

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2012)

Project Ref No	Project ref. 18-014
Project Title	Ecosystem-wide forest conservation in DRC using okapi as a flagship
Country(ies)	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
UK Organisation	Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
Collaborator(s)	<i>Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature</i> (ICCN), Cardiff University, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Gilman International Conservation (GIC), Lukuru Foundation, Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), Fauna and Flora International (FFI)
Project Leader	Dr Noelle Kumpel
Report date	8 November 2012
Report No.	HYR 3
Project website	www.zsl.org/okapi

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).

	Activity	Progress Update and Notes
1.4	Preliminary recce surveys carried out where possible in additional sites	No longer possible for ZSL to implement as lead due to insecurity and lack of project manager in DRC (but may still be able to collaborate on some surveys planned by partners to commence in January 2013 in Maiko, Rubi Tele and northern Virunga areas) (see section 2 for details).
1.5	Basic socio-economic surveys carried out to gather basic okapi information in communities across the okapi range (e.g. Businga, South Ituri, Maiko)	No longer possible for ZSL to implement due to insecurity and lack of project manager in DRC (see section 2 for details).
1.6	Undertake methodology comparison study (genetic marking, camera trapping, line and recce transect) to evaluate the efficacy of methods	Activity forced to be halted due to the rebel attack in RFO; loss of ZSL survey equipment and the source of okapi dung following the captive okapi massacre, and critically continued insecurity due to rebels remaining at large, mean that it remains impossible to resume this activity and it would now no longer be feasible to complete within the timescale of the Darwin Initiative grant (see section 2 for details).
1.8	Field survey and genetic data from all sites analysed and mapped	This activity is on schedule; an intern has been employed to help map and analyse okapi field data from recent surveys and a historical literature review. Genetic analyses from PhD student Dave Stanton are ahead of schedule and should be completed by the end of the year. He has analysed over 200 okapi samples from dung collected during field activities (conducted by ZSL, its partners and himself) as well as museum samples. He has some very interesting results regarding okapi population genetics at historical, range-wide and local scales which will inform the okapi conservation action plan; he will attend and report to the workshop in March 2013.
1.9	Multi-stakeholder workshop held to discuss findings, management actions required and fundraising strategy	Planned for March 2013; preparations underway.
1.10	Okapi conservation action plan written up and report produced	Planned for March/April 2013; preparations underway.

2.1	ICCN rangers, monitoring officers and community-based field staff trained in biomonitoring theory and methods at WCS training centre in RFO, through classroom-based lessons and field training in Epulu area	Following the rebel attack at RFO headquarters, which included the destruction of all administrative buildings and the theft of ZSL and partners' equipment (computers, furniture, GPS units, camera traps, etc.) and meant that activity 1.6 has to be suspended, the training could no longer take place in RFO; it has not been possible to find an alternative site due to insecurity elsewhere (see section 2 for details), so this activity is no longer possible to implement.
2.2	ICCN monitoring officers and community-based team leaders trained in data management, analysis and reporting	As no fieldwork was conducted under activity 1.6 it has not been possible to obtain the data necessary for this training. As for activity 2.1, the destruction of administrative buildings at RFO headquarters where the training was to take place would also have hindered implementation of this activity.
3.3	Monthly patrols by ICCN rangers	Ongoing, as planned. A monthly payment is given to Mont Hoyo Reserve to support patrols there. Thanks to this, ICCN rangers have collected several dung samples for the reserve during their patrols, which were exported to Cardiff University for analysis by ZSL. Annual patrol and other support for Virunga National Park will also be provided in year 3.
3.5	Multi-stakeholder workshop held as for activity 1.10	Planned for March 2013; preparations underway.
3.8	Regular (at least twice-yearly) radio broadcasts and newspaper articles on okapi/forest conservation across DRC	In June, a press release on the RFO attacks and okapi massacre was posted on the ZSL website and, in July, Noelle Kumpel wrote an article on the same topic for 'Giraffa', the newsletter of the IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group's International Giraffe Working Group, which was forwarded to the okapi expert email group. Previously, we were in touch with a radio station in Beni regarding the possibility of broadcasting a piece about the okapi project and okapi conservation in general, but following the evacuation of project manager Elise Queslin and the global news on the RFO rebel attacks and okapi massacre (see section 2 for details), this has not been followed up. However, we hope that the okapi conservation action planning workshop to be held in March 2013 will be covered by the Congolese media and are planning press releases following the meeting. We have already contacted several journalists from Radio Okapi and RTNC (<i>Radio et Television Nationale Congolaise</i>) in Goma, who are available and interested in covering the project and the workshop.

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.

