

Project Update: June 2008

You will no doubt have been aware of the recent unrest in Pakistan and the changes in government, which as you can imagine has made it more difficult for the Cetacean Conservation Pakistan (CCP) team to carry out beach surveys in some areas of Pakistan. Despite these issues the team have managed to successfully conduct some beach surveys, although fewer than expected. However, these surveys are now ongoing throughout the year, as opposed to just being carried out between November and March (2007/2008) as detailed in the grant proposal.

Unfortunately, I did not make my scheduled trip to Pakistan over this period. This was a combination of the untimely events in Pakistan and taking a new post at the University of Durham. However, I do aim to go to Pakistan when I've completed my annual fieldwork commitments with Durham University; this is likely to be at the beginning of 2009. I appreciate that this may seem late, however the team are constantly in touch with either me or Dr. Mauvis Gore (Principal Investigator of a Darwin Initiative project grant in Pakistan and named on the proposal as an immediate contact) and the feedback we are receiving is encouraging as the team is working successfully by themselves showing that the strong element of capacity building at the beginning of this project has been successful. Dr. Gore has been to Pakistan twice this year to oversee the Darwin Initiative project and has kindly overseen and assisted the CCP team in carrying out the primary aims and objectives of the Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation (RSGNC) project. This is no doubt a contributing factor to the success of the RSGNC project, and to Dr. Gore I am most grateful.

The DNA samples are expected to be transported to the UK (subject to CITES permission) in September this year. The completion of analysis may not be until the early part of 2009, a little later than outlined in the proposal. The samples for age dynamics are still being organised for transport because Dr. Tom Jefferson's laboratory is currently subsiding into the sea and is due for demolition, as to be expected this is a great inconvenience to him and he is unlikely to be able to carry out the age dynamic analysis until early next year at the very earliest. Therefore, the need to send these to him is not urgent given the unfortunate circumstances.

Despite these minor setbacks we are encouraged by the working progress of the team and their growing ability to work by themselves. The team have collected several additional samples this year, which add to the catalogue that are now awaiting analysis. We are confident that the results from the analysis will be important to the conservation and management of cetaceans in the Pakistani region of the Arabian Sea. The findings are also expected to be published in an international journal, and this will hopefully set the foundation for continuing this research in this region as a way of gaining vital information on the populations of cetaceans inhabiting this region of the greater Indian Ocean.

Ultimately, the goals of this project are attainable as expected, however the time frame may need to be extended to the middle of 2009. I appreciate that this is around 8 months past the initial completion date; however, matters out with our control have been the primary factor in this call for a tentative extension date.

Marine Mammal Course

The first Marine Mammal Science course was held at Karachi University in January 2007 as part of the ongoing Darwin Initiative project. Lectures were given by Dr. Chris Parsons, Dr. Mauvis Gore, Ross Culloch (supported by a Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation), and Shaoib Kiani. About 50 students and professionals from different institutes attended, including representatives from the Sindh Wildlife Department, Zoological Survey Department, National Institute for Oceanography, the Centre of Excellence in Marine Biology, Zoology Department, and two University students from Hong Kong.

The course was well received and was scheduled to be run again in the summer of 2008; however, it is likely to be re-scheduled to a later date, perhaps early 2009 because of time table clashes with lectures and organisers and their fieldwork commitments.



Ross Culloch lecturing on marine mammal straddings at the first marine mammal science course held at Karachi University. © Dr. Mauvis Gore.