



## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021)

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS086
<b>Project title</b>	Future-proofing endangered species conservation in Anguilla
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Anguilla
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Fauna & Flora International
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Anguilla National Trust, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>Project leader</b>	Olivier Raynaud
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR3
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	

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

Activity 2.3 Plant seeds and seedlings of *Guaicum officinale* and *Rondeletia anguillensis*, including those translocated from sites at high risk, in the Department of Agriculture nursery and in locations identified by Output 1 and provide follow up care as needed.

As part of Anguilla National Youth Week, four youth organisations (Anguilla National Youth Council, National Youth Ambassadors Corps, Anguilla Youth Parliament, and Albena Lake Hodge Comprehensive School Environmental Club) planted 39 lignum vitae (*G. officinale*-seedlings at two primary schools, one high school, and the University of West Indies Open Campus grounds. Four additional plants were planted in private yards by members of the Anguillian community. All newly planted seedlings have been marked by GPS for mapping and follow-up monitoring.

Activity 2.5 Eradicate invasive alien mice (*Mus musculus*) from Sombrero Island in accordance with the 2018 eradication feasibility study and operational plan to facilitate recovery and resilience of *Pholidoscelis corvinus* and other Sombrero endemics.

Between 14 June and 9 August, under the on-island leadership of John Tayton and Toby Ross (FFI), as well as Elizabeth “Biz” Bell (WMIL) who advised remotely from New Zealand, national staff and volunteers successfully removed alien mice from Sombrero Island. While it was always understood that the eradication programme would be challenging due to the remoteness of the island (lying 40 miles northwest of the Anguilla mainland) and its topography, Anguilla National Trust (ANT) staff reported it was the most difficult operation they have participated in to date. The mouse eradication involved positioning 940 temporary bait stations on a 20m x 20m grid (10m x 10m in the more vegetated part of the island). Interspersed amongst the bait stations were 1,880 monitoring points. Bait and monitoring tools (non-toxic wax, soap, chocolate-scented plastic cubes, trail cameras, mouse tracking pads and chew cards) were checked daily for signs of mice. Although baiting and monitoring took eight weeks, there were no more signs of mice after the first 22 days.

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

Seven trained field staff conducted biosecurity checks on the Prickly Pear Cays (2 June, 13 August, 21 September) and Dog Island (4 June), including inspecting and maintaining over 200 permanent bait stations to intercept rodents. Little Scrub was also inspected. No signs of invasive alien rodents or green iguanas were detected on any of these islands.

We also placed six “mouse motels” (wooden boxes designed for nesting rodents) around the Sombrero Island lighthouse ruins as part of the ongoing biosecurity monitoring programme. Should rodents reinvade, they might use these boxes as nesting sites. These boxes will be checked whenever ANT staff visit the island. ANT staff have also been trained to search for other signs of rodents including droppings and chew marks. Given the remoteness of Sombrero and the exceedingly low visitor numbers, however, the risk of re-invasion is very low.

Should signs of rodents be identified on any of the priority islands, we (FFI and ANT, with assistance if necessary from WMIL) are ready to take swift action, including distributing bait from our reserves held in Anguilla.

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

Since our last disappointing discussions with a few of the Prickly Pear landowners, during which we were unable to reach consensus about the translocation of Little Scrub ground lizards (*Pholidoscelis corax*) to Prickly Pear West, we have reinitiated discussions regarding the reintroduction of Anguilla Bank skinks (*S. powelli*) to the Prickly Pear Cays (specifically Prickly Pear East). We are still in the early stages of discussion/negotiation but we are hopeful that these conversations will lead to permission being granted before the end of this grant period.

Activity 2.8 Implement at least one additional conservation measure prescribed by the action plans (Output 1), to be discussed with and approved by Darwin

In our Change Request form dated 2 July 2021, we sought (and received) permission from LTS to spend the £3,500 budget line under Other Costs for “*Other agreed action plan implementation costs*” on a feasibility study and plan for turning Fountain Cave National Park into Anguilla’s first “mainland island” wildlife sanctuary. (A mainland island is an area enclosed by a pest-resistant barrier to create a safe space free from harmful invasive alien species). Although most of the planning will take place in the second half of Year 3, Caribbean ecologist Mr Kevel Lindsay was enlisted by FFI to survey the vegetation of Fountain Cave National Park and advise on restoring its native flora. He has already compiled a report on his findings and recommendations, which include removing invasive plant species and creating buffer zones with corridors to other natural woodlands nearby.

Kevel Lindsay also briefly visited Little Scrub, which had been badly damaged by previous storm surges. His recommendations included, *inter alia*, constructing terraces, mounds and artificial containers to limit damage from future storm surges, removing invasive plant species and establishing monitoring plots. His findings were included in his report *Suggestions for Restoring and Maintaining Plant Cover on Little Scrub Island, Anguilla and Protection of Natural Habitat at Fountain Cavern*. We have already planted native buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*) and seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*) seedlings (using planter cocoons manufactured by the LandLife Company) and prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia dillenii*) cuttings on Little Scrub Island. These plants will be monitored for survival over the next coming months. We will also establish monitoring plots and begin removing the invasive *Scaevola taccada*.

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.

Sombrero Island: On 27 and 28 June, FFI and ANT staff and volunteers assessed the endemic Sombrero ground lizard (*Pholidoscelis corvinus*) population through a mark-resight

survey. The new population estimate of  $884 \pm 103$  individuals is considerably higher than our previous estimate of only  $253 \pm 59$  individuals in 2019 (Year 1), but this is still a perilously small population with a density far lower than observed in ground lizard population in more intact Caribbean ecosystems.