Unfortunately, some unexpected and very serious incidents at one key site (Okapi Faunal Reserve; RFO) and over much of the okapi range (central/north-eastern DRC) have had a major impact on the project's field plans for this year. While security in planned survey areas was relatively secure at the start of the project, the incidence of armed poaching gangs and politically-motivated rebels has increased steadily since then. Given the very real and therefore unacceptable risks to staff of conducting fieldwork in rebel-controlled areas, this has caused delays and ultimately cancellation of much of ZSL and partners' planned survey work.

Our already-delayed, long-term camera trap/recce/transect comparison study at the Apharama research station in RFO finally started in May 2012, with 20 people hired (porters, trackers, cook, ICCN guards) to accompany ZSL staff on a two week trip to set up the study grid. However, access to the research station was prevented by heavy rains swelling the river Egoro and submerging the access bridge, making it too dangerous to cross. The survey was therefore postponed until the end of the rainy season at the start of July. However, on 24 June, just a week before this fieldwork was due to restart, a tragic attack occurred in RFO. Mai Mai rebels (a group of infamous illegal gold miners/elephant poachers deliberately targeting conservationists clamping down on these activities in the Reserve) attacked the reserve headquarters and the nearby village of Epulu. The headquarters were looted and wrecked, with all administrative buildings burnt down. Equipment was systematically destroyed or stolen. A total of 7 people were killed and all the 15 captive okapi kept at the centre by the project's partners, GIC, were slaughtered. The rebels also caused significant damage to villagers' houses. ZSL's field equipment and food rations which had been left in WCS's store room pending the new start of the survey were also ransacked. We

managed to retrieve some camera traps but many were lost. This event, with the loss of this key equipment and the source of dung for the parallel dung degradation survey with the massacre of the captive okapi, as well as the fact that the rebel leader 'Morgan' is still at large, has sadly meant the long-term camera trap/recce/transect comparison study in Apharama at RFO is no longer feasible both for security and practical reasons.

Only weeks after the RFO attacks, the security situation deteriorated dramatically further east. An uprising of M23 rebels, launched by a former FARDC (Congolese army) colonel who broke away from the army, threatened the Virunga National Park headquarters at Rumangabo (and later Goma, the provincial capital), causing park management to evacuate the rangers' families. Rumours circulated that Rwanda and Uganda were providing financial and logistical support, coinciding with more heavy fighting in the area, and the entire zone fell under rebel control. As neither Goma nor Beni, where the project's two offices are located, were safe and fieldwork even less so, it was decided to evacuate project manager Elise Queslin back to the UK in August 2012.

While the RFO headquarters are being slowly rebuilt and some semblance of order is returning to Virunga National Park (with the help of emergency funds for both, to which ZSL has contributed via core funds), the security situation is still unpredictable and it remains inadvisable for ZSL to consider carrying out either our planned RFO methodological study or alternative/planned field surveys in other areas of the okapi range. We are continuing discussions with FFI and the Max Planck Institute regarding collaboration on their surveys in/around Maiko National Park (delayed, but currently scheduled to start in January 2013) and Rubi Tele Reserve (also due to start January 2013), and also potentially on some new WWF-led surveys to the north of Virunga National Park, via the inclusion of one or more of ZSL's Congolese field staff, but unfortunately at this stage it is no longer feasible for ZSL to plan further okapi-focused field surveys of its own as part of this Darwin Initiative project.

We are therefore now concentrating our efforts on the preparation and development of the okapi conservation action plan, which is progressing well and will be a major output of this project. In parallel, we are finalising a proposal to the IUCN Species Survival Commission for a joint Okapi-Giraffe Specialist Group, which would help lend additional credibility to the plan and ensure a framework and support for its implementation. With the project manager now in the UK, and a new intern employed from October 2012 for six months specifically to work on the okapi conservation strategy, we are in a good position to ensure that the data in our possession is analysed, the okapi status review is written up and the conservation action planning workshop is organised and carried out in March 2013 as originally planned.

Although we are still paying the salaries of 5 Congolese members of staff (which cannot legally be broken until the end of their fixed term, which was set for the end of the project, 31 March 2013) as well as the monthly support patrol to ICCN guards, we have significantly reduced the running costs of our in-country operations with the suspension of fieldwork (e.g. fieldwork operating costs, domestic travel and vehicle running costs). Thus, with permission, we would like to revise the project in order to reallocate these savings towards the costs of the action planning workshop for which the budget is currently insufficient (although we have secured additional funds from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for this and continue to seek other sources of funding). We will detail this in a separate formal change request, but wanted to flag it up here in advance.

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

Discussed with LTS: yes, in August 2012 (via telephone call to Eilidh Young)

Formal change request submitted: no, but will be submitted in November 2012

Received confirmation of change acceptance N/A

3. Do you expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No

If yes, and you wish to request a carryforward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible. It would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication of how much you expect this request might be for.

Estimated carryforward request: £

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

Some project funds were unfortunately lost during the rebel attacks at Epulu and by a member of staff whose contract has since been terminated; we will discuss with Eilidh Young how best to report this.

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: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**