

Applicant: **Simpson, Tiffany**
Organisation: **Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate**
Funding Sought: **£49,929.77**

DPLR4\1061

Weathering the storm-creating new habitat for Ascension's seabirds

The Band-rumped Storm Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) nests on the offshore islet of Boatswain Bird, Ascension Island. The islet is inaccessible and therefore the health of the local population is unknown. The expansion of the population to nest on mainland Ascension is currently restricted by the presence of rodents which are known to predate eggs and chicks. This project will create a bespoke nesting site, protected by specialised rodent-proof fencing, to allow the nesting expansion of this species to mainland Ascension.

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Weathering the storm-creating new habitat for Ascension's seabirds

Section 1 - Project Title & Contact Details

Q1. Project Title

Weathering the storm-creating new habitat for Ascension's seabirds

Q2. Please select whether you are applying as an organisation or as an individual (Guidance section 3 and Guidance Glossary)

Organisation

PRIMARY APPLICANT DETAILS

Title Dr
Name Tiffany
Surname Simpson
Tel (Work) [REDACTED]
Email (Work) [REDACTED]
Address [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

GMS ORGANISATION

Type	Organisation
Name	Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate
Phone (Work)	[REDACTED]
Email (Work)	[REDACTED]
Website (Work)	[REDACTED]
Address	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Section 2 - Overseas Territory(ies)

Q3. Please state whether the same (or similar) project proposal has previously been submitted to the UK Government for funding, including through Darwin Plus Local, Defra's other Darwin Plus grant schemes or other UK Government funding mechanisms. Failure to do so may result in the application being ineligible.

No

Q4. Overseas Territory (Guidance section 1.3):

Which UK Overseas Territory(ies) will your project be working in? Please note that in case of a non-permanent resident population you need to demonstrate a clear, meaningful, long-term link to the territory.

St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha*

*** if you have indicated a territory group with an asterisk, please give detail on which territories you are working on here:**

Ascension Island

In addition to the UKOT(s) you have indicated, will your project directly benefit any other UK OT(s) or country(ies)?

No

Section 3 - Project Partners

Q5. Project partners (Guidance section 3.2)

In this section, please give details of all the partners involved (including the Lead Organisation) and provide a summary of their roles.

Project Leader name (Guidance section 3.1):

Tiffany Simpson

Lead Organisation name (if applying as an organisation; Guidance section 3.1):

Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate

Lead Organisation Website (if applicable):

www.ascension.gov.ac/conservation

Is the Lead Organisation based in a UKOT where the project is working (Guidance section 3.1)?

Yes





List other partners involved and where are they based:

None

Summary of roles and responsibilities of each partner in the project: n/a

I confirm that all listed partners are aware of this application and have indicated support: Checked

Attach a Cover Letter for your application (Guidance section 4.2).

-  [20240621 AIG Letter of support - Darwin Local R 4 - Weathering the storm- creating new habitat f or Ascension's seabirds](#)
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Section 4 - Project Summary & Description

Q6. Project Summary (Guidance section 3.8)

Please provide a brief summary of your project. This may be used in communication activities and/or published online, if your application is successful.

The Band-rumped Storm Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) nests on the offshore islet of Boatswain Bird, Ascension Island. The islet is inaccessible and therefore the health of the local population is unknown. The expansion of the population to nest on mainland Ascension is currently restricted by the presence of rodents which are known to predate eggs and chicks. This project will create a bespoke nesting site, protected by specialised rodent-proof fencing, to allow the nesting expansion of this species to mainland Ascension.

Q7a. Description (Guidance section 2.1 and 6)

Please provide a description of your project, including:

- the overall objective
- the current situation and the problem the project is trying to address
- what success will look like and how you will measure it.

Please be as specific as possible when describing the project, using quantified data and evidence where available. You may wish to consider: what are the specific threats to the environment that the project will attempt to address, and what should we know about these threats? What does your successful project look like? And how will you demonstrate whether and how your project has been successful?

This project will provide bespoke artificial nesting chambers for the Band-rumped Storm Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) nesting on Ascension Island. This species is currently restricted to one nesting site on offshore Boatswain Bird Island Sanctuary, nesting in the remaining walls from guano extraction practices here in the 1960's. This habitat is limited, exposed to the elements and the walls are showing signs of collapse. This species has not colonised the mainland Ascension due to the presence of rats which predate eggs and chicks.

