



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

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS128
<b>Project title</b>	Safeguarding Cayman's Sister Islands from invasive species
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Cayman Islands
<b>Lead organisation</b>	RSPB
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Cayman Islands Government Department of Environment (DoE); Department of Agriculture (DoA); University of Aberdeen (UoA).
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Sarah Havery</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>29 October 2021; HYR1</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://cayman.loopnews.com/content/sister-islands-benefit-uk-darwin-plus-conservation-funding">https://cayman.loopnews.com/content/sister-islands-benefit-uk-darwin-plus-conservation-funding</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).**

The project started in July, so this report covers the period from July-September 2021.

**Output 1: Enhanced biosecurity / Invasive Alien Vertebrate (IAV) mgmt. capacity of in-Territory agencies**

The project team have successfully recruited a Biosecurity Officer, Tanja Laaser, who is already based in the Cayman Islands and has started the role in October (ahead of schedule). Inductions have been held with project partners in Grand Cayman and with international partners over MS Teams. A 1-page CV and Tanja's 6-month work plan will be provided in the annual report.

DoE has been working with the Cayman Islands Government's legal drafting department on Alien Species Regulations under the National Conservation Act, after the drafting guidelines were approved by the Premier and Caucus. These are now at the second draft stage and may well be ready for passage before the end of this calendar year.

**Output 2: Enhanced in-Territory community capacity**

The project team completed the recruitment process for the part-time Community Engagement Officer role, but unfortunately the successful applicant declined the offer of employment due to personal reasons. The role is currently being readvertised with interviews scheduled for November. A 1-page CV and the agreed 6-month work plan for this post will be provided in the annual report.

The Biosecurity Officer is currently based on Little Cayman and has begun communicating the objectives and deliverables of the project with the Little Cayman community.

**Output 3: The baseline presence of IAVs and nationally significant wildlife is better understood**

The DoE team has conducted a nocturnal flashlight survey along line transects throughout Little Cayman to create a quantitative baseline index that we can use as an initial measure of control

effectiveness. As expected, feral cats were sighted throughout the island with hot spots where anthropogenic food resources are abundant. Camera trap surveys are planned for local site population estimation at a later stage in the project.

The survey design for the presence/absence surveys for Cayman Brac blind snake has been established by DoE and has been set up for regular monitoring due to start in November. Brown booby monitoring has also been completed on Cayman Brac, with eight people involved who are now aware of the project and its deliverables.

The DoE team have been planning the logistics for the annual population survey of Sister Isles rock iguanas, which is scheduled to take place in November.

UoA have started a desk study on existing data and knowledge of the herpetofauna of the Sister Islands and have drafted a plan for monitoring methods to trial during the visit scheduled for Q4.

#### **Output 4: Reduced impact of IAVs on globally threatened Sister Islands species through effective management**

A feral cat control plan has been drafted for Little Cayman by DoE and DoA, outlining the trapping schedule and location of priority sites to minimise the impact of feral cats on the Critically Endangered Sister Isles rock iguana. Permission from Cayman Islands Government is currently being sought to proceed with the feral cat control on Little Cayman via the drafted Regulations mentioned above.

DoE has conducted a short duration social media campaign about feral cats, the severe problems they create and the need to control them, as a preliminary awareness exercise which showed a surprisingly high level of support from the community in Grand Cayman, and which is likely to have helped advance the policy development in this area.

#### **Output 5: Project Management**

Contracts have been drafted and reviewed with partners and are now at the point of signing.

The first quarterly conference call for core project team was held on 30 September to agree and set the work plan for the Biosecurity Officer.

A visit from the international partners (RSPB and UoA) is planned for Q4.

#### **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 failed recruitment for the part-time Community Engagement Officer was an unexpected development for the team. We have been able to readvertise the role quickly so if we are successful with the next round of recruitment this should not affect the overall delivery of Output 2. This has, however, resulted in a delay in recruiting project management support. It has been highlighted by partners that some external support from an experienced consultant in green iguana control would greatly benefit the project delivery, therefore we will be looking to reallocate some budget from staffing to consultancy once the details are confirmed.

#### **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 Cayman Islands Government have not currently changed the Covid-19 restrictions for international arrivals; however, the current timeframe is to change the arrival procedures in late November 2021. Fortunately, we were able to recruit someone already based in the Cayman

Islands for the Biosecurity Officer post and intend to recruit locally for the Community Engagement Officer post.

Operating within the Cayman Islands has become easier for the local partners with offices and inter-island travel reopening, therefore the project delivery for local partners has become more achievable.

We had not planned any international travel until Q4 within our project timeline and intend to make a decision on international travel in November, following the guidance of our local partners. If international travel is still deemed unfeasible, we will need to submit a financial change request.

**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:	Not yet
Formal change request submitted:	Not yet
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?**

There were two points in our offer letter from Darwin to follow up on. Please find our feedback on these points below:

- Please clarify why RSPB are recruiting the staff to work in Cayman and explain how this offers value for money:* It is challenging and time consuming for local Government departments in Cayman to create new positions, even if they are project funded. This project provides the opportunity to demonstrate the value added to DoE via this role, to build the case to establish this role in the Cayman Islands Government beyond the end of the project. RSPB provides value for money as a large international NGO with structures and resourcing to manage recruitment and line management, reducing the time burden on local partners.
- There remains a concern about whether domestic cats will be included in any of the project plans and therefore any communication risks associated with this (address in half year report):* Mitigation for domestic cats will be included in the project plans relating to feral cat control. The project has a strong community engagement and communication angle (output 2) as it is well understood that this is an emotive subject which needs to be handled sensitively and it is essential to advocate for responsible pet ownership as the solution. Activities 1.12 and 2.3 relates directly to domestic cats specific to the different contexts of the two Sister Islands, which is an essential component for ensuring long-term impact.

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**