

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

Project reference	DPLUS107
Project title	Community supported multispecies invasive vertebrate control on St Helena
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha
Lead organisation	Saint Helena National Trust
Partner(s)	St Helena Government Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Directorate (ENRP), including Agriculture and Natural Resource Division (ANRD) and Environmental Management Division (EMD) INBIMA Invasive Bird management The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Project leader	Michael Jervois (Director)
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/SHnationaltrust

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).

The project started on 1st June due to the late announcement which we received in May2020 due to the delay caused by the coronavirus pandemic, therefore the project has only been in action for a total of 5 months. During this time we have made the following progress:

1.1 Identify and survey myna roosts and undertake counts

A brief introduction to myna roosts was undertaken in the first week of the project. Project staff visited a known Myna bird roosting site in Jamestown where we observed their behaviours and GPS marked the main roost. On the search for other roosts (unknown and known) the team visited the St. Pauls area but were unsuccessful, however, feeding behaviours and feeding locations were observed at Francis Plain. The myna roosts that were identified in 2009 (Feeare Chris J, 2009) have been located and mapped. However, we have yet to observe if they are all still active roosting sites. We have appealed to the public for information on any other roost sites that they may be aware of.

1.4 Survey for rabbits, building on previous work

Rabbit surveys have begun, adopting and improving on those methods from a previous rabbit survey (Rabbit on St Helena: Assessment and advice on the rabbit situation on St Helena: Elizabeth Bell and Dave Boyle; Wildlife Management International Limited; 2009)

We have produced a survey methodology which has been reviewed by Steffan Oppel, a steering group member and scientist at RSPB. He has carried out work with birds on St. Helena in the past. This will be circulated to all steering group member for discussion and approval.

Sample plots have been mapped and the first rounds of “day observation” surveys have been

undertaken on all chosen sites across the island. "Day observation" surveys are simply general observations of a site that are then converted to a general score from 0-9. This score is then used to estimate a population count. This is the same method as was used in 2009. The second round of day observation surveys and the first round of pellet counts have been completed. Using the same formula that was used in 2009, a preliminary base population estimate of around 50,000 has been achieved. However, this number is pre-emptive, as two more rounds of pellet counting need to be completed. In 2009 the estimated rabbit population was around 30,000.

1.5 Deploy tracking tunnels and camera traps at the 3 project specified locations (Deadwood, Man and Horse and Millennium Forest) for detecting rats, cats and rabbits

The data from the set tracking tunnels have been collated and digitized. Our methodologies are undergoing review from the steering group and are currently being updated. These deployments were simply tests of our tracking tunnel methods and capabilities. As a result of the steering group's input our methodologies have been updated to be more detailed and more robust. One significant change we have made is to the locations of our tunnel transects, which will now transverse entire sites at regular intervals.

4 camera traps were deployed at Man and Horse on 20/10/2020. These are only preliminary tests, to get the staff used to using them, and to test our usage methods.

2.1 Order Equipment

Equipment has been ordered through Richard James International shipping through which the Trust has an account. Shipping companies to the island are limited. Richard James procures from the UK and has warehouse to accommodate larger orders. However, if procuring from South Africa then Zedcore is will be used. Hopefully, items will arrive in late November, but delays are common e.g. leaving behind containers, covid-19 etc.

2.2 Build specialist myna/rabbit traps

Myna funnel traps have been constructed however, we are now waiting on additional materials (ordered from abroad) to enable the building of more traps. Its arrival will be timed with the visit from Suzanna, who will help guide us on different trap designs. 3 myna drop door traps have been made previous to the project, which have been utilised. These traps have been tested successfully this year, however, since we don't yet have the license to destroy Mynas the trapped birds were released.

2.6 Visit by myna specialist, providing training and intense trapping in agreed sites

This output has had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. An application was made for Suzanna to travel here in October 2020, but was denied. Due to circumstances, we will have to wait until early next year for her visit.

