

Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	25-007
Project title	Protecting Yap's biodiversity and livelihoods through invasive alien species removal
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Federated States of Micronesia
Lead organisation	Island Conservation
Partner(s)	Ulithi Falalop Community Action Program, One People One Reef
Project leader	Tommy Hall
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	April 2021 – Sep 2021, (HYR 4)
Project website/blog/social media	www.islandconservation.org www.onepeopleonereef.org

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

The impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to hinder progress towards project objectives in the past six months. Yap State and Ulithi Atoll have remained closed to virtually all outside travel through October 2021. There have been a several repatriation flights from Guam to Yap for residents and essential workers, and there is at least one more flight scheduled in November, but no additional flights have been programmed. It is difficult to get authorization as a non-resident and there are significant quarantine requirements that would be cost prohibitive for foreigners. There is currently no line of sight as to when Yap state or Ulithi will open their borders for travel. This has forced the project partnership to remain in a holding pattern while tentatively planning to mobilize for the operation beginning in March 2022. The project has already been forced to postpone for two years due to the pandemic and we are cautious about using funds that will be necessary to implement the project. Therefore, we are continuing to meet weekly and evaluating conditions impacting a go/no-go decision-making process.

We have maintained routine communication with primary points of contact from UFCAP and OPOR. The leadership in UFCAP has ensured their support for the project in 2022 but acknowledged that the safety of the community on Ulithi is the priority. Communication has remained a priority for the partnership, as well. Together, we have been tracking the progress of the vaccination program in FSM as well as continually evolving travel restrictions across the Pacific. The current consensus is to remain on standby and once travel opens, evaluate the ability to implement in 2022. As we approach the end of 2021, the priorities of the team have been to identify critical logistical and resource needs and evaluate strategies to mobilize the project as soon as possible, while ensuring a successful outcome of the project objectives.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for COVID-19 specific)

delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

None.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of COVID-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The ongoing global pandemic and associated travel restrictions are at the root of all project delays. We have been put in a situation where we either risk investing significant project resources to be prepared for the rat and monitor lizard eradication in March 2022 and potentially have to cancel our plans because restrictions remain in place; or, remain on standby until conditions are in place that would allow the project team to proceed (possibly 2022 or 2023). There is no reliable information on when commercial flights into Yap will resume. Ulithi Atoll still has no phone or internet service. Our means of communicating with the leadership on Ulithi is through our primary point of contact with UFCAP who can contact the atoll with the project satellite phone or through a chain of messages via the local air charter that services Ulithi and other outer islands. Even with these two limited options, our communications have been significantly reduced, as such we have not been able to engage the local field team. It is apparent that the isolation of Ulithi during the pandemic has compounded the spill over effects of this global emergency. With the limited operational window for reliable sea conditions to access the project sites, we expect that we will be forced to delay the project another year. However, a component of our go/no-go decision-making process involves reviewing our project objectives and log frame and potentially reprioritizing the rat eradication over removal of monitor lizards. That decision would potentially lead to an increased risk of failure and will certainly increase costs (and expected timelines) for completing the monitor lizard eradication. Thus, we are evaluating this possibility carefully with partners and with our internal eradication advisors.

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

Discussed with LTS: Yes

Formal change request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

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

Yes No Estimated underspend:

3b. If yes, then you need to 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.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

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

The project team is mindful of the fact that many of the local residents who accrued new skill sets and participated in initial project work left Ulithi—or the country entirely—at the start of the global pandemic and have not returned. We are concerned that the cadre of local technicians we helped form with project partners will not be available for project work when we are finally able to travel to Ulithi. We are tracking this possibility accordingly.

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 can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**