



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office



Department  
for International  
Development



## Darwin Plus: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2015)

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| <b>Project Ref No</b>                      | DPLUS031  |
| <b>Project Title</b>                       | South Georgia Habitat Restoration Project: Final Phase  |
| <b>Country(ies)</b>                        | South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands  |
| <b>Lead Organisation</b>                   | South Georgia Heritage Trust (SGHT)   |
| <b>Partner(s)</b>                          | Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds |
| <b>Project Leader</b>                      | Professor Anthony Martin  |
| <b>Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)</b> | HY1 October 2015  |
| <b>Project website</b>                     | <a href="http://www.sght.org">www.sght.org</a>  |

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up) (max 500 words).**

Progress on the main element of the project has been excellent. Output 1 (bait spreading in rodent infested areas of South Georgia) was accomplished successfully, safely and on time. We had a competent and experienced team of people to do the work, and were assisted by the equally skilful and experienced officers and crew of the depot-laying vessel, the RRS *Ernest Shackleton*, chartered from the British Antarctic Survey. The area of land treated, 360 km<sup>2</sup>, was nearly three times the size of largest island cleared of rodents to date globally (Macquarie), but still confidently manageable in the context of what had been achieved on South Georgia in 2013. The whole of South Georgia has now been treated for rodents.

Output 2 - the deployment and checking of rodent devices in the newly-treated areas, was not accomplished because of the relatively short time between completing baiting and leaving the island (a result of unavoidable weather delays and damage sustained by one of our helicopters, see section 2a below). It was possible that some rodents would not have yet succumbed to the bait in that period, so positive results could have been misleading. This area will be checked in the coming season.

During much of the baiting period, the South Georgia Government had two people covering the baited areas searching for, recording and burying carcasses of birds that may have succumbed to the bait, directly or indirectly (Output 3). They finished their work, and developed a report accordingly. In summary, mortality was much as expected, with Antarctic Skua hardest hit in terms of numbers, though fewer ducks were lost than anticipated. Experience from Phases 1 and 2 of the project demonstrated that skua numbers should recover to normal within two or three years.

Output 4 was not accomplished because the RSPB was unable to organise the necessary logistics, and indeed has now withdrawn from the project. This is unfortunate, but in fact the recovery of the flagship endemic South Georgia Pipit is so obvious that sophisticated sampling methodology is not necessary. Whereas pipits have been essentially absent from the main island in the breeding season, and were sparse even during post-migratory dispersal, they are now encountered routinely and commonly. The transformation is extraordinary.

Output 5, the dissemination of results and outreach, has been substantially accomplished. The Project Director completed his operational report in May 2015, and a press conference on the project was held in London on 25 June. This generated coverage on BBC Breakfast TV, BBC Radio Scotland, in the national print media (including the Times, the Independent and the Observer), regional newspapers, several magazines and online. The PD has so far lectured on the project in Gibraltar, Paris, London (twice) and Cambridge since fieldwork was completed.

**2a. 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 (max 300 words).**

The major problem encountered so far was the damage to, and subsequent operational loss of, one of our helicopters, due to a severe storm. The aircraft was parked at the time, so there was no risk to life, but at a stroke this event removed our contingency capacity. However, both of the remaining helicopters functioned well throughout, and the extra pilot then available allowed us to fly long hours when weather permitted, so the job was completed on schedule.

The lesson learned or, rather, confirmed, was that contingency capacity must always be built in to an operation, especially one with as many risk factors as this one. This project was hugely challenging due to the size of the task, the length of the supply line, the notoriously poor weather on South Georgia and our dependence on complex machinery (helicopters) that were not designed to work in the sub-Antarctic, let alone for months at a time and without a hangar to protect them. Losing the use of a helicopter, for one of a number of reasons, was always a real possibility. Having a third aircraft on hand was ostensibly an expensive measure (hundreds of thousands of pounds) but, in hindsight, cheap. Without it, the project would have been defeated before it really began, because we would then have been down to just a single aircraft after one was damaged, and flying operations would have been stopped due to the lack of SAR capacity.

Our inability to achieve Output 2, the deployment and checking of detection devices in the newly-baited area, was frustrating but not of great importance. This can be done at a later stage, and indeed is scheduled for the coming summer season.

**2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with LTS: Yes/No

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance: Yes/No

**3a. 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: £

**3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully as it is unlikely that any requests to carry forward funds will be approved this year.** 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 and would like to talk to someone about the options available this year, please indicate below when you think you might be in a position to do this and what the reasons might be:

**4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

None

**If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review 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 LTS International through a Change Request.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at [Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk](mailto:Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk) . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g., Subject: DPLUSXXX Darwin Half Year Report**