

## 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>	DPLUS178
<b>Project title</b>	Inhabited Territory restoration: completing preparations for a rodent-free Pitcairn Islands
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie & Oeno Islands
<b>Lead partner</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	The Pitcairn Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources Division
<b>Project leader</b>	Andy Schofield
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR2 (Oct 2023)
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	N/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.

Activities are only listed below if there has been an update in the last six months:

### **Output 1**

#### **1.1 Community Impact Assessments written for Pitcairn Island community.**

Following a visit to Pitcairn in January 2023 by the community engagement lead, feedback was collated to produce a consultation document which covered the key issues/concerns raised by the community. This document was structured as follows:

- Concern raised by community member(s)
- Summary of community engagement lead's initial response
- Our understanding of the response(s) to issue or mitigation offered
- Going forward with consultation

This document was shared during the recent October visit and was well received by the community. It will be updated as the consultation process progresses, and the latest version will be submitted alongside the annual report.

#### **1.2 RSPB engagement lead and an eradication operation expert complete initial face-to-face consultations with Island Council & community.**

**1.5 In-depth face-to-face follow-up consultations undertaken by RSPB community engagement lead.**

A follow-up trip to Pitcairn took place in October 2023 which was a first chance for the eradication operation expert (EOE) to visit. RSPB staff and EOE were able to meet with Council (19<sup>th</sup>) and hosted a community meeting (22<sup>nd</sup>), as well as speaking with households individually during the stay. A three-day chartered trip to Henderson also provided Pitkerners a rare chance to visit the island as well as having an opportunity to discuss operational logistics further.

Broadly similar issues were raised during the trip but having plenty of opportunity to question the EOE, as well as read the consultation document, went some way to alleviating community concerns. Conversations had more of a focus on the logistics of an operation and individuals were able to ask about their specific situation e.g. plans for their livestock/pets, water supply, fishing etc. The EOE raised the need to produce bespoke property management plans for each household, working closely with each Pitkerner to do what is best for them whilst ensuring the best chance of success for the operation; this idea was received positively by the community.

**Output 2**

**2.1 Mapping of coconuts on Henderson is undertaken and ground-truthed.**

A three-day visit to Henderson Island took place during the October trip. It was possible to land on both North and West Beach which hold the main coconut groves on the island. Photographic comparisons with previous expeditions show that the density of the trees in the groves has noticeably increased with saplings taking over previously cleared areas. Trees planted in the island's interior could not be located using a drone which may suggest that the spread is less than that in the beach back area, but further surveys will be required to inform the operation.

**2.3 Photographic survey of domestic animal pens and waste management facilities on Pitcairn undertaken.**

Photographs of waste management facilities as well as domestic animal pens were taken during the recent trip to Pitcairn. The waste management facilities are very well organised with recycling sorted into separate bins and non-recyclable waste burnt monthly. Animal pens vary in condition across the island, with some simply requiring shade netting around the edge and on the roof to keep livestock safe during an operation, with others requiring more work. Should the operation be supported by the community and proceed, animal pens will be included in each household's property management plan.

**2.4 All built infrastructure and natural feature issues re-assessed as part of an updated final feasibility study.**

The October visit provided the EOE an opportunity to assess natural features across both islands and some of the built infrastructure on Pitcairn. A trip report will be written and submitted alongside the annual report. The information gathered will be vital for producing the updated feasibility study i.e., the fact that Henderson would require a minimum of two helicopters because of its size and would almost certainly be a boat-based operation as there doesn't appear to be a suitable bait-loading area on land.

**Output 3**

**3.1 Surveys of Pitcairn Reed Warblers provide a population estimate and feeding habit assessment, with the results written up for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.**

As of 18 November 2023, the manuscript entitled 'Population status of the endemic Pitcairn Reed Warbler on Pitcairn Island, South Pacific' has been accepted for publication in the journal, Bird Conservation International. The paper is likely to be published online in 2024 but it might not be until 2025 that it appears in a journal issue.

**3.2 Pitcairn Reed Warbler feeding trials with non-toxic blue bait and rat carcasses conducted and used to inform an updated risk assessment.**

During the October visit, Pitcairn Reed Warbler (PRW) feeding trials were continued in sites used for bait availability assessment. These sites were hectare plots, hand-baited at rates likely to be used during an operation. During last year's trials, bait was placed at a much greater density near to birds to see if there was any interaction. Forcing such a situation was seen as not especially helpful for informing a potential avicultural strategy.

37 observations were carried out during the October trip at a baiting rate of 40kg/ha which equates to two pellets every m<sup>2</sup>; none of these birds appeared to show any interest in the bait. PRWs were regularly seen feeding on insects during observations which may be a potential pathway for the birds to receive secondary poisoning from insects which have consumed bait, but the risk appears negligible. Nevertheless, further research will be conducted before captive holding is either ruled in or out.

**3.5 Surveys of Henderson Rail provide a population status estimate and are used to inform the writing of an updated Henderson avicultural strategy.**

Due to limited time on Henderson, and the fact that trails on the island were completely overgrown, it was not possible to carry out a Henderson Rail population assessment. It is all but confirmed that there would have to be captive holding of rails during a Henderson operation but without an estimated population, it is impossible to judge how many rails would need to be taken into captivity, and the feasibility of doing this. The trails need to be reopened at the next available opportunity to enable a count to take place; this work is planned as part of the wider Pitcairn/Henderson programme and Darwin will be notified of the progress.

**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.**

As already mentioned, a planned rail assessment could not take place this year due to limited time on Henderson and because survey trails were well overgrown. This work is critical for operational planning, but logistically more challenging than expected. Should sufficient matched funding be available, this work will take place next year and Darwin will be notified of progress. Funding allocated to an RSPB Conservation Scientist and Pitcairn Aviculturist Assistants has therefore not been required this year but will be critical to ensure this work can take place next year, and so we will be submitting a change request for this next month.

**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)?**

