



**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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025**

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

Submit to: [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.

<b>Project reference</b>	<b>30-023</b>
<b>Project title</b>	Rights of Wetlands Operationalisation for Biodiversity and Community Resilience
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Bolivia, Ecuador, Guyana, Kenya and Sri Lanka
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Wetlands International Kenya
<b>Partner(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wetlands International Global Office, Netherlands</li> <li>• ATAYAK - Asociación de Yachak del Pueblo de Sarayaku, Ecuador</li> <li>• Cobra Collective, UK</li> <li>• Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, USA</li> <li>• International Water Management Institute, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka</li> <li>• North Rupununi District Development Board, Guyana</li> <li>• Practical Action in Bolivia, Bolivia</li> <li>• Universidad Católica de Bolivia "San Pablo", Bolivia</li> <li>• Worcester State University, USA</li> </ul>
<b>Project Leader</b>	Dr. Matthew Simpson
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2025 HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://cobracollective.org/portfolio/rights-of-wetlands-operationalisation-for-biodiversity-and-community-resilience/">https://cobracollective.org/portfolio/rights-of-wetlands-operationalisation-for-biodiversity-and-community-resilience/</a> <a href="http://www.rightsofwetlands.org">www.rightsofwetlands.org</a>

**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.

During the period April to September 2025 the focus has been delivering further capacity building, implementing the Rights of Wetlands knowledge exchange and advocacy and upscaling and dissemination.. To this end the activities below have contributed to meeting the following outputs.

#### **Outputs**

Output 1 - Robust Evidence Base of Rights of Wetlands in Five Countries

#### **Activities**

1.5 – Annual Stakeholder Project Meeting – we have met with project stakeholders in all 5 countries

1.8 – We have held Rights of Wetlands Community Participatory Video workshops in all 5 countries

1.9 – Legal, Policy, Governance and Communication Workshops were held in all 5 countries

In Bolivia, project members also coordinated with national authorities, APMT (The Plurinational Authority for Mother Earth) in order to include a citation on wetland rights in the national strategy of indigenous people against climate change. After showing results and project perspectives, in the final document, wetlands were included under the perspective of “water resource” which is the government nomenclature.

#### **Outputs**

Output 2 – Increased Capacity for Rights of Wetlands Implementation

#### **Activities**

2.1 – Training material production – Introduction to Wetlands, Introduction to Rights of Wetlands, Community Wetland Management and Participatory Community Engagement Techniques training programmes have been launched online after in-person training in each country. Online courses links are attached at the end of this report.

2.2 & 2.3 – Community Engagement, Community Social & Environmental Rights and Rights of Wetlands training has been on-going by partners with in-person sessions – these programmes have been additional to the original training completed in Year 2.

#### **Outputs**

Output 3 – Rights of Wetlands Knowledge Exchange and Advocacy

#### **Activities**

3.1 – Community best practice sharing has been delivered in each country through the production of 12 community participatory videos. These have been published online on the Cobra Collective's Vimeo site and are currently being screened to all communities. Links to the videos are attached at the end of this report.

In Bolivia an additional two workshops were held along with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to present results from Aguaysal community on their work identifying indicators to monitor the health of wetlands in their lands (it involved rivers, lagoons, floodplains, with other communities around and the cattle ranchers association of the municipality).

3.2 – Video mediated dialogue network meetings have been programmed in for each country to occur in October and November.

#### **Outputs**

Output 4 – Upscaling and Dissemination

#### **Activities**

4.2 – Websites have been regularly updated and video and online course published.

4.3 – Community best practice wetland management analysis is ongoing.

4.4 – Legal, policy, governance and communication best practice analysis is also ongoing with all materials and learning from the project being analysed

4.5 – Policy briefings have continued to be shared with government and NGO stakeholders and were distributed at the Ramsar COP15 in Zimbabwe in July 2025

4.9 – Dialogue with communities, CSOs, NGOs governments and the private sector has continued in all countries.

Guyanese partners have developed some newsletters to communicate with communities responding to issues raised during project dialogues and surveys.

4.10 – Support has been given in the formulation of policy / legislation/ strategies and plans for wetland management in all countries

4.11 – Ramsar Convention on Wetlands side event and promotion at CO15 in Zimbabwe

The following programme was held in the side event at COP15.

