Madang pair off to UK

* Acting British High Commissioner Christopher Thompson (third from right) with the parataxonomists during a recent visit to the Parataxonomist Training Centre in Madang. Photo: Courtesy of British High Commission.

TWO Papua New Guinean parataxonomists based at Madang’s Parataxonomist Training Centre (PTC) have been selected to go to the United Kingdom for a study trip next month. They are Kenneth Molem and William Boen. Their trip is a lifetime which is being funded by the British government will also include short visits to the United States, the Czech Republic and Australia as part of the study tour.

Kenneth and William’s study trips will be the first two of six PNG team members that will receive training in the United Kingdom over the next three years. The training will focus on survey methods for assessment of insect biodiversity, which they will then use to map largely unknown species and richness of rainforest insects in PNG. The project team of 13 parataxonomists will carry out biodiversity surveys in six provinces. They are Madang, Enga, Gulf, Simbu, Southern Highlands and West Sepik.

Despite being school leavers with grade six, Kenneth and William were chosen for the study tour because of their already extensive experience with various research projects on insect ecology in PNG. They have been working at the Parataxonomist Training Centre in Madang for five years and have taken part in field and laboratory studies of insects with researchers from several countries.

Their study tour will include visits to the University of Sussex and the National Museum of Wales in the United Kingdom for one month. They will also make shorter visits to the USA for study with the University of Minnesota and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, to the Czech Republic to visit the Institute of Entomology in Ceske Budejovice and finally to Griffith University in Brisbane.

The visits are part of an important three-year environmental project being funded by the UK’s Darwin Initiative for the Survival of the Species to help preserve PNG’s rich biodiversity and unique environment.

Acting British High Commissioner Christopher Thompson said that he was delighted at the continuing success of the project and the planned visits.

“PNG is a country that is exceptionally rich in biodiversity but does not have the adequate resources and expertise for its conservation. Kenneth and William’s trip will allow them to collaborate with leading universities and researchers in UK and other countries on their project and also to observe other projects on insect ecology. This project is a serious investment into the preservation of forests, plants and insect life in PNG,” Mr Thompson said.

PNG contains 5-8 per cent of the world’s biodiversity, including at least 20,000 species of plants (70 per cent of them endemic) and a large but unknown number of insect species. PNG has been designated as one of the three main tropical wilderness areas of the world, as with over 34 million hectares of tropical forests, PNG ranks ninth among the most forested tropical countries. Large tracts of forest remain biologically virtually unexplored because of its inaccessibility.