



Darwin Initiative Annual Report

1. Darwin Project Information

Project Ref. Number	14-038
Project Title	Ha Long Bay Environmental Awareness Programme
Country(ies)	Vietnam
UK Contractor	Fauna and Flora International
Partner Organisation(s)	Ha Long Bay Management Department
Darwin Grant Value	£234,000
Start/End dates	1 August, 2005 to 31 July, 2008
Reporting period and annual report number	1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 Annual Report #1
Project website	Not yet established
Author(s), date	David Brown, Programme Manager, April 27, 2006

2. Programme Background

Ha Long Bay, a 1553 square kilometer bay studded with nearly two thousand karst islands and islets, is Vietnam's premier tourist destination. The heart of the Bay was designated a World Heritage Site in 1994. Ha Long Bay's marine resources, deep water anchorages, and abundant coral reserves just onshore have long been the foundations of the region's economy. Tourism is an important source of new wealth. In 2005, nearly one and one-half million foreign and Vietnamese visitors cruised on the Bay for a day or two.

The area abutting Ha Long Bay has experienced rapid economic growth over the past decade. The Bay's ecosystems are increasingly impacted by overfishing and habitat destruction, industrial waste, sewage and agricultural runoff, dredging, and bilge flushing. In short, the new prosperity of the Ha Long Bay region threatens to blight its leading source of wealth – its bountiful, biologically diverse, topologically unique and wondrously beautiful bay.

3. Programme Purpose and Outputs

Convinced that the longer run environmental health of Ha Long Bay and its watershed will depend in large part on awareness, stewardship and advocacy by the citizens of the region, FFI/VN launched in September 2005 an environmental awareness program inspired by successful "save the bay" efforts in the developed world but adapted to the distinctive circumstances of Vietnam.

Our primary objective in the first year of the programme has been to launch the EcoBoat project: a floating classroom that uses Ha Long Bay as its campus. Beginning in April, 2006, EcoBoat voyages will provide a vivid environmental learning experience to students 12 to 18 years of age drawn from two populations: regional schools and youth organizations, on one hand, and students from international schools throughout East and Southeast Asia, on the other. Revenues from the international school voyages will subsidize voyages for the local youth.

The successful launch of the EcoBoat project will give strong impetus to the larger objective of the programme, establishment of a self-sustaining *local* organization that is capable of continuing Ecoboat activity and further developing a robust educational and advocacy program. We aim to leverage the growing professionalism and popularity of the EcoBoat program to recruit leaders in the communities on the margins of the Bay as the advisors, trustees and leaders of the projected PVO.

The secondary focus of FFI effort in the first year of the Programme has been reinforcement of close and mutually-supportive working relations with the Ha Long Bay Management Department (HLBMD), our partner in the Ecoboat project. In modern Vietnam, voluntary civic organizations exist entirely at the sufferance of the authorities. The operational consequence of these facts is that achievement of programme objectives depends critically on their vigorous sponsorship and support by the HLBMD.

The operational plan and outputs remain as set out in the grant application. Implementation was lagging five to six months at the end of the reporting period as a consequence of the programme's late start (see below).

4. Progress

(a) A Rough Beginning. The unexpected departure of the intended Programme Manager forced the postponement of programme start-up until August (with Darwin's concurrence). The newly recruited programme manager arrived in HaNoi in mid-September. His first business was revision of the three-year budget to (1) adjust to slippage in the start-up date; (2) accommodate a £56,000 (20%) reduction in the budget originally submitted to Darwin; (3) free additional funds for an FFI project office in HaLong City; and (4) shift resources insofar as possible from salaries and administration to strengthen programme delivery activities.

By mid-November, we had moved staff and office to HaLong City in anticipation of a sharply higher level of engagement with local officials and the general public, and were in intensive discussions with our counterpart organization, the HLBMD,

on a workplan covering the three years of the Darwin grant. It quickly became apparent that it would be prudent to slow down development of the independent private voluntary organization foreseen in the plan until our local credibility and was confirmed by successful launch of the EcoBoat floating classroom.

