

**Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects
Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus
Half Year Report**

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	DPLUS176
Project title	Turning the tide on plastic pollution in St Helena and Ascension
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Ascension and St Helena
Lead partner	Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
Partner(s)	Ascension Island Government (AIG), St Helena National Trust (SHNT), St Helena Government (SHG), University of Exeter, University of Plymouth, Cape Town University, Nelson Mandela University, BLUE Marine Foundation
Project leader	Fiona Llewellyn, ZSL
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1 Oct 2022
Project website/blog/social media	n/a

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).

Outputs 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3: An MSc student from the University of Plymouth has conducted key informant interviews to gather data on the importation, distribution, consumption, and disposal of single-use plastic items across both Ascension and St Helena. Questionnaires were co-designed with ZSL and tailored to context by AIG to offer an insight into values and behaviours around plastic waste on both islands, and to spotlight potential social and/or economical barriers to change. Starting with project partners, key informants were recruited via snowball sampling and supplemented with desk-based research. The waste management teams on both St Helena and Ascension have also been engaged, providing a key insight into the existing waste disposal system on each island, and an understanding of prior and/or existing efforts to reduce plastic waste. The first drafts of digital systems maps have been produced for each island, which will serve as a foundation and a spring-board for the next stages of the system diagnosis across both islands.

In October 2022, three ZSL team members (Fiona Llewellyn, Alice Chamberlain, Surshti Patel) travelled to Ascension for a month-long expedition to officially launch the project on-island and engage with key members of the community via meetings, interviews, workshops, and informal gatherings. This exciting 4-week programme of work will provide a crucial opportunity for capacity building and skills sharing on-island between ZSL and AIG, and to launch project communications via several local channels, including social media, the local magazine, and local radio. Flights have also been booked and logistics underway for the first expedition to St Helena in February 2023.

Outputs 1.4 - 1.6: Planned from Yr1 Q4 onwards.

Outputs 2.1 - 2.6: Planned from Y2 Q1 onwards.

Output 2.7: ZSL has created a draft M&E framework, which will be further developed with in-territory partners and maintained regularly by the core project management team to enable robust, on-going monitoring and evaluation of project impact.

Outputs 2.8: Planned from Yr2 Q2 onwards.

Output 3.1: ZSL has been working closely with on-island partners, AIG and SHNT, to develop a robust scientific monitoring strategy based on a combination of previous experience, scientific literature, and local knowledge. Research questions have been refined and litter sampling methodologies, such as the Marine Debris Tracker and Photo-Quadrat approach, are soon to be piloted by on-island partners in Ascension (Oct-Nov 2022) and St Helena to determine the most appropriate long-term sampling strategy going forwards.

Output 3.2: An MSc student from Imperial College London has completed a biodiversity threat assessment of plastic pollution in Ascension and St Helena using secondary data analysis. This will serve as a foundation on which the team will continue to build with the collection and analysis of primary data. The following opportunities have been progressed so far:

- Together with partners at the University of Exeter, an MSc project has been designed to assess and compare the level and types of plastic found in gastrointestinal tracts sampled from a range of species spanning multiple trophic levels and functional groups in Ascension's MPA.
- Plans are underway with project partners based in Cape Town and Nelson Mandela Universities to process stomach samples from sea bird carcasses sourced opportunistically on Ascension Island, including the Sooty Tern, Black Noddy, Brown Booby, Masked Booby and Ascension Frigatebird.
- A proposal to undertake both photographic and collection methodologies is under review by ZSL's Ethics Committee. These dual collection methods will enable the team to quantify the prevalence and composition of plastics in Brown Booby nests on Ascension Island, whilst building capacity within the UKOTs to conduct further research of this kind in the future.
- An initial conversation has been held with the Senior Marine & Fisheries Conservation Assistant at St Helena Government regarding island wildlife vulnerability to plastic pollution.

Output 3.3: The team at SHNT has been reviewing findings from previous beach sampling which has taken place on-island to understand the types of plastics that were found previously and to determine priority locations and methodologies for building on this work.

