

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2010)

Project Ref No	18018
Project Title	Enabling Montserrat to save the Critically Endangered mountain chicken
Country(ies)	Montserrat
UK Organisation	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (Durrell)
Collaborator(s)	Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Housing and Environment, Montserrat (DoE) Zoological Society of London, ZSL
Project Leader	Matthew Morton
Report date	29.10.2010
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR1
Project website	www.mountainchicken.org (about to go live)

1. Progress over the last 6 months (April – September)

This project started in July 2010 and so this report only covers the first quarter of the project.

We have successfully recruited a Project Manager from the UK who is now based in Montserrat and we have identified and a contract is being finalised for a Montserratian Primary Field Assistant. A Research Officer in the Montserrat Department of Environment has been designated (though this role has been adapted; MSc level training is not appropriate and Durrell will design an alternative programme of training). A laptop and GPS receivers have been procured and an order has been placed for the project vehicle which will arrive December 2010.

During 2009 and 2010, 250 mountain chickens have been bred at Durrell and Parken Zoo under strict quarantine conditions. These will be used for two reintroductions to Montserrat in 2011 (one with co-funding in January and one with Darwin funding later in the year) to determine factors affecting infection rate and survival of reintroduced frogs. The first quarter of this project has focussed on preparations for these reintroductions, along with establishing a decision-making framework amongst the project partners to steer these and future project work.

A total of 14 candidate release sites have been identified in the Centre Hills and a rapid assessment protocol developed to prioritize them. This assessment will be carried out in the second quarter of the project. These will be surveyed and evaluated as suitable release sites but also as a preliminary basis for monitoring prevalence of the chytrid fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (hereafter, chytrid).

A Project Steering Committee (PSC) has been formed in Montserrat and they we are running a workshop in November in order to agree research priorities over the lifetime of the project. A range of research options have been developed in outline covering optimal reintroduction protocols, chytrid fungus ecology and epidemiology, and resistance to chytrid. These will be put before the PSC and national stakeholders in November and priority areas subsequently developed in more detail with the Institute of Zoology (Zoological Society of London, ZSL) and Imperial College, London. We have also established contact with IUCN's Reintroduction Specialist Group to review and advise on our reintroduction plans.

We are reviewing the options for the execution of a public awareness survey to take place in the next quarter prior to the release of the mountain chicken. A live discussion will take place on Montserrat radio including the Project Leader and Manager, the Research Officer and the Director of the DoE following the PSC meeting to invite local opinion and questioning and to promote awareness and improve public communication channels.

A project website is under development, to be hosted by ZSL.

2. Problems or unexpected developments.

In May 2010, a reconnaissance mission was conducted into the preferred release site of the South Soufriere Hills (in Montserrat's volcanic Exclusion Zone) to determine the presence or absence of chytrid. This site had been proposed as a chytrid-free reintroduction site. Unfortunately, our reconnaissance established the presence of chytrid in tree frogs at this site. Therefore we will propose to relocate the release site to Montserrat's Centre Hills (in the Safety Zone) for ease of access and monitoring purposes.

This relocation means reintroductions will take place into an already infected area and we will have to manage these reintroductions in the face of this. Our initial reintroductions in 2011 are being designed to inform us of the effect that those factors we do have control over (age of reintroduced frogs and season) have on the survival of reintroduced frogs. The relocation of the release site has, however, enabled us to consider previously unrealistic monitoring methods. These will include radiotracking of a large sample (34) of frogs allowing us to follow individual fates in detail. This release has also been brought forward from the original proposed time of the second year of the project to the third quarter of the first year. This is due to resource capacity constraints from the European partners to continue to care for the froglets under strict quarantine conditions following two unexpected successful breeding years. The planned Year 2 release will be carried out, however, in addition to the Year 1 (2011) releases. This will be reviewed during Year 1.

The training proposed for the Research officer in the proposal has been revised as no suitable candidate for the MSc programme could be identified. Therefore we are developing the position to a level more suitable to the qualifications locally and have identified a member of the DoE staff to work on a part-time basis alongside the Project Manager with more appropriate training tailored to this person's, and the DoE's requirements, to follow next year.

Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

The identification of chytrid in the focal release site of Roaches and the implications that this may have for the original project plan, was communicated to LTS. However a revised project plan has not yet been developed and will be presented to LTS in Q2/Q3 of the project once the revised reintroduction plans have been finalised amongst the project partners

Discussed with LTS: **no/yes, in...Sept 2010 (month/yr)**

Formal change request submitted: **no/yes, in.....(month/yr)**

Received confirmation of change acceptance **no/yes in.....(month/yr)**

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

Yes No

Estimated carryforward request: £

4. 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 LTS International directly.