

Darwin Plus: Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund Annual Report

Important note *To be completed with reference to the Reporting Guidance Notes for Project Leaders:
it is expected that this report will be about 10 pages in length, excluding annexes*

Submission Deadline: 30 April

Darwin Plus Project Information

Project Ref Number	DPLUS035
Project Title	BVI Seabird Recovery Planning Programme
Territory(ies)	British Virgin Islands
Contract Holder Institution	University of Roehampton
Partner Institutions	Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI National Parks Trust, BVI Government Department of Fisheries and Conservation, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Grant Value	£47,907
Start/end date of project	April-2015-March 2018
Reporting period (e.g., Apr 2015-Mar 2016) and number (e.g., AR 1,2)	April 2015-March 2016, Annual report 1.
Project Leader Name	Dr Lewis Halsey
Project website/Twitter/Blog etc	www.caribbeanseabirds.org.uk
Report author(s) and date	Susan Zaluski & Louise Soanes April 2016

1. Project Overview

This project aims to provide comprehensive data on the population sizes, distribution and status of all breeding seabirds to the British Virgin Islands Government, with particular emphasis on the globally important population of roseate terns. We will develop and trial species recovery methods including prioritisation, management and restoration of key breeding sites.

2. Project Progress

2.1 Progress in carrying out project activities

Please see table below detailing project activities and progress made towards achieving them

	Activities to be undertaken	Progress in meeting project activities
Output 1		
Comprehensive Seabird Surveys of the BVI's Cays.	1.1 All cays surveyed for summer breeding species by boat and validated by land based surveys, when possible, at least once during the two year project	During June 2015 27 out of 50 cays were circumnavigated by boat and 11 of the more accessible, larger islands were surveyed by foot.
	1.2 All cays surveyed for winter/asynchronous breeding species by boat and validated by land based surveys, when possible, at least once during the two year project	Between November 2015-March 2016 20 cays were circumnavigated by boat and 10 cays were surveyed by foot for breeding seabirds
	1.3 Breeding success of roseate terns on different cays monitored	In 2015, birds were breeding in extreme locations and monitoring nest success would have threatened the safety of both birds and project field team. Armed with new knowledge from the 2015 field season, project leaders are developing a plan to monitor breeding success in 2016, possibly sourcing and using game cameras (not originally provided for in budget) with minimal disturbance to birds.
Output 2		
GPS Tracking and banding of Roseate Terns.	2.1 Foraging movements of 10-20 breeding individuals tracked using Pathtrack nano loggers	One Pathtrack GPS nanologger was attached to a breeding adult on East Seal Dog Island; however, we were unable to retrieve the device. Fear of disturbing birds and causing nest abandonment alongside the unlikely probably that we would be able to retrieve the deployed devices as well as health and safety concerns at the site caused us to abandon this activity for year one with plans to reschedule for Year 2. It was discussed at the project steering group meeting (13/10/2015) that if roseates do not breed at a more accessible site in 2016 then we may need to discuss whether alternative species (e.g. bridled terns) would provide useful data that adequately supports the project's main objectives.
	2.2 3 individuals tracked for long-term movements	Two 2-gram PTT tags were deployed on breeding roseate tern adults; These tags did collect data on local foraging, however, both devices malfunctioned after just a few weeks. These tags are newly developed and have not previously been tested but provide potential for future tracking work of small seabirds (http://arci-avianconservation.blogspot.co.za/2015/07/roseate-terns-being-tracked-with.html). The tags' manufacturers have agreed to donate additional tags to be deployed during the next breeding season.
	2.3 Banding of breeding adults at 2-3 specific colony sites.	The breeding colonies of roseate terns during the 2015 breeding season were not easily accessible or we observed that our presence within the colony caused unacceptable levels of disturbance, thus only three individuals were captured were banded.

