

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022**

<b>Project reference</b>	28-016
<b>Project title</b>	From National Contest to National Network: Friends of Felids
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Costa Rica
<b>Lead partner</b>	University of Costa Rica (UCR)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Asociación Amigos de Felinos (ADF), Gente y Fauna, Soul Communication, SPECIES, DINADECO
<b>Project leader</b>	Ronit Amit
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 2022 HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	Website: <a href="http://amigosdefelinos.com/concurso">http://amigosdefelinos.com/concurso</a> Social Media: @genteyfauna, @amigosdefelinos

**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).**

*Comments on the feedback in the original award letter:* (1) related with the longer bounce-back in tourism the National Tourism Institute reports the recovery is increasing steadily, soon approaching pre-pandemic levels. Participant communities do report a perceived increase in visitation (national and international). We do not have direct evidence of risks and benefits related to this increase, indirect evidence is that more visitors relate to more local sales of products and more demand for services under the label Amigos de Felinos. Risks related to irresponsible touristic practices is not directly addressed by our project, with exception of our local participants are vigilant. (2) About which elements of the project are a contest, our 5 criteria to assess local wildlife governance were: ecological importance of the area, threats to wild felids, pro-coexistence practices, structure for local decision making and potential for entrepreneurship. (3) About direct beneficiaries of the contest, after the first edition we estimate a minimum of 255 applicant individuals who received our guidance and feedback to improve their local coexistence with wildlife (5-25 per community) in 17 locations nationally. However, each community was showcased to increase their sense of pride, and many reported indirect benefits to the whole town from our communication strategy (media and political attention, for example; results currently under analysis). (4) The level of benefits varies among the winners, finalists, disqualified, allies, volunteers and interested parties due to our communication strategy aimed to motivate the whole country toward coexistence. The risk of de-motivation was present, and we documented reactions to bad news and we follow up those cases; preliminarily, most people accepted the results, others gave us explanations for dissatisfaction, and bad reactions changed to positive (all these useful to improve the second edition of the contest). (5) About tangible benefits, although revenues from tourism are relevant that is not the only focus of our sustainability strategy which is under development and has other commercialization routes. Tangibility of the benefits is a discussion, we do expect income increases, and also information exchange, skill improvement, recreational opportunities, social opportunities can be also tangible. We want to highlight this project goes beyond the tangible toward personal welfare with wildlife as a driver of benefits. (6) What biodiversity would benefit

when using jaguars and pumas as focal species is discussed widely on the literature, and jaguars are now focal in national and international biodiversity strategies. In our phototrapping, we measure interactions between humans, domestic animals, and the mid and large sized mammal community (that we can specify in the logframe).

*Progress during Q1 (April to June 2022)* – At the pilot communities, the board of the Association Amigos de Felinos (AMFE) advanced with the local hiring of the coordinators of monitoring and entrepreneurship, two women full time. Phototrapping was reactivated in June with 17 camera stations deployed around the communities thanks to a donation from WWF Guatemala and Airbnb. Sales of local products were still low for the period mostly due to low activity of the entrepreneurship team and only two sales points active, however around £500 (350 000 colones) were sold during one single event, the UCR week. Locally, AMFE were frequently invited to meetings and trainings from diverse development institutions.

Launch of Contest was on April 29th, with the [webpage](#) and press releases shared to 242 media contacts and journalists from 11 main communication channels. Media coverage of the Contest included several online, radio and in-press publications: [El país](#), [Delfino](#), [The World News](#) (re-post from EIPais.cr), [UCR news portal](#), [La teja](#), [Interferencia](#) (min 10:40, from radio stations UCR), [La Nación](#), [Semanario](#), [Trece Noticias](#). Additional posts from allies: [Fundazoo](#), [DINADECO](#), [CR National Science Academy](#), [SINAC](#). During the application period, representatives of 48 different communities around the country contacted the Information Center, 19 community organizations started the application process on the online platform, and 17 ended up submitting their application. The application period closed on June 29<sup>th</sup> (after one week extension from the original date). Social networks were active, and the Information Center followed each case for support (and recorded all qualitative data). At the same time, our quantitative survey was open for community members.

