

# DARWIN NEWS

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*The Darwin Initiative draws on the wealth of biodiversity expertise in the UK to work with local partners in host countries to protect and enhance their biodiversity*

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## Secretariat news

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### Successful round 13 projects

The list of 60 successful round 13 projects was announced on 16<sup>th</sup> June. The list is available from the Darwin website at

<http://www.darwin.gov.uk/news/initiative/>

and you can read the Defra news announcement at

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2005/050616c.htm>

Full details on all these projects will be available in due course on the Darwin website.

### Pre-Project Grants and Scholarships

Defra also announced 28 pre-project grants, and 4 new Darwin Scholarships. Details are available via the Defra news announcement as above.

### Round 12 reserve list projects given go-ahead

Ten more projects have been awarded Darwin funding in round 12. The full list of 34 projects is available at

<http://www.darwin.gov.uk/projects/>

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## Round-up

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### Conservation Entrepreneurs

The UNDP Equator Initiative and Conservation International have formed a new initiative – Equator Ventures – to help develop small and medium sized sustainable enterprises. More details are available on the Darwin website.

### Call for Papers

Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability plans to publish a special issue on biodiversity and biosafety. The call for papers is available on the Darwin website.

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## From the field

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### **ACTION PLANS FOR THREATENED AFRICAN BIRDS**

#### **Project ref.: 10/019**

Delegates from 13 African countries gathered in South Africa between 23 February and 4 March to attend a training workshop as part of a Darwin-funded follow-up to project 162/10/019, Action plans for conservation of globally threatened birds in Africa. The overall aim of the follow-up work – which is being led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and funded through a Darwin Post-Project grant – is to encourage and facilitate the implementation of the many national and international action plans developed during the original project. This will be achieved in part through the delivery of two workshops: the one described here, which focused on project development, fundraising and project management, and a second one to be held in Uganda in June, which will cover advocacy, communication, research and monitoring.



The South African workshop was held at BirdLife South Africa's training centre near Wakkerstroom, 285 km south-east of Johannesburg, and was a great success. It was run in a highly participatory way, allowing delegates to share experiences and learn from one another as well as from the facilitators. Because the delegates had widely varying backgrounds and came from countries all over Africa, this approach proved to be very effective. During the workshop, delegates visited a community-run conservation project near Wakkerstroom, and were able to see many of the special birds of the wetland reserve adjoining the training centre and the surrounding high-altitude grasslands.

Establishing and maintaining networks of people (or ‘Species Interest Groups’) committed to the conservation of threatened species such as the Spotted Ground Thrush and White-necked Picathartes is a major challenge in the resource-poor environments in which African conservationists work. We agreed at the workshop that the key focus for Species Interest Groups should be at the national level, and that a high priority should be placed on international networking to assist fundraising, sharing of experience and the achievement of conservation measures through international conventions and agreements.

## THE AXOLOTL – TOUCHING HEARTS AND MINDS

**Project ref.: 11/018**

The Darwin Initiative project to protect the Mexican axolotl (*Ambystoma mexicanum*) and its remnant wetland habitat in Xochimilco reached another milestone in December of 2004 with its 4-day Axolotl Species/Habitat Action Plan seminar/workshop. Hosted by the primary Mexican partner organisation, the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Xochimilco (UAM-X), and run at UAM-X and its field station, CIBAC (Centro de Investigaciones Biológicas y Acuicolas de Cuemanco), the participants were solicited from government and non-



