



**Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects
Half Year Report
(due 31st October 2020)**

Project reference	DPLUS105
Project title	Building capacity to make Montserrat a mountain chicken refuge
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Montserrat
Lead organisation	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Partner(s)	Montserrat National Trust, Montserrat Department of Environment, Montserrat Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, WildDominique, ZSL, NordensArk, Chester Zoo & Bristol Zoo
Project leader	Mike Hudson
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	www.mountainchicken.org https://www.facebook.com/ReWildCaribbean/ https://twitter.com/rewildcaribbean/

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).

We started the project in July, immediately advertising for the two new Mountain Chicken Project Officer roles, to be filled by two aspiring Montserratian conservationists. We had over 20 applications for the roles, and interviewed five candidates. We have now selected the two candidates: Tavis Weekes and Kaysie Ryan, who will begin their employment imminently through the Montserrat National Trust. We have started the process of reviewing Durrell's draft competency register to design a training plan for these staff over the coming year, and have provisionally a place for Tavis on Durrell's DESMAN training course in 2021.

We have also carried out a number of outreach events, including a live broadcast from Montserrat to Durrell's followers, online. This included a Q&A with the project coordinator and a behind the scenes tour of the project facilities. This was very well received and resulted in approximately £500 of donations towards the project. Three interviews have been organised with local radio and prominent local social media channels to promote the upcoming work associated with this Darwin project and recent successes. We have also begun working with local home-schooling groups to ensure they will also benefit from increased outreach and engagement capacity associated with the grant

As planned, we have conducted our thrice weekly feeding of the mountain chickens in the enclosure, alongside weekly pond changes and data collection and maintenance of the live-food breeding facility, as per our original proposal. In addition, maintenance of the plants within the enclosure to prevent overgrowth was conducted, with the enclosure now having a thick understorey coverage compared with the relatively bare earth / ash, when first constructed, which is fantastic to see. Since July we have also discovered 33 nests in the enclosure, showing the animals have adapted well to their home. Unfortunately, none of these nests are yet to produce viable young, but our animals are still young so we were always unlikely to achieve this in 2020. Monthly monitoring and health checks continue to demonstrate improving physical condition and negative results for Bd infection across the population since surviving Bd infection earlier in the year.

We have purchased the project vehicle and shipped it to Montserrat, along with a large number of insect breeding boxes from the UK and the two new laptops for the new project staff. The vehicle has now arrived in the Montserrat and is awaiting customs clearance through the Montserrat National Trust. This will greatly improve our ability to reliably deliver the project.

Finally, the National Trust have provided the project with new office and storage space for the project coordinator, and two new project staff and volunteer. This office space is a great improvement from our previous temporary space and provides a core workplace for project staff, which should increase our productivity and allows us to keep all of our project kit in the same place, rather than our current series of boltholes.

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.

One mountain chicken was found dead in July, and a thorough post-mortem was carried out by the project coordinator. In consultation with the vets, no cause of the death could be defined although a few abnormalities were detected including; internal granuloma and the presence of a currently unidentified parasitic tic, specimens of both have been collected for further analysis. Chytridiomycosis was ruled out through three negative skin swabs for Bd DNA, showing the animal was not infected with Bd prior to and at the time of death, or at time of post-mortem. Whilst upsetting to lose an animal, death due to factors outside our control are to be expected, as these animals are living a semi-wild existence.

We have postponed our outreach and engagement planning workshop, previously planned for October, until November, to allow for the involvement of the newly recruited project officers in

the workshop. We believe, as younger Montserradians, they will provide unique insight into new mechanisms for engaging their peers on the island, which might otherwise be missed. This will not significantly impact the project timetable.

Following the interview of the candidates for the Mountain Chicken Project Officer roles, there were two candidates who, whilst not selected, the interview committee thought were of interest to the project. The first, a teacher with excellent art/outreach ideas, has been offered employment through the National Trust in another role, and will likely be invited to take part in our outreach workshop and later events. The second was a junior member of current mountain chicken volunteers who we could not offer a role in the current project framework. As an alternative to a full role, we aim to offer this candidate an internship, with costs covered. In line with our application, this represents the first official internship on the project. We think this will be a fantastic opportunity to engage another young person in conservation on Montserrat.

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.

Firstly, our project volunteer who assists the Project Coordinator with the delivery of the project, was forced to return to the UK at the start of the project due to the COVID lockdown in Montserrat. Thankfully, the Government of Montserrat have supported her return now that restrictions have been lifted on the island. This would not have been possible without their help. Durrell provided the emergency funding for the repatriation flight and return for this volunteer, so it has not impacted the project budget.

Secondly, inter-island transport between Montserrat and Dominica (via Antigua) is currently not possible, meaning our inter-island knowledge transfer trips are likely to be impacted for the next six months, at least. We will keep Darwin updated with our plans in the face of these restrictions. We plan to start a digital communications version of these trips in the short-term, so that the teams can get to know one another before meeting in person. It will likely be the case that these trips are cancelled for some of 2021, which will reduce our expenditure in the current financial year.

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:	No
Formal change request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	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?

No.

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**