DPLUS018 (Taxonomic and conservation status of *Oceanodroma* storm petrels in the South Atlantic) reported that the South Atlantic populations of *Oceanodroma castro* appear to be genetically, physically and vocally significantly different to other *Oceanodroma castro* populations globally. The project also recommended that the populations from each island (Ascension and St Helena) be managed separately as they may represent separate subspecies. The taxonomic status of this species remains under evaluation (RSPB, in prep) but initial research suggests this species is endemic to Ascension and St Helena.

Band-rumped storm petrels are protected on Ascension and their current nesting site Boatswain Bird Island is a designated Nature Sanctuary. The surrounding Ascension Marine Protected Area (MPA) protects this species food source suggesting that the main restriction for this species expansion is the availability of suitable nesting habitat. It is particularly desirable to establish a second colony to reduce the potential impact of, for example, disease outbreak (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza discovered in South Atlantic Jan 2024 (Falkland Island Government, pers comm)), natural disaster from climate change (the loss of the walls or scree on Boatswain Bird Island) or the accidental introduction of non-native predators to Boatswain Bird Island.

Artificial nesting sites have been proven to be a useful tool to enhance storm petrel breeding populations(1) . This project aims to create nesting chambers on the Letterbox Nature Reserve, adjacent to the current breeding population, to allow expansion of the Ascension Band-rumped Storm Petrel's current nesting range. The nest chambers will be surrounded by a specialised rodent-proof fence, creating a safe haven for this delicate nocturnal seabird which is vulnerable to predation. Non-breeding birds will be attracted to the predator proof site using a tape lure which has been shown to expedite the discovery of nest boxes by birds searching for new nesting sites.

With the data collected in DPLUS018, it is clear that the Ascension Band-rumped Storm Petrel population is fragile and efforts should be made for the conservation of this species. It is important to clarify the taxonomy of this species and DPLUS018 showed difficulties in accessing the breeding population on Boatswain Bird Island. A mainland breeding population would allow AIG Conservation scientists the opportunity to understand this cryptic seabird's ecology.

Project success will be measured by the implementation of 50 artificial nesting chambers on the Letterbox Nature Reserve within a protected compound. It may take several years for the birds to occupy the chambers but Beard et al. (2023) in Saint Helena found a 5% occupancy within the first season after installation of artificial nests and a gradual 85% occupancy after five seasons. It is hoped that this project can replicate this success on Ascension Island.

The AIGCFD will monitor the occupancy of nesting chambers, performing productivity monitoring for the site which will be incorporated into the long-term seabird monitoring for Ascension Island.

1 Bolton M., Medeiros R., Hothersall B. and Campos A. (2004) The use of artificial breeding chambers as a conservation measure for cavity-nesting procellariiform seabirds: a case study of the Madeiran storm petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*). *Biological Conservation*. 116. 73-80.


Q7b. Long-term sustainability (Guidance section 2.1 and 6)


Please describe the long-term benefits of the project and the change it will bring about. How will the outcomes of the project be sustained after the funding is finished?


The customised nest chambers created in this project will provide a second nesting site for a vulnerable seabird species, allowing a potential population expansion. This will have vital long-term benefits to a protected species which may be endemic to two small islands in the South Atlantic (taxonomic evaluation in progress). This project is a practical response to conserving this species following advice produced through a previous DPLUS project.


Once the nest chambers are in-situ, AIGCFD will be directly responsible for maintaining the rodent-proof fencing and will perform regular inspection of the artificial nests for deterioration, making amendments where necessary.

(Optional) Please upload any additional and supporting materials or files (such as maps of project sites, etc) below. Maximum of 5 sides of A4, and is combined as a single PDF:

 [Weathering the storm additional info](#)

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Section 5 - Project Outcome(s)

Q8. Project Outcome(s) (Guidance section 1.2)

Successful Darwin Plus Local projects must demonstrate measurable outcomes in at least one of the themes of Darwin Plus with a clear focus on biodiversity and the natural environment, either by the end of the project or soon after through a credible plan.

Please note: Any proposals including research or monitoring are required to demonstrate a clear link to tangible outcomes for conservation of biodiversity and the natural environment. Please explain how any new research will be applied to drive environmental outcomes on the ground.

Please confirm that your project has a clear focus on biodiversity and the natural environment.

Checked **Biodiversity: improving and conserving biodiversity, and slowing or reversing biodiversity loss and degradation;**

Please tick which additional theme(s) of Darwin Plus your project contributes to (if relevant):

Checked **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**

Unchecked **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.**

Please justify your selection. Please use quantitative information where possible here.

