



**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	29-031
Project title	Improved Conservation and Community Benefits in Kenya's Critical Mountain Forests
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Kenya – Aberdare and SW Mau
Lead Organisation	The Rhino Ark Kenya Charitable Trust
Partner(s)	Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and Aberdare Joint Surveillance Unit (AJSU)
Project leader	<i>Christian Lambrechts</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 31, 2024</i> <i>HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://rhinoark.org/ <i>@rhino.ark (instagram)@RhinoArk (twitter)@rhinoark (facebook)</i> <i>https://www.linkedin.com/company/rhino-ark-charitable-trust/</i>

Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable

Aberdare

GETA INDIGENOUS TREE NURSERY- We achieved a tree seedling capacity of 82,350, exceeding the initial target of 60,085 seedlings. Plans are underway to expand the nursery capacity to 100,000 indigenous tree seedlings. Additionally, a mini greenhouse structure has been established, where we are propagating indigenous bamboo.

REHABILITATION PROJECT- We fully rehabilitated 30 hectares with ongoing site maintenance, which includes spot weeding, and clearing vegetation overgrowth. We conducted a survival count, which stands at 87%. An additional 35 Ha has been adopted, currently under micro-fencing and replanting. During this time period we have undertaken the following in this new plot:

(a) constructed the micro-fence to secure the plot; (b) cleared weeds and bushes; (c) dug holes for planting; (d) planted 18,400 indigenous tree seedlings.

ECOTOURISM PROJECT- Markers have been erected along 39.5 km of ecotourism trails to enhance visitor navigation and safety. After the marking, mapping, and clearing of the trails since the beginning of 2024, we have completed the following:

(a) maintenance of the trails and markers for visibility and protection of visitors and local guides
(b) preparation of signboards is complete, we are in the process of installing them at the summits;
(c) with increased visitation to northern Aberdare a new hiking route to the Rhino Summit was opened

GETA CFA REBUILDING- We successfully facilitated the Geta CFA elections and conducted leaders' induction training for new leaders. Membership drives have been successful, with 3700 community members registered (an additional 1,467 over the past year), and so far, we have printed 2500 pieces of CFA membership cards, with the exercise ongoing. Members of CFA continue to be instrumental in reporting security issues, especially concerning illegal logging and wildlife poaching, for action by Kenya Forest Service. Geta CFA has been working with Rhino Ark in recruiting members of the community engaged in the construction of the 12 km Conservation Fence.

CONSERVATION FENCE- We estimated the fence to be 10 km long in the initial proposal and then found to have an additional 2 km after re-establishing the forest boundary with the assistance of KFS Surveyors and reclaiming forest land that had been encroached. 10 km has been completed and fully functional. We are currently working on the last 2 km, and have managed to undertake the following: bush clearing, fence alignment, excavation of holes, post ramming, building of corner assemblies, and installation of insulators. The Fence committees have recommended five access gates along the stretch of 12 km to allow the community to continue drawing permitted user rights from the forest.

SW MAU

Forest Restoration - Korabariet is under active maintenance, including fence reinforcement, bush clearing and spot weeding, which took place between August 26-September 8.

Community Tree Nursery - Construction of the community tree nursery, at Ndoinet Forest Station, was completed on 30 July 2023. By July 2024 seedlings production increased from the initial 16,000 to 31,000 with plans to reach 50,000 seedlings by 2025.

Community Forest Association Rebuilding – The membership drive and re-registration are actively underway to strengthen the CFA, currently we have now re-registered 600 CFA members.

Joint Surveillance Unit - Between April and September 2024, JSU forest patrols have helped to remove 213 snares and 344 head of livestock from the forest, destroy 21 charcoal kilns and 5 illegal structures, make 14 arrests and find 172 illegal logging events

Forest Outposts – Construction of the Bosta forest outpost was completed on 17 September 2023. and was officially handed over to KFS on 4th October 2023. The outposts (Korabariet and Bosta) are fully operational. Currently each host 8 KFS rangers. This is significantly boosting forest security in the respective zones

Beekeeping Project - In June 2024, a major beekeeping training session for was conducted for 50 members by trainers from the National Beekeeping Institute in Nairobi. -Pre-cooperative training and the formation of an interim committee for cooperative registration took place on August 7, 2024. Membership registration for the cooperative began in September and is ongoing.

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.

1. Unpredictable rainfall pattern and depredation of seedlings by animals

Lesson learnt - We adjusted our planting schedule from April to July and remained flexible, adapting to changing weather patterns. Additionally, we selected tree species that are less appealing to antelopes to minimize browsing damages for

Impact - There was no significant impact on the project timetable, as the team was able to adapt quickly to these changes.

2. Steep terrain and strenuous routes increased the time to clear the trails.

Lesson learnt –We Continued to employ local residents who have extensive knowledge of the terrain, which not only improves efficiency but also strengthens community engagement. We also opted for plastic posts instead of wooden stakes as they are more durable, especially in wet conditions.

Impacts – The project costs increased due to prolonged working days in the field caused by adverse weather conditions and longer travel distance.

3. Large geographic area in which to properly engage key community members
 Geta Forest Station covers the entire Mt. Kipipiri and parts of Northwest of Aberdare Forest. The area is vast and characterized with dense human population, making it challenging to engage key community members effectively.

Lesson learnt – Engaging the entire CFA requires more time and effort is required to reach out to each member of the CFA. To address this, we revised the timetable and conducted community sensitization meetings across the location, achieving positive results

Impact – With a revised timetable, the outreach effort was successful

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: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you could find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)
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 2025)?
 Yes ☐ No ☒ Estimated underspend:

4c. If you expect and 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. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

No feedback was requested from our annual report submission.

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)?

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**?

N/A

For All Projects

Include your **project reference** in the subject line of submission email.

Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com.

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.