INTRODUCTION

“Cross sector partnerships ... are far from commonplace. True partnerships are the stuff of legends. Think of the Fellowship of the Ring...” Tennyson (2011).

The eradication of invasive vertebrates, especially rodents, as a key component of island restoration has an extensive history spanning more than 50 years (e.g. Towns & Broome, 2003; Howald et al., 2007; Towns et al., 2013; Russell & Broome, 2016). Techniques for carrying out this work have developed over this time, and eradication projects are now often highly complex and specialised operations using equipment and people from all over the world.

Until the last fifteen years, the agencies with the resources to undertake the largest projects were generally government conservation agencies (GCAs) in developed countries such as New Zealand, Australia, the USA and Canada. Projects included the consultation of stakeholders, but early operations were often led and managed by single organisations on government land (Towns & Broome, 2003).

As the case for carrying out island restoration projects has become more established (Courchamp et al., 2003; Bellingham et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2016), new organisations, especially non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and for-profit enterprises (FPEs) have become increasingly involved in island restoration. There are now several NGOs and initiatives worldwide that are entirely dedicated to the restoration of islands through the removal of invasive species (e.g. Island Conservation (USA); Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas (Mexico); Predator Free New Zealand (New Zealand)), and this work is gaining in prominence within the wider conservation NGO community (e.g. recent work by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK) and the South Georgia Heritage Trust). In addition, new commitments to carry out this work have been made by international organisations and through international agencies, e.g. the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)’s Honolulu Challenge (IUCN, 2016), BirdLife International’s Invasive Species Programme (BirdLife International, 2017).

The increasing challenge of partnerships

In order to continue to obtain the conservation benefits available from the eradication of invasive species on islands, projects will need to be carried out in even more complex conditions. In light of current technology and experience, we could describe a project where area is less than 10,000 ha; there is a single owner; country jurisdiction is clear; and a single funding source is available as “simple”. In some countries all, or the majority of these projects have now been tackled, or the need for them has not arisen (Howald et al., 2007; Dawson et al., 2015; Parkes et al., 2017; Stanbury et al., 2017). In less developed countries where conservation funding is much scarcer, the idea of national governments supporting island restoration projects is often not well established and finding funds for any project of this sort is difficult. In many countries, islands without human habitation or regular use are extremely uncommon.

Islands with significant human populations, complex and challenging topography, and/or located in extremely remote parts of the world are thus becoming a higher priority (Oppel et al., 2011; Dawson et al., 2015; Parkes et al., 2017; Stanbury et al., 2017). For example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is currently developing a project to restore Gough Island (Tristan da Cunha) through the eradication of house mice (Mus musculus).

The island is extremely remote and is located in a UK Overseas Territory with a small human population and insufficient financial resources to support the operation. The project partnership will include no fewer than six...
project partners from at least three countries, including
government agencies, NGOs, and the local community.

The DIHSE (2017) records 25 rodent eradication
attempts that have been made on islands greater than one
square kilometre in area since 2010. Of these, the majority
(15 of the 25) were not undertaken solely by government
agencies, and even where operations were government-led,
some sort of partnership was needed (e.g. between State
and Federal government agencies).

Howald, et al. (2011) explored the advantages and
challenges of different organisational structures conducting
island restoration projects. The authors found that there
were clear advantages and disadvantages attached to GCAs,
NGOs and FPEs in conducting eradication campaigns,
but concluded that the potential advantages of collaboration
were often greater than the challenges. In this paper, we
consider local community groups separately from NGOs
as another type of organisation which is increasingly
proposing and supporting new island restoration projects.
As well as type, the size and culture of organisations
also has significant importance and impacts on internal
bureaucracy, speed of decision-making and level of
tolerance for risk.

