

Darwin and Darwin Plus Fellowships

Darwin Fellowship - Interim Report

Due within one month of the half way point of your Fellowship (*maximum 3 pages*)

Darwin Fellowship reference	DPLUS218
Name of Darwin Fellow	Giovanni Hughes
Lead organisation	Anguilla National Trust
Fellow's organisation(s)	RSPB, Alderney Wildlife Trust and Antigua's Environmental Awareness Group
Fellow's role within the organisation (prior to Fellowship)	Programmes and Projects Officer
Start/end date of Fellowship	01 April 2024 – Sept 2025
Location of Fellowship	England, Channel Islands & Antigua
Darwin Fellowship grant value (£)	£23,571
Type of work (e.g. research, training, if other please specify)	Work experience
Main contact in lead organisation	Farah Mukhida
Author(s) and date	Giovanni Hughes & Farah Mukhida April 2025

1. Background

As the Programmes and Projects Officer at the Anguilla National Trust (ANT), I'm actively involved in on-the-ground conservation work—everything from collecting critical data to implementing strategies that protect and conserve Anguilla's biodiversity. A large part of ANT's role also involves building strong relationships with government agencies, international conservation organisations, and local communities. Together, we work to increase support for and participation in our conservation efforts. The majority of our work in Anguilla is project-based and funded by Darwin Plus Main or Local grants.

This Fellowship offered an exciting opportunity for me to grow professionally and help build greater capacity within the ANT. My focus through the fellowship has been (and will continue to be) on improving how we involve communities and stakeholders in applied research and the design and implementation of evidence-based conservation strategies. I have been learning through hands-on experiences, supported by three respected organisations, each offering unique insights into stakeholder and community engagement: the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (placement in March 2025), and the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) (placement in April 2025) and Antigua's Environmental Awareness Group (placement in May 2025).

With RSPB, I learned how a large conservation organisation works with private landowners and engages members and stakeholders in scientific research and practical management.

At AWT, I will work with staff to learn more about how volunteer programs and citizen science initiatives can be developed and sustained to support conservation. I'll also see how these efforts have shaped environmental management in a small island community—something very relevant to Anguilla's context. During my month there, I'll take part in projects like bioblitzes, the Living Seas Project, and reserve and volunteer management.

Nearer to home in Antigua, I will work with the Environmental Awareness Group. The EAG aims to have a society informed and empowered to appreciate and sustainably use Antigua & Barbuda's natural resources. Major milestones in EAG's history have been increasing local community support for the conservation of the endangered Antigua racer snakes and the restoration of Redonda Island. During my placement at EAG, I will work with the team to better understand how they engage local communities in conservation initiatives.

These experiences will give me practical tools for engaging volunteers and stakeholders in both supportive and challenging contexts, similar to those we face in Anguilla. I'm excited to bring this knowledge back to ANT, where I'll be working closely with our Executive Director, Farah Mukhida, to apply what I've learned to strengthen our programmes and projects moving forward.

2. Progress

I flew to the UK in mid-March to begin my placement with the RSPB's Otmoor reserve team. This dedicated five-person team, which manages the 485-hectare Otmoor site, was very welcoming and gave me the chance to work alongside them. I had the chance to join volunteer work parties, shadow a volunteer warden, and work alongside volunteer ecologists—all passionate local community members who generously give their time to support the RSPB's efforts.

It was a great opportunity to exchange experiences and insights. Although the UK and Anguilla are different in many ways, I was surprised by how much overlap there is in some of our conservation practices. For instance, both of our teams work on installing floating rafts for breeding wetland birds and conduct annual waterbird counts.

While based in Oxfordshire, I also had the unique opportunity to spend a day with the retired RSPB Regional Director, Mr. Holliday, who has visited Anguilla several times over the past 20 years, and in fact established Anguilla's monthly wetland bird count program. He introduced me to two volunteer-managed wetland reserves in Banbury, which showcased different (but equally effective) approaches to conservation. Seeing how empowered local community groups can lead their own conservation efforts was interesting and offered valuable ideas that I plan on bringing back to Anguilla.

At the start of April, I flew to the small Channel island of Alderney (800 hectares) to begin my placement with Alderney Wildlife Trust. During the first couple of weeks of this placement, I have been involved in many different tasks including using drones to monitor offshore cays, seagrass monitoring habitat management with volunteer work parties, and outreach and education during Alderneys' Easter Wildlife Week. I am also learning about how AWT operates with a population of around 2000 people and how they rely on long-term (6-12 month) volunteer placements and visiting students to support their work.

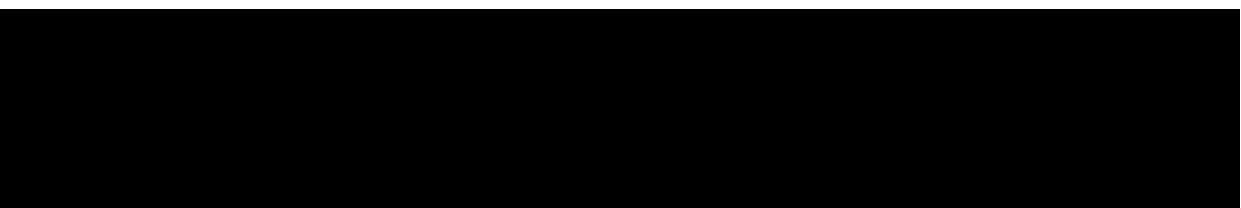
3. Achievements and Outcomes

- Completion of placement at the RSPB Otmoor reserve
- Draft blog in progress to be posted on RSPB's Conservation Action web page

4. Impact of COVID-19 on Fellowship

There has been no impact of Covid-19 on my fellowship activities

5. Safeguarding



6. Next Steps

- **April 2025:** Complete 1-month placement with the Alderney Wildlife Trust
- **May 2025:** Begin 4-week placement with Environmental Awareness Group in Antigua and Barbuda
- **June-July 2025:** Share my experiences with my colleagues on my return to Anguilla through informal discussions and a presentation to ANT colleagues
- **June-July 2025** post blog detailing my experiences on RSPBs Conservation Action webpage