

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects

Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	DPLUS105
Project title	Building capacity to make Montserrat a mountain chicken refuge
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Montserrat
Lead partner	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Partner(s)	Montserrat National Trust, Montserrat Department of Environment, Montserrat Ministry of Education Youth Affairs and Sports, Wild Dominique, ZSL, Norden's Ark, Chester Zoo & Bristol Zoo
Project leader	<i>Mike Hudson</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>Mountain Chicken Recovery Programme</i> <i>Mountain Chicken Recovery Programme (@ReWildCaribbean) / Twitter</i> <i>Mountain Chicken Recovery Programme (facebook.com)</i> <i>Mountain Chicken Recovery Programme (Instagram)</i>

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).

Please see photos on final page.

Output 1: Enhanced capacity exists within Montserrat DoE to implement effective conservation actions through newly recruited and highly trained Project Officers.

Training Needs Assessment (TNA) carried out in person on island during Q1 Y3, with Dr Timothy Wright, Durrell's Conservation Training Manager, working with DoE and MCRP staff alike (1.1).

Project officer Kaysie Ryan completed the DESMAN (Durrell's Endangered Species Management Course) between February-April 2022, at the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust on the island of Jersey. This 12-week course is designed to equip conservation professionals with a complete range of skills to maximise their effectiveness at managing or participating in conservation projects. The latest theory and practice of endangered species recovery will be learnt, and a wide variety of skills in facilitation, management and leadership will be gained.

Tavis Weekes, senior project officer is currently attending the three-month Durrell Endangered Species Management course (DESMAN) in Jersey, where he will achieve a postgraduate certificate, significantly increasing his skillset. Both individuals fulfilling criteria of Durrell's competency framework (1.4, 1.5).

Training of both full-time project officers and part-time interns in collaboration with the Department of Environment and others on island has seen various workshops attended including Drone training, Water Quality training, Herbarium training and QGIS training.

The team continued their collaboration with fellow Darwin Initiative, Exeter University and Exeter Marine Conservation, with project officers training with research officer Jack Wiggins (1.5).

Interisland exchange took place during Q1, Y3, with members of the Dominican Forestry and Parks Division and Wild Dominique travelling to Montserrat from Dominica, working alongside the team in all aspects of the programme, sharing valuable knowledge and aiding cross capacity building. Monthly regional meetings continue to be held for information exchange, programme progression and opportunities, enhancing staff motivation (1.6).

Output 2: Mountain chicken population established and surviving in a semi-wild managed environment with signs of breeding and carrying capacity of enclosures is increased to 50.

This year saw an outbreak of Chytridiomycosis through May/June, detected via PCR analysis, leading to five frogs being infected. Increased observation and health checks were implemented but no intervention was deemed necessary. Swabs taken during July onward have since come back negative. Data analysis is to be completed but no mortality from chytridiomycosis (2.1, 2.3).

Swabs continue to be collected monthly (bi-monthly during chytrid outbreak) and sent to ZSL for real-time PCR analysis (2.2).

Breeding attempts continue through this season, with 29 nests during Q1, Q2 of Y3 (2.4).

Output 3: 5-year conservation management plan for mountain chickens in Montserrat is created based on the results of the trials in the semi-wild enclosure.

Management plan workshop is scheduled for Q3 on Montserrat, with attendees due from Dominica and the UK. Results from trials will be presented during this (3.1).

Funding opportunities are being actively sought. Durrell will be holding a lecture/fundraising evening at ZSL during Q3 with the mountain chicken being one of the species fundraised for (3.4).

Output 4: Increased public engagement with nature in Montserrat using the mountain chicken as an ambassador through outreach events and schools engagement.

Covid19 outbreak on island at the end of April caused all schools to close with the outbreak resulting in 20% of the island in quarantine. No curfews, but events minimized and restrictions in place. Activities have been undertaken at St. Augustine Primary school, with lessons taught to all grades from 1 through 6. MCRP attended MNT's Monty's Messengers easter bank holiday event. The tent, flags, table clothes were all used, with concrete frog painting throughout the day and 2 concrete frog treasure hunts. Food webs were taught to the children attending the Davey Hill kids easter club. Activities were carried out at Lookout Primary Schools summer school and nature connection surveys completed throughout all schools. Activities will continue through Q3/4 of Y3 (4.2).

During the summer, two month-long internships were fulfilled and complete, facilitated by MoEYAS. One individual from the Montserrat secondary school and one from the Montserrat College. Project coordinator also attended Montserrat National Trust's Higher Education evening with a Mountain Chicken stall set up to talk about our programme with attendees (4.3).

To celebrate Mountain Chicken Day, a hike was organised in collaboration with the Montserrat National Trusts Monty's Messengers children's club, open to all, hiking the Mountain Chicken Dry Waterfall Trail. The hike was a tremendous success with over 50 people attending, of those over 30 children. The trail featured nature connection signage designed and erected by the team, painted statue frogs to find along the trail and mountain chicken audio to accompany. A raffle was held for the children participating, featuring an array of environmental gifts from books and frog hats to bat detectors and t-shirts (4.4).

The team have also featured on ZJB radio within the last 6 months, being interviewed on the progress of the project, history, facts about the frogs and the signage that has been put out on hiking trails across island. Average audience of these interviews is thought to be 5000 for a peak show, with an additional 2000-5000 when including website replays accessed by diaspora and non-residents (4.5).

The programme now has 2,005 follows across our three social media channels with average monthly unique engagements since April 2022 reaching 1,602, exceeding our target of 1,000 (4.6). A monthly average reach of 10,800 has also been seen.

18 additional signs have been designed by the team for three further trails on island and funded by the Tourism divisions EU grant. Tourism has now purchased and taken delivery of these, and the team has now rolled these out during Q2, Y3 (4.7).

2. 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.

Covid-19 – First major outbreak on island at the end of April beginning of May 2022 with 20% of the population in quarantine. Schools closed, events restricted, and staffing issues encountered. But no overall impact on project delivery across the year.

This year, five frogs have tested positive for infection with *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (the causative agent of chytridiomycosis) for up to a month each before clearing the infection naturally, with no chemical treatment intervention from us, a first for a captive-bred mountain chicken (they would normally progress to mortality). This might be indicative of success of our habitat manipulations in allowing the frogs to self-treat with high temperatures, or adaptive immunity in response to previous infection. We need to collect more data next year to understand better what the reason for this very positive result and so will be seeking funding to extend the programme by another year. This means we would like to delay output 2.7 (publication of a paper on the projects), until after this additional year, and beyond the end of the Darwin Plus funded project.

With breeding attempts successfully evidencing the frogs have adapted to their environment, fertility levels sit at those seen in captivity (7-8%), and this year so far, we have no successfully morphed tadpoles.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: Yes/**No**

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/**No**

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/**No**

Change request reference if known:

4a. 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: £

4b. 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget 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.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response 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 NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. Please DO NOT send these in the same email.**