



## Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2014)

<b>Project Ref No</b>	19-002
<b>Project Title</b>	A cutting-EDGE approach to saving Seychelles evolutionarily distinct biodiversity.
<b>Country(ies)</b>	Seychelles
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent.
<b>Collaborator(s)</b>	Government of Seychelles Ministry of Environment and Energy; Seychelles National Parks Authority; Seychelles Islands Foundation; Natural History Museum of Seychelles; Wildlife Clubs of Seychelles; Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles; Island Conservation Society.
<b>Project Leader</b>	Dr Jim Groombridge
<b>Report date and number (eg HYR3)</b>	24/10/2014 HYR2
<b>Project website</b>	<a href="http://www.kent.ac.uk/sac/research/projects/jg_biodiversity.html">http://www.kent.ac.uk/sac/research/projects/jg_biodiversity.html</a> also find us on Facebook <a href="#">Edge Seychelles</a>

### 1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) 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 to end September).

The project has progressed to schedule over the past 6 months.

**Training:** Training programmes are being implemented for all project fellows.

We have not run any project workshops during this reporting period. A scheduled bat workshop has been postponed due to health issues of our bat expert and family. See Section 2a below for explanation.

Sylvanna Antat our Corals EDGE fellow attended ZSL EDGE fellowship “Conservation Leadership” training in London in September. Sylvanna reported back that the training was extremely worthwhile and educational for her. During the 2 week course Sylvanna planned the next steps post -EDGE project and ZSL fellowship for her to continue leading on Seychelles EDGE corals research and conservation activities and how she can push this forward. She also received training in leadership skills, conflict management, scientific and popular writing and other topics that will put her in good stead to continue leading EDGE corals research and conservation in Seychelles. All fellows have regular guidance and input from the Project Officer (PO), and their respective species expert (UK project partners) for ongoing guidance and help. Additionally our 3 project fellows who are following ZSL EDGE fellowships receive regular input from the ZSL EDGE of existence team, particularly the EDGE programme conservation officer Dr Nisha Owen and the EDGE fellows coordinator Olivia Couchman, but also from other EDGE team experts.

**Research, monitoring and management activities:** Research, monitoring and management activities are ongoing and progressing to schedule for all our EDGE species.

**Project management/steering.** We held a project partner steering group meeting in September to discuss project progress to date, and to plan for the final 12 months of this project. All local partner organisations were present at the meeting. We also decided to hold a final local project steering group meeting in c.6 months’ time to review progress prior to project completion.

**Bats.** Transects and surveys to locate centres of bat activity and search for new roosts are underway on Mahé and Silhouette. Roost emergence counts are undertaken every 2 months at all 4 known roosts. Malaise trapping is undertaken every 2 months to monitor food abundance in the vicinity of roosts. Invasive plants are managed to prevent overgrowing of

roost entrances. Rodents controlled around roosts using poison dispensed permanent tunnels. A social survey of residents in districts where STB roosts located has been undertaken to assess local knowledge of STB.

We have located 2 areas of regular bat activity a considerable distance from the known roosts on Mahe. Bats have been observed at the same 2 locations on consecutive nights, so these areas are likely favoured feeding sites, but we have not been able to locate any new roosts to date. Survey of La Digue Island completed- no bats detected during 4 evenings of survey (6:45pm-10pm). One abandoned roost was found on La Digue, very near the coast in a boulder field. Old guano deposits are still present but no bats.

We are very happy to announce that the Sheath-tailed bat is finally a legally protected species. Legislation protecting the bat itself, its roosts and the area surrounding its roosts from a suite of potentially detrimental 'activities' was passed on 18 August 2014 (citation: Wild Animals and Birds Protection (Sheath-tailed bat) Regulations 2014). This project cannot claim full credit for the legislation as many people have called for legal protection of the bat for over 15 years. However this project has been instrumental in getting the bat protected **now** rather than it taking at least 2 more years, as it was us who insisted that the bat should be protected under the existing Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act ASAP, rather than waiting to include it in new Protected Areas legislation that has not even been drafted yet (which was how government was planning to protect the bat).

**Sooglossid frogs.** Frog fellow James Mougall has attended GIS training and is now proficient in use of QGIS which he has used to plan his frog surveys, and he plans to use to plot and analyse his survey results and produce distribution maps. Frog surveys, both presence/absence surveys for distribution/range mapping and detailed abundance surveys at repeat locations, are ongoing across Mahé.

**Caecilians.** Caecilian distribution surveys led by caecilian project fellow Charles Morel are ongoing on Mahé (and other islands opportunistically). Repeat surveys at several locations every 2 months are also underway in order to determine caecilian detectability at different times through the year. As well as gaining information on species assemblages and distributions we are filling knowledge gaps in breeding behaviour and life history. We have found that breeding (presence of egg clutches) occurs mostly during the SE trade wind season (May-October) and that at least 3 Seychelles caecilian species lay eggs and guard their eggs until they hatch.

A nation-wide social questionnaire survey covering all districts on Mahé, Praslin and La Digue (c.25 districts in total) to determine local knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards caecilians is in full swing. Berthilde Belle our second project caecilian fellow is undertaking the survey and initial results indicate that the majority of Seychellois believe that caecilians are worms and that they are beneficial to the soil much in the same way worms are.

