



## **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>	DAREX008
<b>Project title</b>	Championing change: Living in harmony with wildlife in lowland Nepal
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Nepal
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Zoological Society of London
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Environment and Rural Development Centre (ENRUDEC), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), Ujyalo Nepal (UN)
<b>Project Leader</b>	Katherine Secoy
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 2025 HYR3
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	N/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).**

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 in the first 6 months of Y3 remains strong. Focus has been upon building the capacity of established Human-Wildlife Coexistence Champions (HWCx) to deliver community-based conservation initiatives, facilitate information sharing between communities and national parks, and participate in diversified livelihood opportunities (Output 1), which continue to be rolled out across communities (Output 2). Alongside this, the implementation of HWC mitigation tools to reduce the impact of HWC has continued (Output 3), with the tools effectiveness to be assessed later in Y3. Surveys were completed to assess the impact of linear infrastructure upon wildlife movements within the landscape, to better understand HWC patterns and inform site selection for constructing wildlife-friendly infrastructure, and work continues to strengthen wildlife care and management facilities across three National Parks (Output 4). Work to enhance grasslands, wetlands, firelines and waterholes in Y3 has also been initiated, and training has been delivered to park staff and communities in wildlife behaviour, community forest management and resource governance. These achievements are impressive in the context of a challenging political environment in Nepal during this HY period. More detail is provided below:

### **Output 1: Foundations set for upscaling HWCx**

HWCx positions are established in Bardia, Shuklaphanta, and Banke National Parks (BNP, ShNP, BaNP) and the process formalising focal persons in Koshi Tappu, Chitwan, and Parsa National Parks as conduits of information exchange is underway for completion by Y3 end [*Indicator 1.1.1, DI-A03*]. A network of HWCx Champions already operates across all six parks, actively reporting HWC incidents and facilitating communication between communities and park authorities [*Indicator 1.2, DI-A01*]. One assumption that BZUCs are willing to match ZSL's contribution through focal-point labour holds partially true; while BZUCs have provided human resource support and meeting space, consistent resource allocation or cost-sharing remains limited, especially where competing local priorities exist. All other assumptions remain true.

The implementation of awareness-raising activities through HWCx champions has continued [Ind 1.3], meanwhile champions' capacity to deliver conservation activities has been enhanced through **14 capacity-building events for 281 champions** across three PAs (Annex 1, act. 1.4.1), and a **refresher training** in BaNP for **15 champions** on the deployment and use of GSM-enabled cameras. (Annex 1, act. 1.5.1). Similarly, to promote awareness on human-wildlife coexistence, HWCx champions led the delivery of **10 community-level awareness events** across three PAs, engaging **369 community members** (Annex 1, act. 1.6.1), **9 school-based programs** for **602 students** (Annex 1, act. 1.6.2), and **8 drill programs** involving **285 community members** (Annex 1, act. 1.6.3).

### **Output 2: Livelihood investments to break cycle of poverty**

Efforts to ensure 3,000 households (HH) benefit from improved agricultural practices [Ind 2.2.1], and 4,000 HH benefit from improved livestock practices [Ind 2.2.2] continue, to be assessed later in Y3. Throughout Y3, HHs participated in agriculture and livestock trainings, showing the adoption of techniques such as vegetable farming, integrated pest management, stall feeding, and livestock rearing, which represent important improvements to current practices in the context of limited livelihood options available. **29 community banks** (BaNP: 10, BNP: 7, ShNP: 12) established in Y1 and Y2 received **top-up funds** amounting to **NPR. 43,38,400** [Ind 2.2, DI-AO3] (Annex 2, act.2.3.2b), and **three new community banks** were established in BNP and provided **with NPR 19,75,680** to initiate operations (Annex 2, act 2.3.2a). To strengthen community bank institutional management and sustainability, **three Training of Trainers (ToT)** sessions on **cooperative management and financial literacy** were conducted in BNP, benefiting **90 bank members** (Annex 2, act 2.3.3). In support of **alternative livelihood opportunities** and to **reduce dependency on forest resources** [Ind 2.5], **15 trainings** on **commercial, seasonal, and off-season vegetable farming** (Annex 2, act. 2.4.3) were organized for **451 members** in BNP, with **100 participants** also receiving **agriculture toolkits** (Annex 2, act. 2.4.5). In BaNP, **four Integrated Pest Management trainings** were conducted for **144 participants** (Annex 2, act. 2.4.6), and in Shukla, **30 improved cattle sheds** were supported as recommended by the respective **Buffer Zone User Committees (BZUCS)** (Annex 2, act.2.5.1).

A **Nature Guide Training** was organized in BNP with 22 **participants** (Annex 2, act 2.6.3) and **driving training** was provided to 11 **participants** (ShNP: 6, BaNP: 5) (Annex 2, act 2.6.4), to contribute to **diversified livelihood opportunities, improved income generation, and reduced reliance on forest resources** [Ind 2.3.2, DI-AO3]. As of this reporting period, 76 individuals (Y2: 43, Y3: 33) have received training in nature-based tourism (hospitality, nature guide, and driving).

