

Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project Half Year Report (due 31st October 2017)

Project reference	23-006
Project title	<i>Translocating conservation success and skills-exchange across four Indian Ocean countries</i>
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Seychelles, Comoros, Mauritius, Madagascar
Lead organisation	Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of Kent.
Partner(s)	Seychelles National Parks Authority, Dahari, Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Durrell Conservation Training Ltd
Project leader	Professor Jim Groombridge
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	<i>HYR2, October 2017</i>
Project website/blog/social media etc.	https://www.kent.ac.uk/sac/research/projects/jg_darwin_initiative.html Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Translocating-conservation-success-and-skills-exchange-across-the-WIO-318569868505836/

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 to end September).

The project has progressed to schedule over the past 6 months.. Progress is described below against the agreed project activities scheduled for the reporting period (April-September 2017).

Activity 0.1. The Project Steering Group consisting of a member from each project partner communicates virtually by skype and email on a regular basis to ensure smooth implementation of the project. In addition the Project Officer regularly communicates with each project partner to ensure the smooth implementation of project activities. Jamie Copsey the managing director of Durrell Conservation Training Ltd (DCT) has left DCT and been replaced David Derand during this reporting period. This is not expected to affect project implementation as (i) Jamie is still around to provide David with advice and handover and (ii) the Project Officer (PO) and David have worked together previously and already have a good working relationship and the PO is getting David up-to-speed with relevant project activities and implementation procedures.

Activity 0.2. Seychelles flycatcher research assistant Indira Gamatis was hired to schedule in April 2017. She has integrated well into the project team.

Activity 1.1. Siti Mohamed (Head of Monitoring and Evaluation at Dahari our project partner in Comores) has undertaken private English language training prior to and during her 6 ½ month Postgraduate Diploma in Endangered Species Restoration at Durrell training hub in Mauritius.

Activity 1.2. Mauritian Wildlife Foundation staff member Sion Henshaw and Dahari staff member Siti Mohamed are both progressing well and are on track to complete their Postgraduate Diploma's in Endangered Species Restoration in October 2017.

Activity 1.3. Two Seychelles nationals Allen Cedras and James Mougale from Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA) successfully completed MSc's in Conservation and Rural

Development and Conservation Biology respectively at the DICE (Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology), University of Kent, UK in September. Both obtained MSc's with MERIT and are now back working at SNPA. Alexandra Rasoamanana a Madagascar national selected by Durrell Madagascar started a taught MSc in conservation and rural development at DICE, University of Kent in September 2017 on a full project scholarship. Alexandra will undertake her MSc research project with project partner Durrell in Madagascar.

Activity 1.4. Several regional skills-exchange visits between project partners are planned to take place to schedule over the next few months.

Activity 2.1. Habitat rehabilitation is well underway and progressing to schedule on Curieuse and Félicité islands in Seychelles and at Ferney valley in Mauritius.

Activity 2.2. A survey of the remnant Seychelles paradise flycatcher (SPF) population on La Digue Island was undertaken in August-September 2017 by Indira Gamatis (project flycatcher research assistant), Rachel Bristol (PO) and Catherina Onezia (BSc student from University of Seychelles). The population was estimated 217 territories and 441 individuals. This is an increase in numbers since the last full island survey undertaken in 2007 which estimated the population at 190 territories and 380 individuals. The survey report will be submitted with the next annual report. The PO and the research assistant also censused the SPF population introduced to Denis island in 2008 and this population is still increasing. Eighty-four individuals were counted on Denis in June 2017 which is an increase of 14 birds since the last census in January 2016. This census report will be submitted with the next annual report.

Activity 2.3 and 2.4. In preparation for SPF reintroductions to Curieuse and Félicité islands a detailed feasibility assessment was undertaken and the feasibility assessment and a proposal to translocate Seychelles paradise flycatchers to Félicité and Curieuse was submitted to the Government of Seychelles to schedule in August 2017. At the end of this reporting period we are still awaiting a response from Government. However we anticipate the first reintroduction will proceed to schedule in November-December 2017.

Activity 2.5. The reintroduction of Mascarene paradise flycatchers to Ferney Valley Conservation Management Area in Mauritius continued during this reporting period as planned. A further nine individuals (mostly adults) were captured in Combo and released in Ferney Valley in September just prior to the breeding season. This brings the total number of individuals translocated to 32. The reintroduction will continue in January- March 2018 when we will translocate more independent juveniles.

Activity 3.1. Post-release monitoring of the birds reintroduced into Ferney Valley is ongoing. Some individuals were fitted with radio-transmitters at the time of release to help monitor post-release dispersal. Post-release monitoring has indicated that juveniles are less likely to disperse post release than adults: three adults are known to have returned back to Combo post release, while no juveniles has been observed back at Combo. However the transmitter batteries only last for approximately 15 days, after which time the birds have proven very difficult to locate, so only time will tell the success of the reintroduction. Greater detail will be provided in the annual report.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt 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.

The PO was scheduled to visit project partners in Madagascar and Comores in late November – early December 2017. However Madagascar is currently experiencing a Pneumonic plague (black death) outbreak. All flights from Seychelles to Madagascar have been suspended until further notice and travel restrictions put in place. The project visit was in order to (i) meet the teams at Dahari and Durrell Madagascar as we have never met in person (ii) to conduct monitoring and evaluation of project progress so far (including any issues and any ways the PO could be more helpful to these partners), (ii) to plan for implementation of remaining project activities, (iii) to visit several of their field projects (including the Madagascar pochard

captive breeding operation, the wild birds and the reintroduction site), and (iv) discuss future plans, opportunities and potential collaborations. We had planned for the PO to visit Madagascar then carry on to Comores as this is by far the most cost-effective air fares and the timing worked for both Dahari and Durrell Madagascar. However flights from Seychelles to Madagascar have been suspended until the pneumonic plague outbreak is under control, and if the PO travels to Madagascar via another (vastly more expensive) route she will be quarantined upon return to Seychelles. Durrell Madagascar has advised to postpone, as the plague situation is showing no signs of improving yet. However postponing until January-February time (rainy season) means that the PO will not be able to visit the field sites in Madagascar as they become unreachable. If we postpone until next financial year that will have project budgetary implications.

The PO is waiting to see if the plague situation will improve before making the decision to postpone. The PO could still visit Dahari Comores in November - December via a route that does not involve Madagascar, and she is discussing the best way forward with Durrell Madagascar and Dahari regarding these project visits in the light of the plague outbreak.

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: No not yet as we are still hoping the pneumonic plague outbreak in Madagascar will subside in time to undertake the project visit before the rainy season (i.e. before Christmas). Once we have decided the best way forward for Durrell and Dahari and the PO we will inform LTS if it has budgetary implications. Please consider this a heads-up on the situation.

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

As explained in section 2a above, we have a potential underspend (of well less than £5000 though). We are trying to re-schedule within this project year to avoid any budgetary implications (this is our preference). However if this is not possible due to ongoing pneumonic plague outbreak in Madagascar and restrictions on flying to and from Seychelles to Madagascar, then we will inform LTS as soon as we can and request a rebudget change request. We hope this will not be necessary, but we want to keep LTS informed of the situation and possible knock-on budgetary implications.

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. Additionally, if you were funded under R23 and asked to provide further information by your first half year report, please attach your response as a separate document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be 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 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report**