

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2009)

Project Ref. No.	17-012
Project Title	Belize large-mammal corridor project
Country(ies)	Belize
UK Organisation	University of Southampton School of Biological Sciences
Collaborator(s)	Panthera, University of Belize, Belize Forestry Department
Project Leader	<i>C. P. Doncaster</i>
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Project website	http://darwin.defra.gov.uk/project/17012/ http://www.belizewildliferesearch.com/index_files/Page972.htm

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

The project held its first Workshop at the Belize Forest Department (11/9/2009), hosted by Forest Department coordinator Mr Hanson, and attended by Project Leader Dr Doncaster, main project partner Dr Harmsen, and project consultant Dr Foster. We discussed options for visiting schools to promote wildlife law and potential for using retired police personnel to focus on prosecutions for wildlife offences. It was agreed to explore potential in Belize and UK to create markets for food products from sustainable farming the corridor area. A second Workshop was held at the University of Belize (14/9/2009), hosted by teaching coordinator Dr Kay, and attended by Drs Doncaster, Harmsen, Foster, Mr Hanson and project consultant Mr Figueroa. We discussed the activities summarised below.

Flights for aerial photography were conducted by Ms Kathy Zeller of Panthera in May-June. Despite wet-season clouds, photos are now collated for half the study area. Ms Zeller will complete the survey in the dry season (Feb 2010). A camera-trap grid has surveyed for individually identifiable species across an effective area of ~250 km² in the northwest of the proposed corridor area. We are now moving the grid SE to survey the region linking the two protected-area blocks in the eastern part of the study area. Initial results reveal much hunting activity in areas near human settlements during the dry season, declining in the wet season. Camera traps indicate a high density of jaguars and tapirs with signs of reproduction (photos and footprints of young accompanying adults), and lower levels of large game such as peccary than in protected areas. Data from a previous study have now been analysed to optimise the surveys for prey species that are not individually identifiable. These surveys are due to start in December-January, and we have already identified half of the transects and camera locations.

Mr Figueroa has been elected Senator, which gives the project direct access to government. Dr Harmsen, Mr Figueroa and Dr Alan Rabinowitz (Panthera) have met with the Minister of Agriculture (Mr Montero), the Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment (Mr Vega) and two area representatives within the proposed corridor (Mr Whits and Mr Hutchinson). They explored the willingness of government to put potentially crown land aside for conservation. This discussion is currently being pursued by Mr Figueroa in his Senator role.

The incorporation within the Darwin project of Mr Figueroa's PhD study has allowed us to bring forward the trapping efforts for jaguars, pumas and tapirs. Panthera is funding upgrade of VHF collars to GPS for jaguars and pumas, which will improve their data collection. At the time of writing, collars are functioning on one puma and two jaguars, one either side of the corridor-bisecting highway which will provide valuable data on the barrier effect of the highway.

Good contacts have been established with the Belize Livestock Producers Association (BLPA), with whose assistance we hope to work towards nationwide implementation of

