

## Darwin Initiative Main Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:  
(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources-for-projects/information-notes-learning-notes-briefing-papers-and-reviews/> ).

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum** of 20 pages in length, excluding annexes)

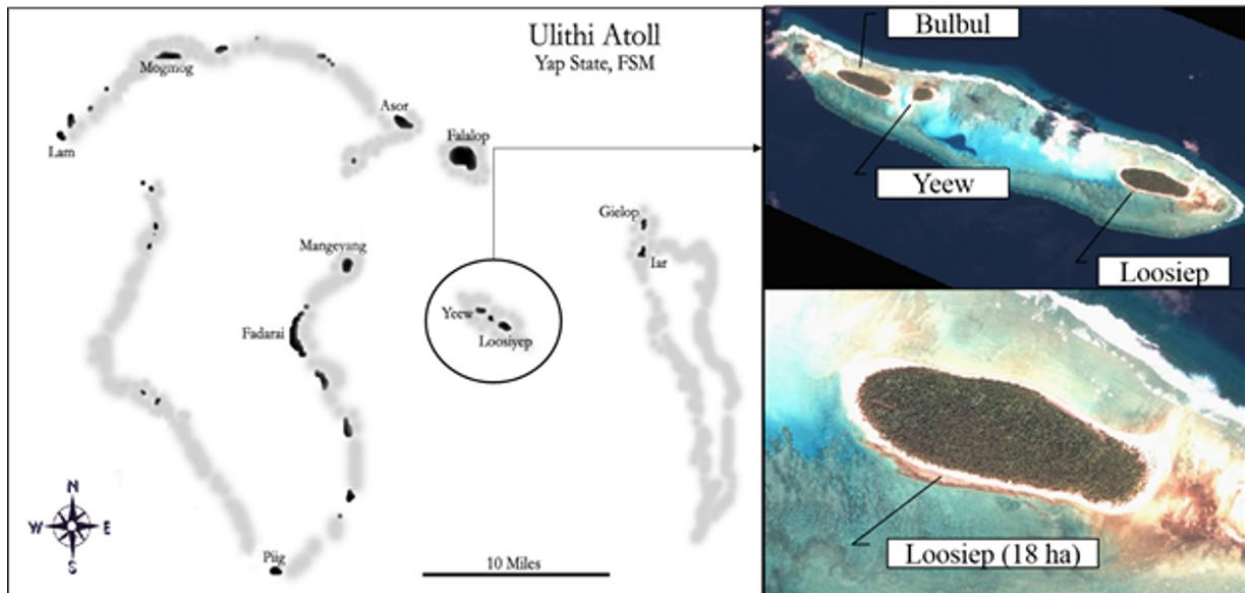
**Submission Deadline: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

### Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	25-007
Project title	Protecting Yap’s Biodiversity and Livelihoods through Invasive Alien Species Removal
Country/ies	Federated States of Micronesia
Lead partner	Island Conservation
Project partner(s)	Ulithi Falalop Community Action Program; One People One Reef
Darwin grant value	£350,000.00
Start/end dates of project	7/1/2018 - 3/31/2022
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2021 – Mar 2022) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	April 2021 – March 2022, Annual Report 4
Project Leader name	Tommy Hall
Project website/blog/social media	<a href="http://www.islandconservation.org">www.islandconservation.org</a> <a href="http://www.onepeopleonereef.org">www.onepeopleonereef.org</a>
Report author(s) and date	Tommy Hall (IC), Madeleine Pott (IC) Nicole Crane (OPOR), John Rulmal JR (UFCAP), April 29, 2022

### 1. Project summary

Ulithi is a remote atoll in the Caroline Islands of the western Pacific Ocean consisting of 40 islets. Ulithi supports some of the greatest biological diversity within the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and is home to regionally important native seabird species, the endemic giant Micronesian gecko and a newly discovered endemic blind snake. Known as the “Turtle Islands,” Ulithi provides nesting habitat for the greatest number of Green Sea Turtles (EN) in Micronesia. Three introduced and invasive species, the black rat, feral pigs and the mangrove monitor lizard, are present on Loosiep, one of the Turtle Islands. There they are impeding horticulture, diminishing critical natural resources, and having a significant impact on the island’s biodiversity. Damage from pigs and monitor lizards is illustrated by the excavation and predation of green turtle nests, the lack of roosting and nesting seabirds on Loosiep and the absence of coconut crabs which are abundant on surrounding islands. Rats are equally destructive, preying on marine turtle hatchlings, seabirds and crops.



