



***Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species
Annual Report***

July 2001 – April 2002

***Community based conservation of Hoang Lien Mountain Ecosystem,
Vietnam***



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1. Darwin Project Information

Project title	Community based conservation of Hoang Lien Mountain Ecosystem, Vietnam
Country(ies)	Vietnam
Contractor	Fauna & Flora International
Project Reference No.	162/10/011
Grant Value	89290
Start/Finishing dates	July 2001 – April 2003
Reporting period	July 2001 – April 2002

2. Project Background

The Hoang Lien mountain forests in northern Vietnam are a major global centre of plant diversity as identified in the IUCN/WWF Centres of Plant Diversity project {CPD EA67} and one of the last refuges of the crested black gibbon. The fragmented forests are under threat from unsustainable exploitation and illegal trade of endangered species, as well as timber extraction and agricultural encroachment.

3. Project Objectives

The project aims in the first year to identify threats to endangered plants, primates and their habitats and to identify priority sites for conservation. This will be followed by community-based conservation interventions such as community participation in the management of an expanded protected area system, local conservation stewardship agreements, development of sustainable management of non-timber forest products and propagation of endangered plants. These initiatives will be introduced in buffer zone villages to generate alternative source of income and to reduce pressure on forests and endangered species.

Two changes have been made to the objectives of this project during the first year of operation:

- The propagation of endangered plants and/or development of more sustainable systems of NTFP extraction output has been refocused to concentrate on a single, major NTFP, cardamom, as the scale and production of this product has been increasing rapidly in the last two years.

- One output (6) of the project has been revised. The biological and social complexity highlighted in the initial studies have meant a refocus to collecting the base line information necessary, and investigating the possibilities, for the most suitable long-term management strategy for the protection of the Van Ban forests.

These changes have been made as a result of preliminary investigations conducted to date indicating a conservation value of the project area far broader than the focal plants and gibbons suggested in the original project proposal. Furthermore, the social, economic and governance contexts in which any proposed conservation intervention must be set, are more complex than originally anticipated during the project's design. On all accounts, it is apparent that more background research is required to enable effective conservation planning and implementation for this site. Consequently, the decision has been made to concentrate the resources available under the Darwin grant on obtaining the information necessary to proceed with proposed interventions such as alternative livelihood schemes and protected area development, rather than to actually implement these actions fully.

This decision is reinforced by the early success of this project to lever significant amounts of further funding to develop the project beyond the pilot phase of the Darwin grant. In January of 2002, FFI was informed that its proposal to the European Commission for an expanded community-based conservation project in the Hoang Lien had been successful. This fund, of over €800,000 for three years, will enable the project and its partners to implement conservation interventions in the area, based on the sound biological and social scientific research supported by the Darwin grant.

One particular issue identified as potentially one of the greatest threats to, and possible opportunities for, conservation of the Hoang Lien forests, is the cultivation of cardamom as a sub-canopy crop. It is suggested that resources initially devoted to the development of model gardens be reallocated to support further research on the use of this NTFP by local communities within the project area.

4. Progress

This project was identified as a conservation priority following a conservation status review of plants and primates in northern Vietnam conducted by FFI, and through consultation with Vietnamese scientific institutions (FIPI, IEBR, University of Hanoi), as well as the Forest Protection Department (FPD), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. These organisations expressed a need for capacity building and training in botanical inventory and systematic identification of priority sites for plant conservation. Moreover, FFI and FPD identified the area as a priority site for the critically endangered black crested gibbon (Vietnam Primate Conservation Status Review 2000). The selection for the project area is based on the National Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), listing the site as one of the highest priority for conservation in Vietnam (GOV 1996). A three-year-review workshop conducted a gap analysis of the implementation of the BAP, highlighting the fact that no conservation interventions have been undertaken to protect the Hoang Lien Mountain Range (IUCN, 1998).

