

## Darwin Plus: Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund Annual Report

Submission Deadline: 30 April

### Darwin Plus Project Information

Project Ref Number	DPLUS034
Project Title	Akrotiri Marsh Restoration: a flagship wetland in the Cyprus SBAs
Territory(ies)	Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs), Akrotiri
Contract Holder Institution	BirdLife Cyprus
Partner Institutions	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre
Grant Value	£248,073
Start/end date of project	1 April 2015 – 31 March 2017
Reporting period (e.g., Apr 2015-Mar 2016) and number (e.g., AR 1,2)	1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016, AR1
Project Leader Name	Dr Foteini (Claire) Papazoglou
Project website/Twitter/Blog etc	<a href="http://www.akrotirimarsh.org">www.akrotirimarsh.org</a>
Report author(s) and date	Melpo Apostolidou, BirdLife Cyprus, 21 April 2016

### 1. Project Overview

This project aims to restore Akrotiri Marsh to a mosaic of habitats, similar to the state it was in some decades ago. This will lead to restoration of species diversity at the site, and will provide increased socio-economic opportunities for local villagers. Through targeted conservation actions the project will provide water management and management of vegetation (mainly reeds) in order to restore biodiversity on site. As part of the project a number of new surveys and monitoring programmes will be carried out, and a management plan for the site developed. The project has clear and measurable objectives and will contribute to the long-term objective of good management of the site, and it will also increase the resilience of the Akrotiri Ramsar site at a time of increasing drought and increased effects from climate change in Cyprus. It will also contribute towards the Akrotiri Management Plan developed by the SBAA and towards the aim of the Environment Service of the SBAs to “provide advice and policy on all Environmental matters within the British Sovereign Base Areas in support of British Forces Cyprus and to encourage good ecological and conservation practice”.

Akrotiri Marsh belongs to the Akrotiri wetland complex which is a recognised Important Bird Area (BirdLife International); a Ramsar site; a Special Protection Area (SPA, equivalent to the European designation); and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC, European designation equivalent). Akrotiri Marsh is located at the Akrotiri SBA, Limassol district which is the Western SBA in Cyprus as shown in the map in Annex 1.

## 2. Project Progress

### 2.1 Progress in carrying out project activities

*1.1 Design of site map and agreement by Project Steering Committee (PSC):* A draft site map (second version) produced in December 2015 is planned to be reviewed (in April 2016, Y2) during the RSPB expert's visit on site. The final draft version of the site plan will be discussed and agreed at the third PSC meeting planned to take place on 13 April 2016. The second version of draft site map is given in Annex 2. The site map indicates the location of management features and visitor facilities, i.e. location of fence, sheds, new habitat creation features, location of bird hides and parking. The project foresaw implementation in Q1 (Y1), however, at the early stages of the project we realised that production of a final Site plan would require information that would be provided by actions planned later on, specifically the topography survey, review of the hydrology of the site, consultation with the various users of the site, i.e. graziers, basketry makers, birdwatchers and nature photographers, people involved in education as well as the local Community and MERAS Committee. Therefore, the final site map will be finalised in Q1 (April) of year 2.

*1.2 Landscaping works to clear/remove reeds and create open areas and islets, dredging:* Due to extremely dense reeds and blocked ditches that kept the site very wet, access within the site was extremely difficult. As a result it had been difficult to determine what exact engineering/landscaping works were needed before we knew enough about the actual problems of the site. During October and November (Q3, Y1) the project focused on investigating the site and unblocking the existing drainage ditches (Activity 1.3). Moreover, a total area of 38 000 sqm in different locations of the marsh was cleared from reeds and graziers collaborated with project partners to put their cattle in those areas in order to control reed growth. This has been successful in most of the areas that were cleared. Currently, the number of animals on site are not enough to control reeds and therefore the project did not proceed with further clearing areas from reeds. Investigation from site visits and talking to experts shows that the most effective and sustainable way to control reeds is livestock grazing. Annex 3 provides photos from these works and evidence for the cleared areas. Due to wet conditions during Y1 it was not possible to carry out more landscaping works. In addition, in order to carry out more landscaping works, create pools, open areas and islets more information on the site's topography was needed as well as more investigation by the RSPB's experts and consultation with project stakeholders as explained on the above description of activity 1.1.

*1.3 Water Management Works (clearing out outlet ditches, water control structures):* During Q3, Y1, the project carried out works to reveal and unblock the existing drainage ditches to allow water discharge from the site during winter (Activity 1.3). These works included clearing reeds from part of the ditches. Clearing ditches was important as it would allow further access on site for investigation purposes and also allow access to carry out more works. The extremely wet condition on site did not allow further clearing of the ditches and this work needs to continue in Y2 to allow immediate control of water on site. The total length cleared was 1715 meters (out of 3275 m). Also, a part-functioning sluice was removed in order to drain the site better. More ditch dredging and installation of water control structures are planned during Q2 and Q3 (Y2) as foreseen. Photos from this action are included in Annex 3.

