



## Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020)

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS121
<b>Project title</b>	Strengthening biosecurity to protect Turks & Caicos' Iguana Islands
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Turks & Caicos Islands
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT); Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR); San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG); Department of Agriculture (DoA); Environmental Health Department (EHD); Pine Cay Homeowners Association (PCHA); Waterloo Investment Holdings Ltd (WIHL)
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Sarah Havery</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)</b>	<i>HYR1</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<i>none</i>

**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 unforeseen impacts of the current Covid-19 global pandemic and the resulting delay in the announcement of the Darwin funding allocations have had implications for the delivery of this project, notably for YR1. Fortunately, the outputs and associated activities remain relevant and possible to deliver but changes were requested and approved in June 2020 to enable the effective delivery of the project. The key changes to the project implementation timetable were (1) change in the project start date to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 and (2) the actions due to start in Q2 and Q3 of 2020/21 will now start in Q4 or in YR2 Q1. The approved changes have enabled a slower start to the project than initially planned, with the progress made since July as follows:

**Output 1: Improving site management**

Activity 1.1: Biosecurity checks have been completed weekly on Little Water Cay by Turks and Caicos National Trust's (TCNT) Conservation Officer. Regular biosecurity checks have been completed on Pine Cay confirming further the presence of rats with evidence across the island. Efforts are underway to prevent rats invading Water Cay as an appropriate response/assessment will not be possible until 2021.

**Output 2: Building biosecurity capacity**

Activity 2.1: RSPB and TCNT have successfully recruited a Biosecurity Advisor to be based in the Turks & Caicos Islands for two years from January 2021.

Activity 2.3: The current Strategic Plan of TCNT was developed in 2011 for the period 2011-2016. The development of a new strategic plan is part of an ongoing institutional strengthening activity of the Trust. Five virtual strategic planning workshops were held via the Zoom platform as part of the

process for the development of the new strategic plan (2021-2025) which has been drafted. The operational plan will include biosecurity-focussed goals. The plan is currently going through a review process with an aim to be completed by the end of November.

Activities 2.4 & 2.5: A legal drafter has been contracted to support the Department of Agriculture with developing the national Biosecurity Policy and Biosecurity Legislation and initial scoping meetings have been held.

Activity 2.6: Planning is underway to produce biosecurity training materials.

### **Output 3: Understanding ecological impacts**

No progress on this output between July – September 2020 as per the approved revised project timetable.

### **Output 4: Increased biosecurity awareness by tour and barge operators**

Activity 4.3: Sensitivity is required around engaging with tour and barge operators because of the current financial strains these operators are under from the global pandemic. Therefore, the immediate focus is on wider public outreach through TNCT's ongoing education programme. Planning is underway between RSPB and TCNT staff to produce outreach materials, including information to be incorporated into the social sciences curriculum for school children.

### **Output 5: Project management**

Activity 5.1: The project monitoring plan is currently being drafted by RSPB.

Activity 5.2: One-to-one meetings have been held between the project leader and the currently active project partners. A project steering group is in the process of being developed.

**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.**

All the key issues the project has encountered so far, and the highest risks to project delivery currently identified, are all Covid-19 related.

**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.**

The Turks & Caicos Islands' (TCI) economy depends heavily on tourism. With the travel restrictions seen around the world as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, unemployment in TCI is increasing, and our in-country partners are facing redundancies and/or budget cuts. This project could not have come at a more critical time as the country starts to come out of lockdown and has been greatly received by the partnership. The project has prevented TCNT staff on Little Water Cay from being made redundant and has enabled the management of Little Water Cay (including biosecurity checks) to continue from July. There have been significant redundancies made in partner Waterloo Investment Holdings Ltd, who are responsible for the management of Big Ambergris Cay. It is currently unclear if/how this will impact the project.

With the high unemployment as result of the pandemic, crime has been increasing in TCI and TCNT's boat engine was stolen from their dock and other boats in the area were vandalised. Anecdotal evidence has also suggested increased poaching of iguanas for food. TCNT has

arranged reduced fares with a tour operator whilst they source a new boat engine. Local awareness through TCNT social media channels are being used to respond to the poaching.

The localised restrictions on inter-island travel have prevented our partners from undertaking important biosecurity checks on many of the priority iguana islands. So far checks have only been possible on Little Water Cay and Pine Cay. The travel restrictions have also prevented an effective response being implemented to the incursion of rats to one of the priority islands, Pine Cay, which had been planned through partner co-funding for March 2020.

San Diego Zoo is currently going through a restructure following the significant financial impact of the pandemic to the organisation. It is currently unclear if/how this will impact the project.

RSPB, San Diego Zoo and the contractor from New Zealand scheduled to complete Activity 3.1 are currently not allowing staff to travel overseas. Travel is currently planned for Q4. If travel is deemed not possible for YR1 by these organisations, then a further change request is required to address the budget implications.

Currently it is considered likely that travel will not be possible by the international partners/contractors, hence the predicted underspend outlined below. A final decision will be made in November on whether travel is possible, and a further change request will be submitted as appropriate by early December.

<b>2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</b>	
Discussed with LTS:	Yes
Formal change request submitted:	Yes [though further change request likely]
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes [though further change request likely]

**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 delay in the notification of successful Darwin projects this year, in addition to adapting the project to the Covid-19 pandemic, has made project planning and delivery challenging for the first year.