



**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	<i>DARCC044</i>
Project title	Improving capacity for plant biodiversity planning in Guinea
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Guinea
Lead Organisation	Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
Partner(s)	Herbier National de Guinée, MBG, Guinée Ecologie, CFZ, CRRA-Sérédou
Project Leader	<i>Charlotte Couch</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>https://www.herbiiergee.org/darwin-cc.html</i>

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.

This period we ran a vegetation survey course in Mamou at ENATEF (the national forestry school) which involved participants from ENATEF staff, local Forestry and National Parks officers and NGOs This was part funded by our JRS Biodiversity Foundation. Planned courses plant ID- we launched a call for candidates for the second iteration of the course. We had more applications than last year (181 for 40 places) several of which came from countries outside of Guinea! Showing that there is appetite for these courses across the region, but also a strong appetite within Guinea. Although we would like the pass mark to be 70%, based on feedback from last year, we are likely to reduce it to 50%. It is a completely new language for many people and just learning the terminology is challenging. The number of families remains the same, as has the number of specimens in the exam (15). We will increase the exam time to 2 hours from 1.5 hrs to make sure people have time to see all the specimens.

Since the previous course we have learned that two of the participants who were interns at an NGO have been given permanent posts following the training course, another has been hired as a project assistant for a project funded by Fondation Franklinia on threatened trees. Additionally, participation in the Veg survey course in Kindia inspired the Prefectural head of Environment to go back to university to study for an MSc.

A young researcher from the national Herbarium attended the AETFAT (African plant and fungal taxonomy) triennial conference. Faya Julien Simbiano presented on his work in Guinee Forestiere as part of the Tropical Important Plant Areas programme. He was one of four delegates from Guinea, the largest delegation to date. It was a great experience for him to present to peers, listen to a variety of talks and discuss with scientists from across Africa.

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.

Unfortunately, the small grants from the IUCN SSC are not available this period due to the end of the quadrennium approaching, therefore our plan to apply for funding to pay for a qualified trainer for the IUCN Red List assessment course in Jan 2026 will not be possible. We will look to see if there is any underspend that we might be able to reallocate via a change request and/or also look at funds within other projects to see if this can be found.

The previously reported changes to the National Herbarium structure have unfortunately caused some issues. In June we had to step in and talk with the new director of IREG the new umbrella institution after he recalled the Herbarium field vehicles and appropriated one for himself. This severely hampered operations as the cars remained in Conakry for several months (March to May) with the herbarium staff not having access to be able to do fieldwork or travel out to the communities or up-country to give training courses. It was not until our (Kew's) arrival at the end of May/beginning of June that we started to get this resolved, this included asking the UK Ambassador to Guinea to mediate and underline the importance of the HNG-Kew partnership. The cars were returned and work resumed. There has been no repeat of this to date, but we are due to renew our Memorandum of Collaboration in December and therefore there could be some new issues raised.

In April this year, the ministry of higher education held a meeting to look at all the MSc courses countrywide and see where there were overlaps and therefore where courses could be merged. This caused some delays within the universities this year and getting projects signed off. The new umbrella organisation of the National Herbarium's delays with implementation of key roles has also caused delays for the HNG MSc course, though there was also the death of 2 committee members required to validate projects. Therefore, it is unlikely that the 2 MSc students will submit their projects before the end of the project. They are collecting data and so once signed off, they should be in a better position to fast track their work.

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: *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: [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: £

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.

The date for democratic elections in Guinea was announced to be 28 December 2025. We will be avoiding visits in country a month before and depending on the outcome, a couple of weeks after. It is unknown how much disruption there will be. We are planning our IUCN Red List course for the end of January to avoid any need to rearrange.

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.

What mitigation measures the project will apply to minimise the loss of capacity in the future do not appear to have been responded to?

We inculcate in our teaching the obligation to pass knowledge onto others, and to assist the next generation so as to help perpetuate the teaching we deliver and avoid the risk of Guinea falling back into its previous parlous lack of botanical capacity.

However, opportunities are growing for young Guinean botanists due to an increasing number of botanical posts in Universities, biodiversity dept posts with mining companies and funded botanical surveys. This ensures that many of those we teach have or will have a good career path once they have the training that we provide as a step up to these opportunities.

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?	Yes
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	