



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

Project reference	DPLUS121
Project title	Strengthening Biosecurity to Protect Turks & Caicos' Iguana Islands
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	TCI (Turks and Caicos Islands)
Lead organisation	RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
Partner(s)	Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT); Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR); San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance (SDZWA); Department of Agriculture (DoA); Environmental Health Department (EHD); Pine Cay Homeowners Association (PCHA); Waterloo Investment Holdings Ltd (WIHL)
Project leader	Sarah Havery
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	Apr 2021 to Sept 2021 HY 2
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.nationaltrust.tc/2020/09/23/saving-the-iguana-project

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. Improved site management

Improved site management – Pine Cay

A Pine Cay Rat Control Plan was agreed to largely replace the Pine Cay Biosecurity Plan. Nine visits were undertaken in the period by the Biosecurity Advisor to Pine Cay to advise on transitioning from the proposed Biosecurity Plan to an interim control plan, implement rat control measures in conjunction with local staff (the interim control plan) and advise of best ways forward to implement the proposed Pine Cay Rat Control Plan.

No sign of cats has been recorded and so Rock Iguanas have just completed their second breeding season with no predation from cats. Baby iguanas appear to be present in greater numbers than seen in any recent years.

Improved site management – Little Water Cay

The Biosecurity Advisor visited Little Water Cay with TCNT staff on seven occasions coaching and training three TCNT staff (plus interns) in rat monitoring and advising on transitioning from a Biosecurity Plan to a Rat Control Plan consistent with international best practise and the Pine Cay Control Plan.

Improved site management – Half Moon Bay

DECRA and TCNT agreed in September to jointly submit a paper to TCIG to propose placing management of Half Moon Bay with TCNT ie to ensure it is managed as a conservation site.

A planning application has been submitted to erect a shelter on site to form a base for two TCNT staff members to engage with visitors around “iguana etiquette” (ie behaviour on site).

Whilst more broadly an IAS causing issues across TCI, Casuarina clearance at Half Moon Bay is to enhance habitat and connectivity to further build resilience in the TCI Rock Iguana population there.

Volunteers under the supervision of the Biosecurity Advisor have cleared 3.74 ha to date. Staff from five tour operators have been engaged and plans adapted to meet some of the concerns raised. A media plan to support the plans for Half Moon Bay is being implemented and local volunteers and advocates have been recruited.

Improved site management - Big Ambergris Cay

Five visits were undertaken by the Biosecurity Advisor to Ambergris Cay to establish and consolidate the biosecurity measures already in place. One staff member (BAC Head of Security) has been trained in the necessary skills (over two visits). Monthly biosecurity checks have been carried out (full records kept) and no incursions have been detected.

Improved site management – Heaving Down Rock

Basic biosecurity measures were implemented at Heaving Down Rock in July. Efforts have been hampered by high staff turnover and lack of security at the site.

Improved site management – other islands

The Biosecurity Advisor and volunteers made visits to four islands to confirm the presence of rats on Mangrove, Water and Donna Cays through visual inspection. No confirmation was found for Fort George. The working assumption is that rats are back present on all ten of the islands.

Cats

No sign of cats has been found on any island.

Improved site management – Stakeholder consultation and management planning (Half Moon Bay)

Stakeholders have been identified and time is being taken to communicate background messages, identify supporters and build support. The management plan will not be completed by end 2021. However significant movement towards it will have been made and it will be completed within the project timeframe.

Improved site management – pathways (ports and boats)

The project has supplied materials (stations, traps and rodenticide) to TCIG Environmental Health department to enable integrated pest control to be continued at South Dock (Provo).

Biosecurity clauses have been written into the contracts between TCNT and the two barge companies using Heaving Down Rock though implementation has to date, been difficult. Advice on including biosecurity measures in the development of Bellefield Landing on North Caicos as an international port was given via public consultation.

Output 2. Improved biosecurity capacity within TCI partners

The Biosecurity Advisor started work on the islands on 10th April 2021.

Recruitment is taking place for a new post of Pine Cay Biosecurity Officer.

Training has taken place with TCNT and Big Ambergris Cay staff. TCNT training has included data collation, quality control and management and has included management team staff as well as those carrying out the field monitoring. On Big Ambergris Cay, the Biosecurity Advisor in conjunction with the BAC management have moved the biosecurity monitoring role to a more senior member of staff (Head of Department level).

