



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

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS 098
<b>Project title</b>	Restoring and safeguarding wetlands of the Caribbean UKOTs
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Anguilla, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Anguilla National Trust (ANT), Montserrat National Trust (MNT), Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT)
<b>Project leader</b>	Charlie Butt
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)</b>	HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media etc.</b>	<a href="https://theanguillian.com/2019/06/flooding-at-the-east-end-pond-being-addressed/">https://theanguillian.com/2019/06/flooding-at-the-east-end-pond-being-addressed/</a>

**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).**

**1. Wetland conservation action plans are prepared in partnership with local experts and grassroots organisations and capacity to develop and implement plans increased**

*Activity 1.1 Action plan process for target wetland sites initiated at inception workshop in Q1Y1 with all project partners, facilitated by technical specialists in wetland restoration*

The inception workshop was held in Anguilla (17-20 June 2019) hosted by our project partner, ANT and facilitated by the RSPB. This workshop hosted 22 participants from the host country and partner territories. The workshop sought to consider the challenges facing wetland sites and provide an overview of wetlands creation, conservation, restoration and management techniques, the latter complimented by RSPB in-house wetlands ecology expertise. The Open Standards framework for conservation planning was introduced as a proposed template for preparing wetland action plans. Open Standards materials were adapted for use in facilitated break out groups on day 2 of the workshop, resulting in draft action plans for all project sites. These draft wetlands action plans will be adaptively managed as the project progresses and up-to-date information is generated following site surveys.

*Activity 1.2 Prepare annual monitoring plans to survey birds and plants*

Annual monitoring plans for bird (cross-territory) have been completed and methods agreed. In response to challenges faced by project partners with data recording and storage, the RSPB is finalising a wetland bird monitoring app - based on Survey123 for ArcGIS - that enables bird monitoring data to be collected on smartphones and stored online. The app uses the same data recording parameters that ANT has been using for recording wetland birds and site conditions across Anguillan wetlands, with the benefit of GPS to precisely record survey sites.

*Activity 1.3 Undertake bird and plant surveys at each wetland site*

Anguilla: Plant monitoring plots were established at East End Pond Conservation Area in August 2019 and a comprehensive plant species list was compiled for Road Salt Pond between May 2019 and August 2019 – both assisted by St. Barths' Agence Territoriale de l'Environnement and students from the Albena Lake Hodge Comprehensive School

Environmental Club. Plant monitoring plots are not feasible at Road Salt Pond as there is only a thin vegetation buffer between the pond and the local road that lines most of its perimeter.

Montserrat: Waterbird and terrestrial bird surveys were carried out around the island as a means of sensitising staff of the Department of Environment to the different species of birds that visit or are found on Montserrat. This helped to train staff on bird identification and bird calls.

Turks and Caicos: an event was held at Wheeland Pond with local community to raise awareness of the importance of the pond for wetland birds and generate local support. The event provided opportunities for all to appreciate the birdlife present. Formal surveys are yet to be conducted but are anticipated to take place before the end of 2019.

*Activity 1.4 Conservation action plans produced for Anguilla's East End Pond Conservation Area and Road Salt Pond Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (Anguilla) and Wheeland Pond (Turks and Caicos) by Q4Y1*

Plans have been prepared for these three sites as an output of the Anguilla wetlands workshop. These will be fine-tuned as the baseline surveys are incorporated and further management needs identified.

*Activity 1.6 Meetings held between National Trusts and Government to assist with planning and decision-making relevant to all wetlands in each Territory*

Montserrat: the RSPB project team and mine rehabilitation consultant visited in June 2019. Meetings were held with Ministers and senior Government officials and senior staff at the Montserrat National Trust. Meetings were also held with policy leads at Governor's House and local developers from the Belham Valley area.

Turks and Caicos: Department for Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) and TCNT have created a cross-team for project implementation, with shared responsibilities, prioritised around core strengths.

Anguilla government departments of Environment, Physical Planning and Disaster Management joined and participated in the ANT-hosted project inception workshop and participated in breakout group discussions that will inform wetland action plans.

## **Output 2. Natural and artificial wetlands where restoration techniques are piloted lead to measurable increase in ecological quality and improvement and enhancement of natural capital values indicators**

*Activity 2.1 Wetland restoration needs assessment for EEPKA (Anguilla), Wheeland Pond (Turks and Caicos) and Belham Valley Wetlands (Montserrat) completed by Q3 Yr. 1 across Territories.*

Wetland restoration needs assessments were completed prior to the workshop by project leads in each territory. These were then reviewed and updated with a broader set of stakeholders during the workshop.