*1.4 Managing vegetation with grazing animals:* During Q3 (Y1), after RSPB expert's advice and consultation with project partners and project stakeholders it was decided that the most effective and sustainable way with long-term benefits to reduce the areas occupied by reeds is grazing cattle as it was traditionally done in the past. To achieve this, a permanent fence was deemed necessary for Akrotiri Marsh.

Currently, cattle graze the site while being tethered providing minimum effectiveness in controlling reed expansion. For a number of reasons, it was decided to erect a permanent fence on site: (1) An electric fence on site could pose health and safety risks for the public visiting the site and is not visitor friendly. (2) A permanent fence can allow controlled access points for pedestrians and graziers' vehicles. (3) A permanent fence provides a more permanent and easy to control solution for managing grazing and at the same time access within the site. The permanent fence will not only allow cattle to graze untethered on the site but will also provide a level of control in access aiming to reduce disturbance on site from visitors. So far, visitors and mainly birdwatchers and photographers, had access within the whole area of the site disturbing breeding birds and discouraging them from nesting there.

The permanent fence will be erected at the north side of the marsh and will not cover the whole site but that it will cover the most accessible section.

Furthermore, according to the Cyprus Law for animal welfare the cattle need to have sheds to be protected from harsh weather conditions. So, in order to enable new graziers to own cattle and use the marsh for grazing the Veterinary Services required sheds to be erected on site. So far, there are no appropriate sheds for cattle on site and because the land is state land no grazier was allowed to erect a shed on site. Since the project foresaw funding of cattle purchase and a project aim was to increase the number of cattle and graziers, we requested advice from the Veterinary Services which required that in order to increase the number of graziers it was necessary to erect sheds for the cattle. We decided to erect four sheds on site to enable more graziers to purchase cattle and this way increase the grazing livestock on site.

For the erection of both the permanent fence and the sheds the District Office Limassol and the SBAs requested a building permit. At the time of writing the project application the information we had from the SBAs was that no building or other permits would be needed. A building permit was requested in late February, not allowing much time for issuing a building permit which usually takes six months. However, with the collaboration from the SBAs who helped run the application procedure quickly, the Department of Forests and the Akrotiri Community Council who prepared a support letter for the erection of fence and the sheds, the procedure for issuing the building permit run much quicker. Moreover, the SBAs had to lease the land to BirdLife Cyprus until the end of the project to enable the organisation to apply to the District Office Limassol for a building permit. The building permit is expected to be issued by the end of April which is around 45 days from the date of the application. This proves the quick procedure followed. In parallel, to save time and ensure money would be spend within Y1 as planned, BirdLife Cyprus carried out a tender procedure for the erection of fence and sheds and a contract was signed in end March, after the submission of the building permit application. The works for the erection of fence and sheds are expected to start in early May, after the Orthodox Easter. The designs for the fence and sheds are included in Annex 4. In order to ensure that BirdLife Cyprus' rights guaranteed BirdLife Cyprus also used the services of a lawyer for drawing up tender documents and contracts.

The Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre will coordinate the procedure for selecting the graziers who will receive funding for purchasing cattle. This procedure is expected to start in Q1 (Y2) as foreseen.

The mobile electric fence will be used to separate cattle belonging to different graziers and move them in specific areas depending on the management needs. The electric fencing will complement the permanent fencing allowing flexibility and new areas to be opened up. This is expected to be purchased in Q1 (Y2).

The sheds planned to be erected in Q1 (Y2) include feeding and watering troughs.

*2.1 Production of a topography survey (contours):* The topography survey for Y1 was completed in Q3 (Y1), please find it in Annex 5. This justified delay was because more features were exposed under activities 1.2 and 1.3 and it was important to include them in the survey as they provide information for designing the site map. More topography data need to be collected as foreseen in Q1, Y2. An updated timeline is included in Annex 6.

*2.2 Key bird species productivity study and population assessment:* The study for the first breeding season (early March – end June) within the project has been conducted. The first study show evidence of breeding Little Bittern and Ferruginous Duck but no breeding of Black-winged Stilt and Spur-winged Lapwing. Please find this report in Annex 7. The surveys for the second breeding season are currently being carried out as foreseen. The study has been/is being conducted by volunteers and BirdLife Cyprus is responsible for overseeing work.

*2.3 Production of a grazing animal carrying capacity study:* This study will be carried out according to the agreed timeline, i.e. during Q2 – Q4 (Y2). The project foresaw this cost under consultancy but after closer examination of the site and its grazing needs, RSPB which has experience with grazing livestock in nature reserves has offered to produce this study at no cost. The allocated budget for this can be used under budget line 'Other costs'. A change request form will be submitted soon.

