



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

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 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	29 - 005
Project title	Safeguarding Rennell Island Livelihoods and Biodiversity from Invasive Species
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Solomon Islands & Fiji
Lead Organisation	BirdLife International
Partner(s)	Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association
Project leader	Steve Cranwell
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31/10/2024 HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end of September).

Output 1

The four Rangers from the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association (LTWHSA) have demonstrated their technical skills in implementing and monitoring rodent control. The Rangers have consistently monitored both treatment and non-treatment plots, each covering 1 km², across all four forest areas of the East Rennell World Heritage Site (ERWHS). The LTWHSA continues to receive support from the four ERWHS communities, and so far, the number of village members trained and participating in the monitoring has significantly exceeded the minimum target of 40, reaching over 200. At a meeting held in Hutuna Village between the Rangers and BirdLife International (BLI) in late March, a 3-month workplan was agreed, and Rangers conducted monitoring based on this schedule. The workplan was reviewed at subsequent LTWHSA & BLI meetings in June, and again in August. Monitoring results from the past six months continue to show a general decrease in crop damage across all four treatment plots, suggesting a reduction in rat presence. Similarly, there continues to be a good abundance of birds in the forest, particularly indicator bird species (Rennell Island endemics). Results from bait consumption for different plots have varied, with little bait uptake noticed near gardens (closer to homes) and an increase in bait uptake further into the forests. This was noted in previous monitoring results and suggests the availability of alternative food sources closer to homes. Trail cameras setup within the treatment plots have captured successful footage of the *Ghoghoviu* (Rennell Shrikebill) and their chicks, at treatment plots in the Tevaitahe & Niupani forest areas.

The timely and efficient transfer of monitoring data to BLI from the Rangers and community members (casuals) supporting the monitoring efforts remains a challenge and is one of the key lessons learned from this project. To simplify the process, the LTWHSA has engaged a young female Business Studies-graduate from Hutuna village who is unable to find work in Honiara, to transfer/enter monitoring data from paper

forms to excel sheets. However, poor network connectivity across the island prevents the prompt transmission of this monitoring data to BLI, and the Local Project Coordinator, George Tauika, can only send these when there is access to a stable network connection, which is often only available in Honiara. Other times, BLI Project Manager and/or Programme Lead collect the data during project monitoring visits. The use of a data collection tool (Kobo Toolbox) was trialled for about three months on-site and worked well for Rangers who were IT literate. There was a consensus amongst the Rangers that they would continue recording data (manually) on paper. BLI is collating the latest monitoring data for comparative analysis by Dr. Ray Pierce (Consultant supporting the rodent control program). Indicators 1.4 & 1.5 will continue to be reported until EOP, while all other Indicators have been achieved.

The projected timeframe for the complete distribution of rodenticide bait from the first consignment was September. Thus, to ensure continuous availability, a second shipment of bait was purchased in March with the expectation it would arrive in Honiara in July. However, shipping delays and miscommunication between shipping agents at the transit port caused the consignment to be delayed, and only arriving in Honiara on October 19th. BLI is liaising with the Solomon Customs Authority for its release into the Biosecurity Depot, to await the next available vessel/ship to Rennell (which has not been confirmed). In the meantime, the Rangers are continuing with the bird and crop monitoring, and search for endemic snails. The irregular shipping schedule/movement remains to be one of the main challenges in working on Rennell (as highlighted in AR2 with the change of Output 1 Assumption 2).

Output 2

Local Biosecurity Coordinator, Patteson Akipu is currently stationed at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Biosecurity (MALB) office, collaborating closely with Biosecurity Director Francis Tsatsia. Outcomes from a successful Biosecurity Workshop in Honiara (March) has been incorporated into drafts of the Renbel Emergency Response Plan for IAS and the Renbel Biosecurity Plan. Both Plans have been disseminated to key implementing partners for review (Indicator 2.1). A second biosecurity workshop and training aimed at stakeholders from Rennell and Bellona (Renbel Province), initially scheduled for September, will now be held in November on Rennell. Seasoned invasive species and biosecurity consultant Dr. Souad Boudjelas of Island Restoration and Biosecurity Ltd (NZ) has been engaged and will provide technical support towards finalizing the Response and Biosecurity Plans and will facilitate the upcoming biosecurity workshop. Indicators 2.2 & 2.4 will be achieved following this workshop and Indicators 2.3 & 2.5 by EOP.