*Activity 2.2 Commission professional rehabilitation and remediation feasibility study (N.S Nettles & Associates proposal to restore East End Conservation Area (Area) wetland site in Anguilla*

Feasibility study completed. The purpose of this study was to map the geology of the pond, provide a better understanding of the hydrogeology of this area, and look at the feasibility to remove the in-filled area. The study sought to assist in developing flood mitigation measures and explore how a more functional salt marsh/pond habitat could be realised to attract a larger and more diverse bird population. The mapping process recorded several deep sinkhole features extending to depths in excess of 20m (66ft). These large relic collapse sinkholes have gradually filled with the residuum of the dissolved limestone, plugging the sinkholes surface porosity with fine silty sands leading to flooding of East End Village. The report recommends various approaches for remediation, however, they are all quite costly. The ANT is in the process of reviewing and considering the report and its recommendations.

**Montserrat:** Scoping mission to Belham Valley and Margarita Valley to assess remediation and restoration needs conducted in June 2019. A mission is planned for Q1 2020 where RSPB

wetland ecologists, management specialists will join the mine rehabilitation consultant and look at wetland creation feasibility, recommendations and meet and consult firstly with the on-island team and then with local stakeholders.

Activity 2.2, 2.3 Professional consultancy commissioned to assess rehabilitation and remediation feasibility to address sand mining in upper Belham Valley Area and potential wetlands location in bay area. A draft rehabilitation action plan has been prepared by the consultant for consultation with Montserrat National Trust (MNT) and the Montserrat Department of Environment (DoE).

**Output 3. The value of wetlands and need for their wise use is better-understood by those intending to undertake operations or make decisions affecting their ecological quality**

*Activity 3.1. Integrated/innovative community involvement to raise awareness and significance of wetlands.*

Turks and Caicos: a door to door informational walk recently took place led by TCNT and DECR. This included providing literature to community members about the Wheeland Pond restoration plans together with an invitation as to how community members can get involved in the project. The following week, a 'Wheeland Pond Community Beautification and Bird Watching Project' event took place – largely a continuation of the community involvement to raise awareness included engaging school science classes in specific assignments, such as monitoring seasonal wildlife. A Community Clean up event was held at Wheeland Pond with involvement of local schools, followed by bird watching activity.

*Activity 3.4 Schools to engage science classes in specific assignments from monitoring seasonal wildlife at wetlands to control of invasive species (plants)*

Anguilla: School students joined with plant monitoring/assessment surveys conducted at Road Salt Pond in May 2019. Students and teachers/supervisors were also trained in bird identification and conducted a trial wetland bird count. Two further schools have been approached regarding the implementation of school-wide wetlands education programmes. The Department of Education has also agreed to support this education initiative through the provision of transportation of students to wetland sites. The programme will be held between October and November 2019.

Montserrat: During field visits, the Montserrat team noted the work required including: installation of dip wells to determine seasonal water table; digging of channels to allow water to flow through to the proposed area for wetland creation and – subject to the forthcoming feasibility assessments - connecting the wetland to the sea to allow salt water and juvenile fish to enter the wetland. There are a range of stakeholders which the project team will consult with, a key group being the Isles Bay community, who live next to the area proposed for wetland creation. To allay any doubts or concerns they may have about the project, a stakeholder meeting will be held early in Q1 2020. This meeting will be to not only explain the project but to invite them to share and contribute their vision and hopes for the area. Their feedback will then be integrated into the wetland creation plan.

**Output 4: Strengthened wetlands conservation management, restoration and organisational capacity of the project partners**

*Activity 4.1 Agreement on the roles and responsibilities of each party in the project.*

Where more than one partner is operating in a territory, cross teams have been setup with roles and responsibilities defined, agreed and captured in a project management file. These files have now been shared with all parties.

**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.**

**Anguilla:** One of the findings of the Nettles' report on East End Pond Conservation Area was that removing the fill from the pond (to increase its size and improve conditions for wetland birds), may do more harm than good by releasing harmful materials into the water. We will continue to consult with ANT to explore the best way forward.

**Montserrat:** The Isles Bay community has expressed concern over plans to engage the sand miners in the project. A team of RSPB experts along with MNT project partners will help facilitate meetings in January 2020 designed to address community concerns and invite input and participation to the wetland action planning process.

**TCI:** There remain rumours of a hotel development that could negatively impact Wheeland Pond. We are trying to verify the level of threat, timing etc., but have no specific information beyond feedback from concerned community members. We are in close contact with our partners to check if we need to act or adaptively manage the project accordingly. RSPB is planning to deploy additional relevant expertise in Q1 2020 to support the project.

**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/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.

**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 issues.

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](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: 25-035 Darwin Half Year Report**