Just before Christmas, FFI Vietnam was informed by the Darwin Secretariat that it would be impossible to restore the £56,000 that had been inadvertently excluded from our grant. The Secretariat did agree to our proposed restructuring of the budget and a March 31, 2006 carry-forward projected at £37,000.

(b) Lift-off. Work began to move rapidly forward in the first three months of 2006. We finalized a detailed workplan with the HLBMD, reached agreement on the charter of a suitable vessel and crew from the HLBMD's fleet, and then a further agreement on accelerated maintenance and modifications to fit the EcoBoat out for use as a floating classroom by early spring. Additionally, under the HLBMD umbrella, we established working relationships with a number of other interested government agencies, in particular the provincial education department.

These developments permitted the secondment of MD and Education Department personnel to work with FFI staff. By the end of the Darwin fiscal year, the combined group had made a strong start on preparation of training materials and lesson plans, site selection for activities and their reconnaissance, modification of the vessel for use as the EcoBoat, and procurement of teaching equipment. Decisions were being made jointly on operating procedures, risk assessment and mitigation, and organization of a series of training voyages.

Also by the end of the Darwin fiscal year, we had agreements with two international schools, the provincial education department, and the provincial branch of the Vietnamese Youth Union for a series of EcoVoyages beginning April 25 and involving 250 thirteen to nineteen year-old students through the end of July. These "proof of concept" trips and subsequent evaluation workshops will give us the experience we need to deliver a larger, more refined and routinized EcoBoat program in the 2006-2007 school year.

(c) Building Capacity, Client Base and Community Support. In April and May, 2006, we will begin marketing the EcoBoat experiential learning experience to international schools from Shanghai to Singapore. Attracting substantial, regular, paying international school business is essential to assure the funding that will enable us to continue a similarly robust, parallel program for the secondary school age youth of the communities on the fringes of the Bay.

By September 2006, the EcoBoat project will have a web presence and, with the help of volunteer interns, will be well-launched into preparation of scientifically sound but easily readable study materials on Ha Long Bay – texts geared to our teenaged clients. We will develop teacher and youth leader training as an

adjunct to the youth EcoVoyages, aiming at seamless integration of the EcoBoat experience with classroom activities. As winter (December-March) approaches, we plan systematic outreach to stakeholder communities and media to deepen enthusiasm for the project and build community support for its sustainable continuation.

In the summer of 2006 we will expand FFI's research support to the MDHLB, focusing on building capacity for systematic monitoring of environmental impacts on the Bay and its littoral. These include, at the MD's request, assistance in the introduction of a rugged and user-friendly GPS/GIS capability and the tools and techniques for regular water quality sampling at selected points on the EcoBoat itineraries. FFI will have full access to the data thus collected, and it will serve as the foundation for the "State of the Bay" reports projected in our Darwin Grant application.

(d) Beyond the EcoBoat, a Local Organization. During the winter months, while preparing for a second full year of EcoBoat operations, we intend also to engage our counterparts and other Government and private sector leaders in serious contemplation of the community's vital economic interest in the health of Ha Long Bay, and in its survival as a premier destination for tourists and lovers of nature.

Vietnam is an authoritarian country, and leadership is top-down. Quang Ninh is a border province where people and officials are considerably less sophisticated than in the capital. Here as elsewhere in Vietnam there is in addition well-ingrained skepticism about foreign initiatives and the motives of their proponents.

Our experience has persuaded us that the notion of establishing a "public-private partnership," alternatively a PVO, must be advanced obliquely, with considerable finesse and a lower profile than contemplated in the original programme document. With the success of the EcoBoat project as the foundation of FFI's credibility in the Quang Ninh community, we aim through reasoned discussion to stimulate a local consensus that there is a need for a locally-rooted, locally-run community organization to run the EcoBoat project and other conservation education activities. We would not presume to say what form that organization should take, but we would be available to give it support.