### **Output 3: HWC mitigation investments for communities and BZUCs.**

This output focuses on implementing **mitigative measures** and supporting the **institutionalization of BZUCs** to reduce HWC [Ind 3.1, DI-D04e]. During this reporting period, **two meetings** were conducted in BaNP with BZUC members to review the effectiveness of implemented mitigation interventions, with **57 participants** in total (Annex 3, act 3.1.1). To strengthen the institutional functionality of BZUC to mitigate HWC, **material support** was provided to **11 BZUC offices** (ShNP: 6; BaNP: 5) (Annex 3, act. 3.1.3).

In BNP, **60m of mesh wire fencing** was repaired in Asaregaudi BZUC, directly benefiting **25 HHs** and **1,600 HHs indirectly** (Annex 3, act 3.2.1b). In ShNP, **6 community solar lights** were installed to reduce night-time wildlife encounters, protecting **43 HHs** (Annex 3, act. 3.2.2). Additionally, 1 early warning system was installed in BaNP, covering **108 HHs** (Annex 3, act.3.2.3), and **40 predator-proof corrals** construction to secure livestock is ongoing in Banke (Annex 3, act. 3.2.4). In ShNP, **88 portable early-warning microphones** were distributed to help deter wildlife from entering farmland or settlements. Further, **1,205m of bio-fencing** was installed in BNP (Annex 3, act.3.2.5a), extending the fencing initiated in Y2 to enclosure the entire settlement (**~200 HHs, 3,885m of fencing**). A similar intervention was completed in Bhada BZUC of BNP, extending **140m** of bio-fence, benefiting **275 HHs** (Annex 3, act.3.2.5a).

Quantitative assessments of the effectiveness of the HWC mitigation measures introduced will be carried out later in Y3, to see if the results align with current field observations, which indicate decreased cases of HWC areas where HWC mitigation measures are adopted. Field observations also show communities residing within 1km of forest borders remain highly motivated to participate in HWC mitigation activities.

### **Output 4: Mitigate the effect of linear infrastructure and habitat fragmentation on wildlife.**

During this reporting period, NTNC and BNP rescued 2 tigers and 3 leopards, minimising the risk of HWC or harm occurring to these animals. Construction of a new tiger holding cage in ShNP has been initiated, which will increase the government's capacity to manage conflict tigers in captivity. Inputs from London Zoo wildlife care experts were integrated into the design of this cage, ensuring animal wellbeing is considered within rescue facility design [Ind 4.5.1, DI-A03], for which the procurement process for the purchase is now underway.

In addition, camera deployment and regular monitoring of the Mahakali II and Mahakali III irrigation canals to assess sites for wildlife-friendly infrastructure in ShNP has continued [Ind 4.3]. In Mahakali II canal, cameras were deployed between **25 April-25 May 2025**, alongside monitoring carried out jointly with park staff to check camera status and functionality (Annex 4, act.4.2.4) and similarly, in Mahakali III canal, cameras were deployed between **22 June 2024-8 July 2024** and **20 November 2024-25 May 2025**, alongside regular field monitoring, to ensure proper functioning, effectiveness of camera placement (Annex 4, act.4.2.4), areas of high movement, and most appropriate sites for the implementation of mitigative measures.

### **Output 5: Investments in PA habitat quality benefit wildlife**

Most habitat management interventions will occur later in Y3 owing to existing habitat management protocols within National Parks. An additional **32 ha of grasslands** are planned for management in Y3, ensuring **217 ha will be managed by Y3 end**, exceeding the target of 50ha by Y4 end [Ind 5.2.1, DI-D01a], and **an additional water hole** will be strengthened **in Y3** (7 in total across Y1-Y3), ensuring the **overachievement of Ind 5.2.2's target** of 6 waterholes strengthened by Y4 end [Ind 5.2.2]. **6.4 km of firelines** located in **strategic zones** of ShNP

have also been maintained [Ind 5.2.3] after heavy damage during last year's floods, to support **park mobility, fire management, and tourism activities** (Annex 5, act. 5.2.3).

Other activities completed under Output 5 this reporting period include the completion of a **capacity-building workshop** in ShNP for **50 staff members** (Ind 5.3, Annex 5, act.5.3.5) to strengthen understanding **wildlife behaviour and signs, and seven training events** (BaNP: 2, BP: 3, ShNP: 2), reaching **203 BZUC members** to enhance skills in **community forest management and resource governance** (Annex 5, act.5.6.4). Activities to come later in Y3 under Output 5 include **strengthening one visitor facility** (ShNP) and **a research facility** (BNP) [Ind 5.3], and **additional training for park and DNPWC** staff in support of the **CA|TS accreditations** for BNP, BaNP and ShNP Y4 end [Ind 5.3.2, DI-A01].