**Figure 1.** Map of Ulithi Atoll and Loosiep Island.

Because of the atoll's extreme isolation, Ulithi's 1,000 residents rely heavily on the natural resources available to them such as food grown in gardens and the sustainable harvest of turtle and bird eggs. Rats, pigs, and monitor lizards have depleted these resources on Loosiep. Monitor lizards frighten the community due to their large size and fearsome appearance. Consequently, gardening on Loosiep has been abandoned. Freshly grown foods are no longer readily available, and the community is faced with a serious dietary-related disease epidemic. These impacts have reduced the community's resilience at an especially vulnerable time in the face of increasingly severe storms and rising sea levels due to climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this as the community has been forced to become more self-reliant as a result of supply chain disruptions that have impeded the transport of food to the islands.

Ulithi's subsistence economy is closely integrated with nature and the community has a strong interest in relying on its natural resources, particularly in the wake of COVID-19. To uphold these traditional values, the integrity of the atoll's living ecosystem must be maintained. Eradication of harmful invasive vertebrates will allow recovery of native species populations and enable the community to preserve its cultural values. The goal of this project is to remove invasive rats, pigs, and monitor lizards and facilitate a transition back to a traditional subsistence lifestyle for the inhabitants of Ulithi. Once the turtle islands are free from these invasive vertebrates, the community will re-establish traditional gardening practices on the island while also being stewards for the recovery of the ecosystem on the island, the sea turtle population, and the surrounding reefs.

## 2. Project stakeholders/ partners

There are two lead partners that support Island Conservation on this project: Ulithi Falalop Community Action Program (UFCAP) and One People One Reef (OPOR). UFCAP represents leadership and the community of Ulithi and are the primary partner on the project. UFCAP's role in the project is to engage community leaders, advise on planning and logistics and facilitate community involvement in all phases of the project. OPOR's role in the project is to lead the socio-economic monitoring and community engagement and outreach. OPOR is working closely alongside UFCAP to facilitate strong community relations and involvement of local scientists. The fourth partner, Blue Ecology, is involved in engaging the youth of the community in this project.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all field work or in-person work was delayed in 2020 and, unfortunately, has been delayed again until 2023. This has directly impacted each partner's ability to progress their objectives for this and many other projects currently ongoing on Ulithi.

The remoteness of Ulithi and lack of telephone or internet access became a real challenge at times. There were several periods where the regular flights were canceled due to lack of fuel in Yap, essentially cutting Ulithi off from the rest of the world entirely. Despite the delays and the continued challenges in communication and engagement, the project partnership has remained strong in its third year. We have kept in regular contact and sought to collaboratively maintain project momentum. However, all partners have had to make significant changes to project spending in order to conserve funds for the time when travel opens back up and we can resume operations at full capacity.

Despite the ongoing setback posed by of the pandemic, we were able to maintain momentum with the partnership. We are now tentatively planning to begin the removal of invasive species from Loosiep in 2023. This past year saw us collaborating with our core partners in the following ways:

- We maintained strong communications with our lead point of contact for UFCAP, John Rulmal, who remains in Guam, until travel to and from Yap returns to normal. Reliable connectivity in Guam allowed us to maintain a constant flow of information between partners and the outer island community.
- We continued discussions focused on larger programmatic goals of the partners that we hope to achieve as a follow-on to this project. This included horizon scanning exercises for the next set of islands in Ulithi Atoll and larger scale eradication projects that incorporate larger agriculture and permaculture programs.
- OPOR held regular virtual meetings with the leaders, community, and youth of Ulithi who happened to be in Yap or elsewhere with internet access. This project remains of particular interest to stakeholders, with frequent discussions around impacts from invasive species, biosecurity, and biodiversity.

### **3. Project progress**

#### **3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities**

Given the continued impacts of COVID-19 on this project, our focus in 2021 lay in maintaining the momentum of our partnership, keeping in contact with on-the-ground partners, and conserving funds until such a time as field work can safely resume.

