

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2023

Project reference	DPLUS121
Project title	Strengthening Biosecurity to Protect Turks & Caicos' Iguana Islands
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	TCI (Turks and Caicos Islands)
Lead partner	RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
Partner(s)	Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT); Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR); San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance (SDZWA); Department of Agriculture (DoA); Environmental Health Department (EHD); Pine Cay Homeowners Association (PCHA); Waterloo Investment Holdings Ltd (WIHL)
Project leader	Joe Jeffcoate
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	27 October, HYR4
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.instagram.com/tcnationaltrust/

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).

The project indicators are still relevant, our monitoring and evaluation systems are fit for purpose and majority of our assumptions (as noted in AR3) hold true, as we move into the eighth and final half-year period of this project.

Output 1 Improved site management of the 10-island Pine Cay complex and Big Ambergris Cay to enhance protection of endemic TCI rock iguana.

Site management has been significantly improved at Pine Cay and Half Moon Bay through removal of invasive non-native species and implementation of conservation management and the achievements are now being embedded in local operations with the National Trust. Close to 70% of Australian Pine (*Casuarina*) have now been removed from Half Moon Bay. However, progress at Little Water Cay continues to be inhibited by high staff turnover (see section 2).

Output 2 Improved biosecurity capacity within TCI partners to implement effective biosecurity management across the 10-island Pine Cay complex, Big Ambergris Cay and at a national level.

The biosecurity capacity of the partners (the "Iguana Partnership") has improved evidenced previously e.g., by the co-ordinated response to Big Ambergris Cay management looking to allow pets onto the island, the political approval of a national Biosecurity Policy and creation of enacting legislation (the latter to be finally approved, we hope by end 2023). In the past six months the partnership has supported the submission of an RSPB-led, cross-territory Darwin Strategic bid to improve biosecurity facilities and engagement with key stakeholders at national entry point at

South Dock on Providenciales. This responds to *Recommendation 1* from the Darwin Mid-term review undertaken in Feb/March 2023:

“There is need for further efforts to improve biosecurity infrastructure/enforcement at the two main maritime points of entry and inter-island barge departures on Providenciales: South Docks and Heaving Down Rock; and at Bellefield Landing, North Caicos. Greater direct engagement by the project (through DoA/EHD) with the Ports Authority is encouraged.”

A Pine Cay Environment Manager post which will have responsibility for biosecurity (due to be appointed shortly) has been developed collaboratively with partners. This role will encompass the duties of the project-funded Biosecurity Officer and embed them in Pine Cay operations. This is a key milestone which will enable sustainability of the project ensuring biosecurity responsibilities to be maintained post project end in March 2024.

Partners implemented an immediate response to a small vessel (likely source of rats) that ran aground ca. 50m off Big Ambergris Cay in April 2023. Shipwrecks like this are a high-risk source of rat incursion. In the absence of a coherent Government response the partnership implemented a biosecurity response together with local Big Ambergris Cay management. There appears (at the time of writing) to have been no rat incursion and Big Ambergris remains rat-free.

Output 3 Improved understanding of the ecological impacts of recent IAS eradication efforts, to inform effective future island restoration/ biosecurity plans in TCI and across the region

Progress against this output has exceeded expectations with all indicators achieved and, in the period covered by this report, the translocation of 74 rock iguanas to Grouper (aka Stubbs) Cay has been carried out. In addition, under license, a small trial of 10 rock iguanas were translocated to Pine Cay and will act as a precursor to a future larger scale population augmentation there. This will most likely be supported by Pine Cay post project - further showing this partner's commitment to the iguana partnership. Both populations will be closely monitored, especially given the presence of rats at these sites.

Output 4 Increased awareness of biodiversity, biosecurity and the impacts of invasive species resulting in improved/better managed tour & barge operator practices

Progress against this output has been and remains mixed (see section 2). The most significant progress over the last six months has been the delivery of Iguana training workshops (re: iguana code of conduct) with the third of the big three companies (Island Vibes Tours) who together carry around 75% of all visitors to Half Moon Bay. There are now several companies signed up to the code-of-conduct. We are preparing to complete endline survey of increased biosecurity awareness, seeking advice from RSPB social science team as previously reported.

Output 5 Project managed and monitored effectively

A partner meeting in May 2023 agreed that the partnership should continue with each agreeing that the partnership has been and continues to be a success. The meeting also allowed partners to identify the most effective actions over the remaining timeframe of the project to maximise delivery and embed what has been achieved. Despite some challenges, the partnership is stronger and is expected to continue after this project has formally ended. Partners have been working closely in development of the aforementioned cross-territory Darwin Strategic application which will strengthen national biosecurity to support the iguana partnership's objectives whilst giving opportunity to partners to share lessons learned within the region.

2. 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.

No new issues have emerged over the past six months and the agreed budget is unchanged. As we head into the final 6 months of this project there is no change to the proposed timetable of project activities.

The key issues as mentioned in AR3 that continue to exert a significant influence on the project over the past six months are:

[Redacted]

- **High staff turnover within TCNT**

Staff turnover at site level, specifically Little Water Cay has meant that practical biosecurity has not yet become embedded in the operational structure of TCNT. A new Heritage Sites Manager post (due to start November 2023) may both allow biosecurity to be embedded and solve the issue of staff retention. RSPB staff continue to support staff to implement biosecurity operations on Little Water Cay for the time being and the new Pine Cay Environment Manager Post will, in part, be supported by TCNT and thus be able to aid staff with biosecurity operations post project end.

- **The abolition of the Tourist Board and its replacement by a commercial Destination Management Organisation (DMO)**

This has restricted progress on a national accreditation scheme as the newly set up private company is not as attuned to this objective as its forerunner.

The DMO's priorities as it sets itself up do not extend to the issue of an accreditation scheme for iguana friendly tours. In addition, the Board composition of the Turks and Caicos Hotel and Tourism Association (TCHTA) has changed with the significant supporter of the subject of accreditation no longer a Board Member. We had considered that TCHTA were to be our partner in place of the Tourist Board. This therefore means the establishment of a formalised accreditation scheme is unlikely to be achieved by project end, though this does not prevent us from achieving Indicator 0.3 / project Outcome. As mentioned above, multiple tour operators, including the 'big 3' (who carry significant influence) have signed up to the iguana code of conduct and the partnership can look to formalising this scheme in future. For the remainder of the project, our focus is to target tourist industry 'members' as opposed to any governing body.

As previously reported, the numbers of Green Iguanas in TCI remain low, and resources purchased to support rapid response are currently surplus to requirements. Therefore, with agreement of Darwin, this project has provided these resources to the RSPB led DPLUS128 *Safeguarding Cayman Sister Islands from Invasive Species* project to support Green Iguana control on Cayman's Sister Islands. We are grateful to Darwin for the flexibility to make use of resources between projects with similar goals.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £ [REDACTED]

4c. 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget 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.

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**