

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2007)

Project Ref. No.	14-038
Project Title	Ha Long Bay Environmental Awareness Programme
Country(ies)	Vietnam
UK Organisation	Fauna and Flora International
Collaborator(s)	University of East Anglia; Ha Long Bay Management Department
Project Leader	David Brown
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Project website	www.ecoboat.org

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

We are moving now into the final phase of the EcoBoat Project – the sustainable lodgment of our environmental awareness raising activities in a Quang Ninh Province community organization. As envisioned, we were able to increase the pace of EcoBoat operations by 30-40 percent over similar months last year. Our Mangrove Remediation Study Area is thriving, and has become an important addition to the EcoBoat curriculum.

There has been an explosion of positive publicity about the project, reflecting that our approach – hands-on outdoor education – is a novelty in Vietnam and a hit with the young people. Most of the publicity is in the Quang Ninh daily newspaper and other provincial organs, but there has now also been coverage by several national newspapers, magazines, radio and, this week, the educational TV channel as well. It sets a very favorable tone for our work in the next several months to set up the successor organization and get it well-launched.

In view of our strategic decision last March to close down the "international school" part of the project and concentrate attention on serving the Vietnamese community (see our last annual report and associated review; formalized in revision of our logframe), fund-raising for sustainability has become a large part of our current effort. We have set up an outreach group (two local staff) to contact Vietnamese enterprises and coax them toward corporate sponsorships – something that is virtually unprecedented in Vietnam. We are optimistic that 20-30 percent of the successor civic organization's requirements can be raised in Quang Ninh at the outset and that this percentage can be raised over time. For the remainder of funding that will be needed by the successor organization, we are approaching foreign-controlled enterprises active in Vietnam.

We understand that the Darwin Initiative is likely to entertain proposals for follow-on funding early in 2008, and hope to secure from it the means to keep one or two FFI expat staff engaged here for another two years to assist the new organization to maintain quality control, maintain fruitful collaboration with foreign institutions, and raise needed funds.

Late in June, an expat researcher trained at the University of East Anglia joined the EcoBoat Team for the purpose of evaluating the project's outcomes. During the remaining months of the project, she aims in particular to document as well as possible the extent that it has been successful in modifying the attitudes of youth participants in EcoBoat trips, in the first instance, and of attentive members of the broader community in the second.

2. 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.

(1) We are concerned but not alarmed that a formal decision has yet to be taken by the province Peoples' Committee authorizing FFI and its counterpart agency, the Ha Long Bay Management Department, to foster the formation of the local, volunteer, independent organization that will take over responsibility for the EcoBoat Project and assume a broader mandate for environmental awareness raising activities. There has been a great deal of informal discussion, and we are confident that a tacit consensus is being reached on the utility of such an organization – the likes of which are rare in Vietnam and unknown in Quang Ninh. Once we have the green light, there will be a great deal of administrative process that must be discharged, not to mention recruitment and training of the projected Board of Directors. And, in normal Vietnamese fashion, it will be done – but not at the deliberate pace we had wished for. Meanwhile, we continue to develop within the project team the Vietnamese cadre that will form the professional staff of the successor organization. Most are also scheduled to receive formal training in higher level management skills.

(2) Rather much more effort than was envisioned has been put into the formalization of the "Lessons from the EcoBoat" – work needed to ensure that they meet the requirements for approval as "curriculum" within the Quang Ninh school system and hence will reach an audience many times larger than we can accommodate on the Boat. The core of the lessons are well-illustrated, kid-friendly discussions of the natural environment of the Bay and the problems raised by human impacts (i.e., "State of the Bay"). They reflect good collaboration between the Project's professional staff and experts recruited from various Vietnamese institutes. All materials that we produce bear the Darwin and FFI logos.

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

No; we consider them manageable within the present framework. Note however, that revisions to the logframe were proposed at about the time of our last annual report (and thoroughly discussed therein). The revisions (discontinuation of marketing to "international" clients and acknowledgement that in Vietnam establishment of a truly "independent private voluntary organization was beyond our reach) were subsequently approved by the Secretariat. They guide our current work.

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? No.