



Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project Half Year Report

Project reference	DPLUS055
Project title	Saving the Iguana Islands of Turks and Caicos
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Turks and Caicos Islands
Lead organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Partner(s)	The Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR), the Department of Agriculture, Ambergris Facilities Ltd and the Institute of Conservation Research San Diego Zoo Global (SDZ)
Project leader	<i>Sarah Havery</i>
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media etc.	http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/b/biodiversity/archive/2018/10/10/saving-the-iguana-islands-of-turks-and-caicos.aspx

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) 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 to end September).

1. Baseline data established and short-term trends identified for Little Water Cay and Big Ambergris Cay for iguanas, boas, humans and predators

Iguanas: Transect surveys of iguanas were conducted on Little Water Cay (LWC, n=8) and Big Ambergris Cay (BAC, n=8) in March/April for comparison with previous transect data conducted on these cays in March 2017. No significant differences were observed in the relative abundance, sex ratio, or age structure of iguana populations on either island. However, on BAC we also collect data on road mortality, and have found that the number of road killed iguanas doubled in 2018 compared to 2017. We attribute this to the resurgence of construction on BAC beginning in late 2017 resulting in an influx of construction workers and associated vehicles and machinery. In August, iguana work on BAC concentrated on establishing several new study sites to expand our investigation of human interaction on iguana biology and will be reported on in AR2. Similarly, on LWC we concentrated on expanding our sampling of iguanas at the high human impact site.

Boas: In March, we captured 144 boas on BAC. Based on our 11-year capture-mark-recapture data set, we estimate the population size of boas on BAC to be 4,765 individuals (95% confidence interval 3,804–6,094). In August, with additional funds provided by the University of North Carolina and the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research, we expanded our study of TCI boas by initiating a radio-telemetry project on BAC to learn more about the movement and behaviour and these nocturnal and cryptic snakes, which will be reported on in AR2.

2. Biosecurity/ IAV plans developed, approved and implemented for Little Water Cay and Big Ambergris Cay

2.1. The biosecurity plan for Little Water Cay (LWC) is currently being drafted and will be reported on in AR2. In October biosecurity trials have been initiated on LWC, led by TCNT, to

determine whether rats prefer wooden bait stations over plastic stations, and ground-based over raised stations. The results will inform the biosecurity plan and will be vital for keeping LWC rodent-free following the concurrent eradication project in 2019.

2.3. The second draft of the Biosecurity Plan for Big Ambergris Cay (BAC) has been completed, but input from partners in TCI is still needed, including the staff on BAC.

Additional co-funding of USD \$27,100 has been provided to the project from Waterloo Investments Holdings Ltd, the company that owns BAC. These funds are being used to complete a rodent assessment of BAC, to (1) determine the current status of the rodent invasion; (2) train BAC staff in biosecurity techniques and implement key parts of the biosecurity plan and (3) complete a feasibility study for eradication of rats and mice from BAC. This involves a team of four experienced contractors and BAC staff to intensively monitor the island for rodents for four weeks.

2.4. Consultation with BAC staff on the plan and the results of the rodent survey will take place in November 2018.

3. Restoration/protection strategy for offshore islands following 'rapid survey' for reptiles and rodents.

3.1. Surveys of 11 offshore cays were completed in March and reported on in AR1. The fact that rats are present on Donna, Mangrove, Fort George, and Bird Cay and feral cats are present on Fort George raised concerns for the longer-term biosecurity of the privately-funded eradication of rats and feral cats from Pine, Water and Little Water Cay, which are near these offshore cays. The eradication is due to start April 2019.

3.2. As a result of our findings, SDZG and RSPB collaborated to find an additional USD \$160,700 to extend the eradication project to include eradicating rats from Donna, Mangrove, Fort George, Grouper (which is connected to Fort George), Lizard and Bird Cay. This funding is being provided by RSPB, SDZG, Fort Worth Zoo and the International Iguana Foundation and the work will be carried out by specialists from New Zealand, Wildlife Management International Ltd. The eradication will form part of the IUCN conservation management plan.

3.3. SDZG plan to use the concurrent eradication project as an opportunity to measure the impact of rodents on iguanas.

4. Capacity and efficacy of personnel with the project team (in TCI and the UK) to implement essential monitoring and biosecurity activities to address invasive vertebrates increased

4.1. RSPB have been working with TCNT to ensure that there is staff capacity to lead the project activities. Staffing levels are almost back to normal so project activities have recommenced on LWC in October with training from RSPB.

TCNT staff worked alongside SDZG on Half Moon Bay in August completing iguana surveys and learning from the team. TCNT staff also showed SDZG the public awareness mascot 'Rocky' and shared the experiences from the EU BEST funded public awareness campaign.

BAC staff are currently working alongside the rodent assessment team and learning and implementing biosecurity methods and techniques on BAC.

A boat engine has been purchased by TCNT under the project and will be used to transport staff to and from LWC.

5. Project managed and monitored effectively

5.1. A project monitoring plan is now in place with partner comments incorporated and has been agreed by all partners. The plan is being updated quarterly.

5.2. A project steering group meeting was held on 2 July, where the Darwin Annual Report Review was discussed and actions and priorities set to address the feedback received, particularly on how to progress with the rodent incursion on BAC.

A trip was planned and delivered led by SDZG in August and a trip has been planned and delivered by RSPB in October. Schedules were planned and agreed in advance by all project partners.

5.3. Technical and financial reporting from TCNT has improved in Q1 of YR2, with reporting received within 2 weeks of the deadline. Technical and financial reporting from SDZG has not improved in Q1 and Q2, but have committed to improving for Q3. RSPB have discussed the internal challenges of accessing the funds in TCI with DoA, and as a result, a contract amendment made so that RSPB can make payments to allow DoA to deliver the public awareness activities.

5.5. A project team meeting is planned on 31 October in TCI where the team will complete the mid-term evaluation and the results will be shown in the second year Annual Report.

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.

Wilhelmina Kissoonsingh left the DoA in September. Dexter Gordon has taken over as acting Director. Fortunately, Dexter has already been involved with the project and attended the biosecurity training in March and attended the project partners meeting in October. Therefore, DoA remain active and engaged with the project.

The results of the BAC rodent assessment, due to finish mid-November, will be used to identify the correct approach for the project in terms of the Indicator 'BAC remains predator free'. An appropriate change request to Darwin will follow once the partners have all agreed on the approach following the results of the assessment.

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: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance N/A

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. 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 rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary.

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

N/A

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. Additionally, if you were funded under R24 and asked to provide further information by your first half year report, please attach your response as a separate 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 . The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report**