



**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 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

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

Project reference	30-021
Project title	Increasing climate resilience for communities and wildlife in Siem-Pang, Cambodia
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Cambodia
Lead Organisation	Rising Phoenix Co. Ltd.
Partner(s)	1. Village forums 2. Department of Primary Industries, New South Wales, Australia 3. Siem Pang District Governor's Office 4. Tetra Tech – USAID Morodok Baitang (November 2022 to January 2025) 5. IBIS Rice Conservation Co. Ltd. 6. Sansom Mlup Prey (July 2022 to December 2024)
Project Leader	Jonathan C. Eames
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	01 April – 30 September 2025, HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://risingphoenix.ltd

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).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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.

Output 1: 55 Climate change resilient community irrigation ponds established at three villages around SPWS leading to a reliable water supply for rice cultivation for 1,375 rural people (50% female)

1.4. Monitoring framework established and implemented with key stakeholders: pond use, pond maintenance, water levels, water quality, rainfall, rice production, cover crops, income in participating/non-participating households.

In August 2025, we monitored the 40 irrigation ponds already dug in Khes Svay, Khes Kraom, Pong Kriel and Kham Phouk villages. We observed and interviewed 103 pond users households out of 134 (IBIS Rice farmers) and the data were updated into the excel monitoring table/framework ([Annex 1: The updated Irrigation ponds monitoring framework](#)) and the minutes of the irrigation pond monitoring were prepared ([Annex 2: The minutes of irrigation pond monitoring in August 2025](#)). The following summarizes results from the pond monitoring in August 2025:

- 9 households used irrigation pond water for their cover crops –to improve soil health, such as cowpea plant – during the early rainy season in May 2025, as this is the good period for improving soil quality before starting the rice farming.
- 51 households used the water for supplying the rice seedling during the nursery stage.
- 34 households used the water for supplying the young rice plants.
- 12 irrigation ponds were fenced by the pond users using locally sourced small woods as the material for fencing, while other 28 irrigation ponds were not fenced.
- 76 households have used 18 irrigation ponds for supplying their family vegetable gardens.
- 76 households used 19 irrigation ponds for their daily activities including bathing, washing clothes, cooking, feeding domestic animals, etc.
- Water level: In August (rainy season) the 40 ponds were filled at 90-100% of their capacities.
- Water quality: The water in 28 ponds was clear, while in the other 12 ponds it was found a bit muddy.

1.5. Monthly Community Development Reports include progress updates and details of water retention, quality and use.

During the reporting period, the community engagement team monitored the irrigation ponds and regularly updated the data in the monitoring framework and in the CDU monthly reports [REDACTED]. As of August 2025, all the 40 ponds were filled at 90-100% of their capacities, and the water will be stored for the next dry season (November to April).

1.7. Study tour to Siem Pang by IBIS Rice growers from two other sites

On 27-29 August 2025, six IBIS Rice Producer Groups with 12 people from two wildlife sanctuaries in Preah Vihear Province (Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary and Chhaeb Preah Roka Wildlife Sanctuary) visited Siem Pang to learn about the climate resilient water management interventions, the community irrigation ponds and forest trapeangs restoration. Five members of Preak Meas Producer Group in Siem Pang and Rising Phoenix staff co-hosted the visit. One commune representative of Preak Meas commune chaired the welcoming meeting of the visit. Two IBIS Rice Conservation Company (IRCC) staff from Preah Vihear and three in Siem Pang also joined the visit. A total of 28 participants (5 women) attended. The study tour also aimed at sharing experiences between the IBIS Rice farmers in Preah Vihear and the IBIS Rice farmers in Siem Pang. [REDACTED]

1.8. Report compiled from study tour to Siem Pang by IBIS Rice growers

A study tour report was produced, compiling the details of the three-day study tour from Preah Vihear's IBIS Rice producer groups to Siem Pang IBIS Rice producer group ([REDACTED]).

1.9. Lessons and best practice from irrigation pond activities shared amongst key stakeholders at district level and two other sites.

Raising awareness and sharing lessons learnt of irrigation pond activities was achieved through the quarterly village and stakeholder forums in May and August 2025 and the study tour from six IBIS Rice producer groups from two other sites in Preah Vihear province to Siem Pang in August 2025. A total of 282 participants (38 women) attended. Two village forum meetings were conducted on 7-9 May and 15-19 August 2025 ([REDACTED]).

