

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

Project Ref. No.	12-009
Project Title	Darwin Field Station for Biodiversity Research Education and Training, The Gambia
Country(ies)	The Gambia
UK Organisation	University of Warwick
Collaborator(s)	Makasutu Wildlife Trust
Report date	April 1 st -30 th September 2004
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 1
Project website	www.darwingambia.gm

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).

The original project start date of April 2003, was rescheduled to October 2003. This report thus describes progress over the second six months of the project (1st April – September 2004).

Darwin Field Station: The revision of the original project plan was due to political issues in which the Government of the Gambia donated a building to be renovated for the field station instead of a new build. In order for the building to be used practically for research and for training courses, the renovation work turned out to be a huge rebuilding and extension project. In addition the building is located 300 m from the main entrance of Abuko Nature Reserve and all the material for the building (cement, sand, gravel, timber, glass etc. had to be taken to the site in wheelbarrows and on the backs of manual workers). The previous building was not secure and existed more as a large make shift shed, the walls being provided by hardboard, corrugated sheets and mosquito netting. The building is now secure, has brick walls and windows. The renovation work cut severely into the capital budget. However additional funds from the British High Commission were secured for furniture, including benches and stools in the laboratory. So it is a major achievement that The Darwin Field Station is now fully equipped and up and running. It has electricity (mains and stand by generator) and running water. There are staff offices, a training room, basic laboratory, lab stores, resource centre, general stores and a staff common room and toilets (see plans and promotional material). The official opening of the centre is planned for 20th October 2004, to be attended by the Vice President and all media, Ministers from Natural Resources, Agriculture and Tourism, Vice Chancellor from the University of The Gambia, Directors of Parks and Wildlife, Forestry, Fisheries, Community Development, plus international donors including UNDP, FAO, World Bank, Peace Corps and VSO. In keeping with our ethos for supporting local communities, much of the furniture including laboratory benches and stools has been sourced locally. However for practical, economic and scientific reasons some office and field equipment, books and computer

equipment have been purchased in the UK and shipped to The Gambia.

Researchers Accommodation: Basic self-catering accommodation will be provided for 6 researchers in a fenced compound. The plans for the accommodation have been drawn up and the site selected in the buffer zone of Abuko Nature Reserve (ANR), with the approval of the ANR Conservation Management committee. This land has also been donated by the Government of the Gambia to the project. The plans have been submitted to the National Environmental Agency and the start of building work is awaiting the result of an environmental impact assessment.

Training courses: The first training of trainers course on *Biodiversity, National Environmental Policy and the Law* took place in July 2004. It was a 10 day course, training 12 personnel from the Department of Wildlife (DPWM), Forestry (DFor), Fisheries (DFish), Community Development, National Environment Agency (NEA), MWT and a local environmental consultancy firm, NACO as trainers. The training on the course was provided by University of Warwick staff Dr Linda Barnett and the Executive Director of MWT, Mr Craig Emms. External lectures were also provided by staff from NEA, DFor, DFish and DPWM on the national environmental policies and natural resource laws. The evaluation of the trainers consisted of written tests on their knowledge of the area prior and post course, and scoring and feedback on individual and team presentations. The trainers also carried out a self-audit on their skills and knowledge at the beginning, mid point and end of the courses and were encouraged to continue this exercise as they continued to train. Individual feedback and evaluation was also provided to trainers on a further three days spent practicing giving lectures, six weeks after the first course. These trainers have now trained colleagues from their own departments and organisations on the first of three step down training courses (3 days long) at the Darwin Field Station. This process has effectively *Gambianised* the courses, with the commitment of the trainers and their respective departments to future training courses run at the field station. Commitment by the trainers to subsequent training courses has been on the whole high, except where trainers have left The Gambia (one unexpectedly left to pursue further studies) or other duties have come up (one trainer). Since the original training course trained two staff from the departments of wildlife, forestry and community development and further staff from other departments and NACO we have a good selection of trainers to call on for future training courses.

