



**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	DARCC039
Project title	Empowering East African Universities to build national conservation capacity & capability
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda
Lead Organisation	WildTeam
Partner(s)	Natural State
Project Leader	Alison Skeats
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 Oct 2025 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.wildteam.org.uk/trainers-network

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).

Output 2. Trainees skilled in vocational conservation skills. In the last six months, WildTeam has delivered 10 online training courses for 617 trainees from around the world (*Activity 2.1 and 2.2: online training delivering vocational conservation skills*). Our bursary scheme enables trainees from underrepresented countries to participate, during the reporting period over 500 bursaries were offered to conservationists around the world, of which 144 from the East African countries were offered full bursaries. Since the start of the project, for the project's 14 target countries in East Africa, people from 9 of these countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda) have become certified so far in one of our Wildlife Conservation Best Practices. 56% of these identify as female or non-binary and 44% male. Since the start of the project, 94 conservationists have been certified from the East African countries, with a total 135 completion certifications (some trainees have received another bursary and completed more than 1 subject, and not all trainees have taken the exam yet). During the last 6 months of that total, 53 people have completed a WildTeam online training

course, and 67 completion certificates have been issued (some trainees have completed more than 1 course).

Output 3. Instructors deliver vocational conservation courses to trainees.

In the reporting period, 10 people have delivered training to others: which means they are now fully certified Conservation Network Trainers, one in a USA university, two for a network of NGOs across Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone, and seven people have delivered training in Kenya. Kenya is one of the target countries for this project; six of these Kenyan people work for local NGO Kang4Nature, and one works with Kenya Wildlife Service. Across these 10 trainers, eight identify as male, and two as female or non-binary. Our aim is that 50% are female or non-binary.

The project intended to improve the capability and capacity of academic institutions. So far, we have increased the capacity of three Universities, one NGO, one State corporation (KWS) and one Network. This Network works across countries in West Africa, and although outside our initial East African target area, increasing the capacity of organisations in West Africa still serves the wider objective to empower local conservationists in countries where training is needed.

An online community room on WildTeam's Networking platform, WildHub, has been set up and launched, to provide support for these trainers and those who are still in-training to become trainers (*Activity 3.1 Creation of a network to support trainers*); there are 125 members of this group. This page and online community will continue to be built up over the next 6 months into a space where trainers can share resources, get tips for delivering their own teaching, and support each other independently of WildTeam staff.

Output 4: Instructors (trainers) skilled in delivering vocational conservation skills

169 people have registered their interest in becoming instructors since the project started (*Activity 4.1 - Instructor engagement*). Of these, 92 have completed their training (*Activity 4.2 - Instructor training*). Our objective was to recruit instructors from 14 countries across East Africa; 18 people from three of these target countries have completed their training (from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda), and seven people (all from Kenya) are already training others. In this reporting period, two people (from Ethiopia and Rwanda) have started and are currently in training in their journey to becoming trainers.

Training materials suitable to be taught in a classroom setting, have been created for our vocational wildlife conservation courses (*Activity 4.3 - Adapting training materials*). The subjects are: Project Management (PMWC), Project Planning (PPWC), Stakeholder Engagement (SEWC), and Grant Writing (GWWC). Additionally, PMWC and PPWC manuals and training materials have been translated into French. Materials for the fifth course (Monitoring & Evaluation) will be complete by end of 2025. This is behind schedule, but these materials require significant review to be made suitable for offline teaching.

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.

Output 1: Trainees have access to employment, funding, training, and collaboration opportunities. Natural State, the partner organisation based in Kenya, were to lead on delivering this activity (*Activity 1.1: Trainee community support*), originally starting in the second half of 2024 (project year 1), and then due to a staff member leaving, a change request was approved to delay this activity until April 2025. Unfortunately, Natural State have not been able to secure a new member of staff for this role and do not have the capacity anymore to deliver the proposed activities, with a change in their priorities in the coming year. Rather than continual delays, Natural State wanted to be proactive and have suggested that they are removed from the grant. They are still very much in support of the grant's proposed outputs and have provided

ad-hoc advice during the project so far. A change request to take this activity out of the grant was submitted and recently approved.

In addition, there is a risk that the WildHub platform will no longer be funded by WildTeam in 2026, so this poses a risk for the Trainers' Network page which is hosted there. If this risk is realised, we will migrate the network room to a more general social media platform, likely Facebook as this is widely used globally.

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: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

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: £

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)?

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

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.

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

[REDACTED]

Suspensions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

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.