Two stakeholder forum meetings were conducted on 6 May and 29 August 2025. A study tour from two other wildlife sanctuaries from Preah Vihear Province was conducted on 27-29 August 2025 with a total of 28 participants (5 women) attending. A producer group in Siem Pang and Rising Phoenix staff co-hosted the study tour in Preak Meas commune to share the lessons learnt and best practice regarding climate resilient water management, irrigation ponds intervention and forest trapeangs restoration.

OUTPUT 2. 20 forest trapeangs restored within SPWS, improving climate resilience and access to water and food for 2,000 rural people (20 trapeangs x 20 households each household x 5 people =2,000 people) their livestock, Eld's Deer, and the Giant and White-shouldered ibis.

2.3 Trapeang monitoring framework (for both restored and unrestored trapeangs) established (including photographs of trapeangs) and operating within 3 months from project start.

The new monitoring framework consisting of remote monitoring by drone to monitor water level change in trapeangs is in place and working. The survey started for the dry season 2024-2025 in December 2024 and continued monthly through April 2025. Fifty-two trapeangs were surveyed, including six trapeangs with pump, ten manually deepened trapeangs, eight mechanically deepened trapeangs and twenty-eight unrestored trapeangs.

2.6 Monthly trapeang and biodiversity reports

The Biodiversity Monitoring Unit produced a monthly report on its activities over the reporting period.

2.9 Lessons learnt and best practice from trapeang restoration activities shared amongst key stakeholders at district level (via village and stakeholder forums) and two other sites via village forums.

During this reporting period, raising awareness and sharing lessons learnt from trapeang restoration activities was achieved through two quarterly village forum meetings, two stakeholder forum meetings and one study tour from two other wildlife sanctuaries from Preah Vihear Province. Two village forums were conducted on 7-9 May and 15-19 August 2025, two stakeholder forums were conducted on 6 May and 29 August 2025, and a study visit from two other sites from Preah Vihear was conducted on 27-29 August 2025. In total, 282 participants (38 women) attended those key events.

OUTPUT 3. Endangered Eld's deer population at SPWS is maintained/or increases BEOP, compared to population baseline at start of project.

3.4 Continue study on overlapping activity patterns of Eld's deer and free roaming dogs to establish a threat mitigation protocol BEO Yr2

Overlapping activity patterns of Eld's deer and free roaming dogs is being monitored through camera trapping in the new Eld's deer monitoring protocol. A threat mitigation protocol will be developed BEOP.

3.6 Conservation strategy (including threat mitigation) for Eld's deer produced with key stakeholders at selected villages BEO Yr 2 and 3

This activity will be conducted later this year during Paul Meek's visit in November 2025.

3.7 One journal paper on Eld's deer conservation written and submitted for publication BEOP.

A paper estimating Eld's deer population in Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary was published in the Pacific Conservation Biology journal:

Meek P., Ladd R., Eames J.C., Leung L. (2025) Deriving a population estimate for Eld's deer (*Rucervus eldii siamensis*) in Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary, Cambodia. *Pacific Conservation Biology* 31, PC25029. doi:10.1071/PC25029

The paper was based on data collected in 2020. Analysis of data collected during camera trap

surveys of 2024 and 2025 is well advanced now. To estimate Eld's deer population densities and abundances, we will use a subset of individually recognizable animals to fit spatial mark–resight (SMR) model. A paper based on these new data will be submitted for publication BEOP.

Output 4. Numbers of Critically Endangered Giant Ibis remain stable and White-shouldered ibis population increases 10% above the baseline at SPWS BEOP

4.1 Giant Ibis nests located and monitored at SPWS throughout the project's lifetime.

The Giant Ibis breeds from May to October during the wet season. In 2023, a total of 17 nests were monitored, with 10 nests successfully fledging a total of 16 young, results that appeared to be in line with the results from the 2021 and 2022 breeding season. In 2024, a total of 11 nests were monitored with 9 nests successfully fledging 13 young. The small drop observed in 2024 compared to the previous years may be linked to 2024 suffering an *El Niño*. It is also worth noting that the monitoring effort from our team was impacted by the concurrent monitoring of a herd of Critically Endangered Banteng, which may have decreased the number of nests effectively discovered. At the time of reporting, a total of 11 nests were found and monitored in 2025, of which 4 failed so far and 4 successfully fledged 7 young.

