



**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 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	DIR30CC\1314
Project title	Scaling up capacity to mainstream wetland conservation in Southern Africa
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Zambia, Zimbabwe
Lead Organisation	BirdLife International
Partner(s)	BirdWatch Zambia, BirdLife Zimbabwe
Project leader	Megan Eldred
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	

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 M&E 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.

Since the project's inception, three whole-of-project meetings have been held, with regular 1:1 check ins with the partners. One of our primary activities has been mapping stakeholders for collaboration during implementation. We have successfully identified key stakeholders and initiated outreach to some of them. Workshops including civil society and other stakeholder have been successfully conducted raising awareness on wetlands, Ramsar and discussions around NBSAP. In Zimbabwe this was also attended by officials from EMA, CSOs and local authorities among others with a total of 31 participants. 5 CSOs (including from outlying areas), 15 CBOs and two youth organisations have been also engaged by BirdLife Zimbabwe to participate in the National Wetland Committee in Zimbabwe, which was formally established to facilitate structured collaboration between stakeholders, civil society, government agencies and the private sector. The committee serves as a platform for information sharing, dialogue, and decision-making concerning wetland issues nationally. Three meetings have been held in the reporting period. BirdWatch Zambia was also able to participate in the planning workshop that culminated in the

nationwide exercise to create a baseline of information on the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the country and the subsequent target setting of the Global Biodiversity Framework, and identify entry points for technical tools. BirdWatch Zambia also played a key role in the review process using the guidance provided. In August, BirdWatch Zambia contributed to a 3-day consultative meeting involving the Sub-committee of the National Technical Committee on Biodiversity on Wetlands on the development of guidelines for the sustainable utilization of wetlands in Zambia, which enabled the scoping of capacity gaps.

BirdLife International has prepared the first iteration of comprehensive target-by-target *Guidance on including wetlands in National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to boost biodiversity and halt wetland loss and degradation* which was published via the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. This document, and additional training materials and toolkit under development will form the basis of technical engagement with the NBSAP process. Two additional webinars were held, one to project partners, and one to all Parties and stakeholders in the Convention, also translated into French and Spanish for wider impact. This was supplemented by the drafting of additional guidance on existing NBSAP targets and indicators.

BirdLife International held an event with partners at CBD SBSTTA to demonstrate the opportunities and guidance for integrating wetlands into NBSAPs. BirdLife also prepared to follow this up with an official CBD Side Event at CBD COP16 on 'Watering NBSAPs' to capacitate all governments (including project partners) on the tools and support available to include wetlands in national policies. BirdLife Zimbabwe also organised a journalist tour to the Lake Chivero Ramsar Site in response to the immediate need to profile threats for wetland invasion within the Chivero Ramsar Site. The tour also served to capacitate journalists on wetlands, Ramsar COP15 and linkages with NBSAP. A workshop with Harare editors on Ramsar COP15 and wetland issues was successfully conducted, building awareness on the importance of wetlands, their conservation challenges, and the role of media in raising awareness ahead of COP15. Editors expressed interest in amplifying wetland-related stories and committed to incorporating environmental reporting into their news agendas. Other stakeholders in the meeting included Members of Parliament from the Committees on Local Government and Justice, the Environmental Management Agency, Ministry of Local Government, Local Authorities, Catchment Councils. It proved useful to bring key stakeholders together to discuss wetland and NBSAP related-issues.

Finally BirdLife International prepared the Terms of Reference for a community of practice supporting the integration of wetlands into national priorities has also begun with a first draft, and engaged multiple BirdLife Africa Partners to participate together in Ramsar COP15 in the reporting period: Nature Conservation Egypt, Nature Tanzania, Nature Kenya, Nature Uganda, WESM Malawi, BirdLife South Africa have expressed interest in joining BirdLife Zimbabwe and BirdWatch Zambia, through BirdLife International, to advocate for wetlands at the COP15.

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.

In the past six months, one of the main challenges has been the short notice from Government for participation in key NBSAP and target-setting discussions for all Partners, leading to a rushed review process. This limited the time available for in-depth analysis and stakeholder consultation. Although we were able to provide meaningful input, the condensed timeline put some pressure on our capacity to offer comprehensive insights. There has also been some hesitation from the Government of Zimbabwe. There is need for capacitation of stakeholders participating in the national biodiversity forum when it comes to describing actions and monitoring plan for the NBSAP, which this project will look to support going forward.

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/ No

Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ 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>	

<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)</p> <p>Actual spend:</p>
<p>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 2025)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>4c. If you expect and 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.</p> <p>If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. 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.</p> <p>NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.</p>
<p>5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</p> <p>No</p>

<p>6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.</p>
<p>To ensure the maximum impact of this project, money has been allocated to BirdLife International in its capacity as a global secretariat with the rationale that the processes, products, toolkits and events will benefit all 123 BirdLife partner organisations (and beyond), in addition to the specific support to the two partners identified in this project, and additional support provide to all African partners through the staff from the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat. This also allows BirdLife International to share knowledge and best practice across regions. Workshops are also being held with other stakeholders, including other CSOs, Community Based Organisations (CBOs), journalists, and a variety of other stakeholders, providing them with an opportunity to input into the process. Through the work of the partners to promote the engagement of CSOs in this process, a variety of opinions will be included in the process. Local people living around the wetlands are routinely engaged by both partners as part of their work, with 15 CBOs engaged in the National Wetland Committee by BirdLife Zimbabwe. Local people will continue to be included in forthcoming workshops in the next project phase. For the toolkit that has already been published on the Convention on Wetlands website, we will enquire with the Secretariat for the official download statistics, although this will exclude where this has been shared directly by email. Noted on 1.2 and 3.3 outputs – we will review this ahead of the EYR.</p>

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	Yes
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	