

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

Project reference	DPLUS141
Project title	Habitat restoration and wise use for Akrotiri and Cape Pyla
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Cyprus - Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia
Lead organisation	BirdLife Cyprus
Partner(s)	Terra Cypria - The Cyprus Conservation Foundation Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas Administration Environment Department (SBAA ED) RSPB (BirdLife in the UK)
Project leader	Martin Hellicar
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2021, HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	- (yet to be set up)

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).

This period (July 2021-October 2021) was the initial - starting phase of the project. The project award paperwork was received on 30th July 2021 and although in July some background work was done, officially the project work started more intensely on August 2021.

Horizontal activities that have taken place during this period, include:

- Formation of the project team
 - Recruitment of Project Coordinator (Phoebe Vayanou) at BirdLife Cyprus. Post taken up 1st of August 2021
 - Recruitment of one part-time Scientific Officer (Theodosia Theodorou) at BirdLife Cyprus. Post taken up 1st of August 2021
 - Recruitment procedures (position announcement, interviews, etc) for the a) Scientific Officer (part-time) and b) Conservation & Communication Officer (full-time) at Terra Cypria, are ongoing at the time of writing, with the aim to recruit them within November 2021.
- 1st Project Kick-off Meeting amongst the Project Partners – Project Steering Committee: This has been taken place on 17th of September 2021 and all involved team members from the Project Partners participated. All project actions were discussed with the aim to share current experience and knowledge, to clarify the involvement of each partner in each action, to identify actions that might involve challenges (bureaucratic, stakeholders' views, etc) and discuss the best way forward.
- Acquisition of the 3 laptops for the Project Team.
- Scoping/ initial meetings with project partners and/or stakeholders, field visits to the project target areas, etc, as described in the following paragraphs.
- Financial organisation of the project (templates, time sheets, expenses recording, monitoring, etc) within and amongst the Project Partners.

Output 1. Support for sustainable management of invasive *Acacia saligna*, with a focus on post clearance habitat restoration on Cape Pyla

1.1 The literature review on the post *Acacia* clearance approaches and methods for restoring natural vegetation and limiting regrowth of *Acacia* has started. In addition, two meetings/ discussions with local experts on *Acacia* from the Forest Department and SBAA have been made in order to learn from their experience and share thoughts.

1.2 Field visits to Cape Pyla have taken place, in order to identify possible suitable areas, where the trial plots can be placed according to criteria, such as habitat suitability, background history of *Acacia* clearance, access, land ownership, management of the area, etc. Maps are currently being prepared with these criteria, so that provisional areas are identified and then proceed with all necessary permissions/licenses for the trial plots, according also to the results of the literature review.

1.2.1 Discussions amongst the team members on the monitoring/ recording protocol for the vegetation surveys have been made and the surveys will start as soon as the trial plots are identified.

1.4 The programme for monitoring of illegal mist netting levels by BirdLife Cyprus with RSPB support continues. The autumn monitoring season was completed by mid-October (analysis and results pending).

Output 2. Reed management solutions successfully piloted at Zakaki Marsh

2.1 Meetings concerning the scope of the hydrological study have been made within the team of the Project Partners, as well as with external consultants – local experts on the hydrology/ water management of the area, in order to identify the current state of knowledge and management of the hydrology of Zakaki area, as well as the reeds ecological needs in terms mainly of water period and water quality. Currently, and based on the outcome of these meetings, the Terms of Reference for the Hydrological study are being drafted.

2.2 Mechanical reed clearance in front of the existing hide at the marsh took place on September 2021 under the MAVA-funded MedIsWetII project, which project partner Terra Cypria is leading on.

2.3 Bird counts at Zakaki Marsh have taken place every month to monitor the occurrence and numbers of the priority species *Aythya nyroca* and *Himantopus himantopus* and also of other birds (resident or migrant visitors) using the wetland.

Output 3. Sustainability established for conservation cattle grazing at Akrotiri Marsh

3.1 One to one meetings have been taken place with the graziers in the field in order for them to meet with the new project team, to discuss issues/ problems/ needs they have, to be informed about the new project and to start renewing close cooperation. Also, a meeting with most of the graziers and the project team has been scheduled for 1/11/2021, in order to discuss more thoroughly and in a group all the above matters.

Output 4. Reduced disturbance to key wildlife species, including birds and marine reptiles, through the implementation of an access management plan for sensitive Akrotiri habitats

4.1 A spatial mapping is currently being set up in ArcGIS with all the different layers that will act as input for the drafting of the Access Management Plan (i.e. sensitive wildlife areas, access routes, parking areas, recreational areas and facilities, administration boundaries, proposed developments, areas of interest, etc). At the same time, stakeholder identification and mapping is taking place, ahead of the necessary consultation procedures to follow.

4.2. Monitoring of birds (occurrence, numbers and breeding activity) is taking place on a monthly basis.

Output 5. Eco-tourism opportunities enhanced within Akrotiri peninsula, benefiting in particular the approx. 900 local residents of Akrotiri community

5.1 The project team has identified wildlife facilities in Akrotiri area suitable for monitoring visitor numbers and accordingly has contacted two companies in UK that sell automatic 'foot-fall' recording equipment in order to ask for quotes. We are in the process of acquisition of the equipment.

For the rest of the actions of Output 5, scoping meetings have taken place within the team of the Project Partners, in order to discuss the best ways forward and exchange ideas and current knowledge. At the same time, a meeting with Akrotiri Community Council President has been arranged for 1st of November to meet with the new project team and to discuss the eco-tourism opportunities for the area, their aspirations and ideas.

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.

- Recruitment procedures

The recruitment of the Scientific Officer under the SBAA Environment Department was changed after communication and approval from the Darwin Plus team. Under DPLUS141, three of the project partners (BirdLife Cyprus, Terra Cypria and the SBA Environment Department) have funding for a Project officer each. In preparing and planning for the hiring process as a project team, we came to realise that the required hiring process under the SBAA is complicated and time-consuming. So, it was decided that the Project Scientific officer under the SBAA ED to be hired instead by BirdLife Cyprus and Terra Cypria, as two part-time Project Scientific officer posts. This option was seen by all project partners as a practical alternative, it was approved by Darwin Plus team and of course it will not alter the total budget allocation in any way.

In addition, the recruitment under Terra Cypria for the a) Scientific Officer (part-time) and b) Conservation & Communication Officer (full-time) took more time than anticipated because the two suitable candidates for the position that were planned to be recruited, found a job position elsewhere and this created some delays in the recruitment procedure. We note however that this slight delay will not impact negatively on any of the project activities. This will affect only the budget in terms that for the months that these two positions were not filled up, there will be an underspent (please see section 3).

- Wildlife camera in Akrotiri Salt Lake (5.3)

The action 5.3, i.e. set up a wildlife camera in Akrotiri Salt Lake, might not be possible to be placed due to military reasons/ permissions – This will be cleared by next annual report.

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.

No.

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:	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 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?

No

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**