

DPLR1\1026

Darwin Plus Local - Final Report (1)

Officer: Linzi Ogden

Section 1 - Darwin Plus Local Project Information (Essential)

Project Reference Number

DPLR1\1026

Q1. Project Title

No Response

Overseas Territory(ies)

St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan de Cunha

Lead Organisation or Individual

Ascension Island Government

Partner Organisation(s)

NA

Value of Darwin Plus Local Grant Award

£30,720.00

Project Start Date

01 April 2023

Project End Date

31 March 2024

Project Leader Name

Tiffany Simpson

Project Website/Twitter/Blog etc.

No Response

Report Author(s)

Report Date

03 May 2024

Project Summary

No Response

Project Outcomes

Checked	Biodiversity: improving and conserving biodiversity, and slowing or reversing biodiversity loss and degradation;
Unchecked	Climate Change: responding to, mitigating and adapting to climate change and its effects on the natural environment and local communities;
Unchecked	Environmental quality: improving the condition and protection of the natural environment;
Checked	Capability and capacity building: enhancing the capacity within OTs, including through community engagement and awareness, to support the environment in the short- and long-term.

Section 2 - Project Outcomes (Essential)

On a scale of 1 (high – outcome substantially exceeded) to 5 (low – outcome substantially did not meet expectation), how successful do you think your project has been?

3 - Outcome met expectation

Project outcomes and justification for rating above

i) Non-native predators (black rat, house mouse, rabbit, sheep and myna birds) are amongst the greatest threats to Ascension Island's terrestrial biodiversity. These species threaten biodiversity including endemic plants and invertebrates, green turtles and seabirds. They also spread damaging invasive plants. By facilitating consultants to evaluate the current situation, this project has given AIG the knowledge required to employ best practices to better control these species and consider the feasibility of eradication.

Consultants from Wildlife Management International (WMI) visited Ascension for two weeks. They conducted a series of stakeholder meetings with organisations across the island to understand the extent of the problem from many different perspectives. These discussions also identified the barriers and difficulties to eradication of each species to inform feasibility and costs. They conducted site visits to Nature Reserves, Green Mountain and other areas of high biodiversity. They also visited areas of high predator concentrations including settlement areas and the dump. They were able to work closely with the AIG Environmental Health team to understand current control practices and make recommendations for improvement.

The primary output from this project is a report produced by WMI evaluating the feasibility of eradicating each of


the predator species against seven key criteria including technical feasibility, sustainability, political/legal acceptability, social acceptability, environmental acceptability, capacity and affordability. Findings indicated that although most eradications are technically feasible, all would require significant funding, an improvement in island infrastructure to host large eradication teams and robust community engagement. Based on some of the criteria, the total eradication of house mouse and feral donkeys was determined to be unfeasible.


ii) For this project, success was measured by the ability to provide the road map and stakeholder support for eradication attempts where appropriate. Stakeholder meetings revealed that support was very high across the island for eradication of rodents but the complexities surrounding eradication of myna birds, feral donkeys and sheep would require considerable consultation. The meetings and site visits allowed the team to map out areas that would be suitable for aerial baiting vs those that would require ground crews. This enabled them to calculate the approximate costs for each standalone operation. Considering all of the factors and requirements indicated that the costs for a full eradication of mice would be over 45 million and rats would exceed 33 million. These costs are well beyond the current resources of AIG. However, there are many strategies that can be introduced to better control these populations. The report outlined a plan for implementing high, medium and low priority improvements.


iii) Recommended improvements were identified and addressed within the first round of proposal evaluations. The primary concern was whether staff would be offered training by WMI during the visit. By shadowing the Environmental Health team, WMI was able to provide informal training and advice throughout their routine work to better implement best practice standards. Staff were also trained in morphological sampling of rats to understand their population dynamics and diet as well as to test for resistance to particular baits.

Supporting Evidence - file(s) upload

 [Bell et al 2024 \(Invasive Species Eradication Feasibility Assessment Ascension Island\) - DRAFT](#)

 03/05/2024

 15:42:46

 pdf 14.94 MB

Supporting Evidence - links to published document/online materials

Bell, E.A.; Marshall, E.S. & Titterton, L.J. (2024). A Feasibility Study for the Eradication of Invasives Species on Ascension Island, United Kingdom Overseas Territory. Unpublished Wildlife Management International Technical Report to the Ascension Island Government.

