

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

Project Ref. No.	162/11/018
Project Title	Aztecs and Axolotls: Integrating Tourism and Conservation at Xochimilco, Mexico
Country(ies)	Mexico, United Kingdom
UK Organisation	Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE)
Collaborator(s)	Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco (UAM), Mexico. Centro de Investigaciones Biologicas y Acuicolas de Cuemanco (CIBAC) Comision Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad (CONABIO - the National Commission for the Knowledge and use of Biodiversity), Mexico.
Report date	5/11/04
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 3
Project website	http://www.kent.ac.uk/anthropology/dice/research/axolotl.html

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up).

Despite the death of Dr Graue (Mexican project Director) in January, the project has remained on schedule during the first half of the third year of funding.

Following the recruitment of four boatmen ('remeros' - who completed the first guide-training workshop) to the project team to help in the development of the second guide-training workshop, this second workshop was brought forward to April/May 2004. It was highly successful, graduating 16 remeros, and receiving very positive feedback from the participants (average score on 5 point scale of 4.7 for overall quality, and 4.0 for content). In addition to the workshop materials each 'graduate' was given a large folder of learning materials about Xochimilco and its wildlife, and subsequently supplied with a set of 24 A3-sized magnetic interpretation panels, incorporating pictures and text about key wildlife species. Attached to the inside of the roof of the trajineras (tourist boats), these panels have generated considerable interest amongst the other remeros. The workshop established a very valuable link with the remeros it worked with, who represented 4 of the 9 commercial embarcaderos (embarkation points), and with the Director of Xochimilco Tourism, who awarded the certificates, and with whom we will be holding talks during the forthcoming visit about the possibility of conducting further workshops for other groups of remeros. These would enable them to be refined and packaged so that the Mexican partners (and the remeros themselves) could subsequently deliver them in their entirety, thereby leaving a lasting (and growing) legacy from the project.

Prof. Josefina Reséndez, from the Division of Science and Arts for Design (UAM) has continued to work with the project on what has developed into another major component – the production of eco-regional souvenirs. Prof. Reséndez has provided us with data concerning the activities of the artisan network we established following the workshop in November of last year. We will be reviewing this component with her during our trip in December, and will be working with her and the artisans to try and ensure that the network will continue and develop after the end of the Darwin Initiative funding (see note on gift cards below).

The axolotl research group, which we set up, and which is led by Dr Luis Zambrano of UNAM, has produced a new axolotl bibliography containing nearly 900 references.

The Axolotl Species/Habitat Action Plan (ASHAP) Seminar/Workshop has been arranged from 6-9th December – and will involve ~40 invited participants drafting the ASHAP

Although we failed in our bid to get funding from "The RARE Centre" for a conservation education campaign, our application failed because it had not been linked to an NGO. Through our recently established partnership with the Parque Ecologico (PEX) – we will be submitting a new application, and will be meeting candidates during the December trip.

Through the Darwin Project we recruited Amanda Steck (Université Genève). She is currently in Mexico doing experimental research on axolotl macrophyte selection for egg-laying, and who is under the supervision of Dr Zambrano. Since obtaining her MSc as part of the Darwin project, Jeanne McKay has continued to work on the project on a voluntary basis, providing extremely useful input on issues relating to international relations, marketing, illegal trade and amphibian conservation. Her recent appointment as the International Co-ordinator for the IUCN Declining Amphibian Population Task Force will ensure her continued involvement with the project as well as wide publicity for the project through the IUCN network.

Publicity and dissemination have included a 30 minute programme on Channel 11 TV (the equivalent of BBC2), an article in the Latin American popular science magazine "Muy Interesante", two articles on the Foreign Office website (all these thanks to our collaboration with the British Embassy in Mexico), three University newsletter articles (2 in UK and 1 in Mexico), one paper on the project accepted by the *Herpetological Bulletin*, a poster presented at the Society for Conservation Biology Annual Conference, New York, in August of this year, and the production of 5000 axolotl postcards.

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 affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The tragic death of the project Director in Mexico, Dr Graue, in January of this year has had significant ramifications for the project, mainly in relation to the development of CIBAC. Although the project Darwin Fellow Alejandro Meléndez has taken over the project co-ordinating role in Mexico and performed it well, the future direction of CIBAC was in a state of flux until a new Director, Fernando Arana, was appointed. We are currently working closely with him – and his Head of Department – Dr Juan Chavez – to ensure that the future management plan for CIBAC includes a clear strategy for the maintenance, use and development of the axolotl colony and the envisaged Darwin Initiative legacy. During our forthcoming trip we will be meeting with all parties involved to decide on targets to meet by the end of the DI project, and agree on the implementation of the exit strategy. The successful production of the CIBAC Management Plan is likely to be a key component in this process. Fortunately, because Drs Bride and Meléndez are managing the investigator team, these developments will not impinge on the remaining survey work planned for the next few months, and indeed, will provide useful material to feedback into the project review process.

The project commissioned a research assistant at UAM - who had been producing a series of hand-crafted gift cards featuring wildlife of Xochimilco - to train members of our artisan network to make these cards. These cards are currently being marketed and promoted in both Mexico and Britain, and we have already received bulk orders from the souvenir shops at London and Chester Zoos. The sale of these cards provides an income for the artisans (and the production can be shared amongst different members of the family) and also yields a significant profit that can be channelled back into biodiversity conservation at Xochimilco. One of our UK partners - the British Herpetological Society - has kindly agreed to act as the UK intermediary in this enterprise, and thereby guarantee continuance after the end of the project.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?	
as yet n/a	
Discussed with the DI Secretariat:	no/yes, in..... (month/yr)
Changes to the project schedule/workplan:	no/yes, in.....(month/yr)

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?
None

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with the Darwin Secretariat directly.

Please send your **completed form by 31 October each year per email** to Stefanie Halfmann, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme, stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message.**