

Darwin Fellowship - Interim Report

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

Darwin Fellowship reference	DARFW DPLUS219
Name of Darwin Fellow	Devon Carter
Lead organisation	Anguilla National Trust
Fellow's organisation(s)	Durrell and Centre of Ecology and Hydrology
Fellow's role within the organisation (prior to Fellowship)	Research Officer
Start/end date of Fellowship	01 January – 31 December 2025
Location of Fellowship	Jersey, Channel Islands & Wallingford, England
Darwin Fellowship grant value (£)	£28,651
Type of work (e.g. research, training, if other please specify)	Training
Main contact in lead organisation	Farah Mukhida
Author(s) and date	Devon Carter & Farah Mukhida July 2025

1. Background

As a Research Officer at the Anguilla National Trust (ANT), my role focuses on developing and implementing applied conservation research programmes using best practice methodologies. I'm responsible for collecting and managing habitat and species-related data, and I collaborate with ANT staff and external partners to analyse and present this information. The goal is to inform conservation actions, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and contribute to policy recommendations. The majority of ANT's work is supported by Darwin Plus Main and Local funding

As part of this Fellowship opportunity, my work is divided into three key components. The first (February-May 2025) focused on completing the Durrell Endangered Species Management Graduate Certificate (DESMAN). The course is directed at individuals currently employed in biodiversity conservation and future conservation leaders. The course delivers skills, knowledge, and attitude required for conservation practitioners and covers topics related more specifically to biodiversity and drivers of species decline, conservation planning and priority setting, small population biology and genetics, principles of animal husbandry, techniques for managing wild and captive populations, research skills for species conservation, population monitoring techniques, ecosystem restoration, developing and implementing education and awareness programmes, applying GIS for ecological data, and building team management and leadership skills.

The second component (May 2025), involved spending one week with Durrell's Curator of Herpetology and Invertebrates, Mr. Matt Goetz, where I was able to learn about the zoo's long-term captive breeding programme, including of two of Anguilla's endangered reptile species (Lesser Antillean iguana *Iguana delicatissima* and Anguilla Bank racer *Alsophis rijgersmaei*).

The third component (May-June 2025) was a placement with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH), where I worked with Centre staff to enhance my data management and

analysis skills, especially as it relates to species and habitat conservation and assessing effectiveness of conservation interventions.

Following my return to Anguilla at the end of June 2025, I have been focusing has been placed on applying and sharing knowledge and skills with the rest of the ANT team. In particular while working with CEH staff I developed an analysis pipeline using R software to analyse Anguilla's 20 year wetland bird dataset. This is already being put into use for Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) site updates on Anguilla.

2. Progress

The DESMAN course, based out of the Jersey Zoo, began in mid-February and I had the privilege of joining 15 other early-career conservationists from around the world. It's been an incredible opportunity and journey of learning – learning not only from the course itself but also from the diverse conservation work taking place in different regions. In addition to completing NUMBER short courses (Understanding Species and Biodiversity; Threats and Conservation Actions; Population Monitoring; Species and Population Management; Integrating Conservation and Rural Development; Conservation Education; Facilitation and Communications Skills; An Introduction to GIS for Conservation; Leadership Skills for Conservation; Research, Analytical and Presentation Skills for Conservation; Planning and Managing Effective Conservation Project), successfully completing the course, and receiving the Durrell Endangered Species Management Graduate Certificate ([Evidence 1](#)), I have also been able to join and actively participate in a global network of like-minded professionals, which has been both inspiring and enriching.

A major part of this Certificate programme, was developing a project proposal directly relevant to the work that I am engaged in back in Anguilla. The ANT, building on a now recently-completed DPLUS-funded project that led to the Caribbean's and the UKOT's very first mainland island (DPLUS158 *Piloting a new solution for invasive species in the UKOTs*), is working to reintroduce Critically Endangered Anguilla Bank skinks *Spondylurus powellii* into the invasive species-free Fountain National Park mainland island. With Matt Goetz as my mentor, I developed a project proposal that outlined Anguilla Bank reintroduction best practice, a monitoring and evaluation programme, and a budget ([Evidence 2](#)).

Although this proposal was submitted as part of my course/certificate work portfolio to DESMAN, I refined it with Matt's guidance during my week-long placement with his team at the zoo where I was able to learn about skink husbandry and habitat enrichment. It was then shared with the ANT and used to support a successful application to Fauna & Flora's Conservation Leadership Programme funding mechanism. A grant of USD 9,000 was secured to support this reintroduction work.

