



Department
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for International
Development



Darwin Plus: Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund Annual Report

Important note *To be completed with reference to the Reporting Guidance Notes for Project Leaders:
it is expected that this report will be about 10 pages in length, excluding annexes*

Submission Deadline: 30 April

Darwin Plus Project Information

Project Ref Number	DPLUS028
Project Title	Assessing the conservation status of the Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross
Territory(ies)	Tristan da Cunha
Contract Holder Institution	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Partner Institutions	Tristan Conservation Department
Grant Value	
Start/end date of project	1 April 2014 – 31 March 2016
Reporting period (e.g., Apr 2015-Mar 2016) and number (e.g., AR 1,2)	April 2014 – March 2015 Annual Report 1. (AR1)
Project Leader	Claire Stringer (April 2014 – January 2015) and Andy Schofield (January 2015 – March 2015). (RSPB)
Project website	N/A
Report author and date	Andy Schofield and Dr Alex Bond (RSPB) – 30 th April 2015

1. Project Overview

The project's overview was to obtain robust population estimates of Atlantic yellow-nosed Albatross (AYNA) on the UK Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha (TDC) and to build local capacity and knowledge with the Tristan Conservation Department (TCD) and to provide standardised monitoring data and population trends of breeding AYNA.

By project end we will provide a global population estimate for the AYNA and have established a robust TDC population trend monitoring programme.

Tristan da Cunha (TDC) is thought to hold around two-thirds of the global population of the Endangered AYNA but there has been no population census since 1974 (estimate of 10,000-30,000 pairs). In April 2013, the Advisory Committee of the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) identified the need to secure a robust estimate of this species population as soon as possible to allow a global population estimate to be made and clarify the species' conservation status.

At the same time, the Tristan Conservation Department (TCD) are keen to expand their existing AYNA monitoring programme to allow ongoing assessment of population trends, which combined with the full census, would allow the conservation community to observe whether existing conservation measures are achieving conservation targets for this species, and whether other actions are needed to prevent population declines.

This project will carry out a population census of AYNA on TDC and generate a global population estimate. We will also support TCD to establish a TDC population trend monitoring programme which will provide ongoing assessments of population trends.

Our goals were and still remain to produce the first accurate global estimate for Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross (AYNA), and to design a monitoring scheme suitable for Tristan da Cunha. AYNA is endemic to the Tristan group, and is subject to mortality in fisheries bycatch throughout the South Atlantic Ocean. The lack of a current population estimate has been highlighted by the Agreement of the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), and the Tristan Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

Tristan da Cunha is the world's most remote inhabited island, located almost half-way between South America and South Africa at 37.6° South. Gough Island lies some 350 km to the south-east of Tristan at approximately 40° South (see map attached below).



2. Project Progress

2.1 Progress in carrying out project activities

The project started on time and all planning was completed by RSPB in conjunction with the Tristan da Cunha Conservation Department (TCD). RSPB staff (Alex Bond and Greg McClelland from the Centre for Conservation Science) were deployed to the island as planned in September for the forthcoming summer field season. However due to the poor weather conditions at key periods the planned aerial census of albatross nests on Tristan was not able to take place. This meant it was not possible to produce the following outputs listed below:

Output 1

1.1 – Aerial photography survey to map AYNA nesting colonies on TDC (and possibly Nightingale and Inaccessible Island if time allows.)

Poor and unsafe flying weather during our short window for helicopter flights (5 days) meant we could not complete this activity. This will now be completed in Q2 and Q3 period of year 2 in 2015.

1.2 – Analyse aerial photographs using established methods to census TDC AYNA population.

Because flights were not conducted, we could not analyse photographs. We have, however, piloted the techniques using photographs obtained in September 2014 at Gough Island, and will use this knowledge and experience to improve our methods for the aerial photographs gathered in Q2 and Q3 in 2015.

1.3 – Ground truth population estimates at predetermined sample areas.

Again, because flights were not conducted in Q2 and Q3 in 2014, this activity could not be completed. Reconnaissance of suitably representative plots was conducted in Q3, which will better prepare us for the survey in 2015.

1.4 – Population estimate analysis and report produced and published.

This will be completed following the Q2 and Q3 survey in year 2 (2015).

Output 2

2.1 – Review existing monitoring scheme and sites to identify improvements to allow scheme to deliver standardised quality population trend data.

