

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS128
<b>Project title</b>	Safeguarding Cayman's Sister Island's from invasive species
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Cayman Islands
<b>Lead partner</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Cayman Islands Government, Department of Environment (DoE), Department of Agriculture (DoA), University of Aberdeen (UoA), National Trust for the Cayman Islands (NTCI)
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Joe Jeffcoate</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>27 October 2023, HYR3</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/CaymanSisterIslandsInvasiveSpecies">https://www.facebook.com/CaymanSisterIslandsInvasiveSpecies</a>

**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).**

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

The project team would like to thank the reviewer for the useful feedback from AR2 which is proving useful in guiding implementation and has been discussed at the latest steering group meeting. A response to one comment is provided in section 2.

The majority of the project indicators are appropriate, including all Outcome level indicators, and our M&E continues to be discussed at all project meetings. The partnership is strong and continues to work well and partners have agreed to sustain the partnership post-project, having submitted a Darwin+ Main proposal in October 2023 to build on this project.

**Output 1: Enhance capacity of in-Territory agencies to plan, manage, implement and monitor biosecurity/IAV control**

We have been able to identify a consultant with experience and existing contacts in the Sister Islands to come on board to support the biosecurity officer responsibilities. We are therefore confident we will be able to develop the inter-island biosecurity plan by end of project as planned. Unfortunately, although identifying this individual happened quickly, getting them established on the project has taken longer than hoped due to delays in acquiring a Cayman Islands work permit. (See Section 2).

Meanwhile, ongoing biosecurity response is implemented particularly in relation to Green Iguana removals with the Alien Species Control Officer supporting efforts on Cayman Brac and with regular monthly volunteer culls ongoing. Partners DoE and DoA are coordinating the development of biosecurity signage.

**Output 2: Enhance in-Territory community capacity to implement and monitor biosecurity and IAV control**

Community engagement is ongoing. The most significant activity has been a 2-week summer camp coordinated by the Community Engagement Officer on Cayman Brac. The camp targeted school children and involved multiple NTCl and DoE staff, discussing topics such as biosecurity and invasive species. We have also recently engaged the former RSPB Community Engagement Officer, Marique Cloete, to join the project as a remote volunteer supporting communications coordination from November 2023.

Volunteers continue to engage with the project. Green Iguana night searches have continued on Cayman Brac, coordinated by the Community Engagement Officer and Aliens Species Control Officer in support of enhanced Green Iguana control efforts. In addition, night searches on Little Cayman have taken place, one with DoE and NTCl staff during the RSPB visit in July in coordination with the Green Iguana B'gonna volunteers. Volunteers also joined the University of Aberdeen's cryptic reptile surveys on Little Cayman in June/July. Many Sister Islands residents who would likely have volunteered were off island at this time, however, volunteers made the effort to visit from Grand Cayman. We are expecting additional volunteers during the final cryptic reptile surveys in November and will put out communications shortly to this end.

**Output 3: The baseline presence of IAVs and nationally significant wildlife is better understood. Interactions and impacts of IAVs are determined and used to inform conservation management and community engagement.**

The feral cat population survey (through camera trapping) on Little Cayman has now been completed and all data analysed. The upper estimate is approx. 200 feral cats and lessons learned from the survey methodology will prove useful in future (e.g., on Cayman Brac). A repeat flashlight survey has also been completed to provide before/after estimates of feral cat abundance since significant control operations began in 2022.

Cryptic reptile survey methodology was further refined. Pit fall traps and drift fencing were used across different coastal habitat types, and repeat transect surveys and checking of refugia were completed across the Sister Islands. A number of dwarf boas were found during the transects including along the Lighthouse Trail, where boas have rarely been seen; however, limited numbers of target snake species were found in other efforts, and so further refinement of the methodology is ongoing in support of the final surveys. A first draft of the Snake Conservation Plan is completed to be finalised in 2024 following the final survey.

The latest nesting surveys of the Brown Booby colony on Cayman Brac have given the project team great hope. Since feral cat and rodent control operations started in early 2023, there has been no recorded fatalities of Brown Booby adults or chicks and a 78% fledgling success (9 eggs laid, 7 fledged successfully) along the Lighthouse Trail was observed. These control efforts began part-way through the nesting season and so we are optimistic of even greater success this nesting season (2023/2024). We are currently coordinating communications to share this story.

A draft paper is being compiled collaboratively between partners focusing on native species' responses following invasive mammal control, particularly regarding Sister Islands Rock Iguanas on Little Cayman, Brown Boobies on Cayman Brac and cryptic reptiles across both islands.

**Output 4: Reduced impact of IAVs on globally threatened Sister Islands species through effective management.**

Feral cat control on Little Cayman has continued with another 2 successful efforts in this reporting period with NTCl Grand Cayman field staff in attendance to learn from DoE. Residents have supported the control efforts and have commented that they are seeing less cats and more birds, small lizards, and hatchling iguanas. Control efforts on Cayman Brac has been ongoing since Feb 2023 at the Brown Booby colony with what appears to be positive results (see above). The Alien Species Control Officer has had significant impact on supporting invasive species (feral cat and rodent) control across both islands and the value of this position cannot be understated. This role has also been heavily involved in responding to Green Iguana sightings as well as supporting volunteer cull efforts on Cayman Brac.

The Green Iguana control plan is currently being finalised and regular DoE culls and night searches are ongoing. Expert cullers from Grand Cayman have been deployed to Little Cayman in support of enhanced control efforts.

The RSPB led DPLUS121 *Strengthening Biosecurity to Protect Turks & Caicos' Iguana Islands*. had additional resources (e.g., flashlights, nets) purchased in support of Green Iguana control that were not being used. These resources have been provided to DoE in support of Green Iguana control efforts and night searches on Cayman Brac. We are grateful to Darwin for the flexibility to make use of resources between projects with similar goals.

**Output 5: Project managed and monitored effectively**

We held a project meeting in July 2023 on Grand Cayman and discussed the project progress assessing potential challenges to implementation for the final year of the project. Directors from both DoE and NTCI were present at the meeting. We continue to monitor the project via quarterly meetings and the project lead is in regular communication with partners.

**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.**

Progress under Output 1 has been slow as we await the consultant to begin work. We were delighted that we managed to identify someone with experience in the Sister Islands, good connections and plans to return to the islands, however, we had not anticipated such delays in acquiring a work permit. We had expected that, as was previously the case, a work permit would not be required given government departments are partners to the project. It does appear this is likely to be resolved by November 2023, but this has squeezed the timelines to complete all biosecurity activities. Partners have agreed the priority is the development of the inter-island biosecurity plan and therefore other biosecurity activities (e.g., biosecurity signage) may well be delayed.

**AR3 Review comment for response in HYR: Does the project have a contingency plan if the biosecurity officer post is not filled quickly?**

Given the aim to engage stakeholders and develop the plan collaboratively, we decided it was best to have this work completed by someone on island. If this cannot be achieved, we would aim to have the contract completed remotely and review partner workplans to coordinate the necessary on-island engagement. This remains our contingency plan in the (unlikely) case that the on-island consultant cannot secure the work permit as described above.

[Redacted]

**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: ██████████

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: £

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?

N/A

**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](mailto: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**