Whilst it is apparent that partnerships provide
opportunities to capitalise on the strengths and compensate
for the weaknesses of different types of organisations,
partnerships can be complicated to establish and maintain.
The same people who have significant strengths and
experience in designing and implementing island
eradication projects do not always have a similar level
of experience or expertise in developing or maintaining
organisational partnerships, especially when organisations’
cultural aspects can be highly variable. Staff turnover can
be an issue, as partnerships are effectively formed between
individuals as well as organisations, and some organisations
have higher turnover than others. It is important for the
organisations that are planning and managing eradication
projects to recognise the importance of consistency of
staffing in these projects, and endeavour to provide this,
as well as supporting training in partnership-working for
technical staff wherever possible.

This paper assesses some of the factors that may
be influential in making partnerships work. There is no
way to carry out a scientific analysis of how to create a
strong partnership that will lead to a successful project
outcome: partnerships (like marriages) are not a scientific
construct. However, the authors of this paper have been
involved in a wide range of projects with partners from
government, NGOs, and local communities. From our
combined experience, the main elements needed, in our
opinion, are presented, along with some of the common
pitfalls. Sharing our experiences may enable other project
managers to analyse their own potential partnerships,
and hopefully use these principles to enhance the likelihood of
project success.

What partnerships are, and when they should be
established

According to Wilcox (1998) a partnership is an
agreement between two or more individuals or groups
to work together to achieve common aims. Sterne, et al.
(2009) identified nineteen characteristics of partnerships,
including mutual trust and respect, clearly identified roles
and responsibilities, transparency of decision-making,
and a process for adjudicating disputes. The Nature
Conservancy (2017) suggests there are six stages to most
partnerships, and Tennison (2011) defines twelve stages.
The main points are:

* Prepare: define the need for partners.
* Select: choose the best partner(s) to work with.
* Negotiate: create agreement to inspire action and
reduce the potential for conflict.
* Manage: implement joint work.
* Measure: monitor and evaluate the partnership.
* Conclude: adapt, improve or conclude the partnership.

During the first stage, it is important for project
managers to consider carefully whether forming a
partnership is the best choice in their individual situation.
Reasons to establish a project partnership include the
desire to increase capacity amongst other organisations and
stakeholders; the need to access a new decision-making
authority or constituents; the opportunity to share costs; and
the ability to make projects more sustainable and resilient.
One method of comparing these potential benefits with the
potential costs would be a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses,
Opportunities, Threats) analysis.

It is advisable to establish partnerships early in the
project planning process, if indeed it is considered that a
partnership would be beneficial. The Nature Conservancy
(TNC) recommends a partner scoping exercise at the
start of planning any conservation project (The Nature
Conservancy, 2017). However, this step is not currently
included in resources specific to island restoration, such as
the Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII) Resource Kit (Pacific
Invasives Initiative, 2011). In particular, there appear to be
significant benefits from involving community partners,
including landowners, at the initial stages of project
planning (Varnham, 2011; McClelland, et al., 2011), not
least because their local knowledge can add value to
planning and their drive to succeed can assist in motivating
the rest of the partnership.

Potential partners could be identified in a stakeholder
analysis which may be carried out as part of the feasibility
study for an operation, e.g. step 2.1 of the PII Resource
Kit (Pacific Invasives Initiative, 2011), or through a
scoping exercise (The Nature Conservancy, 2017; Flora
and Fauna International, 2009). However, it is likely
that if external funds are to be sought for an eradication,
partners may need to be identified even sooner than this.
As part of considering the composition of a partnership, it
can be useful to consider the implications of excluding a
particular organisation or group and how this could affect
the outcome and the other partners. For example, excluding
local people from a partnership could lead to mistrust from
funders and external agencies as well as the community
themselves, or even prevent the project from going ahead.

Often, there may be little or no choice about who to
work with, for example it is often necessary to work with
a local government agency, or the island owner. In some
cases, they could be reluctant partners at first, but may
become more engaged when they see the benefits of the
relationship. This engagement could take a long time to
achieve, and in some cases may never be possible. In other
cases, partners may be willing, but there may be high costs
connected to their involvement. Thinking ahead about
the costs and benefits will help in considering whether a
partnership is appropriate, and in minimising the costs and
maximising the benefits (Flora and Fauna International,
2009).

