Dr Nikky Thomas outlines to the Indian media the role of scientific research in promoting biodiversity cons in the Old World Tropics Credit Harrison Institute

Enhancing taxonomic capacity to underpin tropical biodiversity conservation (SE Asia) (18-002)

On 19 February, 2013, Dr Paul Bates of the Harrison Institute helped launch Bat Conservation Africa. As the name suggests, this network is dedicated to the study and conservation of bats in Africa and was the outcome of a week-long summit in Naivasha, Kenya organised by Bat Conservation International (USA) and attended by 30 African and international delegates.

At the summit, representatives from 19 African countries drew on the experiences of others from the United States, Latin America, Europe and Australia in helping design the new network. The role of the Darwin project in Southeast Asia featured extensively, acting as a working example of how to promote dialogue, capacity building, and international collaboration at a regional level.

This was not the first time that the project has acted a role model. In April, 2012, Dr Nikky Thomas of the Harrison Institute together with Darwin trainees from Lao PDR and Thailand undertook the first of a series of planned workshops in the Indian Subcontinent to promote networking, training and research. Thanks to these activities, made possible by Darwin support, we now have a taxonomic network that stretches from Southeast Asia to Southern Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa – it is truly a network of the Old World tropics.

Sadly, the first phase of the current project in Southeast Asia is now drawing to a close. However, we feel that it has achieved all its aims and more. Initially involving just four PhD students from Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia, these have been joined by a further five MSc students from additional countries that include Bhutan and Zambia. Initially concentrating on bats and birds, new subjects areas include rodents and amphibians and in addition to taxonomy per se cover other aspects

such as disease risk in frogs in peninsular Thailand and threats to squirrels from hunting in Lao PDR. Together with the Prince of Songkla University Vice President, Dr Chutamas Satasook and her colleagues from Thailand and supported by the University of Ulm, Germany, the project hosted the first international bird conference for Southeast Asia (November, 2012).

Over and above training a new cadre of young, committed, in-country taxonomists, many new discoveries have been made. On the basis of his research of flying squirrels in the markets of Lao PDR, Darwin student, Daosavanh Sanamxay, has just submitted a paper on a new species of one of the world's rarest squirrel genera, whilst new bat species have been described, or are being described, from Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. There have been taxonomic reviews of Thai squirrels and peninsular Thai-Malay murid rodents. A project on the frogs of the Tarutao Islands promises exciting results. It seems that every week, the team finds something new, something interesting, and something worthy of publication. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Darwin Initiative for making this extensive, in-country taxonomic network a reality and for giving taxonomy a chance to flourish in the Old World tropics where biodiversity is at its richest but least understood.

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Payment for environmental services scheme in Uganda improves collaboration among stakeholders and invigorates land ownership verification (18-012)

A payments for environmental services (PES) scheme in western Uganda, which compensates people for conserving and restoring chimpanzee corridor forests is managing to reach small-scale private forest owners and is overcoming barriers of informal land ownership and boundaries.

413 forest owners have worked with local leaders and project staff to map their forests. Village local leaders have supported forest owners to ensure that ownership status of their land is verified. This has been done through consultation with neighbouring community members. The project has connected people of different origins, ranging from peasants and farmers to religious leaders and politicians. This work has also helped define the size of forest areas and type of land ownership.

The PES scheme participants fall predominantly under customary landownership which means, in Uganda's case, a lack of legal documentation of ownership but one that is entrenched in traditional ownership norms.

The results of the mapping show that 54% of the Private Forest Owners (PFOs) under the scheme have forests whose size is ≤ 1.5ha and only 4% of those under the scheme have forest that are ≥ 16ha.

Forest management plans can help ensure

Tracking forest Boundaries with PFOs
Credit P Hatanga