



**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>	31-005
<b>Project title</b>	Socially and ecologically coherent freshwater protection in Northern Philippines
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Philippines
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Zoological Society of London
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture – Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource
<b>Project Leader</b>	Alejandro A. Belen
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYRY2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.zsl.org">Http://www.zsl.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).**

The project continues to achieve its milestones under the log frame and implementation plan, with steady progress across all four outputs contributing to the protection and sustainable management of the Pared River Catchment (PRC).

Under output 1, the project successfully expanded habitat restoration efforts, with 34.4 hectares of riparian areas across eight newly established Freshwater Sanctuary (FS) sites planted with 17,517 fruit-bearing and native tree seedlings sourced from ten locally managed nurseries. Engagement with barangay stakeholders, specifically landowners, ensured commitments for maintenance and stewardship of the planted areas. Support from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) through the *Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating* Disadvantaged/Displaced workers (TUPAD) programme provides short term emergency employment to workers in the informal sector who are displaced, underemployed, or seasonal" enabled 200 local participants, including People's Organisations (PO) members, women's group, river wardens and farmers, Freshwater Sanctuary Management Board (FSMB) members and

fisherfolks, to contribute towards the planting activities, (through a financial contribution of Php. [REDACTED])

The ecological assessment identified three invasive tree species (*Gmelina arborea*, *Swietenia macrophylla*, and *Leucaena leucocephala*), totalling over 5,000 individuals along riparian zones. While the request for their removal was deferred under Dept. Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Administrative Order No. 2000-21, DENR recommended a progressive replacement strategy (planting shade tolerant native species beneath existing invasives, which will serve as nurse trees until native seedlings mature. Eight of ten proposed FS sites were endorsed through barangay resolutions and Municipal Ordinances in Alcala, Baggao and Penablanca.

Under Output 2, the project has facilitated the formation of 10 FS management bodies, each with a five-year strategic action plan. Eight of these plans along with two FS Management plans have been finalised and submitted for adoption by municipal legislative bodies. A network of FS management bodies is now being established to enhance coordination and policy coherence across the PRC.

Under output 3, 63 community volunteers (including fishers, farmers, barangay police), received training by Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and DENR as river wardens (and issued IDs by respective mayors), to support evidence-based management. They are now actively conducting patrols and biophysical monitoring, with data submitted to the Municipal Agriculture Office.

Fish tagging to understand species movement and FS effectiveness is underway, with 172 individuals (34% of the target 500) from eight native species using the Visible Implant Elastormer (VIE) method. This provides baseline data for assessing fish population and dynamics and informs future expansion of the FS no-take zones.

Under output 4, community empowerment continues to advance with six Community Managed Savings and Credit Associations (CoMSCAs) established, engaging 155 members (62 men, 93 women) who have collectively saved Php. [REDACTED] and Php. [REDACTED] towards their environmental fund (EF) dedicated to FS maintenance and incentives for river wardens. Initial Biodiversity-Friendly Enterprises (BDFEs) have been identified through participatory planning in Baggao and Alcala, and five POs have been registered with DOLE for further livelihood assistance.

Law enforcement capacity was strengthened through the BFAR and DENR-led training, while technical skills in silviculture, nursery establishment, and invasive species management were reinforced through the project. These collective actions demonstrate growing local ownership and partner collaboration in sustaining FSs and safeguarding the PRC's ecosystems. These collective actions demonstrate growing local ownership and partner collaboration in sustaining FSs and safeguarding the PRC's ecosystems.

**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.**

The partnership between ZSL, the Local Government Units (LGUs) and DOLE in Region 2 in restoring riparian ecosystem functions along the PRC has been both a success and a valuable learning experience. While several implementation challenges were encountered, particularly related to logistical coordination, administrative processes, and aligning timelines across partner organisations, the partnership produced significant results, notably in the extent of riparian areas restored and the number of community members engaged. A key lesson learnt has been the value of convergence initiatives, bringing together government agencies, local communities, POs, and landowners. Their collective participation has strengthened local ownership and stewardship of the freshwater ecosystems and the project.

An unexpected but positive development during this reporting period was the recognition and adoption of ZSL's freshwater sanctuary model by DENR Region 2 through its Regional Wildlife management committee and the Cagayan River Basin Management Council as Other Effective Area-based Conservation

Measures (OECM). This recognition represents a significant policy-level achievement, reinforcing the project's alignment with national conservation frameworks and potentially paving the way for replication of the FS model in other river systems.

While the DENR's decision not to grant a cutting permit for invasive tree species presented a challenge, it also prompted the adoption of an adaptive management strategy. In line with DENR guidance, share-tolerant native species are being planted beneath existing invasive trees, as described in point 1. above. This adjustment has slightly extended the restoration timeframe for some riparian areas but is not expected to significantly affect the overall project timeline of budget.

**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
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes
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> (Confirmed by Niras via email 20.08.2)	

**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 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)

n/a

**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.**

n/a

**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 are no specific points from our Annual Report AR1 requiring a response within this reporting period.

## 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.	n/a
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	n/a
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com">BCF-Reports@niras.com</a>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>