## **Darwin Initiative**

## Half Year Report (due 31 October each year)

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

Project Ref. No. Ref 14-059

**Project Title** 

Certification to Support Conservation of Endangered Mexican Cacti

Country(ies) UK; Mexico

**UK Organisation** University of Reading

**Collaborator(s)** Principle collaborator: University of Queretero,

Report date 31 October 2006

Report No. (HYR

1/2/3/4)

HYR 2

**Project website** http://www.uaq.mx/ccma

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).

In the last six months the stakeholders' report was to be completed, and fieldwork was to continue with a focus on in situ and ex situ collection of target species for SSR testing. We planned to have 50% of our species collected (325 accessions, 400 individuals), extracted and sequenced, and ssr screening underway. The stakeholder report is available in English, and we are preparing the Spanish language version. Field work has continued, but with some changes to the schedule as discussed below. We now have more than 342 accessions in our DNA collection. This includes 157 collections for SSR work. We have sequence data from 149 species. There are fewer species sequenced than we had planned, and this is due in part to the field schedule (below) which has emphasised local sites and collection for ssr work. We have sequences of 53 and 51 primer pairs for our two case study species, Echinocactus grusonii and Ariocarpus bravoanus respectively. We are currently screening the E. grusonii DNAs for polymorphism using all the primer pairs for that species across all our DNAs and are on track to publish primer notes for both species early next year. We have two more populations of Ariocarpus bravoanus to collect, and will do so once field funds are resolved in Mexico (see below). Overall we are ahead of our ssr schedule and behind on our sequencing schedule, and are now diverting resources from ssrs to sequencing, including DNA extraction form voucher specimens.

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.

We still have to carry out the planned six-week trip collecting trip to Baja, and we have a fieldtrip to collect *Ariocarpus bravoanus* outstanding. As detailed in the Annual Report, rescheduling of the Baja trip was because the UAQ technician travelled to Reading for training. Since then other problems relating to the field work have become acute. These relate to UAQ's maximum advance for field trips, which is only MX \$5,000.00 (approx. GBP £250.00). This restriction is a serious problem for long trips, especially when an airfare is needed. The Mexican PI has solved this problem in two ways, firstly by accessing personal funds and

waiting three to four months for repayment and secondly by using a UAQ vehicle. However, the PI is not able to sustain field costs from personal funds, and a UAQ vehicle has become difficult to access for more than very short periods (two vehicles are currently out of use). Even when field trips have been planned for four or five days and the DI project has access to the vehicle trips have been cancelled. This is because UAQ finances have not made funds available despite application for funds being made weeks in advance.

In the face of difficulties in carrying out trips of more than a very few days we have focussed instead on completing the local fieldwork and collecting for ssr work. Consequently we are ahead on our ssr schedule, but our species collections are behind. We now need urgently to carry out the longer trips for species collection. To make this possible we will not be transferring further funds for fieldwork to UAQ, and will fund fieldwork from Reading. In the short term we are using herbarium specimen material for DNA extraction.

In our annual report we explained that the six-week trip to Baja would be scheduled after the return of the Mexican technician to UAQ. This trip and the outstanding *Ariocarpus* trip will take place once procedures are out in place for monies to be accessed more efficiently in advance from the University of Reading.

Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement? I telephoned the secretariat in August to discuss the problems we were having with UAQ releasing funding for fieldwork. I explained that we needed to lean more heavily on UAQ to ensure that funds for fieldwork were released in a timely fashion so that we could meet our fieldwork commitments. The secretariat explained that the responsibility for ensuring that UAQ followed the MoU lay with the University of Reading, and following advice we sent a second strong letter emphasising the importance of timely release of field funds. Since then there have still been problems and we have decided that field funds will not be transferred to UAQ, but will be administered from Reading. Changes have not been made to the original agreement with DI, but we may need to revise our MoU with UAQ. It may become necessary to reschedule some other longer fieldtrips and I will discuss these changes with DI secretariat.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: yes, in August 2006 (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: no/yes, in......(month/yr) We are preparing a third letter to UAQ explaining that project objectives were delayed because of financial bureaucracies, and that future fieldwork will be funded from the University of Reading. Once we have that plan in place I will send a revised field plan to the secretariat.

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

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>