

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

Half Year Report

Project reference	DPLUS191
Project title	Enabling invasive plant eradications and long-term management in Tristan
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Tristan da Cunha Group
Lead Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Partner(s)	Conservation Department, Tristan Government Key Contractors: Indigena Biosecurity International, I-Rigging Solutions
Project leader	Andy Schofield
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	N/A

Activities are only listed below if there has been an update in the last six months.

Output 1. All emergent New Zealand Flax plants eradicated from areas of known presence on Inaccessible Island World Heritage Site.

1.1.1 Experienced rope access team hired to travel to Inaccessible Island in Q3 of each year to carry out NZ Flax eradication and survey work.

1.1.3 Inaccessible Island equipment/food airdrop takes place during the annual SA Agulhas II Gough Island relief voyage, in each project year.

1.2.1 NZ Flax team are joined by a Tristanian with rope access experience during each field season.

The experienced rope access team recruited in Year 1 is ready to travel to Inaccessible in the last week of January 2025 for their second season of NZ Flax eradication and survey work. One member of the Year 1 team was not a good fit for the expedition team and caused strain. They were replaced in June with a new team member, a highly experienced climber assessed for their suitability for working in such a challenging environment to ensure good team dynamics. The team will be joined by a Tristanian who has been on the last four flax expeditions to the island.

After the unfortunate failed airdrop last year, these errors were learned from and remedied, and this year's airdrop was confirmed successful in September.



Picture of Inaccessible Island, taken by the helicopter crew after the successful airdrop this September.

Output 2. Targeted Pōhutukawa control with tree coverage significantly reduced on Tristan.

2.1.3 Invasive plant specialist provides training to 8 Tristanians to use specialist App, and spreadsheet templates, so all plant eradication work is recorded.

2.3.2 Tristanian project team eradicate all accessible, emergent Pōhutukawa trees by project end.

Indigena Biosecurity International (IBI) has provided training resources and held a training session to Tristan Conservation Department (TCD) to enable them to learn and use the 'Locus' mapping app that will be used to record and create maps of all plant eradication work. TCD was provided with a new smartphone that can run the Locus app. The Tristanian project team is just entering the plant control work season as Tristan moves into its warmer months, and so have started their second year of Pōhutukawa control and are currently trialling using the Locus app to record their progress.

Output 3. All emergent self-sown Monterey Pine eradicated from Tristan.

3.3.1 Tristanian project team trained in safe Monterey Pine eradication techniques.

3.3.2 Tristanian project team eradicate all self-sown Monterey Pines by end of Year 2

IBI has provided TCD with a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Monterey Pine eradication techniques. The SOP was developed using the highly successful techniques used in New Zealand and adapted for Tristan's needs and operating environment. The Tristanian project team has started Monterey Pine control work and have already reported the herbicide application method of eradication suggested by Indigena to be quick, easy, and highly effective.

Output 4. Baseline knowledge and community understanding of existing priority invasive plant species improved through surveys, mapping and F2F discussion.

4.1.1 Invasive plant specialist reassesses invasive plant species from 2008 report, feeding back in person to Tristan Government and producing a written report.

4.1.2 Invasive plant specialist writes 'Invasive Plant Strategy' by project end to provide guidance to Conservation Department for future seedbank control of priority species.

4.2.1 Invasive plant specialist produces up to date maps of species of concern from 2008 report.

IBI have continued to work on developing a written invasive plant species report, mapping species of concern, and writing the Invasive Plant Strategy using data collected in Year 1's visit. These will be finalised following the planned Year 3 visit. IBI and RSPB held a workshop day to outline and plan all outstanding work due to be completed during this visit to ensure project outputs are met.

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.

One of the three target invasive plant species for this project is New Zealand Flax. Growing down the cliffs of Inaccessible Island, its removal requires a specialist rope-access team that must travel to Tristan each year. As the world's most remote inhabited island, there are only c.140 berths available to-from the island per year via an unpredictable and over-subscribed shipping schedule. The project has therefore chartered bespoke yacht transport in Years 1 and 3 to relieve berth pressure and secure the flax team's travel. The project is now in Year 2, and so without the yacht transport, the flax team secured their berths for January 2025 as soon as the shipping schedule was announced. Unfortunately, one of the few vessels servicing the island was deemed unfit to sail earlier this year, placing an extremely high strain on berth numbers, and consequently the flax team currently no longer have guaranteed travel to Tristan.

