



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	DPLUS 086
Project title	Future-proofing endangered species conservation in Anguilla
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Anguilla
Lead organisation	Fauna & Flora International
Partner(s)	Anguilla National Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Durrell Conservation Trust
Project leader	Dr Jenny Daltry
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	None exclusive to this project, but activities feature regularly on Anguilla National Trust's social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram).

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Output 1. Climate change-informed species action plans produced by a participatory process for Anguilla's terrestrial Endangered species that are most at risk to climate change

Activity 1.6 Write up, peer-review and publish the climate change-informed conservation action plans for the threatened reptiles and plants (UNDERWAY)

Conservation action plans for the endangered reptiles and plants were developed through a participatory process in Year 1 and are now being reviewed and finalised.

Output 2. At least six priority interventions prescribed by the action plans to increase climate change resilience are implemented, monitored, and evaluated

Activity 2.2 Establish and monitor artificial sandy nesting sites in *Iguana delicatissima* habitat on Prickly Pear East (UNDERWAY)

The project team created an artificial sandy nesting site for Lesser Antillean iguanas *Iguana delicatissima* on Prickly Pear East in July 2020. A trail camera was positioned to record activity but no nesting is likely to occur until next year (this species normally nests between April and June) . Two more sites were identified as potential artificial nesting grounds, which we plan to create in 2021.

Activity 2.3 Plant seeds and seedlings of *Guaiaecum officinale* and *Rondeletia anguillensis* in locations identified by Output 1 and provide follow up care (UNDERWAY)

In addition to the 40 *G. officinale* grown in two nurseries in Year 1, 70 seedlings were potted by Anguillan residents (including 60 children) during the ANT's *Where The Wild Things Are* summer programme. Residents took the young trees home and will plant them when they are slightly larger. Names and contact details of all participants were recorded with their permission for follow-up monitoring.

Activity 2.6 Implement biosecurity surveillance and rapid response protocols to prevent further incursions by harmful invasive alien species on priority islands for endangered species (Dog Island, Prickly Pear Cays, Little Scrub, and Sombrero) (ONGOING)

Six trained field staff and six (new) volunteers conducted biosecurity checks on the Prickly Pear Cays (27 May, 24 June, 16 July and 28 August) and Dog Island (25 May, 22 July and 29 September), including inspecting and maintaining over 200 permanent bait stations to intercept rats. Happily, no signs of invasive alien rodents or green iguanas were detected on any of the offshore islands during this period.

Activity 2.7 Translocate at least 30 *Spondylurus powelli* (and/or another target reptile species) from mainland Anguilla to reintroduce this species to Prickly Pear West in accordance with Output 1 and IUCN Reintroduction Specialist Group guidelines (UNDERWAY)

In preparation for translocation, we have drafted a plan for reintroducing Anguilla Bank skinks from the Anguilla mainland to Prickly Pear West. In addition, we completed a feasibility study and plan to translocate Little Scrub ground lizards *Pholidoscelis corax* to Prickly Pear West to save the species from the inexorable loss of habitat to sea level rise and storm damage on Little Scrub islet. The project team is now in discussions with Prickly Pear West landowners to solicit their approval for the proposed (re)introductions.

Activity 2.9 Establish and launch long term monitoring programme for the target reptile and plant species to evaluate project impacts on status and distribution (UNDERWAY)

Baseline surveys of the status and distribution of all seven target species were completed in Year 1 (Activity 1.1) and these species are now being monitored by the trained field personal (chiefly ANT staff and volunteers). Staff have continued collecting distribution and ecological data whenever they encounter the target species. In the first half of Year 2, our team recorded Anguilla bushes *Rondeletia anguillensis* in two new locations and Anguilla Bank racers *Alsophis rijgersmaei* in four.

Output 3. National capability to plan, manage, implement, and monitor climate change-informed species conservation actions is raised, supported by enhanced technical skills and greater public awareness and cooperation

Activity 3.2 Plan and undertake training and on-the-job mentoring of ANT staff and other nationals in applied conservation management (ONGOING)

Six volunteers received training on how to detect invasive alien species and to operate the permanent bait stations on offshore islands. All six participated in biosecurity checks on the Prickly Pear Cays and Dog Island (see Activity 2.6).

As in Year 1, Project Coordinator Dr Louise Soanes was based in the Anguilla National Trust (ANT) office throughout this reporting period, and continued to mentor and assist ANT staff with wildlife surveys, conservation planning and data analysis.

Activity 3.4 Develop and implement an advocacy and public awareness campaign guided by the findings of 3.3 (ONGOING)

Advocacy and public awareness activities in the first half of Year 2 used a variety of media including social network platforms, pamphlets, presentations, “pop-up” endangered species learning events, and environmental summer programmes. Notable actions include:-

- On 18 May and 16 September, ANT staff visited five primary schools, Anguilla’s secondary school, and four businesses, engaging with 877 individuals, to introduce students, teachers, and other members of the public to the Endangered Anguilla Bank racer. To support these “pop up” education events, an informative pamphlet about the snake was produced and disseminated to all participants.
- Photographs of the endangered species, accompanied with brief information, and a blog about the Critically Endangered Lesser Antillean iguanas, were shared via the ANT’s Facebook and Instagram pages (9 posts each, reaching over 17,300 individuals to date, many of them nationals).