*2.4 Production of a study on Killifish for Akrotiri marsh:* BirdLife Cyprus signed a contract with a consultant on 22 February 2016. There was a month's delay in starting the study as it took more time than foreseen for partners to agree with the contractor on the detailed content of the final deliverable. The study will be completed in end January 2017. This study will include information on the current distribution of the Killifish *Aphanius fasciatus*, information on species biology, the relation of this

species with the alien mosquito fish *Gambusia holbrooki*, possible implications to other species from re-introduction of *Aphanius* in wetlands, restoration options and monitoring recommendations.

*2.5 Production of a water management regime:* The Water Management Regime will be produced out as foreseen, in Q2 – Q3 (Y2).

*2.6 Monitoring of key variables carried out at site (water quality, bird species present, plants present, habitat area, etc.):* The Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre has been monitoring water quality and plants present at the site. The water quality data are given in Annex 8 (a) and a list of the plants present and their location in Annex 8 (b). In addition, RSPB has kindly provided water level loggers that have been installed on site. These data will provide important information on the site's hydrology. A graph showing the first results is given in Annex 8 (a). Water level gauges were also installed to complement data collected from the water level loggers. Apart from the bird species productivity study and population assessment under activity 2.2, BirdLife Cyprus also conducts systematic monthly bird counts for Akrotiri Marsh. These data are given in Annex 8 (c). To monitor habitat area BirdLife Cyprus produced a georeferenced orthophotomap which shows in a high quality images the site's habitat features. The map is given in Annex 8 (d).

*2.7 Site management plan, with clear site management objectives, drafted and agreed by Project Steering Committee:* The preparations for carrying out the Site management plan will start as foreseen in Q2 (Y2).

*2.8 Workshop on wetland restoration held in Cyprus with experts from abroad to share knowledge and experience:* Project partners are considering a modification to this action in order to make this workshop more useful to local users. Instead of focusing on wetland restoration, we propose to have a workshop that will cover issues like the use of grazing in nature reserves, as well as some elements related to livestock management with electric fences, and livestock wellbeing.

*2.9 Networking travel to a wetland abroad for Akrotiri Village, Environment Centre and BirdLife Cyprus:* Project partners are considering a modification to this action in order to save costs. One trip instead of two is proposed.

*2.10 Purchase of equipment: optics, computer, camera, chest waders, GPS, dingy, drone and camera:* All of the above equipment has been purchased except the drone and the dingy. The drone will be purchased in Q1 (Y2). However, due to the nature of the site, water levels and the number of open areas with water it is not deemed necessary to purchase a dingy as it would be of no use for Akrotiri Marsh. We propose to use the allocated budget for the dingy under budget line 'Other costs' to enable us to carry out more landscaping works.

*3.1 Design and construction of observation tower with display space:* This activity will take place during Q2 and Q3 (Y2) as foreseen. The project has identified two locations to create new habitat features, i.e. open pools, scrapes, nesting islets and these features will attract birdwatching interest. The project proposes to create one elevated birdwatching hide at the southeast of the site and a second one at the north that will allow people with mobility problems to use it and enjoy the site. As the site is quite large (150 hectares) and the permanent fence will restrict access for visitors during the breeding season (March – June), it was decided to offer two hides for visitors in order to provide enough viewing opportunities and discourage people from entering the fenced area and causing disturbance to wildlife.

*3.2 Design and construction of information signs:* This activity will be implemented during Q2 and Q3 (Y2) as foreseen.

*3.3 Design and construction of a walkway to the observation tower:* This activity will be implemented during Q2 and Q3 (Y2) as foreseen. A path will be created for each of the birdwatching facilities to channel visitors to these facilities.

*3.4 Allocation and development of designated parking area and bollards:* The exact location of the parking depends on the location of the visitor facilities and landscaping works. The location of these features will be discussed and agreed during the third Project Steering Committee meeting that will take place on 13 April 2016. The works to formulate the parking area will take place in Q2 – Q3 (Y2) together with activities 1.2, 1.2, 3.1, 3.4. Bollards were suggested to restrict accessibility to site, however this will be achieved by fencing the site, please see above activity 1.4, so no bollards will be put in place.

*3.5 Hire local villagers to make screening for walkway to observation tower:* This activity will be implemented in Q2 (Y2) as foreseen.

*3.6 Hire local villagers to harvest sedges and other material for basketry:* This activity is proposed to take place in Q2 (Y2) instead of Q1 (Y2) to coincide with activity 3.5 so that some of the collected material can be used for the screening.

*3.7 Design and production of ecotourism brochure for Akrotiri including other activities and products:* This activity is proposed to be implemented in Q4 (Y2) instead of Q3 (Y2) to allow some time for the visitor facilities to be completed in order to include information and photographs of those in the brochure.

