



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

Project reference	DPLUS 098
Project title	Restoring and safeguarding wetlands of the Caribbean UKOTs
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Anguilla, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands
Lead organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Partner(s)	Anguilla National Trust, Montserrat National Trust, Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), Department of Coastal and Environmental Resources (DECR), Montserrat Government Department of Environment (DOE)
Project leader	Mr. Charlie Butt
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	30th October 2021, (HYR2)
Project website/blog/social media	Road Salt Bay Pond Video, produced by ANT: (18) Watch Facebook Belham Valley Video: (18) 664Connect Media – Posts Facebook MNT blog post: Creating Green Spaces & Places Where People Can Connect With Nature... - Montserrat National Trust TCI Spatial Plan: TCI NPDP 2020 TCNT profile of project: (18) Turks & Caicos National Trust Facebook

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).

The in-territory teams have continued to demonstrate resilience and adaptability in the face of the Covid-19 global pandemic, so the project has largely been delivered as envisaged.

Output 1

Bird surveys undertaken at Belham Valley Wetlands, Montserrat - monthly from March to September; on 26 May 2021 at East End Pond Conservation Area (EEPCCA) & Road Salt Pond (RSP) IBA, Anguilla; and bi-monthly at Wheeland Pond, Turks and Caicos from May-July).

Mangrove planting continued at EEPCCA and RSP with a 45% and 50% survival rate respectively. Wheeland Pond (WP) clean up completed and approvals obtained for signage. Final construction of viewing platforms underway at Wheeland. Public education and bird watching surveys undertaken at WP by TCNT, DECR and community volunteers.

Meetings held between ANT staff and Government to assist with planning and decision-making relevant to all wetlands in Territory. ANT in contact with the Department of Physical Planning regarding updates on the proposed mega-yacht marina at RSP. The project proponent has not taken any action to advance the project (including mandated environmental impact assessment) since signing the MOU/Contractual Agreement with government in June 2020.

The Director of Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT) met with the Heads of Departments and the new Minister of Tourism Hon. Josephine Connolly where project updates were shared, together with plans for TCNT to scale up efforts in the eastern islands including Grand Turk, Salt Cay and South Caicos (July 22nd, 2021).

Through May-September, consultations were held with Montserrat sand miners and the DoE, led by consultant Jonathan Stacey via Zoom platform and questionnaire. The 'Belham Valley Rehabilitation Guidelines: Sand & Gravel Mining' were prepared by the consultant, with input from the DoE, and were finalised for Cabinet ratification/approval along with Amendments to the Modification of the Physical Development Plan for North Montserrat 2012-2020. MNT and RSPB responded to the request for input on this modification. Local golf course designer, Dwayne Hixon, contracted to enhance the lower Belham Valley wetlands. Works commenced with guiding support of the DOE, MNT and RSPB wetlands ecology team.

Output 2

Construction of viewing platform and boardwalk at EEPKA completed and signage installed. Wheeland Pond solid waste removal undertaken and viewing platform and walkway near completion. Anguilla National Trust (ANT) relocated office and moved all mangrove seeds and seedlings to the Agricultural Unit-Department of Natural Resources nursery, to reduce impacts from free roaming goats. Mangrove seeds are being collected to replenish the nursery and to be planted at the project sites and wider wetlands. Wheeland community outreach has mainly been virtual via social media and other means due to restrictions.

ANT worked with smaller groups in a more COVID-19 secure environment, despite being unable to organise large community activities, due to COVID-19 outbreak. Social media (primarily Facebook) used to engage the public about Anguilla's wetlands. Island-Wide Clean-Up Day (18th September) included community volunteers in a clean-up at EEPKA. An open on-line survey conducted to gauge awareness and values towards RSP completed by 221 individuals. Over 95% of respondents indicated importance related to natural and cultural heritage. A series of short films about the ecological importance of the RSP produced (with additional RSPB funding support). The docu-series was viewed by 19,557 individuals. ANT also hosted on-line trivia to which 5,706 individuals responded. Prizes offered to first correct responders.

Anguilla's permanent Secretary of ministry for the environment initiated quarterly meetings among departments and the ANT, exploring opportunities for inter-agency cooperation to increase project impact. Draft position paper prepared outlining the value of RSP to safeguard as conservation/protected area.

Meetings were held with Chief Surveyor, DOE, MNT concerning securing wetlands of Lower Belham valley as Crown Lands and protected areas, potentially vested to the MNT.

Output 3

Two companies (Social Security Board of Anguilla) assisted with tree planting restoration of EEPKA (4 September 2021). Social Security Board of Anguilla staff assisted with World Migratory Bird Day count on same day. Consultations held with Montserrat Tourist Board and Dwayne Hixon (local developer) as key stakeholders with interests in the Lower Belham Valley. Belham Valley Wetland featured in a blog produced by MNT here (See activity 2.3) TCNT joined 'Kimcha Village Bird Sanctuary' in support of their "Seniors BBQ Fun Day'. Staff were able to engage the senior residents of the Blue Hills, Wheeland community members, and the district representative, Hon. Kyle Knowles on the value and use of wetlands.

Interactions with students in Anguilla has been minimal since due to rising COVID-19 cases. However, ANT is working with Albena Lake Hodge Comprehensive School Sixth Form Biology class on a wetlands restoration study. The study will compare growth and survival of mangrove species (red, black, white) under different conditions within EEPKA. Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and the Environment (MALHE), DOE staff and MNT involved in virtually engaging schools and the public on shorebirds and wetlands importance.

Output 4

RSPB commissioned a TCI-based environmental consultancy to develop materials and encourage public participation in spatial plan (NPDP) consultation in 2020; the NPDP was published on 1st October 2021. The plan makes references to securing/managing wetlands and the contribution of the Darwin Plus wetlands project in this regard.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact the Caribbean region. A cross-OT in person meeting has therefore been ruled out and a virtual meeting is proposed for March 2022 to facilitate sharing of project experiences, challenges and approaches to wetlands management.

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.

Anguilla: nothing to note (but see 2b). The adoption of the proposed measures to increase the sustainability of sand mining in the upper Belham Valley (**Montserrat**) has proved to be more difficult than anticipated due to remote working. Options to incorporate the proposals into legislation continue to be explored with GoM. Movement of staff due to personal circumstances leading to stretched MNT staff resources and adaptive management of project. **Turks and Caicos Islands:** The need to balance administrative challenges (e.g., labour disputes, loss of staff) challenged TCNT capacity.

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.

It is unlikely we will be able to hold an in-person project team wrap-up meeting / workshop as hoped for, due to the challenges of Covid-19 in the Caribbean including travel and convening groups of people from different countries. **Anguilla:** The outbreak of relatively large clusters of COVID-19 has led ANT to reassess what project activities can be safely engaged in. **Montserrat:** Public stakeholder engagement activities delayed; arrangements made to hold meetings virtually when policy decisions are communicated. **TCI:** Limited access to community and materials arose from disruption to supply chain due to COVID-19, which has also mainly impacted the public awareness activities, impeding school outreach, community meetings, travel and official government meetings.

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

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. 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?

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly hampered the ability of RSPB staff as well as project partners to travel locally, regionally and internationally for project purposes. With this in mind, RSPB anticipates further correspondence with Darwin as regards to adaptive management of the final year of the project.

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**