We are working with Tristan Government to find a solution and expect to know the outcome in a month's time. If this issue isn't resolved, there are options open to us, but we would look to contact the NIRAS team to discuss the situation and get their advice before moving forwards.

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

Discussed with NIRAS:	No, but if the potential problem in Question 2 is not resolved we will contact NIRAS to discuss.
Formal Change Request submitted:	N/A
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	N/A
Change Request reference if known: N/A	

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

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 2025)?

Yes No

4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should 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.

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

N/A

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.

In our Year 1 annual report, one feedback request was to respond to the DPAG Stage 2 application feedback suggestions. Our apologies for not providing this sooner. Our responses are as follows:

Consider including an Outcome Indicator covering the increased capacity which is a cornerstone of the sustainability of the project outcomes.

Increasing Tristan's capacity is a critical marker of the success of the project, and vital to ensuring the project's legacy enables Tristan to continue, lead on, and develop their own invasive plant control programme going forward. It is important this is reflected in the project Logframe, and we therefore strongly agree with this comment and wish to include such an Outcome Indicator. We sought the advice of a NIRAS Analyst as part of wider Logframe revisions, who helped guide the creation of a new indicator. This change will form part of an upcoming change request due to be submitted this December. We propose to change **Indicator 0.4** from '*Tristan Conservation Department (1 female / 3 male) trained in invasive plant identification, control and mapping by project end*' to '*5% of Tristanians report they are applying new capabilities regarding invasive plant management (3:1 male: female ratio)*'.

It was not clear what contingency plans are in place for logistical/access difficulties.

Please see our contingency plans referenced in Q18 'Risk Management' in our Stage 2 application, and 'Important Assumptions' in the project Logframe.

The project faces the following logistical/access difficulties, and has the following contingencies:

- 1) **Airdrop.** Prior to each Inaccessible Island New Zealand Flax removal field season, an airdrop is essential to transport equipment/supplies to the plateau to minimise time spent moving between base- and satellite-camps. A successful airdrop is a highly complex task, involving many parties and requiring strong organisation and communication, as well as favourable weather conditions. If unsuccessful, the helicopter will drop supplies on Tristan instead, and then the airdrop will be taken ashore with the expedition team when they reach Inaccessible by boat. The contents will then be loaded into backpacks and carried by the flax team to their campsite. Unfortunately, the Year 1 airdrop was unsuccessful, but this contingency was trialled and successfully enacted.
- 2) **Access to Tristan.** Tristan is the world's most remote inhabited island, with only c.140 berths available to-from the island per year. The project needs to bring in up to 5 staff in a year (3 professional climbers, invasive plant expert and project manager) via an unpredictable and over-subscribed shipping schedule. As a result of Covid, there continues to be a backlog of medevac needs placing pressure on berths, and so the project chartered a bespoke yacht in Years 1 and 3 to guarantee transport for staff (targeting the years with the highest staff load needing to travel). Tristan Government are committed to ensuring project staff can travel, so in the event of an oversubscribed shipping schedule, there are usually also other travel options open to us, such as cruise ships and vessels chartered for other projects. By working closely with Tristan Government there is always a good chance of getting project personnel out.
- 3) **Impact of weather.** If weather conditions are unsuitable, the flax team may lose time available to perform New Zealand Flax control work on Inaccessible, and likewise Tristan Conservation Department on Tristan with their Pohutukawa and Monterey Pine control work. We have already reduced this risk as much as possible by scheduling work in the summer months. By planning an 8-12 week working period on Inaccessible each year, the team can afford to lose days to poor weather, and still have enough time to complete the target work programme. Pohutukawa and Monterey Pine control work on Tristan is less time restricted and can be done anytime throughout the spring and summer when Tristan Conservation Department (TCD) can work. With such a large working window, there will be enough suitable weather days to complete the control work, even if there is a particularly wet spring/summer.