This project will generate a second nesting site for a vulnerable seabird population. This will provide a fail-safe to reduce the potential impact of disease outbreak, natural disaster (loss of current nesting site through excessive

rainfall) or accidental introduction of non-native predators on the islet where they are currently nesting.

This project will enhance the seabird biodiversity nesting on mainland Ascension Island by creating safe habitat, free from rodent predation pressures through specialised fencing.


Section 6 - Workplan

Q9. Workplan (Guidance section 2.2)


Please provide anticipated dates for the start and end of your planned project here. Please use the Darwin Plus Local Project Workplan (available at: <https://darwinplus.org.uk/apply/local-applications/>) to provide a list of the individual activities you have planned for this project, a brief description of what each activity entails, and the months in which the activities will be carried out. If the project involves only one activity (e.g. a purchase), please still provide project start and end dates (noting estimated times for procurement). Please note that your project must start after 1 October 2024 and be completed by 31 March 2025.


Start date:	End date:	Duration (e.g. 3 months):
01 October 2024	31 March 2025	6 months


Please upload the completed Darwin Plus Local Project Workplan with your proposed project activities here

 [r4-dplus-local-implementation-timetable-templa](#)

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Section 7 - Costs

Q10. Costs (Guidance section 2.2 and please read the Finance Guidance)

Please provide a breakdown of costs to be funded through Darwin Plus Local (in GBP).

Are you seeking any matched funding for this project?

Yes

How much matched funding are you seeking and where from?

AIG in-kind matched contribution of staff time:

Director of Conservation: £ [REDACTED] ([REDACTED])

Coastal Reserves Manager: £ [REDACTED] ([REDACTED])

Conservation Fieldworker: £ [REDACTED] ([REDACTED])

AIG Overheads: £1,500 (vehicle use, fuel, building costs etc.)

Budget line	Explanation	Cost in GBP
Staff costs:	None	£0.00
Consultancy costs:	Support from Richard Brown and Giselle Eagle for 4 weeks	£ [REDACTED]
Overhead costs:	None	£0.00
Travel & subsistence costs:	Travel and accommodation for consultants for 4 weeks on Ascension	£ [REDACTED]
Operating costs:	None	£0.00
Capital equipment:	Materials and equipment to build nest chambers (£ [REDACTED]) Specialist predator proof fencing (£ [REDACTED]) Tape lure (£ [REDACTED]) Consumables (£ [REDACTED]) Shipping to Ascension (£ [REDACTED])	£ [REDACTED]
Other Costs	None	£0.00
Total:		49,929.77

This section provides more information on the budget to help evaluators understand how you will use the funds you are requesting. You do not need to list all costs, but please list and detail costs of more than £1,000 per item below, under the appropriate budget line.

Details of staff costs over £1,000 (if relevant)

None

Details of overhead costs over £1,000 (if relevant):

None

Details of travel and subsistence costs over £1,000 (if relevant):

Flights from UK to Ascension- £ [REDACTED] per person
Travel/Accommodation in UK- £ [REDACTED]
Ascension accommodation and utilities- £ [REDACTED] for 4 weeks
Car hire on Ascension 28 days x £ [REDACTED] per day- £ [REDACTED]

Details of operating costs over £1,000 (if relevant):

None

Details of capital equipment costs over £1,000 (if relevant):

Nest chamber materials and equipment- £ [REDACTED]
Specialist predator proof fencing (150m length, 1.2m height. Stainless steel 316 grade. Posts, flashing, bracing, hood, bracing elbows etc.)- £ [REDACTED]
Storm petrel tape lure equipment- £ [REDACTED]
Consumables- £ [REDACTED]
Shipping to Ascension- £ [REDACTED]

The main expenditure of the project will be on a specialist rodent-proof fencing. This is an essential aspect of the project, ensuring the birds can nest in a safe location, free from predation pressures. Other capital costs will be on building materials for the project and the necessary consumables to create the nesting chambers and then install them on-site.

Details of consultancy costs over £1,000 (if relevant):

Giselle Eagle and Richard Brown are the Skokholm Wardens, Wales, where they have custom built and successfully installed several storm petrel nesting habitats. The pair are responsible for the design of this project's nesting chambers based on their experience and research with this seabird genus.

Eagle and Brown will spend 4 weeks on Ascension, developing a mould, producing nest chambers and then hiking the chambers into position on the Letterbox Nature Reserve. They will provide training to AIGCFD on the maintenance of the chambers and practical advice on species management.

