

DPLR4\1061

Darwin Plus Local - Final Report (1)

Officer: Tiffany Simpson

Section 1 - Darwin Plus Local Project Information (Essential)

Project Reference Number

DPL00106

Project Title

No Response

Overseas Territory(ies)

☒ St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan de Cunha

Lead Organisation or Individual

Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate

Partner Organisation(s)

n/a

Value of Darwin Plus Local Grant Award

£49,929.77

Project Start Date

01 October 2024

Project End Date

31 March 2025

Project Leader Name

Tiffany Simpson

Project Website/Twitter/Blog etc.

<https://www.ascension.gov.ac/conservation/about-conservation>

Report Author(s)

Report Date

15 April 2025

Project Summary

No Response

Project Outcomes

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

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?

⦿ 4 - Outcome moderately did not meet expectation

Project outcomes and justification for rating above

The project aim was to create a safe nesting site for the band-rumped storm petrel (*Oceanodroma* spp.) on mainland Ascension Island. The species is currently restricted to an offshore islet with limited habitat provided by some old walls. With increased rainfall in recent years caused by climate change, these structures are crumbling and there is potential to lose the only nesting population of this species on Ascension. In addition, there is evidence suggesting this species may be endemic and therefore the importance of increasing the species population cannot be understated.

Though the project is currently incomplete, new habitat has been generated and in forthcoming months the site will be rodent-proofed to make it safe for the species to nest here, thus fully achieving the desired outcomes.

The project may be separated into two sections:

1. Constructing bespoke nesting chambers for a protected seabird species (Appendix A). This section of the project was completed with the guidance of consultants. Sixty chambers were created and with local volunteers,

hiked into position on the Letterbox Nature Reserve (NR) (Appendix B,C,D).

2. Building rodent-proof fencing around the site to protect the small, vulnerable seabirds from predation. This part of the project is not complete. All materials for the project had to be imported via the Falkland Island Resupply Ship (FIRS) operated by the MoD. The stainless-steel posts had a long lead-in time and they arrived after the closing date of the previous ship. Consequently, the fencing will arrive on Ascension on the next scheduled ship (currently expected to arrive April 30th following two delays). AIG Conservation are committed to completing this promptly once the resources arrive with the ambition that the site is completed for the next breeding season (Sept 2025). Only once the specialist fencing is installed, can local scientists begin luring individuals to the site using attraction calls, until then it would be unethical.





There is little known about this cryptic seabird so the visiting consultants conducted mist-netting activities (under permit by the British Trust for Ornithology) with AIG Conservation staff to catch individual storm petrels (Appendix E, F). It was found that the species reacted well to the attraction call and that they were enticed to the new nesting site on the Letterbox NR- an encouraging sign for the success of this project.





The mist-netting activities allowed researchers to collect a range of data including biometrics which confirmed that the nest chambers were the correct size. Blood samples were also collected for genetic analysis which will help to establish if the species is endemic to Ascension- important information for population management.





In Feb25, a presentation was given to 48 members of the public about the project and Ascension's seabirds (Appendix G). The project was also highlighted in a number of social media posts, greatly raising the profile of the Ascension storm petrel.





To date, this project has greatly increased scientific knowledge of the species and in forthcoming months will provide an additional safe nesting site for the vulnerable storm petrel.





Supporting Evidence - file(s) upload





 [Appendix G Ascension seabirds public talk poster](#)
 15/04/2025
 15:42:32
 png 1.44 MB





 [Appendix D Volunteers hiked 60 concrete nest boxes into position on the Letterbox NR, Ascension, Tom Barnes](#)
 15/04/2025
 15:42:26
 jpg 3.37 MB

 [Appendix F Researchers collecting biometric data of a storm petrel, Ascension Island, Sophie Tuppen](#)
 15/04/2025
 15:42:23
 jpg 395.98 KB

 [Appendix E New Darwin project to create nesting habitat for nocturnal storm petrels, Ascension, Giselle Eagle](#)
 15/04/2025
 15:42:15
 jpg 156.74 KB

 [Appendix C New storm petrel nesting habitat, opposite current nesting site on Boatswain Bird Island, Ascension, Laura Shearer](#)
 15/04/2025
 15:42:00
 jpg 3.07 MB

 [Appendix B New storm petrel nesting habitat on Letterbox NR, Ascension, Laura Shearer](#)
 15/04/2025
 15:41:52
 jpg 5.9 MB

 [Appendix A Prototype storm petrel nesting chamber on Letterbox NR, Ascension, Laura Shearer](#)
 15/04/2025
 15:41:05
 jpg 5.11 MB

Supporting Evidence - links to published document/online materials

See uploaded files

Project Challenges

The greatest challenge for this project was the short time frame to procure materials and have them delivered within a timely manner. Prior to the project beginning, we had prepared an exhaustive shopping list and engaged with several organisations to obtain quotes for the application. We were therefore hopeful that we would manage to make the tight closing dates but shipping dates were altered by the MoD due to ship engine failures and therefore it was difficult to coordinate.