	Activities to be undertaken	Progress in meeting project activities
Output 3		
Prioritisation of key breeding sites	3.1 Collation of previous seabird data (e.g. historic roseate tern breeding sites)	This activity was successfully completed. Previous seabird data has been provided to government agencies. A manuscript is currently in review with the Journal of Caribbean Ornithology (Annex 1).
	3.2 Trial installation of 20 nest boxes for shearwaters, tropicbirds and tern species at three sites to encourage nesting and increase nesting success, decoys, playback)	10 wooden nest boxes for roseate terns were built and placed at a former breeding site (Green Cay) and two composite nest boxes for red-billed tropicbirds were placed at two separate breeding sites. A decoy was added to one of the sites in August 2015. Nest boxes were checked in October 2015, November 2015, and March 2016, and there was no evidence of occupation. Project leaders spent the first two project quarters liaising with other conservation professionals and reviewing literature on successful projects. Involving habitat enhancement features. A decoy artist was located and has begun work on Roseate tern and tropicbird decoys for project. A RSPB Recovery Manager visited the BVI during Q1 and after site visits is researching other habitat enhancement methods, such as the clearing of vegetation from rocky outcroppings at one site. A report with recommendations is in the process of being developed.
	3.3 Identify potential threats facing each island (introduced predators, development, human disturbance)	The BVI based field team placed chew blocks at 4 breeding sites and game cameras at 3 colonies to monitor for presence of introduced predators. Interviews were conducted with marine park wardens and dive operators about site disturbance at some cays identified as breeding 'hotspots'. Project leaders also developed a feasibility study for the eradication of invasive black rats at one of the priority sites identified (The Seal Dog islands). This report is available on the project website http://www.caribbeanseabirds.org.uk/publications.html
	3.4 Run stakeholder workshop to prioritise cays for breeding seabirds	The first stakeholder workshop was held on June 16, 2015 in Road Town, Tortola facilitated by JVDPS, University of Roehampton and RSPB. This meeting focused on Government agencies and personnel from National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, BVI Conservation & Fisheries Department, The Ministry of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture were in attendance. The main purpose of the meeting was to outline the work being undertaken. It was agreed that more data from the first year of field work was needed to help inform for planning process for prioritising cays. Project leaders will host at least (2) additional workshops. Additionally, project leaders met with private islands owners/personnel and also consulted dive operators, who will all be included in prioritisation planning process. In addition, during September 2015, JVDPS, NPT and government of BVI met to discuss priority cays for rat and goat eradication for a further Darwin plus project application. This informed a follow up proposal on island restoration, which was successfully funded in March 2016 and will help to restore several seabird breeding sites in the BVI.
	3.5 Produce seabird recovery and management plan	Local project partners have begun to collate geographical and biological data on each of BVI the cays which will form the basis of this plan. Meetings between local project partners and Government are planned over the 2 nd year of the project to discuss potential actions

	Activities to be undertaken	Progress in meeting project activities
Output 4		
Improved access to data and database	4.1 Train NPT, CFD and other partner staff in seabird survey and monitoring methods	<p>The June 16th workshop in BVI introduced monitoring and survey methods for seabirds in the morning session, then during the afternoon two CFD and 3 NPT accompanied JVDPS and University of Roehampton staff to conduct seabird surveys around three of the BVI cays. One member of Government staff and one members of NPT staff accompanied JVDPS staff members on two winter seabird survey days.</p> <p>One member from JVDPS, NPT and Government worked together to complete GPS tagging of Magnificent frigatebirds on March 22nd, with JVDPS staff training NPT and Government in tagging methods.</p>
	4.2 Train CFD in the planning and implementation of seabird monitoring programmes.	Three CFD staff members attended the morning session on our first stakeholder workshop, two also stayed for the field-component. Local project partners are working with CFD to develop a long-term monitoring strategy.
	4.3 Establish a project steering group with government in key role to ensure buy in and long term support for the project.	A project steering group has been established. Its first meeting was held on the 15 th January 2015, with representatives from JVDPS, CFD, RSPB and University of Roehampton present – minutes were circulated to all project partners after the meeting. The second meeting was held on the 13 October 2015, (see minutes from meeting in Annex 3 & 4)

2.2 Project support to environmental and/or climate outcomes in the UKOT's

The project will train staff and volunteers from partner organisations in seabird tracking and survey methods and through stakeholder consultation will design and implement sustainable long-term seabird monitoring programmes within the Territory.