Output 3.4: Although planned from Yr2 Q1 onwards, the match-funding from the John Ellerman Foundation has enabled this work to start sooner. As noted above, the ZSL team, currently in Ascension, is working with the JEF-funded Project Coordinator, Tobias Capel, to trial and refine robust sampling methods which will then be implemented by Tobias over the next 12 months to secure a robust data set.

Output 3.5: As described above, trials are beginning in Ascension with AIG while the ZSL team is on island, and methods are currently being developed with SHNT for monitoring in St Helena.

Output 3.6: Opportunistic collection of bird carcasses has begun in Ascension with 30 carcasses previously collected by AIG. In St Helena, work is being carried out by SHNT on a separate project to determine if microplastics are a threat to whale sharks. Our project will closely support and build upon this work.

Output 3.7: Trialling of SUP bottle identification and origin is underway in Ascension (while the ZSL team is on island) and will begin in St Helena when the Project Manager takes up position in St Helena in November 2022.

Output 3.8: Planned for Yr2 Q1.

Output 3.9: Planned for Yr3 Q3.

Output 4.1: ZSL leveraged the opportunity to discuss plans for a UKOTs Plastic Pollution Steering Group with representatives from both the Turks and Caicos Islands and Tristan da Cunha at the 'Small Islands, Big Impact' Blue Belt event in London (Spring 2022). The concept was received positively, and our project team is now forming a list of key contacts to invite to the steering group and co-creating a briefing note to illustrate the group's purpose and objectives.

Output 4.2: A literature review of plastic-free best practice tourism has been initiated by ZSL and SHNT, and findings will be fed into the UKOTs Plastic Pollution Steering Group when formed for discussion.

Outputs 4.3 and 4.4: Planned for Yr2 Q4 onwards.

General: The team is delighted to report all four in-territory staff vacancies have now been successfully recruited, including Matthew Owen who is local to St Helena, and Toby Capias who had already been working on Ascension for a number of months. ZSL were pleased to host a two-day workshop in London with Toby, AIG Project

Coordinator, who was on leave in the UK during September 2022. A positive project launch meeting was held in June 2022, whereby international partner introductions were carried out, preferred ways of working were explored, and communication lines established. A core project management team which spans the UK, St Helena and Ascension, has since formed and meets weekly to facilitate cross-country capacity building and opportunities for co-designing the delivery plan. In addition, wider 'all-partner' meetings are being held once a quarter - with two taking place to date.

In recognition of complex colonial histories, and in support of our sector-wide movement to decolonise conservation spaces, this project team will be continually working together to reflect on our practises and move towards creating an environment for equitable and ethical conservation delivery. To this end, in September 2022 Helena Bennett (Director, SHNT) held a session 'Welcome to St Helena' and provided the wider team with interesting and important cultural and historical insights into the island. Toby Capias (Project Coordinator, AIG) also delivered a similar session on Ascension for non-territory-based team members. Alongside this, the core project management team is completing a 'Human Ethics Review' process via ZSL, which encourages reflection into individual positionality, and aims to drive increased self-awareness among project staff and best practice when engaging with communities. As we continue, we will be building on reflexivity and positionality through discussions and in our approaches.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt 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.

Output 1.2: Due to restricted internet access on Ascension Island, the team experienced unforeseen challenges in supporting a remote MSc project. As a result, the sample size for key informant interviews on Ascension was reduced. However, this will not have a long-term impact on the project or budget, as the sample size will be significantly broadened via in-person engagement during the October expedition and beyond via the JEF-funded Project Coordinator role in AIG.

Recruitment: The project officially launched on 1st June 2022 following successful funding confirmation at the end of May 2022. Our timeline had originally allowed eight weeks to recruit four in-territory positions, however this process has taken slightly longer with contract start dates delayed. This is due to a combination of pre-booked extended leave during the months of August and September, limited flights in-and out of- the territories, relocation challenges and personal commitments of new recruits.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known: n/a

4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year? No

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**