*3.8 Design and production of website to highlight Akrotiri Marsh and other birdwatching tourism in the area:* The website was launched on 20 October 2015, with a minor delay of a few weeks [www.akrotirimarsh.org](http://www.akrotirimarsh.org) due to the time needed to collect the information and content for the website. The website is updated on a regular basis.

*3.9 Production of project logo, small leaflet and sticker:* The project logo was produced in Q2 (Y1) as foreseen. The project sticker and leaflet were prepared in early November 2015 (Q3, Y1). The project produced 3000 leaflets (1500 in Greek and 1500 in English) and 6000 stickers. These were distributed through Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre and are available at the reception desk to all visitors. BirdLife Cyprus also distributes them at various awareness raising events. Electronic copies of the logo, leaflet and sticker are available in Annex 9.

*3.10 Organise two awareness raising events with the local community:* The first awareness raising event took place on 17 December 2015, Q3 (Y1). This timing was considered more suitable as more actions would have been implemented by then to be discussed with the local community. The event included a presentation about Akrotiri Marsh, its wildlife and its importance and a presentation about the project, and its aim. The invitation was distributed to Akrotiri village and around 25 people attended the event. The next event is proposed to take place in Q2 (Y2) instead of Q1 (Y2) for the same reasons. The invitation and photographs from the event are given in Annex 10.

*4.1 Recruitment of project manager:* BirdLife Cyprus' Project Coordinator was recruited as a project manager at the beginning of the project, in Q1 (Y1) as foreseen. The project manager works full time on this project and has the full overview of project implementation, coordinates all project activities, prepares reports and overviews budget. The Project Leader Director overviews the work of the project manager.

*4.2 Establishment of Project Steering Committee with key stakeholders:* The PSC was set up at the beginning of the project to facilitate exchange information and coordination. The members of the Committee are the three project partners as well as the SBA Administration and stakeholders from the Republic of Cyprus. These are the Game and Fauna Service (competent authority for birds), the Department of Forests (competent authority for the management of Forests) as the site is considered forest land, the Water Development Department (competent authority for managing water), the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research, the Akrotiri Community Council and MERAS Committee. The latter is a Committee that manages the land use rights for locals at Akrotiri Marsh according to a court decision in 1943 which states that only Akrotiri villagers are allowed to exploit the land for grazing, water and collecting basketry material.

*4.3 Regular Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings (minimum four in total):* The Committee had two meetings so far according to the approved timeline. The first meeting was held in April 2015 and the second in December 2015. A third consultation meeting is organised for 13 April 2016 according to the approved timeline. We don't foresee any delays in the implementation of this activity. The minutes of the two PSC minutes are given in Annex 11.

*4.4 Regular budget monitoring:* BirdLife Cyprus monitors budget throughout the duration of the project. Actual expenses are entered into a cost statement which is updated on a regular basis and budget forecasts for future actions are entered into a spreadsheet to control underspend / overspend. The exchange rate is checked monthly and BirdLife Cyprus uses the EU official exchange rate (Sterling pound/Euro) as published in the official journal of the EU.

*4.5 Reporting:* A half year report has been submitted in October 2015 as per the Reporting Instructions of Darwin Initiative. No delay is foreseen for the project reporting.

## **2.2 Project support to environmental and/or climate outcomes in the UKOT's**

The project is being implemented in close collaboration with the Environment Department of the SBAA, which is responsible for protection and management of the natural environment in the SBAs. The project contributes to the SBA efforts of implementing the Akrotiri Peninsula Environmental

Management Plan (APEMP). Management measures described in the Site Management Plan prepared as part of this project can be included in the APEMP. Further than that, the implementation of this project contributes in achieving actions of the APEMP. This is the first time that such an active management of wetlands is being attempted in the Cyprus SBAs. This management effort can set an example for other management activities to follow as the SBAs have learnt a lot from this experience.

The generic objective in the APEMP is to maintain or restore the important features at Akrotiri Peninsula at a favourable conservation status, taking into account economic, social and cultural requirements and local characteristics. The project achieves this fine balance, by restoring the marsh ecological condition, whilst at the same time promoting economic, social and cultural benefits to the local community through eco-tourism, grazing and basketry. It also promotes environmental education, as many of the environmental programs of Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre, a partner to the project, are based on the marsh.

The project has already provided unique opportunities for stakeholders, especially those in the Steering Committee, to work together, discuss the management of a site, consider the needs of different users, listen to the views of the users, and take decisions. Implementing this project has been an important capacity building exercise for stakeholders like the SBAs, the Akrotiri Education Environmental Centre, the Akrotiri Community and the MERAS committee to collaborate for the management of a natural site. This is the first time such an opportunity has arisen in the SBAs.