2.3 Progress towards project outputs

Output	Baseline	Change recorded by 2016	Source of evidence
1. Our understanding of seabird colonies and breeding success of key species is improved across the BVI and utilised to support conservation planning.	<p>The last Territory-wide seabird survey was conducted in 2004/2005;</p> <p>No comprehensive surveys of Audubon's shearwaters have ever been conducted.</p> <p>Seabird surveys and monitoring plan developed for Great Tobago as part of Darwin plus project "Using seabirds to inform Caribbean marine planning" 2014/15</p> <p>Historic seabird survey data from the 1990s indicates populations in rapid decline.</p>	<p>This objective will be fully achieved by the EOP once all data has been collected.</p> <p>A manuscript on the historic breeding records of seabird species with a focus on roseate terns is currently in review with the Journal of Caribbean Ornithology</p>	<p>Available by EOP</p> <p>Draft manuscript (Annex 1)</p>

Output	Baseline	Change recorded by 2016	Source of evidence
2. Our understanding of roseate tern foraging movements and site choice is greatly improved.	Limited banding data from the early 1990s.	This output has been limited by the inaccessible breeding sites of roseate tern in 2015. However, we intend to review all historical breeding data recorded for this species from both the British and US Virgin Islands and examine choice of breeding sites (e.g. cay size, topography, vegetation cover) and produce a manuscript detailing our findings	Available by EOP
3. BVI Seabird Management and Recovery Plan produced and proposals to update international designations made.	Limited information on key sites. (with the exception of Great Tobago which was the focus of a previous Darwin plus proposal, data from this will be incorporated into the Management and Recovery) IBA seabird information last updated in 2005.	We are continuing to collect data to support the achievement of this output	Available by EOP
4. Government and local stakeholders have access to improved seabird data and improved capacity to monitor seabirds and maintain databases.	Limited capacity within the BVI to implement sustainable seabird monitoring.	Staff from JVDPS, NPT, and Government of BVI attended stakeholder workshop on 16th th June 2015 with fourteen attendants from CFD, NPTVI, Agriculture and the Ministry of Education, and one NGO (Association of Reef Keepers).	Stakeholder workshop agenda (Annex 4)

2.4 Progress towards the project outcome

Project Outcome: *Successful species conservation and site protection requires the collection of comprehensive data on populations and the threats facing them. This project sees the collection of such data. Which will in turn allows the prioritisation of key sites for conservation management within BVI. Through the training of local staff and engagement of stakeholders this project will seek to implement long-term monitoring and assessment programmes to aid in the conservation of seabirds within the territory.*

As detailed above (section 2.1) we are on target to achieve the project outcome through the continued collection of seabird breeding data and ongoing training and engagement of local partner staff and liaison with local stakeholders.

2.5 Monitoring of risks

The three main risks identified at the start of this project included (1) adverse weather conditions affecting fieldwork; (2) tracking device failure and (3) illness/injury to key staff members. These risks still hold true, particularly that of tracking device failure which we encountered as a problem in 2015, and are currently working with the device developers to test new devices. Another identified risk since the start of the project is that of inaccessibility of some field sites, as when trying to access roseate breeding colonies it was deemed unsafe to continue working at these colonies given the terrain and the disturbance we were causing to the colony.

3. Project Stakeholders/Partners

This project is being led locally by the JVDPS in partnership with the two other main stakeholder organisations in the British Virgin Islands (NPT and CFD). As detailed above in tables 2.1 and 2.3 these major stakeholders have been involved in project implementation. A stakeholder meeting was held on the 16th June 2015 with 14 attendees (including six from NPT, four from CFD, one from Department of Agriculture, two from the Ministry of Natural Resources and one from a local conservation NGO). In addition local cay owners have been engaged from three private islands.