Once we have achieved that breakthrough, hopefully by the end of the next Darwin fiscal year, FFI can focus its efforts to good effect on exit strategies: providing material, technical and advisory support to such an organization that will build its capacity to manage the EcoBoat and other environmental education activities and, we hope, to advocate effectively and sustainably on behalf of the Bay.

5. Actions Taken in Response to Previous Reviews – not applicable.

6. Partnerships

FFI's principal partner in the HaLong Bay Environmental Awareness Programme is the **Management Department of Ha Long Bay (MDHLB)**, established in 1995 to manage the newly-designated World Heritage Site. The MD's principal role has been to regulate and provide services to a large and fast-growing tourist industry, and to minimize tourism's negative impact on the Bay's ecosystems, extraordinary topography, and indigenous communities. The MD has had some success in advocating for less environmentally destructive economic development on the shores of the bay. It and its Director, Ngo van Hung, appear to be generally well-thought of in the community. Hung is determined to take the MD up to a higher level of effectiveness by building up its capabilities for systematic monitoring of the protected area and its buffer zone, modelling and analysis of anthropogenic impacts, and fruitful exchange with other, especially foreign, sources of technical knowledge and assistance.

FFI began capacity-building assistance to the MDHLB in 2002, and was able to build strongly on this relationship over the past year. We have pledged support for Hung's capacity-building objectives – committing both manpower and financial resources to helping the MD to improve its international profile and to qualify for direct grant assistance from other donors. An FFI volunteer teaches an upper-level English class to MD staff. Another will help to renovate the English language section of the MD's website, on which the EcoBoat project will share space by the end of the summer. We are seeking to identify consultants who can design systems and teach GPS and GIS applications, and others who can teach grant-writing skills.

Once he understood the EcoBoat project thoroughly and embraced it for perhaps mixed reasons -- both as an effective method of community outreach and as a status symbol for Ha Long Bay – Director Hung given very strong support to the EcoBoat project. He has seconded to us several of the MD's best young staff and committed all sections of the Department to assist us enthusiastically. The EcoBoat itself is a particular fruit of this collaboration: it was a white elephant in the MD fleet before we realized its potential for conversion to use as a floating classroom. Our long term rental costs have been lowered and we gain a better boat, a crew that knows the Bay intimately, and a business arrangement far less risky than boat charter from one of the private tourist boat companies.

The **Quang Ninh Province Education Department (QNED)** is another long-term partner with FFI. A particular accomplishment was the 2002-2003 development of a sequenced environmental education syllabus centered on Ha Long Bay that is currently used in 142 schools from 1st through 9th grade. QNED has nominated staff to work as needed with FFI on the development of training materials, and to facilitate the organization of EcoBoat day and overnight trips for high-achieving middle school students.

A third partner is the Quang Ninh province branch of the Ho Chi Minh Communist **Youth Union**. The Youth Union is an umbrella organization that coordinates virtually all non-school activities for youth of school age and beyond, significantly including conservation clubs. FFI has partnered training programs in the past for Youth Union volunteer leaders, and we welcome the Youth Union's strong interest in sending groups of school age youth on overnight EcoVoyages.

Under the Management Department's patronage, we have secured the endorsement of the **Provincial People's Committee** (i.e., administration) for the FFI Ha Long Bay workplan and established cooperative relationships with the **Departments of Tourist Affairs and Transport**. We have had as yet little contact with the **Environment and Natural Resources Department**, but will correct that omission in coming months.

Our relations with the sections of the **Quang Ninh police** who are responsible for keeping track of foreigners and foreign organizations have been surprisingly difficult. The reasons are not clear to us and do not stem, we think, from errors of commission or omission on our part. In the event, the police have been slow to grant necessary approvals even though FFI's establishment of a local office has been warmly welcomed by other elements of the local government.

7. Impact and Sustainability. Implicit in the last part of section 4, but so important as to be worth repeating, the sustainability of the EcoBoat project and its potential for growth into a full scope, locally rooted, at least quasi-private voluntary organization is depends vitally on our success in persuading local elites, in particular members of the Quang Ninh administration, that they should want it to survive and thrive.

