

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2010)

Project Ref. No.	17-025
Project Title	Building evidence and capacity to conserve Hispaniola's endemic land mammals
Country(ies)	Dominican Republic
UK Organisation	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Collaborator(s)	Sociedad Ornitológica de la Hispaniola (SOH); Zoological Society of London (ZSL); Parque Zoológico Nacional (ZOODOM); Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales
Project Leader	Richard Young
Report date	October 2010
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR1
Project website	www.thelastsurvivors.org

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).

1. Scientifically robust data on conservation status and requirements of the Hispaniolan solenodon and hutia and their key threats are collected, analysed and disseminated

- Genetic analysis of available hutia specimens has been completed, and a publication for submission to *Molecular Ecology* has been written. The results show that the Hispaniolan hutia represents three extant evolutionarily significant population units that are best classified as two genetically highly distinct subspecies. Collection of available solenodon samples from across the species range in Hispaniola has now been completed, and genetic analysis of these samples started. We are on track to complete this phylogenetic work well in advance of species action planning in 2012.

- Extensive interview work (300 interviews in 9 communities) in Dominican and Haitian communities in Sierra de Bahoruco has been carried out by Cristina Fernandez Secades (MSc student, Imperial College London), to collect local informant data on the awareness and perceptions of endemic and invasive mammals, and the magnitude of potential threats to solenodons and hutias from poison baiting and local dog predation. These data have been analysed and written up as an MSc thesis. This work provides a baseline of awareness against which we can measure the success of the project in awareness-raising at local level.

- Since April of 2010 a total of 113 random sites have been surveyed in the core zones of three national parks (Sierra de Bahoruco, Jaragua and del Este) as well as a range of forest fragments in the buffer zones. Parque de Este has proven to be particularly interesting as we have found evidence of hutia which are morphologically distinct to other populations. We are well-placed to finish work at the 3 national parks by end of 2010 and use these data to model the distribution of both species across the island. This will allow us to design the island-scale distribution survey to be conducted in 2011.

- After submitting a progress report to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, the project has now been issued with a nationwide research permit. A preliminary survey has been carried out in National Park "Sierra Martin Garcia", adjacent to the Sierra de Bahoruco.

2. Skills in conservation biology and planning are strengthened in local partner organisations and more widely in Dominican Republic

- A system of performance appraisals with local partner staff has now been implemented with which to measure increase in skill levels. A significant increase in project management and scientific responsibility has already been assumed by the counterpart project manager. Jose Nunez-Mino taught a two day course for Dominican field guides. The course introduced basic scientific principle, field work planning, GPS skills, map reading and specific methods used to detect presence of solenodon and hutia. Park Guards have begun to accompany the field team and receive training.

3. Awareness of status and conservation needs of Hispaniolan endemic land mammals substantially improved at local, national and international level

- Very high profile and international media coverage of the project and the Hispaniolan solenodon through web, TV and radio stories on the BBC, which in turn stimulated increasing interest from local media. Apart from the existing webpage, blogs and facebook presence we have now launched on Twitter (@solenodon_joe) allowing people to follow our work more closely. A very successful event (photographic exhibition and lecture series) was held in London (July 2010) in order to both increase awareness of the work being done and raise extra funds for the project. Both species have now featured as IUCN "Species of the Day" (Solenodon on 17th June 2010 Hutia on 2 September 2010). An event to celebrate the first year of the project has been scheduled for the 21 of October 2010 at the British Ambassadors Residence in Santo Domingo. This will be an opportunity to bring many different stakeholders together for the first time in order to inform them of the progress of the project to date.

- Dr. Becky Coe (ZSL Education department) visited the project for three weeks and worked with the DR National Zoo (ZooDom) educational department in order to assist in developing an effective educational outreach programme. During Becky's stay in DR a total of 11 talks were given (total audience number: 538) at a variety of Universities (3), schools (4) and to all staff at the national zoo. Since Becky's visit, solenodon and hutia are now a central part of ZooDom's presentation to visiting school groups and others.

4. Strengthened capacity for conserving and monitoring the Hispaniolan solenodon and hutia

- Katarzyna Grasela from The Nature Conservancy & Dr Jose Ottenwalder have agreed to become independent project reviews for the project, and to advise how best we can engage with and strengthen Dominican conservation capacity. They have been presented with the report and there is a scheduled meeting for the 20th of October 2010.

- We continue to build on good relationships with various relevant organisations within the Dominican Republic (primarily Universities and other NGOs). For example, we were asked to carry out a survey for solenodon in Isla Catalina by The Nature Conservancy, Fundemar and the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources.

- Both field project managers (Jose Nunez-Mino and Pedro Martinez) and the project co-leader (Jorge Brocca) have been asked to participate in the National Red list assessment process.

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.

- One of our research assistants (RA) has decided to leave the project in August of this year because he has other commitments although continues to be available when needed. A replacement RA has been found (Ramon Espinal) and although he is not as experienced he is a very fast and keen learner.

- Pedro Martinez (counterpart project manager) has been unwell and although he has taken some time off he has continued to be fully engaged and central to the project. He is currently receiving treatment and is under medical supervision but this situation is not currently impacting the project.

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

Discussed with LTS: **no/yes, in..... (month/yr)**

Formal change request submitted: **no/yes, in.....(month/yr)**

Received confirmation of change acceptance **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?

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 LTS International directly.

Please send your **completed form by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.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**