4. Monitoring and evaluation

The project is overseen by a Project Steering Group that comprises the principles from each project partner as well as independent experts from outside the project. The steering group has met twice during the past year. Minutes of each meeting are included in Annex 2 & 3

5. Lessons learnt

The main issue encountered during the first year of this project was the exchange rate fluctuation that occurred between the time we submitted the Darwin application and the time that funds were distributed. This affected the amount of funds that could be allocated to the projects main locally based partner (JVDPS).

The project strengths include having project partners who had already successfully completed Darwin plus project in the past, and in particular this one which followed directly on from a previous Darwin project, so established project partner relationships were already in place and this project was able to add to the data and findings from the previous Darwin project

6. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

N/A

7. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

The main difficulty encountered during implementation of year one of the project was the lack of accessibility to roseate tern breeding sites to conduct GPS tracking and banding of birds. The project steering committee have discussed options for year two and have agreed that if roseate terns again breed in inaccessible sites we will switch our tracking to a closely related species – the regionally important bridled tern. This tracking data combined with the tracking data collected from the globally important population of magnificent frigatebirds conducted in a previous Darwin plus project (and still on-going) will be useful in identifying important local foraging areas for breeding seabirds within the Territory. We also plan to collate and analyse historical breeding records of roseate terns from the British and US Virgin Islands to examine any correlations with island features (e.g. cay topography, size, vegetation etc.) to allow choice of breeding site to be determined.

8. Sustainability

The project will train staff and volunteers from partner organisations in seabird tracking and survey methods and through stakeholder consultation will design and implement sustainable long-term seabird monitoring programmes within the Territory.

JVDPS, NPT and CFD will take responsibility for the seabird monitoring as part of their on-going work programmes. The University of Roehampton will continue to provide advice and oversight to monitoring programmes as part of the University's portfolio of knowledge exchange. The RSPB is committed to support the organisational development of the UKOT partners in the long term through the work of its partner development officer, including providing financial support and assistance with fundraising.

On-going publicity throughout the project will continue to raise awareness to help ensure long-term interest and sustainability in seabird conservation. For example, In April 2016, an article on the project will appear in the Birds Caribbean Newsletter.

In addition, The Puerto-Rico based "Cay Conservation Action Team", an initiative of the Caribbean Landscape Cooperative invited the JVD Preservation Society to join the collaborative network of conservation managers and is working to support the synchronization of seabird counts across the Puerto Rican Bank. JVDPS regularly informs the network of project activities, and the group is also working to seek trans-boundary funding.

9. Darwin Identity

The following efforts have been to publicise this project and the Darwin Initiative:

- Powerpoint presentation of project at BirdsCaribbean by Susan Zaluski at BirdsCaribbean conference, Jamiaca July 2015
www.birdscaribbean.org/category/news/jamaica-meeting-2015/
- Regular tweets by University of Roehampton detailing work
- A Press release was sent at project start and is attached as Annex 5
- In March 2016, JVDPS sent releases to Caribbean biodiversity and birding listserves and received several responses from actors around the region interested in the project.
- Stewart McPherson's multi episode documentary series aired on BBC 4 and featured our conservation work at the Great Tobago Island frigatebird colony, and was then shared extensively on social media in the BVI.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1lvLLG1Csg>

10. Project Expenditure

Table 1 Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016)

Project spend (indicative) in this financial year	2015/16 D+ Grant (£)	2015/16 Total actual D+ Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs			0%	
Consultancy costs			+100%	*The RSPB have declined to claim for this amount for year one as they feel their contribution to the project was covered by the "in-kind" contribution of time that they had allocated. With approval from Darwin this has been reallocated to cover boat cost for JVDPS.
Overhead Costs			0%	
Travel and subsistence			-5.5%	£1399 was bought forward from year two of the project to cover project leads visit to BVI in Year one rather than year two of the project, this was change has been approved by Darwin plus
Operating Costs			+0.8%	
Capital items	-	-	-	
Others (Please specify)			0%	
TOTAL			-2.2	This difference is due to more being spent in year one on travel and subsistence as explained above

