



## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021)

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS105
<b>Project title</b>	Building capacity to make Montserrat a mountain chicken refuge
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Montserrat
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Montserrat National Trust, Montserrat Department of Environment, Montserrat Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, WildDominique, ZSL, NordensArk, Chester Zoo & Bristol Zoo
<b>Project leader</b>	Mike Hudson
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.mountainchicken.org">www.mountainchicken.org</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/ReWildCaribbean/">https://www.facebook.com/ReWildCaribbean/</a> <a href="https://twitter.com/rewildcaribbean/">https://twitter.com/rewildcaribbean/</a> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/mountainchickenrecovery/">https://www.instagram.com/mountainchickenrecovery/</a>

**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).**

**Output 1: Enhanced capacity exists within Montserrat DoE to implement effective conservation actions through newly recruited and highly trained Project Officers**

Training Needs and Assessment (TNA) workshop to identify and develop skill gaps within the Department of Environment and National Trust is currently being scheduled for February/March 2022 (1.1) due to the now relative easing of travel restrictions into Montserrat.

To further both project officers training, Mr Weekes and Miss Ryan both attended and complete Durrell's online ESR (Endangered Species Recovery) course. This five-day, online interactive learning experience introduces the issues and practical skills involved in saving threatened species from extinction, developing a critical understanding of biodiversity conservation, the issues it raises and how they can be addressed, as well as practical research skills to inform conservation action.

Project Officer Miss Ryan will attend the DESMAN (Durrell's Endangered Species Management Course) beginning February 2022, at the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust on the island of Jersey. This 12-week course is designed to equip conservation professionals with a complete range of skills to maximise their effectiveness at managing or participating in conservation projects. The course covers the theory and practice of planning and running endangered species recovery projects, alongside a variety of professional skills in facilitation, management, and leadership.

First aid training in both Anaphylaxis Awareness level 2 and Concussion and Brain Injuries level 2 has been undertaken by both project officers.

In collaboration with the Department of Environment, historical mountain chicken frog survey training has been complete including navigation using GPS and transect methodologies, alongside bird survey training, with bat survey training organised for November (1.5).

In collaboration with a fellow Darwin Initiative on island assessing turtle populations, being undertaken by Exeter University and Exeter Marine Conservation, project officers Mr Weekes and Miss Ryan trained with research officer Jack Wiggins of the University of Exeter. They received 2 days training per week over two months in population surveys; turtle track identification; nest excavations; sampling; pit-tagging; flipper ID tagging; egg chamber measurements. This experience has been extremely valuable in building the conservation skillset of our officers, exposing them to differing methodologies and species on island. We aim to continue this collaboration during the lifetime of both projects.



Monthly online inter-regional meetings began in April, between the mountain chicken conservation teams in Montserrat and Dominica. These calls are being held in place of in-person inter-island exchanges which we aim to resume when quarantine between the islands is not prohibitively long. The calls have allowed the teams to begin familiarising the teams with the personnel on both islands, and the work, successes and challenges they face (1.6).

The two Mountain Chicken Project Officers also continue to develop and build confidence in their skillsets across all areas of the programme, both have lead outreach initiatives, given presentations to students, trained interns and have regularly featured on the local radio.

**Output 2: Mountain chicken population established and surviving in a semi-wild managed environment with signs of breeding and carrying capacity of enclosures is increased to 50.**

This year we've witnessed no infection with the Bd fungus and no mortalities in the mountain chickens or in the normal reservoir species on the island (2.3). Only three positive samples were detected in 240 tree frogs samples taken at the two sites on the island. We believe this is likely due to unusual environmental conditions this year and is unlikely to represent a long-term trend in infection dynamics. Unfortunately, this lack of infection has limited our ability to collect data on the efficacy of our environment manipulations on limiting chytridiomycosis in our mountain chickens (2.1).

The team has also continued husbandry of the mountain chickens, including three times weekly feeds (2.2), weekly pond changes (2.3) and monthly health checks including disease screening. A total of 354 swabs have been collected from Mountain Chickens and processed with real-time PCR in partnership with ZSL (2.1).

Monthly health check reports alongside monthly Darwin reports are circulated amongst project veterinary and health experts from the project partners to ensure inclusive decision making (2.5).



**Output 3: 5-year conservation management plan for mountain chickens in Montserrat is created based on the results of the trials in the semi-wild enclosure.**

Not scheduled for Y2.

