

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	DPLUS128
Project title	Safeguarding Cayman's Sister Islands from invasive species
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Cayman Islands
Lead partner	RSPB
Partner(s)	Cayman Islands Government - Department of Environment (DoE), Department of Agriculture (DoA); University of Aberdeen (UoA).
Project leader	<i>Sarah Havery</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 2022; HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/CaymanSisterIslandsInvasiveSpecies/

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 team would like to thank the reviewer for useful and positive comments in response to the AR1. In response to comment 2 – “Develop an M&E plan for the project as soon as possible –update on progress by half year report an” M&E plan is developed and being implemented. See Output 5 for further details.

Output 1: Enhanced biosecurity / Invasive Alien Vertebrate (IAV) mgmt. capacity of in-Territory agencies

Biosecurity officer, Tanja Laaser has continued key stakeholder engagement meetings and port/warehouse visits. Crucially, DoE facilitated introductions between Tanja and the Customs & Border Control (CBC) to include in the ongoing biosecurity audit. Following completion of the audit materials will be drafted to best suits the needs of all stakeholders with the aim of improving biosecurity practices.

In support of improved biosecurity a green iguana incursion response plan and a control plan is in development (see Output 4).

DoE continues to push forward the Alien Species Regulations under the National Conservation Act. This looks positive to pass before the end of 2022 and will allow for greater autonomy of the DoE to operate and implement improved biosecurity and invasives species control.

Output 2: Enhanced in-Territory community capacity

The project [Facebook page](#) has now been launched and a [project video](#) shared.

Community Engagement officer, Marique Cloete has completed a baseline survey on both Little Cayman and Cayman Brac during June-August. The survey targeted 10% of each of the Sister Islands population. In total 261 residents [Little Cayman: 61 (38%), Cayman Brac: 200 (10%)] provided responses. The data from the survey will be analysed and a baseline report produced.

Volunteers continue to take part in opportunities (i.e. green iguana culls – 28 across all engagements) on Cayman Brac, with participant numbers increasing to 24 volunteers. Following the development of the green iguana control doc (see output 4) we expect to develop clear volunteer role descriptions to aid the recruitment of biosecurity volunteers across both islands.

In all engagements (i.e. survey, events, volunteers) the project has reached 343 (17% of population) on Cayman Brac and 82 (51% of population) on Little Cayman.

Both Marique and Tanja discussed the project and its objectives in an [invasive species session](#) at Island Innovation's virtual island summit on 30 Sept 2022. The presentation made mention of Darwin+ funding and the objectives of the project and included panellists from DoE, National Trust for the Cayman Islands, and an opening statement from Cayman Islands Premier, Wayne Panton.

Output 3: The baseline presence of IAVs and nationally significant wildlife is better understood

Following on from initial spotlight surveys, feral cat camera trap surveys were completed by DoE in June/July 2022 in the western area of Little Cayman. Two cameras were installed in 25 locations in ~8m from one another. The aim was to install these cameras in a way that they would overlap in their view to collect an image from either side of an animal when triggered and aid identification of domestic/feral cats. The cameras were left for approx. 4 weeks before being retrieved. Data from traps is being analysed and a summary report will be available by the next annual report. From this data we expect to establish a population estimate for the West end of the island and will infer population of feral cats on Little Cayman. This data will support the upcoming feasibility study field visit by Robinson Holdsworth Conservation Trust in Nov (see Output 4).

Rodent transects were repeated in June/July alongside the feral cat camera trap surveys. Two transect lines in Little Cayman were repeated. We are prioritising rodent surveys in Little Cayman (over Cayman Brac) as this has been noted as a key concern for residents (i.e. meso-predator release) during community engagement surveys (see Output 2).

UoA research fellow, Thomas Bodey and MSc project student, Alexander Philip completed reptile surveys on the Sister Islands in June. One of the three project target species was found during the surveys on Cayman Brac (Cayman Brac dwarf boa *Tropidophis schwartzi*). A review of the survey methods is planned to take place prior to the next visit (Jan/Feb 2023) between UoA and DoE which will support establishing population estimates for these species.

A baseline population assessment for Sister Island rock iguana on Little Cayman has been established. Numbers appear higher in 2022 (ca.2557) compared to 2019 (ca.1786), though this is largely a result of adjustments to survey methods and the survey taking place in March as opposed to Nov, which is much closer to the breeding season when animals are more active and available for detection. Current survey methods on Cayman Brac will require review but we hope to progress population estimates in early 2023.

Output 4: Reduced impact of IAVs on globally threatened Sister Islands species through effective management

Feral Cat trapping has been able to resume on Little Cayman following the legal dispute resolution in April. On 23 – 25 May a community cat registration event was held on Little Cayman. Although numbers were somewhat reduced (because of many residents leaving the island in the summer months) a good cross section of the community was present as well as representative of the Humane Society – travelling from Cayman Brac specifically to attend the event.