There will be two further step down courses on the same subject before the end of the year, resulting in 48 staff from 4 partner organisations trained in ecology and biodiversity., national legislation and the law. The research skills course is due to take place in January 2005, targeting research personnel from DPWM, Forestry, Fisheries, National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), Community Development and the University of The Gambia.

Workshops: The project assessment and development of advanced courses workshop was due originally to take place in August 2004. This has now been rescheduled to November 2004.

Research: Research in Abuko Nature Reserve has had an effective start during the first year of the project. As well as establishing permanent plots and transects, a herpetological survey and monitoring scheme has begun (since July 2004), using two drift fences set up in the gallery forest and guinea savanna habitats. This project builds on a previous survey carried out in ANR in 1999. During 2004 collaboration with Dr Mark Oliver-Rodel (a specialist in West African amphibians) of Wurzburg University, Germany has begun. He is assisting with identification of the frogs and toads (via email). Dr Rodel has been instrumental in setting up the West African amphibians

network, and MWT has been invited to be a member. MWT staff have acquired good identification skills concerning the amphibian and reptilian fauna through running the survey, and MWT is currently actively seeking funding to continue and expand its herpetological research. Baseline data collection on the permanent plot vegetation is on-going (concentrating on herbs in the wet season). The MWT staff have also acquired good identification skills concerning the trees, shrubs and climbers. Dr Linda Barnett has aided MWT in forming a new link with Kew Botanical Gardens, London to help build a plant species list for the reserve, with the long-term aim of establishing a herbarium at the Darwin Field Station. In addition individuals have undertaken small research projects including traditional uses of the plants in the reserve, primate and bird behaviour and beetle collection. A number of universities and research institutions from outside The Gambia have already expressed interest in utilising the Darwin Field Centre with a general interest in developing undergraduate, Master and PhD research projects. Such initial contacts will take time to develop but are promising.

Dissemination of Information: Promotional information has been produced and circulated about the Darwin Field Station to Universities and Colleges in the UK and USA. The Darwin project website has been launched on a local server in The Gambia (Quantumnet) in mid September, address www.darwingambia.gm. The site that was developed previously at the University of Warwick proved to be inaccessible to the public and very slow to load, and required extensive rework by UK staff in The Gambia. The TA is continuing to work on the pictorial side of website and this should be in place very soon. Images will be added to the pictorial database throughout the project, as will updates to the website. An impressive display in the public area of the Darwin Field Station about the Darwin project is in place to promote the centre and raise awareness about biodiversity and conservation in The Gambia. The target audience is visitors to Abuko Nature Reserve (mainly international tourists).

Hit Count from Quantumnet statistics: September 600 hits.

Easy to Use Field Guides: Guide 1 on Gambian butterflies has been published (1000 copies) and Guide 2 on Gambian mammals is in draft form (copy being sent by the post). 2000 copies of guide 2 will be produced. Half of the guides are being distributed free to schools via the Peace Corps and VSO and other NGOs that work throughout the country, and relevant government departments and agencies. The rest of the guides are available for purchase at the centre.

Publicity: In order to raise awareness of the Darwin project and biodiversity nationally, we have secured a contract with the national newspaper the *Daily Observer* to write a weekly column. This column will start in October 2004 and continue throughout the second year of the project. High profile coverage of the opening of the Darwin Field Station (including newspapers, radio and TV) is assured due to the excellent long-standing relationship MWT has with the media. MWT produce a newsletter three times a year, which contains an article about the Darwin project. The newsletter is distributed to MWT members worldwide and locally to all interested parties (including ministers, natural resource department directors and funding agencies).

An ex-BBC film producer has volunteered two weeks of his time to film and produce a video/DVD on the activities of the Trust and the Darwin project. This film is now being edited and Gambia Radio and Television Service (GRTS) has committed itself to broadcasting the film on national TV when it is completed.

Partnerships, Support and Development of The Project: Over the last six months the Darwin team has been developing links with a number of research institutions (Kew and Wutzberg University), as well as funding (local and international) bodies to develop research projects that will provide continuing support for the running and maintenance

of the field station. These organizations include the British High Commission to The Gambia, UNEP, FAO, the World Bank and UNICEF. Two of the government training colleges in The Gambia (Kafuta Forest College run by the Department of Forestry and the Rural Development Institute run by Department of Community Development) have also expressed an interest in having modules on their one and two year courses respectively on biodiversity. We are working hand in hand with these departments to see if funding can be secured to develop such modules, which would very simply and effectively broaden the audience that the subject material would reach.

