

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	29-011
Project title	Terai Arc: Community stewardship to secure wildlife corridors and livelihoods
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead partner	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Parsa National Park (PNP) and Mithila Wildlife Trust (MWT)
Project leader	<i>Ms. Monica Wrobel/Mr. Bishnu Prasad Thapaliya</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 2023, HYR2</i>
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).

The project operates in the northern buffer zone of Parsa National Park (PNP) and aims to secure connectivity between the protected areas and northern Shivalik hills using a corridor of community-managed forests. It addresses human-wildlife conflict, promotes diversified livelihoods, and enhances agroforestry. This half year progress report, covering period of April to September 2023, outlines solid progress across all project outputs.

Output 1 Joint participatory management framework for North-East Parsa community-forest corridor is established.

Over the last six months, ZSL actively restored a five-hectare area in the Janahit CFUG of Lokhit Buffer Zone User Committee (BZUC) by promoting forest regeneration (*Act 1.5.3*). Fencing systems with concrete poles and barbed wire was installed to protect the ecologically significant site, previously impacted by human interference. The goal is to ensure a secure environment for ecological rejuvenation, benefiting local wildlife and enhancing biodiversity. Additionally, an interaction program was conducted on August 28, 2023, in partnership with PNP and the National Trust for Nature Conservation to discuss the impact of linear infrastructure on wildlife (*Act 1.8*). This event gathered 28 participants from various organizations to discuss the impact of linear infrastructure on wildlife, emphasizing the importance of balancing development and conservation efforts.

Output 2 Reduced short-term costs from HWC, and long-term plan to manage future HWC pressures in corridors, enable communities to receive net benefits from their community-forest corridor.

During this reporting period, extensive efforts were made to mitigate Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) in the project sites. A total of 50 predator-proof corrals (PPCs) were constructed (*Act 2.3.1*) across Lokhit BZUC (10), Manahari BZUC (15), and Amleshwor BZUC (25). These PPCs safeguarded around 350 small livestock, predominantly goats, and assets valued at NPR 5.25

million. Notably, 74% of the beneficiaries were women, and 68% belonged to indigenous and disadvantaged groups. Beneficiaries contributed 50% of the materials and labour, underlining the effectiveness of the initiative. A 4-kilometer stretch of solar fencing (*Act 2.3.2*) was maintained in Amlekhguni to deter wild animals, particularly elephants, from entering farmlands, benefiting 732 households, and protecting 25 hectares of farmland. Three community streetlights were also maintained, offering nighttime visibility to 210 households. To support human casualties resulting from wildlife conflicts, a quick relief fund (*Act 2.3.3*) was established at the BZUC level, extending beyond casualties mentioned in the Relief Distribution Guideline of 2080 (2023 A.D). However, it doesn't cover crop loss as a result of wildlife interference. Considering its effectiveness where ZSL Nepal has implemented similar practices, we anticipate an increase in the fund later in the year, with additional contributions from PNP and the respective BZUCs. Additionally, two information boards (*Act 2.4.1*) were strategically placed to raise awareness of tigers and elephants, constantly reminding the community about the importance of wildlife conservation and habitat preservation.

Output 3 Diversified livelihoods for the most marginalized community members provide a direct revenue stream from the protected area, ensuring that precarious households equitably benefit from the corridor and are not forced into the overuse of natural resources.

We are pleased to report that three women's groups initially formed within a community bank structure have gained official recognition as subcommittees under the BZUC, endorsed by PNP, highlighting the project's community bank sustainability. A seven-day animal husbandry training course (*Act 3.1.3*) took place from August 17-23, 2023, involving 30 female participants, 60% of whom were from indigenous and disadvantaged backgrounds. The training covered topics such as Urea Molasses mineral block production, feed supplement preparation, and shed management, resulting in a 41% knowledge increase among participants. Additional support (*Act 3.1.4*) was provided to the community bank to enhance operational procedures, transparency, accountability, and administrative efficiency. During this period, 23 more beneficiaries accessed soft loans, totalling 59 beneficiaries, with NPR 645,000 disbursed, primarily benefiting 87% from indigenous and disadvantaged groups. Two workshops on local-level tourism promotion (*Act 3.2.10*) were held, involving 93 stakeholders, with significant representation, 68% from indigenous and disadvantaged groups and women. The workshops produced recommendations for cultural events, infrastructure enhancements, improved transportation, and attractive tour packages. In support of tourism in PNP and its buffer zone communities, ZSL produced a short video documentary showcasing wildlife in PNP, the cultural diversity of buffer zone communities, and recreational destinations.

Output 4 Enhanced agroforestry practices adopted throughout the community-forest corridor, laying foundations for long-term forestry revenues and sustainable corridor connectivity across Parsa National Park.

In September 2023, three agroforestry events (*Act 4.1*) were held across project sites, engaging 140 participants, with strong representation from women (89%) and indigenous/disadvantaged groups (85%). These workshops led to a 22.9% increase in post-test knowledge scores. On June 29, 2023, 150 beneficiaries received various saplings (fodder, fruit, bamboo) (*Act 4.2*), with each household getting more than 40 saplings for planting. Additionally, 5,000 tiger grass plants were distributed to 20 low-income households, supporting income diversification (grass plants are used to make items such as brooms which can be sold), primarily among indigenous and disadvantaged groups in Manahari BZUC. Another initiative (*Act 4.3*) promoted wildlife deterrent cash crops, benefiting ten households in the Janahit buffer zone community forest user group. They cultivated crops such as turmeric (123 kilogram), chilli (13 kilogram) and ginger (37 kilogram) in 0.6 hectare of land, fostering coexistence with wildlife. An educational exposure visit (*Act 4.4*) to Nawalpur district took place from June 26-28, 2023, involving 41 stakeholders from various backgrounds. The visit emphasized the significance of agroforestry, demonstrated farming techniques, and facilitated collaboration and networking while enhancing community banking and women's group management skills.

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.

ZSL experienced a change in staffing when the individual responsible for overseeing the project went on maternity leave. Before this change, several one-on-one handover meetings were organized to ensure a smooth transition in project management. Progress debriefing meetings were also held with our implementing partners. Importantly, this staffing change did not impact the project's timeline or budget allocation.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance: No

Change request reference if known:

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?

As of this reporting period, which marks the halfway point of the fiscal year, we were able to spend a total of £████████ from our annual budget. While our current spend rate stands at ██████████ we anticipate a more thorough utilization of the allocated budget over the coming 6 months. This confidence is grounded in the fact that the bulk of our high-budget activities, including the Dhole survey and action plan, seed funding for the community bank, wildlife deterrent crop measures, support for predator-proof coral, fencing, and the promotion of regeneration activities, are all slated for execution in the third and fourth quarters. The preparatory work of these activity has been already started.

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.

The annual report review has not mentioned any specific feedback or comments regarding future actions.

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**