

**Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects
Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus
Half Year Report**

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2023

Project reference	DPLUS155
Project title	Securing Montserrat's threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Montserrat
Lead partner	UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
Partner(s)	Montserrat National Trust, Species Recovery Trust, Government of Montserrat: Department of Environment
Project leader	Dr Mike Pienkowski
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2; <i>the project began on 1st October 2021 due to delays beyond the team's control. Therefore, a full year report was submitted at the actual half year point in March 2022; a HYR1 October 22 and AR2 in April 2023.</i>
Project website/blog/social media	www.ukotcf.org.uk www.montserratnationaltrust.ms <i>Montserrat National Trust Facebook page</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).

1.1 Implementing Management Plans

Management Plans for each *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* site now agreed and being implemented. Project Officers continued to visit sites to carry out additional surveys on sites, as well starting to plan for surveys on additional sites. Discussions on demonstration sites continue.

1.2 Monty's Messengers children's club

Monty's Messengers [MNT's primary-school-age club restarted as part of project] events took place in May with an activity to design and create bird feeders from used plastic bottles. Strong involvement in Children's Society week in August, bringing in many not already involved in Monty's Messengers (some cross over with DPLUS192); visited wetland to ID birds there.

1.3 Training and capacity building

The biosecurity risk to plants at the Trust was identified as a risk to the project and so additional technical support was required. Senior Conservation Officer (Chris Sealys) joined the MNT in May team supported by an externally secured grant (from the John Ellerman Foundation). Together with UKOTCF's Council member (and CEO of the Manx Wildlife Trust), Leigh Morris, they co-delivered a training programme over two weeks in May. It included native plant nursery personnel, Ministry plant nursery staff, and some local farmers. The training programme had some cross-over with DPLUS192 (set out in DPLUS192Y1HYR). Following his visit Leigh provided a brief outline of needs and priorities for the garden.

The horticulture training workshop yielded many videos (using techniques such as air-layering, grafting etc). In addition to the short posted on social media after the training, it is envisaged that these will be uploaded online so they can be searchable (either MNT or UKOTCF or both).

1. 4 Equipment purchase

Following recommendations for the garden as in 1.3, materials were purchased and delivered to Montserrat, specifically Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for garden staff to facilitate high standards of biosecurity in the native plant nursery.

Replacement chain-saw chains and other purchases obtained and supplied to Montserrat.

1. 5 Communications

Further videos on *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* sites and Adopters edited and published on <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife/> and on Facebook posts (mostly posted fortnightly on MNT's Facebook page).

Communications Officer resigned due to overload of other contracted work. Activities spread out amongst other personnel and new MNT staff. New Officer expected from December.

Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat issue 15 produced and circulated; includes biographies of new persons in team as well as reports on many recent activities in this and related projects.

Heritage Radio shows in May, June, August; all available on SoundCloud.

Leigh attended a Farmers' Association meeting and radio show in May during his visit.

1.6 Biological data and information

Planning for trip by volunteer senior entomologist to Montana (USA) to work on accessing digital records on Montserrat collated from across Europe and North America.

iNaturalist records system continues to grow (some cross-over with DPLUS192) which builds on this.

On invertebrates, revised version of the endemic bottle bee document attached with plant host photos. Provided advice on imported bees to an Adopter. Additional documents prepared on plant host and pollinators. iNaturalist keys and have set up one for: Montserrat's Butterflies [Butterflies of Montserrat · iNaturalist](#); Montserrat's Spiders [Spiders of Montserrat · iNaturalist](#); Montserrat's Beetles [Beetles of Montserrat · iNaturalist](#).

1. 7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Five Project Team meetings were held during the period, with 2 others postponed as key personnel absent.

Mid-term review visit in June 2023. Useful feedback received and understanding of Darwin Plus fund gained. Also beneficial to NIRAS staff visiting the island for the first time. Radio interview given to highlight the fund on island and talk about the wider challenges to conservation.

In general, we think that, with the changes made to logframe (see below), our assumptions still hold true.

1. 8 Recognising additional support provided

UKOTCF Council members donated time- see above 1.3. Following their recommendations, MNT has now joined Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) as a member, which will facilitate knowledge exchange, resources and enable them to be part of a global network.

Funding has been obtained through the Darwin Local fund to build on additional opportunities at Wildlife Home (WH04) Pipers Lot. A trail developed with young people, an outdoor camping area will utilise the space to encourage visitors both from around the island and tourists. This shows skills of MNT staff in developing these 'mini' applications is growing. [Now 3 submitted].

Project Officer Ajhermae White secured a Darwin Fellowship through the Department of Environment to undertake an MSc in Island Biodiversity and Conservation at Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies (JICAS) starting in September 2023. This is an important part of the legacy of the project and building future capacity on island. A replacement Officer from the Department is being discussed.

New MNT Finance Officer, with substantial accounting experience, recruited improving efficiency of financial operations for the project and training other MNT staff.

As noted, MNT appointed two news officers; funded from a different source, these officers help with production of native plants and site surveys for project.

A FERA biosecurity workshop on Montserrat used MNT equipment (including the MNT microscope) purchased through the project for identifying ant samples. Sharing ant species with FERA to gain more knowledge of sample collected during July 2022 visit. Ongoing conversations with NHM and FERA and entomologists supporting the project.

Project officer attended Invasive species week organised by the Great Britain Non-native Species Secretariat (GBNNS) and provide a presentation titled: "*Non-Native Species in Montserrat – Cultural Perspectives*": <https://www.nonnativespecies.org/what-can-i-do/invasive-species-week/webinars/>.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Absences due to leave or sickness has been a challenge. Activity has been compressed into short spaces of time to accommodate for periods of absences.

With the experience of implementing this project for over a year in close cooperation with the local community and volunteer visiting specialists, the Project Team realised that on aspect of the original Outcome and one of its indicators could act against the planned Impact. Accordingly, small amendments to these aspects of the log-frame to improve the balance of the Outcome statement and some of the indicators in order to best achieve the Impact statement were proposed and accepted in June.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known: no reference provided; approved by email 16/06/2023

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: ██████████

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No; we made various comments to the mid-term reviewers (during their visit to Montserrat in June 2023) and we do not need to add to these at this stage.