



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

Project Ref No:	DPLUS035
Project Title:	BVI seabird recovery planning
Country(ies)/Territory(ies)	British Virgin Islands
Lead Organisation	University of Roehampton
Partner(s)	Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society. BVI National Parks Trust and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Project Leader	<i>Dr Lewis Halsey</i>
Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)	<i>April-October 2016</i>
Project website/ Twitter/ Blog/ Instagram etc	<i>www.caribbeanseabirds.org.uk</i>
Funder (DFID/Defra)	<i>Darwinplus</i>

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).

Output 1.1 All cays surveyed for summer breeding seabirds

This output is now complete, All of the 60 cays and islets making up the British Virgin Islands have now been surveyed at least once during this two year project, with the majority being surveyed twice. We are now in the process of compiling results to inform the island prioritisation plan. <https://twitter.com/LouiseSoanes/status/742686191896535040>

Output 1.3 Comprehensive Audubon's shearwater census conducted

Surveys were conducted on 31 cays during Jan-March 2016. A new breeding site was reported on East Seal Dog <https://twitter.com/LouiseSoanes/status/706179102974328832>. Local partner JVDPS is hosting an Audubon's shearwater expert (Dr William Mackin) to lead and support surveys during February/March 2017.

Output 1.4 Breeding success of roseate terns monitored

Roseate terns were recorded breeding only on Cockroach Island during the 2016 breeding season, this is a relatively hard to access island, landing is only possible by jumping onto rocks from a dingy. So was not possible to record breeding success of terns on this cay.

Output 2.1 & 2.2 Tracking and banding of roseate terns

Although these were outputs from year one of the project as circumstances did not allow us to achieve these outputs in year one we attempted to complete this output again in year two. However roseate terns bred only on Cockroach Island which is relatively hard to access. We did land once on the island with the intention of attaching loggers, but the level of disturbance to the colony was deemed too high to continue to work at the colony, with birds not settling back on their nests for almost an hour that were on the island, leaving eggs and young chicks vulnerable to sun exposure.

Output 3.2 Trial habitat enhancement

The discovery that all islands that were potentially suitable (e.g accessible and historically sites for breeding seabirds) for habitat enhancement measures had invasive rat species present led us to first attempt a rat eradication on East and West Seal Dog (according to the feasibility study compiled by project partners in year one of this project:

<http://www.caribbeanseabirds.org.uk/pdf/feasibility.pdf>). Funding for rat control/eradication at Seal Dogs has been provided by Darwin Plus (DPLUS043) with additional support from a local funder when DPLUS funding was delayed. Rat control was implemented March-June 2016. Regular checks since June 2016 (with chew blocks and game cameras) and visitation by rat eradication consultants from Puerto Rico in September found no evidence of rats being present. Continued biosecurity will take place on these two cays as part of the new Darwin Plus project (DPLUS043). As we anticipate that islands will be rat free for 2017 breeding activity, we plan to set up a call playback sound system to attract Audubon's shearwaters, and place decoys of tropicbirds and roseate terns on the island to attract these breeding seabird species, in addition nest boxes for roseate terns will also be deployed. In September 2016, materials to build a remote playback station were purchased and JVDPS volunteers and school children will set up the small solar-powered station. These measures will be undertaken during December 2016 /January 2017 before the winter seabird breeding season begins. The Seal Dog islands will be used as a showcase for a small-scale island restoration in the British Virgin Islands. <https://twitter.com/LouiseSoanes/status/706849143625388032>. At Sandy Cay, nest boxes and a tropicbird decoys were set up. Although there was no breeding activity, there was evidence of investigation by birdlife. In other locales, it has taken birds multiple seasons to nest in the boxes.

In addition to the above mentioned outputs that were scheduled for the first half of the year, the following related project work has been undertaken:

1. Local Partner JVDPS continues to liaise with colleagues in the USVI with their Department of Parks and Natural Resources Fish & Wildlife Unit to develop long-term coordination of summer breeding surveys.
2. Through the abovementioned relationship (#1), a Phd Candidate at University of Louisiana –Lafayette in the United States has been identified. Ms. Paige Byerly has now sought and secured funding for work on ROST in USVI, studying limiting factors to their role on ROST recovery. Research components will include the role of colony size and predation in limiting reproductive success. Local Partner JVDPS is working on obtaining permits for Ms Byerly to stay in BVI during summer 2016 and appropriate support so that Ms. Byerly can include BVI sites in her investigation.
3. In September 2016, local partner JVDPS Director Susan Zaluski visited with US Department of the Interior biologists working on ROST in Rhode Island. She visited a MOTUS tower that has been erected to support VHF tracking of ROST and least terns. Federal partners have secured funding for MOTUS towers to be erected in nearby US Territories (Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands). Towers have a 25 km range and JVDPS is working to include input on tower locales so that they cover portions of the BVI. JVDPS is also working with partners about possibility of including additional towers in BVI and utilising VHF devices for post project tagging.
4. Local partner JVDPS Director Susan Zaluski wrote and submitted a project to Birds Caribbean on project DPLUS035: entitled "Saving the BVI's Seabirds" It will appear in November on their website/blog <http://www.birdscaribbean.org/category/news/> and will be circulated via their international listserv.
5. Local Partner JVDPS Director Susan Zaluski met with Lyndon John, RSPB in Montserrat during an EU-funded Invasive Species workshop (October 2016). John agreed to serve as a facilitator for an in-country prioritisation workshop with BVI stakeholders and the two parties are developing plans for a Feb. 2017 workshop.

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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.

As in the 2015 summer breeding seabird season roseate terns bred on difficult to access islands, and on the breeding sites that could be landed on the level of disturbance to the roseate tern breeding colonies was deemed unacceptable to attempt regular visits to the colony for productivity monitoring or for tracking work. It was noted that adults rarely returned to their nests when researchers were present at the breeding sites. It has been reported that seabird eggs left unattended for more than 20 minutes in the Caribbean climate will die, the same will be true for very young chicks (Lowrie et al. 2012: Seabird Breeding Atlas of the Lesser Antilles).

Thus, we will be unable to achieve Outputs 2.1-2.3. However, we do intend to use data that has already been collected to draw some conclusions on breeding site selection of roseate terns in the Virgin Islands by examining historic breeding records and relating to breeding site characteristics (e.g. size, relief, etc), which will be useful when we compile the island prioritisation document. In addition links have been made with USVI and USA organisations, to develop long-term roseate tern conservation strategies.

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	N/A

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g., more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

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.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No

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 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. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g., Subject: 22-035 Darwin Half Year Report**