



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

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)
Project leader	Co-Project Leads: Angelica Valdivia (FFI Country Director, Nicaragua) & Alison Gunn (FFI Senior Programme Manager, Central America)
Report date and number	October 2021 - HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	www.fauna-flora.org/projects/improving-sustainable-use-natural-resources-ometepe www.facebook.com/Ometepe-Reserva-de-Biosfera-247014089552321

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 Management: During this period, two meetings of the project Steering Committee - involving FFI, Biometepe, RAPO and CAPs - were held to present updates on activities, share experiences and discuss upcoming project plans, challenges and priorities.

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

The four Community Commissions, established in Y1, conducted a total of 60 forest protection and fire prevention patrols from May to September 2021 across 1,950 ha of forest – continuing to prioritise key sites for the conservation of Ometepe’s population of Endangered yellow-naped parrots (~3 patrols/month at Mérida/Santa Cruz, Bague/Madroñal, La Palma/Corozal, and Peña Inculca). According to local authorities’ records, these patrols are contributing to a significant reduction in the rates of forest fires and illegal felling of timber trees compared to 2019 and 2020; whilst analysis of monitoring data by Biometepe indicates a reduction in poaching levels of up to 62% in patrolled forest areas compared to 2020. The Commissions also took part in the annual YNP population census, led by FFI and Biometepe in July 2021, which recorded 862 individuals across four sites.

In line with priority sites for reforestation agreed with the Ministry of Environment (MARENA), a further 20 hectares have been reforested this period in the Peña Inculca Wildlife Refuge (8,000 native forest trees and plants planted), alongside follow-up care and management of previously planted saplings. In addition, the project supported beneficiary farmers to plant 9,794 native forest and fruit trees on their agroecological plots.

In terms of community-led biological monitoring, a key advance this period has been work to train and support the local Drinking Water Committees (CAPs) to conduct monthly freshwater monitoring. FFI trained 9 CAPs members in survey methods, identification of macroinvertebrates

and in the use of Survey123 App for data collection (including taking and geo-referencing images). Monthly monitoring has been underway since August 2021. Monitoring overwintering survival of migratory birds (MoSI), following protocols adapted from standard methods, will recommence at two sites in November 2021.

Awareness raising activities this period have focused on the slogan "*Caring for our parrots is loving Ometepe*", disseminated via social media, activities in schools and community events, including a community theatre and a local 'expo' fair in collaboration with the Tourism Institute and municipal authorities - reaching an estimated 334 adults and children (51% female).

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

Building on the training programme for Biometepe's team of agroecological extensionists, as designed and delivered in Y1, two further training modules were delivered this period. The first was taught by technicians from the Institute for Agricultural Health and focused on national laws regarding agricultural seed production, certification and trade; the second focused on ecosystem service values and links with sustainable agricultural production.

The project is now providing on-farm technical outreach and practical support (tools, seeds and seedlings) to 252 beneficiary farming households. Extension support to help farmers adopt agroecological practices - including crop diversification, intercropping, agroforestry, alongside the use of mulching, micro-irrigation, vermicomposting, legumes and mycorrhiza to improve soil quality and crop yields - is provided through an average of two visits per month per farm (i.e. ~500 visits per month). In addition, ten fire awareness training workshops were held in ten communities (140 participants, 30% women), in coordination with technicians from the Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA). In order to reduce and prevent forest and agricultural fires, the sessions highlighted the risks and impacts of using fire to burn stubble or to clear areas for planting, alongside the benefits of alternative practices which improve the physical and chemical quality, and therefore productivity, of the soil.

The project has continued to support regular meetings the RAPO Network, which occur every two months. RAPO meetings are an opportunity for member farmers to share experiences and learning, to develop their plans for the application of agroecological practices, and coordinate the supply of their fresh produce in local markets. This period, the project facilitated five farm visits, in coordination with INTA, to enable farmers (100 farmers participated - 80 men, 20 women) to learn about others' experiences and application of agroecological practices. For example, one of these visits focused on simple techniques for grafting, layering and pruning of fruit trees (including citrus, guavas, mangoes) to improve plant health and productivity.

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

This period, FFI continued to focus on market literacy training for marginalised actors in the market chain, including training for RAPO members in the Business Model Canvas tool and in the use of revolving funds to finance production inputs. This work is a precursor to the participatory market mapping workshops for two market sub-sectors - processed and packaged produce (including cassava, plantain and yucca chips); and basic grains produced under the agroecological model - scheduled for later in Y2. Following the 'market system selection' discussions facilitated in Y1, these sub-sectors have been shortlisted as they remain priorities despite shifts in local markets through the Covid pandemic. Targeted training and support has also been provided to beneficiary producers, to analyse and develop process flows for the cassava/plantain chip production.

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

Data from community patrols, yellow-naped parrot monitoring, farmer-led monitoring of farm plots and freshwater monitoring is being collated, compiled and analysed by Biometepe and FFI's Specialist in Biological Monitoring. Further socioeconomic monitoring and KAP surveys, alongside detailed analysis and dissemination of findings and lessons, are scheduled for Y3.

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.

Local NGO and project partner, Fundacion Entre Volcanes (FEV), officially closed down as an organisation in August 2021. FEV had not been playing an active role in the project as originally envisaged, and since project inception FFI has been leading coordination with the CAPs and supporting post-harvest processing directly. There are no financial implications, as associated costs were budgeted as consultancy or operational costs. A change request is in preparation formally notifying the Darwin Secretariat of the removal of this partner from the project.

There has been a change in the RAPO leadership this period. FFI has therefore taken the time to present the project aims and activities again to the RAPO leadership, to ensure they are on-board and align with RAPO priorities.

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 project's design, with many activities led by local partners and island stakeholders, reduces risk and has enabled us to largely deliver project activities as planned. The project's local FFI/Biometepe team, have been able to continue operations and delivery of all essential field activities (including direct support to farmers where needed), in line with agreed Covid-19 protocols and associated risk assessments. We have also supported RAPO to educate its members and other islanders about necessary measures to reduce the risk of transmission.

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: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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?

Thank you for your continued support!

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**