominated to participate in this project were either promoted within NAFRI or seconded to other organisations. Replacements were agreed during the planning visit by UK staff in July. The FRC team now includes staff who worked on the previous Darwin Project in Lao PDR (Rattan Diversity and Sustainable Management). Two of these staff spent 3 months undertaking botanical training at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Their participation should enhance the training aspects of the current project.

The protected area in which the project plans to work, Nakai Nam Theun National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NNT NBCA), is closely linked to the development of the World Bank sponsored Nam Theun II Hydroelectric Scheme. This scheme is an extremely important development for the Lao government in terms of its economic potential and as a test case for balancing development with conservation. A Water Management and Protection Authority (WMPA) was appointed in May 2004 with responsibility, among many other things, for the approval and coordination of scientific work in the wider catchment area, including NNT NBCA. In August, the Darwin Project was asked to submit a formal application to undertake training and scientific work to the WMPA in order to provide a test case for their management procedures. The application is expected to be successful though a back-up plan has been devised in case of problems.

In May 2004 the UK project leader was informed by a colleague in the Nationaal Herbarium Nederland in Leiden (L) that an EU project entitled 'Biodiversity Informatics and co-Operation in Taxonomy for Interactive shared Knowledge base' (BIOTIK) had been approved. BIOTIK will work in Lao PDR and the western Ghats of India with L and CIRAD as EU partners, and the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP), and Faculty of Science, National University of Lao PDR as Asian partners. The main aim of the project is to develop interactive computerised systems for tree species identification in selected hotspots in Lao PDR and India. Their work also includes training in taxonomy. The database that they will use, and base their outputs on, is the Botanical Research and Herbarium Management System (BRAHMS). This system is freely available from the developers at Oxford University, UK and is widely used by herbaria involved in the South East Asian Botanical Collections Information Network (SEABCIN) that has developed from the Flora Malesiana project. L plays a key role in this project and is a development centre for the BRAHMS system. BRAHMS is considerably more complicated than the PADME system at the RBGE which was going to be used in this project.

UK staff met BIOTIK staff in Paris in early July 2004 to discuss potential areas of overlap and areas for collaboration between our projects. As a result of this meeting, we agreed that both projects would coordinate training courses and would share results from inventory work. The Darwin project would also field test the identification system when it was ready. The BIOTIK project plans to target NBCAs in different parts of the Annamite Mountains from the Darwin project and their results will enhance the National Species Database that is one of the Darwin project's main outputs. It was also agreed that the BRAHMS system would be used by both projects and that the BIOTIK project would be responsible for database development. UK staff have obtained a copy of BRAHMS and have also undertaken training in its use at Leiden.

In mid-July 2004, UK project staff visited Lao PDR to meet project partners and refine the project design and implementation timetable.

During the visit, they met staff from the Sustainable Forestry and Rural Development Project (SUFORD), a joint initiative between the Finnish government, the World Bank and the Lao Department of Forestry and Conservation and based in lowland production forests in southern Lao PDR. One of the requirements for this project is the establishment of plots in which the impact on biodiversity of different logging regimes can be monitored. This requires staff or consultants skilled in tree identification. The SUFORD project represents an additional potential source of trainees and information for the Darwin project. Their target areas, some of which

are close to the NNT NBCA, also represent possible alternative sites for the Darwin project's field work should access to NNT NBCA be difficult in the first year.

During the visit, UK staff met representatives of the Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STEA - part of the Prime Minister's Office) who are responsible for overall coordination and development of scientific work in Lao PDR as well as implementation of the CBD. UK staff presented the project at each meeting. This was positively received and the project will remain in close contact with STEA.

The role of the IUCN office in Lao PDR has been developed; they are now responsible for financial management in Lao PDR and for general liaison and project development – they are one of the few organisations able to handle foreign currency and with a reliable e-mail system.

In the first year, a 3 week visit to the UK by Lao staff had been scheduled. This has been delayed until June-July 2005 due to commitments of Lao staff and UK staff. Suitable staff from FRC and NUoL have been identified and the process of obtaining visas has been initiated. We hope that they will attend the 13th Flora of Thailand meeting in Dublin in July. Finance for this aspect of the project has been carried over to the second year with the agreement of Darwin Secretariat. UK staff are also investigating the possibilities of obtaining a grant from the Royal Society to support an extended visit by the Dean of Botany at NUoL. The aim of the visit would be to allow her to develop her research interests on the flora of Lao, make contacts with other researchers and academics in the UK and Ireland.

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

The names of the staff from FRC have been changed. Finance for the visit by the Lao counterparts have been carried over to the second year (£3600). Changes to the timing of the training visit to Lao do not affect the budget.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: yes, in August 2004 (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan yes, in August 2004 ((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?

No other issues at this stage

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 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.**