### **PCC and PMU Meetings**

In addition to output-level achievements, as per the project's management structure Project Coordination Committee (PCC) and Project Management Unit (PMU) meetings have continued in Y3. This reporting period, one PCC meeting and four PMU meetings were held. Key decisions made during the PPC meeting included the decision to procure Smart Eye Camera device to enhance protected area management, installing a solar backup system at the Lamati Research Centre and organizing a provincial-level knowledge sharing event on corridor functionality assessments to be led by ZSL Nepal (Annex 6, act.6.2)

Similarly, PMU meetings agreed to sensitise the Active Youth Network on the operation and effectiveness of Early Warning Systems and Luna GPS, installing radio collars on rhinos to monitor transboundary movement between Kartinighat (India) and BNP, upgrading and promoting the Arjuni Visitor Information Center, ShNP, and ensuring regular coordination between stakeholders for the effective implementation of Y3 activities (Annex 6,act.6.3).

Departmental level field monitoring was also carried out in the reporting period under which in total 5 joint monitoring was held in Banke, Bardiya and Shukla (Banke:2, Bardiya:2, Shukla:1), among which 4 joint meeting was led by DNPWC official and one in the leadership of Director General of DNPWC, during which this monitoring team assessed bio fence, habitat management works, and tiger holding cages constructed in Y2 (Annex 6, act.6.8).

### **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 major challenge encountered during this reporting period was external to the project's control. Social unrest was experienced across Nepal in September 2025, which saw the collapse of the ruling government, internal curfews placed across Kathmandu and the closure of Nepal's international airport. During this two-week period of disruption, all project activities were paused by ZSL and implementing partners. However, a new government was installed, and internal curfews were relaxed swiftly, ensuring project activities have resumed and progress in Y3 continues apace.

A new general election is slated for March 2026, with political and social tensions expected to be heightened during this time, meaning the potential for further social unrest around election time is high. The impact that this may have on Y3 project activities is unclear at this stage, however ZSL will continue to monitor the situation closely and ensure BCF are kept up to date with any development that may impact project delivery.

The political situation has had an impact upon some proposed Y3 activities; owing to the delicate situation in Nepal until the outcome of the election is known, ZSL has paused plans for its animal care, management and veterinary experts to travel to Nepal in early 2026 to deliver activities for the achievement of Indicator 4.5.1. by the end of Y3 [DI-A03], namely through act 4.8 *Improve DNPWC's existing institutional capacity regarding post-rescue management of wildlife* and act 4.9 *Scale-up the use of in-country expertise to train and systematically manage other wildlife units*. This delay will see Ind 4.5.1 delivered in Y4 rather than Y3, with these activities delivered in early Y4 when risks relating to international travel are reduced. All other activities planned as part of achieving IND 4.5.1. will occur in Y3 as originally planned, and this delay will have no impact upon the agreed project budget.

In addition, Y3 funds allocated for large construction work, namely the tiger holding cage and HWCx learning centre, may also be affected by the political situation in Nepal. Both these activities require purchases that follow extensive government procurement processes, and in the event of further social unrest, the government may need to postpone or delay stages of these procurements, or staff may not be able to complete construction activities, meaning the delivery of both activities by Y3 end may become difficult. Both activities currently remain on track, however ZSL will continue to monitor the situation closely and will inform BCF of any issues during the submission of its final Y3 change request in December 2025.

Another challenge encountered has been sustaining the engagement of HWCx Champions as volunteers. Over time, some champions have become less active due to livelihood demands or limited incentives, so ZSL and partners are exploring mechanisms to create stronger incentives for sustaining their engagement in project activities. All champion related activities and indicators remain on track; however this is something ZSL will continue to monitor closely.

**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: N/A	

**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: [REDACTED]

**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?**

Suspicions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to [fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk](mailto:fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk)

ZSL will provide further details for addressing anticipated Y3 underspend in a change request to be submitted in November or December 2025.

**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.**

In response to the recent social unrest experienced in Nepal, ZSL has updated its risk register to reflect the risks of:

- Social unrest in the lead up to following the planned general election in March 2026, resulting in internal curfews, demonstrations, mass protests, or the curtailment of internal or international travel, leading to the delay or cancellation of project activities, leading to the inability to spend project budgets or complete large scale construction works such as the tiger holding cage and HWC awareness visitor centre.
- Social unrest endangering the safety of ZSL and implementing partners' staff.

ZSL will continue to monitor the situation in Nepal closely throughout Y3 to ensure the safety of its and its implementing partners' staff, and to ensure that BCF are updated at the earliest moment if any of the project's activities become impacted by the political situation.

**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.**

To be reported on in the Y3 annual report.

## **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.

Have you reported against the most **up to date information for your project?**

Have you **clearly highlighted any confidential information** within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?

Include your **project reference** in the subject line of submission email.

Submit to [\*\*BCF-Reports@niras.com\*\*](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com)

Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.