

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form

Project Title	Marine biodiversity assessment and development in Perlas Archipelago, Panama
Country	Panama
Organisation	Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh
Project Ref. No.	162/12/021
Report date	27 th October 2003

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months 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).

Project running as planned. Memorandum of Understanding agreed and signed by Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Panama and Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. Darwin Fellow No. 1 selected and appointed (although she only started in August 2003 because of slight delays in getting all project contract work signed and approved and setting up system for transfer of money from UK to Panama). Two UK personnel, UK project Leader (James Mair) and Sarah Benfield (PhD student) travelled to Panama and took part in 10-day research cruise on STRI vessel as planned in August 2003. Samples and information collected have started to be worked up and processed. Background information on Las Perlas Archipelago being entered onto GIS. Contact with potential network partners established with a view to formalising network. Initial satellite imagery has been bought and is being processed both in Edinburgh and Panama. Darwin Fellow 1 travelled to Edinburgh in late September 2003 to register and start on MSc course.

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 effect the budget and timetable of project activities. Have any of these issues been discussed with the Department and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

No problems encountered. An unexpected development has been the recent announcement of Las Perlas Archipelago being targeted for massive investment for "Sustainable Tourism". This may restrict some aspects of recommending some areas of the Archipelago as potential Marine Park zones but, on the other hand, there may be advantages if the developments are truly planned as "sustainable" – e.g. there may be extra funding for further environmental/conservation studies. The host country co-ordinator (Dr Hector Guzman) is currently liaising with relevant people and authorities involved in the development plan.

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Delays in project approval, contract signing, etc., with DEFRA and then setting up Memorandum of Understanding with Partner make it difficult to start a project in full swing in April of the financial year 1. If project approval timing remains similar in the future, it may be advisable to recommend to project leaders to allow a month or two at the beginning for set-up activities and not plan major, important project activities right at the very beginning which might need to be delayed for these reasons.