The first output is focused on the removal of invasive species from Loosiep to make the five turtle islands rat free and implementing biosecurity. In 2021, we were unable to progress the rat and monitor lizard eradication components of the project. Due to the travel restrictions in place and a concern over introducing the coronavirus to a remote atoll with limited medical resources, we continue to delay the rollout of the biosecurity program which involves a series of trainings and workshops with communities on each of the inhabited islands.

The second output is the recovery of native biodiversity on Loosiep. In 2021, no further progress was made towards this outcome as rats and monitors have yet to be removed. With the removal pigs completed in 2020, we can assume that turtle nests in the past year have had a much higher success rate. We can also expect that much of the native atoll forest on Loosiep is recovering from the impacts of pigs rooting. The follow-on impacts of removing pigs will benefit invertebrates and reptiles, but rodents and monitor lizards still must be removed to realize maximum benefits.

Output three is the increased availability of natural resources and increased crop production after food gardens are established on Loosiep. Activities related to baseline data collection and development of plans for the food gardens were all completed on schedule in 2019. No specific activities related to the post-eradication monitoring of natural resources availability or initiating agricultural gardens could be implemented as the rat and monitor lizard eradication has yet to begin.

Developing community capacity, Output four, is a substantial and important component of this project. Many of the activities focused on capacity building were completed or initiated in 2019. No further activities associated with capacity building were completed in 2021. We know there

has been some attrition in the field teams originally built under this project and that some local supporters are no longer be in Ulithi. Thus, we expect that we will need to repeat and reinforce some of the trainings, education and outreach already conducted.

The final output of establishing a period of employment for local community members was delayed due to the pandemic. When the field work resumes in late 2022 or early 2023, we expect the field and support teams to be back at full capacity after some initial re-engagement.

### **3.2 Progress towards project Outputs**

Due to the ongoing project delays in 2021 and 2022, our ability to make progress towards any of our project outputs was extremely limited. In early 2022, the partnership formally decided to further postpone all travel and field work in Ulithi until late 2022 at the soonest. Fortunately, the Darwin Initiative has accepted our request for an additional one-year delay. If travel opens up by late 2022, we anticipate achieving project outputs by the close of the project. If there are outputs that have not been achieved by the end of the project period, IC and the partners will continue to raise funds to support the completion of these outputs.

Output one addresses the removal of invasive vertebrates and establishing biosecurity. Other than continuing to dialogue about keeping the project on track and partners aligned for a future eradication of invasive species on Loosiep, no activities were completed during this performance period that advanced progress towards this output. The partnership carefully evaluated the possibility of supporting the local community in removing monitor lizards and rats from Loosiep with remote support from IC (i.e., without on-the-ground technical advice). However, the lack of reliable communications systems and the risk to a successful eradication outweighed potential benefits to the community and hopes to expand invasive species eradications more broadly within Ulithi--an expressed desire of the community. Despite continued delays to eradicating monitor lizards and rats, there is still enthusiasm amongst partners and within the community to see Loosiep restored. And although COVID-19 has been top of mind for many in the region during the last two years, people in Ulithi and Yap have a heightened awareness of the threats of invasive vertebrates and the impact they have on terrestrial and marine environments.

The second output the project will achieve is the recovery of native biodiversity on Loosiep Island. Progress towards this output is reliant on the removal of invasive vertebrates. With the pig removal completed in 2020, we can anticipate some benefit to the native ecosystem on Loosiep Island, particularly to the success of nesting turtles. No further action was taken to remove invasive vertebrates (rats and monitor lizards) in 2021, therefore we cannot report on any additional recovery at this time.

Improving food security was identified as a major priority by the Ulithi community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Output three focuses on increasing availability of natural resources and better crop production. Our project proposes to achieve this by first removing invasive vertebrates. Therefore, we cannot report on any increases due to the delay in project activities resulting from the COVID-19 crisis.

Our community engagement lead for the project, OPOR, continued to include women and youth in online workshops which included developing communication and outreach ideas around invasive species management and biosecurity practices. These fall into output four of this project, which aims to develop community capacity. Since 2020, the partnership has maintained motivation and momentum in the project, but there were no real advances in increasing local capacity. We continue to have confidence in the ability of the partnership and the community to see this project through to success once field work resumes. Output five is in alignment with output four; the project team remains on standby and are ready to mobilize once work resumes, though some recruitment and/or retraining will likely be necessary.