The proposal has also since been shared with a company that is redeveloping Anguilla's airport, including extending the island's runway. The runway extension project, unfortunately, would involve the displacement of primary skink habitat – an old stone wall dating back to the late 1800s/early 1900s, where skinks take shelter, forage for food, and bask in the sunlight. The company had reached out to the ANT asking if there was any project or programme to which they may be able to contribute. The timing was fortuitous as I had just shared the Anguilla Bank skink reintroduction proposal with the ANT team; it was used to outline what would be required to safeguard the (soon-to-be) affected skink population. The work aligned well with the company's goal to offset biodiversity impacts and they have committed to assisting the ANT to carefully deconstruct and reconstruct the wall within Fountain National Park, and support ANT's efforts to collect as many skinks as possible from the impacted area. It is heartening to know that my time spent and lessons learned during the DESMAN course and the week-long Jersey Zoo placement have been helpful and are directly being used and applied in the field and to safeguard one of Anguilla's most vulnerable species.

The DESMAN course was the first time that I took part in formal classroom-based training since leaving school. The entire experience was overwhelming positive – from sitting in lectures, conducting research, interacting with fellow conservationists, and experiencing life on a

different small island developing state. Hearing about my fellow students' experiences added another layer of insight into the course, making it all the more impactful but also incredibly clear how important the work that we are doing is to the long-term survival of our island biodiversity.

Following the DESMAN course and the Jersey Zoo placement, I spent a month with the UKCEH. The ANT has been engaged in a number of species and habitat monitoring projects and programmes and we have collected a phenomenal amount of data in just the last two or three years alone. We are now looking at how to use this data to support management decisions, including protected area and international site designations (e.g., reassessing our Important Bird and Biodiversity areas and transitioning them into Key Biodiversity Areas, Important Plant and Biodiversity Areas, Important Shark and Ray Areas, Ramsar Sites). During my month with the UKCEH, I learned how to use different types of software, including how to write and apply R code, to sift through, analyse, and present data. To ensure that what we were creating and undertaking was directly relevant to our work at the ANT, I remotely met with the Executive Director and our external project partners to review what we actually wanted to achieve and what would be needed to achieve identified goals. In addition to working with the UKCEH team to process data related to our joint DPLUS203 *Shining a light on Anguilla's moths* project, we also reviewed 20 years of wetland and seabird data to support the ANT's work to reassess Anguilla's IBAs (and transition to KBAs), and to support Anguilla's proposal to designate Road Salt Pond as a KBA (part of our the ANT's and the Government of Anguilla's DPLUS212 project).

On the ground, and back in Anguilla, I have been working with the ANT team to reintroduce additional Anguilla Bank racers into Fountain National Park – we were able to capture and reintroduce an individual to the Park at the end of June 2025, bringing the total reintroduced to 14. I have also been working with Ms Isabel Curtis, ANT's Conservation Officer who is the lead on the recently-funded Anguilla Bank skink project (funded by Fauna & Flora), preparing the space within Fountain National Park where the skink habitat will be reconstructed, creating a compost area to attract insects which serve as the skink's initial food source. I also had an opportunity to speak about the ANT's endangered species conservation initiatives to colleagues from across the region during a week-long Caribbean Conservation Capacity Building workshop, held at the end of June and attended by ten participants from five different Caribbean islands including, coincidentally, a colleague from Antigua who also attended the same February-May 2025 DESMAN course.

Achievements and Outcomes

I returned to Anguilla on 24 June 2025 following four months of capacity and skill development placements. During my four months overseas, I successfully completed the DESMAN course, receiving the Durrell Endangered Species Management Graduate Certificate.

Through the course and my time at Jersey Zoo, I supported the ANT's successful application for external funding and the development of a corporate partnership to reintroduce/translocate Critically Endangered Anguilla Bank skinks to the newly-established Fountain National Park mainland island.

Through my time with UKCEH, I have collated and presented data related to Anguilla's seabirds and wetland birds and am now working with the ANT team, supported by the UKCEH and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, to develop a manuscript outlining results of 20 years of wetland monitoring. This data is also being used to reassess mainland IBAs (to transition them into a single mainland wetland KBA) and to support ANT's and GOA's application for Ramsar Site designation of Road Salt Pond.

3. Impact of COVID-19 on Fellowship

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

4. Safeguarding

No safeguarding issues reported

5. Next Steps

- **August 2025:** Contribute to an article in the Chartered institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) InPractice magazine focusing on careers in the UKOTs
- **August-December 2025** Continue to share lessons learned and experiences back in Anguilla
- **September-December: Draft and submit a manuscript detailing Anguilla's 20 years of wetland bird monitoring**

Evidence

Supporting evidence have been uploaded