

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 2023

| | |
|---|--|
| Project reference | 28-022 |
| Project title | Restoring the 'water tower' cloud forests of Kenya's Taita Hills |
| Country(ies)/territory(ies) | Kenya |
| Lead partner | RSPB |
| Partner(s) | Nature Kenya, Birdlife International, Plants for Life International (PLI), Kenya Forest Service (KFS), Dawida Biodiversity Conservation Group (DABICO) |
| Project leader | Jake Zarins – International Species Recovery Programme Manager |
| Report date and number (e.g. HYR1) | HYR3 |
| Project website/blog/social media | |

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).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

During the reporting period April-September 2023 project delivery has moved forward as planned and with no significant disruptions. After a forest fire destroyed a significant area of the projects Msindunyi restoration site major effort have been made to replant with as many seedlings as possible in order to help fast track vegetation recovery prior to the anticipated rains. Fortunately, these rains have been significantly better than those experienced over the previous two years which will have greatly improved the establishment of these seedlings.

As well as ongoing implementation the project team has been focused on the options and opportunities for scaling this project once the funding support for this grant is finalized. A long-term vision for forest recovery in the Taita Hills is under development to assist with fundraising and a proposal is being prepared for Indianapolis Zoo's 'Saving Species Challenge' having successfully been accepted into the second phase of the application process.

More specifically project activities have progressed as outlined in the work plan to achieve project **Outputs 1-5** which contribute to the overall project **Outcome** where *'The cloud forest fragments that currently survive in Taita are protected and expanded through a combination of conservation*

and livelihood interventions, safeguarding their unique biodiversity and enhancing local water security.'

Below is a summary of activities implemented per Output.

Activities contributing to **Output 1- Protection of all surviving fragments of cloud forest and edge habitat in Taita is strengthened;** with technical support from Kenya Forest Service, 3 Participatory Forest Management Plans have been validated through community and stakeholder consultation forums (**Annex 1- example of validated Participatory Forest Management Plan**). Five Community Forest Associations carried out public sensitization activities across varied dates in May 2023 on risks associated with forest fires reaching a total 406 community members (210 men and 196 women) (**Annex 2**). Support was provided to Taita Taveta County Government to develop county level forest conservation policy legislative framework- Taita Taveta County Forest Conservation and Management Bill 2023- which will ensure protection and sustainable management of all surviving fragments in Taita Hills and across the county (**Annex 3**). Additional policy frameworks that were influenced included the Water Master Plan Taita Taveta County (**Annex 4**), Taita Taveta Physical and Land Use Development Plan (**Annex 5**), Taita Taveta County Spatial Plan (**Annex 6**), and Taita Taveta County Participatory Climate Risk Assessment (**Annex 7**)

Activities contributing to **Output 2: Restoration of cloud forest habitat is initiated around key existing fragments;** included facilitation of forest adjacent community to restore 19.4 ha of both degraded and fire damaged areas of Susu, Ndiwenyi, Ngangao, Iyale, and Msidunyi forest fragments by planting 28,394 indigenous tree seedlings of 19 tree species propagated in community-led tree nurseries. 76 forest adjacent community members (50 males and 26 females) took part in the exercise (**Annex 8**). Monitoring and mentoring of community led tree nurseries to enhance tree seedling production was carried out in collaboration with Taita Taveta County forester (**Annex 9**). As a result, 32 Site Support Group (DaBiCo) member (11 males and 21 females) were trained on tree nursery husbandry and updated tree nursery register where 52,886 indigenous tree seedlings from 20 species are under propagation of which, 35,565 tree seedlings are ready for planting in October-November-December 2023. Mapping of potential new land parcels falling within the suitable habitat area for Taita Apalis in Vuria forest was carried out to pave way for targeted approach in creation of new forest reserves through future land purchase as financing becomes available.

The livelihoods of local community was enhanced –**Output 3**, through training of 56 poultry farmers (27 men and 29 women) on poultry management in July, 2023 (**Annex 6**) led by Taita Taveta County livestock extension officer. A total of 389 households represented by (211 males and 178 females) beneficiaries of 1,000 macadamias and 1,000 avocados to enhance agro-forestry initiative (**Annex 10**). Following the completion of setting up of 30,000 water storage tanks, training and mentorship of the community committees responsible for the water project was completed. 31 members of Kiundu Mata Water Project (17 males and 14 females) were trained by Taita Sub-County water experts on the management and operation of the community water project (**Annex 11**) targeting sustainability of water infrastructure. Rolling out of the second phase of the water storage strategy was actualized targeting 5 primary Schools (Iyale pry school, Mwangea pry sch, Murughua pry sch, Maghimbinyi pry sch, Mwangea pry sch) and 1 community project (Mbangangombe community).

To ensure **Output 4- The conservation and livelihood impacts of the project are monitored and evaluated;** community-led biodiversity surveys were carried out documenting 255 birds representing 33 species, among them the Critically Endangered Taita Apalis (5) and Endangered Taita Thrush (10). A small scale rainfall and mist pilot study was set up in Ngangao forest to start

to collate data on the contribution of the Taita Hills Forests in mist capture supporting ground water recharge. Further to this, documenting water quantity flows via meter readings from the installed water storage tanks continued with this data to be used as part of the projects efforts to define a baseline of the importance and role of the forests in capturing and retaining water and the importance of this resource for local livelihoods. Given an adjustment in scope of this water balance study a change request has been submitted as per the suggestions of the reviewer of the project Year 2 EoY report.

A formal project steering committee meeting was held in June 2023 (**Annex 12**) contributing to **Output 5**, where discussion was held assessing Year 2 reviewers' feedback and planning improved project implementation approach for Year 3.

In addition to this steering committee meetings a series of separate calls have been held over the reporting period with relevant partners engaged as required to provide expertise and additional focus on the adaptation of the water balance study and in particular to discuss options and opportunities for the project beyond the end of this grant. The project team together with experts in captive breeding from the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation and Dr Carl Jones from Durrell held a number of discussions that helped inform the development of the stage one proposal for the Indianapolis Zoo's 'Saving Species Challenge'.

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.

No notable problems were encountered during the last 6 months that have affected the project – although the replanting efforts required following the forest fires of March 2023 have placed some additional burden on the project team to ensure the affected area could be replanted in time for the rainy season.

As mentioned above a change request has been submitted to formally document the slight change in scope of the projects Water Balance study.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known: No reference as yet – submitted 16th October 2023

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: ██████████

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. 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.

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

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

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, 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.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS 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. 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**