### **3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome**

**Outcome:** Removal of harmful invasive species will result in native and endemic species recovery and improved conditions for horticulture, resulting in increased food security for the community.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions have been a huge impediment to achieving our outcome. We were unable to make meaningful progress toward the project outcome in 2021. With continued travel restrictions to Yap and Ulithi, in partnership with the community, we determined that the project should be delayed an additional year, until 2023. The community and the project partnership remain enthusiastic and committed to the project and we aim to achieve the project outcome by the end of the project period. Indicators designed to measure the intended outcome remain relevant and will be evaluated once the partnership is able to get back to work in Ulithi.

We have already communicated to the Darwin Initiative that we expect the monitor lizard work to require an additional 3-5 years of effort to complete. We are actively searching for funds to conduct monitor lizard removals beyond the scope of this project to achieve a successful outcome and support future, similar efforts in Ulithi and the outer islands of Yap.

### 3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Assumption 1: No extreme or unusual weather conditions inhibit ability to complete project or grow crops.

Comments: We will continue to work with local partners and use the best available information to plan our work in Ulithi. The global pandemic was and is an underlying risk that cannot be anticipated. Although we assume such events will not occur, we are prepared to deal with unforeseen situations by working with partners to adaptively manage risks.

Assumption 2: Enabling conditions to complete the project are in place for the duration of the project (e.g., access to Ulithi atoll, operable boats, local field team available, permission and mandate from local community remains in place).

Comments: We cannot assume that enabling conditions will always be fully in place for the life of the project. Weather will always pose a risk of hampering our progress in Ulithi, as it does on all island projects in the tropical Pacific. Unplanned events such as fuel shortages, serious illness, or the death of a community member can cause significant resources to be withdrawn from the project, including boats, field team members, or even access to Loosiep itself. For example, if a chief of high enough prestige passes away, access to certain areas under their jurisdiction may be closed for lengthy periods of time (multiple years) as a part of traditional mourning and resource management. In the case of the COVID-19, the traditional leaders of Ulithi decided that access to Ulithi would be restricted to safeguard the health of the community, a goal shared by all partners—no matter how disruptive it is—to ongoing projects. However, due to the high level of trust and dedication from our partners, we can mitigate the impacts when enabling conditions are not fully present. A high level of empathy amongst our partners and the capacity to adaptively manage obstructive developments to the project are two hallmarks of this partnership that will ensure we achieve our desired outcome.

Assumption 3: Normal travel to Yap State and Ulithi will resume by 2023.

Comments: With the COVID vaccine widely available in the region and recent variations of the virus decreasing in prevalence, we are observing travel opening back up to near full capacity to other islands in the region (e.g., Rep. of Palau). We have no reason to believe that Yap will remain closed through 2022. Nevertheless, this remains an assumption and we have no influence on the state or country's decision to re-establish travel. Even if the country does open to travel, if there is a resurgence of COVID there is always the potential that Yap will re-close its borders.

Assumption 4: Project staff and community are able to manage and mitigate the risks of COVID-19.

Comments: All staff are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Additionally, all staff are required to compile COVID mitigation plans which detail the measures they will take to keep themselves and their partners safe while traveling to project sites and while at project sites. These plans are reviewed and approved by our Human Resources Manager and Vice President of Conservation prior to any staff travel. We are currently working on several other projects in the region and thanks to these mitigation plans and other preventative measures, local or travelling staff have avoided contracting COVID-19 as a result of project travel or activities.

Assumption 5: Local support for the project remains strong, despite a multi-year delay in project implementation.

Comments: The project is fortunate to have a local point of contact who is well respected within his community and an excellent communicator and community organizer. He remains in close contact with the community leadership and confirms that the community very much supports the project. They have even expressed interest in immediately scaling up the eradication to remove rats from the large, inhabited islands on Ulithi, if funding were available. It is worth noting, however, that after being closed off from loved ones and the rest of the country for several years, the people of Ulithi keenly feel the need to visit family, take part in funerals, and attend to business matters that will take short term precedence over the eradication work. We deeply respect these needs and their priorities and will work with the community to plan accordingly.

Assumption 6: Rats on Loosiep are susceptible to the same bait and baiting methods that are used on similar tropical islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Comments: Based on the results of our bait trial in April 2019 and IC's experience in successfully completing rodent eradications around the world, we hold to the assumption that Rats on Loosiep are susceptible to the same bait and baiting methods that are used on similar tropical islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Assumption 7: The tools and methods available for the monitor lizard eradication will be effective in detecting and removing the last individual.

