

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

*Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.*

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS102
<b>Project title</b>	Saving Tristan's only native tree and its associated unique buntings
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Tristan da Cunha Island Group
<b>Lead partner</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Conservation Department, Tristan Government Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) The Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA)
<b>Project leader</b>	Andy Schofield
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR4 (Oct 2023)
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	N/A

**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).**

April to September 2023, a period which covers the quieter winter season on Tristan, was used to maintain cultures of our control agent *Microterys nietneri*, both on Tristan but also within the quarantine facilities at CABI, Egham; this was done to allow a final shipment of adult wasps to Tristan for the next visit in November/December 2023. Unfortunately, it was too difficult to maintain the indoor culture of the agent on Tristan during the winter months, despite remote supervision. A new culture will therefore need to be established from a hopefully already established outdoor population on Tristan, or through this new UK shipment, to enable further releases later in the summer (Jan-Mar).

In April, the Conservation Department team reported seeing emergence holes in scale insects on Nightingale Island. Although promising, we are lacking photographs of this and have been cautioned by others who have observed scales damaged by buntings gleaning branches which can potentially look like parasitised scales. The trip in November will hopefully be able to confirm whether the agent has established or not on each island.

Activities are only listed below if there has been an update in the last six months:

**1.5 Culturing of *C. hesperidum* from Tristan at CABI for testing and mass rearing of agents**

**3.1 Rearing of agents for release at CABI quarantine facilities using several chambers to keep individual agents separated and supply population of scales uninfected**

**4.3 Follow on shipments and releases of agent(s) to cover all three target islands**

A culture of *M. nietneri* has been maintained at CABI's facilities in Surrey as we haven't yet got definitive proof that the agent has successfully established on Tristan. Our specialists will

therefore take out more wasps during their trip this month to re-establish the culture on the island, but we hope that this will be able to be bolstered by an established outdoor population on Tristan. Further releases of the agent on all three islands are planned for this austral summer to maximise the chance of establishment. Should establishment be confirmed on an island, releases will be prioritised on islands where it hasn't been.

**2. 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.**

For three years of the project, maintaining a culture of the pest species *Coccus hesperidum* on *Basella alba* (Malabar spinach), as a suitable host to maintain a culture of the parasitoid *M. nietneri*, was unproblematic. However, during this reporting period, an infestation with glass house thrips made this difficult as no pesticides could be used to control this pest species on the spinach plants. We therefore had to go through the process of switching to much slower growing host plants, which were not being attacked by thrips such as *Schlefflera* and *Fatsia*. As the scales themselves take several weeks to reach a size to be infested by the parasitoids, this led to a bottleneck in culturing; only recently have we been able to increase numbers of the control agent again. We should, however, be able to produce a suitable number of wasps for a final shipment to Tristan this month.

Unfortunately, due to a combination of changes in sailing dates and unforeseen medevacs in the last month, a planned two-week visit by our experts from CABI and Fera is now likely to be less than a week. This reduces the chances of the specialists getting to the outer islands as they are dependent on sea state. The emergence of the wasps being brought on this trip had also been timed for a specific date; now that the date has been moved back it means that fewer wasps are likely to survive the journey and it will be more difficult to re-establish the culture on Tristan. Medevacs must of course take priority, but it is frustrating given the lack of in-person support the Conservation Department team have received during this project.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: Unknown - confirmed by email on 31/10

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)**

**We are waiting on some outstanding paperwork so we are unable to give the actual spend for this period. T**

Actual spend: £

**4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?**

**No** Estimated underspend: £

**4c. 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget 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.**

**NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.**

**5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

N/A

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.**

**All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.**

**Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with NIRAS through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**