A project initiation meeting was held in Hanoi and Van Ban District in July 2001. This involved Sara Oldfield (Project Team Leader UK), Frank Momberg (Project Team Leader Vietnam), Paul Jepson (FFI Asia Pacific Regional Director) and Steve

Swan (Conservation Biologist) together with national FFI Vietnam personnel. Discussions with project partners and local government were also held as part of this inception phase, which resulted in the development of an initial work plan to cover this period, the establishment of a field office, and the commencement of the process to obtain local government endorsement of the project. A combination of delayed receipt of money from the UK, and longer than expected local endorsement procedures, led to a delay in starting the project. Despite a six-month delay (see below) in the commencement of field activities, the project has progressed with the biological and human ecological research programmes together with the conservation awareness programme, targeting key local villages at the project site.

During the first year of the project, activities focused on biological surveys of the project site with an emphasis on plants, an acknowledged conservation priority for the Hoang Lien (see above). The survey of flora and vegetation of the project site was undertaken by an international team of botanists from the Komarov Institute of Botany, St. Petersburg, and the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR), Hanoi. During this period the team undertook surveys of some of the highest (> 2,600 m) peaks of the project area, describing the vegetation types (using 25 sample plots) and inventorying the flora (through the collection of over 4,000 voucher herbarium specimens). For details of methods and results see Appendix I of Averyanov *et al.*, (2002).

The single most important discovery of this research was Vietnam's first and only population of the globally threatened conifer *Taiwania cryptomerioides*, which is known from only two other locations in the world. As a follow-up to the preliminary botanical surveys, Dr. Aljos Farjon, world authority on conifers from the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Chair of the IUCN/SSC Conifer Specialist Group, assessed the conservation status of this population and other threatened species of conifer from the region (see Appendix II– of Farjon, (2002).

Zoological survey work began in December with inventories of large mammals (largely by camera trapping) and birds. This was undertaken primarily by Steven Swan, and in the case of birds, in collaboration with BirdLife International's Vietnam Programme and the IEBR (Tordoff *et al.*, in prep.). Important results from the zoological survey include the discovery of new populations of globally threatened gibbons, civets and endemic muntjac; the designation of the project site as an 'Important Bird Area'; and a new population of Southeast Asia's only threatened amphibian, the Vietnamese salamander *Paramesotriton deloustali*.

Second to the collection of base line data, the other main component of the project during the first year was the development of a local awareness campaign. The programme began in October with formal training by the Vietnamese NGO Environment for Nature, Vietnam, in Cuc Phuong National Park. In January of 2002 the awareness programme implemented preliminary field activities in key minority villages. These activities centred on village meetings that introduced the project and the conservation value of the surrounding forests. By April, these meetings had evolved into village festivals on forest protection, which were jointly implemented by FFI and the local Forest Protection Department (FPD). At the beginning of 2001 a children's storybook, highlighting the plight of the black gibbon was developed, with 500 copies to be distributed to schools within the project area.

Significant delays were encountered during initial negotiations with local government during project implementation. Essential provincial endorsement for the project took

nearly five months to secure. Difficulties in obtaining endorsement for the project were not the result of any resistance to the project by local government, but largely due to the limited capacity of the project's principal partner, FPD (see section below on partnerships). Delays were incurred while the project's inception was brought into line with procedures of the Vietnamese government system.

Further delays in the first field work scheduled on the project, the botanical survey planned for October – December 2001, occurred due to the absence of the lead technical advisor for this component of the project, Dr Peter Boyce (of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew - RBGK), who failed to arrive in Vietnam due to ill health. This resulted in a re-scheduling of the botanical survey, which due to the availability of Dr. Boyce's replacement, Prof. Leonid Averyanov could not start until March 2002.

Tentative work plan for the second year of the project is as follows:

<i>Activity</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Biological surveys</i>												
<i>Human ecological research</i>												
<i>Stewardship agreements</i>												
<i>Awareness programme</i>												
<i>Protected area development</i>												

5. Partnerships

Collaboration between the project and its main partner, FPD has had some initial difficulties. This is partly due to the lack of experience of the local FPD in working with foreign-funded projects. A workable relationship with FPD has slowly developed over the past six months. However, low level of local capacity may limit the implementation of some aspects of this project. Regrettably, the main technical partnership between the RBGK, FPD and IEBR failed to materialise as result of sudden illness of Kew's senior technical advisor to the project (see above). Kew were unable to field a replacement for Dr. Boyce, and with a significant delay already incurred, alternative arrangements had to be made. Success was achieved in partnerships between the project and other national agencies such as IEBR who provided many of the scientists who conducted the biological survey work, and the local Youth Union who were involved in the awareness work.

