

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	30-006
Project title	Improving integrated landscape management on the Zunil-Atitlán-Balam Juyu biocultural corridor
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Guatemala
Lead partner	The Nature Conservancy
Partner(s)	Vivamos Mejor Association
Project leader	<i>Jorge Cardona</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1</i>
Project website/blog/social media	
<p>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).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>We had planned a launch of the project jointly with the United Kingdom Embassy in Guatemala for October 8, 2023. Unfortunately, due to the political situation in Guatemala, which caused massive road blockages, we have rescheduled it jointly with the embassy for the beginning of 2024</p> <p>Output 1: By 2026, local governments, institutions and indigenous communities have enhanced capacities for the inclusive governance and sustainable management of 63,000ha in the core zone of the Zunil-Atitlán-Balam Juyú biocultural corridor.</p> <p>The Project has held initial meetings with relevant stakeholders, to discuss about the corridor’s governance issues (A report on regarding this issue (Actividad 1.1 avances) is attached). The Project’s activities have focused on supporting CONAP in promoting, instituting, and strengthening the <i>Central Highlands Conservation Area Management Support Roundtable</i>. This roundtable includes RUMCLA, most of the corridor’s stakeholders and all conservation area managers within the Central Highlands. The Project is currently planning to support the roundtable’s next meeting in Y2, inviting newly elected local authorities. With the Project’s support, we expect that this roundtable, will serve as the cross-sector platform that can lead the planning and management of the corridor.</p> <p>Stakeholders that will participate in this roundtable include representatives of civil society and government institutions that manage protected areas. Capacity building activities (1.2 and 1.3) will not begin until Y2, once municipal officials have taken office and municipal personnel turnover has stabilized.</p> <p>Regarding Activity 1.4, so far, bibliographic review has established the conceptual framework for our ecological monitoring system. We have defined a methodology that includes the establishment of twelve permanent plots across various ecosystems and microclimatic conditions within RUMCLA. A supervised classification of satellite images to categorize the</p>	

ecosystems within RUMCLA has also helped shape our methodology. Baseline values have been measured for 6 plots (50 %). More than 80 different tree species have been reported, and 54 have been identified at species-level, drawing notice to the richness of oaks. More than 290 species of birds have also been reported, with the presence of the Azure-rumped tanager. Climatic variables such as mean temperature and precipitation will be considered for the bioclimatic corridor proposal (Activity 1.6). A methodological summary and maps and a shape are attached. (Actividad 1.4 – Avances). Since Q2, we also began with geospatial information analyses and secondary information gathering to update the corridor’s management plan (See attach Activity 1.5), and secondary information gathering to update management plans for municipal conservation areas (Activity 1.7). We expect some delay regarding the corridor’s management plan update process due to the undergoing government transition process, as newly elected officials won’t take office until Y2. For this reason, our conservation planning activities have focused on moving forward with the updating of management plans for conservation areas.

Output 2: By mid-2026, the rate of loss of key ecosystems due to wildfires is at least stable in the Zunil-Atitlán-Balam Juyú biocultural corridor.

The Project has begun reviewing available forest fire datasets (national and international) to evaluate and analyze the history of forest fires in the corridor and establish a baseline for this output (Activity 2.1). With these datasets, we’ve also begun analyses to identify wildfire occurrence patterns by testing a model that identifies relations between satellite detected thermal hotspots (2012-2022) and biophysical variables. Preliminarily, we have found stronger relationships between hotspots and two variables: slope and average annual temperature, and a weaker relationship with average annual precipitation and distance to roads. These results will help us identify fire prone areas, an important input for the Integrated Fire Management Strategy planning process. To compensate for delays due to the undergoing government transition process, we expect to dovetail the Integrated Fire Management Strategy planning process within the Corridor-level conservation planning process (Output 1).

Output 3: By 2026, 75 ha of forests in key biological connectivity areas of the Zunil-Atitlán-Balam Juyú biocultural corridor are restored and serve as demonstration sites.

In Q2, we held our programme-level reforestation planning meeting, during which we preliminarily identified communities near potential key connectivity areas that we expect to restore (See attach Activity 3.1) and established restoration targets for the next 3 years. For this project we plan to restore 30 ha, and the remaining 45 ha in FY25/26. We identified two key areas for connectivity restoration, 1) Yatzá river region, and 2) Santiago-San Lucas region, Since Q1, the Project has been actively assessing seed availability and collecting seeds from local seed sources for native, key, endemic and endangered species (See attach Activity 3.4). Currently, seeds for more than 10 different species have been collected and seedling production in CEDRACCs nursery has begun.

Output 4: By mid-2026, 390 indigenous families will improve their household economy, with a minimum 15% increase of their annual income derived from sustainable livelihoods and savings from reduced fuelwood consumption.

In Q2, we also held a programme-level strategic planning meeting that focused on the Project’s sustainable livelihoods activities: beekeeping, coffee, and fuelwood-saving stoves. We preliminarily identified regions with beekeeping activities that occur close to the corridor’s core zone (Activity 4.1). In the case of sustainable coffee agroforestry systems, we identified foreseeable difficulties in acquiring high quality coffee plant seedlings for the Project’s renewal activities based on the preliminary local assessment we have done in which the seedlings quality is low in terms of robustness, and sources of the seeds. We will look for high quality seedlings in other regions (Activity 4.2). For this reason, during FY2 we will begin engaging with coffee growers’ cooperatives to identify and quantify the need of and interest in coffee plant renewal and engage with coffee plant seedling sellers to ensure availability and purchase for Q1 of FY24/25.

The Project has already identified 225 beneficiary households in communities located close to the corridor’s core zone for the construction of improved fuelwood-saving stoves, with the delivery and guidance in the construction and use of wood-saving stoves planned for Q3. The

analysis of the baseline surveys is also underway. We expect to deliver the remaining stoves on FY24/25 and continue monitoring this activity throughout the project. We are still analyzing the results, we attach a document with preliminary results (Actividad 4.3 Resultados) .

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.

- Even though we submitted a change request for the logframe due to the foreseeable government transition period and received confirmation of change acceptance, the current state of affairs in Guatemala has forced postponement of some Q3 activities until Y2.
- Massive street protests in Sololá and throughout the country have mildly impacted budget and activity implementation.
- Most field activities are currently suspended until further notice, and we are expecting reduced fuel and car maintenance expenses due to restricted mobility.
- Budget implementation has temporarily slowed down, considering input and equipment delivery is hindered because of restricted mobility.
- All planned workshops and stakeholder engagement activities have been reprogrammed for Y2, including the *Central Highlands Conservation Area Management Support Roundtable* meeting, significantly reducing available time to engage the roundtable stakeholders and begin corridor-level conservation planning activities.
- Sociopolitical burn-out may have a negative effect in the short-term, considering that effective governance building in Y2 and Y3 will require stakeholder motivation, trust and leadership.

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: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: not known, e-mail confirmation received Sept 21st 2023

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

Actual spend: £. [REDACTED]

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: [REDACTED]

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?

Not at this time.

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**