Details of other costs over £1,000 (if relevant)

None

If your project budget was prepared in another currency and converted to GBP, please provide the exchange rate, its source, and the date it was accessed:

Other currency:	Exchange rate:	Source of this exchange rate:	Date exchange rate accessed:
No Response	No Response	No Response	No Response

Darwin Plus Local has been created to build capacity and contribute to local economies in-territory.

What % of the total will be spent in the OTs? [REDACTED]

If less than 80% of the total project spend is to be spent within the OT(s), please explain why.

No Response

Section 8 - Local and National Priorities**Q11. Local and national priorities**

Please explain how this project aligns with local and national priorities? You may wish to consider the project in the context of national environmental laws, objectives, strategies, territory specific agreements, action plans or policies.

This project aligns with the Ascension Island Biodiversity Action Plan by enhancing the population of Ascension's nesting seabirds.


The Letterbox Nature Reserve was designated as a Protected Area in 2003 in line with the UK Government's commitments under the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) Target 3 for area-based protection of important biodiversity sites. The site was identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Birdlife in 2006 due to the internationally important populations of seabirds which nest here.

The Management Plan for the Letterbox Nature Reserve and Boatswain Bird Island Sanctuary (www.ascension.gov.ac/conservation/projects) highlighted that the conservation of seabird species was priority for these Protected Areas. Research action J specifically states to develop mitigation measures against the potential impact of climate change on Ascensions seabirds. This project will provide safe nesting habitat for a locally protected (likely endemic) seabird which current nesting options are at risk from a number of factors including climate change.


Will the project take place on Government owned land or water or involve biocontrol, invasive alien species control or eradication?

Yes

Please attach evidence that you have Government support for this project i.e. a Letter of Support. Applications which indicate that they do not take place on Government land or water, but which propose work that appears to the reviewers would be difficult/impossible to carry out without working on government land or waters may be ineligible if no Letter of Support is provided.

 [20240621 AIG Letter of support - Darwin Local R 4 - Weathering the storm- creating new habitat f or Ascension's seabirds](#)

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Section 9 - Project Risks

Q12. Project Risks

Please demonstrate your consideration of any risks involved in this project and how you intend to manage them. Please note the importance of health and safety and environmental risk assessment in the design of your project. If there is any possibility that your project may have negative impacts on the environment or human health, it is important that you provide a comprehensive analysis of potential environmental and human health risks, and the prevention measures you will take to ensure the work does not cause harm.

Depending on your project, you may wish to consider:

- Biosecurity risks – particularly for projects involving external equipment.
- Safeguarding risks – particularly for projects involving vulnerable groups such as children, older people or people with disabilities.

Risk	Mitigation
Risk that the nest chambers are not occupied	<p>Chamber size and design based on findings from other storm petrel work including that on St Helena which showed occupancy in the first year from the same species.</p> <p>Tape lures used to attract non-breeders to the site which may then utilise the chambers in subsequent breeding seasons.</p>
Rodents manage to enter and proceed to predate the storm petrel eggs/chicks	<p>Fencing is a highly specialised design to reduce the ability for rats and mice to enter the nesting site. Fencing has a skirt dug underground to prevent rodents from tunnelling.</p> <p>Once installed, the site will be baited for weeks until no further bait is taken, suggesting the site is clear of rodents.</p> <p>Tape lure will not be used until the fencing is erected on site and the site is clear of rodents.</p>
Health and Safety Risk: Injury to staff from manual handling/working in remote locations.	<p>AIG Safety Officer to agree on Risk Assessments produced for the project. All project staff and volunteers provided with appropriate manual handling training. Lead staff first-aid trained for fieldwork scenarios. Additional safety equipment carried such as radios and a satellite phone in case of emergencies while working in a remote location.</p>

Do you require more fields?

No

Section 10 - Terms & Conditions

Q12. Terms and conditions (Guidance section 3.10)

By applying for Darwin Plus Local you are adhering in full to the grant Terms and Conditions in full (available at: [Darwin Plus website](#) and as referenced in the Guidance at section 3.10). For information, the Terms and Conditions include requirements for all applicants to (amongst other requirements as per the full Terms and Conditions):

- Uphold a zero tolerance for inaction approach to tackling sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment.
- Where appropriate, make all reasonable and adequate efforts to address gender inequality and other power imbalances.
- Notify all cases of fraud and theft (whether proven or suspected) relating to the project to the Grant Administrator as soon as they identified.

Please indicate you have read, and understood, and will adhere to the Terms and Conditions.

