



Darwin Initiative/D+ Project Half Year Report (due 31st October 2019)

Project reference	DPLUS087
Project title	Transitioning the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme to sustain conservation success.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Cayman Islands
Lead organisation	National Trust for the Cayman Islands
Partner(s)	
Project leader	Stuart Mailer
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media etc.	www.nationaltrust.org.ky

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 In line with outputs 1.1. and 1.2 the SSAP Secretariat has now been appointed and was responsible for the administration and preparation for the first SSAP meeting, including scheduling the workshops and facilitating travel arrangements. The meeting was well attended with 8 overseas and 18 local attendees. Many of the key stakeholders were in attendance, including the Department of Environment (DOE), QEII Botanic Park, the Bronx Zoo (WCS), San Diego Zoo (SDZICR), Fort Worth Zoo and Island Vets, in addition to NTCI.

The meeting was held in Grand Cayman from the 16th- 20th September, 2019. The workshop meetings and discussions were productive and attendees worked cohesively to ensure that the time together was used effectively. The key outcomes from the conference included creating a new draft action plan and priorities for species conservation. All the outcomes from this meeting will be collated by the Secretariat and along with communication via monthly video conferencing will continue to contribute towards a final version of SSAP.

Due to work commitments, the annual welfare veterinary visit was rescheduled from the end of July to the 6th October. The veterinary team led by Dr Calle carried out detailed examination of the health of the captive population; and their suitability to be released from the facility at a future date. The vets confirmed there had been an improved weight gain over baseline [Output 3.5] across the group of captive animals and that overall they exhibited improved body condition.

Output 2. BIRP facility staff have commenced the programme of work intended to improve the captive breeding facilities. [Output 2.1 & 2.2] Cage /enclosure repairs and replacement are on-going. Fifteen new hatchling cages have been built and installed within the facility. Work has been carried out to the existing large adult enclosures and these have now been repaired and re-painted. Repairs have been made to 25 of the sub-adult enclosures and on-going repairs and improvements are being overseen by the new Operations Manager.

The team has begun to develop some new larger pens but are taking some time to evaluate a number of design ideas in order to improve the functionality of the new enclosures, so that they offer optimal environments for the Blue Iguanas and contribute more effectively to improving health and welfare standards with the facility. They are currently trialling a new idea for dividing the enclosures to use a more flexible structure than block work. The new concept is to use mesh panels with rollers, which will still prevent the iguanas escaping; but will provide a more cost effective and flexible alternative to concrete walls; allowing pen sizes/shapes to be adapted more easily in the future to meet changing needs of the facility.

Since June, 2019, the BIRP team have begun a programme of site clearing around the facility in order to improve bio-security at the site.[Output 2.3] Tenders have been requested and evaluated and contractors are under consideration to install some of the biosecurity upgrades including new flashing on the existing chain link fencing and concrete footings created to enable us to tie the fencing to the ground and create a more effective security barrier for excluding green iguanas and dogs. Daily patrols of the perimeter of the captive breeding facility are being carried out

to ensure that there is no damage to or breaches of existing bio-security barriers such as fencing and traps.

In addition, the team are examining current data and examples of good practice in bio-security. Recently they have been in contact with a local farmer who has had great success in protecting his crops against invasive Green Iguanas. The team are now evaluating whether some of these practices would transfer and be effective within the facility. As the team are clearing, building and making improvements to the facility; they are trialling various ideas and methods and then assessing their success and effectiveness before installing anything new; this will help to ensure the best outcomes and provide value for money through better management of resources, ensuring a more cost effective and efficient outcome.

Output 3. A hybrid motor vehicle has been purchased for use by the BIRP staff [Output 3.1]. This vehicle is already making a significant contribution to work at the facility, enabling staff to collect and offer a greater diversity of diet for the Blue Iguanas and food variety has almost quadrupled with an increase from 6 plant species to over 23 species of plants currently offered. The target is to reduce staff time for food collection by 25% and that is still our goal. Food collection time has not yet decreased significantly because new staff have needed to orientate themselves and locate suitable collection sites which offer the quantity, quality and variation of feed. It is anticipated that the time spent gathering food will start to decrease as the new staff are now developing an excellent working knowledge of the area and plants and have identified and mapped many suitable collection sites. A greater variety of plant species are being gathered and the amount of food offered has been seasonally adjusted by 200% in line with veterinary advice and so some of the time savings have not yet been realised.

