

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2008)

Project Ref. No.	15-038
Project Title	Restoring island biodiversity: The reintroduction of endemic Mauritian reptile communities
Country(ies)	United Kingdom and Mauritius
UK Organisation	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Collaborator(s)	Mauritian Wildlife Foundation and National Parks and Conservation Service
Project Leader	Dr Carl Jones
Report date	21 st October 2008
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR 3
Project website	http://www.mauritian-wildlife.org

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).

In accordance to the agreed baseline timetable, the past six months have been devoted to monitoring. Each of the translocated reptile populations on Gunners Quoin, Ile aux Aigrettes, Ile aux Fouquets and Ilot Chat have been monitored by the Mauritian project staff under the direction of Dr Cole. Data have therefore been obtained on the health, survival, dispersal, recruitment and niche utilisation of each translocated population and their impact upon the resident terrestrial vertebrate and invertebrate communities. Comparative data have also been collected from the donor populations on Flat Island, Ilot Vacoas and Round Island. From these recent trips we can demonstrate that the translocated skink populations are fit and healthy, survival remains high, that there are no major shifts in niche utilisation and recruitment is occurring. Telfair's skinks have bred successfully on Gunners Quoin, with juveniles being discovered in most locations on the island. Juvenile Telfair's skinks have also been found on Ile aux Aigrettes, although in lower numbers than on Gunners Quoin. Applied research is currently underway to improve skink productivity on Ile aux Aigrettes. The translocated Bojer's skink population is growing rapidly on Ile aux Fouquets resulting in a ten-fold increase in skink captures since the initial release. The translocated population of orange-tail skinks are already reproducing on Gunners Quoin. Night geckos can no longer be found on Ilot Chat following the invasion of a rat at the beginning of the year (see 15-038 AR2). Prior to rat invasion both night gecko populations had more than doubled and were co-existing suggesting that establishment would have occurred. The impacts of the translocations remain positive, with marked declines in some of the more persistent exotic species on Ile aux Aigrettes and further evidence of seed dispersal by the Telfair's skinks.

Intensive monitoring on the offshore islands has led to the discovery of previously undetected or recently introduced alien species, but also new distribution records for endemic invertebrates. Evidence of recent animal invasions and human related disturbances on the offshore islands has led to discussions with the host partners and governmental stakeholders in Mauritian conservation to decide on a best course of action for greater island protection. These issues will also be addressed in October during a second sensitisation workshop for the National Coast Guard and during a training course for new volunteers and individuals who could not participate in last year's ISLA course. In June an article on the unique Mauritian reptiles and the offshore islands was published on the central pages of a major National newspaper. Collaboration with the seed bank project (Ref 15-035) has continued with assistance in the field on offshore islands. Collaboration with the Rare campaign has also

developed, whereby project staff record details of island use in the southeast to assist the campaign's objective to reduce island abuse. The project has also assisted in developing endemic gecko "tattoo" transfers for Yoplait's SAFARI range of yoghurts who are promoting Mauritian conservation. The promotion was initiated in September, with advertisements on radio, television and motorway billboards.

Training remains a strong component of the project. Mauritian project staff can now conduct small island trips alone and assist the project manager in training other individuals and disseminating project information. A step-by-step guide to obtain population estimates from data collected on island trips has been created for the host partners.

The project continues to be involved with the ecotourism and education programme on Ile aux Aigrettes. A workshop was conducted on the island for students from the Nottingham Trent University, UK to learn techniques in assessing reptile fitness and to survey the impact of skinks on the introduced snail population. To enhance island visitation and dissemination of information regarding the project and Mauritian biodiversity, short interactive field workshops were conducted to create stronger links with the major regional travel and tourism group.

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.

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/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Changes to the project schedule/workplan: 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?

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 . 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**