

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2013)

Project Ref No	DPLUS008/Project ref: 2223
Project Title	A rare plant census of St Helena
Country(ies)	St Helena
Lead Organisation	St Helena Nature Conservation Group
Collaborator(s)	-
Project Leader	Phil Lambdon
Report date and number (eg HYR3)	22/10/2013: HYR1
Project website	http://www.shncg.org/endemic-plant-survey/

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up).

Only three of the outputs were scheduled for the first half-year:

Output 1.1 Census conducted by visiting each known endemic population in turn

Thus far, perhaps around 30% of the targeted sites have been visited and surveyed. These mostly include drier, lowland and middle-altitude areas because the flush of winter annual endemic species is currently in evidence in these areas.

Output 2.1 One member of EMD personnel trained in field surveying during part of the survey

This activity is proceeding on-schedule. Shayla Ellick, a member of the Environmental Management Division (St Helena Government), has participated in almost all of the survey trips, improved her knowledge of endemic plant locations and taken a full part in designing/implementing the survey methodology.

Outputs 4.1/4.2 Seed of *Panicum* species collected and grown in controlled nursery conditions

This activity has been delayed due to dry weather. St Helena's native *Panicum* is currently flowering and has set very little seed thus far, although a small amount of seed was obtained last week. A South African collaborator has been secured to collect seed from continental counterpart populations, but more detailed research has revealed that the African species, *P. stapfianum*, does not flower or fruit until November/December. Therefore, no collection has yet been possible.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Progress has been hindered by the weather. A number of the island's more common endemic plants are annuals, which are stimulated to germinate by winter rains. The autumn was unusually dry on St Helena, and their appearance was delayed considerably. This made it inefficient to commence fieldwork (which would have required repeatedly surveying the same sites). Effectively, the result has been to delay the start of the project by one quarter. Hopefully this will not greatly affect the schedule for completion, as the programme was not originally envisaged to be particularly intensive. From November – January I hope to be able to devote approximately 80% of my time to surveying, which will allow the short-fall to be absorbed. However, whilst there should be no problem with completing the fieldwork within a year, it will mean that the analysis and report-writing will be condensed within a much shorter period, and could overspill into a second year. It is too early to say for certain, but if so, the delay will involve a few months at most and not require any additional cost.

The winter, though periodically wet, has remained drier than average. The combined effects of a continuously very dry year have been rather stressful to the island's plants. Numbers of endemics have been much lower than observed on previous occasions, and some known sites for annual species have yielded zero counts. Furthermore, species such as boneseed (*Osteospermum sanctae-helenae*) have experienced a very short season and are already starting to die-back (they would often be expected to survive until December-January). Clearly, this was not an ideal year to conduct an endemic plant survey. In recompense, it does allow us to obtain a snapshot of how numbers are affected in poor years, and thus provides some lower estimates for between-season variability, which is valuable in assessing how vulnerable the populations are to climatic factors.

2b. 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 expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No

3b. If yes, and you wish to request a carry forward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible through the formal Change Request process. However, it would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication now of how much you expect this request might be for.

Estimated carry forward request: £

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 or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with LTS International through a Change Request.

Please send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**