Finally, during the project's first year the SBAs completed the designation of five Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), including the Akrotiri Marsh Area, in order to preserve, maintain or re-establish habitats and flora and fauna species of sufficient diversity and size to support protected habitats and flora and fauna species listed in Schedules 1 and 2 to the Protection and Management of Nature and Wildlife Ordinance 2007 and other important habitat and species. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) have been designated in order to preserve, maintain or re-establish habitats of sufficient diversity and size to support protected wild birds listed in Schedule I of the Protection and Management of Game and Wild Birds Ordinance 2004 or migratory species of wild birds not included in the same schedule. The project supports this objective by restoring habitats, flora, bird and other fauna populations.

### 2.3 Progress towards project outputs

<b>Output 1: Habitat modified to create mosaic with increased species diversity and opportunities for villagers</b>			
Indicators	Baseline	Change recorded by 31/3/2016	Source of evidence
Indicator 1.1 Site is visibly transformed from solid reedbed to a habitat mosaic (site map)	Site is dominated by reeds with little diversity	38 000 sq m cleared from reeds, drainage ditches exposed and functioning. Further landscaping and water management works that are programmed for Y2 will contribute in creating more habitat diversity.	Annex 3 & Annex 8
Indicator 1.2 Open habitat created where sedge/rush can re-colonise (in the future). Reeds cleared in an area of around 50ha	Sedge and rush area is reduced and reeds have expanded to open areas leaving limited space for grazing animals	As above Also, a fire (not initiated by the project) that started on 20 March 2016 burned around 85% of the reedbed. However, the reeds are quickly recolonising the site as there is not enough cattle to graze it and control it. Also tethered grazing cattle is not effective for reed control. The fence, the sheds and watering and feeding stations will address these issues.	Annex 3 & Annex 8
Indicator 1.3 More space for grazing animals created	Reeds have created a solid reedbed thus taking over suitable habitat for birds and eliminating local vegetation.	As above	Annex 8



Indicator 1.4 Bird diversity and plant diversity increased	Site is dominated by reeds with little diversity	As above	Annex 8
<b>Output 2: Site management plan developed based on clear site management objectives and site values monitored</b>			
Indicators	Baseline	Change recorded by 31/3/2016	Source of evidence
Indicator 2.1 Site management plan will be developed and agreed by PSC. Clear site management objectives agreed.	General information available, but no defined water management regime, site management objectives or site management plan for Akrotiri Marsh in place.	Information on the site's topography, hydrology and data on water quality, bird population & plant distribution collected. This information and more to be collected during Y2 will be used to produce a water management regime and a site management plan.	Annex 5, Annex 7 & Annex 8
Indicator 2.2 Preliminary studies produced Bird productivity and population assessment study produced	Some baseline information, but scattered. Insufficient information available for monitoring. No topography study available.	Produced a topography survey, a bird productivity study for 1 <sup>st</sup> breeding season, produced a georeferenced map, and gathered data on plant distribution, habitat, water quality and hydrology.	Annex 5, Annex 7 & Annex 8
<b>Output 3: Birdwatching tourism infrastructure developed and promoted</b>			
Indicators	Baseline	Change recorded by 31/3/2016	Source of evidence
Indicator 3.1 Visitors' observation tower, walkway, information boards and car parking all installed.	No visitor facilities, limited possibilities for nature watching, no visitor access management. Small information board at site, no parking for birdwatchers.	Implemented preparatory procedures to create birdwatching hides, parking allocation and initiated procedure to erect permanent fence for visitor access management.	Annex 2 & Annex 4
Indicator 3.2 Tourism leaflet developed and available at key locations	Difficult to find information about site. Link to village not clear.	Creation of the eco-brochure is a future action. The website and the project leaflet produced, currently provide information to tourists about the site.	Annex 9 & Section 2.1, activity 3.8.
Indicator 3.3 Public awareness increased	Lack of awareness among the public and local community.	Local community is more aware about the site's importance and need for management. Around 25 people from the local community attended the information event. 1 newspaper clipping about the project so far. 43287 clicks on the website	Annex 12, Website: <a href="http://www.akrotiri.arsh.org">www.akrotiri.arsh.org</a>
<b>Output 4: Project delivered on time and within budget</b>			
Indicators	Baseline	Change recorded by 2016	Source of evidence
Indicator 4.1 Reporting deadlines met, audit passed with no issues identified.	N/A	Reporting deadlines met	Half Year Report, submitted in October 2016.