Comments: We have not yet succeeded in reliably detecting or trapping juvenile monitor lizards; nor in finding an active monitor lizard nest. We strongly believe that the monitor lizard eradication can be achieved through attrition; however, it may take three or more years of consistent effort to achieve it. In 2019, a significant knockdown of the monitor lizards was achieved, the benefits of this knockdown will have likely been lost with several nesting periods occurring on island since that time. The partnership is still actively researching methods and striving to be innovative in how we address monitor lizards in the juvenile age class. Concerning location of monitor lizard nests, we have strong interest in utilizing detection dogs to reach this end. Our current level of funding cannot support detection dogs, however, and the partnership will need to invest more time in securing significant additional funds for this conservation tool. We continue to seek funds to support this project component.

Assumption 8: Existing programs to monitor coral reef and green sea turtle nesting on Loosiep will continue for the foreseeable future.

Comments: This assumes OPOR will continue to have access to funds for their marine work, and there will be interest and motivation from the community to carry on with turtle monitoring.

Assumption 9: Trained persons remain engaged and motivated to pursue further work in conservation projects when opportunities are available.

Comments: With a two-year delay in field work, we cannot assume that the team trained in 2019 will be available in 2022. However, we are prepared to take on new team members and bring them up to speed. Based on our experiences with field work and community engagement across Ulithi atoll, we are confident in the assumption that trained persons will remain engaged and motivated to pursue further work in conservation projects when opportunities are available. To this end, the positive reception of the Ulithi community to the work currently under way has generated enthusiasm for more widespread eradication efforts across Ulithi that exceeded our expectations. We are reassured that previously trained team members can integrate field workers and train them to become experienced and motivated eradication practitioners, thus

creating a positive feedback loop where the project can adapt to the loss of skilled team members.

Assumption 10: The Council of Chiefs agrees with the proposed methods for the project. Based on the scoping trip completed in March 2017, trial work in 2019 and a letter of support received for the project, preliminary support is in place from local community leaders.

Comments: As of the drafting of this document we strongly believe this assumption holds true. Our discussions with partners and the council of chiefs since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to inspire confidence in their commitment to the project and the anticipated outcomes.

Assumption 11: FSM Government has the capacity to task someone to participate in part of the project's implementation.

Comments: There is continued interest from the FSM and Yap State governments to build capacity to protect and restore their island ecosystems and natural resources through the removal of invasive species. Biosecurity also remains a priority for Ulithi and other outer islands.

### **3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and poverty alleviation**

Our expected outcome is that the removal of harmful invasive species will result in native and endemic species recovery and improved conditions for horticulture, resulting in increased food security for the community. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our project has not yet been able to achieve significant positive progress to increase the wellbeing of the community or have a positive impact on biodiversity, as of late 2021. However, the removal of feral pigs in 2020 will contribute towards some ecosystem recovery. We expect many natural resources, such as sea turtle hatchlings, to already be on the road to recovery with the removal of this nest predator.

Unfortunately, we have been forced to delay an additional year. We are hopeful that we will make great progress and have a positive impact when work resumes in late 2022 and 2023. It is worth noting that the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the Ulithi community have strengthened their desire to improve their food security and increase natural resources. Partnership meetings over the course of 2021 often led to strategic discussions about how to develop and fund a broader program of work to restore terrestrial and marine ecosystems through invasive species eradication in Ulithi.

## **4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements**

COVID-19 has forced us to delay all major project activities. As such, there is nothing new to report on project support of conventions, treaties, or agreements. In the absence of a finalized post-2020 CBD framework, we are continuing to work towards the previously established 2020 goals. We are in the implementation stage of this project and our aim to achieve biodiversity convention goals remains in progress as described below. We have been in touch with the FSM focal point for the GEF project and are hoping to collaborate as appropriate. They are interested in the implementation of the rat eradication. We had planned to invite them to participate in 2021 and subsequently, in 2022. However, due to continued delays, we now plan to invite them when we resume work in 2023. Once work on this project restarts, we will actively seek interactions with local and UK convention focal points.