As a result of collecting and collating literature about the flora and fauna of The Gambia for the resource centre in the Darwin Field Station, we have been able to prepare the first comprehensive species list for the country (of only about 3,000 species). A specific outcome of the project is thus that we have now identified specific and large gaps in knowledge about The Gambia's biodiversity.

The dearth of baseline information in The Gambia is in part down to a lack of skills in taxonomy, species identification and species inventory (one exception being the birds). For effective management plans for the protected areas and appropriate planning for biodiversity and natural resource management it is imperative that this under-capacity is addressed. The current project has made a valuable start but has also highlighted a much more severe problem than anticipated. A natural extension to the current Darwin project would thus be for the University of Warwick to co-ordinate training and national capacity building at the Darwin Field Station in specific taxonomic fields (e.g. priorities would be bryophyta, mycology, entomology, and mammology) for a small number of government and NGO personnel. The taxonomic expertise would be sought from the UK to help build the local capacity and provide longer-term institutional collaborations between The Gambia and the UK. The Darwin Field Station and project team would facilitate what would be short taxonomic training courses in the field, to be run at the Field Station by invited UK expertise.

MWT/Darwin project staff have initiated and chair an ANR Conservation Management Committee with the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management. The current aim of the committee is to produce the first management plan in the reserve's history and also to involve local communities in the management of the reserve.

MWT have also been allocated a volunteer from the US Peace Corps. This is the first time that a volunteer has been placed with an NGO in The Gambia and Peace Corps has made a long term commitment to the Trust promising to replace volunteers when they come to the end of their posting. This development also opens up new possible sources of funding within The Gambia from Peace Corps themselves and the US Ambassadors Fund.

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.

During the last six months Dr Susan Barker (project director) has moved from her position at the University of Warwick to the University of Alberta, Canada. Upon discussion with the University of Warwick and the Darwin Secretariat, it was agreed that Dr Linda Barnett should become project leader with Dr Barker playing a supportive role on the project. Although this change has not held up the project

unduly, certain activities have been delayed and we are not entirely back on track time wise with the project. However, we anticipate being so by the end of this financial year.

There have been a number of unexpected developments concerning the training courses. These include the general lack of capacity of the staff in government departments with respect to their knowledge and understanding of biodiversity (especially concerning the departments of forestry and wildlife). This has resulted in adjusting our training courses and their content to an appropriate level. The Department of wildlife (DPWM) also has a tremendous shortage of staff as many of middle management personnel are away training on Masters courses out of the country. This has left the remaining staff severely overstretched and apparently unable to commit to future training courses. This situation is currently under discussion with the Director of DPWM, as it is crucial to have representation of this department on the courses and as researchers at the Darwin Field Station. This situation will not affect the timetable concerning further training courses, as we have other trainers from other government departments who can facilitate them. The lack of staff in DPWM and their general lack of capacity has been a long-term challenge to the department in The Gambia, but one that requires addressing alongside shorter aims and objectives of the Darwin project.

An additional unexpected development concerning the training courses is the fact that salaried government personnel expect to be paid substantial per diems to attend training courses in addition to travelling expenses. It is also traditional for a course/workshop/seminar to provide a mid day meal and breakfast upon arrival. These extra expenses actually make the courses much more expensive to run than first anticipated. This financial aspect will be a constraint on the number of courses that can be run during the project, unless co-funding for the courses/full funding (e.g. for NGOs/CBOs) is secured. This aspect will be discussed with the projects partners during the workshop for advanced training courses workshop in November to obtain a consensus for the direction of the project and the subject areas of the future training.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Dr Linda Barnett has been made the project leader and Dr Susan Barker project assistant with the agreement of the Darwin Secretariat and Dr Susan Barker.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: /yes, in...July 2004..... (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? No

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.