The level of intensity of partnership that is desired
should also be considered. Some partnerships are short-
term, and relatively informal relationships, whereas others
may develop into strategic long-term, organisation-wide
relationships. It is also possible for any partnership to break
down before its objectives have been achieved. A plan for
how to deal with such a break should be included in the
partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding
(see discussion below).
Key elements of strong partnerships

Although there is a diverse range of organisations involved in island restoration work worldwide, the elements required for partnerships are the same. It has been suggested that the key principles of equity, transparency, and mutual benefit should apply to most partnerships (Tennyson, 2011). These principles provide a foundation on which the partnership can operate. In order to build this foundation, those forming new partnerships should consider the following in particular: good communication; clearly defined roles; appropriate leadership, staffing and personalities; clear, shared vision and expectations; and clarity over funding and resource issues (Wilson, 2005; Tennyson, 2011; Ozarski, 2015).

One basic tool that most partnerships use is a written partnership agreement (also referred to in some cases as a memorandum of understanding or memorandum of partnership). Partnership agreements can vary widely in their level of detail depending on the complexity and aims of the partnership and the degree of formality but should, at a bare minimum, define the boundaries of the partnership. Partnership agreements should cover the areas set out below and may include others, depending on the specific needs of the project.

As previously noted, one of the main characteristics of partnerships is that the partners are working towards a common aim. Where a group or individual has an interest in delivery of an island restoration project but is not as committed to the same goal as others, a partnership should not be formed – this could lead to confusion and frustration. The project team should seek to maintain a good relationship with such stakeholders but should not force an inappropriate partnership.

Good communication

When partnerships do not work, poor communication is often blamed. Effective communication is essential to move projects forward, especially in partnerships where partners may have different motivations and expectations. Setting out a shared communication strategy is recommended within partnerships. General principles of communication for partnerships (after The Nature Conservancy, 2017) include:

- be timely in communication;
- brainstorm new issues;
- be consultative, not dictatorial;
- be flexible;
- document agreements and plans, and revisit, adjust and adapt as the situation changes;
- a policy of “no surprises”.

In addition to these principles, it is important to respect cultural and organisational differences and challenges when communicating. Communication methods should be adapted to suit each partner organisation’s strengths and weaknesses, e.g. emailing high resolution newsletters to communities with limited internet access is not effective communication.

Partnerships may be formed for many reasons. These may include the development of fundraising support, advocacy, avoiding bureaucracy, the need for landowner and resident buy-in and support, resource sharing, research, provision of expertise, and to enable different organisations to gain project experience, perhaps building towards their own projects in the future. All of these reasons are legitimate; however, it is important that all partners are clear about their own and other partners’ motivation, and the scope of each partner’s involvement. It is only ongoing communication that will enable this clarity. At times, some partners may also need to operate transparently outside the scope of a partnership, for example, government agencies which may also have a regulatory role. If the scope of each partnership has been clearly established and communication is clear, this should be possible.

It is important to include positives in communication. Even though project planning and implementation is challenging, project teams benefit from celebrating successes, recognising achievements, and saying “thanks”. It is important to ensure dispersed partners are all able to take part in celebrations and reflect on the achievements and progress being made.

It is also important to consider the way in which a project will communicate itself externally. Publicity and “branding” can often be stumbling blocks in partnerships, and many projects have developed their own brands, independent of the partner organisations (e.g. the Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project). Early decisions on shared messages and how to acknowledge partners and supporters can help to avoid issues later on.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities

It is extremely important that the partners in any island restoration project understand their respective roles and what is expected of them. The roles and responsibilities of different organisations will vary over the course of the project and it is important that all partners understand how their roles and those of other partners will change over time. This is particularly important in the planning and post-operational phases of the project where roles may be less obvious.