*Progress during Q2 (July to September 2022)* - From July 1<sup>st</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> we carried out the first round of jury evaluations. The 15 external juries accepted the invitation to score applications, along two or our staff members. Each application was review by 4 independent juries; we obtained the ranking per two categories with median value of the scores. We selected 15 finalists, five for category #1 (“need for coexistence”) and 10 for category #2 (“example of coexistence”). Two of the applicant organizations were classified as non-eligible (according with the [Contest Guidelines](#)). Following results’ announcement on July 12th, we carried out inspection visits at 15 communities, however one finalist decided to withdraw their application (they did not have enough participants involved). The 2-day inspections visits included a workshop focused on participatory improvement for the reapplication form, and rapid socio-ecological assessment of evidence of the five application criteria mentioned above. Reapplications were submitted by 13 contestants, one other was not able to submit on time, even with an extension. In the second round, juries evaluated applications different to their first round. We added international experts on human-wildlife interactions and community development, for a total of 24 external juries. Each jury independently reviewed 2-3 applications: 3 to 4 evaluations per application. The ranking process was the same using median score values. From 13 finalists that re-submitted, 10 improved their scores (Output 1 and 4 indicators).

The Awarding Event on September 29<sup>th</sup> was open to the public, with our social network and media campaign focused on featuring finalists to make them feel the recognition and pride. We brought 28 representatives from winning communities and 11 from pilot communities, while 12 representatives from other 6 finalist communities attended by their own. We had the attendance of 80 people at the auditorium in the University (+15 of our staff and volunteers) and it was followed asynchronously by 38,776 people online. Special guests were the President of the University Gustavo Gutiérrez-Espeleta, the Vice-Minister of Environment Rafael Gutiérrez, and the UK Ambassador Exc. Mr. Ben Lyster Binns, in his first visit to the University of Costa Rica. They had the honorary task of delivering the awards to winning communities. As closing activity for the event, we facilitated a fair for the communities to exhibit and sell their local products. We received a lot of praise for the event and the project from all involved public.

Pilot communities provided their first reports on wildlife monitoring and entrepreneurship with advances in systematization of activities and control of participation. Organization Gente y Fauna facilitated planning and reporting tools for the coordinators; it also emerged the opportunity for a collaboration to share jaguar identification with many researchers in the

surrounding areas that seems promising. For the period, the AMFE also delivered talks to high school students, prepared a grant application to Mohamed bin Sayed Fund (for October), and coordinated several visits of a course of Research on Sociology from the University. Another milestone, was the formal agreement with the University finally signed after many administrative issues, allowing the directive board to move forward with financial needs and controls. The Contest is closed for the year, and now we are headed to the implementation of the Amigos de Felinos scheme at the winner communities.

**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.**

Timing has been managed after several delays; many issues relate to the pace of the administration procedures (all hirings require tedious procedures, many legal and financial nuances take extra time to assess). Production of campaign materials also had delays. Media coverage was affected by competing national headlines. All that impacted the period the contest has open and access to information. However, we adapted to make the best of targeted paid promotion and rural radios. Services of a project manager and social media were also key. The second contest will benefit from all lessons arising from experience and data, we expect a better flow of the communication campaign, stronger guidelines, and evaluations for the contest.

The constant M&E is allowing us to identify issues and take corrective actions. We are preparing an additional Request Changes Form to update the logframe, particularly activities and indicators related to marketing of the eco-label due to delays, and personnel availability. Human resources issues keep as our weak point, and we will perform a deeper analysis of resources that need adaptation for Q4 and the next year soon (after the current intense fieldwork for community training during Oct-Nov). We will review budget efficiency.

**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:	Yes, we requested advise several times
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Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes, two for the period
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Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes, two requests accepted
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Change request reference if known:	not known, response dates were Dec 8 <sup>th</sup> and Jul 15 <sup>th</sup>
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**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?**

No additional issues to report in our case. On the contrary, we appreciate the flexibility, efficiency, ease, and accompaniment shown by Darwin Initiative so far. The feedback from the first Annual Report was refreshing and very welcome on our part, all recommendations will be reflected in the respective reports.

**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.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto: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**