We also conducted seabird surveys on Sombrero Island in July, with results analysed and presented in the report *Sombrero Island Marine Park Nature Reserve Seabird Census 2021* and we have been compiling data on terrestrial and wetland birds, with a species list and numbers being recorded on eBird. We have also mapped the extent of vegetation on the island. As part of the post-mouse eradication biodiversity monitoring programme, we will continue to monitor the recovery of lizards, birds and vegetation with annual surveys being proposed for the next five years (and every five years thereafter).

Prickly Pear East: To maximise time and cost-efficiency, surveys of Lesser Antillean iguanas (*Iguana delicatissima*) are conducted on Prickly Pear East whenever biosecurity monitoring is scheduled for the offshore cay. Happily, we have been able to confirm the reintroduced colony of iguanas is reproducing successfully, at least a dozen young and sub-adult individuals seen during this reporting period. We are currently developing more advanced monitoring protocols, drawing on methodologies applied to iguanas in St Eustatius and the Cayman Islands, to properly estimate and assess population numbers, trends, and dynamics.

### **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

Over the last six months, 18 individuals (6 ANT staff members and 12 volunteers) from Anguilla were trained in mouse eradication and monitoring protocols, with training provided by FFI. Seven ANT staff members have also been trained in vegetation restoration and monitoring protocols with training provided by Kevel Lindsay (freelance ecologist appointed by FFI) and Trenton Roach (Agriculture Unit, Department of Natural Resources).

Activity 3.4 Develop and implement an advocacy and public awareness campaign (including but not limited to, newspaper articles, press releases, presentations, CCSleuth, and social media).

With COVID-19 infections fluctuating in Anguilla and with restrictions being placed on group gathering numbers and social distancing requirements, most of our advocacy and public awareness activities have focused on using traditional and social media, including two press releases through radio and newspaper and more regular updates on the ANT's Facebook and Instagram accounts. Three Instagram posts averaged 63 likes while Facebook's combined reach for six posts was 32,233 individuals (an average reach of 5,372 individuals each).

In 2020, the ANT launched a Wildlife Friendly Certified programme for hotel and villa partners. The certification programme is a voluntary programme that recognises and promotes tourism stakeholders that have adopted wildlife-friendly practices, including those that safeguard Anguilla's endangered species. Since its initiation, two hotels have been certified: one in Year 2 of the project and one in September 2021.

More than 40 members of the public were directly engaged in this project during the reporting period. Thirty volunteers assisted with the planting of *ligum vitae* (*G. officinale*) seedlings, two volunteers assisted biosecurity and biodiversity monitoring the offshore cays, and two planted seeds and seedlings on Sombrero Island and Little Scrub. Community members continued to report sightings of the invasive *Iguana iguana*, including four requests to have the animals removed. (ANT staff were able to successfully remove one alien iguana from one person's yard while other residents were asked to contact the ANT again as soon as they observed iguanas on their premises again, so that staff can take immediate action).

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

The ministry responsible for natural resources has been holding quarterly joint meetings with FFI's local partners, the ANT and the Department of Natural Resources. Updates on all project activities are provided and discussed. Meetings were held in April, June and September. The next meeting is scheduled for November 2021.

An article entitled *The Threat of Invasive Common Green Iguanas to Native Caribbean Fauna* was published in the June 2021 issue of *inpractice*, a bulletin of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

The ANT also participated in an FFI-facilitated workshop (September 2021) with conservationists in Antigua who are currently assessing the feasibility of reintroducing native Saban black iguanas to Redonda (an island restored and protected with support from Darwin Initiative, #23-003). ANT staff were invited to share their experiences in iguana population assessments, husbandry, reintroductions and translocations.

**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 no major problems. However, we submitted a Change Request form on 2 July 2021 to highlight a couple of new developments and requested approval for our proposed solutions. This included a request for Olivier Raynaud to become Project Leader for the remainder of Year 3 because Dr Jenny Daltry has begun leading a new partnership between FFI and Re:wild to scale up fundraising and conservation action with local conservationists across the entire Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot. This role complements the Darwin project in many ways but means she is no longer able to manage the Darwin Plus grant. FFI's new Project Manager was approved and this change of personnel has had no impact on the budget or timetable of project activities.

**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.**

While all field activities continue to be implemented as scheduled, many of our public awareness-raising activities have shifted from face-to-face engagement to sharing information online. While this is not our preferred approach, it should not affect the costs, timeframe or, importantly, overall success of the project.

Another issue related to Covid-19 was highlighted in our Year 2 Annual Report and the Change Request form submitted in July: The project had a modest underspend of ~~£466~~ (specifically under Capital Costs, on building a boat) due to the pandemic's impact on supply chains. This matter was resolved, and the vessel fully paid for, but FFI's partner, Anguilla National Trust, raised concerns that food prices have increased sharply on Anguilla since 2020. This is consistent with other studies (e.g. WFO, 2020), that have reported rising food prices across the Caribbean due to the pandemic. We therefore requested permission for the balance from Year 2 to be reallocated to Subsistence in Year 3. This request was approved.

**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
As explained in Output 2) Activity 2.8), a Change Request was sent on 2 July 2021, which has been accepted by LTS.	

<p><b>3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £</p>
<p><b>3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.</b> Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.</p> <p><b>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.</b></p>
<p><b>4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</b></p>
<p>No thank you.</p>

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](mailto: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**