

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2009)

Project Ref. No.	17-022
Project Title	Conservation of the lowland savanna ecosystem in Belize
Country(ies)	Belize
UK Organisation	University of Edinburgh with Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh
Collaborator(s)	University of Belize; Belize Botanic Gardens; Forest Department of Government of Belize; Programme for Belize.
Project Leader	Dr Neil Stuart
Report date	31 October 2009
Report No. (HYR1)	HYR 1
Project website	http://eeo.ed.ac.uk/sea-belize

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

Progress since April 2009:

1. 1st April 2009: Project launches: press releases issued to UK and Belize media; news coverage on Channel 5 TV in Belize of interview with Dr Kay at University of Belize (lead project partner).
2. 1st April 2009: PDRA (Dr Iain Cameron) hired by University of Edinburgh; work starts on website (**activity 1.1**).
3. 16th April 2009: Planet Action donates SPOT imagery for Belize to project; work commences to develop a revised classification of the savanna ecosystem from this imagery (**activity 3.1**).
4. 23rd April 2009: Meeting of UK project partners.
5. 21st May 2009: DEFRA New Projects Meeting attended in London.
6. June 2009: Project website (**activity 1.1**) launched (URL as above);
7. 4th June 2009: Second meeting of UK project partners;
8. 1st July 2009: UK Darwin Botanist (Zoe Goodwin) hired; work begins on developing database of savanna plant distributions and habitats (**activity 1.7**) and associated checklist (**activity 2.1**).
9. 1st July 2009: Article published in July/August edition of *RICS Business Magazine* (verified circulation to over 96,000 Chartered Surveyors worldwide).
http://www.ricsbusiness.com/index.php/feature/article/professional_pioneers_julaug09/
10. 13th July 2009 Transcript of the full interview with Darwin project team published online:
http://www.ricsbusiness.com/index.php/feature/article/face_belize
11. 15th July 2009: Meeting with Belize High Commission in London. Liaison on launch event in Belize and facilitation of contacts with organisations in Belize.
12. 28th August – 3rd September 2009: Bilateral meetings with each of the project partners and also with Department of Lands & Surveys and the Commanding Officer, British Forces Belize. British Army Support Unit (BATSUB) offers logistical support and assistance to the project.
13. 2nd Sept 2009: Research permit for fieldwork approved by Belize Forest Department.
14. 3rd Sept 2009: Annual Meeting of all Project Partners (**activity 1.2**) held at University of Belize. All partners send representatives.
15. 3rd Sept 2009: Launch event for Darwin Project 17-022 (shared with project 17-012). Held at the residence of the British High Commissioner, Belmopan Belize. Over 50 delegates attend from national and international NGOs, government agencies, British Forces and private institutions involved in savanna conservation.

16. Sept 2009: Initial contacts made with potential further project partners from the Association of Protected Areas Management Associations (APAMO), Toledo Institute for Development & Environment (TIDE), Ya'axché Conservation Trust (YCT), Department of Lands & Surveys, Belize Land Information Center and Biodiversity & Environmental Resource Data System of Belize (BERDS)
17. 6th – 14th Sept 2009: Reconnaissance visits made to 17 sites located throughout Belize and assessed for revisiting for detailed collecting.
18. 16th Sept 2009: 25th Flight Army Air Corps provide a 2-hour helicopter overflight of the savannas.
19. 15th Sept – 15th Oct 2009: 9 field sites visited as part of the first season of plant diversity surveys, from which 197 plant specimens are collected (**activity 1.3**). Local field assistant hired on temporary contract to support UK Botanist until mid Oct. Specimens prepared for export.
20. Poster presentation on the provisional mapping of the savanna ecosystem from SPOT imagery (**activity 3.1**) accepted for presentation at the 13th International congress of the Mesoamerican Society for Biology and Conservation to be held from October 26-30 2009 in Belize City.

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 first period of field surveys, originally planned to take place in the dry season between October – December 2009 has terminated prematurely due to the unexpected illness of the UK Darwin Botanist which necessitated her return to the UK on October 15, 2009. The work plan has been adjusted so that work on some activities (mainly 1.7, 2.1 and 5.1) originally planned for the first quarter of next year, will now be undertaken by the UK Darwin Botanist between October-December 2009 while she recuperates.

The revised plan expects that the UK Darwin Botanist will be well enough to return to Belize in January 2010 to take part in training activities (activity 1.8) and to then recommence field surveys required to complete the first season of fieldwork and the field training of the newly hired Belize Darwin Botanist.

A consequence is that the start date for the hiring of the Belize Darwin Botanist has had to be delayed until 1st January 2010. This is not problematic, since in fact the University of Belize had not been able to advertise the post until October; the delay allows the advertising of the post to be extended and may encourage further applicants to apply.

The main impacts upon the budget of this unexpected return by the UK Darwin Botanist are that the project now needs to fund an additional return flight to Belize, to allow her to return in January to resume the fieldwork originally planned to take place from mid October to December 2009. We are proposing to reallocate some underspend expected from this FY into next FY to allow the two Darwin Botanists to now undertake their second field season during the wet season (Sept-Dec 2010).

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

Yes. Initial contact made with Darwin Secretariat on 16th October. We have arranged a meeting with Eilidh Young in Edinburgh to discuss the proposed budget changes on November 6, 2009.

Since the collaboration agreement between the University of Edinburgh and University of Belize has not yet come into force, we are dealing with this by written amendments to the collaboration agreement. This does not require any changes to the agreement between the University of Edinburgh and DEFRA.

Discussed with the DI Secretariat: Yes, see above

Changes to the project schedule/workplan:

Yes, some changes to workplan already implemented, others proposed, see (2) above. We anticipate still being able to complete the majority of activities scheduled for FY 1 before April 2010. The exception is the timing of the second field season, originally scheduled for March/April 2010, which will now need to be rescheduled to take place in Sep-Dec 2010, during the wet season.

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 email** to Eilidh Young, Darwin Initiative M&E Programme at Darwin-Projects@ectf-ed.org.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 14-075 Darwin Half Year Report**