



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	27-010
Project title	Community-led stewardship and conservation of the Ometepe Island Biosphere Reserve
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nicaragua
Lead organisation	Fauna & Flora International (FFI)
Partner(s)	Biometepe (Cooperativa de Agroturismo Rural y Conservación Sostenible de la Biodiversidad de Ometepe R.L.) Network of Agro-ecological Producers of Ometepe (RAPO) Fundacion Entre Volcanes (FEV)
Project leader	Co-Project Leads: Angelica Valdivia - FFI Country Director, Nicaragua, and Alison Gunn, FFI Programme Manager, Americas & Caribbean
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	HYR1 – October 2020
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.fauna-flora.org/projects/improving-sustainable-use-natural-resources-ometepe

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).

Project start-up: In agreement with the Darwin secretariat, the start date for this 3-year project was amended to 1 July 2020, in line with the receipt of the Grant Award paperwork. The revised project Budget and Implementation Timetable was submitted to Darwin via Change Request in July and the associated movement of funds between financial years (the project will now continue until 30 June 2023) was approved by Defra in August 2020. This report therefore relates to the first three months of the agreed project period.

During this period, the project was set up within FFI's institutional project management systems. The project team (four FFI staff, four members of lead partner Biometepe, plus representatives from RAPO and Ometepe's Drinking Water Committees - CAPs) held initial planning workshops in July and August, to review and update the project workplan and budget in line with the revised project dates. The project Steering Committee was also established - comprising FFI Nicaragua Country Director, FFI Americas & Caribbean Programme Manager, FFI Community Livelihoods Specialist in Nicaragua, Biometepe President, RAPO Coordinator and a representative from the CAPs. The Committee held its first meeting via Skype in August 2020 to oversee decisions related to project management and implementation of Year 1 activities, including coordination with government and academic institutions and other project stakeholders and the adaptive management of the project within the context of Covid-19. With support from FFI's Conservation Science & Design team, the project's Co-Leads also reviewed how best to incorporate recommendations from the Darwin Expert Committee into the project.

The scope and terms of partners' and wider stakeholders' roles within the project have been reviewed with those involved. Our lead partner Biometepe's role has been formalised through a sub-grant agreement, signed on 3 September 2020. To ensure successful project delivery, FFI has been working with Biometepe to identify any organisational capacity needs that we can

support, through our Partner Due Diligence process and associated actions (including a Finance and Governance review, completed in September 2020). Relevant applications for permits for wildlife monitoring have been submitted to the Ministry of Environment (MARENA).

Output 1. Community-led forest protection and wildlife conservation strengthened.

Building on previous engagement with local communities, during this period FFI and Biometepe supported the formation and initial capacity building of four teams of young people from four communities for the protection of forest areas identified as priorities for conservation of Ometepe's population of Endangered yellow-naped parrots (YNP). Initial training has been delivered in monitoring techniques, detection of illegal extraction and in establishing links with authorities for reporting environmental crimes. The teams took part in the annual YNP population census, led by FFI and Biometepe in July 2020, which recorded over 1,000 individuals across four sites.

Two community-run nurseries have been established for the propagation of native forest and fruit tree saplings for reforestation. 3,500 seedlings have already been propagated, with a focus on the propagation of native tree species (including species of *Quercus*, *Gmelina*, *Cedrela*, *Swietenia* and others) of ecological importance for wildlife, including nesting parrots. Priority sites for reforestation, covering 80 hectares, have been formally agreed with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Environment (MARENA) through our joint workplan and replantation efforts will be formally recognised by this agency.

To strengthen the role of local people in the protection of forested lands (community-owned, cooperative-owned, or on small-holders' land) we have engaged with the indigenous community at Peña Inculca, the Cooperativa Carlos Dias Cajina on the flanks of Maderas volcano and with farmers. FFI has worked with Biometepe and other stakeholders to develop a series of protocols for community involvement in environmental monitoring. Protocols for monitoring overwintering survival of migratory birds (MoSI) have been adapted from standard [methods](#), with monitoring due to commence at two sites in November. Protocols for farmer-led monitoring of biodiversity on farm plots have been drafted; the proposed method has been trialled on one farm and, following validation, is due to be rolled out in November. Terms of reference for a consultant to support development and implementation of locally-led freshwater monitoring, in coordination with the CAPs, have been agreed.