Checked

Supporting documents list (please have these ready to attach with application)

- Cover Letter of no more than two A4 pages. (Guidance section: 4.2 has information on what this cover letter should include).
- If the project takes place on public land or water or is addressing invasive alien species, a Letter of support from OT Government.
- Project Workplan in the template provided for Darwin Plus Local (available at: <https://darwinplus.org.uk/apply/local-applications/>).
- Map and additional information (optional) maximum five additional pages.

If your application is successful

If your project application is successful, the Fund Administrator (NIRAS) will ask you to provide some financial evidence for due diligence checks before you receive your project grant. (Please see section 3.3 of the Darwin Plus Local Finance Guidance). Please be ready to provide this evidence promptly.

- **Financial evidence for organisations:** Year-end financial statements, the latest management accounts or audited accounts (if you have these).
- **Financial evidence for individuals:** Proof of identity such as a passport, ID card or driving licence and solvency (such as bank statements) and a police check.

Section 11 - Certification

Certification

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the statements made in this application are true and the information provided is correct.

Checked

I have the authority to submit an application on behalf of my organisation.

Checked

Name: Jolene Sim

Position in the organisation: (if applicable) Acting Director of Conservation

Signature (please upload e-signature)

 [Jolene Sim signature](#)
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Date: 21 June 2024

Section 12 - Submission Checklist

Checklist for submission

	Check
I have read the Guidance documents, including the “Darwin Plus Local Guidance” and the “Darwin Plus Local Finance Guidance”.	Checked
If my proposed project takes place on public lands or water or is addressing alien invasive species, I have uploaded a Letter of Support from Government.	Unchecked
I have uploaded a cover letter that details the information requested in the guidance (Guidance section 4.2 has information on what this cover letter should include).	Checked
I have read, and can meet, the current Terms and Conditions for this fund (found at: https://darwinplus.org.uk/apply/local-applications/) for this fund.	Unchecked
I have provided actual start and end dates for my project that fit this Round.	Checked
I have provided my summary budget based on UK government financial years i.e. 1 April – 31 March and in GBP in the application form.	Checked
I have uploaded my project workplan using the specific template provided (available at: https://darwinplus.org.uk/apply/local-applications/).	Checked
I have uploaded all supplementary documents if I have any.	Checked
(If copying and pasting into Flexi-Grant) I have checked that all my responses have been successfully copied into the online application form.	Checked
The application has been signed by a suitably authorised individual (clear electronic or scanned signatures are acceptable).	Checked
I have checked the Darwin Plus website immediately prior to submission to ensure there are no late updates.	Checked
I have read and understood the Privacy Notice on the Darwin Plus website.	Checked

We would like to keep in touch!

Please check this box if you would be happy for the lead applicant (Flexi-Grant Account Holder) and project leader (if different) to be added to our mailing list. Through our mailing list we share updates on upcoming and current application rounds under Darwin Plus. We also provide occasional updates on other UK Government activities related to biodiversity conservation and share project news. You are free to unsubscribe at any time.

Checked

Data protection and use of personal data

Information supplied in the application form, including personal data, will be used by Defra as set out in the **Privacy Notice**, available from the [Forms and Guidance Portal](#).

This **Privacy Notice must be provided to all individuals** whose personal data is supplied in the application form. Some information may be used when publicising Darwin Plus including project details (usually title, lead partner, project leader, location, and total grant value).

Project Title: Weathering the storm- creating new habitat for Ascension’s seabirds

Darwin Plus Local

Provide a **Project Implementation Timetable** that shows the key milestones in project activities. Complete the following table as appropriate to describe the intended workplan for your project. Round 4 is for a **maximum of 6 months** with activities starting from 1 October 2024. All activities must be completed by 31 March 2025.

Please add/remove columns to reflect the length of your project. For each activity (add/remove rows as appropriate) indicate the number of months it will last, and shade only the months in which an activity will be carried out. The workplan can span multiple pages if necessary.

Activity #	Description (max 25 words)	No. of months	UK Financial Year 2024/25					
			Calendar Year 2024			Calendar Year 2025		
			Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
1.	Equipment procurement	2 months						
2.	Equipment received from shipping	2-3 days						
3.	Installation of rodent proof fencing	2-3 months						
4.	Baiting site to control potential rodents	Once a week						
5.	Construction of nesting chambers	2 months						
6.	Installation of nesting chambers on Letterbox NR	1 month						
7.	Installation of tape-lure to attract non-breeding birds	2 months						
5.	Monitoring of nesting site for occupancy	Last 2 months and then added into ongoing monitoring						
6.	Data entry, evaluation and report writing	2 days per month						