There was a significant lead-in time to procure stainless steel posts for the fencing and this was exacerbated with the Christmas/New Year period. Efforts were made to find options from South Africa and the USA too but unfortunately the delivery dates would not work with closing dates for shipping. Consequently, the fencing which forms an important aspect of this project has been delayed and will not arrive until after project end.

Procurement on a remote island is an ongoing challenge and it was known that this would be a risk however the project can still go ahead successfully, albeit a few months later than initially planned.

Lessons Learned

Obtaining support from consultants who have experience in a similar project design and implementation was invaluable. The consultants provided essential capacity to build the nesting chambers and shared a wealth of knowledge with AIG Conservation staff regarding population management for storm petrels. In addition, there was much capacity building for on-island staff particularly in feather and brood pouch analysis to age and identify the current breeding stage of individuals.

Another aspect which worked well was the community engagement with the project through public presentations and social media posts. The nest chambers were 17kg and required being carried into position, 3km through rough lava fields. Fortunately, 16 hardy volunteers offered to help and they were in-situ in just one morning. The project brought the Ascension storm petrel to the forefront of the community who were unaware of this small, elusive, nocturnal seabird.

The main failure of this project was being unable to obtain the fencing materials within the designated 6-month time frame due to long lead-in times for procurement and shipping delays. Unfortunately, these were out with the control of the project team but if this project were to be repeated, we would probably opt for a longer time frame to accommodate for potential shipping delays.

AIG Conservation would recommend that others conducting similar projects engage with experts in the field. We found this saved significant time and efforts as the consultants provided fundamental support to the project lead.

Section 3 - Project Finance (Essential)

Project Expenditure

Project Spend (indicative)	Total Grant (£)	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	49,929.77	46,728.09	6.4%	

Please provide a short narrative summary on project finances.

Savings were made in several aspects of travel and subsistence for the consultants:

2 x flights- budget [REDACTED] Saved £80.

UK travel- budget [REDACTED] Saved £91.04

Ascension car hire- [REDACTED] Saved £260

Ascension accommodation charge- budget [REDACTED] Saved £288.3

The predicted costings were more than the actual expenditure within this aspect of the budget.

There was an increase in expenditure for capital items as the predator-proof fencing was higher than initially quoted (the price of stainless steel fluctuates) however this brought this aspect of the budget to -1.3% more than anticipated. Thankfully savings in travel and subsistence supported this aspect of expenditure.

The largest area of discrepancy is from shipping costs. These can be difficult to estimate in advance as they are calculated based on size/area of shipping container required which can vary. Shipping costs are not currently available until all materials have been received and reconciled. The above reflects on the shipping costs from the items received in Feb. Final costs will be known when the fencing materials arrive at the end of April. The accurate project finances will be reported on the Financial Report and Actual Claim as soon as it is available.

There was no co-financing secured for this project.

Section 4 - Contribution of Project to Darwin Plus Programme Objectives

Please select up to **one** indicator that applies with **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.
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Group A Indicator Results

Local government staff gained new skills and knowledge of storm petrel biology using expertise of consultants through this project. Capital items will allow further research on the species, providing local scientists with the tools required to manage this species effectively.

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.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-B02: Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-B03: Number of new/improved community management plans available and endorsed.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-B04: Number of new/improved sustainable enterprises/ community benefits management plans available and endorsed.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).
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Unchecked	DPLUS-B06: Number of Local Stakeholders and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights.
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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.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-C02: Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-C03: New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-C04: New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published.
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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.
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Group C Indicator Results

n/a

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

Checked	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

This project will provide a second safe nesting site for a vulnerable seabird which is currently restricted to a small offshore islet, largely boosting the local population. This will also provide a contingency should the only population be impacted by degrading habitat caused by climate change.

Section 5 - Project Partnerships, Wider Impacts and Contributions

Project Partnerships

Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate (AIGCFD) was the lead organisation for this project. AIGCFD was responsible for all project management, implementation, budgeting and reporting. Planning and decision making was ultimately the responsibility of AIGCFD but advice and recommendations were provided by Skokholm Wardens.

