

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	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 (e.g. HYR1)	October 2022 - HYR3
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).

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

The four **Community Commissions** on Ometepe (30 members, 45% female) have been supported to collaborate with local authorities (local police and Ministry of Environment - MARENA) and deliver protection patrols across **2,150 ha of forest**. During this last 6-months (Apr-Sept) **80 forest protection and fire prevention patrols were conducted** across six priority areas of habitat for Critically Endangered yellow-naped parrots. These patrols are contributing to a reduction in the rates of forest fires and illegal felling of timber trees compared to baseline (as corroborated by local authorities' records). However, illegal wildlife poaching pressure remains high – our records indicate that ~22% of YNP chicks are still being illegally poached.

In accordance with agreed priority sites for **reforestation** - and in coordination with MARENA, landowners, communities and youth groups - **7,000 native forest tree saplings and plants** were planted this period in the Peña Inculca Wildlife Refuge, alongside follow-up care and management of >21,000 previously planted saplings. In addition, the project supported beneficiary farmers to plant **5,000 native forest and fruit trees** on their agroecological plots.

Community-led protection and monitoring of yellow-naped parrots (YNP) continued this period, resulting in the **observation of 66 active YNP nests** and **successful protection of 105 YNP chicks** until they fledged. In July, the **annual YNP population census** was conducted on Ometepe, led by FFI and Biometepe, which recorded **1,267 YNP individuals** across six sites. Monitoring equipment was successfully procured for the monitoring of migratory birds during the upcoming winter migration season (including mist nets and bird banding rings, as per standard Monitoring of Overwintering Survival (MoSI) protocols). Preparations were put in place for World Migratory Bird Day in October 2022, with **MoSI stations set up in San Miguel, Santa Domingo and Peña Inculca**.

The project has supported further roll-out of community-led biological monitoring. During this period, **on-farm monitoring of birds and insects** was carried out by 39 farmers (9 female, 30 male) on 54 farm plots (average of 10 monitoring sessions per plot conducted - i.e., 540 in total). Further training was delivered to the local Drinking Water Committees (CAPs) to strengthen their capacities to conduct **freshwater monitoring**, identify macroinvertebrates, improve water harvesting and conservation of up-stream ecosystems (12 people trained, 9 of whom also received training during Y1 & Y2). The CAPs teams collected 24 macroinvertebrate samples during monthly monitoring, using Survey123 to record data. In parallel to the project, FFI also recruited an intern, who will work with FFI's Agricultural Landscapes team over the next 4 months, to help the project **learn from academic approaches linking biodiversity monitoring to sustainable agriculture interventions**, and propose recommendations to enable us to better monitor and enhance conservation impact.

Conservation awareness messages linked to the slogans "*Caring for our parrots is loving Ometepe*" and "***Caring for our Parrots is loving Ometepe; their home is in the forest not in a cage***" were disseminated to target audiences via a series of events and social media. Three talks were delivered in local schools, reaching 173 children (45% female); a street theatre event was held, led by the local community theatre group "*Los Improvisados*", reaching 72 children; 21 posts were published on the Ometepe Biosphere Reserve Facebook page, generating ratings from 5,900 people; and messages were shared at the 2022 Ometepe Expo in September, reaching an estimated 120 people.

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

As part of their ongoing professional development, **Biometepe's team of agroecological extensionists attended eight training sessions** (7 people trained) delivered by Nicaragua's Ministry for Rural Development (MEFCCA), Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA), Self Help International (SHI) and FFI. Training topics included; management of seed banks, production and use of biological/organic fertilizers and biological controls, and commercialisation of agroecological products. The Biometepe team continued to provide agroecological extension support to 252 beneficiary farming families across 10 communities, through farm visits and 'field school' sessions with farmers, including technical support for those farmers choosing to adopt bioinputs on their plots. One of the project's beneficiary farmers was supported to participate in the National Agro Innovation Technology Contest in Chinandega, with their platano-derived liquid fertilizer coming second in the 'Alternative Inputs' category. 160 beneficiary farmers also

received seed for pest and drought resistant varieties of crop plants. Awareness-raising messages on the prevention of agricultural and forest fires were shared through six talks (180 farmers reached).