**Output 4: Increased public engagement with nature in Montserrat using the mountain chicken as an ambassador through outreach events and schools engagement.**

MCRP organized, with the help of the Montserrat National Trust, an award ceremony for Mr Calvin 'Blacka' Fenton (our Mountain Chicken Expert), who was nominated by Durrell for the Disney Conservation Hero's Award 2020, for his lifetime contribution toward conservation. He was successfully selected as one of twenty individuals worldwide to receive the award. A ceremony was held where awards were given from both the MCRP Coordinator, the Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Crenston Buffonge and Mr Lloyde Martin of DoE. A significant award, recognizing his efforts helping the mountain chicken recovery programme, amongst other conservation initiatives on island.



Increased public engagement has been seen on all fronts of the programme. Engaged with grade's two and three of Lookout Primary School, giving a presentation by the team on the mountain chicken recovery programme and an activity carried out with the students to replicate how we health check and disease screen the frogs. All schools on island have been contacted to organise presentations across all grades. As a team we also took part in the summer school that was featured at the National Trust in August. A presentation and health check activity with replica frogs was undertaken followed by a second session later that week painting statue mountain chickens.



Through collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Affairs, two one-month internships were offered across island, filled and complete through July/August/September. One student from the secondary school and one student from the college. Interns were trained and partook in all aspects of the project from husbandry and field work to data input and outreach.

Positive feedback from both was received with one individual wishing to actively continue to volunteer on fieldwork (4.3).

To celebrate Mountain Chicken Day, a hike was organised in collaboration with the Department of Environment, broadcast on the radio, open to all, hiking an historical transect rather than the trails available to all. Although weather postponed the initial date, the hike was successful and featured statue frogs that had been painted by the art student of the Montserrat secondary school. These were placed along the transect and the audio of mountain chicken calls played upon approach, engaging the hikers in the realism of locating a frog in the wild. A raffle was held for all participants featuring an array of environmental gifts (4.4).



As part of mountain chicken day, the team also featured on mid-morning ZJB radio, being interviewed on the progress of the project, history and facts about the frogs. Average audience of these interviews is thought to be 5000 for a peak show, with an additional 2000-5000 when including website replays accessed by diaspora and non-residents (4.4, 4.5).

Project staff have also recently featured on 664 connect – a leading local website, with a large viewership of especially younger people in Montserrat, one of our key targets for outreach activities.

The programme now has 1,672 follows across our three social media channels with average monthly unique engagements since April 2021 reaching 1,476, exceeding our target of 1,000 (4.6).

Trail signage has been produced for four trails on island with the initial rollout planned for November. Mountain chicken statues have been painted by art students of the Montserrat Secondary School and these will accompany the Dry Waterfall trail, designated as the mountain chicken trail. The Tourism Department have asked the team to design signage for a further three trails on island which would be funded under their EU grant (4.7).



**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.**

The removal of potential predators to froglets within the semi-wild enclosure transpired to be more difficult than first thought. The use of pit-fall traps and noosing enabled us to remove an initial 10+ adult/sub-adult ameivas, with the perimeter overlay with smaller mesh to ensure re-entry was not possible. The remainder ameiva had either become familiar with the traps or highly reactive to our presence. With continued effort we have now caught and removed a total of 20 individuals and will continue to bait traps during daylight hours to capture any that may remain. Mountain chickens are nocturnal by nature, whilst ameiva are diurnal. Though no threat to an adult mountain chicken, these lizards may have been predatory toward froglets. Other species such as herons cannot be ruled out as a predatory risk also. If it transpires that no froglets remain evident, the management of future froglets will be adapted to exclude and mitigate these risks until deemed safe.

**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.**

Montserrat has reopened its borders as of the 01.10.21, making prior inter-island exchange between Montserrat and Dominica (via Antigua) impossible. Due to this our inter-island knowledge transfer trips had to be postponed. Restrictions to transit through Antigua require at least one vaccination, with a mandatory 5-day quarantine in Montserrat. We began a digital communications version of these trips monthly, so that both teams get to know one another before meeting in person whilst also knowledge sharing. We hope regulations will continue to reduce and thus allow us to engage in at least one inter-island exchange before the end of Q1 2022. This is likely to reduce our expenditure in the current financial year (1.6).

**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](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: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**