

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2007)

Project Ref. No.	13032
Project Title	Addressing a threat to Caribbean amphibians: capacity building in Dominica
Country(ies)	Dominica
UK Organisation	Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London
Collaborator(s)	Forestry and Wildlife Division & Veterinary Services Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Commonwealth of Dominica; Fauna & Flora International; London Zoo; Chester Zoo; Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Project Leader	Dr. Andrew Cunningham
Report date	October 2007 (submitted December 2007)
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR3
Project website	www.mountainchicken.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).

After a relatively quiet period in the second half of year 2, the first half of year 3 has been extremely busy and productive. Firstly, we were delighted to find Mr Trevorne Douglas, a Dominican molecular biologist technician, to replace for Dr Valarie Thomas. Mr Douglas, who had recently returned from a technical position in a molecular biology laboratory in the USA, was able to start almost immediately, thus ensuring continuity for the molecular diagnostics aspect of the project. Although an experienced molecular biology technician, Mr Douglas required additional training in order to be competent in the techniques employed by the current project. We used salary monies saved during the interim period between Dr Valarie Thomas leaving the project and Mr Douglas' start date to pay towards a three-week visit (12th May to 2nd June) by Mr Douglas to the Institute of Zoology, London for further molecular biology training. This training was given by Trent Garner (research fellow) and Matt Perkins (technician). A follow-up training and supervisory visit by Trent Garner to Dominica took place in August.

Also in July/August, Richard Gibson and Ian Stephen (London Zoo), Matt Sweetman (Chester Zoo) and Helen Meredith (ZSL Conservation Programmes) visited Dominica over a three week period to work on the captive breeding aspect of the project. In addition to discussing, amending and approving the designs for the Dominican captive breeding centre, and to providing further advice and training on cricket culture techniques, they collected mountain chicken frogs for the international component of the captive breeding programme. The species is now quite rare on Dominica and, despite intensive hunting over the three week period with the assistance of 13 forestry staff, only seven frogs were captured; five males and two females. These animals were screened for *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* infection at the time of capture and again on reaching the U.K. Both batches of tests were negative and the animals are currently housed under high biosecurity conditions in the Institute of Zoology, London.

The collecting trip provoked a great deal of positive interest from the press in Dominica, including a television broadcast, a live radio phone-in programme dedicated to the subject and two large newspaper articles.

In September, Andrew Cunningham paid a supervisory visit to Dominica. The transect monitoring and disease surveillance continues to go well, with good compliance from the Dominican staff to the protocols and timing of the surveys. A slight hitch in the ordering of

laboratory consumables due to problems with the supplying company was identified and remedied. During this visit Dr. Cunningham raised serious concern about the continued delay to the construction of the captive breeding centre there. This led to separate meetings with two cabinet ministers: the Minister of Agriculture and Environment (within whose ministry the project falls) and the minister for public works (whose department is responsible for constructing the centre). Both ministers were extremely apologetic about the delay, which appeared to have been caused by a combination of bureaucracy and mislaid paperwork, and both ministers gave solid assurances that the facility would be constructed very soon. It was relayed to Dr. Cunningham that the prime minister of Dominica was taking a personal interest in the project and was extremely enthusiastic about the development of the captive breeding programme within Dominica.

At the beginning of this period, Mr. Eric Hypolite stepped down as director of the Forestry and Wildlife Division. He was temporarily replaced by Mr. David Williams, who was acting director during the period of the collecting trip in July/August. Mr. Williams was very supportive of the trip and of the project as a whole. A new permanent director, Mr. Minchinton Burton, has since been appointed (with effect from 1st August). Andrew Cunningham met with Mr Burton during his supervisory visit in September and was pleased to find that Mr. Burton also is extremely supportive of the project. The change in FWD director, therefore, has no negative implications for the project and could bring about renewed enthusiasm from the FWD side of the project.

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.

Please see text in 1. above.

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

None.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no/yes, in.....(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?

I continue to find the annual reporting onerous and repetitive, thus causing delays to submission of the annual report. I know other colleagues with Darwin grants have the same issue with the annual reporting form and it is a common topic of discussion and complaint. Simplification of this form along the lines of the half yearly reporting form would be much appreciated.

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 email** to Eilidh Young, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme at Darwin-Projects@ectf-ed.org.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: 14-075 Darwin Half Year Report**