Output 3

The LTWHSA convened its Annual General Meeting in June, with representatives from the MECDM, the GEF6/EREPA Team, Live & Learn SI, the SI National Commission for UNESCO/Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), BLI and a UNESCO staff from Paris present as observers. New LTWHSA Committee members were elected and the LTWHSA Strategic Plan was presented and agreed by new members. Community members noted that the AGM was one of the most successful meetings held by the LTWHSA, as it provided them the chance to meet and ask questions of the partners involved in projects at the ERWHS. Ms Akane Nakamura was equally impressed by the activities that LTWHSA has been undertaking with BLI and observed the enhanced capacity of the LTWHSA. BLI met with LTWHSA new Committee members and together with old Committee members discussed the remaining project activities and ongoing project management support. Indicators 3.1 to 3.4 have been achieved at this point, and a final State of Conservation (SOC) report will be submitted (by the LTWHSA) to the SIG by Feb/EOP (Indicator 3.5).

Output 4

The women of the ERWHS are already reaping the benefits from the establishment of the respective village Savings Clubs (Indicators 4.1 & 4.3). BLI Project Manager, Miliana Ravuso met with the women in June and shared their stories on [Darwin Initiative Latest News](#). The LTWHSA has been working with Live & Learn SI, and with support from UNESCO, has identified a local organization, [Kastom Gaden Association](#) to implement a sustainable farming project in East Rennell (Indicators 4.2 & 4.4). At the LTWHSA AGM in June, BLI Project Manager, Miliana Ravuso and the GEF6/EREPA Team presented project updates. Communities were reminded of the project timeframes (Darwin concluding March 2025 & GEF6/EREPA continuing until 2026/27) and assured of the continued support of the GEF6/EREPA project, followed by the Live & Learn PES scheme. LTWSHA Rangers will be recruited into the GEF6/EREPA project and will undergo further training by the MECDM team to support the data collection activities under EREPA and the PES project (Indicator 4.5). The GEF6/EREPA has already run its first [GIS training](#) in March.

Output 5

Project updates were shared at a Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting, held in Honiara in August. Representatives from MECDM were present, together with BLI and the Project Consultant. Key outcomes from the LTWHSA AGM and project visits were shared and a joint MECDM/UNESCO National Commission/BLI trip has been planned to take place before year-end. Scheduling more frequent PSC meetings has been challenging due to conflicting schedules and commitments among members, making it difficult to have everyone available on the same day and time. Nevertheless, regular correspondence with individual PSC members has been maintained through email and Zoom meetings (communication records are available), and member support remains positive. BLI has convened meetings separately with PSC members on each project visit; with MECDM and GEF6/EREPA Project Team (5th June), with the

National Commission for UNESCO/Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (6th June), and with MALB, Biosecurity Division (13th June). Success stories and lessons from the project have been shared regionally through the annual [PRISMSS](#) programme of which BLI is a key Partner, and the BLI Pacific Partnership Meeting in September, which saw all 6 BLI Partners from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Zealand and Palau represented.

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.

Following the agreement between the LTWHSA, UNESCO National Commission/MEHRD and BLI to develop an educational resource toolkit for schools in East Rennell (CR: Indicators 1.4 & 1.5), the MEHRD Curriculum Manager has recommended using a Honiara Town Council approved manual to guide the development of this booklet. BLI is still awaiting access to the manual to proceed with the drafting. While this will delay publication, BLI & the LTWHSA is optimistic it will be finalized by EOP.

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
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Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ No
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Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ No
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Change Request reference if known: An email from BCF Senior Administrator Eilidh Young was received on 13th August 2024.

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

Actual spend: £ XXXXXXXXXX

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 2025)?

Yes ☐ No ☒ Estimated underspend: £

4c. If you expect an underspend, then you should 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 to your project 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?

No.

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.

In the 2nd Annual Report Review (June 2024), BirdLife has been requested to respond to comments and queries in the next Annual Report.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	√
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	√
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	√
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	√