3.1 Establish site monitoring protocols

Site surveying methodologies and protocols have been written, and have been sent to the steering group for review and approval. Some of these protocols have been adopted from previous works by the National Trust, written by previous director and project manager on the Predator control project Dr. Chris Hillman. The site monitoring protocols will encompass all of the species on the respective sites.

3.4 Baseline site assessment before vertebrate controls undertaken, including presence and vegetation survey, on control and comparable sites

Vegetation Surveys have just commenced as of 28/10/2020. The first site to be surveyed is Deadwood Plain and the work is ongoing. So far 2 900m² Quadrats have been surveyed. The methodology has been loosely adopted from a guide on vegetation surveys by the Department of Conservation of Australia, but adapted to suit the needs of the project.

3.6 Monitor vertebrate presence/abundance on control and comparable sites

Vertebrate presence is being measured on our three key conservation sites, in tandem with the rabbit, cat, and rat surveying. Rabbits, cats, and rats are all being surveyed on our three sites

for a baseline estimate of presence.

4.1 Train Trust and SHG staff in control techniques

Project Officer Denis Leo has given project staff basic functional training in trapping techniques. These techniques are based on his almost decade of experience in the field. Steering Group member Suzanna Saaldera is going to provide the Trust staff as well as other stakeholders with Myna trap training. The Senior Veterinary Officer (steering group member) has agreed to deliver a training session to all project staff on Cat euthanasia. Project Officer Denis Leo already trained, however will do the session as a refresher.

4.2 Recruit trapping volunteers from the community, including farmers, syndicate members and land owners/managers

This activity has yet to be started, as we don't yet have the materials to build traps or even the information available to provide the volunteers. However, a press statement has been made via printed article and radio programme indicating the intention of the project to recruit volunteers, so the idea has been put out into the public.

4.3 Run community trapping information sessions and workshops

No community trapping information sessions have been held yet. However, an internal National Trust information session has been held. This is to prepare the project team to advocate for the project which helped to prepare them for answering any difficult questions they may encounter when doing public workshops and outreach work. The nature of vertebrate trapping makes it quite controversial, so it is important that the project staff, as well as the National Trust Staff are fully informed and prepared to encounter the potential public backlash against the work. The success of this project greatly depends on the public's adoption and support of the ideals and goals of the project, and the more preparation before public consultation the better.

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.

Due to Covid-19, there was a delay in receiving the project funds for the first 3 months. This delayed our procurement of materials. While this was indicated to be done in quarter 1, but has actually happened in quarter 2, it will slightly change the timetable of the project. Without trap building materials, camera traps, and tracking tunnels carrying out our surveys for targeted species have been slightly delayed. I do not foresee this affecting the overall project outputs or budget, other than that the funds for the overseas procurement will be spent in Q3 rather than Q2.

Also due to Covid-19, our project partner and Myna expert could not visit the island when was initially agreed. Without her initial input many of the outputs related to myna trapping, public awareness of myna trapping programs will have to be postponed by at least 2 quarters. This will affect the timeline of the project's outcomes slightly. I do not think this puts the project at risk though. These outputs can be adjusted to still be completed. This mainly affects the volunteer trapper program and community engagement, myna trap building, and myna surveying. I do not believe that these delays will affect the project drastically. That being said, output that could potentially be affected is **2.3: 3000 Mynas trapped and destroyed by the end of the project**. Since there will be a significant delay in this work commencing, 3000 might not be achievable, or the timeline of the project will have to be changed to continue trapping into the final quarters.

Output 1.3 (Myna population census undertaken by March 2021) could also be affected if Suzanna does not make it to the island by the end of January. Since traveling to the island is a bit uncertain at the moment, if she doesn't make it here by January it is currently unknown

when the next available flights will be, and this output may have to be moved to June. If this output gets postponed, then most other Myna outputs will have to be postponed

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

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**