Season	Nests	Failed	Succeeded	Young fledged
2021	17	6	11	14
2022	16	5	11	18
2023	17	7	10	16
2024	11	2	9	13
2025	11	4	4 so far	7 so far

4.2 Satellite trackers placed on three giant ibis BEO Yr2

This activity planned for year 2 of the project has been delayed as our workplan was impacted by the concurrent monitoring and eventual successful translocation of a herd of Critically Endangered Banteng located in a degraded forest near the wildlife sanctuary. This activity will be conducted during the second half of year 3, at the end of 2025/beginning of 2026, with the objective of fitting GPS-GSM trackers on two giant ibis BEOP.

4.3 White-shouldered Ibis nests located, and monitored in SPWS throughout the project's lifetime.

The Rising Phoenix Biodiversity Monitoring Unit team survey for White-shouldered Ibis nests during the breeding season from November to May. The breeding season 2023-2024 (Year 1 of the project) marked a new record for SPWS, with 41 nests monitored, highest point since monitoring started, and 62 young successfully fledging from 31 nests. In 2025, White-shouldered Ibis nests monitoring was completed in April 2025. A total of 31 nests were found. 28 nests successfully fledged 52 young. The total number of failed nests this season was 3.

Season	Number of nests	Number of nests fledged	Number of fledge chicks	Success rate %
2022-23	32	27	51	84
2023-24	41	31	62	76
2024-25	31	28	52	90

4.4 Monthly Biodiversity Monitoring Reports produced and key data shared at Stakeholder forums and the Cambodia Ibis Working Group

Six monthly Biodiversity Monitoring Reports were produced over the reporting period (April-September 2025), and two stakeholder forums were held on 26 May and 29 August where key data were shared with district level stakeholders. One Cambodia Ibis Working Group meeting was held on 19 June 2025.

4.5 Annual Breeding survey results for Giant and White-shouldered ibis produced and shared at stakeholder forums and the Cambodia Ibis Working Group

Breeding and census surveys results were presented at stakeholder forums held on 26 May and 29 August and at the Cambodia Ibis Working Group meeting held on 19 June 2025.

<p>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.</p>	
<p>It was originally planned to dig the remaining 15 irrigation ponds in Khes Svay, Khes Kraom and Pong Kriel villages in April 2025. However, we had to delay this activity due to the concurrent translocation of a herd of sixteen Banteng to the wildlife sanctuary. The translocation operations started in January 2025 and were concluded in May 2025. It required a heavy commitment from Rising Phoenix, monopolising both financial, human and material resources. As a result, the remaining irrigation ponds will be dug during the first quarter of 2026.</p> <p>The Mid-Term Review conducted in May 2025 identified that the project's logframe required strengthening, particularly at the outcome level. Outcome indicators lacked clarity, appropriate means of verification, and distinction from outputs. Rising Phoenix has addressed these issues by revising the logframe, refining indicators and verification methods, and reallocating resources from four irrigation ponds to fencing existing ponds to prevent erosion and improve sustainability. A Change Request was submitted to BCF on 3 October.</p>	
<p>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</p>	
Discussed with NIRAS:	Yes
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No
<p>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></p>	

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)</p> <p>Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]</p>
<p>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)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible, and not later than 31st December. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please</p>

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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk

Not applicable

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.

Not applicable

The Project Risk Register was updated and attached in **Annex B**.

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.

There were two comments from the Year 2 Annual Report review which need to be addressed in this half-year 3 report:

1. *Clarify key project outputs supported by this Darwin project. AR2 reports 23 trapeangs being dug but interviews with the project team during the MTR clarified that only 10 trapeangs have been funded by Darwin.*

Response:

In Year 1 (March 2024), a total of 10 trapeangs were restored in the wildlife sanctuary – 2 funded by the Darwin Main grant and 8 supported by USAID Morodok Baitang. In Year 2 (March 2025), 13 trapeangs were restored – 8 funded by the Darwin Main grant and 5 supported by the IUCN grant [REDACTED]

In total, 23 trapeangs have been restored over two years, with 10 funded by Darwin Main and 13 supported by co-funding sources. The remaining 10 trapeangs are planned for restoration in Year 3 (February–March 2026) and will be financed by the Darwin Main grant. By the end of the project, a total of 20 trapeangs will have been restored with Darwin Main funding.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	N/A
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	N/A