

Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2011)

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| Project Ref No | 18018 |
| Project Title | Enabling Montserrat to save the Critically Endangered mountain chicken |
| Country(ies) | Montserrat |
| UK Organisation | Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (Durrell) |
| Collaborator(s) | Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Housing and Environment, Montserrat (DoE) Zoological Society of London, ZSL |
| Project Leader | Matthew Morton (Durrell) |
| Report date | 29.10.2011 |
| Report No. (HYR 1/2/3/4) | HYR2 |
| Project website | www.mountainchicken.org |

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up).

Post-release frog monitoring was revised when internal radio transmitters in released frogs came to the end of battery life in April. Weekly monitoring now continues at the release site. Since the release in January over 1,200 swab samples and location data of released frogs have been collected in a database. Nine months after the release, frogs are still being found at the site in good condition and growing, with large increases in body mass.

The population estimation method continues to be developed with the purchase and deployment of five Wildlife Acoustic SongMeters. These audio recording devices have enabled us to widen the areas covered by night surveys to search for surviving frogs. The software that analyses the recordings creates identification files called 'recognizers', which then allow us to automate the analysis of the large amounts of data recorded by the SongMeters. These recognisers are being developed and once complete analysis of the data will begin.

Surveys of frogs that have continued to survive in Montserrat since the appearance of chytrid also continue. These have been modified for the wet season by using aural point counts for frogs calling on the banks of forest watercourses (ghauts) as opposed to using ghauts as transects to search visually for frogs attracted to water sources.. Four new surviving frogs have been located in 3 locations, and have been micro-chipped and added to the database since these modified surveys began.

The chytrid monitoring sites continue to be surveyed on a monthly basis and will continue throughout the next year. Over 1,300 tree frogs swabs have been taken since surveys began.

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) continues to meet on a quarterly basis and an international PSC meeting took place in Montserrat in August with attendees from Dominica, Saint Lucia and the UK. At this meeting a draft of the Research Strategy – both within the current Darwin project, and beyond – for the mountain chicken was reviewed and discussed which included a proposal for two PhD students: one lab based researching the effectiveness of potential treatments to counter the effects of chytrid; and one field based, researching the ecology of the mountain chicken, other sympatric amphibian species, and *Bd*.

A Communication Strategy for the project has been developed and is currently being implemented in Montserrat. Presentations to the local schools are underway, including visits to

the forest. Drafts for informational leaflets and posters are being reviewed. The proposal for a Mountain Chicken Category for the Montserrat Christmas Festival Calypso Monarch Competition 2011 have been approved by the Festival Committee with and the winning song will be recorded and made into a jingle for the local radio. In this reporting period the project has appeared in 1 local TV interview, five radio interviews and issued four press releases. A Wildlife documentary student visited Montserrat to film fieldwork activities associated with the project which will be used to develop educational videos on island. During her visit she also ran a half-day Wildlife Filming and Photography Workshop which was well attended by local photographers. The project website continues to develop and be updated. A competition for a project logo was launched and a winning entry was selected and is now in use on all project documentation and publicity.

In the UK, the mountain chickens were featured in the BBC1 series, Miracle Babies, which aired during September. Also a media student from France, who spent time at Durrell in Jersey, who was supposed to film the release, did travel out to Montserrat and filmed various aspects of the project. Durrell is able to use this footage and will be creating a film of the project, which will be made available to DEFRA for use. The film credits will acknowledge Darwin Initiative support.

The project paid for two people to attend the Island Species-Led Action (ISLA) course in the Dominican Republic led by Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust to increase local capacity. One person was a member of the forestry staff, Government of Montserrat and one was the Primary Field Assistant for the project. The course focussed on providing people with the skills necessary to recover endangered species from immediate extinction and to plan for their long term recovery. Both persons passed the course and one has since been identified as a second candidate for the Durrell DESMAN course in February 2012.

The Durrell Overseas Team meeting was attended by the Project Coordinator and Project Leader and presentations of the release of the mountain chickens to Montserrat were delivered to an international audience.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments 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.

As part of the study design a second release of frogs during the wet season in August 2011 was planned to compare with the previous release in the dry season. Prior to the release an unidentified virus was discovered during routine checks following a post-mortem of two frogs that died at the captive-breeding facility in Jersey. The release was immediately postponed until the origin and affects of the virus could be investigated. It has since been confirmed that the virus was associated with the crickets fed to the frogs and was a result of contamination of the samples. The release is now being rescheduled but is unlikely to take place in the wet season which affects the overall study of the releases. The costs within the Darwin budget which covered the shipment of the animals out to Montserrat, were not incurred. Some flights and radio-transmitter costs were not recoverable, but these are associated with a co-funding grant. Darwin has been kept informed throughout the process.

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

The Issues have been discussed with LTS, but no changes were needed to the budget to reflect the change in timing of the second release of mountain chickens.

Discussed with LTS: no/yes, in..... (month/yr)

Formal change request submitted: no/yes, in.....(month/yr)

Received confirmation of change acceptance no/yes in.....(month/yr)

3. Do you expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No

If yes, and you wish to request a carryforward of funds, this should be done as soon as possible. It would help Defra manage Darwin funds more efficiently if you could give an indication of how much you expect this request might be for.

Estimated carryforward request: £

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

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 or budget should not be discussed in this report but raised with LTS International directly.

Please send your **completed form by email** to Eilidh Young at Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk . The report should be between 1-2 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 17-075 Darwin Half Year Report**