government organisations, universities, research institutions, and the media, as well as the remeros (local boatmen with whom the project has been working closely) and other local stakeholders. Over the first two days project partners and other key participants had the opportunity to present findings and perspectives, which had emerged from the project and related work. These covered legal protection, local planning, the implementation of the CBD, the market for nature tourism, the process of engaging the local community, the ecology of Xochimilco, the impact of threats, captive breeding and reintroduction, eco-regional design and souvenir production, the development of flagship species, and public education. They served to summarize and consolidate information gathered during the course of the project and provide a framework for two subsequent days of participatory workshop. Over fifty people attended this workshop, collectively identifying the key issues and components of the Axolotl Species/Habitat Action Plan and working in small groups to set goals and objectives for addressing these issues, identify appropriate actions for each objective, and assign lead agencies, timeframes and organisations to these actions – with the findings of each stage being discussed in workshop plenary sessions. This format allowed input from all and the feedback demonstrated an extremely high degree of satisfaction with the event and a strong recognition of the importance of the Darwin Initiative in establishing and taking forward the project objectives. The draft plan, which emerged from the workshop has since been sent out to participants and other interested parties for their comments, and is expected to be published by the end of May. It will be dedicated to the memory of the late Dr. Virginia Graue of UAM-X, former Director of CIBAC, who initiated the project and whose passion for the axolotl, together with her determination and good humour, continues to inspire all those who had the privilege of knowing her.

A most encouraging subsequent development has been the recent discussion of the DI project by the Senate of the Congress of the Mexican government (on the 15th March 2005), and its voting through a motion to ask the President to instruct the Secretariat of the Commission for the Environment, Natural Resources and Fishing, to activate an “urgent” governmental programme jointly with UAM-X and the University of Kent to avoid the extinction of the axolotl in lake Xochimilco. What this will mean in practice remains to be seen, but the decision will influence governmental actions that impact upon axolotl conservation, and in itself is an indication of the important fruit our Darwin Initiative “seeds” can produce.

## CONSERVATION EDUCATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

**Project ref.: 11/024**

As this article is being written Kyrgyzstan is going through a political "Rose Revolution". Hopefully by the time of publication the country will be stable once again. For the past three years, a quieter revolution in biodiversity education has been taking place led by an environmental NGO, BIOM, and their UK partners, the Field Studies Council, through a Darwin supported "School Green Land" Project.



The purpose of the "School Green Land" project is to "raise the awareness and understanding of school students and communities in Kyrgyzstan of the unique nature and value of Kyrgyzstan's biodiversity and the importance of protecting this as the country seeks to move towards sustainable development". In many ways Kyrgyzstan is typical of a country in transition in central Asia and the former Soviet Union. It has a rich biodiversity, the richest in the region, which is under threat because of the worsening socio economic conditions of the life of the population which is resulting in over use of

natural resources especially in rural areas. At the same time, growing consumption in urban areas is also causing pressure on biodiversity. There is therefore a huge need to raise awareness of local communities about unique role and importance of biodiversity and the establishment of different patterns of behaviour.

The "revolution" of the School Green Land Project is in the content and approach of biodiversity education. Most biodiversity education in the countries in transition is 100% classroom based, knowledge based and teacher centred - with few links to real life! Our project aimed to change this.

Firstly, at the heart of the project is a network of 25 School Green Land schools, each of which has created a "biodiversity micro-reserve" in their school grounds. These reserves are demonstration natural ecosystems which can be used by teachers to provide lessons, activities and other awareness raising and educational events for school students and local communities. Our approach to biodiversity education is practical - giving an opportunity for first hand experience in an "outdoor classroom".

Secondly, our biodiversity learning is participatory. Teachers, children of various ages, their parents, and also various representatives of local communities took part in the design and creation of those micro-reserves. Most schools organised the creation of the reserves in such a way that meant the process of reserve development was a learning activity with children, young people and the community all involved in design as well as the hard work of moving earth and planting plants!

Thirdly, our biodiversity learning is focused on sustainable development. We aim to introduce principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into school curricula, as well as in life of school as a whole through the micro reserve. It is not simply knowledge-based ecology.

Fourthly, the learning is student centred. Teachers have been provided with activities and teaching ideas that involves students in non-traditional (at least for Kyrgyzstan) activities such as role plays, experiments and decision making activities.

To make all this happen we have trained a group of 50 teachers, 2 from each of the 25 schools, on how to use the micro-reserves for learning with school students and the community. The teachers from the 25 pilot schools have run workshops both for teachers in their schools and also for teachers

from surrounding schools and so our network of teachers is constantly expanding. We have now involved teachers from around 200 schools - or about 10% of schools in the republic.