## 2.4 Progress towards the project outcome

Outcomes	Baseline	Change by 31/3/2016	Source of evidence
Main outcome is restoration of the site to a mosaic of habitats leading to increased species, especially birds and plants.	Site is dominated by reeds with little diversity. Sedge and rush area is reduced and reeds have expanded to open areas leaving limited space for grazing animals.	38 000 sq meters cleared from reeds, drainage ditches exposed and functioning to allow further works. Landscaping works, fence, sheds and feeding stations will increase the number of grazing cattle as they act as a motive for people to own more cattle and for more people to buy cattle. Already two new graziers have purchased more animals. Outcome is expected to be achieved for a large part of the site.	Annex 3 & Annex 4
Increased socio-economic opportunities for local villages	No visitor infrastructure at Akrotiri Marsh, no actions in place to attract tourists to the marsh.	The changes in grazing and the landscaping works are expected to help the regeneration of rushes and sedges that are used in basketry, and the hides and visitor infrastructure will help increase the visitor interest to the site. Furthermore, the fence will help make the graziers and the livestock's lives easier. Together all those actions will increase socio-economic opportunities for local villagers. All those actions have been prepared in Y1 and will be executed in Year 2. Preparatory procedures are in place to erect visitor infrastructure on site and amend grazing patterns. An eco-touristic brochure and workshop which are future actions are expected to contribute further to the local economic development.	Annex 2

This ground-breaking project provides the first targeted management for a site within the Cyprus SBAs. The project is expected to significantly contribute in restoring Akrotiri Marsh and creating a mosaic of habitats in order to restore species diversity and enhance the socio-economic opportunities for the local community. The site, which had been unmanaged for decades will take some years to recover and respond to the project's management measures. By its end, the project will have set the appropriate foundations to reach the project outcome and continue the management of the site in the future.

## 2.5 Monitoring of risks

The risks described in the project application have been reviewed and are still considered valid. For what concerns the exchange rate, this risk proved unfounded for the first Year of the project, however, it is maintained for the second year as the Referendum related to the UK leaving or staying in the EU can have a serious impact on the exchange rate of the Sterling, depending on the outcome. The referendum is planned for 23 June 2016, after which the situation will be clarified.

The major works on site are planned to be implemented in Q2 and Q3 (Y2). To reduce and manage the risk of poor performance by the contractor, we are also planning to unblock the existing draining ditches to drain the site and allow access for works. BirdLife Cyprus expects to issue a tender for a large amount of money in Year 2, and in order to guarantee BirdLife Cyprus' rights plans to use the services of a lawyer.

One more risk has been identified. This concerns the need for building permit requested by the District Office Limassol and the SBAs for the infrastructure to be erected on the marsh, i.e. fence, sheds, birdwatching hides. This has caused a delay during Y1 which the project managed to overcome by communication and coordination between involved partners (please see details in Section 2.1, activity 1.4 and Annex 13). A reviewed table of risks is given below:



Description of the risk	Likelihood the event will happen (H/M/L)	Impact of the event on the project (H/M/L)	Steps the project will take to reduce or manage the risk
Suitable contractors cannot be found to carry out major works, or fail to perform	L	H	BirdLife Cyprus will use experienced staff, and legal advice, to carry out the tender processes using systems developed for previous projects. Works will be monitored closely during and after performance.
Bad weather delays work taking place	L	M	Contracting processes will allow sufficient time to allow work to be carried out within the correct season even if delays are necessary. Budget will not be allocated all in one year to allow for such eventualities.
Exchange rate fluctuations affect funds available for implementation	M	L	The RSPB will provide additional co-funding for any exchange-rate shortfall up to £10,000.
Delays from bureaucracy of the District Office Limassol for issuing building permit for the birdwatching hides	M	M	Documents necessary for the application to be submitted promptly to allow sufficient time for issuing the building permit.

### 3. Project Stakeholders/Partners

The project has involved key partners for the implementation of its activities. BirdLife Cyprus has been the lead partner of the project and responsible for the implementation of the majority of actions and responsible for the overall project management and coordination. The organisation has been building on existing experience and knowledge in managing a project for the management of a wetland. The Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre (AEEC) run by the SBA Administration has been acting as a link between the project and the local community as after 12 years of operation it has built good relations with the community. The AEEC has been also involved in all stages of project development. RSPB has extensive experience in wetland management both in terms of ecology and conservation as well as attracting visitors and has been contributing in all project outputs.

All project partners have been involved in decision making and moving the project forward. Project partners in Cyprus (BirdLife Cyprus and AEEC) have had regular meetings and site visits to plan actions ahead and take decisions, together with the SBA Administration. RSPB have visited the project already two times to provide support to project activities and will do the same in Y2. During RSPB visits all project partners meet and organise site visits. Further than that, there is regular communication through emails and telephone as well as skype calls when necessary.

Other key stakeholders have been also involved in project planning and decision-making. This is mainly achieved through Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings as described in Section 2.1 activities 4.2 and 4.3. PSC minutes are given in Annex 11. The composition of the PSC achieves the involvement of key stakeholders who have historical knowledge of the site, knowledge on species or other specialised knowledge. This involvement has played a key role in project planning and decision making.