The project collaborated with the BirdLife International-IEBR Important Bird Area Project in surveying the avifauna of the project site (see progress description above). Discussions have also been held with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, to ensure a collaborative approach to the conservation of threatened conifers occurring (e.g. *Taiwania*, see above) in the Hoang Lien Mountains building links with a second Darwin project in Vietnam.

6. Impact and Sustainability

Despite its relatively small size, the project is nevertheless recognised as the largest conservation project in the Northwest of Vietnam, and the only one within the Hoang Lien Mountains in Lao Cai Province. To date, the project has yet to engage in direct self-promotion as it has effectively only just started in terms of field activities.

The principal exit strategy of the project is to successively lever further funding to maintain conservation action at the site in the short-term, i.e. while a need for external support persists. The first step of this process has already been achieved with the approval of a larger EC grant (see Section 2 above) that will build upon the foundations provided by this Darwin project till 2006. In the longer term, the project hopes to achieve sustainability through a dual strategy of: a) elevating local community's levels of awareness of, and commitment too, conservation of the Hoang Lien forests, coupled with, b) the development of a network of national protected areas (of which Van Ban would be one) embedded in a wider, internationally recognised, 'Man & Biosphere Reserve' designation.

7. Post-Project Follow up Activities

Not applicable.

8. Outputs, Outcomes and Dissemination

Table 1. Project Outputs (According to Standard Output Measures)

Code No.	Quantity	Description
6A	1	Conservation awareness training
6B	4	Conservation awareness training
7	1	Children's storybook
8	65	Conservation biologist and project co-ordination
9	1	Botanical survey report
13A	1	Herbarium collection
23	>600,000	EC co-financing for expanded follow-on project

Recruitment of the original three-person awareness team proved to be impossible at the salary rates proposed. Consequently, a decision was made to take a trainer of trainers approach in concentrate all formal training in a single individual who would subsequently instruct individuals from local government (e.g. FPD) and mass organisations (e.g. Youth Union).

Reduced input from UK project staff during this first year is a result primarily of the replacement of senior botanical TA with a non-UK specialist, and delays in starting the fieldwork. (Increased UK project staff input is expected in the second year of the project as field research continues).

Delayed biological survey work has obviously delayed the number of technical reports produced during this reporting year.

An additional output was also achieved during the botanical survey work. Entirely new herbarium collections were made for the project site, primarily for the IEBR, but with duplicate collections going to major international herbaria including St. Petersburg, Missouri and Kew.

The greatest additional output achieved early on in the project is the confirmation of additional resources to support the project above and beyond the geographical and temporal scope of this pilot Darwin project – EC grant with a value of >£ 600,000 to continue for three years beyond the close of the Darwin project.

Table 2: Publications

Type *	Detail	Publishers	Available from	Cost £
(e.g. journal paper, book, manual, CD)	(e.g. title, authors, journal, year, pages)	(name, city)	(e.g. contact address, email address, website)	
Report *	Averyanov, L., Phan Ke Loc & Do Tien Doan (2002) Flora and vegetation survey of Van Ban District, Lao Cai Province of Northern Vietnam			

Book	The hunter and the orphaned gibbon	Fauna & Flora International Vietnam Programme, Hanoi	Fauna & Flora International Vietnam Programme, IPO Box 78, Hanoi GPO, VIETNAM vietnam@ffi.org.vn	Free
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9. Project Expenditure

Table 3: Project expenditure during the reporting period

Item	Budget	Expenditure
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10. Monitoring, Evaluation and Lessons

General project progress has been monitored through bi-annual reports to project partners and FFI project management cycle reporting. Specific research outputs are verified by survey reports (see Table 2 above).

11. Author(s) / Date

Sara Oldfield and Steve Swan, August 2003 (based on an earlier draft which unfortunately was not submitted).