



Darwin Initiative Main/Post/D+ Project Half Year Report (due 31st October 2019)

Project Ref No	DPLUS099
Project Title	Fragmented cloud forest habitat rehabilitation through innovative invasive plant management
Country(ies)/Territory(ies)	St. Helena, South Atlantic Ocean
Lead Organisation	Environment Natural Resources & Planning Directorate, St Helena Government
Partner(s)	...
Project Leader	Derek Henry
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	31/10/10 HYR1
Project website	

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).

Since 1st April 2019, the project has progressed, with some delays experienced due to staff recruitment and retention. A Project Manager was recruited for a period of 26 weeks (from 1st April – 20th September), during which time, job profiles were devised and recruitment completed for: a Restoration Specialist (commencement 22nd July on a three day per week basis), a Senior Cloud Forest Technician (commencement 1st April) and three Cloud Forest Technicians (2x commenced 6th June and 1x commenced 24th June). Subsequently, one of the Cloud Forest Technicians' resigned (12th August) however, this post was quickly filled and a new recruit commenced on 27th August. Since the resignation of the Project Manager, a recurrent staff member (Terrestrial Conservation Officer Habitats) has taken on Project Management Responsibilities.

Some of the key activities listed against the project outputs over the past six months include:

1. Strengthened local capacity to better protect priority habitat fragments against invasive plants
 - Although recruitment has been delayed, practical training was provided to the Cloud Forest Technicians on the use of best practice invasive clearance techniques as per the clearance protocols from DPLUS029. Training is being delivered by the Restoration Specialist and Senior Cloud Forest Technician, both with knowledge and skills from previous project and recurrent work. The two Technicians that commenced on the 6th June have passed their three month probation period.
 - During bad weather conditions project staff worked at the Peaks Endemic Plant Nursery. Training was provided by nursery staff (from the Terrestrial Conservation recurrent team) on the following areas; growing medium preparation, the collection of genetic material, propagation methods, picking out, potting on, watering and seedling care. Nursery training will be continued throughout the project, as different techniques are utilised depending on the seasonality of species.
2. Improved knowledge of applied ecology of vegetation succession enabling better scheduling of invasive alien plant control
 - Under DPLUS029 120 important habitat fragments were identified. Since the start of the project 23 fragments were visited, access routes maintained/defined and invasive impacts assessed. Preliminary clearance works also commenced at fragments with significant invasive impacts. Preliminary works involved invasive clearance of a 1-2m perimeter around

fragment margins with some supplementary planting of endemic species to encourage natural expansion and regeneration.

- Four potential corridors to link habitat fragments have been identified to date. The clearance of one of the corridors has been led by the recurrent team and has involved the clearance of invasives (mainly flax) along the central ridge with supplementary planting to support the few natural endemics within the area. Once established, the endemic habitat in this corridor will support the development of a closed canopy over the ridge top footpath. This will allow connection of fauna on the North and South side of the ridge. Works to identify additional corridors is still to be undertaken and will incorporate the use of maps produced under DPLUS029 along with surveys for feasibility.
- The methodology for corridor assessment and monitoring has been developed by the Restoration Specialist and will be trialled in the field shortly. The methodology for habitat assessments from the DPLUS029 i.e. invertebrate niches and tree surveys will be utilised to monitor progress against the DPLUS029 baseline data.
- Applied training on the implementation of techniques outlined in the invasive clearance protocol will continue across project sites. The training includes how to evaluate and if necessary modify techniques in order to establish suitability, within a range of ecological communities.
- Due to the resignation of the Project Manager no drone surveys have been undertaken since the start of the project. However, project staff have been and will continue to capture photographs of works on the ground. Although this provides evidence of works it is not effective in areas with established canopy cover. An agreement with local aviation authorities to allow drone usage and training for team members is to be undertaken.

3. Knowledge and awareness of invasive plant management strategies and alternative approaches amongst key stakeholders, demonstrating sustainability through the betterment of protected areas with decreasing intervention over time, lowering the cost and effort to manage in the long run

- Editors from the local newspaper 'The Sentinel' visited the Project Team on 24th September "to meet the people who work so hard to preserve the endemic habitat". An article regarding the visit was published on 3rd October 2019. See http://www.sams.sh/images/sentinel/Sentinel_191003.pdf for more details.
- Project and recurrent staff attended the bi-annual careers fair on 9th October to raise awareness of the works being undertaken on the peaks and the benefits to the community. The event also provided staff with the chance to engage with students and adults, share experiences and discuss opportunities for individuals to contribute towards works e.g. work experience/apprenticeships. Following the careers fair an invitation has been extended to Elected Officials and the Chief Secretary to undertake an exposure visit of the Peaks.

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.

The resignation of the Project Manager (20th September 2019) has resulted in the loss of ecological skills, knowledge and a background understanding of the project. Skills and knowledge of ecological practises and management has been retained through the recruitment of the Senior Cloud Forest Technician (from the recurrent team) and the Restoration Specialist (who has previous experience from DPLUS029); both have been coordinating the practical field work. The Project Management responsibilities have been absorbed under a recurrent SHG post by the Terrestrial Conservation Officer. The responsible officer is still getting up to speed with the project and the requirements for Darwin Reporting.

There have also been two further resignations from the Cloud Forest Technicians; the first commenced on 6th June and resigned on 12th August and the second commenced on 24th June and will be resigning on the 31st October. Fortunately the first loss was replaced rapidly commencing on 27th August. Recruitment for the second resignation is currently in progress. The delay experienced in the establishment of a functioning field team has resulted in training having to be delivered multiple times and the Technicians at various competency levels depending on when recruitment and training had commenced. To strengthen the field team's practical capacity further recruitment is currently in progress for two additional Cloud Forest Technicians.

Following the additional recruitment the Project Team will consist of:

Project Manager (recurrent SHG officer)	Part-time
Restoration Specialist	Part-time (3 days per week)
Senior Cloud Forest Technician	Full-time
Cloud Forest Technicians (x5)	Full-time

Weather conditions over the past month have limited field work at some fragments, where slippery ground conditions result in difficulty accessing and working safely on steep uneven terrain. To mitigate against this project staff worked at the plant Nursery and undertook invasive maintenance at sites where access and work was still possible. Work at the plant nursery involved: contributing to the construction of the new shade house (which will enable an increased production of endemic plants for restoration planting), training in endemic plant propagation, seedling care, pest control and invasive composting. Despite the recent wet conditions, total rainfall over the winter months has been extremely low. The whole island is experiencing water shortage which is likely to be exacerbated as we progress into the usually drier summer months. For the project, the future impacts of continued dry weather will be on nursery production for restoration planting and on establishment success in the field.

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	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 A change request will be submitted reflecting changes.

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.

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

None at present.

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 projectschedule/work plan 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**