

Title A previous BirdLife Community Blog highlighted the threat posed by feral livestock to the Centre Hills on Montserrat and actions being taken by the Darwin Initiative funded project [?Reducing the impact of feral livestock in and around the Centre Hills?](#) to tackle this. The Darwin funded portion of this programme came to a successful end in March 2011 following a final project workshop earlier that month. During this workshop results were presented and the interim Feral Animal Action Plan reviewed and revised by the participants which included representatives from the Government of Montserrat and Royal Montserrat Police Force; local farmers, livestock owners and landowners; scientists from the UK Government as well as regional representation from the St. Lucia Forestry Department. A major component of the action plan involved control of feral livestock in and around the Centre Hills using locally trained hunters. A hunting programme targeting feral pigs, goats, sheep and cattle was carried out from May to December 2010 prior to a six week cessation period. The effectiveness of this hunting programme was assessed by comparing data collected from the infra-red game camera network before and after this hunting period. Analysis of the data showed that the programme had significantly reduced the density of goats and cattle. Other methods such as the use of corral traps are to be trialed in relation to feral pigs.



Pigs predated turtle nests (DOE Montserrat).

In conjunction with the hunting programme measures to improve the rearing of farmed livestock through alternative rearing methods; an improved tagging and registration scheme have been initiated through the project. These measures aim to educate and assist local farmers in better livestock management thereby reducing the number of loose farmed livestock which are a major annual contributor to feral populations. Two significant outputs of the project are the production of a Feral Livestock Management Manual and the development of important regional capacity in feral livestock management with respect of the Montserrat hunting team. It is anticipated that the Montserrat hunting team (alongside the Feral Livestock Management Manual), using the knowledge and experience they have gained throughout the course of project can act as trainers and advisors for other Caribbean islands with regard feral livestock control and management, thereby reducing the need for further outside intervention. Although the Darwin funding has now finished it is vital that the feral livestock management programme continues. This has been aided by a successful Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) funding bid. This will provide a further two years funding that will aid not only feral livestock control but also important conservation work on the Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi*, mountain chicken *Leptodactylus fallax* and sea turtles. Ultimately this programme will help protect the Centre Hills; a designated Important Bird Area containing the majority of Montserrat's remaining forest and last viable enclave for the Critically Endangered Montserrat Oriole; as well as providing vital environmental services and being an important tourism asset for Montserrat. Author: Jeff Dawson, Project Coordinator; Department of Environment; Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment; Montserrat To watch video on turtle digging the nest click [here](#) To watch video on the pigs eating the eggs click [here](#).