Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report

Project Ref. No.	163/13/007
Project Title	Taxonomic training for a neglected biodiversity hotspot within Lao PDR
Country(ies)	Lao PDR
UK Organisation	Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Collaborator(s)	Forest Research Center (National Agriculture and Forestry Institute), National University of Lao PDR, IUCN Lao
Report date	23 rd October 2006
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 3
Project website	http://www.rbge.org.uk/rbge/web/science/research/tropdivers/laos.jsp under development

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project

In the first 6 months of the final year of the project RBGE staff visited Lao for the final field work and identification training visit (May – July). As in previous visits, the main period of field work was based in the Nakai Nam Theun NBCA. The project team joined forces with one of the NBCA's anti-poaching patrols to visit the Nam On catchment in Boulapa District in the most southern and remote part of the protected area. Over 400 collections were made over a period of 10 days. These included at least 2 new species and new national records for 3 conifers and numerous angiosperms.

In Vientiane the last formal identification workshop was held over a period of 2 weeks. 15 trainees from a range of organisations attended. During the training select trainees undertook the role of trainers as a way of evaluating their progress. Over 60 collections were identified, a considerable improvement on previous workshops. Included in this work was the verification of specimens collected from provenance trail plots of *Aquilaria crassna* that had been set up over the last 4 years by FRC. Students identified a species from a closely related genus (*Gyrinops vidalii*) that had been mistakenly included in the trial and were giving misleading results.

During this period, the herbarium at NUoL was completely reorganised by the trainees as part of their training. All specimens were placed in appropriate family and genus covers and older damaged specimens and those for which there were no labels or information for discarded. Specimens collected during the project have all been mounted, labelled and incorporated. A similar unsupervised training exercise is due to take place at the FRC herbarium after the departure of the RBGE staff - the results of this exercise will be evaluated during the final visit in February 2007.

Training in Vientiane also included work on the IUCN 2001 categories and criteria. A select group of senior staff and trainees evaluated all rattan species along with several important NTFP species. The results of the rattan work were presented by Mr Banxa Thammavong at an international conference in the Philippines. Senior staff are preparing a general translation and guide to the IUCN 2001 categories and criteria that will be published by the project. A preliminary checklist of threatened plants is also being compiled.

Project staff also completed and submitted a review to the IUCN of the plant species currently listed under CITES Appendices I, II and III. This review, based partly on the work that the

project has done on a national checklist resulted in several new species being added to the list in addition to several hundred orchid taxa that were not listed as occurring in Lao PDR. A full copy of the report will be included in the final report.

The French-Lao-English botanical glossary has been published and the Botanical Resource Pointer is due to be published within the next 2 months – copies will be available for the final report. Working Copies of these have been available since the start of the second year.

Work on the Preliminary National Species Checklist and the preliminary checklist for Nakai Nam Theun NBCA is progressing well. Two scientific papers are in preparation

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 project made a successful application to the Darwin Initiative for a Darwin Fellowship. The successful candidate, Mr Soulivanh Lanorsavanh, a lecturer in the Faculty of Science at NUoL and one of the project's most outstanding trainees, arrived at the RBGE on September 24th for a 3 month placement. During this time he will be working on the preliminary national and protected area checklists, visiting Kew and the British Museum and preparing a revision of two genera in the family Menispermaceae that have important medicinal qualities but are frequently misidentified. He will also be working at the Bangkok Forestry Herbarium in January 2007 for 4 weeks and then presenting the results from his Fellowship at the project's final workshop in February/ March 2007.

The RBGE project team also assisted the Faculty of Science to make a successful application for US\$6.8k from a special fund set up by the World Bank to assist Lao organisations involved in biodiversity work. The money is being used to renovate and improve the main herbarium at the Faculty of Science. Work is due to be completed by the end of the Darwin project. It represents a significant achievement and should help to safeguard the collections made during the project and enhance its legacy.

RBGE staff have also met with potential French collaborators to identify potential botanical and herbarium based projects that may be eligible for funding from the French Government funds from 2007. One possible project would be the organisation and funding of the first ever regional meeting of the participants and collaborators in the *Flore du Cambodge, du Laos et du Viêt Nam (FCLV.* Further information will be included in the final report.

During the first two years the project team have been developing a proposal with the Mekong River Commission for the production of a regional guide to the aquatic vegetation of the Lower Mekong Delta. Unfortunately, after considerable discussion, the senior management at the RBGE have decided that, given the financial constraints of the proposal, it would not be viable.

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

None of the issues discussed above have required the involvement of the Darwin Secretariat or involved changes to the original agreement.

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?

Not at this stage

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 <u>planned</u> modifications to your project schedule/workplan or budget should <u>not</u> 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, <u>stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk</u>. The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. <u>Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message.</u>