



**Darwin Initiative D+ Project  
Half Year Report  
(due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017)**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS055
<b>Project title</b>	Saving the Iguana Islands of Turks and Caicos
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Turks and Caicos Islands
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	The Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR), the Department of Agriculture, Ambergris Facilities Ltd and the Institute of Conservation Research San Diego Zoo Global (SDZ)
<b>Project leader</b>	Elizabeth Radford
<b>Report date and number (e.g., HYR3)</b>	HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media etc.</b>	

**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).**

**Summary:**

The project started very strongly in April with a month long period of research on both the iguana and rat populations on the two main project sites. This work included training of project partners and a very successful, widely reported project launch on 7<sup>th</sup> April in Providenciales TCI. Ministers were in attendance as well representatives of all project partners including the Global Conservation Director from RSPB.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria have resulted in substantial damage to project sites in TCI and the infrastructure needed to reach them. The planned field visits in September and November have been postponed. With a short pause (6 – 9 months) this project can and will continue, and by the end of the three years we believe any time lost will be made up. Critically we will need to transfer some funds from year 1 to year 2 to facilitate a successful completion of the project.

**Detail:**

The project began on April 3<sup>rd</sup> with four weeks of fieldwork on the two project sites Little Water Cay (LWC) and Big Ambergris Cay (BAC). On 7<sup>th</sup> April 2017 the project was officially launched in the Opus Conference centre Providenciales with around 100 people in attendance (including two Ministers from the new government). The Minister of Tourism addressed the meeting and there were presentations by all major partners as well as a question and answer session. The event was widely reported on the TV, radio, press and social media.

**Progress against outputs.**

1. Baseline data and short terms trends for iguanas, boas humans and predators on the 2 sites

San Diego Zoo led the iguana research which took place from 3<sup>rd</sup>- 30<sup>th</sup> April. The field sites on BAC were Calico Jacks and the Environmental Learning Centre and on LWC were the Visitor centre and Half Moon Bay. The following data were collected from previously marked study

populations: abundance (capture-mark-recapture data), sex, age (through morphometrics), blood samples to monitor stress levels and for genetic sampling, flight distances (when disturbed), mortality of iguanas and boas through road kill on BAC.

Transects were set across both islands for iguana abundance estimates these transects can be repeated even if BAC is fully developed in future. New individuals were tagged as needed

The planned surveying of islands near LWC for rodents and reptiles to facilitate a study on the effects of rodents on iguanas and to identify islands in need of restoration was delayed for the next field visit due to technical problems with the boat.

## 2. Biosecurity plans developed for the 2 sites

RSPB, San Diego Zoo Global and Big Ambergris Cay Ltd staff undertook a biosecurity scoping for Big Ambergris Cay in the second week of April as part of the fieldwork. This was led by Karen Varnham of RSPB. The main areas of human activity including the marina were assessed and rodent monitoring tools deployed to determine presence/absence of rats and mice. There was no sign of any rodents over 3 nights. (1) pathways (2) monitoring and (3) incursion responses were discussed by the team, and Karen has subsequently drafted a biosecurity plan for BAC which is currently under consultation in the team. The barge (a main pathway) arrives once/month highlighting that currently the biosecurity risk – for rodents - is relatively low.

## 3. Restoration/protection strategy development and rapid rat monitoring

Rapid monitoring methods for rodents: Various monitoring methods were deployed on Little Water Cay in the first week of fieldwork in April to see which picked up rat activity the quickest. These included tracking tunnels baited with peanut butter, camera traps and different flavoured wax blocks (chocolate, coconut, peanut, sardine) across the existing island bait grid. A total of c.100 monitoring tools were deployed. Full checks of the monitoring tools were completed, with tracking tunnels proving to pick up rat activity most quickly. Day time working meant baiting of the camera traps was unsuccessful (experimental baiting with sardines) as the bait was eaten by iguanas before night-time, therefore reducing opportunity to pick up rat/cat activity. In the future, when monitoring for rats on offshore cays we plan to undertake evening/night work to ensure we can effectively bait the camera traps. Iguana activity was also high in the tracking tunnels. The first draft of the rapid rat monitoring method has been produced and will be tested on the next field visit.

