



**Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects  
Half Year Report  
(due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021)**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS084
<b>Project title</b>	Identifying and conserving resilient habitats in the British Virgin Islands
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	British Virgin Islands
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
<b>Partner(s)</b>	National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, Fort Worth Zoo
<b>Project leader</b>	Thomas Heller
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR3, October 2021
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/resilient-habitats-bvis">https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/resilient-habitats-bvis</a> ; Twitter @KewUKOTs #kewbvj; Facebook <a href="https://www.facebook.com/NPTVI/">https://www.facebook.com/NPTVI/</a>

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

Over the last 6 months we have focussed on getting the project back on track after the enforced break in activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The overall situation in BVI has improved enabling field work to restart. Particular progress has been made on the following outputs:

Output 1.1. The team at NPTVI has undertaken several visits to the field, including Virgin Gorda, Fallen Jerusalem, Great Tobago and Tortola, to survey and monitor populations of threatened plants. In addition to dedicated project fieldwork, a recent research visit by cactus researchers Andrew Gdaniec and Paul Hoxey presented an opportunity for complementary activities contributing to Outputs 3.2 and 4.2 (below).

Output 1.2. Significant progress has been made on undertaking genetic analyses of *Zanthoxylum* at RBG Kew. We have optimised a DNA isolation protocol for leaf samples of *Zanthoxylum* and DNA was extracted from all 590 samples collected to date and DNA concentration was quantified. The preparation of genomic libraries for target enrichment has begun, with the protocol optimised for this material.

Output 1.3. Data gathered in the field has been added to the project GIS

Output 3.2. Two new *ex-situ* collections have been made of the Endangered cactus *Leptocereus quadricostatus*, with cuttings made from plants at two populations on Anegada added to the accessions at the JR O'Neal Botanical Gardens on Tortola.

Output 4.1. A review of delivery of Capacity Building for the project has been made, taking into account significant staff turnover of the project team, along with the impact of Covid-19 on in-person delivery of practical training. An increased role for online training, as well as peer-to-peer training among the team in BVI has been agreed, with RBG Kew's MS Teams education platform identified as best suited for online training for this project.

Output 4.2. The opportunity for peer-to-peer training for the project has been seized, with new members of staff at NPTVI being trained in plant identification and *ex-situ* conservation by experienced colleagues within the organisation.

Output 5.2. NPTVI has circulated regular fieldwork reports with updates on activities towards Outputs 1.1 and 3.2.

Output 5.3. Regular Steering Group meetings have continued. Adapting to continued Covid-19 disruption has been an important topic of discussion.

**2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for COVID-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

As noted in AR2, staff turnover has been the biggest development unrelated to Covid-19 that the project team has had to adapt to in the delivery of this project.

The Project Leader, Dr Martin Hamilton, left employment at RBG Kew, with Thomas Heller taking his place in this role, and Dr Juan Viruel joining him as Co-PI. While this has an impact of distribution of workload among the team, we do not anticipate that this will have an impact on the budget and timetable of project activities.

At NPTVI, Natasha Harrigan and Creightanya Brewley left the organisation, with new recruits Chenae Walters, Chane Smith and Glendon Gregg joining the project team. Likewise, we don't anticipate this will have a significant impact on the budget and timetable of activities. However, the change in staffing and retention of skills does have implications for delivery of capacity building, compounded by the impact of Covid-19 on the project. However, the project is responding to the opportunity presented by online teaching platforms, with adopting Kew's Microsoft Teams education platform enabling training resources to be uploaded and made more accessible, both to project partners and potentially other UKOT partners in the future. Likewise, it enables training to be delivered remotely, as well as in person, and forms a valuable library of resources for NPTVI staff and potentially can be shared with other UKOT

partners. There is now an increased focus on peer-to-peer training within NPTVI, as well as a focus on some of the skills lost from the team, such a plant identification and propagation.

**2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of COVID-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

The impact of Covid-19 has continued to be mainly in travel restrictions preventing travel by international partners to participate in fieldwork and in-person capacity building for the first six months of this year of the project. While fieldwork involving Kew and FWZ is in planning to resume in November this year, it will not be possible to make up for this delay by rescheduling fieldwork within this financial year alone, which was planned as a very busy year in the field to begin with.

Nevertheless, we have been able to adapt by NPTVI continuing many of the field activities independently, rather than focused during joint fieldwork involving all project partners. This has ensured good progress towards Outputs 1.1, 3.2 and 4.2 in particular. However, the volume of data to collect in activities such as the Rapid Botanical Surveys, require the full field team to work together in the field, and as such fieldwork (and associated budget) needs to be redistributed across the final 18 months of the project.

We are confident that the project is still very much deliverable within the agreed timeframe, but is contingent on agreement from DEFRA to transfer budget for travel & subsistence from the current Y3 of the project into the revised Y4. The details of this are currently being evaluated and will become clearer as we finalise the plans for our first joint fieldwork in November. We estimate that a carry-forward of approx. [REDACTED] will be required. A change request to this effect will be submitted as soon as possible.

**2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with LTS: Yes/No

Formal change request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/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: [REDACTED]

**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. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

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

No other matters to raise.

**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 DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [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: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**