

Darwin Fellowship - Final Report

(Please check guidance for submission deadlines, max 6 pages.)

Darwin Project Ref No.	EIDPS027
Darwin Project Title	Darwin Fellowship- Nilda Maria Leticia Lopez Sosa
Name of Darwin Fellow	Nilda Maria Leticia Lopez Sosa
UK Organisation	BirdLife International
Your Organisation	Guyra Paraguay
Your role in your Organisation	Policy and Advocacy Officer
Start/end date of Fellowship	August 2010-March 2011
Location	Cambridge UK
Darwin Fellowship funding (£)	£13,815
Type of work	Training
Main contact in UK Organisation	Muhtari Aminu-Kano
Author(s), date	Leticia Lopez, 31 May 2011

1. Background

- Briefly describe your involvement in the Darwin project before the start of your fellowship.

I was involved in implementing the Darwin Initiative post-project EIDPO029 on behalf of the host country organisation in Paraguay. My role was to gather biodiversity-related information for inclusion in Paraguay's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) national reports and to undertake scoping studies on ways to implement effectively the CBD national action plan in the country. My main work as a Policy and Advocacy Officer of Guyra Paraguay is to provide technical advice to the CBD and Ramsar Focal Points for the Government with regards to the implementation of the respective Conventions and to support the development of public policies on biodiversity, based on scientific information.

- Describe aim and objectives of the Fellowship, and programme of work.

The aim of the Fellowship was to strengthen my leadership potential by enhancing my knowledge and understanding of policy analyses and advocacy with a special focus on the CBD process. This will lead to active participation of my employer (Guyra Paraguay) in CBD related work and thereby enhance the capacity for CBD implementation in the country.

The programme of work included collation, compilation and analysis of information held by Guyra Paraguay as well as data from BirdLife's comprehensive World Bird's Data Base to produce case studies that illustrate the state of Paraguay's birds, the threats facing them and the policy responses being undertaken. These case studies have been used to produce a policy document that presents 'State of Birds of Paraguay. Initially, I consulted the relevant literature and undertook an analysis of the information available on relevant websites. Secondly I was assisted to design and conduct my research through individual supervision. Thirdly I was closely involved in BirdLife's preparations for the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD. I was an active member of the BirdLife delegation at the meeting as a means of gaining hands-on experience. Fourthly, I visited other UK-based conservation organisations such as the United Nation Environmental Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the Cambridge Conservation Initiative as well as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Through Skype conference, I met with the Head of Policy at the World Conservation Union (IUCN) who is based in Gland, Switzerland.

Finally I developed a post-fellowship follow-up plan to be implemented on my return to Paraguay- which I presented to the BirdLife Secretariat staff.

- Briefly describe the roles of the UK and Fellow's institutions.

The role of BirdLife International Global Secretariat was to provide me with its expertise and necessary guidance linking science with policy, in order to have a better understanding of the CBD implementation nationally and internationally. BirdLife Secretariat also provided a desk space and IT and other facilities during the Fellowship.

Guyra Paraguay supplied scientific information as well as time and technical backstopping from other staff members for the development of my activities in the UK; during the CBD COP-10 in Japan and at the end of the Fellowship. Guyra also released me to undertake the Fellowship.

2. Achievements

- Summarise the work undertaken during your Fellowship. What were the main activities undertaken. Highlight any work undertaken but not originally planned and explain why this happened. Highlight any problems encountered and how they were overcome.

A major output of the Fellowship was the publication on the 'State of the Birds of Paraguay'. I was supported by various BirdLife and Guyra staff to develop the concept and to collect and review the relevant literature. Also I attended several meetings, both physically and electronically, with scientists from BirdLife International and Guyra Paraguay, with the aim to improve the draft outline of the publication. The Information Management team at BirdLife Secretariat has developed a Factsheet on Paraguay that provided the basic scientific information which I built-upon in the development of the advocacy publication.

Additionally I supported the Project Leader of the main Darwin Initiative post-project (EIDPO029) to produce the second half-year report and to coordinate the project's activities with other host country Partners. During the CBD COP-10, the BirdLife Secretariat organised a workshop for its host country Partners involved in policy projects (mainly the Darwin Initiative post-project) to share experiences, lessons learnt and ways to improve the projects. I facilitated aspects of this workshop (Annex 3 contains the report of this workshop).

Before and during the CBD COP-10, I supported the coordination of the BirdLife delegation (Pictures of some members of the delegation are presented in Annex 4). My main responsibility was to follow-up the negotiations on Access and Benefit Sharing during the second week of the negotiations. COP-10 also provided me with an opportunity to develop a network of relevant contacts with stakeholders from around the world. I also supported the Paraguayan delegation during the conference by providing technical and political advice regarding Access and Benefit Sharing. In particular, I helped to develop the speech of the Paraguayan representative at the High Level Ministerial Segment at the request of the Paraguayan government.

