

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 2022

Project reference	DPLUS155
Project title	Securing Montserrat's threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Montserrat
Lead partner	UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
Partner(s)	Montserrat National Trust, 664 Montserrat, Species Survival Trust
Project leader	Dr Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2022, HYR1. <i>The project began on 1st October 2021 due to delays beyond the team's control. Therefore, a full year report was submitted at the actual half year point in March 2022</i>
Project website/blog/social media	www.ukotcf.org.uk www.montserratnationaltrust.ms <i>Montserrat National Trust Facebook page</i>

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

Field-surveys on 12 sites – 'Wildlife Homes' – (ahead of target 5) done.

Basic analysis of results complete and incorporated in management plans.

Management Plans drafted for 10 sites (ahead of target 5) plus 2 advanced in preparation, all in consultation with 'Adopters'.

All Wildlife Homes (and some potential ones) visited, each on several occasions, by Project Officers.

Discussions with Adopters held at times convenient to them (usually early morning or late afternoon or weekends).

"Monty's Messengers" (environmental activity primary-school-age children's club) revived for the first time since the volcanic emergency in the years from 1997, and 4 events taken place so far.

Locally recruited intern (work-experience student) continues to work full-time (except when at lectures etc) on the project, and a number of enthusiastic teenage volunteers ("cadets") joined the project to learn alongside visiting scientists, and to help supervise the Monty's Messengers.

Higher Education Evening piloted (additional to targets) – to make best use of project personnel and others to encourage further training and development of local young persons.

7 newsletters (exceeding target 4) newsletters published in first year, in 2 series.

Chipper and tools arrived on island and now in use creating organic compost and management tasks within agreed plans.

Plant nursery operational, with 2066 native plants propagated for donation to Adopters.

Project team meetings (usually online) held initially fortnightly, reducing to monthly at the end of the reported period (1 year from project start) – still greatly exceeding the quarterly target.

Output 2

Training needs identified with local partners, and supplied to project personnel, Adopters, young people and the public, in large part by scientists volunteering their services.

Some of these also undertook insect collections and surveys, generating interest on island via radio shows and social media content.

Link up with another project “Hidden Histories” (in which UKOTCF and MNT are two of the partners) provided extra training (including personnel, Adopters and students joining in on herbarium training).

Output 3

Observation reporting system for the public set up, using iNaturalist, with training provided by visiting scientists and project personnel.

Training, kids’ club etc developments noted above.

Public event held, involving Governor’s Office, Acting Chief Minister, Environment Minister, former Environment Minister (now in Opposition), UKOTCF & MNT Council members and personnel, Adopters, visiting scientists and others.

Questionnaire on pre-project attitudes complete; analysis being undertaken (all schools on Montserrat and some other members of community were included).

Extensive radio coverage MNT Director Mrs Francis in June, UKOTCF/MNT team in July, with several others including on the MNT Heritage show (re-launched taking place every Tuesday, joint radio/ video streaming) appearances, with both local and remote personnel making several guest appearances. Intern also becoming a regular broadcaster with gardening tips.

Regularly engaging with over 3,000 persons – in from Montserrat and internationally. Top 5 social media posts during March to September were (with Post-reach in brackets): Monty’s hike (5454); Monty’s Easter fun day (4003) Invertebrate training (3187); Higher education evening (3041); Update from Belham Valley site (3006)

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.

A major challenge to the project has been the devaluation of the GBP, largely due to UK Government. Since the project was started, there has been a 20% devaluation of the £ against the local currency (Eastern Caribbean dollar), and a 25% devaluation from its long-term level. Because the UK Government does not adjust grant amounts for such reasons, this has meant that participants have had to work for a lower than agreed rate of pay if the project is to achieve its targets, and other savings are having to be made – because almost all expenditure is tied to EC\$ or US\$, which have experienced the same changes against GBP. Whilst personnel have generally tried to deal with this despite their relatively low incomes, there is no capacity to add additional tasks or cope with any further devaluations of the GBP.

We identified in earlier reports the problem of success, in that there was a much higher request for local people to become Adopters than the project’s target for this. We have continued with the strategy of managing expectations. In addition, we decided that we could make efficiency savings by developing several Wildlife Homes in parallel, rather than our original approach of one or two at a time. This is working, despite ground surveys proving very labour intensive –

but providing so much insight. This revised approach may delay progress on a few sites but will progress most much faster than target, giving a net benefit. It will also give us the potential of increasing the total number of Wildlife Homes well above target by the end of the project, to benefit from more of the local popularity of the project.

These re-adjustments (combined with the effective 20+% reduction in real value of the grant) have put great strains on the team. This was added to in that a community partner was successful in securing a UK-supported study place in the UK (applied for earlier) and was unable to undertake a number of project roles for which they were particularly suited and would have undertaken. We have managed to reallocate these tasks, using the strength in depth of our team – and further supporting our decision at the start to split the Project Officer between several part-time personnel.

Despite all these challenges and consequent overload on personnel, we have managed to cope without endangering the project. However, this running-to-stand-still (or rather to progress) has meant that we plan to take a breath to review internally the project activities overall as we approach the half-way point of the project (and the second financial-year-end report, which will be 18 months into our project). We look forward to this, and are committed to take full benefit of local enthusiasm for the project.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: ~~Yes~~/No

Formal Change Request submitted: ~~Yes~~/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance ~~Yes~~ /No

Change request reference if known:

4a. 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: £

4b. 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.

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

No

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), 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.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS-LTS International 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**