We visited the three main monitoring sites on Tristan and Nightingale Islands, and have collated existing data from 2004-2014. The low density of nests on Tristan makes robust monitoring at this site very difficult, but established plots on Nightingale are sufficient for long-term monitoring. Reconnaissance in 2014, and additional information obtained in 2015 will indicate the best location for suitable monitoring on Tristan. A significant amount of time has been given to the review of the existing monitoring scheme, especially with regards to data handling and storage. TCD have had in depth training and presentations to build their capacity and knowledge within this area.

2.2 – Review aerial data to see if other sites could be suitable for long term monitoring.

This will be conducted following aerial surveys in 2015. Ground-based reconnaissance has been conducted in some areas, and additional areas are planned for 2015.

2.3 – Recommend modifications to current monitoring scheme to match needs and capacity.

We have made several recommendations to improve monitoring in existing plots at Tristan and Nightingale. These include the use of uniquely-marked nests, better delimitation of plot boundaries, and improved data management. This will continue in 2015.

2.4 – TDC staff trained to deliver modified monitoring scheme (GPS handling, data recording, survey methods.)

TDC staff have been rigorously trained in the recommended changes to monitoring protocols that have been made to date, and additional training will continue to occur throughout year 2, (2015-16).

2.5 – AYNA chicks ringed on Tristan da Cunha and Nightingale Island to support monitoring.

Chicks were successfully ringed at two plots on Tristan, and on Nightingale in March-April 2015.

2.2 Project support to environmental and/or climate outcomes in the UKOT's

This project addresses two activities in the Tristan da Cunha Biodiversity Action Plan:

- 6.4.3 - breeding Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross will be monitored annually on Nightingale and Tristan
- 6.4.5 - A census of Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross on Tristan will be carried out

The outcomes were also highlighted as a significant data gap by the ACAP Population and Conservation Status Working Group at the 8th Advisory Committee meeting in Uruguay (Sept 2014; AC8 Doc 11, Table 6: "(vi) Survey Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross at Tristan Island."). Tristan da Cunha is a signatory to ACAP.

We successfully monitored breeding success at Tristan and Nightingale (BAP 6.4.3), and have trialled methods for aerial surveys at Gough Island, which can be used on Tristan in 2015.

Tristan Conservation Department staff were provided with training by highly skilled and experienced seabird biologists in all aspects of effective and sustainable monitoring methods, including seabird ringing, nest monitoring, and data management, and will implement monitoring of AYNA using the recommendations produced and experience gained during Year 1 of the project (2014-15) in year 2 of the project in (2015-16).

2.3 Progress towards project outputs

Output 1: Obtain the first global population estimate for Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross.

Minimal progress in Year 1 owing to our inability to obtain helicopter time. Surveys on Gough Island (funded separately) were completed, and techniques for analysing photos are being trialled. We will be able to achieve this objective by the close of the project if weather conditions are favourable in 2015.

Output 2: Establish a TDC AYNA population trend monitoring scheme that is realistic for the available capacity and gives reliable population trend data

We have reviewed the current protocols on Tristan and Nightingale, and made recommendations for improving the methods on Nightingale (see above). The ability to monitor population trends on Tristan is considerably more challenging owing to the birds' lower nesting density. See above for details of reconnaissance in 2014, and plans for 2015. We will be able to achieve this objective by the close of the project, as our extensive on-the-ground reconnaissance in 2014 (and planned in 2015) will provide sufficient information, even if no helicopter flights are possible in 2015.

2.4 Progress towards the project outcome

The project outcomes (a global population estimate for AYNA), and building capacity for monitoring on Tristan) can and will still be achieved if suitable weather conditions allow helicopter time / flights in 2015. If we are unable to conduct flights in 2015, we will attempt to secure additional funding for flights in 2016. We have made significant steps towards improving capacity within TCD, including workshops on data management, in-the-field-training, and plans for TCD to lead the new monitoring scheme in 2015-16.

2.5 Monitoring of risks

The identified risks are still present. Weather could, again, cancel flights in 2015. This remains a Medium risk with High impact.

3. Project Stakeholders

Our work has involved the Tristan Government and Tristan Conservation Department from the beginning. Their support and involvement is a fundamental aspect of this project. TCD staff worked alongside RSPB staff in 2014, and will do so again in 2015. Daily discussions of activity took place between RSPB and TCD staff, and TCD staff provided much-needed information on the location of monitoring sites, and summaries of previous data.

4. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation has been underpinned by detailed work plans prepared by project partners collaboratively. This is particularly important before planning the field work and aerial surveys to ensure we adequately plan for logistics, weather and the remoteness of the work. This will be done by the TCD and the RSPB research biologist.

The RSPB has established an internal working group to review project progress, comprised of members from the Global Seabird Programme (Cleo Small) who leads on our ACAP engagement; Conservation Science (Juliet Vickery and Alex Bond); and Overseas Territories Unit (Clare Stringer and Andy Schofield). Clare Stringer maintained close contact with Trevor Glass on TDC to ensure Tristan involvement and this was then taken over by Andy Schofield in the latter part of the 2015 project year –we have had a robust working relationship with TDC Conservation Department for the last six years.

We have also shared experiences on techniques through the JNCC's ACAP officer (Anne Saunders), BAS (British Antarctic Survey) as well as with colleagues in the Falkland Islands (Falklands Conservation and New Island Conservation Trust as well as the Falkland Islands Government).

We have developed a Logical Framework for the project and will monitor progress against indicators included at outcome and output level.

5. Lessons learnt

We will look for more automated methods for counting birds from photographs. Based on our experience at Gough in 2014, our current manual method is inefficient and labour-intensive. If repeating this project, we would allow for a greater chance for weather interruptions of helicopter flights. Similar projects in the future will be designed on a longer time-scale to provide a greater chance for success given the narrow window during which we can undertake flights (approximately 5 days/year while the SA *Agulhas II* is present at Tristan).

6. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

N/a.

This is the first annual report to be submitted for this project.

7. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

The major risk and significant difficulty encountered in year 1 for this project, is the availability of suitable weather windows whilst the team and the helicopter are based on Island as mentioned in previous sections.

8. Sustainability

The AYNA project has a high profile within the Island community on Tristan da Cunha and events have been held and well attended. The purpose of these events was to inform and enthuse Islanders about AYNA and stress the importance of the Tristan island group for this species.

The RSPB team have worked closely with the Tristan Conservation Department (TCD) and there is a strong commitment from both RSPB and TDC to continuing AYNA monitoring and further research after the end of the Darwin project in 2016.

Local TCD staff have had excellent training in all aspects of monitoring breeding albatrosses as both part of the Darwin project and local capacity building within TCD.

This will allow a more sustainable programme of monitoring to be carried on in to the future and also allow a more robust data set to be gathered over a longer period of time which will in turn present a much more rounded view on longer term datasets for AYNA trends on the Tristan group of islands.

9. Darwin Identity

The Darwin Initiative logo has been used at local events held on Tristan (for both of the currently running projects on Tristan), and in the profile on the tristandc.com website.

The Darwin Initiative support is a separate project with a clear identity on Tristan. There is a good understanding of Darwin on Tristan, although there are only one or two government departments with a clear understanding of the programme. The population of Tristan is very small (less than 300 people) and there have already been two successful projects leading to increased capacity on Tristan for conservation work. In fact, the pool of workers available for conservation work is still referred to as “the Darwin team” and one of the boats used for conservation work is known as the “Darwin Express”.

Due to the extremely limited internet access on Tristan, it is difficult to download large files like the Darwin newsletter, so it would be good if hard copies could be delivered to key community members (e.g. Island Council, Heads of Fisheries and Conservation).

10. Project Expenditure

As per the RSPB's email to Eilidh Young on 20th April 2015, the project leader on Tristan visited Nightingale Island and due to bad weather conditions, has not been able to return as planned. As he is responsible for compiling the financial report, this section has been omitted. The claim form in May is still predicted to be submitted in time with all the necessary details. We take this opportunity to thank Darwin for their understanding in this matter and apologise for the delay.

Please expand and complete Table 1.

Table 1 Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015)

Project spend (indicative) in this financial year	2014/15 Grant (£)	2014/15 Total actual Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs				
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs				
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital items				
Others (Please specify)				
TOTAL				

Highlight any agreed changes to the budget and **fully** explain any variation in expenditure where this is +/- 10% of the budget. Have these changes been discussed with and approved by Darwin?

11. **OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes**

I agree for the Darwin Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here)

Checklist for submission

	Check
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk putting the project number in the Subject line.	
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please discuss with Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line.	
Have you included means of verification? You need not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	
Do you have hard copies of material you want to submit with the report? If so, please make this clear in the covering email and ensure all material is marked with the project number.	
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	