

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

*Note: 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 2022**

<b>Project reference</b>	<a href="#">DPLUS084</a>
<b>Project title</b>	Identifying and conserving resilient habitats in the British Virgin Islands
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	British Virgin Islands
<b>Lead partner</b>	Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
<b>Partner(s)</b>	National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, Fort Worth Zoo
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Thomas Heller</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>HYR4</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/resilient-habitats-bvis">https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/resilient-habitats-bvis</a> ; Twitter @KewUKOTs #kewbvi; Facebook <a href="https://www.facebook.com/NPTVI/">https://www.facebook.com/NPTVI/</a>

### **1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).**

Activities contributing to all of the project's Outputs have seen good progress in the first six months of Y4.

**Activity 1.1 Fieldwork to survey globally threatened species.** Known populations of all five exemplar tree species have been visited during the last six months: *Myrcia neokiaerskovii*, *M. neothomasiana*, *Zanthoxylum thomasianum*, *Varronia rupicola* and *Vachellia anegadensis*. Nesting sites for the Anegada Rock Iguana, *Cyclura pinguis*, were surveyed in June and July 2022, along with six transect surveys and artificial retreat transects checked for the Anegada Skink, *Spondylurus anegadae*. The network of game cameras deployed in *C. pinguis* habitat has also been maintained.

**Activity 1.2 Genetic analyses of *Z. thomasianum*** 384 samples prepared with universal and custom *Zanthoxylum* bait sets have been sent for DNA sequencing. Remaining population-level samples of *Z. thomasianum* from Puerto Rico have been received at Kew.

**Activity 2.2 Field work to gather vegetation and habitat data** The network of climate data loggers, ink traps and game cameras have been maintained over the past six months, with data downloaded. Work to verify identification of >1552 plant records gathered during Rapid Botanic Surveys made in January-February 2022 has continued, in preparation for further analysis.

**Activity 3.3 Collect plant material for vegetative propagation and ex-situ conservation** All five of the exemplar plant species had new collections (cuttings) made for *ex-situ* conservation at JRONBG, with more than one population sampled for four of them. Ex-situ collections of 16 other globally threatened species (and other species of conservation importance in the BVI) were also made during this time.

**Activity 4.2 Training of four NPTVI staff in germination experiments, survey techniques and species identification delivered by Kew and FWZ specialists** Seven NPTVI staff were trained in ex-situ plant propagation techniques at JRONBG in May 2022.

**Activity 5.3 Undertake Steering Group meetings and produce minutes** Steering Group meetings were held in April and August 2022.

**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 project has progressed well over the past six months, with implementation across all five Outputs. The principal area where progress has been difficult is in Output 3 (*Ex-situ* collections of five globally threatened plants enhanced to support conservation), one of the indicators being "Seed quality and storage behaviour studies completed for five plant species". There has been little or no seed available for the five tree species forming the focus of this project to undertake Activity 3.2 (Undertake seed storage behaviour studies). Field teams will continue to monitor these plants for sufficient seeds (at least 100 freshly collected seeds per study), while also adhering to sustainable seed harvesting levels, during the last six months of the project.

Nevertheless, good progress has been made towards Output 3 overall, with a focus on securing vegetatively propagated *ex-situ* material for the J.R. O'Neal Botanic Gardens, meeting the requirements of indicator 3.2 "Seed or cuttings from 5 globally threatened plants held at J.R. O'Neal Botanic Gardens for propagation". The need for seed storage behaviour studies was identified for *Z. thomsonianum* in particular, which has not hitherto been successfully conserved in seed banks; and confirming the unsuitability of the two *Myrcia* species for seed banking, in line with other members of the genus.

While this continues to be a challenge, we do not anticipate a budgetary impact, nor any need to make a formal Change Request.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: Yes/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known: N/A

**4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**4b. If yes, then you need to 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. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

N/A

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.**

**Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**