This project will address the following CBD Aichi Targets, and the project will help the FSM meet its objectives under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the related Micronesia Challenge:

*Target 9* - Through this work two invasive vertebrates (rats and monitor lizards) listed among the world's worst invasive alien species by the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group will be

removed from the island of Loosiep and protocols to prevent their reinvasion will be developed. We have also added to this eradication project the removal of pigs from Loosiep Island.

*Target 12* - The removal of invasive vertebrates will address a key threat to green sea turtles in Micronesia and help stem the declining population trend for this endangered species. The project will provide greater security from extinction for species found only on Ulithi such as the Ulithi blind snake.

*Target 14* - This project will address concerns over essential resources related to the livelihoods and well-being of local populations. This project is designed to restore Loosiep island, safeguard essential terrestrial food resources, and reduce pressure on the food resources of adjacent islands.

*Target 15* - The impacts of invasive species, although localized, have reduced the community's resilience at an especially vulnerable time in the face of increasingly frequent and severe storms and rising sea levels resulting from climate change. This project will contribute to both ecosystem resilience and community resilience through increased food security. Further, this project has already begun to catalyse future eradications within Ulithi that will serve to augment resilience.

*Target 17* - FSM prepared a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in March 2002 to fulfil its obligations to the Convention. A Yap State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (YBSAP) was also developed. Both plans identify invasive species as a major threat and constraint to biodiversity conservation in the FSM. The YBSAP also identifies invasive species as a threat to Yap's natural communities, economy and way of life and specifically identifies rat control and public awareness as priorities. Within the NBSAP, a Strategy and Action Plan was derived. This project advances the following overarching goals identified within this Action Plan:

*Theme 4. Agrobiodiversity:* The conservation and sustainable use of Agrobiodiversity contributes to the nation's development and the future food security of the FSM.

*Theme 6. Biosecurity:* Border control, quarantine and eradication programs are effectively protecting the FSM's native biodiversity from impacts of alien invasive species.

*Theme 9.* Traditional resource owners and communities are fully involved in the protection, conservation, preservation, and sustainable use of the nation's biodiversity.

This project will enable FSM to advance these goals by removing three invasive species from an area within FSM. It will raise local awareness of the threat of invasive species and the importance of biosecurity, and it will develop capacity that can be used elsewhere within FSM to advance implementation of its NBSAP.

*Target 18* - For thousands of years, Ulithi's natural resources were effectively controlled through traditional management. However, like many other small island communities, this traditional management was abandoned over the last century, resulting in the decline of turtles, fish and other crucial marine resources. Traditional management has now been reimplemented and has proven to be effective. However, invasive species have interrupted the community's ability to manage their natural resources. Removing these invasive species will restore balance on Loosiep and enable traditional management by the local community for the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of terrestrial and marine resources.

## 5. Project support to poverty reduction

**Note:** We have altered the concept of 'poverty alleviation' to 'promoting wellbeing'. It has become clear to us as we progress in this work that the people of the outer islands and Ulithi, in particular, do not consider themselves 'poor', and that concept has connotations that are not conducive to helping people with (western) perceived poverty and gender equity issues. However, they do articulate what it means to them to feel secure, including food, environmental, and social security. Thus, we have modified the concept of 'poverty alleviation' to 'promoting wellbeing' as articulated by the community.

We expect the communities of Ulithi to benefit from increased food and environmental security and improved wellbeing. The re-establishment of healthy gardening islands with abundant natural resources will allow the community to resume critical gardening (agriculture) and natural



resource harvesting activities. One People One Reef is leading the completion and analysis of pre- and post-intervention surveys.

Just prior to and at the beginning of the pandemic, the wellbeing survey was rolled out across the community. Because of the pandemic, we saw lower participation than we had initially hoped for. Some surveys remain unanalysed in Ulithi due to pandemic travel restrictions. We ran statistical analyses on the data received so far and encountered challenges in accounting for the small sample size. As a result, in 2021, we formed a team of social scientists and experienced statisticians to evaluate how our current dataset can be used to develop a baseline of community wellbeing in Ulithi Atoll. Initial working meetings are being held in May 2022. We expect that this team will develop an appropriate analysis method to extract a maximum of data from the surveys by early 2023.

Due to project delays, no notable achievements have been accomplished this year.

