



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	DPLUS111
Project title	Building resilient, participatory management of marine biodiversity in hurricane-prone BVI
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	British Virgin Islands
Lead organisation	Marine Conservation Society (MCS)
Partner(s)	Association of Reef Keepers (ARK); Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DOAF), Government of the Virgin Islands; Ministry of Natural Resources, Labour and Immigration (MNRLI), Government of the Virgin Islands; University of Exeter (UE)
Project leader	<i>Peter Richardson</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.bviark.org/steel-project.html

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. Assessment of the status, nature and extent of the traditional turtle fishery:

The local project team members have been meeting remotely and now regularly meets twice monthly, and the wider team has meet twice on a quarterly basis.

The Partnership Agreement (Activity 1.1) has also been finalised and signed off by all partners.

Biological monitoring of landed turtles has not occurred during this reporting period due to the fishery being closed as of 31 March but will reopen on Dec. 1.

To date, this project has detected only a few turtles landed in BVI, with an apparent reduced demand for turtle meat resulting in few recorded landings.

Two meetings with the Anegada team and one of the fisheries officers specifically, have been held to ensure tagging protocols are being carried out correctly and to make amendments to the nesting beach protocol.

In-person community meetings and the development of a new presentation (with findings so far with the project) were undertaken to engage with communities since COVID restrictions lessened. The first meeting was held in Oct 2021 (Y2Q3).

A draft socio-economic questionnaire survey (Activity 1.6) has also been created and piloted with project staff prior to anticipated implementation in Y2Q3 as part of an MCS fieldwork trip scheduled for November 2021. This activity also benefits from the learning from project DPLUS106, where a similar survey was successfully implemented in Montserrat by MCS in August 2021.

Output 2. Development and management of national BVI Sea Turtle Database, including updated assessment of turtle populations and habitats at key index sites:

Flipper tagging have been carried out by ARK on a (monthly) basis, and data entered into the project database – in the report period a total of 22 in-water research trips were completed, with data entered into the database.

69 turtles were captured, 16 were recaptures and 53 were newly tagged. An increase in the number of Fibropapilloma cases has been observed, now with 10 confirmed cases. Two of the turtles had tumours surgically removed and released back into the wild.

Benthic monitoring was carried out at one location, Deadman’s Bay on Peter Island.

Nesting beach monitoring and recording has been carried out regularly on Anegada by the contractor throughout the period with a total of 87 nests recording during this period. An additional 5 nests have been recorded on Tortola. Quarterly aerial surveys were suspended due to logistical reasons with the supplier associated with covid-19 restrictions, but will resume in Y2Q3.

Output 3. Recommended amendments to Virgin Islands Fisheries Regulations and Endangered Animals and Plants Ordinance, and revised STRAP:

The CVM project has been delayed due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on MCS staff and their commitments to other Darwin Plus projects. The CVM filming element of the project is scheduled to start in Y2Q3 and be completed by Y2Q4. A draft CVM interview guide has been circulated to project partners for comment prior to implementation.

In addition, a preliminary list has been compiled of issues and recommendations that will be included in the revised STRAP.

Output 4. Disseminate project findings to national, regional and international audiences:

ARK has given 3 presentations about the STEEL project at a school in Virgin Gorda.

ARK has also regularly posted project updates regarding fieldwork on their Facebook site.

A front-page article in a local newspaper, about a fibropapilloma-infected turtle released after successful surgery, included information about the STEEL project and how it is being funded, see - After surgery, a turtle swims home - The BVI Beacon

A similar article on another ARK turtle rehabilitation also mentions the STEEL project and funding, see - The BVI Insider Magazine

The Royal Virgin Islands Police Force community unit was invited on a turtle-tagging trip and resulted in several of the field officers and the Police Commissioner setting up a Turtle Task Force chat group as a means of communication and enforcement response. This will provide immediate assistance for the STEEL project in the event of reporting illegal turtle fishing, reporting of injured turtles and assistance at nesting sites. Since the chat group started, several of the officers are assisting with raising funds to develop beach signage at nesting beaches.

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.

The aerial surveys, CVM work and social science surveys have been delayed because of Covid restrictions. The CVM work and social science surveys have been delayed largely due to a backlog of delayed fieldwork that the MCS team is working through, and this work is now scheduled to commence in November/December 2021. MCS will prioritise this CVM project and endeavour to hold the CVM workshops in Q1 of 2022, however this delay, and the delay to the aerial survey work may require a 3-6 month project extension to ensure that the data from these elements are fully considered in the project outputs.

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.

Covid impacts have largely resulted in delays to some elements of the work that could not be avoided, and thus we haven't been able to adapt. Meanwhile local-partner led fieldwork has commenced as planned. In-person meetings/presentations have been adapted by using online platforms but as restrictions are being lifted, in-person engagement will commence.

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: No – not yet.

Formal change request submitted:
No – we plan to submit a change request before the end of the calendar year.

Received confirmation of change acceptance na

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

Yes No 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?

None

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**