Even if all that lasts from FFI and Darwin's three year commitment in Ha Long is the EcoBoat project itself, the impact on the local community could be quite substantial. After years of grinding poverty, Vietnamese are finally achieving enough wealth to look ahead and to consider the impact of present decisions on future income and quality of life. Run at full capacity for the eight months of the year that the weather is good on Ha Long Bay, the EcoBoat experience can make a powerful impression upon over 1000 local high schoolers annually, as well as 300 or more secondary students from international schools throughout East and Southeast Asia. And these are, as the shopworn but still true phrase has it, the leaders of the future.

The most likely outcome if we are patient but persistent is that the EcoBoat project will become the core of an auxiliary organization sponsored by and largely dependent on the Management Department of HaLong Bay. This is an very acceptable outcome, for the organization could evolve over time as Vietnam itself evolves toward allowing more scope for PVO's. In the meantime, it would offer a politically acceptable channel for the growing number of environmentally aware people in the HaLong City area to get active. This outcome would merit

continuing FFI involvement to ensure the necessary management and marketing skills.

The best possible outcome in the present environment would be an organization that is allied with the Management Department but led by independent individuals with high status in the community, people who have been impressed by the EcoBoat project and see the potential for a broader scope of operations. They would refrain from extreme positions but would weigh in effectively on the margins when development decisions are being made that impact the Bay's sustainability as a source of wealth and a quality of life resource. If by luck and effective persuasion on our part, we could achieve such an outcome, there would be a powerful case for several years more of capacity building support to ensure that the organization has all the technical skills needed to survive and grow.

8. Outputs, Outcomes and Dissemination

After a slow start, FFI is rapidly developing an educationally exciting, highly professional experiential environmental program afloat on HaLong Bay. This will give us a base to attempt more outreach and more training. It gives us the base for aggressive marketing of EcoBoat field trips to international schools. To the extent these become regular customers, we will lock in revenues that permit a high level of outreach to the local community.

Searching for ways to deal with the £56,000 shortfall from our original request [paragraph 4(a) above] and to maximize delivery of EcoBoat experiential education to school groups, we concluded that much of the training projected in the Project Outputs schedule (outputs 6A, 6B & 7) could be delivered more effectively through on the job training of EcoBoat staff rather than through the hire of outside consultants to provide training in a formal classroom setting. We have also been able to realize substantial savings in salary costs. These shifts of emphasis have been discussed with Darwin in the first midyear report and in exchanges attendant on revision of our budget.

We have chosen to defer a high public profile for the EcoBoat project (outputs 15, 16, 18 and 19) until after we have proven the concept through extensive field-testing during the second quarter of 2006.

Considerable effort by FFI and secured staff is being devoted to the development of teaching modules based on the Ha Long Bay environment. These are the basis of a growing menu of activities from which clients can choose to integrate each school group's EcoBoat experience closely with classroom learning objectives. There appears to be no standard output measure that fits this important activity.

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

Code No.	Description	Year 1 Total
6A, 6B	48 people to receive teaching and awareness raising skills training; 8 training weeks	None
6A, 6B	8 people to receive financial management training, 2 training weeks	1 person; one training week.
6A, 6B	14 people to receive materials preparation training; 3 training weeks	4 people; one training week
6A, 6B	18 people to receive marketing skills training; 6 training weeks	None
6A, 6B	36 people to receive institutional development skills training; 3 training weeks	None
6A	All staff to receive safety and first aid training	Scheduled 04/2006
6A, 6B	16 people to receive research and monitoring training; six training weeks	One person; one week
6A, 6B	12 people to receive participatory research training; two training weeks	One person; one week
7	Eight training manuals/materials to be produced	None
8	56 weeks to be spent by UK project staff on training, research and project facilitation in Vietnam	Liesje??
8	100 weeks to be spent by team leader monitoring the project and mentoring partners and host country team members in Vietnam	25 weeks
9	Three year research and monitoring programme produced	None
11B	8 reports from the research and monitoring programme to be submitted to peer reviewed publications.	None
12A	Client data base established	Established 03.2006
14A	Project inception workshop held for strategic planning of the project with multi-stakeholder input	Three one-day sessions, 12.2005, 02.2006, & 03.2006
15A	5 all-Vietnam press releases	None
15B	6 local press releases	None
15C	2 UK press releases	One (see para 11)
16A	3 State of the Bay reports	None
18A	5 Vietnam TV features	None
18B	5 UK TV features	None
19A	3 Vietnam radio features	None
19B	4 UK radio features	None
20	Assets worth £10,000 handed over to PVO at project end	n/a
21	Project will result in creation of one new	None