Project Challenges

This project identified many complications and complexities to eradication that were unforeseen to AIG staff and other island stakeholders. The costs associated with these eradication plans were therefore much higher than anticipated and currently unfeasible within the current resources of AIG. However, the experts from WMI were prepared that this might be the case and were able to provide options for better control methods in the event that eradications would be unfeasible. The final report outlined a strategy for implementing high, medium and low priority changes that can be made in the shorter term. We can now take these recommendations forward and seek appropriate resources in a much more targeted manner.

Lessons Learned

i) The partnership with WMI worked very well. Outcomes, costs and expectations were all agreed early in the project, allowing the visit to go very smoothly. The interaction with island stakeholders including the Island Council, US and UK military as well as many other local organisations proved to be invaluable. The varying perspectives revealed the complexities associated with both aerial and ground baiting, allowing for more

accurate assessments of costs and feasibility to be evaluated. These discussions also revealed many opinions from the public that would require considerably more consultation before proceeding to eradications, particularly for donkeys, sheep and myna birds. The consultants' ability to shadow the Environmental Health team was also very important to understanding current practices and recommending strategic improvements.

ii) Unfortunately, the consultants were unable to visit Ascension Island until January 2024. This meant a reduced timeframe to produce the final report and didn't leave any time for Ascension to begin to implement recommendations following the close of the project.

iii) iv) In an ideal world, the consultants would have come earlier in the project to allow for more time to consider their findings. The outcomes have indicated incredibly high costs for species eradications. They have also provided a lot of alternative suggestions. While these are much more easily achievable to implement, they still require additional funding. Having these results earlier would have provided more time to prepare applications for funding before the finalisation of new budgets within AIG and other funding organisations.

Section 3 - Project Finance (Essential)

Project Expenditure

Project Spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2023/24 Grant (£)	2023/24 Total actual Darwin Plus Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff Costs				
Consultancy Costs				
Overhead Costs				
Travel and Subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital Items				
Others				
Total	30,720.00	29,789.00	3	

Please provide a short narrative summary on project finances.

Consultancy costs were agreed at the beginning of the project through a Partner Agreement. Three milestone payments have been invoiced at the signing of contract, completion of visit and completion of the final report. The first two invoices have been received and paid. The final invoice has been received and payment is being finalised.

Travel and subsistence costs were managed by AIG to include the costs of flights, car hire, accommodation and internet to the total of [REDACTED]. These costs are yet to be finalised but will come in slightly under budget as the cost of the consultant's flight to the UK was less than predicted.

Section 4 - Contribution of Project to Darwin Plus Programme Objectives

Please select up to **one** indicator that applies within **each group/indicator list (A, B, C, D)** and report your results for that indicator in the text box underneath. If you do not have relevant results to report for any of the indicators in a particular group, you can leave them blank.

Please also submit some form of evidence (above) to demonstrate any results you list below, where possible.

Group A: Capability and Capacity - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Unchecked | DPLUS-A01: Number of people from key national and local stakeholder groups completing structured and relevant training. |
| Unchecked | DPLUS-A02: Number of secondments or placements completed by individuals of key local and national stakeholders. |
| Checked | DPLUS-A03: Number of local/national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project. |
| Unchecked | DPLUS-A04: Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training. |
| Unchecked | DPLUS-A05: Number of trainers trained reporting to have delivered further training by the end of the project. |

Group A Indicator Results

Three staff from the AIG Environmental Health team received informal relevant training in applying best practice methods for rodent control. The report produced by WMI provided a road map for recommended improvements that can be made across AIG and other organisations.

Group B: Policies, Practices and Management- Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Unchecked | DPLUS-B01: Number of new/improved habitat management plans available and endorsed. |
| Unchecked | DPLUS-B02: Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed. |

Unchecked **DPLUS-B03: Number of new/improved community management plans available and endorsed.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-B04: Number of new/improved sustainable enterprises/ community benefits management plans available and endorsed.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).**

Unchecked **DPLUS-B06: Number of Local Stakeholders and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights.**

Group B Indicator Results

N/A

Group C: Evidence and Best Practices - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Unchecked **DPLUS-C01: Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-C02: Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-C03: New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-C04: New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-C05: Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence.**

Group C Indicator Results

N/A

Group D: Sustainable Benefits to People, Biodiversity and Climate - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Unchecked **DPLUS-D01 Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-D02: Number of people whose disaster/climate resilience has been improved.**

