

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2012)

Project Ref No	19026
Project Title	Darwin Initiative Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Ascension Island
Country(ies)	Ascension Island - UK Overseas Territory (OT)
UK Organisation	University of Exeter (UoE)
Collaborator(s)	Ascension Island Government (AIG) Conservation Department Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) Queen Mary University of London (QMU) Royal Botanical Gardens, (RBG Kew) Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) University of Lund (UoL)
Project Leader	Dr. Annette C. Broderick and Prof Brendan J. Godley
Report date	31 October 2012
Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4)	HYR1
Project website	http://www.conservation-ascension-island.gov.ac/current-projects/designing-and-implementing-biodiversity-action-plan-bap-ascension-island <i>(This is a temporary page while Ascension Island Government are refurbishing their website)</i>

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).

Progress in carrying out project activities (1-4)

In the first few months of the project, we have progressed well against our schedule on all key aspects.

Output 1. Capacity Building

1.1 Appointment of Darwin Research Fellow

Dr Nicola Weber and Dr Sam Weber have been appointed as the Darwin Research Fellows (DRF), sharing the salary and responsibilities of the post so that the ambitious targets of the project can be met. Both are working as full-time members of staff in the AIG Conservation Department and this increased capacity will allow more novel research to be carried out with partner organisations in addition to identifying areas where research would be needed in the future.

1.2 Appointment of Darwin Trainees

The first traineeship will be advertised in November 2012 to commence in January 2013. Preference will be given to residents of the OTs (Ascension Island, St Helena, Falkland Islands and Tristan Da Cunha). No prior experience of conservation will be required for these posts, but priority will be given to people that express a genuine desire to work in this field. We are currently liaising with the St Helena National Trust who, as part of a separate Darwin project, offer a Diploma in Conservation to see whether a Darwin trainee exchange programme would be feasible. In this way, trainees could gain experience working on the two Islands that could potentially lead to a formal qualification.

1.3 – 1.7 Training of staff and trainees in taxonomy, population monitoring, endangered plant culture techniques and GIS, including workshops.

The DRFs visited project partners in the UK in July/ August 2012 prior to taking up the posts on Ascension to discuss priorities for the project and to begin to put together a timetable for visits to the Island and training workshops. During their visits, project partners will work extensively with Conservation Department staff but will also run a series of training workshops that will be open to conservation professionals from the other OTs and interested members of the public on Ascension.

Over the next 6 months, project partners from CEH (Nov 2012), the University of Birmingham and Army Ornithological Survey (AOS) (Nov/ Dec 2012), RBG Kew (Jan/ Feb 2013), UoE (Feb 2013), UoL (Feb/ March 2013), RSPB (Feb/ March 2013) and Dr Richard Hartnoll (March 2013) will visit Ascension to work with and to train AIG Conservation staff. Marcella Corocran from RBG Kew will lead the first formal workshop (Jan/ Feb 2013) on *in situ* and *ex situ* culture techniques for endangered plants. The programme for this workshop is currently being finalised and it is anticipated that colleagues from St Helena and the Falkland Islands will also attend, thereby fostering more cross-territory links.

Two GIS training sessions are also provisionally booked with an independent consultant, Mr Alan Mills, for April 2013 and April 2014. The first session will focus on improving AIG's existing GIS system and database so that it is fully functional and user-friendly, and all AIG Conservation staff (and also staff from other departments such as Environmental Health) will be given basic training. The second session will focus on more in-depth spatial analyses to enable the Conservation Department to do more with the database and the wealth of information that they will have available to them.

Output 2. Field Research

As this project is in its infancy, we have yet to fully develop this output. Project partners and the AIG Conservation Department have developed a timetable for visits to the Island (see above) and plans for the research work and training that will happen are currently being finalised.