	educational organization	
22	10 marine research plots for monitoring water quality	None
23	\$63,000 to be raised for the project in addition to funding from Darwin	\$5000

Table 2. Publications: None

Table 3. Project Expenditure (2005-2006)

Monitoring, Evaluation and Lessons

As the reader may have concluded already, the EcoBoat project does not fit neatly into Darwin's standardized output measures-driven reporting framework. Our effort during the first year has been focused on developing a core group of project staff and elaborating a program of cooperation with partner organizations. By the end of the reporting year, we had moved to the stage of readying the EcoBoat itself for service as a floating classroom, developing standard procedures, and devising hands-on teaching modules that make full use of the Bay's unique values.

The EcoBoat project is at this stage very much a work in progress, with a strong "social engineering" component. We believe that:

Achievement will be measured to the extent that the local authorities and people of communities on the borders of Ha Long Bay:

A (1) are impressed by the EcoBoat project; (2) take "ownership" of it; (3) and commit their own time and resources to its continuation in a scientifically and pedagogically sound manner; and

B (1) are, as youth participants on EcoVoyages, motivated by the EcoBoat experience; so that (2) as adults, they are inclined to support sound

environmental management policies and environmentally friendly decisions with respect to HaLong Bay and its periphery; and

FFI's successful execution of the EcoBoat project motivates the local authorities to allow, and the people of communities on the borders of HaLong Bay to join together to:

C (1) find ways and means to continue the EcoBoat project in a sustainable way, with technical assistance from FFI; (2) establish some form of governing organization for the EcoBoat project that is locally rooted and managed, and (3) that organization over time develops into an independent or quasi-independent voluntary body with a primary mission of advocating sound environmental management policies and environmentally friendly decisions with respect to HaLong Bay and its periphery.

11. Outstanding achievements during the reporting period.

I agree for ECTF and the Darwin Secretariat to publish the content of this section.

With the Darwin Secretariat's support, FFI is now well embarked on an environmental education initiative in Vietnam's spectacularly beautiful but severely challenged Ha Long Bay.

In 2005, 1.5 million visitors marvelled at the 2000 limestone islands that stud the Bay, creating a seascape supremely worthy of its designation as a World Heritage Site. Yet many visitors also left Ha Long Bay greatly concerned by the evidence of man's impact on the natural setting – landfill, toxic wastes and sewage runoff, dredging, unwise development of the littoral, overfishing, reef destruction.

FFI is concerned too. Building on several years of capacity building support to the Bay's management agency, FFI has launched the EcoBoat project. The EcoBoat is a floating environmental education classroom, and the Bay is its campus. FFI-led activities give local and international youth hands-on experience grappling with environmental dilemmas.

Twenty teenagers at a time, the EcoBoat experience is building local support for policies that reconcile the twin imperatives of economic development and environmental protection. Each week during the long Vietnamese summer, youth groups explore caves, interview fisher families, learn navigation, map reading and scientific measurement skills, and debate how best to preserve the unique cultural and biodiversity values of the World Heritage Site.

HaLong Bay's marine resources and natural beauty give strong support to the local economy, but will unwise economic development kill the goose that lays the golden eggs? By the end of its three year Darwin grant, FFI/Vietnam aims to

leave in place a successor organization that is strongly rooted in the community, is committed and equipped to continue the EcoBoat program, and is an effective advocate of sound management policies and environmentally friendly decisions for HaLong Bay.

(web-quality photos enclosed with report; higher resolution photos available on request)