

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2014)

Project Ref No	DPLUS011
Project Title	Ile Vache marine restoration project
Country(ies)	British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)
Lead Organisation	Chagos Conservation Trust
Collaborator(s)	UK FCO; The RSPB; Royal Botanic Gardens Kew; University of Warwick
Project Leader	<i>Peter Carr</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).

There has been huge progress over the last six months, with almost all of the project activities completed during this time, as per the agreed project implementation table (as updated in the submitted Annual Report in April 2014).

The pre-eradication vegetation management on Ile Vache Marine (outputs 1.3 and 1.7) was completed in June 2014, by volunteers from the British Forces based in British Indian Ocean Territory. The rat eradication exercise happened on Ile Vache Marine as planned, between the 1st and 18th August 2014 (outputs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7).

The Project Leader (Peter Carr) and the rat eradication expert contracted for this project (Grant Harper) undertook the eradication exercise and are both very satisfied with the operation. Two different types of bait were hand broadcast on different days, in case any rats resisted the first type. In addition, 150 bait boxes were left on island loaded with two further types of bait (chocolate and coconut flavoured). The baiting plan could be viewed as excessive, but as there are still more rat eradication failures on tropical islands than successes, the team wanted to do everything possible to ensure success.

Apart from the ongoing continued technical liaison between project partners (output 1.2), there are only three outputs left to be completed (3.1 – 3.3), which are related to post-eradication monitoring and the writing of a related academic paper. Please see the next section for more information related to these outstanding outputs.

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.

1. The September 2015 end date for this project has previously been agreed with a successful change request process with LTS International. Since this agreed change, the professional rat eradication expert contracted for this project (Grant Harper) has attended a specialist conference at which he was informed that the latest guidance dictates that for a successful rat eradication on a tropical island to be deemed as scientifically valid, two rat-free years must have passed after the eradication exercise. Thus, the eradication attempt on Ile Vache Marine cannot officially be said to have been successful until September 2016. Thus the final two outputs for this project (3.2 and 3.3, the writing and dissemination of an academic paper will not be possible until after

September 2016, which is beyond the three year term of this round of Darwin Plus projects. This has been discussed on the telephone with LTS International and the official project end date is to be confirmed. A change request form will be completed if required.

2. After completing the eradication exercise on Ile Vache Marine, there was still some bait left. All of the bait had been donated by two companies (Bell Labs in the USA and Animal Control Products of New Zealand). The Project Leader and the rat eradication expert had to remain on the Pacific Marlin (the BIOT Patrol Vessel) until it was scheduled to return to Diego Garcia some days later. Thus, they requested permission from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London to use the remaining bait to try and eradicate the rats on two further islands and this request was granted. The bait was hand broadcast by the Project Leader, rat eradication expert and British Forces volunteers on these tiny two-hectare islands (Sel and Jacobin Islands in the Salomon Atoll) on 16th August 2014. These islands were chosen as they are surrounded by rat infested islands. If they are reinvaded it will provide conclusive proof that a single operation would be needed to eradicate rats from the Salomons (and western Peros Banhos) islands. This is essential operational planning information.
3. In between eradications, the Project Leader and the internationally recognised rat eradication expert had time to inspect two islands (Grand Coquillage and Mapou) and confirm that contrary to the last survey's findings (from 1996), these islands are rat free. This is great news for the birds and turtles in BIOT and important information for conservation management. The Project Leader, Peter Carr's calculation is that 19 islands out of 55 are now rat-free.
4. In addition, the Project Leader and the rat eradication expert took the opportunity to discuss and scope out further operations of terrestrial conservation management in BIOT. Such plans are currently being developed with other Chagos Conservation Trust Trustees and others for great environmental benefit in future.

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 (1 and 2, Sep 2014)	No (3 and 4)
Formal change request submitted:	No (1)	N/A (2,3,4)
Received confirmation of change acceptance	No (1)	N/A (2,3,4)

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

Yes No

3b. If yes, and you wish to request a carryforward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible through the formal Change Request process. However, it would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication now of how much you expect this request might be for.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

An enormous amount has been achieved in the last reporting period under the auspices of this project. All at the Chagos Conservation Trust would like to thank Darwin Plus for the support that has made this possible.

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 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 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**