

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2007)

Project Ref. No.	162/15/017
Project Title	Implementing a Recovery Plan for the Critically Endangered Pygmy Hog in Assam.
Country(ies)	India
UK Organisation	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Collaborator(s)	1. The Forest Department (FD), Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of Assam. 2. IUCN – SSC Pigs Peccaries and Hippos Specialist Group (PPHSG) 3. Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme Research & Breeding Centre (PHCPRBC), Basistha, Assam
Project Leader	Dr. John E. Fa
Report date	31 October 2007
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 2
Project website	None at present

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).

ACTIVITIES IN MANAS

Pygmy hog surveys

Rapid surveys were carried out in the areas under Bansbari range of Manas where pygmy hogs were known to occur. In addition, similar surveys were also carried out in some grasslands in the Bhuyanpara and Panbari ranges, particularly in areas that had become accessible after cessation of political disturbances in the region to establish presence or absence of pygmy hogs in these areas of the Park. These surveys included covering randomly laid transects through the grasslands in the months of April and May. Pygmy hogs were found in all three ranges of the Park. Although presence of the species in Bansbari and Bhuyanpara ranges was known, this study proved that pygmy hogs continue to survive in the extensive grasslands of Panbari range too. Unfortunately, due to early commencement of rains these surveys could not be conducted after mid-May, limiting the number of transects and sample size. The study was unable to provide adequate data for a reliable estimate of the population of the species (see the report “*A rapid survey of pygmy hog Sus salvanius and its grassland habitat in Manas National Park*” for details of the study).

Training and Capacity Building

Frontline protection staff

The posters, manuals, trainee guides and data recording booklets were produced in local language (Assamese) for distribution among trainees who were trained by two accredited trainers and three competent monitors who had received training during intensive trainers training programme held at Manas in March 2007. These trainers and monitors were given direct assistance by a field biologist contracted for the purpose. Altogether 43 new trainees from the following three ranges of Manas participated in these follow-up training programmes: Bansbari Range 9 trainees (6 frontline staff and 3 conservation volunteers); Panbari Range 19 trainees (9 frontline staff and 10 conservation volunteers); Bhuyanpara Range 15 trainees (10 frontline staff and 5 conservation volunteers/casual

labourers). Binoculars and GPS were supplied to those key camps where the staff regularly went on patrolling in the Park.(please see the report “*Monitoring Manas Wildlife - Training Frontline Field Staff of Manas National Park*”).

School teachers

An educator workshop for the conservation of Manas and its grassland habitat was held in Guwahati from 7 to 10 July 2007 in collaboration with *Centre for Environment Education (CEE)* and a local NGO, *Green Manas*. Eighteen teachers representing over ten rural middle and high schools from Bansbari and Panbari ranges participated in the workshop. All participants were provided with travel allowance, and lodging and boarding. In addition training kits consisting of education material, posters and stickers were distributed.

The workshop used a combination of illustrated talks, interactive games, discussions, film shows and field trips to impart training to the teachers with focus on grasslands and threatened wildlife of Manas. The training sessions included topics such as concept of ecosystem, components and techniques of EE, threatened wildlife of Manas, and nature trail for field observation of animals, and plants.

Post training assistance is being provided to the trainees to undertake awareness generation programmes in their respective schools and community. Two high school teachers from Panbari range have conducted three programmes each in their own schools. Stationery, stickers, and printed material were given to these teachers to facilitate the extension work.

Local NGOs

The project assisted in a couple of stakeholders’ workshop on “Communities, wild tiger and their habitat: Enhancing community participation in formulation and implementation of conservation and education programmes” jointly organised by *Aaranyak* and *EcoSystems-India* at Potasali (Nameri) and Bongaigaon (Manas) in May 2007. Other collaborators included *Nature’s Foster*, *Green Manas* and some other local NGOs.