- Gillian Davies, Society of Wetland Scientists and BSC Group - Introduction to Rights of Wetlands
- Matthew Simpson, Society of Wetland Scientists, 35percent and Cobra Collective - Community Action for Rights of Wetlands
- Manjula Amararatna and Chaturangi Wickramaratne, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Sri Lanka and International Water Management Institute - Rights of Wetlands in Sri Lanka – National Policy on Living Entities and Draft Resolution on Rights of Nature in Wetlands

- Patricia Gualinga, Kichwa People of Sarayaku, Ecuador - Kawsak Sacha (The Living Forest) Declaration
- Dr. Julie Mulonga, Wetlands International Eastern Africa - Rights of Wetlands in the Kenyan Context
- Community video – Kenya - Tana River Community - Mangrove Restoration
- Suelma Ribeiro Silva, Brazilian Network of Ecosocialists - Rights of Wetlands in the Brazilian Context
- Dr. Ritesh Kumar, Wetlands International South Asia - Summary and discussion on how Rights of Wetlands can support the delivery of the Convention on Wetlands

In addition, in this period, the following presentations and sessions have been given at the following conferences and meetings:

INTECOL and SWS Europe Conference, Tartu, Estonia, 30<sup>th</sup> June to 4<sup>th</sup> July 2025

- Rights of Wetlands – Transformative change to mend the broken human-wetlands relationship – Plenary Presentation by Matthew Simpson
- Symposium - Making it Count: Operationalizing the Rights of Wetlands with 5 presentations – Chaired by Gillian Davies

SWS Annual Meeting, Providence, Rhode Island, USA, 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> July 2025

- Rights of Wetlands: Transformative Change to Meet Global Challenges – Plenary Presentation by Gillian Davies and Matthew Simpson
- Symposium - Navigating the Future: Evolving & Implementing Rights of Wetlands Policy with 5 presentations

SER Meeting, Denver, 30 September 2025

- Rights of Nature in Wetlands: Recognizing and Operationalizing Wetlands' Right to Restoration and Regeneration – presentation by Gillian Davies

Inside Climate News article on Rights of Wetlands team at COP15 in Zimbabwe - The Scientists Making the Case for Nature's Rights – Katie Surma - <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/05102025/wetlands-rights-of-nature/>

Meetings held in Bolivia

- July 2025 - "Introduction to Wetlands and Their Community Management" workshop was held in Santa Rosa de Yacuma, organized by Practical Action and IISEC–UCB in coordination with Jasayé. The event brought together 58 participants (35 women and 23 men) from the Germán Busch and Santa Rosa educational units, who strengthened their knowledge about the importance and protection of wetlands.
- September 2025 – Practical Action participated in the inter-scientific meeting "Women as a Fundamental Pillar in the Preservation of Ancestral Knowledge and Natural Indicators for the Adaptation and Resilience of Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems to Climate Change," organized by the Platform of Indigenous, Native and Peasant Nations and Peoples for the Fight Against Climate Change (PILCC for its acronym in Spanish) and APMT in Uyuni. During the event, videos produced by the youth platforms of Jasayé and Aguayzal were screened to share good community practices on wetlands management with Indigenous peoples. The official presentation of the Strategy also took place, highlighting the importance of Wetlands Rights and the harmonious coexistence of communities with these ecosystems.
- September 2025 - IISEC–UCB, in collaboration with Practical Action and the Youth Platform, implemented a week-long programme (22–28 September) in Santa Rosa de Yacuma to strengthen audiovisual skills and environmental awareness regarding wetland rights. The activities reached 207 students from three educational units (U.E. Tte. Cnl. Germán Busch Becerra, U.E. Santa Rosa I, and U.E. Gerardo Reyes) and 18 young members of the local platform, who also participated in field trips to Laguna Bravo and the Yacuma River. The sessions integrated theoretical and practical learning, culminating in the creation of audiovisual materials reflecting local issues and solutions for wetland protection.
- September 2025 - IISEC also participated in the Local Conference of Youth on Climate Change (LCOY Bolivia 2025) held in Santa Cruz. The IISEC representative presented the experience of the Darwin Initiative and the project on operationalising wetland rights, highlighting the restoration proposal for Bahía de Cohana, which was later selected for presentation at the National LCOY for its scientific and community relevance.
- September 2025 - one youth representative of the project along with other youth representatives joined the "March for Forests and Life," a collective action uniting indigenous, campesino, social, and youth organisations in response to Bolivia's ongoing environmental crisis marked by deforestation, forest fires, and extractive pressures. The march's National Petition (Pliego Petitorio) called for the immediate approval of the Law 118 of Forests and Other Life Systems (Ley 118 de Bosques y Otros Sistemas de Vida) as an essential framework to protect forests, wetlands, RAMSAR sites, water recharge zones, and Indigenous territories. It demanded the declaration of a National Climate and Environmental Emergency, the repeal of regulations authorising burning and land clearing, and the establishment of agroecological and zero-deforestation practices. This