While not formal partners, the consultants from Skokholm Wardens were invaluable to this project. Their expertise and guidance throughout the construction of the habitat and the biological sampling ensured that all activities were completed in a timely manner and according to best practice standards. Staff from AIGCFD were able to build capacity to be able to carry on legacy activities independently. Good relationships were formed during the visit and will continue beyond the duration of this project.

The local community were also key stakeholders in this project. Volunteers were exceptionally helpful in carrying materials to the site and assisting with the construction of the habitat. Volunteer opportunities, a public presentation and social media outputs generated interest for the storm petrel as well as other Ascension seabirds locally and globally. This has led to increased support in other ongoing seabird conservation projects.

Wider Impacts and Decision Making

The nesting chambers are located within the already protected Letterbox Nature Reserve, which has recently been expanded for the projection of future spread of seabird nesting. The species are also already protected by the Wildlife Protection Ordinance, 2013, so no immediate decision making is required. If storm petrels begin to nest in this new habitat, ongoing management and research will be supported. This may lead to consideration of additional actions in the next review of the Letterbox Nature Reserve Management Plan.

Sustainability and Legacy

The success of this project has provided evidence that the storm petrels are likely to move to Ascension Island to utilise this new habitat for nesting. The materials purchased and the knowledge gained through this project will continue to be used for biological sampling and monitoring of this species well beyond the close of this project. Project staff are ongoing and will add these activities to their annual objectives.

Section 6 - Communications & Publicity





Exceptional Outcomes and Achievements





The Weathering the Storm project created a second safe nesting habitat for storm petrels on Ascension Island by installing nest chambers protected by a specialist rodent-proof fence. The species is currently restricted to one nesting site on an offshore islet which is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The new nesting site will allow an expansion of the local population which, until now, has not been possible due to the presence of introduced rats which will predate these small seabirds as well as their eggs.





There is some evidence which suggests the species may be endemic to Ascension Island and therefore a second nesting site is critical to protect the species from potential extinction. Once the site is occupied by the petrels, local government scientists will have the opportunity to research the species biology to inform future population management.





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.

 [Appendix D Volunteers hiked 60 concrete nest boxes into position on the Letterbox NR, Ascension, Tom Barnes](#)
 15/04/2025
 16:11:45
 jpg 3.37 MB

 [Appendix A Prototype storm petrel nesting chamber on Letterbox NR, Ascension, Laura Shearer](#)
 15/04/2025
 16:10:24
 jpg 5.11 MB

 [Appendix C New storm petrel nesting habitat, opposite current nesting site on Boatswain Bird Island, Ascension, Laura Shearer](#)
 15/04/2025
 16:08:47
 jpg 3.07 MB

 [Appendix E New Darwin project to create nesting habitat for nocturnal storm petrels, Ascension, Giselle Eagle](#)
 15/04/2025
 16:06:18
 jpg 156.74 KB

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

Filename: Appendix E- new Darwin project to create nesting habitat for nocturnal storm petrels- Ascension- Giselle Eagle.

Caption: A storm petrel perches on a rock on Ascension Island. The Weathering the Storm project has created a new nesting site for the species, protected by rodent-proof fencing as this small seabird is vulnerable to predation.

Filename: Appendix C- new storm petrel nesting habitat, opposite current nesting site on Boatswain Bird Island- Ascension- Laura Shearer

Caption: Ascension storm petrels are currently restricted to an offshore island- Boatswain Bird. The Weathering the Storm project created new nesting habitat on the mainland with 60 nest chambers installed in linear features, similar to their current nesting walls. It is hoped the species will use this second site in the forthcoming years.

Filename: Appendix A- prototype storm petrel nesting chamber on Letterbox NR- Ascension- Laura Shearer

Caption: The Darwin Weathering the Storm project created bespoke nesting chambers for storm petrels on mainland Ascension Island. Each nest chamber has an entrance tunnel which was designed to blend into the surrounding habitat. A removeable lid will allow local scientists the opportunity to monitor the species once the site is occupied.

Filename: Appendix D- Volunteers hiked 60 concrete boxes into position on the Letterbox NR- Ascension- Tom Barnes

Caption: New nesting chambers were built for small seabirds using robust concrete to protect against the Ascension elements. 16 volunteers carried the boxes into their new location- 3km through lava flows on the Letterbox NR.

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.

Facebook- Ascension Island Conservation, Ascension MPA

Instagram- Ascension MPA

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 Lead
Email	<div></div>
Phone	
Do you need further sections to provide additional contact details?	
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No