



**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	DPLUS136
Project title	Anguilla Shark Conservation: social acceptance, spatial protection and legislative reform
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Anguilla
Lead Organisation	Marine Conservation Society
Partner(s)	Anguilla National Trust (ANT), Fisheries and Marine Resources Unit-Department of Natural Resources (FMRU), University of Exeter (UoE)
Project leader	<i>Amdeep Sanghera</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>31 October 2024, HYR3</i>
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.

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

In April 2024, to fill existing gaps and to respond to fishers' reports on shark sightings and potential breeding locations, we deployed drifting mid-water BRUVS at four locations (Activity 1.9). These drifting systems are comprised of five connected BRUVS that span across a total distance of 880m. During our second week of fieldwork, despite marking the drifting system with buoys and publicising its deployment through the Fisheries' network, it appeared as though a large vessel (probably not a fishing vessel) ploughed into the system and dragged it from its deployment site. The project team spent two days searching for the system (including deploying a plane to increase the search area), but unfortunately we could not find the BRUVS. On the third day, a fisher reported that they had found the BRUVS and we were able to retrieve them. Upon inspection of the system, we found that we had lost two of the five BRUVS that we had deployed. While we are disappointed to lose the BRUVS, we still feel fortunate that we were able to recover the remaining three. We have spoken with the manufacturer, Blue Abacus, and they will work with the Fisheries Unit to replace the lost units. Despite this unfortunate event, we were still able to collect twenty videos from locations that had not been surveyed before (Activity 1.10).

In addition to these BRUVS systems, we also wanted to deploy cutting edge infrared video camera technology, with cameras being deployed at deeper depths and for longer periods of time (Activity 1.11). One camera system was brought to Anguilla but upon arrival and equipment check, we found that the system was actually damaged in transit and, unfortunately, could not be safely deployed. The project team has spoken with the manufacturer, who indicated that the system needed to be returned for repair.

Given these setbacks, we submitted a change request to extend the project deadline to end of January 2025 which would allow us to deploy additional mid-water BRUVS as well as the IR system in November 2024, analyse results, and include findings within our draft publication. Our change request was approved.

As part of an exciting new partnership with the Imperial College of London, the results of our BRUVS data collection programme have been used to trial a newly-developed software called SharkTrack which is able to sift through BRUVS footage and identify/classify elasmobranchs (Activity 1.10). SharkTrack is based on machine learning which means its ability to correctly identify species improves as the amount of data available to it increases. Initial results of SharkTrack are impressive: the programme requires just two minutes of manual classification per hour of video, corresponding to a 97% reduction of manual analysis time. A draft manuscript of these findings has been developed, with project partners listed as co-authors and Darwin Plus/Biodiversity Challenge Funds being acknowledged as a key funder/contributor. The manuscript is currently being considered for publication within a peer-reviewed journal.

In addition to the SharkTrack manuscript, we are also drafting a manuscript presenting the results of this multidisciplinary project (Activity 1.18). The manuscript will report on the presence, diversity and distribution of sharks recorded during the BRUVS surveys and also combine the social data collected through our LEK surveys and CVM video recordings and workshops.

Output 3. At least two priority interventions prescribed by the action plan are implemented and monitored

In April 2024, as part of the Government of Anguilla's BLUE Week programme, which promotes and celebrates Anguilla's marine environment and blue economy, project partner Dr. Matthew Witt (UoE) facilitated a half-day training workshop on the benefits and application of bycatch reduction devices, and specifically SharkGuard (Activity 3.1). The workshop was attended by 10 commercial and subsistence-level fishers. Following this workshop, a pilot study to trial the use SharkGuards on longlines was launched in partnership with a fisher. Results of this study will be presented at a second bycatch reduction workshop scheduled for November 2024.

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 six months of Year 4 of this project, we held two Project Steering Committee meetings (Activity 4.1).

During this period, we also focused efforts on raising public awareness (Activity 4.3.1), including showcasing sharks and shark-related research at two public environmental exhibitions (no. attendees: 115), Anguilla BLUE Week movie night (no. attendees: 100) and trivia night that included questions about Anguilla's shark and ray species and a presentation about these elasmobranchs (no. attendees: 50), and a social media post: (Facebook reach: 2780 accounts; Instagram reach: 218 accounts).

In addition, building on the relationships and framework for stakeholder engagement developed through the Community Voice Method, we continued to directly engage fisherfolk in conversations about marine conservation and protection as well as the value of sharks to fishers' livelihoods, a priority area identified within the Shark and Ray Research Action Plan (Output 2, Activity 2.3). Carried out by project partner Amdeep Sanghera (Marine Conservation Society), 11 participants closely connected to the shark fishery and its supply chain (e.g. shark fishers, consumers, restaurateurs) were interviewed as part of key informant surveys. These surveys inquired about participants' values towards the shark fishery. Early analysis highlights strong cultural attachment to the shark fishery, while for some participants there is also a seasonal economic driver too, namely providing shark meat for certain annual festivals. A full analysis is to be carried out in Q3, and will provide the project with a values evidence base to support future shark conservation and management interventions.

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.

Issues related to the implementation of Output 1 with the loss of two BRUVS and the damaged IR-enabled BRUV hampered our April 2024 field season. We discussed the possible implications these issues would have on the project with NIRAS, with a change request form having been submitted and approved. Our project has now been extended to end of January 2025, with an additional field season scheduled for November 2024. Results of this field season will inform Output 3 (Activity 3.2, Activity 3.3) as we will be in a better position to provide evidence-based recommendations related to marine spatial planning and protection.

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: N/A

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)

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 2025)?

Yes ☐ No ☒

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.

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.

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.

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.

We have recently submitted ARY3 for this project and are currently awaiting any feedback. We will respond to any feedback provided in our final project report.

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.

If not already submitted, have you attached your **risk register**?

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.

N/A

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?	N/A
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	✓
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	✓