



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 2025

Project reference	30-012
Project title	A Community Approach to Waterbird Resource Management, Chia Lagoon
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Malawi
Lead Organisation	Birdlife International
Partner(s)	Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM) Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST)
Project Leader	Alex Ngari
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	The project will not have its own website. However, it will be represented on BirdLife and Partners' websites and social media pages. www.birdlife.org/africa

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).

Activity 1.1.1: *Awareness raising and engagement activities to identify community members interested in participating in the waterbird management*

The project facilitated the Area Development Committee meeting in all the 3 traditional administrative jurisdictions in July where project progress was shared and over 120 community members appreciated the positive impact of the project on Chia lagoon as well as increased access to loans which is transforming livelihood of communities.

Activity 1.1.2 *Engagement of District and local government, existing village structures*

WESM staff participated at the district executive committee (DEC) meeting where the project progress was presented. The dry spell was recognized as a key challenge affecting rehabilitation efforts and which affected growing of planted trees. The committee appreciated the significant outcomes of the project including promotion of Chia Lagoon as a avi-tourism destination spot.

Activity 1.5.1: *Chia Lagoon Bird Hunting Associations in operation, including monitoring of adherence to agreed bylaws.*

The association was trained in group constitution/by-laws development and governance. The association was also exposed to financial management.

Activity 2.2.1: *Participatory process to plan restoration. Work with community to undertaken restoration actions*

The project conducted tree monitoring visits which included community forests managed by village natural resources committees. Equipment was procured and used to remove invasive species with the participation of community. Motorized boats were also harnessed during removal. The common invasive species targeted includes the following: *Pontederia crassipes*, Water Hyacinth; *Azolla filiculoides*, Water Fern; *Pistia stratiotes*, Water Lettuce

Activity 2.4.2: *Ongoing Waterbird monitoring protocol will be designed and implemented. Training provided for community participation.*

Using the bird monitoring protocol, WESM and MUST conducted monthly monitoring activities during the period under review. During the exercise, 12 bird species new to the site were recorded including Grey-headed Gull, Lesser-swamp Warbler and Long-toed Lapwing.

Activity 2.4.3: *User friendly Bird ID guides will be designed and distributed*

In June, 22 wildlife club patrons were trained in clubs management and aspects of nature conservation including bird identification. 30 Bird identification posters were shared. Tourism lodges were reached for MoU on promoting avitourism at Chia lagoon.

Activity 2.5.1: *IBA/KBA assessment undertaken (include birds, fish (using existing data).*

The KBA assessment was conducted, and the site was approved as a key biodiversity area under the name Chia Lagoon and the floodplains.

Activity 3.2.2 *Micro lending mechanism is in operation, coupled with training for beneficiaries.*

The project disbursed funds (\$5,000) through the revolving fund scheme to organised village savings and loans groups. Monitoring has been conducted on the business being operated by the beneficiaries. Through Micro Loan Foundation \$17,774 was disbursed to over 105 community members around Chia lagoon.

Activity 3.3.1 *Avitourism is promoted through marketing and outreach to tourism businesses, bird guide training and installation of physical facilities.*

The project had consultative meeting with tourism businesses including Tongole Wilderness and Nkhotakota Pottery Lodges. The meetings focussed on promoting avitourism to their guests to increase their experience in Malawi by taking them on boat ride to watch birds at Chia lagoon. Further, WESM staff and community members were trained in setting up to eco-tourism enterprises by Dr. Kimberly, a tourism expert of World University Service of Canada (WUSC), a WESM partner.

Activity 4.1.1 *Meetings are held with stakeholders involved in Fish for Tomorrow and Chia Lagoon fisheries management and with Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve.*

The project held meetings in May and July with over 60 key stakeholders within biodiversity sector to share the project results. The project also contributed to the national biodiversity assessment initiative championed by Malawi government.

Activity 4.2.1 *Dissemination of project information and emerging results at national level through articles/broadcasts, briefings and meetings*

WESM promoted the project activities through engagement of media houses during most of project meetings. The project activities were broadcasted on radio such as Zodiak Radio, Nkhotakota Community Radio. An article was published in the Nation Newspaper. The project articles were also included on BirdLife International and Darwin webpages.

Activity 4.3.2 *Dissemination of project information and wider experience/lessons learned of CBNRM, especially for wetlands at international level through articles and participation in international event*

Project results were shared at different international meetings including the International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB) held in Australia in June and at the 15th meeting of Conference of Parties to Ramsar Treaty held in July in Zimbabwe where WESM had a stand displaying Chia Lagoon project material.

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.

During the reporting period, Malawi continued to face a national shortage of fuel. We had to reschedule implementation of some activities based on fuel availability. Dry spells affected the survival rate of planted trees.

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: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	
4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025) 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 2026)? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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.	
5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures? Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk	
No	
6. Project risk management 6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.	
Our project does have an Overseas Security and Justice assessment	
7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.	
We received feedback/comments from the reviewers for our Y2 report with a recommendation that they be responded to on our next annual (Y3) report. Our project was scored as 'Empowering' on the GESI Scale.	