



Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2014)

Project Ref No	20-022
Project Title	Enhancing habitat connectivity through sustainable development around the Gola Rainforest
Country(ies)	Sierra Leone
Lead Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Collaborator(s)	Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP), Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH), Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), Forestry Division, Cambridge University Department of Land Economy and Rainforest Alliance.
Project Leader	<i>Nicolas Tubbs</i>
Report date and number (eg HYR3)	<i>October 2014, HYR2</i>
Project website	<i>n/a</i>

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) 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 to end September).

The project's start date was the 1st of July 2013, therefore this second half year report against the agreed baseline timetable for the project, reflects activities which took place at the end of the 3rd quarter of Year1 and 1st quarter of Year2.

This entire period was marked by the Ebola epidemic ravaging West Africa, including Sierra Leone. The project area was severely affected and obviously project activities during this period have been impacted. Furthermore, this period was also marked by the collation of bird and habitat data, cocoa mapping.

- (i) As previously reported over 300 bird point counts inside and outside the National Park were completed between November 2013 and March 2014 alongside the habitat assessments at each point, camera trapping to identify mammals present, and mapping of cocoa plantations. The very last trip into the field happened to coincide with the week the first Ebola cases in Guinea were made public. Therefore none of the first year's field work was directly affected by the epidemic. However, the second field season had to be cancelled as it was due to start at the end of September to match with the cocoa's harvest season, focusing on human wildlife conflict and crop raiding in particular.
- (ii) The collation of bird and habitat data has been driven by the need to represent bird communities as they vary by habitat and land use. Estimates of bird densities by habitat have been produced using Distance Sampling methods. Initial results suggest some differences between bird communities in the forest outside and inside the National Park, in particular more generalist species have been recorded in community forests and plantation habitat compared to within the park. However, higher indices for forest-dependent and red-listed species in plantation habitats combined with lower indices for generalists compared with slash-and-burn farmland habitats suggest that plantations do provide better habitats for species of conservation concern and thus are potential wildlife corridors. Results are very preliminary and further ongoing analysis is aiming to determine potential indices to monitor biodiversity here, including community-encompassing metrics which are sensitive enough to detect important changes in bird

abundance and species composition. Rainforest Alliance is providing valuable support here.

(iii) The mapping of cocoa plantations has made valuable progress with support from Beccy Wilebore from Cambridge University. Maps were produced based on the ongoing mapping of the field data, with RapidEye satellite imagery. Doing so allowed distinguishing cocoa plantations from other habitats with fairly high confidence, though the distinction between abandoned and active cocoa was more difficult. These results are encouraging and will hopefully support us to confidently extrapolate our findings.

(iv) In order to address the comment made by the reviewer on the 1st Annual report, a stand-alone monitoring and evaluation plan for this project is being developed. Prior to the Ebola outbreak, it was anticipated this plan would have been finalised and rolled out by now. Though the Project Manager has been much involved in the international efforts to fight the epidemic, this plan is close to finalisation and be ready for implementation once field activities resume in full.

Acknowledging the reviewer's concern that promoting agriculture in a forest corridor may have effects by increasing interactions between farmers and wildlife, the desk review currently taking place is bearing that concern in mind and, as requested, will be explained in the next Annual Report.

2a. 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.

Obviously the most notable unexpected development has been the Ebola outbreak which is ravaging Sierra Leone. This has forced all community engagement to be brought to a halt as of late June. This was not too serious initially as it was the beginning of the rainy season, however, the field work meant to start in September to coincide with the cocoa harvesting season has had to be put on hold due to practical and health and safety concerns. Hence the human-wildlife data to be collected, particularly focusing on crop raiding, has had to be postponed until the Ebola outbreak is under control.

The RSPB has been monitoring the situation closely and LTS have been kept closely informed. The situation is constantly evolving which makes it extremely challenging to ascertain when field activities can be resumed in full. In the meantime, focus has been shifted to office-based activities and outputs, such as the desk review of mitigation strategies for crop-raiding.

2b. 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/No**

Formal change request submitted: **Yes/No**

Received confirmation of change acceptance **Yes/No**

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

Yes No Estimated underspend: £25,000

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully as it is unlikely that any requests to carry forward funds will be approved this year. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project and would like to talk to someone about the options available this year, please indicate below when you think you might be in a position to do this and what the reasons might be:

As discussed with LTS, the Ebola outbreak has severely impacted the project's implementation and we agreed the best way forward will be to submit a budget change request alongside a no-cost extension request. Though the epidemic is constantly evolving and therefore making any planning particularly challenging at present, we plan to submit such requests before the end of January 2015.

4. 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 can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 20-035 Darwin Half Year Report**