To support the network we produce a regular newsletter. "School Green Land" is periodically issued and have information on the BIOM web site. The newsletter covers the information about work of project schools, and also informs teachers about ESD, new methods and approaches to realization of ESD in schools, ways of community involvement in biodiversity conservation and so on. It is the only regular environmental newsletter for schools in the country. We have also produced a pack of information and educational materials to support teachers including -

- A 200 page ring binder format manual for the teachers on biodiversity conservation "School Green Land", containing information about sustainable development, the biodiversity of Kyrgyzstan, how to create a school micro-reserve, and activities for teachers of different subjects based on the micro-reserves.
- Poster "School Green Land" aimed at teachers, illustrating what sustainable development is and the process of how to create a school micro-reserve.
- Poster "Biodiversity - diversity of life" aimed at school students containing information on the role of biodiversity role in maintaining conditions suitable for life on the Earth, a map of global ecosystem destruction by humans, methods of biodiversity conservation, and a map of protection areas of Kyrgyzstan.

All the materials are unique both in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, both in terms of content and design. They present a new approach to the realisation of environmental education, involving both schools and communities in biodiversity conservation and around half the schools in the country will receive a copy of the posters! So far more than 15000 children, young people and adults have been involved in the project!

Our achievements have not just been limited to Kyrgyzstan. As a result of the project the BIOM Team have been involved in the UNECE Education for Sustainable Process and were part of the national team that attended the High Level Ministers Conference in Vilnius in March to sign the European Strategy and the leader of BIOM has been invited to join the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Education Education for Sustainable Development Group

Our project is nearing its completion - so what happens next? The next few months are going to see concentrated activity in the micro reserves as spring and summer approach - with the focus on community activities. The final dissemination events under the project "School Green Land" are planned for June 2005, but might have to be delayed because of the political changes. In the future BIOM intends to carry on supporting and to expand the network of "School Green Land" schools which we believe brings a large contribution to promotion of ESD and Biodiversity Education in Kyrgyzstan.

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## MAPUTALAND CONSERVATION PLANNING SOFTWARE ADOPTED WORLDWIDE

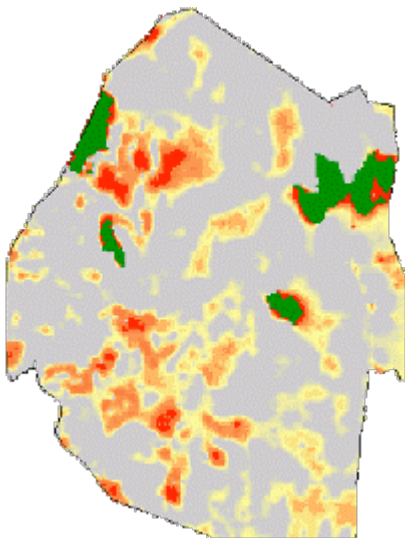
**Project ref.: 12/006**

Maputaland is an area of high biodiversity value that covers part of Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland. The region is the focus of a number of national and transnational conservation initiatives but there is no overall planning system to guide and integrate all of these schemes. This problem is being addressed by a project that involves the University of Kent's Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology and a number of partner organisations in the three range states. Together, these institutions will map the biodiversity of the region and identify the most important conservation areas.



*Training session in Maputo*

A central element of this work is to build capacity, so that the project partners continue to use and update the Maputaland conservation planning system. However, it is also important that the planning system is easy to use, which is why the project has developed a user-friendly computer program called CLUZ (Conservation Land-Use Zoning software). This software allows people to carry out on-screen conservation planning and also acts as an interface for MARXAN, an advanced planning program that was developed at the University of Queensland. This means that anyone with some knowledge of computers can produce conservation plans with real-world relevance.