During the last few months I have been working on the final draft of "State of Birds of Paraguay" (see advanced draft in Annex 6), where I used the scientific information provided by Guyra Paraguay and BirdLife International Secretariat to develop this tool for decisions makers. The document in the Annex is a draft. With further financial support from the BirdLife Secretariat, I will organise a national workshop upon my return to Paraguay. This is aimed to provide additional information that will be used to update the draft and produce the final publication.

- What have been the main achievements of your fellowship? Key documents should be annexed to this report.

During the 8 months I carried out literature reviews mainly related to the preparation of the publication "State of Birds of Paraguay" and also gained a deeper knowledge and understanding, through this review, of the CBD process in the lead-up to COP-10.

The main achievement of the fellowship was to understand how to build policies based on scientific information and how to prepare a case study in order to provide the evidence base for policy formulation. It was very useful to understand how the BirdLife network's policy programme works and how to operate in the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) environment.

3. Outcomes, lessons and Impact

- Do you feel that the work undertaken during your Fellowship has improved skills that are relevant and important for your work in your organisation? How are you planning to apply those skills in future work?

I feel, and I know, that this fellowship has improved my skills, especially with regards to **critical thinking**. I have acquired new skills in the review of policy documents and in writing institutional policy briefs. The development of BirdLife International's Policy Brief on Access and Benefit Sharing and my role as the network's focal point on this issue at CBD COP-10 taught me how to balance conflicting views and negotiate an acceptable institutional position that we advocated in Nagoya. It was an excellent exercise for me to set aside my personal point of view and be objective, critical and impartial, during the drafting of the policy brief and also during COP-10. The report of BirdLife's participation in COP-10 is given in Annex 1.

Other skills I have improved are my oral and written communication abilities. During the fellowship at the BirdLife Secretariat, I made several presentations in front of various audiences such as BirdLife International staff (see annex 2); the press and BirdLife International Partners, among others, and during meetings, where I had the chance to improve my oral communication. The opportunity to write BirdLife's Policy Brief on Access and Benefit Sharing, the preparation of the Half Term Darwin Fellowship Report and the Second Half-Year Report for Darwin Main Project; and an interview for the World Birdwatch Magazine, where I wrote the responses myself (Annex 5), and now this Final Report have improved my writing.

Another improved skill that I would like to highlight is that of team work. During my stay at the Secretariat, I had the chance to work with scientists, administrators, communications officers, among others, and get the chance to learn from each of them and to do what I consider to be fantastic work together.

In Paraguay I will go back to my Policy and Advocacy Officer position, where I will fully use all the skills mentioned above.

- What arrangements have been made for your future involvement, what more could be done, what discussions have taken place with your original employer to ensure that your new skills are utilised?

Guyra Paraguay has reserved my position as Policy and Advocacy Officer for me to return to. This will allow me to run the Public Policy Program for the organisation where I can implement all the lessons learnt. Further I have developed much closer contacts with the Paraguayan Government during COP-10, and when I return to the country I will start the follow up of the COP-10 process through Guyra Paraguay.

- Has the Fellowship helped to improve your capacity to solve practical problems related to the sustainable use and/or conservation of biodiversity in your country?

Yes it has. I have seen how to build a case study; I have learnt how to analyze data and present the results in policy relevant formats. The most important issue is that I had improved my teamwork skills therefore learnt how to get the best advice from other professionals. Although in most cases I won't have all the answers in my head, and by myself, I am now more fully aware that we can find the solution together in a well-coordinated team. I therefore regard the best lesson that I learnt during the fellowship to be that of working in an effective team. I now more firmly believe that teamwork is the best way to solve problems related to the environment.

- Have you had the opportunity to make contacts with other UK biodiversity institutions, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs or the private sector during your fellowship? Will these contacts be useful for your future work, and how are you planning to maintain them?

Yes I have had meetings with IUCN Policy Officers and with UNEP-WCMC Scientific and Policy Teams regarding CBD, CITES and UNFCCC; with the World Land Trust; the Kew Gardens Policy Department; with RSPB Policy team and with the director of Cambridge Conservation Initiative (see brief notes in Annex 7).

All these meetings were informative and will be even more useful as they have helped me to gain a network of contacts for my work in the future.

- Any other issue emerging from your experience as Darwin Fellow that you would like to raise, or suggestions for improvements to the Darwin Initiative Fellowship scheme.

From my experience, the fellowship is an excellent opportunity to improve skills of medium career professionals, to learn by doing, and especially to have a global vision of environmental problems and a better understanding of global initiatives to tackle these problems.