In addition, the field team have begun work to develop materials and messages to raise conservation awareness, recording interviews with project stakeholders and existing beneficiaries, for compilation into a radio infomercial.

Output 2. Sustainable agroecological production adopted by Ometepe's farmers.

FFI's and Biometepe's specialists have worked together to design and plan the series of nine training modules to be taught to Biometepe's agroecological extension team during Y1. The first module, on farm planning, administration and resource management (with the aim of enabling farmers to analyse costs and benefits of different crops, practices and technologies), was delivered to Biometepe's extension team by FFI. The team have begun providing on-farm technical outreach and practical support (tools, seeds and seedlings) to beneficiary farmers; the aim is to provide technical support to the project's 200 beneficiary farming households through an average of 2 visits per month per farm (i.e. 400 visits per month). FFI and Biometepe have also facilitated 18 farmer training workshops on agroecological practices, including soil health and composting, cultivation of mycorrhizae, agroforestry, biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation.

The project has begun supporting meetings of the RAPO Network. At their August meeting, FFI and Biometepe shared information with RAPO's committee and members regarding the scope and proposed activities under this Darwin project and RAPO's role in the project was discussed. At this meeting, training needs for RAPO members were identified and discussed, including in participatory market mapping (as per project Output 3). During this initial period of the project, members of RAPO's committee facilitated five exchanges of experiences between farms on Ometepe and two field tours, thereby already assuming their key role in promoting sustainable practices and lesson sharing, and in motivating more of Ometepe's farmers to adopt an agroecological approach.

Protocols for evaluating progress and impact through an agricultural practices survey and socioeconomic impact assessment of target households have been designed. Baseline information is being collected and should be completed by the end of the growing season in January 2021.

Output 3. Stronger, equitable relationships established between agroecological producers and market system actors.

Whilst activities under this Output are scheduled to start next quarter, initial discussions with farmers are underway and a timetable for Participatory Market Systems Development (PMSD) processes, including participatory market mapping, agreed to coincide with the upcoming sowing season.

Output 4. Ometepe as a model of conservation and sustainable development is known by stakeholders in Nicaragua, bird specialists and agroecological communities.

Scheduled for Y2 and beyond.

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.

The only change to the project is the revised project implementation period of 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2023, and associated movement of funds between financial years, as approved by Defra.

We are delighted to report that the project team have “hit the ground running” and have made good progress on all activities planned for this period. We are also pleased to confirm positive coordination with the Nicaraguan authorities, in line with our agreed workplans and through official approval of annual permits for scientific monitoring activities within the Biosphere Reserve (permits now issued on 15 October 2020 for the period October 2020 to September 2021).

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 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has compounded existing socio-economic vulnerabilities amongst rural communities across Nicaragua, resulting in increased dependencies on natural resource extraction, and Ometepe is no exception. Within this context, project strategies to support sustainable livelihoods and increase islanders’ resilience, combined with actions to increase local understanding of the value of biodiversity and motivate community-led conservation, remain highly relevant and necessary.

FFI has so far been able to maintain our operations in Nicaragua throughout the pandemic; we remain focused on our long term objectives whilst mitigating against current risks and challenges wherever possible. We are delivering all essential field activities, in line with FFI Nicaragua’s Covid-19 protocols (including use of PPE and social distancing measures) and activity-specific risk assessments. To date, the island of Ometepe has remained somewhat insulated from the pandemic and recorded cases of Covid-19 on the island remain low.

The project’s design, with many activities led by local partners and island stakeholders, reduces risk and has enabled us to deliver project activities as planned. FFI and the project Steering Committee will continue to monitor the situation and apply an adaptive management process. We will keep the Darwin secretariat informed of any developments which may affect project activities, budget or implementation timetable.

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 (re. project dates and movement of funds between years – submitted 17/7/2020)
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?

N/A

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**