Monitoring for cats did not start in 2017, as another privately funded project eradicated all by one of the feral cats from the neighbouring cays Pine Cay and Water Cay. This removes the need for widespread cat monitoring in the project. Preventing cat incursion will be an important aspect of the Little Water Cay biosecurity protocol

## 4. Increase staff capacity

TCNT and DoA staff received training in rapid rat monitoring tools during the April visit. Correy Hall, Jennifer Handfield-Forbes, Courtney and Galvin Hall from TCNT; and Weinland Crossman, John Forbes, Michele Wilnick and Patrick Innis from the DoA. TCNT staff also assisted with the iguana research work on LWC and learnt more about the biology of and threats to iguanas which will help their general awareness raising work with tourists and the community.

BAC staff were given guidance notes in case a rat incursion occurs on the island prior to biosecurity training (next visit) when the biosecurity protocol will be finished and its implementation will begin.

### **Postponed fieldwork:**

*The second biannual visit for biosecurity training on BAC was timetabled for September 2017 and for iguana and boa work and rapid rat monitoring on offshore cays for November 2017. Due to the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Irma and Maria (see below) these visits have*

been postponed. We hope (but cannot yet be certain), that this visit will take place in the Spring of 2018. The position will be clearer by December 2017/January 2018

**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.**

**Administration:** contracts have been signed with the National Trust (TCNT) and the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Coastal Resources (DECR) preferred to sign a memorandum of understanding and to donate their staff time in kind, given the difficulty in extracting project funds from central government out to departments in previous projects – we were not aware of this when developing the initial project budget. **We hope to re deploy the funding original ear marked for DECR staff time to other areas of the project such as for contractors to re- clear trails for the project on Little Water Cay or for repairs to boas and docks post hurricanes.**

**Hurricanes Irma and Maria:** On September 8<sup>th</sup> Hurricane Irma – at category 5 - hit the Turks and Caicos Islands causing widespread damage and devastation (165 mph winds), two weeks later Hurricane Maria – at category 3 – hit the islands for a second time. Buildings, sites and infrastructure of the TCI project partners on Providenciales were damaged, some were completely destroyed. TCNT have moved out of their headquarters and are currently moving into an alternative office in Grace Bay. Power and internet services were restored only on 10<sup>th</sup> October and that was not universally across the islands. SDZ's boat (in dock on Providenciales) sustained minimal damage, which will need to be repaired prior to the next field visit.

*Project site 1- Little Water Cay:* Project equipment (bait stations) had been stored prior to hurricanes, but trails needed for biosecurity work on the island have been severely obstructed by debris, the dock and boats are damaged. It might be necessary to ask for a budget change around to enable these trails to be reopened.

*Project site 2- Big Ambergris Cay:* Infrastructure on this island (needed to host project field staff) has suffered extensive damage. It is not clear when this island will be able to host our project team again

Now less than 90 days since the hurricane it is not possible to detail the budget changes we might need right now. It is likely that around £10,000 of project field costs will need to be carried over to next year and some money associated with DECR staff costs re deployed next year. We should be able to confirm this figure by early 2018. There may be further knock on effects at the end of year 2, but at this early stage we believe it will still be possible to complete all the project activities in the three years but rather than six field trips with international scientists it is likely there will only be five or possibly four.

**Project Personnel change:**

- i) The project leader Elizabeth Radford will leave RSPB on 24th November 2017, she will be replaced as project leader by Sarah Havery. Sarah has been involved with this project from the outset, with a substantial role in the fieldwork alongside Karen Varnham.
- ii) Simon Busuttill left TCNT in July 2017 and was replaced by Dellaresse Higgs who holds the same role in relation to this Darwin project, namely oversight of the TCNT work

**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:

**Request to submit in January 2018 when hurricane impacts are clearer**

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?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £ 12,000

**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.

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We need to wait a few more months before submitting the change request to be sure of the hurricanes impact on the project. We understand budget changes must be submitted in January 2018. We are sure the expenditure can be righted by the end of the project period.

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

We therefore have 2 questions

- I) In exceptional circumstances – such as the passage of a category 5 and category 3 hurricane, will the Darwin Secretariat consider transferring our underspent funds to the next financial year?
- II) Will the Darwin secretariat accept the formal change request in the new when we are clearer about the impact of the hurricane?

**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. Additionally, if you were funded under R23 and asked to provide further information by your first half year report, please attach your response as a separate 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](mailto: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**