Extensive effort was made to identify domestic cats prior to control efforts including door-to-door visits, flyers/posters, via social media and the community event itself and we are confident that all domestic/companion cats have been registered in Little Cayman. A total of 21 companion cats are currently registered.

Between 6 – 12 June DoE and DoA recommenced feral cat control operations on Little Cayman. A total of 35 feral cats were removed.

At both the community registration event in May and subsequent control activities in June the Humane Society expressed support for feral cat control with volunteer Operations Manager

present during control efforts. The project team is taking a proactive approach to engaging the Humane Society as a priority stakeholder for all feral cat activities.

Further to on-going volunteer culls (see Output 2) additional control efforts, focused on green iguana nesting took place in June. This year (May 2022) is the first time that a green iguana nest has been found in Cayman Brac – the iguana was removed but no eggs were found. Subsequently, further efforts to check for nesting activity took place at known hotspots for green iguana on Cayman Brac. Tanja Laaser led nesting identification/destruction training to volunteers and RSPB/DoE staff present. A total of 7 green iguana nests, 1 nesting female, 143 viable eggs, and 15 hatched eggs were found and removed.

A green iguana control effort database has been set up and is being updated via the project SharePoint (including previous DoE records). This was developed collaboratively between RSPB and DoE as well as with input from Joe Wasilewski in August during a meeting to discuss key points from his visit in February. This session also helped to establish the key points needed in the green iguana control plan which is now drafted and with partners to review. We are on track

Following a successful tender process in which we received 6 applications (including applications multiple applications from NZ and Aus), the Australian consultancy Robinson Holdsworth Conservation Trust (RHCT) have been awarded the contract to complete a feral cat eradication feasibility study for Little Cayman. RHCT will conduct a field visit to Little Cayman in late Oct/Nov 2022 and expect a completed feasibility study report by end of February 2023.

Output 5: Project managed and monitored effectively

The project M&E plan is now in place and is being used by project partners. A meeting schedule is established including quarterly coordination meetings between partners and activity coordination meetings approx. every 6 weeks between RSPB and DoE project management team. A project progress and risk log are regularly updated following these meetings.

Technical reporting templates have been developed to support accurate partner reporting and regular communication between RSPB and project partners continues.

We will hold an in-person mid-term project review in Oct to assess the status of project activities and review the implementation plan, the results of which will be shared in AR2.

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.

Though the feral cat control is now able to resume, further feral cat control operations have not been possible since June because of limited availability of DoA vets to visit the Islands for prolonged periods. This has slowed our progress to completing activities 4.1 & 4.3. Once the alien species regulations are in place this will allow us to involve independent vets to support control efforts, which may be an additional cost to the project to support the delivery of project indicators 0.3, 4.1 and 4.2.

It has become apparent – via ongoing engagement and community survey - that communities on both Sister Islands are less receptive to formal/regular public events (i.e they are not particularly well attended). Therefore we do not feel that the biannual events planned under activity 2.9 (*Biannual Community events/volunteers' "get-together" to increase awareness*) is the best approach to achieve goals under Output 2. We will continue to approach residents via social media, mailing lists and F2F engagements such as culls and informal meetings. We will look to review engagement activities during the planned mid-term review (Oct) and through work planning for the community engagement officer. This does not currently have budget implications or prevent us from achieving Output 2.

Necropsies of feral cats on Little Cayman show little evidence that feral cats are preying on rodents (as consistent with previous studies). However, the community survey has shown that a key concern for residents (on both islands) is that removal of feral cats will see an increase in rodent numbers. Meso-predator release is therefore a clear concern for the community and so we will be sharing evidence from the project with community members via proactive

communications (Facebook, mailing list) to improve the knowledge and understanding of the impact of any future eradication – should it be deemed feasible – on rodent numbers, and reduce concerns.

It should be noted that following more accurate resident population data for the Sister Islands (2021 census report) population numbers on both islands are reduced, therefore fewer individual residents are targeted than initially planned (indicator 2.4). We will review these targets during the mid-term review.

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: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance 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?

We are concerned of the recent devaluation of the pound and potential impact upon the project, which operational costs are in dollars. The true impact of this is yet to be understood, however the high cost of living and generally higher and increasing costs that already exist within the Cayman Islands (and indeed the Caribbean more widely) does raise the potential for the project budget to no longer reflect its needs. We feel that the operational budget for this project is likely to be robust enough to weather this flux, however, this is a particularly hard-hitting issue for the project staff based in the Cayman Islands, who are paid in GBP. This is a management issue for RSPB which is being discussed internally at a senior level.

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.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**