



**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	30-026
Project title	Conserving biodiversity through community engagement in Gaurishankar Conservation Area, Nepal
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead Organisation	NTNC - National Trust for Nature Conservation
Partner(s)	-
Project Leader	<i>Dr. Madhu Chetri</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31/10/2025
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.ntnc.org.np/

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.

Progress is outlined below based on the key milestone during this period (April to September) as in the project implemented timetable.

Output 1: Enhance the national and local capacity in mountain biodiversity conservation in through trainings, and awareness programme

1.2. Leadership and advocacy training to CAMCs, CFMSCs and mother groups on biodiversity conservation and its significance.

Altogether, four units of Leadership and Advocacy Training was conducted on the second quarter of the third year of the project in the GCA. The training aimed to strengthen leadership capacity, enhance advocacy skills, and promote biodiversity conservation among local stakeholders. A total of 120 participants (10 females and 110 males) took part in the session. The program featured case studies and success stories highlighting effective community-based conservation practices. Key topics included the working modality of Conservation Areas, the legal framework

for conservation, and the roles and responsibilities of Conservation Area Management Committees (CAMCs) and Conservation Forest Management Subcommittees (CFMSCs).

1.3 Support to bachelor's and master's students in research and training.

On 26 September 2025, the project announced the final selection list for the Student Research Grant Support Program to encourage young and emerging researchers in the field of biodiversity conservation. This initiative provides financial assistance to enthusiastic Bachelor's and Master's degree students to support their academic research. The grant focuses on a wide range of conservation-related topics, including fish diversity assessment, small mammal surveys, traditional and ecological knowledge in mitigating human–wildlife conflict, and rangeland mapping and grazing practice assessments, among others. In the current cycle, GCAP is supporting eight students (4 male, 4 female) undertaking research on diverse themes related to conservation.

1.6. Forest fire control training and support.

The project successfully completed the procurement of forest fire management tools and equipment, ensuring resources are ready for effective wildfire response. A training on forest fire control techniques using these tools is planned for the next quarter, after which the equipment will be distributed to CAMCs across the Gaurishankar Conservation Area (GCA). This will enable local stakeholders to actively engage in fire prevention and control efforts.

1.8. Training on behavioural change and attitude towards wildlife conservation.

A total of five units of behaviour and attitude change training program was conducted in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok of GCA to promote effective human–wildlife conflict management through practical mitigation approaches. A total of 148 participants (106 male, 42 female) attended the sessions. The training emphasized behavioural change, awareness of threats such as habitat loss and climate change, and the adoption of sustainable practices. It also empowered communities to actively engage in future conservation initiatives.

Output 2: Enhance the national and local capacity in mountain biodiversity conservation

2.1. Conduct status research of megafauna

Under this activity, in the third year the project has continued research to assess the status of megafauna within the Gaurishankar Conservation Area (GCA). A total of 20 camera traps has been installed across key habitats to monitor wildlife presence, distribution, and behaviour in Lapchi area. The data collected will contribute to a better understanding of species diversity, habitat use, and conservation priorities within the GCA.

2.6. Support CAMCs and FMSCs for regular forest patrolling operations

The project has provided support to 43 CFMSCs to strengthen regular forest patrolling operations within their respective areas. This support aims to enhance community-based monitoring and protection of forest resources under the guidance of CAMCs. Regular patrolling has contributed to reducing illegal activities such as timber extraction, poaching, and forest encroachment, while also promoting sustainable forest management practices.

2.7. Coordination meeting among government officials and security personnel to establish information networks to control illegal activities

Two coordination meetings were organized in the Dolakha and Sindhupalchok regions of the GCA to strengthen collaboration among government agencies and security personnel. A total of 62 participants (3 female and 59 male) attended the events. These interactions have enhanced inter-agency coordination and improved the collective response mechanism for conservation law enforcement within the GCA.

3.2. Conduct awareness programmes on human wildlife conflicts at community level, especially targeting issues related to retaliatory killing

The three units of awareness program on Human-Wildlife Conflict was conducted in the month of September, 2025 in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok of GCA. A total of 73 (55 males, 18 females) participated in the event, crucial for fostering coexistence between local communities and wildlife. By equipping participants with the knowledge and tools necessary to protect their livestock and change their attitudes toward predators. The program has laid a foundation for sustainable conflict mitigation.

3.7. Training to farmers for regulating grazing of livestock in the prime wildlife habitats

One training event was conducted to educate farmers on regulating livestock grazing in prime wildlife habitats within the GCA. The training focused on promoting sustainable grazing practices, reducing pressure on critical habitats, and minimizing human–wildlife conflict. A total of 29

participants (20 males, 9 females) gained practical knowledge on improved pasture management and the importance of balancing livestock rearing with biodiversity conservation.

4.10. Provide training to home-stay owner in hospitality, lodge management and cooking/baking.

Three training events on homestay management were conducted in Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, and Ramechhap districts of the GCA. Each three-day event was attended by a total of 67 homestay owners and employees (27 male, 40 female). The training focused on enhancing skills in hospitality, lodge management, and food preparation, with special emphasis on pickle making as a means to promote local products and improve visitor experiences. These activities have strengthened the capacity of local entrepreneurs to provide better services and support community-based eco-tourism in the GCA.

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.

Over the last six months, the project experienced several operational and environmental challenges that influenced the pace of certain activities. Prolonged monsoon rainfall and occasional landslides in parts of the GCA temporarily hindered field mobility, causing minor delays in planned training and field data collection activities. Another challenge observed was the limited availability of local participants during the agricultural season, which occasionally affected community-level engagement. Additionally, the procurement of some field equipment took longer than anticipated due to supply chain delays, which caused delays in the implementation. Lessons learned include the importance of flexible planning, early coordination with local stakeholders, and adaptive scheduling to accommodate environmental and seasonal factors.

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: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	

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: £ XXXXXXXXXX

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: £

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 31st 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

None

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.

No

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.

The project appreciates the positive "Empowering" assessment received in the GESI scale in the previous annual report. Building on this recognition, the project has continued to actively promote equitable participation and leadership opportunities for women and marginalized groups across all levels of implementation. The project will continue to uphold and strengthen its GESI-sensitive approaches by ensuring equal access to opportunities, capacity development, and leadership roles, thereby contributing to more inclusive and sustainable conservation outcomes within the GCA.

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.	N
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Y
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Y
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Y
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	Y
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Y