Darwin Initiative D+ Project
Half Year Report
(due 31 October 2016)

Project Ref No	DPLUS025
Project Title	Conservation of the spiky yellow woodlouse and black cabbage tree woodland on St Helena
Country(ies)/Territory(ies)	St Helena
Lead Organisation	St Helena National Trust (SHNT)
Partner(s)	Environmental Management Division – St Helena Government (EMD); Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB); Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
Project Leader	Jeremy Harris
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	April-September 2016 HYR3
Project website/ Twitter/ Blog/ Instagram etc	http://www.nationaltrust.org.sh/shnt-conservation-programmes/natural-heritage/spiky-yellow-woodlouse/
Funder (DFID/Defra)	DEFRA

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 to end September).

On-island arrival of the new Project Manager occurred at the end of June 2016. Up until this point work was effectively on hiatus, with interim work undertaken by Rebecca Cairns-Wicks. Induction and familiarisation with the island, habitats and terrain has necessarily taken time, but work towards targets has continued with the support of local and international stakeholders.

Output 1: Habitat restoration at The Dell

Initially work focussed on basic maintenance and site familiarization. The recruitment of a field worker at the end of August 2016 has allowed for more concentrated effort on weeding and will be key to planting efforts, as well as providing fieldwork support for the Project Manager.

The aim of seed collection and rearing of 5000 endemic ground cover and 600 trees is ambitious but is still viewed as achievable. Over the past 2 years, 983 endemic ground cover plants (Diana's peak grass *Carex dianae* and dwarf jellico *Berula burchellii*) have been installed and 318 endemic trees (black cabbage tree *Melandodendron integrifolium* and dogwood *Nesohedyotis arborea*). This constitutes over half the endemic tree aim, with over 200 black cabbage trees being reared in the EMD nurseries, along with 100 dogwood trees soon to be available to meet this target. Black cabbage trees are currently in seed and it is expected seed can be collected soon. Work also continues toward endemic ground cover establishment; 115 Diana's peak grass have been planted and are doing well, with minor rabbit damage, lobelia plants are almost ready for installation from EMD nursery at Scotland and varied propagation techniques are being trialled including grass splitting, propagation from cuttings and fern propagation. In addition to giving the project the best chance of reaching its target of 4000 remaining plants, these techniques will also improve knowledge and benefit future conservation efforts on St Helena. Additionally endemic ferns are naturally colonising below the windbreaks,

which will be encouraged through sympathetic weeding and will enhance site regeneration. Vegetation establishment is good, many of the plants installed over the last 2 years are surviving, although detecting all planted individuals to estimate survival, particularly in well established areas, is difficult. Survival of newly established plants will be monitored regularly.

Output 2: Assessment of effectiveness of shade canopy at enhancing re-establishment of cloud forest of open ground

The current windbreaks are in good repair, with only one beginning to show wear due to the high wind frequently experienced on High Peak. Eight additional windbreaks have been installed to provide shelter for plantings across the area in between two rebony (*Trochetiopsis x benjaminii*) patches and to avoid the need for additional potential disturbance once greater numbers of plants are installed in the area.

Vegetation below the shade canopy is well established but the canopy itself is becoming dilapidated. It has been agreed between SHNT and EMD that its' careful removal is preferable to potential damage to surrounding endemic vegetation in the event of untimely destruction. The plants below it will be monitored, but it is expected that the long-term impact of careful removal is minimal. Assessment of the effectiveness of the restoration techniques employed, focussing on the windbreaks in particular, will be produced before the end of the project.

Output 3: Assessment of the number and location of existing SYW sub-populations, habitat specifications and spatial extent

Visits to over 12 sites across the Peaks have been conducted, supported by DPLUS029. Information on spiky yellow woodlouse (SYW) locations is being built up from these visits, with additional locations, and extent from known locations, being developed. Suspected SYW locations are surveyed using a standard, straightforward methodology that can be repeated. A limited number of sites will be used as study sites and will be visited more frequently, for observations on individual behaviour, as well as assessing the extent of these populations as far as practicable. Terrain and habitat sensitivity are important factors so searches are mostly limited to established tracks through areas to avoid excessive disturbance and habitat damage. While potentially limiting knowledge, this will protect populations from excessive and potentially unforeseen impacts of disturbance.

Output 4: Complete a risk analysis of establishing an ex situ population including an evidence base of analysed research data, examples and expert opinions

Key stakeholder views on establishing an ex situ population have been sought, all of whom are in agreement that an on-island facility would be preferable to a UK based option, and case study examples are being sought to fully inform any future decision on establishing a captive breeding population. A guidance document will be produced by the end of this project.

Concerns are primarily aimed at the necessity of captive breeding and lack of knowledge of the species potentially resulting in high individual losses. To undertake this element of work would require dedicated staff, funding and knowledge, but may be an important element to increasing knowledge on the species, reducing disturbance pressure on wild populations as well as potentially providing a reserve population if wild populations experienced a substantial decline. This would also provide educational or promotional opportunities but this is secondary to other needs.

A population viability analysis for the wild population is of limited value currently as most factors for informing it are currently unknown and unlikely to be defined during this project.

Output 5: Biodiversity inventory and Habitat Action Plan produced for the Dell

The Habitat Action Plan was always planned to be one of the final documents produced for this project. This is planned to be a working document, which should complement work conducted on Diana's Peak National Park.

A biodiversity inventory will be undertaken in conjunction with other staff members at SHNT by the end of the project.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt 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.

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 currently expect to have any significant (e.g., more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

No ☐

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.

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 <u>planned</u> 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 send your **completed report by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **<u>Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g., Subject: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report</u>**