

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	DPR10S2\1007
Project title	Preserving endemic threatened wildlife populations through effective protected area management.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Grand Cayman
Lead partner	National Trust for the Cayman Islands
Partner(s)	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).
Project leader	Luke Harding
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2022; HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.nationaltrust.org.ky/our-work/conservation/ Facebook; Instagram @Blueiguanaconservation

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).

Once we received confirmation of our successful application, we carried out a series of start-up meetings with key stakeholders and partners NTCI, DoA, DoE, RSPB and other on and off-island partners. The focus of these meetings was to allow partners and stakeholders the opportunity to begin the planning process for the relevant outputs of the grant and ensure that all staff and resources are in place to effectively deliver the grant. An agreed regular meeting and reporting schedule was confirmed as part of our M&E plan.

The receipt of the Darwin Grant has been met with great enthusiasm on island and a series of press releases were made to announce the project launch. The project launch was announced across several social media platforms, via Cayman news outlets and radio interviews.

Output 1:

The recruitment process has been carried out (Output 1.1) with the jobs advertised and suitable candidates appointed for both the Field Officer and Assistant Field Officer roles.

In addition, work has begun on disease screening (Output 1.3) and is being conducted in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) on multiple target species including Hicattee, Anoles, racer snakes and blue and green iguanas. Through this screening we have been able to establish that the blue iguana is unlikely to be an asymptomatic carrier of one of the main target pathogens of concern *Helicobacter*. No trace of this focal pathogen was found in any other species except the Invasive Green Iguanas – indicating that at the very least this species could be a factor in its spread/transmission and reiterates the importance of managing this species effectively. These initial screening results build confidence in our current screening protocols and also has implications on the quarantine and releases procedures for blue iguanas going from the captive facility into the protected areas. The results of this study have been submitted as a publication on disease screening in Iguanas for *Helicobacter* and the focus will now transition to avian health screening within these PAs.

A series of meetings have taken place with RSPB (Output 1.4) regarding monitoring within the PAs in order to decide key factors such as planning an agreed methodology, frequency of monitoring and methods of collecting and reporting data.

Work has commenced on the purchase and installation of fixed plots weather stations {Output 1.5) and a site has been designated within the Salina reserve, the weather station has been installed and data is already being gathered and analysed. An area has been selected to site a weather station within the Colliers reserve and the equipment has been ordered and will be installed as soon as it is delivered.

The PA boundary for both Salina and Colliers (output 1.6) have been mapped and work has begun to ensure they are clearly marked for management and monitoring purposes.

The trail clearing process has begun (Output 1.7) with plans established for both PAs to ensure that effective trail clearance and maintenance is carried out.

Output 2:

A Template has been agreed for Management plans for Salina and Colliers reserves based on plans currently used for other sites. These plans have been tested and proved to be effective and so have served as a template/framework to start the process of developing management plans for the two protected areas that are the focus of this project. (Output 2.1)

Preparation for population monitoring has been started and camera trap grid designed (Output 2.2) and 1st set of data run. Harrisburg University have assisted with the preparation, helping to design camera grids and suitable methodology. Multiple camera distances were trialled at 40/80 and 120m and the findings used to determine best practice/methodology. These trials were carried out in the Salina reserves and so a decision has been made to make changes to the normal annual distance sampling survey schedule and carry out the surveys in Salina in March 2023 (instead of Colliers) in order to provide a direct comparison with the monitoring and data which has been established during this trial work with Harrisburg University.

Output 3:

Meetings and consultation has been held with an Bio-security expert team from Australia who are already involved with our key partners the DoE looking at the impact and management of feral cat populations on islands. The meetings have assisted with the development of a trapping schedule and protocol for both PAs. (Output 3.1). Different trap designs are currently being trailed within the Queen Elizabeth II Botanical Park, looking at aspects of design such as single or double doors systems and their effectiveness.

A series of meeting have also been carried out with both the DoA/DoE to establish partnerships and clear responsibility for invasive species management across the island and to create effective working protocols within current animal law and legislation.

A volunteer programme (Output 3.5) has been established and is rapidly expanding and with 27 people completing training since May. This is a truly encouraging start to this initiative as the target for the end of the programme was 30 volunteers and we are already only 3 guardians off this target within the first half year. Training is being developed to include key areas of our work such as PA management.

We have successfully launched the mobile application E-guana,(Output 3.6) with over 400 downloads and over 79 submissions already. During the development phase discussions were held with our partners DoA/DoE regarding the suggestion by the Darwin Advisory Plus Group that we should piggyback the app onto an existing DoE app, but it was felt that a single more basic app would be a more appropriate interface for users to quickly and easily use and would promote greater engagement and therefore, support better data outcomes. The DoA and DoE have been very supportive of this initiative and have shared details and promoted its use on their website and social media channels and their staff are using it frequently and it is being shared with the community and staff on the Sister Islands creating wider usage and data collection.

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.

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands (NTCI) changed Executive Director in late September 2022 – Ms. Annick Jackman left and was replaced by former NTCI Director Mr Frank Roulstone. This change is not expected to cause any notable delays or problems. A change request has been submitted for this change.

Internal changes with banking and accounting processes have caused delays in our ability to be able to order equipment required for the project, however, these have all been addressed and ordering is now able to take place.

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: No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance 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?

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**