Map of Swaziland showing the existing protected areas (in green) and important sites for conservation on unprotected land (in red)

The project has already run workshops in Kwaluseni, Maputo and Pietermaritzburg to provide CLUZ training. This also allowed people to analyse their existing data and this was done successfully during the Kwaluseni workshop at the University of Swaziland (UNISWA). This workshop took place in December 2004 and brought together people from the Swaziland Environment Agency, the Swaziland National Trust Commission and UNISWA. These organisations have collected a range of species and vegetation distribution data and this information was used to produce the first map showing priority sites for biodiversity conservation in Swaziland.

Our project also makes CLUZ freely available to anyone interested in conservation planning and it can be downloaded without charge from the project website (<http://www.mosaic-conservation.org/cluz>). This means that the legacy of the

Maputaland project will not just be in southern Africa, as more than 190 people from 50 countries have already downloaded CLUZ since July 2004.

## GOUGH EXPEDITION JAN/FEB 05

### Project ref.: 12/010

A project funded by the Darwin Initiative is currently underway in Tristan da Cunha, in the south Atlantic, to produce a biodiversity action plan for the archipelago. Tristan da Cunha is the world's most remote inhabited island, and its wildlife is of global importance both in terms of the variety of endemic species and the numbers of breeding seabirds.

The aim of the project is to increase the capacity for wildlife conservation on Tristan, and to enable the community to be involved in the implementation of the Tristan da Cunha Biodiversity Action Plan. A team of 10 fieldworkers has been working with the project, carrying out seabird research and monitoring, habitat mapping and invertebrate collection. Much of this work has been done on the main island of Tristan, with some work also carried out on the neighbouring islands of Nightingale and Inaccessible.

The fourth island of the group is Gough, which is 250 miles to the south, and very rarely visited from Tristan. It is the most important site for breeding seabirds in the south Atlantic, and the main breeding site for the Tristan albatross. This is a species of wandering albatross, which is currently threatened with extinction as a result of losses to long line fishing and chick predation by mice at the breeding grounds on Gough.

In January 05, a fishing vessel was chartered to take the Darwin Initiative project team down to Gough to carry out a survey of Tristan albatrosses and introduce the team to the species, habitats and conservation issues of Gough. Only one member of the team had visited Gough before so it was a new experience for most, and one of the comments that was made by the team members on the first day was that it was very strange to be working on an island that they did not know their way around.



*Ringling Tristan albatrosses in Gonydale, Gough Island*

Although the Tristanians found the conditions on Gough a lot tougher than they are used to, it was a very rewarding experience for all and really brought home to the team the conservation problems threatening the seabirds of Gough. Much of the five days on Gough was spent counting and ringing Tristan albatrosses, although the team took the opportunity to go to the summit of Gough, something that a Tristan team had never done before. This is hopefully the start of a higher level of involvement and participation by the Tristan islanders in the conservation of Gough, and certainly several members of the team hope to have a long-term involvement in the monitoring of the Tristan albatrosses.



*Tristan team flying the Tristan flag on the summit of Expedition Peak, Gough Island*

## GOOD NEWS FROM NEPAL

**Project ref.: 12/030**

The past year has been very eventful in Nepal, not only for the dramatic political changes with the King seizing power in February, but also for the activities of the Darwin Initiative project “Building Capacity for Plant Biodiversity, Inventory and Conservation in Nepal”. Events began with the March 2004 workshop in Kathmandu where all eighteen Nepalese Darwin Scholars and the trainers got together for the first time to exchange ideas on modern methods of plant collecting, data recording in the field and the use of herbarium specimens.



*Plant collecting from elephants on the second training expedition in Royal Chitwan Nation Park*

These new ideas were tested on a day's fieldwork on nearby Phulchoki hill, and then six Scholars got the first chance to really put this into practice on a 3-week expedition to the Everest region (Sagarmatha National Park). Not only was this an excellent opportunity for hands on experience in fieldwork with a diverse team of botanists, but also the physical hardships of a trek-based camping expedition bring people together and add personal value to their hard won plant collections. Whilst the first expedition visited the lofty peaks of the high Himalaya (up to nearly 5000m), the second expedition journeyed to the lowland jungles of Royal Chitwan National Park (ca. 100m). This followed the second workshop in November which concentrated on identification techniques and descriptive documentation. The Chitwan expedition was very different, but no less arduous. Here the dangers of mountains, yaks and altitude are replaced by ferocious wildlife and the landmines