Communities, local and non-local NGOs, and local and non-local government agencies may all have a role. In federal systems, it may also be necessary to involve different levels of government (e.g. the Macquarie Island pest eradication project involved both the Tasmanian State Government and the Australian Federal Government, or in the UK Overseas Territories where local and UK governments may play a role). In the Macquarie Island pest eradication project, the funding agreement between the Tasmanian and Australian Federal governments outlined that funding was joint, but that implementation was a Tasmanian government responsibility. Based on that agreement there was no confusion over operational roles. Without such clarity, multiple partners and stakeholders may perceive themselves to have decision-making authority leading to confusion and potentially to operational difficulties.

In order to minimise this sort of confusion, most projects develop some sort of partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding. This may be legally binding in some partnerships. However, even if roles are clearly set out in writing, it should not be assumed that all project partner staff who are participating in meetings or in project teams are aware of these roles, and they may need to be reiterated and revisited many times. Templates for developing project partnership agreements are available from Flora and Fauna International (2009), The Nature Conservancy (2017) and in the Partnering toolbook (Tennyson, 2011). None of these are specific to island restoration projects, and it would be useful if practitioners could develop and share resources in this area in the future.

Sometimes the project plan can be effective as a partnership agreement. All projects should have a clear plan which clearly describes the agreed roles and responsibilities of all partners. A good reason to have a partnership agreement is when a partnership is likely to go beyond the scope of a single project.

It is also important to set out the roles and responsibilities for the various advisory and steering groups that will be
developed within most partnership projects, each of which may involve a subset of the project partners. Terms of reference for these groups have been developed by many projects but, as with partnership agreements, they are not yet generally shared. Develop with such a review regularly of great use to future projects, and this could be hosted on websites such as those of the Pacific Invasives Initiative (section now in development) or the Great Britain Non-native Species Secretariat.

Leadership, staffing and personalities

As with any endeavour, the people involved are a major factor that will lead to the work being enjoyable and effective, and the success of any island eradication project will largely depend on the skills, dedication, and attitude of the team involved. If a project is being organised by a single agency, then that agency can recruit a team made up of the most suitable/experienced people available and although there may be some personality issues during the project implementation period, it should be possible to manage these as part of normal business practices.

However, when working in partnership, there can be pressure to include representatives from different organisations in teams despite substantial differences in experience and culture. In addition, the representatives of the partnership organisations whose job is primarily to service the partnership in terms of communications and logistics. Organisations that may have the capacity to replace staff that are causing difficulties within a partnership, smaller partnerships may not have this ability. Individuals who may be skilled at motivating others and providing leadership within a project may not always be best suited to developing and maintaining complex project partnerships and vice versa.

Most partnerships require more management time than anticipated. If a particularly wide partnership is necessary, it may be necessary to bring in new staff whose job is primarily to service the partnership in terms of communications and logistics. Organisations that are planning large projects with complex partnerships should consider recruiting personnel who have skills and experience in this area and can complement the technical skills of the operational management team.

If possible, organisations partnering in island restoration projects should aim to involve more than one staff member in each project so that there is a chance to review decisions and assess how the partnership is developing, and to assist continuity in case of staff turnover. If problems arise, each partner organisation should have a clear understanding of how they can raise concerns and address them at an early enough stage to avoid a complete breakdown of the partnership and potentially of the whole project.

Clear, shared expectations

As discussed above, organisations may enter into partnerships for a variety of reasons and with a variety of expected benefits. Additionally, motivations for wanting to be involved may be very different, even if the ultimate goal is shared. At the start of the partnership relationship, organisations should work to establish their shared goals and vision for the work to be undertaken. They should develop a project plan or agree the process that will be used to develop this. They should set out guidelines for decision-making and what will happen in the event of disagreements. It is also helpful to agree on a formal grievance process before a dispute emerges.

One area where there seems to be particular potential for a mis-match of expectations is in relation to pre-eradication preparation. It is important to make clear plans regarding who will make an island “ready” for eradication, e.g. track cutting, removal of waste, inform at-risk residents, leading on any research, etc., as well as who will fund this work. Sometimes preparation can take a long time, and it can be difficult maintaining enthusiasm and energy throughout this phase.

