



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	DPLUS087
Project title	Transitioning the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme to Sustain Conservation Success
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Grand Cayman
Lead organisation	National Trust for the Cayman Islands
Partner(s)	Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), San Diego Zoo (SDZ), Queen Elizabeth II Botanical Park (QEIBP)
Project leader	Luke Harding
Report date and number	31 October 2020; HYR2
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).

Output 1: Work continues on all aspects of the project and a first draft of the Strategic Species Action Plan 2020-2025 has now been produced and delivered to the Executive Director for the NTCI by the SSAP Secretariat. Specific chapters of this draft document have been distributed to SSAP participants for their specialist input [Output 1.3]. Meetings have been held on-island with key stakeholders to seek their input towards progressing the SSAP. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused disruption to all aspects of the project and was instrumental in the delay of many aspects of the project such as the planned SSAP meeting. The pandemic meant a cessation of several months to the project building work and resulted in a postponement of the planned 2020 SSAP meeting. In response to this crisis we have changed the SSAP meeting to an on-island meeting which is now scheduled for the end of the year and invitations have been sent out to applicable personnel [Output 1.4]. International partners will attend the meeting via video conferencing and will still be able to contribute to the final draft of the SSAP. The SSAP 2020-2025 document remains on target to be published in early 2021.

The annual veterinary health checks [Output 1.4] in partnership with WCS/Bronx Zoo have been cancelled for 2020 due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, however, there is now an agreement to carry out the health checks with an on-island team in 2020. The health checks will be carried out by the BIC team, assisted by on-island veterinary staff. We have increased our on-island capacity for veterinary work by inviting a veterinarian to assist the programme by sitting on the BIC Steering Committee.

Output 2: Construction work saw some disruption due to the Covid-19 crisis but, despite this, the BIC team have been successful in their endeavours and have built housing for 50 subadults. These new housing units have been fitted with moveable dividers which give greater flexibility and, as a result, we now have the ability to house up to 100 individuals, if required. In addition, the work carried out means that we have been able to increase square footage in the enclosures for every iguana at the facility, which is expected to improve animal welfare, growth rates and body condition [Output 2.1 & 2.2].

The biosecurity improvements on the 776.95m perimeter fence [Output 2.3] have continued and quarter-inch fine mesh has been erected on the outside faces of two fence lines, so far. In addition,

mesh and flashing have been erected on the fence line. Observations of green iguana hatchlings making futile attempts to enter through the new fencing have occurred on numerous occasions, demonstrating that once completed, the fence will significantly decrease opportunities for invasive alien species to enter the facility. The fencing is a key aspect of the biosecurity measures for the facility, but other measures are also employed to maintain heightened security. Daily patrols of the perimeter fence are ongoing in order to inspect all areas of the facility for wear and tear and any ingress by animals. Threats from damage and predation by feral/stray dogs and cats is another area of concern and traps are employed to manage invasive mammals within the park.

Output 3: The final nutrition report has now been completed and this will serve as a baseline to provide science-led nutritional standards at the BIC facility. Since April, BIC has increased diet variation from offering 32 different food plant species to 42 species. This increase has been assisted by seasonal weather changes, with plentiful diversity of plants around the island. The cultivation plots at the facility [Output 3.3.] have been raised and expanded along three fence lines. We brought in several mounds of soil and multiple plants species have been added to the plots - the seasonal increase in rainfall has created an explosion of supplementary food plants available at the facility, including a variety of seasonal flowers and fruits. Several additional food plant species have sprouted within the new enclosures, increasing our overall cultivated plant species. The cultivation plots have been especially advantageous and well utilised as there was an increased volume of iguanas at the facility due to our successful breeding season this year.

Partnerships have been maintained with Fosters Food Fair and local food growers [Output 3.4] and this has further supplemented both the amount and variety of food which can be offered to the blue iguanas at the facility. These links are proving useful in gaining more food sources and dietary variation for the iguana and also creates a deeper understanding of the project and greater connectivity with the wider community. BIC continues its Blue Iguana Champion scheme to recognise community members that have donated food plants, fruits and even construction materials to assist the project.