Improved biosecurity – policy and legislation

A policy has been drafted based on a template produced by the GB Non-native Species Secretariat. The veterinary and plant protection sections of the Department of Agriculture have adapted the draft text to local circumstances. The Department of Agriculture will be consulting other relevant Departments with the intention of producing a final version for submission to Cabinet.

A detailed suite of draft amendments has been produced to enact biosecurity measures. These have been incorporated into four pieces of existing and draft legislation: animal and plant health Ordinances and associated draft Regulations. This complex work is still being developed by the Department of Agriculture. Once this is complete, consultation with other Departments will continue.

Improved biosecurity – green iguanas

A green iguana reporting hotline is live and receiving occasional reports of potential animals. Facebook and Instagram pages are being run by TCNT staff.

There have just been two confirmed reports of green iguanas in TCI in this reporting period. One on Providenciales was captured and killed in September. In June one was reported on Grand Turk. A volunteer investigated and the animal was destroyed. A database of all sightings is being maintained.

The priority is to raise awareness. “No to Green Iguana” adverts are being placed in two of the three freely and widely distributed magazines on the islands with an article on Green Iguanas including identification photos in the third. “Business cards” with the hotline number have been printed in Creole and English and A4 posters the same. A pocket-sized booklet, again in Creole and English, on identifying green iguanas and what to do is nearing completion of design and arrangements for printing are being investigated.

One trained volunteer based on Providenciales is active across the islands. More volunteers from a wide range of communities are being sought.

First approaches on this issue have been made to a range of contacts eg Graceway Foods, the National Port Authority, landscape gardening companies and some of the biggest resorts such as Beaches.

Output 3 Improved understanding of ecological impacts

This output has been the one most affected by the Covid restrictions, as staff from neither San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance nor Wildlife Management International Limited (WMIL) have been able to visit TCI in this period. The planned re-introduction to Grouper Cay will need re-assessing in response to the re-invasion by rats.

Output 4 Increased awareness of biodiversity, biosecurity and the impacts of invasive species resulting in improved/better managed tour & barge operator practices

The baseline questionnaire was designed using input from the RSPB’s Senior Social Scientist. The delay to the Biosecurity Advisor’s arrival and on-island Covid restrictions in place when he arrived prevented

the questionnaire being used prior to significant awareness raising work being carried out. As a result, no “pre-project” baseline data has been collected. Different methods of assessing behavioural impact are being looked at.

Output 5 Effective Project Management

Meetings of the Iguana Islands Steering Committee (the project steering group) have taken place twice during the period (June and September) via video. The wider Iguana Islands Partnership Group designed around face-to-face meetings on-island has not met. Planned visits by UK RSPB staff have not taken place yet due to organisation-wide travel restrictions. These are scheduled for Q4, now that restrictions are lifting. On-island the Biosecurity Advisor has held regular meetings with most partners and occasional meetings with the remainder.

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 re-invasion by rats of the 10-island Pine Cay complex took place before this reporting period but in the absence of any visits by WMIL or other specialists (eg RSPB, SDZWA) it was only with the arrival of the Biosecurity Advisor in Country in April that a full on-the-ground assessment be made and response organised. The result is a clear move from Biosecurity plan to Control Plans for rats on Water and Little Water Cays. It is neither possible (nor actually desirable) to carry out rat control on the seven smaller islands plus Water Cay in the 10-island complex. Whilst an unexpected issue, it has been dealt with in as effective manner as possible.

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.

1. Lack of visits by International experts has delayed progress on some outputs
2. Engagement with many stakeholders (Hotel and Tourism Association and eg resorts and tour operators) has been limited particularly due to the introduction of the requirement for vaccination for ALL visitors in September and the necessary management time and focus needed to implement this.
3. Increased workload of Government staff (esp Environmental Health) as a result of C19 has reduced their capacity to engage with the Project
4. No F2F Iguana Islands Partnership meetings has resulted in the partnership losing momentum towards becoming a locally-led forum. RSPB management and the Biosecurity Advisor aim to reinvigorate the partnership over the coming months.

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 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?

None

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**