Unchecked **DPLUS-D03: Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended.**

Group D Indicator Results

N/A

Section 5 - Project Partnerships, Wider Impacts and Contributions

Project Partnerships

- i) Wildlife Management International (WMI) was listed in the project as a consultant rather than a formal project partner. In the initial project planning they provided a quote identifying what they were able to provide. This was discussed with AIG to ensure that their capabilities aligned with the needs of the project.
- ii) Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate (AIGCFD) provided the overall project management including budgeting and reporting. Staff collated existing information requested by WMI prior to the visit. They also facilitated the trip and organised all stakeholder meetings and site visits.
- iii) WMI and AIG have a history of working together, with WMI having facilitated a successful cat eradication on Ascension between 2001 and 2004 and also evaluated methods of rabbit and myna bird controls. They are great partners to work with. Not only are they very knowledgeable experts in the field but also very approachable and accessible for the wide range of stakeholders that they engaged with. Their report was comprehensive and incorporated all agreed activities. AIG will continue the relationship with WMI as we strive to implement the recommendations provided.
- iv) There were many varied stakeholders in this project. Everyone on Ascension Island is affected by the presence of non-native predators and their individual relationships to these predators vary by species. Through a series of stakeholder meetings, this project sought the views from as many perspectives as possible to ensure that the recommendations were comprehensive and the criteria of social acceptability was well represented.

Wider Impacts and Decision Making

This project has provided the information required to make informed decisions about the feasibility of eradication of non-native predators. It evaluated each species against seven key criteria and determined that although most are technically feasible, the costs for rodent eradication are prohibitive and the social acceptability of feral donkey eradication is currently unfeasible. These findings show that alternative methods, standardised approaches and cooperation between organisations are required to more effectively control these species. Decisions will need to be made to identify resources and willingness to take forward the recommendations proposed.

Sustainability and Legacy

The legacy of this project is the road map to implementing better control methods for non-native predators. While full eradication is the preferred outcome, the costs, barriers and consultation required to take it forward is not feasible for any species in the short term. Increased training, more strategic rodent baiting, predator fencing, improved waste management as well as many other recommendations ranked in order of high, medium and low priority can be implemented in the meantime. AIG staff as well as other impacted organisations will be provided with this report to incorporate what they can into routine work now and make arrangements for more long-term changes.





Section 6 - Communications & Publicity





Exceptional Outcomes and Achievements

NA

Photo, video or graphic to be used for publicity and communications.

Please upload at least one relevant and engaging image, video or graphic that you consent to be used alongside the above text in Defra, JNCC or NIRAS communications material.

 [DPL0038_EH carrying out rodent necropsy_Ascension Island](#)
 11/05/2024
 14:09:15
 jpg 1.82 MB

 [DPL0038_WMI training EH team on rodent necropsy_Ascension Island](#)
 11/05/2024
 14:09:15
 jpg 1.79 MB

Photo, video, and/or graphic captions and credits.

During the visit, consultants from Wildlife Management International trained local AIG Environmental Health staff in carrying out rodent necropsies. This information can be used to better understand the biology and diet of rats collected from around Ascension Island. Samples can also be used to test for resistance to rodenticides.

DPL0038_EH carrying out rodent necropsy_Ascension Island - Wildlife Management International
DPL0038_WMI training EH team on rodent necropsy_Ascension Island- Wildlife Management International

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat, Administrator, and/or JNCC to publish the content of this section.

Yes, I agree for the BCFs Secretariat and/or JNCC to publish the content of this section.

Please list any accounts that you would like tagged in online posts here. This can include project pages, partners' pages or individuals' accounts for any of the following platforms: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.


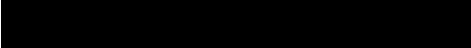
@AscensionIslandConservation – FB
AIGConservation - Twitter

Section 7 - Darwin Plus Contacts

Please tick here to confirm that you have read and acknowledge the BCF's Privacy Notice on how contact details will be used and stored and that you have sought agreement from anyone that you are sharing personal details with us on their behalf.

I confirm I have read the Privacy Notice and have consent to share the following contact details

Project Contact Details

Project Contact Name	Tiffany Simpson
Role within Darwin Plus Project	Project Leader
Email	
Phone	

Do you need further sections to provide additional contact details?

No