Further to our goal of sustainability of BIRP a facility tour has been added at 3pm on a Tuesday and as the staff time reduces for food collection over the coming weeks we intend to increase tours, offering at least 2 extra afternoon tours during peak season and we will also introduce a noon tour, if demand dictates.

Plant species vary according to many factors such as seasonal variations and we have identified a number of recurring issues such as a lack of variation of diet in the dry season, when plant materials are much scarcer. Some private land offers greater variety of plant and we are approaching private land owners to gain permission to collect plant materials at certain times of the year to enhance the amount and variety of food for the captive Blue Iguanas. Having the new hybrid vehicle allows us to be able to go farther afield to get food and the new refrigeration enables us to store plants collected.

Work to create a draft baseline nutrition report has started and the weight and body condition of CBF iguanas is being regularly monitored in order to maintain and/or increase the condition of the Iguanas over baseline. Presently we are still relying on wild collected plant materials but the variety of the plants collected has increased by over 280 %.

The work towards purchasing suitable refrigeration units has started and suitable units have been researched, costings collated and the freezer unit has now been ordered. This acquisition will help meet our target to decrease the amount of staff time taken up collecting food as it will enable a larger food collection on some days as we will be able to store food items gathered in optimum conditions to maximise the nutritional integrity of the food gathered. A site for the freezer unit has been made ready and we are awaiting delivery of the unit in the next few weeks and we will then order the refrigeration unit.

The BIRP team are liaising with the other experts within our partnership including the QEIBP Horticulture Manager, SDZICR and WSC, to establish a wild food plant nursery to supplement and expand the diet (especially in the dry season) of the ex-situ population of iguanas. [Output 3.1] A short list of suitable plants species is being identified and we have established the pilot plots growing 3 plant species and are currently building more beds in order to increase capacity for up to 5 plant species to be grown on site by the end of year one. [Output 3.2].

Work has commenced in forging links with major supermarket chains on Island, with a view to them providing an alternative food supply source. Preliminary meetings with Fosters supermarket and the National Trust's CEO have taken place and discussions are on-going with the owners of Fosters supermarkets to gain a commitment from them to be part of the programme and for them to outline the quantity, variety and frequency of food they could supply. Fosters have expressed an interest in working with us and once we have secured their support, we can then use this as a model to approach other supermarkets.

Output 4. The annual survey at the Colliers Reserve is on target for March 2020 [Output 4.2] and work to clear the trails at this site has already commenced in order to ensure easier access for the survey teams next year. A meeting of the local partners was held on the 31st October, 2019 to plan detailed logistics, including survey team members, particularly competent, prospective overseas invitees, survey techniques and applicable technologies. [Output 4.1].

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.

Unexpected staff changes within the BIRP team meant there was a delay to work at the onset of the term of the grant. In particular, the recruitment process for a replacement Operations Manager was rigorous in order to ensure that the selected candidate possessed the desired skills and experience. We are encouraged that we were also able to recruit a young Caymanian with working experience with Cayman Brac native iguanas to the Programme. The two newly appointed staff members took up employment at the beginning of June, 2019. This impacted work at the start

of the project to some extent, but a great deal of effort has been put in by the team to ensure that targets and time frames are now being adhered to. We are pleased that with the new Operations Manager, Luke Harding, now on board, we will be going from strength to strength on the project deliverables and the conservation programme as a whole.

The planned workshop and veterinary team visits were moved from July to September and October respectively. This was a reflection of the heavy workloads of overseas stakeholder staff. The SSAP workshop took place within the designated quarter and had no impact on the overall budget or timetable. The second visit to the island by the WSC vet team in October was funded entirely by themselves.

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: **Yes**

Formal change request submitted: **Yes**

Received confirmation of change acceptance **Yes**

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.

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?

Fluctuations in the US\$ / Sterling exchange rate since the original submission of the grant application have significantly impacted the funds available to us to date. This has added a substantial degree of uncertainty in planning for and executing expenditure and a shortfall in funds when compared to our original estimates.

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 R25 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 DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to 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: 25-035 Darwin Half Year Report**