<p>mobilisation underscored the recognition of wetlands and water bodies as vital systems for life, justice, and community resilience, reaffirming the importance of their inclusion within Bolivia's national environmental agenda.</p> <p>Meetings participated in Kenya where Rights of Wetlands was discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Through a participatory process, stakeholders drafted the River Tana Water Protocol. The protocol outlines a shared vision for sustainable use, management, and restoration of water resources in the Tana Basin, promoting resilience and equitable access for dependent communities.</li> <li>- Wetlands International participated in multi-stakeholder meetings in May and August 2025, led by the Wildlife Research &amp; Training Institute, to advance the Ramsar Site designation of the Msambweni–Vanga transboundary seascape between Kenya and Tanzania (716 km<sup>2</sup>). These engagements reviewed the draft report and initiated local sensitisation following endorsement of the proposed Ramsar site.</li> <li>- In August 2025, Wetlands International participated in the <i>Wavemakers: Blue &amp; Green Innovation Forum</i>, which focused on financing partnerships for coastal resilience. The event featured CSO–startup collaborations, live pitches, and a Blue Economy showcase, highlighting practical financing pathways and authentic reflections from practitioners advancing inclusive coastal innovation.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>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.</b></p>	
<p>The following issues have been reported by project partners but these have not had a significant impact on the delivery of the project timetable and do not have any budgetary implications.</p> <p><b>Sri Lanka</b> The participatory video-making training for youth required continuous follow-up to address various technical and creative challenges. Similarly, the process of finalizing the videos faced multiple hurdles, from developing compelling storyboards and selecting suitable community participants for the narratives, to editing and adding subtitles. These were overcome by providing additional support to finalise the videos.</p> <p><b>Bolivia</b> Several logistical and technical challenges were encountered during this period. Access limitations to Aguaysal community delayed the filming process, while irregular electricity supply in the area created difficulties during the editing phase. These challenges required additional technical support to ensure proper completion of the audiovisual product. Also, availability of time from community members was limited due agriculture task and ranching. Due to the unforeseen difficulties mentioned, its final delivery has been rescheduled for October 2025.</p> <p>Some outputs must be rescheduled, for example Video Mediated dialogues and best practice sharing (output 3). All those are reachable in October and November 2025. Despite these constraints, the commitment of the youth teams and continuous coordination among ISEC, Practical Action, and local partners ensured sustained progress. The process strengthened logistical planning capacities, resilience, and adaptive learning within community-based audiovisual production.</p>	
<p><b>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</b></p>	
Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No
Change Request reference if known: Not applicable	

**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.

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

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 2026)?

Yes ☐ No ☒ Estimated underspend: £0

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.

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 31<sup>st</sup> December. 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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

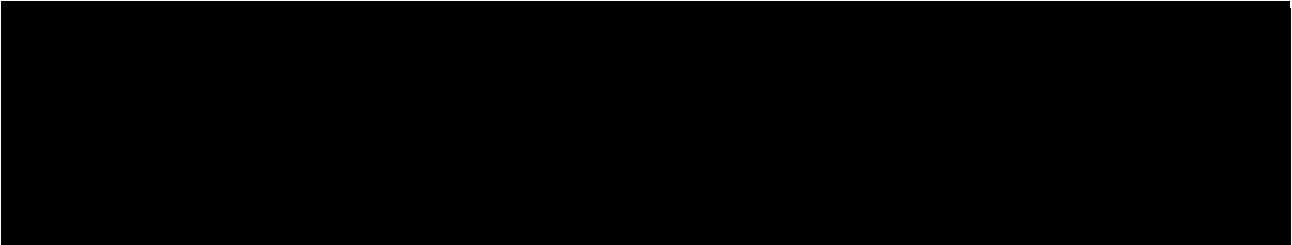
Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to [fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk](mailto:fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk)

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



**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 have updated our risk register and it is included at the end of this report. We have also provided more evidence of delivery of the project activities at the end of this form.

## Checklist for submission

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