



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	DPLUS134
Project title	Repelling the invader: turning the tide on Ascension's Mexican thorn
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Ascension Island
Lead organisation	Ascension Island Government
Partner(s)	CABI
Project leader	Diane Baum
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	N/A

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 start date was 1st September 2021 and so this report covers the one month period to the end of September 2021.

1. General progress

a) Recruitment of Project Officer

A Project Officer has been recruited and is due to arrive on Ascension on 8th November 2021. This role will be crucial to delivering many of the project outputs. We are fortunate to have recruited Chrisna Vissner from the South African National Parks Authority who has many years' experience of controlling *Prosopis* species.

b) Purchase of equipment

There are very long lead in times for equipment to arrive on Ascension. PPE, herbicide applicators and a laptop have already been purchased to ensure that the Project Officer is able to start work as soon as they arrive. Further equipment will be ordered later in the FY once the Project Officer has had time to assess the situation on Ascension.

2. Output delivery

No outputs were due to be completed during this period and progress is only reported for those where activities were due to begin in Q2 or Q3 of 2021/22.

a) Output 1.1 Use drone imagery to map Mexican thorn distribution

The AIG drone is currently being repaired in the UK. In its absence we have looked into the possibility of using high resolution satellite imagery as the basis for distribution mapping. Two

potential suppliers have been identified and we have approached JNCC for assistance given their expertise in Earth Observation applications.

b) Output 1.3 Transport plants to the UK for biocontrol host range testing

Seeds from Mexican thorn growing on Ascension Island have been sent to CABI and are in cultivation in their quarantine facility to provide food for a population of the biocontrol agent. CABI have obtained a list of species included in recent host range testing conducted in South Africa and from this CABI and AIG have developed a list of additional valued plants that need to be included in the bespoke host range testing for Ascension. Sources of these species have been identified and seeds and plants are being collected or purchased or use in the trials.

c) Output 3.2 Create article for local press

AIG Conservation staff have drafted an information sheet about Mexican thorn. The final press article will be published once the Project Officer is in post and has reviewed it.

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.

The malfunctioning of the AIG drone could delay or disrupt the proposed mapping of Mexican thorn distribution. It is currently unclear when the drone will be fixed and returned to the island. As a contingency we are looking into the use of satellite imagery to provide the base distribution mapping, which can then be ground-truthed by the Project Officer and volunteers. There is likely to be some delay to the beginning of work on this output, but satellite imagery could make the process more efficient meaning the final output could be delivered on schedule. This output is important for producing the overall integrated control strategy, but it will not delay work on other outputs in this FY.

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.

A change request was submitted in June 2021 and approved in August 2021 pushing the planned visit by a consultant into FY2022/23 due to impact of covid on international travel. There are indications that the current very restricted access to Ascension will improve in April 2022 and the previous air route from South Africa via St Helena will be restored. This should allow the consultant based in South Africa to visit Ascension in 2022/23 as per the updated project timetable and budget.

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**