- Between 11 and 14 August, the ANT held its annual *Where The Wild Things Are* Summer programme, attended by 52 children between the ages of 3 and 7. On 11 August, programme activities focused on the Endangered Anguilla Bank racer and included a short talk and a walk through its habitat to search for these harmless snakes. On 12 August, the children potted Endangered lignum vitae *Guaiaacum officinale* seedlings which they took home to plant in their gardens (see Activity 2.3).
- The ANT and FFI, with assistance from the University of Roehampton, designed and produced a visitor's guide on how to protect Anguilla's biodiversity. The pamphlet highlights Anguilla's endangered species and will be shared with visitors upon entry by the Immigration Department once the island re-opens to tourists later this year.
- On 22 August, the ANT presented on the project's seven focal endangered species and activities being undertaken through this project to the Toastmaster's Club (25 attendees, both online and in person).
- In addition to those counted above, more than 60 members of the public were directly engaged in this project during the reporting period. Six volunteers assisted with biosecurity and biodiversity monitoring on both the Anguilla mainland and offshore cays, and other residents helpfully reported sightings of Anguilla Bank racers, Anguilla Bank skinks and invasive alien green iguanas *Iguana iguana*. The project team followed up on these reports with site visits to collect relevant data.

Activity 3.5 Publicise and report on project progress and result through national and international media and directly to national groups, cross-territory stakeholders, international scientific community, and Executive Council (UNDERWAY)

On 10 September, ANT staff met with the newly elected Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Kyle Hodge, and apprised him of the Darwin Plus project, its purpose, value, and expected results. The urgent need to protect Anguilla's endangered species by listing them on Schedule 1 of the Biodiversity and Heritage Conservation Act was also discussed.

After the meeting, a summary report of ANT's work, including highlights from this project, was shared with the Minister along with a list of recommended amendments to the Biodiversity and Heritage Conservation Act. ANT also submitted a request for Fountain National Park to be vested to the ANT to enable it to be managed for the benefit of Anguilla's native and at-risk biodiversity (this small but important protected area is currently not managed by any agency). The project team recently discovered that Fountain National Park holds one of the largest populations (over 100 individuals) of Critically Endangered Anguilla bushes, and could potentially become a reintroduction site and sanctuary for other endangered species.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

There have been relatively few problems or unexpected developments, other the few caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (see 2b).

In July we submitted a Change Request (which was approved) to adjust the following activities due to two recent unforeseen difficulties:

- Change in the source of iguanas for Activity 2.1 due to an emerging disease risk. Among the aims of this project in Year 2 is to enhance Anguilla's depleted population of Lesser Antillean iguanas (*Iguana delicatissima*) by importing additional breeding stock from another part of the Caribbean. Our original proposal stated that at least 30 iguanas would be translocated from the nearby French island of St Barths, whose local authorities had kindly agreed to provide them. Unfortunately, the disease *Devriesea agamarum* was discovered among iguanas on St Barths in Year 1. This bacterium appears to be new in the Caribbean and causes severe skin lesions on lizards, but little is known about the disease or how to treat it. In the interests of protecting Anguilla's reptiles, we therefore cannot risk importing any

animals from St Barths at present. We have therefore begun looking into options of sourcing Lesser Antillean iguanas from another island, such as Dominica or St Eustatius, if these are still free from the disease. The population modelling we conducted in Year 1 showed that 10 unrelated individuals would be sufficient rather than 30. As agreed through the Change Request, Activity 2.1 has been rephrased to “Translocate at least 10 *Iguana delicatissima* from a healthy source population to reinforce the colony on Prickly Pear Cays, Anguilla, with the necessary CITES permits, health assessments and genetic records”. We hope to secure an agreement from the government of Dominica or St Eustatius before the end of Year 2, but, due to the change in source location and further work needed to develop holding facilities, it may be more realistic to aim to transport and release the iguanas in Year 3.

- Change to the location of artificial nesting sites for Lesser Antillean iguanas (Activity 2.2) due to Year 1 survey findings. Scheduled for Year 2, we originally proposed building artificial nest sites on mainland Anguilla. However, project surveys in Year 1 concluded that this species is effectively extinct on mainland Anguilla and there would be no point in building such sites here. We have therefore begun installing artificial nest sites on Prickly Pear East instead (see above) to benefit the reintroduced colony of iguanas on this offshore island. As per the Change Request, Activity 2.2 has been rephrased to “Establish and monitor artificial sandy nesting sites in *Iguana delicatissima* habitat on Prickly Pear East (to enhance reproductive success in accordance with Output 1)”.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Anguilla responded promptly to the Covid-19 pandemic by closing all its ports of entry from 17 March 2020 and has had only three positive cases to date (none fatal). Local personnel had to work from home for three weeks but made good use of this time for entering data, writing reports, and online teaching. The Project Coordinator, Dr Louise Soanes, as well as Project Co-leader Farah Mukhida and other ANT staff returned to office on 22 April and were able to resume fieldwork from June onwards. Although sadly none of the team members based overseas (including the Project Leader) have been able to conduct work on the ground since March, we maintained regular contact with the Anguilla-based members via Skype and Zoom. Fortunately, most of the team members live in Anguilla and were able to continue working largely as planned.

Consequently, hardly any of the scheduled activities have suffered apart from Activity 2.5 – eradicating invasive alien mice *Mus musculus* from Sombrero Island. Covid-19 travel restrictions prevented our eradication and rope access experts from the UK and New Zealand to travel to Anguilla. As it became apparent that this work could not be carried out in Year 2, we submitted a Change Request in July to postpone the eradication operation to Year 3. We hope that our lead mouse eradication expert from New Zealand, Elizabeth Bell, will be able to travel by Year 3 Q1. This postponement has zero direct impact on the Darwin Plus budget because the eradication operation is funded by other donors to FFI.

Another less significant consequence of Covid-19 and the travel restrictions during the first half of Year 1 is that the project is underspending on flights and subsistence costs for the Project Leader and other international members. Now that Anguilla requires all international visitors to undertake two weeks of quarantine on arrival, however, we anticipate that trips in 2021 will incur greater costs and thus put our budget back on track.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS:	Yes/No
Formal change request submitted:	Yes/No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/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.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

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 can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to 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: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**