Manas training and community centre

The construction of the Manas centre at Bansbari was started in April but it suffered a setback due to damage of roads and bridges connecting Bansbari to Park HQ town of Barpeta Road. The constriction continues

Community engagement/involvement

Under the community initiative, preliminary survey of the fringe villages and discussions with the community were conducted to identify the model villages for village level interventions. Following this exercise, three villages: Barengabari (Bansbari range), Thaijobari (Bhuyanpara range) and No. 3 Sourang (Panbari range) have been selected. These villages exhibit severe dependence on forest resources with the potential to reduce the extraction of forest products. Subsequent consultation with the community has revealed that the village level interventions will be need-based, and will consider the development priorities of the community to garner its support for reduction in harvest of major and minor forest produce.

A socio-economic survey including the resource use pattern was conducted, followed by focus group discussions (with women, men, self-help groups) for need assessment of proposed interventions. The interventions are being introduced in a phased manner to instill a sense of stewardship in the people of project villages as well as secure the active participation of the community. In Barengabari, entry-level activities were initiated to strengthen the involvement of the villagers. Assistance was provided to renovate a bamboo foot bridge in anticipation of the rainy season. Without this bridge there is no access to the village. Interventions planned for the project villages include alternative income generation sources (bee-keeping, food preservation training, fishery), supply of potable water, reduction of human-elephant conflict through trip-wire, chilly use as a deterrent) and veterinary care. However, owing to severe floods the implementation of community activities a have suffered a

setback.

ACTIVITIES AT BASISTHA, POTASALI AND SONAI RUPAI

Conservation breeding

In order to provide captive-bred pygmy hogs for the pre-release facility in Potasali and eventually for reintroduction in Sonai Rupai, efforts were resumed to produce more hogs at Basistha breeding facility after a gap of about five years. Altogether, eight sows farrowed at Basistha, but only 23 hoglets from seven of these litters survived. By the end of September 2007, the captive population stands at 80 and this could well be 15-20% of the entire population of the species on earth.

Pre-release facility

The pre-release facility at Potasali was developed further. After securing the entire area with chain-link and electric fence, a strip of 30 m wide land around the 6 ha plot was acquired for creation of a buffer zone belt around the pre-release centre. Constructions of two of the four pre-release enclosures were completed and one of the enclosures is being tested by putting a couple of captive hogs there on trial basis. A temporary bamboo observation tower has also been constructed to observe the hogs in the pre-release enclosures. It is encouraging to note that these hogs have significantly changed their behaviour within a few weeks of release and are becoming wild, foraging actively and profitably and avoiding contact with their own caretakers.

A student enrolled for M.Sc (Wildlife) with WCS India programme visited the project to plan for a study towards his dissertation and is going to start work on behaviour of captive hogs in pre-release centre from December.

Release sites

Several meetings were held with the new Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Western Assam Wildlife Division, in-charge of the Nameri and Sonai-Rupai, to discuss the protection and management strategies for better habitat conservation in these PAs and for our plans to release pygmy hogs in restored grasslands. The protection and habitat management in these PAs have improved significantly in the recent months and many of our recommendations are being implemented by the new DFO. The results are apparent as the habitat is looking better. Reconstruction of Gelgeli protection camp located at one of the planned release sites in Sonai Rupai has been completed and it is being refurbished by our project.

Workshop in Jersey

A workshop was held in Jersey in end July 2007 to review and to prepare and action plan for the project activities. Besides the project personnel (Dr. John E. Fa, Dr. Raj Amin, Mr. William Oliver and Dr. Goutam Narayan, Dr. Parag Deka) the workshop was attended by Dr. Mark Stanley-Price, Mr. Quentin Bloxam and Dr. Stephan Funk.

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.

Severe floods in Manas area and Sonitpur district caused serious operational problems and many planned activities could not be completed in time. Although these activities have been postponed and are being taken up after the flood waters receded. This will however not affect the budget and will have some impact on timetable delaying some of the project activities a little.

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

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?

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**