

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: 31st October 2023

Project reference	DPLUS136
Project title	Anguilla Shark Conservation: social acceptance, spatial protection and legislative reform
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Anguilla
Lead partner	Marine Conservation Society
Partner(s)	Anguilla National Trust, Fisheries and Marine Resources Unit- Department of Natural Resources, University of Exeter
Project leader	<i>Peter Richardson</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>31 October 2023, HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.mcsuk.org/ocean-emergency/marine-protected-areas/recovery-projects/projects-in-uk-overseas-territories/sharks-and-rays-in-anguilla/

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).

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.

Output 1. Development of first ecological and social baselines regarding sharks in Anguilla.

As part of our baseline ecological monitoring assessments for Anguilla’s shark and ray populations, we have conducted two additional rounds of baited underwater remote video station (BRUVS) deployments, between 12 and 28 April, including 69 camera drops (minimum 1-hour soak time) across 16 distinct locations and between 20 June and 3 July, including 55 pelagic drift camera drops (minimum 2-hour soak time) across 9 locations (Activity 1.9). The latter set of deployments focused on the mid-water column and shark species (e.g., tiger sharks) that are more frequently found in the open ocean rather than the nearshore.

We have completed analysis of all videos from 2021 and 2022 and are currently analysing data collected in April and June (Activity 1.10). Video footage from all (analysed) BRUVS deployments confirm the presence of Caribbean reef sharks (EN), blacknose sharks (EN), nurse sharks (VU), lemon sharks (VU), tiger sharks (NT), silky sharks (VU), spotted eagle rays (EN), and southern stingray (NT).

Complementing ecological assessments, community voice method (CVM) interviews conducted in Year 2 of the project were transcribed and analysed, with a report and film being produced. In June 2023, the CVM film was screened within three different communities across Anguilla (Island Harbour, The Valley, Sandy Ground) (Activity 1.16). The screenings, attended by a total

of 55 individuals, provided community members and stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss their positions, values, and perspectives as they relate to shark and ray research, conservation, and management (see <https://www.mcsuk.org/ocean-emergency/marine-protected-areas/recovery-projects/projects-in-uk-overseas-territories/sharks-and-rays-in-anguilla/>). Results of these workshops are compiled in a project report as well as an informative, easy to share infographic, which will be sent to participants (attached here).

Key findings indicate that shark conservation/management is required but that additional data should be collected to ensure that management decisions are data-driven; sharks are misunderstood and education and outreach should focus on the important role that shark species play within the marine ecosystem; and the marine environment is critically important for Anguillians for food, recreation, livelihoods and mental health.

Recognising the importance of biological and social data to inform management, the project team submitted a change request form in September 2023, requesting that instead of developing a species action plan for Anguilla's sharks and rays (Activity 1.17), a research action plan, outlining research priorities identified by natural resources managers and informed by the CVM consultations, be developed instead. The research action plan has been drafted, indicating short- and long-term priority research/knowledge priorities.

Output 2. Evidence-based shark SAP and supporting legislative amendment recommendations are produced through a participatory process.

This output has been amended, with an SAP (Activity 2.2, Activity 2.3) now being replaced with a research action plan. The research action plan was developed through consultations held as part of the CVM process (screenings and workshops held in June 2023) and then refined and finalised by local partners and the University of Exeter. The research action plan will be used to guide local partner work programmes and funding proposals. The potential for having endangered species listed on Schedule 1 of the Government of Anguilla's Biodiversity and Heritage Conservation Act is now being discussed (Activity 2.4). Listing of species on Schedule 1 would formally trigger the call for species-specific conservation plans and would strengthen project proposals that would enable necessary research and conservation action planning.

Output 4. Enhanced national capacity to plan, manage, implement and monitor shark conservation action, supported by improved technical skills and greater public awareness and cooperation.

During the first half of Year 3 of the project, we held 2 Project Steering Committee meetings (Activity 4.1).

As part of a sub-regional learning and knowledge exchange, Guadeloupe-based shark expert Océane Beaufort visited Anguilla during the April 2023 BRUVS deployment session. During this time, she was able to meet with local staff and University of Exeter's Dr Matt Witt. After reviewing BRUVS footage with her, we realised that we had misidentified a shark species – Caribbean reef sharks and blacknose sharks are incredibly similar with just a few subtle phenotypic/morphological differences. We are now aware of these differences and have been able to differentiate between the two species. Following (and due to) Océane's time in Anguilla, we have added blacknose sharks to our elasmobranch's species list. Océane also conducts shark research in St. Barthelemy and we are now planning another exchange visit during which staff from the Anguilla National Trust, Fisheries and Marine Resources Unit, and University of Exeter will visit St. Barthelemy team in April 2024 to learn more about their BRUVS deployment methods and to introduce their team to the equipment and methodology that we have been using in Anguilla.

In an effort to raise public awareness, we conducted two well-attended presentations in April 2023 (no. of attendees: 79) during which local partner staff and Matt presented on shark ecology and project findings and an additional presentation to the Anguilla Enhancement Project community-based organisation (no. of attendees: 10) during which the project, its aims, activities, and results were presented and discussed.

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.

Unexpected developments/issues related to the implementation of Output 3 have been already been discussed with NIRAS, with a change request form having been submitted and approved.

Our change request is focused on Output 2: the creation of an evidence-based species action plan for sharks and rays in Anguilla. Based on our current understanding of sharks and rays we do not feel it would be appropriate to devise a species action plan when we are now aware that there are crucial gaps in the biological and social scientific data available to us. We believe that species conservation action must be based on scientific evidence. This is particularly important when considering a commercial and controversial species such as sharks, and while this project has already significantly increased our knowledge and understanding of sharks and rays in Anguilla, we do not feel that we are as yet in the position to make clear, scientifically-informed recommendations on appropriate management actions.

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: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: Submitted on 27.09.23 – confirmation received 29.09.23

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: ██████████

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 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. 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.

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 BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No other issues.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, 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.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS 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. 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**