## **6. Consideration of gender equality issues**

All the partners are working to include more women and girls in youth and outreach activities. In 2019, the last time that we were able to collaborate on the ground with partners, women were involved in many facets of the project (see Annex 3, Table 1), representing 18% of the local team. In addition, the OPOR team has been making regular posts on its Facebook site (many of which are specific to women and their roles) which reaches close to 1,000 people. OPOR is continuing to leverage Darwin Initiative funds by holding regular virtual calls with community members who find themselves in Guam and Hawaii and want to continue engaging in biodiversity and conservation projects until they can return home to Ulithi. About half of the attendees are women or young women. In 2021, these projects took the shape of transforming information about invasive species and biodiversity conservation into communications materials that can be easily understood by the youth of Ulithi and other Outer Islands. In addition, this information is being integrated into songs and set to music as another effective means of communicating the threats of invasive species and the value of natural resources. We have found that the women, especially, enjoy the musical component and are looking forward to taking the songs back to their communities.

Due to project delays, no notable achievements have been accomplished this year on gender equality.

## **7. Monitoring and evaluation**

The logical framework continues to be the primary tool to evaluate real project progress and serves as a regular topic of conversation with our partners. Due to the isolation of the Ulithi community during the global pandemic, it has been challenging to include them in M&E conversations, but the log frame will serve as a valuable tool for restarting conversation about how to complete the project, as we approach critical deadlines for making decisions about how to proceed.

For IC, OPOR, and UFCAP, the log frame, especially the activity list, serves as a checklist of deliverables. It is important to note that the benefits of eradication projects are longer-term than the scope of this grant and project. Assuming the project remains sustainable in the long-term, the impact will continue to amplify over the years. The methods and the baseline data developed for this project allow for the evaluation of the long-term impact, at any point in the future. The measurable indicators established at the onset of the project are still relevant.

## **8. Lessons learnt**

The biggest lesson or takeaway from the previous year is that it is important to establish contingency plans for unexpected delays to the project by one or more years. Island Conservation has a standardized practice of completing checks prior to committing major resources to a project. Now, contingency for longer term delays is an integral part of those reviews. Although we committed significant project resources into the 2020 implementation that was eventually delayed, it quickly became apparent that the partnership was critical to maintaining momentum and local commitment to the project.

We also learned that remote island communities, by nature, are vulnerable and may not follow broader international trends. For example, we predicted that with the roll out of vaccines in 2021 and many Small Island Developing States opening their borders in 2022 (e.g., Republic of Palau), that the Federated States of Micronesia and Yap State, would follow suit. This is not the case, however, and international travel is only open for repatriation purposes into Yap state. Going forward, we would recommend being deliberate about these assumptions, particularly as they relate to different risk thresholds amongst partners and between cultures.

It was fortunate that our lead point of contact for the community and UFCAP relocated to Guam early during the pandemic. This allowed us to maintain regular contact and some engagement directly with the island. We also left a satellite phone on Ulithi which was critical to maintaining communications over the past year. We would recommend to anyone planning work with a remote community to plan on alternate means of communication in the event of unexpected and long-term delays.

## **9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)**

Thanks to the feedback received by reviewers in late 2021, whereby it was expressed that we are unlikely to receive another extension to the project should international partners be unable to travel to Yap in 2023, we are on track to develop a Plan B by June 2022. We will carefully assess risks to and efficiencies for achieving project outcomes, should we decide to deviate from our original plans and implement the project with remote support to the local team. Along with that Plan B, we will identify critical decision points for the ensuing six months and track our progress towards those decisions. Any decisions reached by the project partnership will be carefully messaged to shape expectations within the community.

## **10. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere**

The main risk at this juncture is that we will be forced to abandon our plans of providing on-site, in-person support to local teams in the rodent eradication. The quality of support that eradication experts can provide to local teams via remote methods (e.g., satellite phone or stable internet for video calls), differs greatly from the guidance and mentoring that can be delivered in-person to community partners. In addition, it has been four years since local staff were trained in eradication methods and several skilled team members have left Ulithi. It is uncertain how many trained field personnel remain skilled and available to undertake the rodent eradication in 2023. All of these risks will be considered as part of our Plan B conversation with partners.