The new fridge/freezer has been installed and has enabled fresher storage of seasonal fruits and flowers from sites around the island, which has been particularly useful when feeding the hatchlings. The hybrid vehicle continues to be used for BIC-related activities, including daily food collection. New nearby food collection sites have been identified which has reduced staff time [Output 3.1], though food collection sites are decreasing due to new housing developments around island since Covid-19 lockdown restrictions were lifted. BIC has introduced several feeds throughout the day, replicating wild feeding behaviour.

Historically, annual health checks have recorded overall health, body condition [Output 3.5] and growth rate within the captive population, and these have been carried out in partnership by WCS/Bronx Zoo. Improvements through increasing diet diversification and volume of food offered may have supported hypothesised links with improved reproductive success, as 2020 has been BIC's most successful breeding year in a decade with over 90 hatchlings from targeted captive pairings.

Output 4: Planning for next year's field surveys continues and a planning meeting took place with the DoE to discuss logistics for the March 2021 surveys. International field survey candidates have been identified and provisionally selected [Output 4.1], however international travel will depend on Covid-19 restrictions at the time of the surveys. Alternatively, an on-island survey team has also been identified, comprising of BIC and DoE staff and volunteers, in the event that international volunteers may not be allowed tourist visitor entry into Grand Cayman by March. Trail clearance in the Salina Reserve has begun and final preparation [Output 4.2], including marking out transects, will be completed by the end of January.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific)

delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Hurricane season has seen several major storms in Grand Cayman this year, with unusually high levels of rain which has led to slower productivity on the construction at the BIC facility. These seasonal weather patterns and subsequent disruptions are partly to be expected during the stormy season, but some years are worse for storms reaching land and so it is hard to accurately predict these weather patterns, the severity and, therefore, the subsequent disruption to the project work.

The biosecurity improvements have been progressing well but there was a small delay in completing alterations to the fencing, due to complications with the binding wire used to attach the aluminium flashing to the fence - this corroded quickly and an alternative wire had to be sourced. The fence construction is now on track to be completed in November 2020.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has delayed the SSAP meeting from September until the end of November 2020 [this has been addressed in a change request and permission was granted by Darwin Initiative in April]. Overseas partners are currently unable to travel and their input will be managed remotely via email and conferencing calls which will allow off-island partners to still participate. Over the past few months, Covid-19 has caused a slower than usual response from partners for their input due to some partners being furloughed and others on restricted work therefore hampering their availability.

The building work at the facility was scheduled to be completed before the start of rainy season but was delayed by the period of time that the island was on a full Covid-19 lockdown and so work had to be stopped and carried out later than planned. As the Covid-19 restrictions were lifted on Grand Cayman, construction recommenced but was affected due to the lack of availability of skilled contractors, heavy machinery and a national cement shortage. Other building materials were also in short supply as imports of materials and deliveries suffer on-going severe delays due to Covid-19.

The annual veterinary assessments are being carried out by the BIC team and on-island veterinary specialists as Covid-19 restrictions have prevented the WCS/Bronx Zoo team joining the team on-island this year; Dr. Paul Calle will still be available to offer advice and assistance with the health screening via videoconferencing.

Planning for the 2021 surveys has been complicated by the current pandemic and in response to this we have identified two possible teams one comprising of a mix of on-island and international personnel and another team recruited wholly from on-island staff and volunteers. This strategy is designed to obviate some of the possible difficulties which may arise due to the pandemic as participation of the international component of the survey team will be dependent on further Covid-19 restrictions which may continue to hamper travel and would prevent staff gaining the necessary permission and permits to enter Grand Cayman.

2c. 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

Formal change request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

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. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

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

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 DO NOT send these in the same email.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to 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: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**