**Corals.** Sylvanna Antat and team have completed all the fieldwork for (i) baseline mapping of coral distributions for 3 EDGE coral species supposedly found in the inner (granitic) Seychelles on reefs and (ii) to determine whether existing Marine Protected Areas are providing adequate protection for EDGE corals. Over 100 dives within and outside MPAs were conducted (with 3-4 divers per dive) have been completed. Only one of the 3 EDGE corals (*Physogyra lichtensteini*) in this study was recorded within the granitic Seychelles. Sylvanna's results show (i) no difference in *Physogyra* abundance or size within versus outside MPA's, (ii) most *Physogyra* are large and there is very little recruitment (iii) *Physogyra* corals are found in cooler and clearer waters (ie significant predictors of *Physogyra* presence and abundance were temperature and visibility).

**Black Parrots.** In April 2014 BirdLife International (recognised authority on Birds) officially recognised the Seychelles Black Parrot as a full species (was previously considered a sub-species), something which Seychellois ornithologists have long argued for based on behavioural and morphological characteristics. However the inclusion of genetic research undertaken in collaboration with this project in the project leader's genetics lab at DICE, University of Kent, finally resolved the issue. BLI announced the official change in status in April 2014. This change in status should help precipitate further conservation funds.

The black parrot breeding season runs from October – March and all black parrot fieldwork in terms of catching, ringing and breeding monitoring is therefore conducted outside this reporting period. However phenology monitoring to monitor black parrot food abundance is undertaken every 2 weeks throughout the year and has been ongoing during this reporting period. The black parrot project fellow Terence Payet therefore undertakes most of his education, awareness and advocacy work during this reporting period (reported on below). Terence has

also undertaken a questionnaire survey of Praslinois to determine their feelings towards black parrots during this reporting period. Black parrots eat fruits in peoples' gardens' which is not always appreciated by the locals, and we want to know if this is really an area of contention and a potential problem for black parrot conservation, in order to best plan future advocacy angles. Terence has almost completed his survey and will be finished by the end of October.

**Education and awareness activities:** Education and awareness activities are progressing to schedule. During this reporting period we have gone on air for 2 national radio programmes and one national TV programme. One interview on the black parrot and it's new full species status on radio Seychelles in April and one programme on this project on Pure FM radio on the 45 minute radio show 'Green Seychelles'. Project officer Rachel Bristol, corals fellow Sylvanna Antat and caecilian fellow Charles Morel were the show guests and we had the opportunity to talk about this project and the work we are doing on Seychelles EDGE species. The public also phoned in with questions during the show and we had the opportunity to answer questions.

1 x ½ hour television programme (News Extra) Black Parrot recognised as a full species by international ornithological community (BirdLife International/IUCN) featuring Dr. Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, CEO of Seychelles Island Foundation (project partner), and Mr Ronley Fanchette, Director of Conservation Section, Department of Environment (project partner).

We have also completed production of 6 x 10 minute long TV programmes about this project. They are scheduled to play on National Television in November and December. One documentary provides an introduction to the project and the other 5 each focus on a different EDGE species/taxonomic group. All are in Creole (the local language) and feature our 5 project fellows on their respective species/taxonomic group documentary and the project officer for the introduction documentary.

Displays have been produced on Black parrots and Sooglossid frogs and are on display in the Vallee de Mai Visitors centre. Caecilian posters have been produced and distributed to schools and are also on display in the Natural History Museum.

Black parrot fellow Terence Payet has given presentations on black parrots in all 4 schools on Praslin with visual power point presentations and a 'pet' black parrot named Rio who was rescued as a nestling after losing a wing to rat predation. Rio is a real hit with school children and a rare opportunity for them to see a black parrot up close. Project Officer has been filmed in the field with frogs and caecilians describing their uniqueness and threats for a new Air Seychelles inflight video. Poster produced about Sylvanna's EDGE fellowship project on EDGE corals found in Seychelles. We have also actively participated and show cased this project and the work we are doing with manned displays at several well attended activities including: the Wildlife Clubs of Seychelles 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, International Biodiversity Day celebrations and Seychelles National Parks 35 years of existence celebrations.

**2a. 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.**

Diana Renaud our project sheath-tailed bat fellow is leaving the Department of Environment and is transferring to the Department of Social Affairs. This has only happened in the last 2 weeks of October (outside this reporting period) but we feel it is appropriate to report on it now. Various options have been discussed between Diana, the Project Officer (Rachel Bristol), the Department of Environment (Director General for Wildlife, Enforcement and Permits, Mr Flavien Joubert who is Diana's focal point for this project), ZSL EDGE of existence team and the project leader over the past week as to the best way to proceed. We have all agreed that the best way to proceed is for Diana to continue to lead on the Sheath-tailed bat work and to also continue with her ZSL EDGE fellowship (which is not transferable) when she leaves the DOE. The Project Officer, Diana and Mr Joubert have met and planned out who and how the project STB work will be undertaken given that Diana will be working for Social Affairs as of next month.

Prof. Paul Racey our UK project bat expert has had to postpone his second training and mentoring trip to Seychelles several times since February 2014 due to .....it looks like he will not be able to make it in December as planned as he has developed a knee problem making walking difficult. We have discussed with Prof. Racey that if by January he is still unsure if he will be able to make a

project trip to Seychelles before the end of the financial year (end March 2015) then we will together with him decide if there is someone else suitably qualified who could come in his place to provide valuable input into STB conservation - someone from Bat Conservation International for example. We will keep LTS informed of the situation and any proposed solution. Prof Racey is still however very helpful in providing input, guidance and expert opinion via email.

Our proposed solutions to these 2 problems encountered should not negatively affect this project's outcomes, the implementation timetable or the project budget.

**2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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

No

**3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully as it is unlikely that any requests to carry forward funds will be approved this year.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project and would like to talk to someone about the options available this year, please indicate below when you think you might be in a position to do this and what the reasons might be:

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