There must also be clear expectations about how the partnership will move on, in the event of either success or failure of the planned eradication operation. Partners should be clear on: who will assume responsibility for reviewing the project, and for a repeat attempt if necessary; how failure will be communicated and who will lead on this and whether the partnership will be expected to remain in place until a repeat operation is planned and concluded. It is good practice to build in a review point for partnerships at a key milestone (e.g. once an eradication operation is completed) to assess how well the partnership has progressed, whether all partners have met their commitments, etc. The outputs of this process could inform the organisations if they are considering extending the partnership to cover further projects.

Project plans for eradication projects often conclude two years after on-island operations cease, or when the island is declared officially ‘pest-free’. However, in many situations, site managers or residents will need to remain engaged with projects in the longer-term, for monitoring, biosecurity, or to begin more intensive restoration efforts such as the reintroduction of threatened species. Partners should make their plans clear as soon as they can, as if some partners plan to withdraw from working on the island post-eradication, it may be necessary to introduce new partners to assist in post-project site management. In particular, it is extremely important to be clear about who will be responsible for maintaining monitoring and biosecurity arrangements after the eradication project is complete, and who will respond in the event of a pest incursion (either of the pest that was eradicated, or something entirely new).

Clarity over funding and resource issues

It is good practice for partners to share information on their planned contribution to a project, including cash and non-cash (in-kind) contributions. Some contributions may be invisible to those partners who are not directly involved. For example, a partner who is taking the lead on drafting legal contracts may be spending time and money on expensive services, but another partner may be completely unaware of this activity. Project budgets should ideally take account of in-kind contributions of time from all project partners, as well as cash contributions from donors. A clear project plan (as discussed above), and a designated project manager are important to ensure all partners know what contribution they are expected to make. Clear governance of a partnership is also important so that the project manager is given clear accountability and responsibility for deliverables and is not told to do different things by different partners.

Joint fundraising can be a problematic and difficult area for many partnerships. Partnerships should aim to develop a collaborative fundraising agenda with mutually agreed managing. There should be clarity over which partners have responsibility for donor cultivation and management, and how donors will be managed after the project has concluded to avoid perceptions of “donor poaching” (The Nature Conservancy, 2017).

Partners need to be clear on what financial disbursement or opportunities they expect from the project. For example,
if local communities wish for project supplies to be purchased from local outlets, this should be flagged early so that any increased costs associated with this can be dealt with. If government agencies expect to charge fees to the project (or conversely will waive standard fees) these expectations should be raised and addressed early on to avoid budgetary shocks.

CONCLUSIONS

The days of single agencies implementing island restoration projects may be waning, as islands with human populations, mixed tenure, complex legal status and multiple stakeholders are now high on international priority lists for future operations (Oppel, et al., 2011; Dawson, et al., 2015; Stanbury, et al., 2017). Operational managers and organisations committing to carry out these operations in future need to be aware of the skills and the level of time needed to maintain partnerships, and the potential pitfalls. Recent experiences have served to illustrate that partnerships can deliver immense gains for conservation – without them, we would not have seen recent operations on Vahanga, Antipodes, Palm Bay, Desecheo and the Isles of Scilly (as just a few examples).

Lessons from particular partnerships for island restoration projects may be captured in grey literature such as project review documents, but there is little openly accessible material available about best practice in this area. It would be very helpful to future project managers if review documents and templates for partnership agreements could be shared openly with others. Websites such as those for the Pacific Invasives Initiative or the Great Britain Non-Native Species Secretariat could usefully host this sort of information.

Although working in partnerships can be very challenging at times, it is apparent that island restoration will only continue to deliver benefits worldwide if its practitioners are able to work together and draw in new organisations. By considering the elements of partnerships early in the process, we hope that more operations will be “_matches made in heaven” and a shotgun will seldom need to be drawn from the figurative cupboard.

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REFERENCES


521