FFI and Biometepe has continued to support the Network of Agro-ecological Producers of Ometepe (RAPO), through 4 meetings held this period. In addition to sessions on organisational strengthening and techniques for the production of bio-inputs, a key focus this period has been on marketing of agroecological products and market systems development (see Output 3). The project also supported an exchange visit between RAPO farmers, Biometepe and the community cooperative ANAHUAC, which took place in the mainland municipality of Tola in July 2022 (15 participants).

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

Building on the preparatory work earlier in the project (which selected the entire banana/plantain value chain as the priority for Participatory Market Systems Development and initial mapping to identify the key actors in this market chain), in July 2022 FFI facilitated the participatory market mapping workshop involving 20 actors across this market chain (suppliers, processors, inputs, transporters, intermediaries and buyers). This process helped to empower marginalised actors to forge alliances with other market actors, and identify opportunities to realise the potential to generate added value for actors within the current and potential market chain - including drawing on the technical support of state agencies (INTA & MEFCCA), financing within the market for improved irrigation, crop varieties, processing and communications, and responding to market demand from the tourism sector for agroecological products. As a result of the workshop, a short-term workplan was agreed between market actors, alongside the identification of needs for market chain improvements, collaborative decision-making and training. Following the workshop, FFI delivered training to marginalised actors in market literacy and commercialisation of production/processing to build their capacities to engage in the market - during this period, 5 female and 5 male producers received training in negotiation techniques, market access and manufacturing standards and best practice. The project is also working with marginalised actors to support the development and marketing of specific initiatives within the banana/plantain market chain: '*Organick*', a platano-derived liquid fertilizer, '*Frituras Sabor Ometepe*' fried plantain chips, '*Finca Mi Tierra*' products and '*Red de Agroecológico Productores de Ometepe*' products.

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

During this period, FFI and Biometepe continued to collect and collate monitoring data, the analysis of which will be shared through our next annual report. In September 2022, key findings and learning from the project were shared nationally through a lesson sharing event held in Chinandega (a department in the NW of mainland Nicaragua). The event covered the principles of an agroecological approach to farming and their social, economic and environmental benefits – i.e. lower production costs, reduced need for agrochemicals, access to additional technical inputs from INTA, comparative market advantages, strengthened climate adaptation, as well as strengthened local leadership and networks. Farmers from Ometepe, Tola and Chinandega attended, as well as representatives from INTA (51 participants: 32 female and 19 male). In September, FFI was also invited to present lessons from the project at a national conference hosted by INTA on '*Agroecological Practices to Increase Production of Basic Grains*', which was also disseminated through Facebook (94 views of video transcript, 156 people reached in total).

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.

Nicaragua is vulnerable to destructive tropical storms and hurricanes, particularly from July to October. This season, farmers on Ometepe were impacted by Tropical Storm Bonnie in July 2022 (which developed into a Category 3 Hurricane), with high winds and torrential rains affecting cultivated crops and fruit trees. Project strategies to strengthen the resilience of Ometepe's farmers and farming practices to such extreme weather events remains a key priority output of this project.

During 2022, the effects of the pandemic on health and the local economy have decreased significantly. During project activities, mitigation measures (including wearing of masks) are used where appropriate to reduce risk of transmission. Tourist visitation to Ometepe has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, so this sector of the local economy is still suppressed. The priority for local families continues to be to guarantee food security, with farming surpluses mainly marketed locally, and project interventions respond to these local priorities.

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 N/A

Change request reference if known:

4a. 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: £

4b. 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 re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget 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.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Thank you for your continued support!

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response 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 NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****