

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form

Project Title	Nematode biodiversity and worldwide pollution monitoring
Country	Brazil, Poland, Pakistan, India, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, Kenya, Chile, Vietnam
Organisation	Plymouth Marine Laboratory
Project Ref. No.	162/8/249
Report date	October 2001

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months against the agreed baseline timetable for the project.

Two scientists from PML visited Sea Fisheries Institute, Gdynia, Poland during May 2001. Four Polish scientists attended the informal workshop: Alexander Drgas (Sea Fisheries Institute, Gdynia), Maria Szymelfenig (Institute of Oceanography, University of Gdansk), Joanna Rokicka-Praxmajer (Department of Oceanography, Faculty of Marine Fisheries and Food Technology, Agricultural University in Szczecin) and Barbara Urban-Malinga, (Institute of Ecology PAS. PML scientists advised on meiofaunal study techniques used in Poland and suggested improvements. We provided further training on meiofaunal sampling, extraction and analysis and particularly assisted on nematode identification. Training was extended to 1 scientist (Barbara Urban-Malinga) additional to the three who attended the Plymouth workshop. Travel funds were provided to enable Joanna Rokicka-Praxmajer to travel to Gdynia from Szczecin to participate in the further training.

Project review meetings were held in May and October 2001.

In July 2001 Dr Melanie Austen attended the 11th Meiofaunal Conference in Boston USA. She gave an oral presentation about the Darwin project and a practical demonstration of the Darwin Nematode key at the poster session. Copies of the key on CD Rom were handed out to conference participants. The international conference delegates showed a lot of interest and enthusiasm for the project and the software.

In September 2001 prototype Virtual Museum Nematode Collection prototype database entry forms were installed on the Darwin Nematode web site.

In September 2001 β version 1.1 of the computerised interactive Identification Key to Nematode Genera was completed and is available on the Darwin Nematode web site and on CD ROM.

From October 1st PML hosted an extremely successful one week training workshop on statistical analysis of community data using PRIMER software for 16 trainees from Brazil, Trinidad, Poland, Pakistan, India, Kenya, South Africa, Vietnam. The workshop was well publicised with TV and radio broadcast and newspaper articles.

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 effect the budget and timetable of project activities. Have any of these issues been discussed with the Department and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

We had some problems choosing suitable Pakistan participants for the second workshop in October 2001. There was some doubt raised locally in Pakistan as to whether the most appropriate scientists had been invited to the workshop due to staff changes at the University of Karachi including the 'retirement' of one of the participants who came to the first workshop. The matter was discussed at length with Sylvia Smith at DEFRA who sought advice from the Foreign Office. All correspondence was copied to Ms Smith. Eventually we decided that the original nematologists who had come to the first Darwin workshop should both be reinvited to the second workshop (as originally planned). It was anticipated that there could be some loss of project funds due to cancelling the flight of a third Pakistani scientist (who had earlier been invited in place of one of the original scientists). However, Dr Maqbool from Karachi appeared to be able to avoid any extra expense being incurred.

We have had programming problems with the Virtual Collection and this has not progressed as quickly or smoothly as anticipated. We are still not able to install software to download accompanying images to the nematode descriptions. The delays will mean that take-up and use of the Virtual Collection may be rather limited during the lifetime of the project although we hope its use will still increase subsequent to the project when the facility will be taken over and maintained by the Natural History Museum.

We were belatedly informed that a pornographic network had hacked into our web site. Users of the Nematode forum facility were automatically transferred to a pornographic site when they tried to open the nematode forum pages. We suspect this put a lot of people off using the site.

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

This report is late because we were waiting for the usual email notification of the format required for this six monthly report since the format has differed for every report since the project started. Since the email notification did not arrive it was only by chance that the web site was checked to see if any forms could be found there. It would have been helpful to have received email notification as a reminder of the revised forms. It is helpful that the forms do now at last appear to be standardised.