

Darwin Initiative – Half Year Report

Project Ref. No. 15/011

Project Title Building Capacity for Forest Inventory in the Republic of Congo

Country Republic of Congo (Brazzaville)

UK Organisation Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Collaborators WCS-Congo, Insitut Développement Rural, Centre d'Etudes sur les Ressources Végétales, Centre National d'Inventaire et d'Aménagements des Ressources Forestières et Fauniques.

Report Date 31st October 2006

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1. Outline progress of the last 6 months against the agreed baseline timetable for the project. The project started on schedule on 1 June 2006. The first 4 months have been very successful, building relationships with project partners during an intensive first training trip in Congo, and setting in motion many activities for the remainder of the project.

This first training trip was conducted as planned in August 2006, by project leader David Harris and Jean-Marie Moutsamboté of the Insitut Développement Rural. This comprised a formation – *Botanical Inventory and Identification* – for seven para-taxonomists (three more than planned) taught in French, in the field in northern Congo. In addition the permanent forest plots were delimited and herbarium specimen collection initiated. Two plot-workers were employed to continue these activities, trained in identifying, collecting and databasing specimens, and left with the equipment to carry out this work. The trip also included meetings in Brazzaville with project partners and discussions with Dr. Moutsamboté towards developing his undergraduate teaching courses. This trip was slightly shorter than planned because the logistic support from WCS and the full time input from Dr Moutsamboté meant that the main objective of the trip, the first training course, was achieved well within the timetable.

The second major achievement of the project in this phase has been the arrival in Edinburgh of Mireille Ndoundou Hockemba, to learn English so that she can enrol on the MSc in *Biodiversity and Taxonomy of Plants* in September 2007 at the University of Edinburgh. Mireille received an unconditional offer to study General English as a Foreign Language at Stevenson College, made a successful visa application in Kinshasa and arrived in Edinburgh on 2nd September. She began the course on 4th September and has already been advanced to the Intermediate class. Next term she will transfer to Academic English as better preparation for the MSc course,

Other achievements include a UK national press release (*Edinburgh botanists embark on Congo conservation project*) which was put out and immediately taken up by the *Edinburgh Evening News* under the headline *City botanists on Congo conservation mission*. It has also been taken up by the newsletters of Botanic Gardens Conservation International (*Cuttings*), and the Edinburgh Consortium for Rural Research (*Bush Telegraph*). Both these reports will include images from the project's first training course in Congo.

The drafting of the key project output – a training manual and identification guide to the trees of the northern Congo, is well underway – the schedules, costs and format for the production of the manual have been discussed and agreed with RBGE publications, and the first specimens have been selected and sent to Rosemary Wise for illustration.

After discussion with partners it was decided to postpone the local radio broadcast until trainees were available for interview.

David Harris is currently in Congo on a second training trip which will concentrate on monitoring and supporting the activities of the two full-time plot-workers employed by the project.

2. Give details of any notable problems of unexpected developments that the project has encountered. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The project has encountered no significant problems thus far. Our decision to enrol Mireille for two terms of English tuition rather than one has necessitated some slight changes to the budget, and as is to be expected there have also been some minor alterations to the timetable, including delaying the local radio broadcast, but nothing that will significantly affect the project activities, outputs and costs.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? We have contacted the Secretariat, and they have agreed, to transfer £1,500 from the travel and subsistence budget to the language training budget to support Mireille's second language term of English language tuition.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: Letter sent 28th September, response received from Margaret Okot 17th October and amounts confirmed by email 18th October.

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: None anticipated.

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring or financial procedures? None.