## **11. Sustainability and legacy**

The project still plans to include representation from Yap State in the implementation phase. In December 2019, there were simultaneous outbreaks of dengue fever and leptospirosis in Yap state, and the governor declared a state of emergency. Rats are vectors for leptospirosis and in some cases may support mosquito populations. As a result, there has been an increased interest in the rat eradication on Ulithi. The community outreach component of this project led to an increase in interest to eradicate rats both from the inhabited islands and other uninhabited

garden islands. Specifically, there is a desire to increase productivity of traditional agricultural practices. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the supply chain to Ulithi (and Yap) has been significantly impacted, further increasing the community’s desire to improve agriculture and natural resource management and reduce their reliance on the ‘outside world.’ Once this project is successfully completed, the partnership plans to develop a programmatic rat eradication strategy for Ulithi Atoll which will largely be a community led effort, utilizing the capacity developed from this project.

**12. Darwin identity**

The Darwin Initiative continues to be a critical partner on this project. Island Conservation has created a website that highlights Loosiep Island and Ulithi Atoll. The Darwin Logo is proudly displayed as the first supporter of the project. The site can be found here: [Ulithi Atoll, Loosiep Island](#). At the bottom of the page are several blog posts related to the project. Unfortunately, there has not been much to report on other than the delay due to COVID-19.

**13. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery**

The outer islands of Yap are remote, and are serviced twice weekly by a small plane, one state ship, one national ship, and occasional visitors by boat. There are no hospitals and limited nurses and medical supplies. Therefore, it has been critical to isolate the people of the outer islands from potential sources of infection (there are a significant number of people who also have high-risk underlying health conditions, such as diabetes). As a result, we have been unable to travel to the atoll since March 2020 and have delayed the project by three years. It is still uncertain as to when we will again be able to engage in fieldwork, but we remain hopeful we can resume logistics planning and travel in late 2022. Please see Assumption 4 of Section 3.4 for further details on health and safety precautions. Communication has been difficult (there are only radios and a limited number of satellite phones in the islands). Collaborating has become challenging as we are no longer able to meet in person, and communication channels with our colleagues across the islands have been unreliable. We are actively working with partners to secure improved telecommunications for the people of Ulithi and are hopeful that we will soon be able to collaborate more closely with island residents. If this project is successful in delivering its intended outcome, the people of Ulithi will have increased food and environmental security and will be less vulnerable to the knock-on impacts (e.g., supply chain disruptions) resulting from this and other pandemics or global catastrophes.

**14. Safeguarding**

Please tick this box if any safeguarding or human rights violations have occurred during this financial year.

If you have ticked the box, please ensure these are reported to [ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk) as indicated in the T&Cs.

There are no updates to our safeguarding policies or practices.

Per U.S. law, Island Conservation has a safeguarding policy. Our staff complete annual trainings on issues like harassment and sexual exploitation. Our staff are required to follow these policies. Any volunteer or subcontractor brought on to the project by IC must sign a contract explicitly agreeing to comply with the policy. Prior to starting field work, we discussed the policy with UFCAP and agreed upon measures to ensure the policy would be followed by the field team. Further, we established a clear line of communication in the event someone from the local field team or our own team violates the policy.

## 15. Project expenditure

Our projected spend for 2021/22 was based on 2020/21 expenses. Once it was clear that a 2022 eradication was not feasible due to continued travel restrictions into Yap State, we made a concerted effort in 2021/22 to conserve funds until work can resume on the ground. Thus, there was a substantial overall variance resulting in a difference of GBP 3,274 from our expected spend and our actual spending for the time period. The variances in the staff costs, overhead costs, and operating costs do not represent variances between budget lines but within categories over the timeframe. We intend to use unspent funds in those categories as originally planned but have not yet generated the expenses to do so. We will apply remaining funds in this upcoming fiscal year (2022/23).

**Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022)**

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2021/22 Grant (£)	2021/22 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)	████	████	-41%	Underspend due to concerted effort to minimize expenses
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs	████	████	-41%	Underspend due to concerted effort to minimize expenses
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs	████	████	-43%	Underspend due to concerted effort to minimize expenses
Capital items (see below)				
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)				
Others (see below)				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,966</b>	<b>4,692</b>	<b>-41%</b>	

The figures cited above pertain to our most recent Financial Change Request approved by the Darwin Initiative in January 2022.

## 16. **OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes**

I agree for the Darwin Initiative Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

Due to project delays, we have no outstanding achievements to report on during the reporting period.