*Nepalese collecting plants in the field at Phulchoki*

left by the Maoist insurgents: fieldwork in Nepal is nothing if not eventful! Sets of the plant specimens have been left with our partner organisations in Nepal and some brought back to the UK for identification and incorporation into our own collections. Half of the Darwin Scholars came to the study visits in Edinburgh and in London. This gave an invaluable opportunity for the Darwin Scholars to work one-to-one with British counterparts and experience the dynamics and organisation of major international botanical research institutes. Midway through the visit the suspension of flights and all communications with Nepal during the takeover by the King caused concern, but thankfully this was short-lived and the group was able to return to Nepal as planned. The project team is looking forward to the last and largest of the training expeditions where nine Nepalese and four UK botanists will be returning to Sagarmatha National Park in September.

**Project Website:** <http://rbg-web2.rbge.org.uk/nepal/darwin/index.html>



*First training expedition group at Gokyo lake, Everest Region*



*Anjana Giri working on her plant specimens in the Edinburgh Herbarium*



## DARWINNET – A CHM FOR THE DRY FORESTS OF PERU AND ECUADOR

Project ref.: 13/006

The BirdLife International project DarwinNet has been gathering pace since its official launch before the Governments of Peru and Ecuador in January of this year. The project which won in the 12th round of the Darwin Initiative is centred on information exchange to enhance the conservation and sustainable development of the critically threatened equatorial dry forests of Peru and Ecuador, a region equivalent to the Tumbesian Endemic Bird Area – as defined by BirdLife International. The region (covering c.130,000Km<sup>2</sup>) has exceptional levels of endemism, including 14 threatened species of bird unique to the region, among them the unusual Peruvian Plantcutter.



*Environment Ministers of Peru and Ecuador sign agreement to support the DarwinNet project*

“By assisting in the development of an ecoregion-based clearing-house mechanism, BirdLife International is promoting greater exchange of expertise and experience, and enhancing the ability of the region to make accessible a broader range of information to support implementation of activities related to biodiversity.”

Hamdallah Zedan – Executive Secretary,  
Convention on Biological Diversity.

During the last half of 2004 the project focused on training of its in-country team-members from Peru and Ecuador, which also involved member of the BirdLife secretariat office in Cambridge travelling to northern Peru to give training workshops on database management, GIS and webpage design.

The project is being implemented in collaboration with the Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment and the Peruvian National Environment Council, as well as the CHM (Clearing House Mechanism) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Considered the first of its type globally this multinational, transboundary and stakeholder driven initiative aims to efficiently gather, repatriate, analyze and disseminate information on this region. This will raise awareness of its importance, establish conservation priorities, and build capacities for its conservation amongst stakeholders thereby consolidating policies for land use and development that are consistent with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

The project is implemented by in-country partner organizations Nature & Culture International with offices in Peru and Ecuador and the ProBosque Foundation in Ecuador, as well as the BirdLife International Americas Office in Quito, Ecuador.

During February and March of this year the team members have travelled throughout the region giving presentations to local authorities and other stakeholders, with positive feedback strengthening the role of the mechanism. The project has also been presented at the 10th meeting of the SBSTTA of the CBD in Bangkok in February as well as the 2nd meeting of the CBD on CHMs in Latin America in Brasilia in March.



*The threatened Peruvian Plantcutter is endemic to the sparse dry forests of northern Peru*

Although at an early development stage, through DarwinNet Ecuador and Peru are taking a major, resource efficient and innovative step towards meeting their obligations under the CBD. This is catalyzing binational co-operation for the management of biodiversity and will serve as a model for similar critical ecosystems shared by more than one country. By creating a greater awareness of the values, functions and services of forests amongst all stakeholders, DarwinNet is helping to promote their sustainable use. The outcome will be enhanced conservation of the region's environment based on a fair and equitable sharing of knowledge and resources. The projects' webpage can be accessed at <http://www.darwinnet.org>

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