

# Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2009)

<b>Project Ref. No.</b>	<b>EIDPO024</b>
<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Securing the future for Gurney's Pitta and its forest habitat</b>
<b>Country(ies)</b>	Thailand and Myanmar
<b>UK Organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>Collaborator(s)</b>	Bird Conservation Society Thailand (BCST), Forest Restoration Research Unit (FORRU), Chiang Mai University, Thailand, Biodiversity And Nature Conservation Association (BANCA), Myanmar
<b>Project Leader</b>	Ian Barber (RSPB)
<b>Report date</b>	31 October 2009
<b>Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)</b>	HYR 1
<b>Project website</b>	

**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).**

## **Planning**

A project planning meeting was held in April in Bangkok involving the Thai partners (BCST and FORRU) and RSPB. In August, a planning meeting was held in the UK between the Myanmar partner (BANCA), BirdLife IndoChina and RSPB. In addition, Skype conference calls have been held between Thai partners and RSPB to discuss progress and future work.

## **Staff**

The FORRU-Krabi tree nursery facility continues to employ a local team of 2 full time and 2 part-time staff to propagate trees and carry out field work. In addition, Ms. Panitnard Tunjai ("Dia"), a PhD candidate, from Walailuk University, is having a major input into the project. A former field officer at FORRU-CMU, Ms. Panitnard has excellent experience in forest restoration. She visits the site monthly to help out with staff management, set work schedules and check on data collection. BCST have continued the employment of a Community Liaison Officer to undertake the educational aspects of their work.

Dr. Stephen Elliott (FORRU) and Kritsana Kaewplang (Director BCST) have overall responsibilities for their organisations work.

## **Phenology and Seed collection**

The phenology study, started under the first Darwin project has continued. FORRU-Krabi staff scanned 68 local forest tree species every 3 weeks to determine when each species flowers and fruits to optimize seed collection times.

## **Nursery**

The nursery seed germination facility was expanded to approximately three times its former area to accommodate increased tree production. A similar expansion of the standing down area is now underway. More than 18,000 trees are currently under production and most will be ready for planting in June 2010.

Specimens of young seedlings are also being collected from the nursery to act as a reference collection for support of surveys of natural forest regeneration in the future. Seedling growth monitoring experiments are ongoing.

## **Planting and monitoring**

On 8th August, an area of 10 rai (1.6ha) was planted with 5,000 framework trees, (raised over the previous year in the nursery, with sponsorship from OBC). In a sub-plot of 2 rai (0.3ha), 32 species were selected and labeled for monitoring (30 individuals per species). The labeled trees are being monitored for baseline height and root collar diameter. The planted site is adjacent to a forest where Gurney's Pitta had been presented in the previous two years. The 10 rai, planted by the project this year, was part of a much larger planting program of 300 rai (48ha), funded by the Thai Government.

Weed control operations continued and the trees were growing vigorously and most were in good condition. However, roughly 10-20% of the trees inspected had been severed at the root collar by large, burrowing, beetle larvae (which we are currently trying to identify). The full extent of the damage will be assessed in the end-of-rainy-season monitoring in December.

The planting event was carried out much later than desirable (optimal planting time is late May for Krabi) due to bureaucratic impediments. Permission was repeatedly granted for two other sites and then inexplicably withdrawn, even after weeding had been carried out and paid for to prepare one of the sites for planting. This has caused some minor budget problems. Between May and August, a total of 3 planting plans were prepared, submitted, approved and then cancelled by Government officials.

The uncertainty of the planting date and location meant that FORRU-CMU staff were unable to plan their attendance and organise community participation. Furthermore, the trees were planted too late in the rainy season to allow sufficient root development to take place before the onset of the dry season in November. Therefore, it is likely that high mortality of these trees will occur by next April-May.

Preparations are in hand for a workshop in late October on "Habitat Restoration for Gurney's Pitta – planning forest corridors". This will bring together Government officials, local communities and NGOs to discuss and decide on future areas for forest restoration.

## **Community Activities**

A "Treasure Tree" program has been initiated to involve local school children in seed collection and to begin to build a sense of "community stewardship" of the nursery and planted plots. Teachers nominate pupils to join activities in and around the nursery, such as tree seed collection, germination and potting. Their participation is recorded on a Treasure Tree Club member card. After five activities the children are rewarded with "treasure" (i.e. a T-shirt). Large labels, advertising the scheme, have been placed on the identified framework species (from the strategy document) and progress with collection of seeds of those species is displayed on a large poster in front of the nursery. Two events have been run so far and another involving 20 school children is planned for October.

As well as assisting with the Treasure Tree programme, BCST have been working with local teachers and the first Teacher Training course is planned for November to develop ways of incorporating the project into the school curriculum. The first Youth Camp Weekend looking at bird and tree identification was organized for 10-14 yr olds.

## **Research**

The Government Research staff undertook a survey of 15 protected forest areas in Southern Thailand from January to May 2009 but did not detect any new areas for Gurney's pitta. The results from Khao Nor Chuchi lowland forest area revealed 12 individuals responded to tape playback. The survey will be repeated next year and extended to cover some non-protected areas and a more intense study of the Khao Nor Chuchi area is proposed.

In July, a paper titled "Population, distribution, habitat use and breeding of Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* in Myanmar and Thailand" by Paul Donald et al, based on the results from the original Darwin funded project was published online in *Bird Conservation International*.

**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.**

Survey work in Myanmar was timetabled from the start of the project in April and the results would feed into survey work in Thailand in 2010. However, the relatively late announcement by Darwin of the Post Project funding caused problems for BANCA to put together a survey team and so the survey has been delayed a year until the 2010 breeding season. After discussions with all partners it was agreed that this will not adversely affect the survey work in Thailand as the likely new areas to survey are generally known and can be fed into the Governments Research work next year.

There may be a slight impact on the budget allocation as the survey work continues into May and so the project may have to request a budget carry over from 2009/10 into 2010/11.

This is the second year that planting has been disrupted due to bureaucratic obstruction. An overhaul of the system to identify planting sites and grant permission to restore them is required and we hope that this impediment to restoration will be addressed in the workshop in October.

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

**Discussed with the DI Secretariat:** No                      no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

**Changes to the project schedule/workplan:** No    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? 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](mailto: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**