



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects
Half Year Report
(due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	DPLUS087
Project title	Transitioning the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme to Sustain Conservation Success
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Grand Cayman
Lead organisation	National Trust for the Cayman Islands
Partner(s)	Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), San Diego Zoo (SDZ), Queen Elizabeth II Botanical Park (QEIBP)
Project leader	Luke Harding
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2021; HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.nationaltrust.org.ky/our-work/conservation/ Facebook; Instagram: @blueiguanaconservation

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).

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Output 1: The Strategic Species Action Plan for the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana 2021-2026 was finalised in April 2022 and published in August 2021. The original deadline was postponed due to delays that were ultimately fortuitous - the Foreword for the SSAP was written by the Honourable Wayne Panton, Premier of the Cayman Islands. This was a significant achievement to show governmental support for Blue Iguana Conservation (BIC) and environmental action towards native species. The SSAP was published and shared via BIC social media platforms, along with a summary infographic to engage and enable all BIC followers to understand the strategies and objectives planned for the next five years. There has been media attention regarding the SSAP, including local news articles, BBC Wildlife Magazine, the IUCN Iguana Specialist Group and blue iguanas as a featured species featuring in a video at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in September 2021. This output has now been completed.

Output 2: Developments to the infrastructure at the BIC facility are all completed. Development of additional quarantine cages (Holding capacity of 30 animals) was made possible through a Change Request (Submitted and approved in August 2021) for reallocation of unspent funds due to travel restrictions during Covid pandemic. Our old quarantine cages were 30+ years old, are no longer fit for purpose and did not meet the same high standards that the new cages provide. The increased health and husbandry improvements at the facility made upgrading the quarantine facilities a high priority especially given recent *Helicobacter* cases during 2021.

The biosecurity improvements on the facility's 776.95 m perimeter fence have been completed and Year 3 of DPLUS087 focuses on the monitoring and evaluation of this work. There has been no record of invasive alien species inside the facility since October 2020. This enables the captive blue iguanas to be as secure as possible. Daily patrols of the perimeter fence are ongoing and there is frequent maintenance of vegetation growth on both sides of the fence. Both dog and cat traps are employed to manage invasive predators within the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park.

Output 3: Food plant variety has been maintained at around 40-55 species during 2021 due to an improved weather equilibrium of regular rain and sunshine on Grand Cayman this year in comparison to the past few years. The cultivation areas within the BIC facility have become extremely effective with over 140 plants from 51 different species and numerous additional plant species have established within the new semi-wild iguana habitats, creating natural browsing opportunities. Whilst this output has been completed and the food grown at the facility provides over the target 20% supplementation to the captive diet, BIC is continuing to evolve this part of the project.

The development and creation of the BIC Plant Handbook has been utilised by staff, volunteers and has proven a useful training resource for plant recognition and engagement with children at school talks.

Despite the improved seasonal weather changes, the BIC team continues to struggle finding food plant collection sites across the island due to increased housing development and decreased accessibility to land. In response to this issue the Blue Iguana Gardens initiative was launched in May 2021 to encourage the community to grow blue iguana food plants for frequent harvesting. In just the first 5 months this initiative has already had 39 registered private gardeners, 3 farmers, 4 schools, 5 businesses, 2 plant nurseries and 2 landscaping companies, along with a corporate sponsorship from Health City Cayman Islands who is planting specific plants for us within the hospital grounds. This strongly demonstrates the desire for the Cayman community to be involved in supporting BIC's efforts to help the long-term sustainability of our conservation efforts. BIC has received over 300 buckets of food plant donations. BIC, in turn, has supplemented gardeners with off-cuts from 15 food plant species to start their Blue Iguana Gardens, including donating 12 different plants, including papaya, Indian Mulberry, Duppy Gun and Chinese Violet to establish a sizeable garden at Cayman International School. The Blue Iguana Gardens initiative along with our own cultivation plots have already decreased food collection time by 26% compared to January 2021, achieving our target set of 25% (Output 3.1).

The hybrid vehicle remains a valuable resource for BIC to reach Blue Iguana Gardens and remaining food collection sites around the island. The fridge/freezer is utilised daily for keeping fruits and leaves fresh.

The 2021 annual health checks were completed on-island in October 2021 with BIC partners St Matthew's University School of Veterinary Medicine (SMU) leading on these checks for a second year, due to Covid-19 border restrictions still preventing WCS/Bronx Zoo to attend. The improved diversification of food plants and nutrition showed increased body condition in the facility's captive iguanas and was reflected in the 2021 breeding success of over 110 hatchlings, particularly in first-time breeding females, who laid large, good quality eggs and regained body condition quickly after laying.

Output 4: The annual blue iguana census survey took place in March 2021 using an on-island team as Covid-19 border restrictions prevented involvement from international participants. All data has been analysed and this output is now completed.

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.

Hurricane season saw one major storm in Grand Cayman, which led to minor damage to the BIC facility infrastructure, this has now all been repaired at the cost of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands.

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.

Covid-19 and local general elections delayed the public launch of the new SSAP document. The document was finalised but there was a delay due to general election. The newly elected Hon. Wayne Panton, Premier of the Cayman Islands, supported our work, resulting in him writing the foreword, proving further impetus for the significance of this SSAP. The SSAP was published in early August 2021 and has been well received.

The islands' border restrictions mean that mandatory quarantine is still in place, reducing the ability for international vets to assist at BIC. However, BIC has been able to use on-island partners during this time which has been invaluable for assistance and ensuring that vital health screening continues.

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: £

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?

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. 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**