Other meetings or communication take place between project partners in Cyprus and other stakeholders, when needed, i.e. in August 2015 before the investigation works, in November 2015 during the works, in January 2016 for the preparations of the fencing. Project partners also had consultation meetings with the Akrotiri Community Council and MERAS Committee, i.e. for the fence specifications and location of access points on fence for locals who collect basketry material in January 2016.

The Akrotiri Community Council as well as MERAS Committee had been very supportive to this project from the early stages of its implementation and a good relation has been built between project partners and the Council and Committee. This has been evident from the comments we had received during the first event with the Community (Activity 3.10 described in Section 2.1) as well as from a

letter of support they had sent to the SBA Area Office and to the District Office Limassol to assist BirdLife Cyprus and the project to get the building permit for the fence and sheds with no delays. The letter of support, in Greek, is given in Annex 13.

#### **4. Monitoring and evaluation**

BirdLife Cyprus is responsible for monitoring project implementation and project partners are also involved. The work of the Project Manager (please see also section 2.1, activity 4.1) who oversees and coordinates project implementation is overviewed by the Project Leader Director. The PSC also monitors the project through its meetings and by keeping minutes and following-up actions points. During meetings, detailed project progress and results are presented and also future steps are discussed and agreed. When needed emails with updates on project progress are also shared.

To monitor and evaluate technical work, i.e. clearing reeds and ditches, we conduct site visits and share results between partners and stakeholders. The work of contractor is overviewed by BirdLife Cyprus and RSPB staff who have expertise in wetland management.

Specific indicators and information are used to demonstrate that the outputs and activities actually contribute to the project outcome. Specifically, photographs and maps are used to evaluate and demonstrate achievement of Output 1. Baseline studies and species monitoring are used to evaluate the effectiveness of Output 2. Photographs, record of visitors and participants to events, clicks on website, record of school requests for Akrotiri Marsh, number of newspaper clippings are used to evaluate achievement of Output 3. The reports to Darwin, the financial reports, the PSC meetings and the actual timeline of activities delivered are used to demonstrate effectiveness of Output 4.

Moreover, certain key activities per output are being monitored:

Output 1: Progress with design of site map, reed clearance, ditch clearing and water levels.

Output 2: Implementation of monitoring and data collection, including studies and timely purchase of equipment. BirdLife Cyprus has been monitoring birds and Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre has been monitoring plants, water quality and water levels.

Output 3: Progress with design and production of awareness raising/communication material, including website, leaflet, project logo, sticker and event with community.

Output 4: Reporting (activity and financial).

#### **5. Lessons learnt**

One of the main lessons learnt during the first year of project implementation was that the project had to communicate project aims, activities and long-term benefits in order to manage expectations within the local community. Due to lack of management, the site was transformed from a rich in biodiversity site to a solid reed-bed with no habitat diversity. This project initiates steps and puts actions in place to restore the site, however, setting the clock back and restoring the site cannot happen overnight. As a consequence, the direct economic benefits to the local community, need time to become evident and this is something the project has communicated with the local community.

The project needs to continue to involve all stakeholders and to communicate widely, thoroughly and transparently about project intentions and reasoning behind those intentions. The project has been challenged to take into account the needs of many different users (i.e. birdwatchers, graziers, education) and this is also something that the project needs to communicate.

The project has achievable targets and it has involved all key partners with relevant expertise. There is also key input from partners (RSPB) with many years of experience on reserves management, partners with knowledge on wetland management, birds and managing projects (BirdLife Cyprus) as well as partners (AEEC) with good historical knowledge for the site.

The sometimes cumbersome SBA administrative and the Republic's procedures that have at times slowed progress have taught us that working with project partners and key stakeholders can help overcome the issues. Maintaining communication and involving all key partners in both design and implementation phase of the project also helps deliver a project within timeline and in an effective way.

The need for a building permit was a surprise that caused some delays, and contradicted previous advice we had received. We recommend asking for clarification on such issues early on in writing, and asking for answers in writing by the competent authorities.

## **6. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere**

As described in the project application, the project focused its work and budget in clearing reeds with machinery. However, as explained in Sections 2.1 and 2.3, for the purposes of achieving effective and long-term reed management control it was decided the best course of action was the permanent fencing of part of the site to allow a different grazing regime. The fence will allow cattle to graze untethered and therefore will be more effective in controlling the reed. Furthermore, in combination with the sheds and feeding stations it provides a motive for graziers to own more cattle, or for more people to own cattle because it provides a much less time consuming method to keeping cattle. Keepers of tethered cattle need to move them daily and bring them water which is physically demanding and very time consuming. With more and untethered grazing cattle, the reeds can be kept under control and pushed back to create suitable habitat for birds. A combination of cutting and grazing may be needed in some areas to start controlling reeds. However, grazing cattle provide a long-term and cost effective means to control reeds. In addition, untethered grazing cattle create a more natural way of grazing which helps the plants used in basketry. The fence will also provide a way to control access within the site and will therefore minimise disturbance to birds.

