

Darwin Initiative

Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

PLEASE NOTE: Due to the increased number of reports expected in 2005, we will not be able to confirm receipt of reports but will contact you individually should any questions arise

Project Ref. No.	14/053
Project Title	Development of a conservation strategy for the critically endangered Mekong giant catfish
Country(ies)	Lower Mekong region (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam)
UK Organisation	Imperial College London
Collaborator(s)	Network of Aquaculture Centers in Asia-Pacific (NACA); Mekong River Commission (MRC); UNDP/IUCN/MRC Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme (MWBP); FAO Fisheries Department; Royal Cambodian Department of Fisheries; Lao Department of Livestock and Fisheries; Royal Thai Department of Fisheries.
Report date	31 October 2005
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 1
Project website	www.aquaticresources.org/darwin14053.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).

Overall progress of the project has been good. A highly successful inception workshop was held in Bangkok in August, bringing together representatives of the original project partners as well as several additional organisations. The meeting achieved a broad-based review of the species' status, conservation aims and measures, and research and information requirements. Most importantly, the meeting succeeded in establishing a Mekong Giant Catfish Conservation Strategy Group: a coalition of all major relevant organisations which have agreed to join forces in the development of an overarching conservation strategy. A joint conservation strategy process has been developed. The second major workshop in this strategy process will be held in Phnom Penh in December, hosted by our partners the MWBP and the Royal Cambodian Department of Fisheries. Collation of existing information is progressing well, and initial analyses are being carried out.

The inception workshop has provided a number of important insights and new perspectives, which have prompted some changes in emphasis of the research activities proposed under the project. Most importantly, it was realized that the captive population of Mekong giant catfish maintained by the Thai Department of Fisheries is far larger and more diverse than initially thought. The captive population now holds almost 20,000 individuals in 22 age groups, derived from over 100 wild parents. This population is clearly a critical resource for conservation of the species, and may well contain greater genetic variation than the remnant wild population. Appropriate genetic management of the captive population is thus of crucial importance, and research in this area will take on a greater importance than originally anticipated. On the other hand, effective collaboration with many organisations implies that existing information relating to catches and population status can be compiled more easily than expected. It is thus likely that some changes in resource allocation to field activities will be proposed in order to ensure that funds are used towards the project purpose in the most effective way possible.

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.

There have been no significant problems, but some changes will likely be made to the specific work plan in response to new insights gained during the inception workshop. Principally, these involve a greater emphasis on genetic analysis and development of breeding plans for the captive population, and on workshop activities with the broad range of partners. Less effort than anticipated may be required for other data collection activities. The overall work plan, budget and outputs of the project will not be affected.

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

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: no

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no

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.

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.**