An additional specialist has become involved in the project; Dr Richard Hartnoll, Professor Emeritus at the University of Liverpool. Dr Hartnoll is a leading land crab specialist and the only person to have worked extensively on the land crab, *Johngarthia lagostoma*, for which the majority of the world population is thought to occur on Ascension Island. The DRFs have prepared and submitted a grant to Flora and Fauna International's Flagship Species Fund for the purchase of 2500 PIT tags and tagging equipment that will allow the first population size estimate to be derived for this species on Ascension and a long-term monitoring programme to be established. This information will feed directly into the Species Action Plan (SAP) for *J. lagostoma*. AIG Conservation Department will hear about the outcome of the grant application before the end of the 2012 calendar year.

Immediately prior to taking up this post, the DRFs were employed on an OTEP project to assess the status of the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) on Ascension Island. The results from this earlier study will form the basis of the SAP being developed for the green turtle that will serve as a template for the future SAPs. The DRFs are currently working on this SAP and will circulate to all Darwin partners in the coming months for comments and suggestions so that a format for the future SAPs can be agreed upon.

Output 3. Awareness Raising

3.1 Active engagement between school, other community groups and biodiversity professionals

In addition to holding workshops, project partners will also visit the local school with members of the conservation team to give an assembly and/or classroom activities about their specialist biodiversity area. We will plan trips for community groups such as the Scouts and Brownies to

learn more about Ascension's biodiversity, for example bringing them to the beach to observe land crab spawning and nesting turtles, and to Green Mountain National Park to learn more about the endemic plants. The Conservation Department is frequently supported by local volunteers and we are currently putting together an email list so that we can co-ordinate activities such as beach cleans and biological surveys. The Conservation Department values their help and in keeping volunteer activities varied we aim to maintain interest within the community.

3.2 Design and population of a detailed and vibrant biodiversity website

AIG are currently refurbishing their website using a website design company in the UK. The new website will have pages for each of the departments, including Conservation. In bringing this all together, AIG aims to create a dynamic new website that provides information on all aspects of life on Ascension Island. With the funding from the Darwin Initiative the Conservation Department will get additional support from the website design company to create a vibrant website with information on Ascension's biodiversity and current projects. The BAP will go onto this website with separate pages for each SAP, so that this information is widely accessible to all interested parties. When targets are met, or information needs to be added then these pages can be easily updated. The website will also have a blog so that we can keep readers engaged and interested in the work that is being carried out

3.3 Active media campaign throughout the project

We have started the media campaign as we hope to continue with articles and interviews in both the international (UK) and local (Ascension Island) media. We have had two articles about the project in the local newspaper, *The Islander*, and the following articles resulted from a press release (http://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/featurednews/title_194691_en.html) detailing the funding award:

West Briton: *Tremough scientists head off to South Atlantic* 5th April 2012

BBC Radio Cornwall interview 14th March 2012

3.4 Production of highly accessible Darwin Newsletter

The Darwin Newsletter has been integrated into the existing AIG Conservation publication, "Conservation Quarterly", where it has been allocated a designated section with appropriate branding (Darwin logos etc.). PDFs of the newsletter can be downloaded from the internet (<http://www.conservation-ascension-island.gov.ac/conservation-quarterly>) and are also emailed to all on the AIG client database (biodiversity professionals and all other interested members of the public who have expressed an interest in receiving the publication). News of the Darwin Project has featured in the last three editions of the Conservation Quarterly:

Broderick, A. & Godley, B. (2012) New Darwin Initiative Project. *Conservation Quarterly*, 37, pp. 10.

Weber, N. & Weber, S. (2012) Implementing a Darwin Initiative Biodiversity Action Plan for Ascension Island. *Conservation Quarterly*, 38, pp. 11.

Weber, N. & Weber, S. (2012) Implementing a Darwin Initiative Biodiversity Action Plan for Ascension Island 2. *Conservation Quarterly*, 39, pp. 6-8.

Output 4. Darwin Reporting

This first half year report produced on time shows our commitment towards meeting the projects goals and making it as successful as possible.