This considerable additional cost was budgeted under the 'Other costs' budget category. Moreover, some underspend under 'Travel' and 'Capital' is proposed to be transferred to 'Other costs' to cover some of the cost for the fence. A Change Request form will be submitted to Darwin during May.

An issue that the project had to overcome was related to complaints received from a few birdwatchers concerning the erection of the fence and access restriction. The complaints were posted on a Facebook group for birders, in early March 2016. To address these concerns BirdLife Cyprus replied publicly to comments under the same posts in Facebook. The project will also organise a consultation meeting for birdwatchers and nature photographers on 13 April, to dispel fears, by explaining the aim of the project, the need for the fence and present the new habitat features and visitor facilities. Restricting access by vehicle/foot to core wetland breeding areas during breeding season is normal practice and essential in order to meet the project objectives.

## **7. Sustainability**

The project has been promoted through the information event with the Community – a second will follow in year 2, the project leaflet, the sticker the logo and the website. Moreover, a press release was published during the first year and more will follow in year 2. It is expected that planned activities under Output 3 will contribute in promoting the site to a wide audience.

The project has been strongly supported by the SBA Administration and by the local community (please see also Section 3 and Annex 13). The SBAs approached BirdLife Cyprus to discuss future funding opportunities for a project that will contribute in SBAs' efforts to address the illegal killing (trapping) of birds within the SBAs. This action demonstrates the good relations and trust created as part of this project, between SBAs and BirdLife Cyprus.

The project will implement management actions that act as a first step in managing the site and restoring its biodiversity. It will also provide appropriate tools (i.e. baseline information, grazing carrying capacity study, water management regime, site management plan) to continue the work. Future management of Akrotiri marsh should be possible at a low cost, sustained by the SBAA in cooperation with the Akrotiri Community. SBAA Environment Department has submitted a budget line entry for a project to maintain draining ditches on a regular basis. This is still subject to budget approval. Villagers will have a role to play in maintaining ongoing grazing management at the site, and will also be involved in hosting birdwatching tourists and providing information about the site. Graziers have already proved their good intentions to contribute to the project's outcome by collaborating with project partners for moving their animals to desirable areas of the marsh.

The visitor infrastructure created as part of the project has a key role to play in attracting tourists which can offer long-term economic benefits to the local community. Through the project, the link between Akrotiri Marsh and the local community has been enhanced and this is evident from the fact that new graziers have been added.

BirdLife Cyprus will continue monitoring the site during the key seasons for birds and will promote the site as a birdwatching destination through its website and through its publications. BirdLife Cyprus will also aim to provide ongoing support and advice related to site management to the SBAs after the end of the project.

## 8. Darwin Identity

In all cases the Darwin Initiative funding has been recognised as a distinct project with a clear identity. The SBAs and the local community are familiar with the project.

The material produced as part of the project bears the Darwin logo and where possible the Darwin Initiative contribution is acknowledged with the phrase “*The project is implemented with aid from the Darwin Initiative through UK Government funding*”. Specifically, the project leaflet, the sticker and the website [www.akrotirmarsh.org](http://www.akrotirmarsh.org) feature the Darwin Initiative logo (Annex 9). The website also includes a link to the Darwin Initiative website. A press release was published in October (2015) where the contribution of the Darwin Initiative was acknowledged (Annex 12). Presentations given during PSC meetings and events with Community also bear the Darwin Initiative logo. Moreover, the project was presented with a poster during the Conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island communities that took place in Gibraltar, in mid-July 2015. Please see Annex 14 for an electronic version of the poster. The project is also promoted through BirdLife Cyprus’ publications, i.e. in seven issues of the monthly e-newsletter: <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/mailling.php?id=60>, <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/mailling.php?id=67>, <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/mailling.php?id=70>, <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/mailling.php?id=71>, <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/mailling.php?id=72>, <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/mailling.php?id=75>, <http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/mailling.php?id=77>.

## 9. Project Expenditure

**Table 1 Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016)**

Project spend (indicative) in this financial year	2015/16 D+ Grant (£)	2015/16 Total actual D+ Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs			-1.23%	Due to the exchange rate.
Consultancy Costs			-23%	The payment for the Killifish study foreseen for year 1 was transferred for year 2.
Overhead Costs			1%	-
Travel and subsistence			-31%	The travel abroad under Output 3 did not occur during year 1. Also, the project spent less money than foreseen for fuel.
Operating Costs	00	0	0%	-
Capital items			-33%	The drone was not purchased in year 1 but will be purchased in year 2. Also, the optics and the computer were purchased at a lower cost than foreseen.
Others			12%	This variance results from the unforeseen expense for the erection of the permanent fence and the four sheds as explained in Section 2.1 under activity 1.4 and in Section 6.
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>-0.37%</b>	

