



**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	DARNV027
Project title	Addressing wildlife entanglement in discarded fishing nets through community-based approaches
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	India
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Wildlife Institute of India
Project Leader	<i>Harish Guleria</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>www.zsl.org</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).

Due to ongoing issues within the project partnership, there have been continued delays in implementation (as discussed via email with NIRAS on 18th September 2025). As a result, progress during the last six months (April–September) has been limited. However, some noteworthy developments are summarised below:

- Five key staffing positions have been filled, with only three field assistant posts remaining.
- Field plans have been redesigned, with specific tasks and responsibilities now designated to each team member.
- A gap analysis is currently underway to validate our understanding of contextual changes since the pilot study in 2019. Survey questionnaires are being revised to capture updated information on current community livelihoods, types of fishing nets used, strategies for reusing or repurposing old nets, gender roles in fishing activities, and labour division within fishing households. This will ensure project activities are grounded in accurate and current data.
- An extensive literature survey was conducted, focusing on the global and national status of Abandoned, Lost, or Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG). It examined business models

centred on recycling plastic waste and fishing net materials from 1961 to 2025 and highlighted the environmental impacts of ALDFG on aquatic biodiversity, with particular emphasis on Indian freshwater ecosystems.

- A meta-data analysis was conducted using a statistical model to assess the status of ALDFG-related studies across disciplines. Earlier decades focused primarily on impacts and entanglements, while recent years have seen increased attention to management, policy making, ghost fishing, and the circular economy.
- In the summer edition of a newsletter with the Wildlife Institute of India, the team introduced the concept of ALDFGs, their environmental impacts, and the circular economy as a promising approach to address these concerns.
- A revised schematic was prepared based on the overall theme of the project (Annex 1).

The project was also shared across various scientific forums:

- Oral presentation at the 36th Annual Research Seminar (ARS), 2025, held at the Wildlife Institute of India under the theme 'Conservation Policy and Management'. The presentation, titled *"From Waste to Wealth: Addressing Abandoned Fishing Gears through the Lens of Circular Economy and Livelihood Development"*, took place on 14th–15th October 2025.
- Virtual oral presentation at the Freshwater Symposium for Early Career Researchers, hosted by the Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research, Kolkata, under the theme 'Community Involvement in Conservation' on 10th October 2025.

Our abstract was selected for a talk at the 11th World Sustainability Forum in Barcelona, Spain, held on 2nd–3rd October 2025, under the theme 'Circular Economy'.

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.

There have been significant challenges within the partnership, which led to a project pause in Year 1 and further delays in Year 2 (NIRAS has been made aware of these).

In addition, the team is conscious that another year has passed, and the data from the preliminary study now requires validation before proposed project activities can move forward. It is essential to conduct an updated survey across all three targeted blocks—Bihpur, Kahalgaon, and Gopalpur.

The existing Phase I survey was conducted in 2021, and there is now an urgent need to carry out a field survey that reflects the current situation, using modified questionnaires. The study area has since experienced extreme monsoon flooding, which may have significantly altered human settlements and the economic conditions of the fishing community in the post-COVID-19 context.

A fresh baseline survey is therefore crucial to capture the current socio-economic and ecological realities of the fishing communities. It will help accurately identify active fishing villages, assess their dependence on fishing gear, and understand their interest in engaging with the proposed net recycling and livelihood enhancement activities. This step will serve as the foundation for initiating the core components of the work plan effectively.

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:

no

Received confirmation of change acceptance:	n/a
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>	

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.

<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)</p> <p>Actual spend: [REDACTED]</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 2026)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £</p>
<p>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.</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, 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.</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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</p> <p>Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk</p>
n/a
<p>6. Project risk management</p> <p>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.</p>
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.

Due to delays in year one, we had to score the project as 'not yet sensitive' in AR1. However, we assured NIRAS in a recent meeting (Sept 25) that the preliminary work which informed this project was rooted in equitable and inclusive approaches. The pilot work focused on understanding the socio-economic context, ensuring meaningful engagement with the fishing community, and through these local women came to light as a priority group to work with and empower. FGDs and KIIs were held specifically to understand the role of women in the fishing community to date, and the potential for new roles and new livelihoods through a recycling model. This project has key targets for female participation within the supply chain model, and specific outputs centered around outreach and inclusive engagement with women. As mentioned earlier, activities in year two will revisit some of the engagement work previously conducted to ensure we're aware of any contextual changes that may impact on our proposed activities, and we will adapt our project plan accordingly.

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