

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2007)

Project Ref. No.	15-021
Project Title	Strengthening the National Biodiversity Strategy in Congo Brazzaville
Country(ies)	Congo (Brazzaville)
UK Organisation	University of Reading, CAER
Collaborator(s)	Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, Natural History Museum London, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Ministère de l'Economie Forestière et de l'Environnement (MEFE), Groupe d'Etude et de Recherche sur la Diversité Biologique (GERDIB), Centre d'études sur les Ressources Végétales (CERVE), Université Marien Ngouabi, Groupe de Recherche sur l'Ecologie Forestière et l'Environnement (GREFE)
Project Leader	Simon G. Potts
Report date	31 October 2007
Report No.	HYR1
Project website	http://www.rdg.ac.uk/caer/project_congo.html

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).

RESEARCH

- Extensive fieldwork activities have continued and rapid vegetation assessments are now complete across most of the Mayombe region (April-September 2007).
- Material collected up until June 2007 has now been distributed among taxonomic partners: plant material to herbariums at Kew, Hamburg, Koblenz, Munich, Wageningen and the National Herbarium of Belgium; bees to Royal Belgium Institute of Natural Sciences.
- Additional and extremely useful GIS data for the region has been offered by a WHO project following negotiations with the project leader (Dr Volker Hammen).

DISSEMINATION

- UK press release (10/09/2007) was picked up by several newspapers and the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/berkshire/6988915.stm>).
- A popular article was published in Reading Bulletin (11/10/2007). See Appendix 1.

TRAINING

- Extended field classes have been run to give practical on the job training for a number of forestry technicians working for MEFE. Specifically the following skills have been taught: species assessment (IUCN protocols), rapid biodiversity assessment methods, basic GIS and sampling protocols, collection management and introduction to Brahms database.
- A number of technicians have progressed into new jobs following our training activities.

MANAGEMENT

As highlighted by our evaluator, coordination activities are demanding in a project of this scale.

- Operational management of fieldwork is coordinated by Ralf Becker *in situ*.
- Responsibilities for the shipment, identification and data availability are managed as follows: (1) all plant material is handled by Ralf Becker who is directly in contact with specialists at various herbariums (all are previous collaborators); (2) butterflies are identified by local partners in Congo with difficult material to be sent to the UK if necessary at a later date (overseen by Simon Potts); (3) all bee material goes to Alain Pauly (Royal

Belgium Institute of Natural Sciences) who uses his existing network of international taxonomists as appropriate.

- In country training is delivered by Ralf Becker, who is almost permanently resident in Congo, and he engages local partners as required; visits by overseas specialists is coordinated by Simon Potts.
- Extensive use of email, phone and Skype are used to keep all partners updated on progress and expected outputs.

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.

Difficulties have arisen with local partner commitments to training activities. Despite signing of memoranda of understanding to the contrary, local partners are making unrealistic demands for room rental fees and *per diems* for staff and students to attend training workshops. Lengthy negotiations have not persuaded Congolese partners to stand by their original agreements.

We have therefore chosen to run extensive in-field classes in and around our research area to provide practical hands-on training covering the same subject material as planned for our workshops. The regional Directors of MEFE at Dolesie and Pointe Noir have agreed to provide forest rangers and technicians to be trained and also classroom space for teaching computing, databasing and analytical skills at a later date. We will now employ a qualitative and quantitative measurement of trainee performance by setting practical field-based tests of knowledge learnt; this will be expanded upon in our next report.

Our revised training programme will have no financial implications for the project, however the timing of some training sessions will need revising depending upon availability of trainees and teaching staff. Overall the training content will remain the same but the venue and mode of delivery will be modified. We will need to modify our reporting approach to demonstrate delivery of training against our original milestones.

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

No

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

EXPENDITURE

Confirmation of expenditure can be found in statement of expenditure (see Appendix 2)

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**

Exploring the Congo

A team of University of Reading scientists have mounted the first scientific expedition into a remote corner of threatened African rainforest.

Experts from the University's Centre for Agri-Environmental Research are examining man's affect on the remote rainforests of the Mayombe mountains in the Congo basin, which are under increasing threat from logging and agriculture.

Little is known about the area's flora and fauna, but what is clear is they may be lost if deforestation continues.

Dr Simon Potts, Senior Research Fellow, Agriculture, who is leading the team, said: "This is a very exciting project which will allow us to study one of the last areas on earth relatively unknown to science.

"The Congo basin is widely recognised as one of the world's most important biodiversity hotspots, but we don't actually know much about what grows and lives there, and more importantly, what might happen to them if deforestation continues. It is vital we examine this area now so these biological treasures are not lost forever."

Ralf Becker, the project manager in Congo, has just returned from the Mayombe mountains with the first samples. The expedition team has already



University expedition vehicle in the Congo

collected more than 400 species of plants, three of which may be new to science and are currently being examined by experts at Kew Gardens, London. The expedition also collected more than 150 species of butterfly and many types of bee.

The expedition is conducting a systematic survey of plants and pollinators in the region and aims to identify some of the main threats to the forest. The project has been sponsored by DEFRA's Darwin Initiative, which assists poorer countries

with rich biodiversity to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through collaborative projects drawing on UK biodiversity expertise.

Carrying out research in the area is extremely difficult because of the lack of roads, mountainous terrain, swamps and torrential rains and would be impossible to reach in a normal 4WD. A specialist expedition vehicle has therefore been sent from the University of Reading to the Congo.

Appendix 2: Statement of Expenditure from University of Reading, Research and Enterprise Services

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING



Whiteknights House
 Whiteknights House
 P.O. Box 217
 Reading RG6 6AH
 direct dialling 0118 378 8106

Our Ref: Research Project H3115000/H3115001

Statement of Expenditure

1st September 2006 to 31st March 2007

	Budget	Actual	Accruals 06/07	
Staff costs	23,756.00	23,756.00	0.00	
Rent, rates, heating, lighting, cleaning (overheads)	15,222.00	15,222.00	0.00	4,712.75 + O/S overhead
Postage, telephone, stationery	300.00	208.79	(91.21)	
Travel and subsistence	17,500.00	17,278.81	(221.19)	1,363.94 + advance O/S August 07
Printing	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Conferences, seminars etc	300.00		(300.00)	
Capital items	6,650.00	6,583.29	(66.71)	
Others (please specify)	8,300.00	8,480.59	180.59	
	<u>72,028.00</u>	<u>71,529.48</u>	<u>(498.52)</u>	

Signature
 Award Holder

Signature *Olivia Smith*
 Research Administration Manager

Date 27 October 2007

The under-spend was as a result of a repayment against an advance of expenses made to the Congo parties