

## 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>	DPLUS154
<b>Project title</b>	Sustainable management planning for St Helena's National Conservation Areas
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	St Helena
<b>Lead partner</b>	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
<b>Partner(s)</b>	St Helena Government, SAERI (Falklands) Ltd (SFL)
<b>Project leader</b>	Amanda Gregory
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 2022, HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	@JNCC_UK, @StHelenaGovt, @SAERI_FI, @Darwin_Defra

### **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).**

DPLUS154 is a 2.75-year project which commenced in December 2021. This half-yearly report therefore outlines progress made to date on activities that were scheduled for Year 2 (Y2) of the project (April-September 2022). Please note that we have used the revised Logframe and Implementation timetable which were approved through formal Change Requests in Year 1 (Y1) of the project.

Progress against each Output is detailed below, however, as an overarching summary, some significant challenges have been encountered in this reporting period which has meant activities have not advanced as planned. The major cause of delay has been the challenges associated with recruiting a Project Officer – details of which are outlined in Section 2, together with the contingency plans which are being put in place. With implementation of these plans, the team are confident of getting the project back on track by the end of Y2.

#### **Output 1: 13 NCA Management Plans, which include governance arrangements, submitted to SHG for adoption and legal endorsement (WP1)**

In order to inform the development of the management plans for each of the 13 Nature Conservation Areas (NCAs) it is necessary to undertake a number of preliminary steps which were due to continue or commence in this reporting period, including: collating historic and existing environmental data and metrics (**Activity 1.1**), identifying data gaps and then filling these gaps where possible (**Activity 1.4**), and agreeing methodologies and indicators to conduct baseline assessments (e.g. of status/condition, pressures/threats) (**Activity 1.2, 1.6 and 1.7**). While it has been possible for project partners to continue with some of the data mining exercises (**Activity 1.1**), progress or commencement of all other listed activities have stalled due a Project Officer (PO) not yet being recruited. It was planned that the PO, who would be based in St Helena, would coordinate the undertaking of these activities. Unfortunately, the

project team has not had spare capacity in this reporting period to progress these activities in the absence of a PO. This has had a knock-on effect to activities under the remaining Outputs.

### **Output 2: Trained SHG/National Trust Officers able to manage, monitor, assess, report, intervene and undertake future reviews of Management Plans and determine the effectiveness of NCA sites (capacity, guidance and tools)**

The primary activities under this output in this reporting period were to commence field-training for the data collectors including on field safety, plant and invertebrate identification, data handling and management, and use of GIS (**Activities 2.1, 2.4, and 2.8**). As the preliminary steps in terms of collating existing data and identifying priority data gaps to be filled have been delayed (see summary under Output 1), and it was not thought logical to recruit data collectors until these had been completed, but which were also reliant on having the PO in post, it means there has been no progress on these activities. Likewise, while it had been hoped to develop the Train-the-Trainer programme (**Activity 2.2**) in this reporting period, it was agreed between the Project Partners that this should be postponed until the project time-table and activities have been reviewed (in light of ongoing delays in other areas of the project) so that the most beneficial training programme can be developed.

### **Output 3: Modelling and testing management options for effective and sustainable Management Plans to achieve better nature conservation and socio-economic outcomes**

The activities under Output 3 which were to be continued or commence in this reporting period (i.e. **Activities 3.1 – 3.5, and 3.8**) were contingent on progress having been made under either Output 1 or 2. However, given the delays in these, it has not yet been possible to make further progress on Output 3 activities.

### **Output 4: Stakeholder awareness and understanding of the benefits of sustainably managed NCAs to maximise stakeholder buy-in and engagement during development of the Management Plans**

In this reporting period the project team commenced planning for the first stakeholder workshop which was aimed to launch the project, explore effective engagement options with stakeholders, and undertake data gap exercises (**Activity 4.2**). The objectives, desired outcomes and agenda for the workshop were drafted, a date selected for the workshop (25 and 26 October 2022), and stakeholders to be invited identified (**Annex 1a**). An invitation letter was also drafted and was due to be issued in early October 2022 (**Annex 1b**). Identified stakeholders include representatives from SHG, businesses operating within the NCA, landowners, community members and other NGOs based on St Helena. A team from JNCC will travel to St Helena in October to jointly facilitate the workshops with SHG. The first of the gender assessments and analyses will be conducted upon conclusion of the workshop (**Activity 4.9**).

A comprehensive stakeholder communications plan is still under development (**Activity 4.1**); and as the stakeholder surveys to assess understanding of biodiversity and pressures/threats in the NCAs (**Activity 4.4**) is reliant upon preliminary activities under Output 1 to have been completed, these have not yet commenced.

### **Output 5: Project management, monitoring, and evaluation**

In this reporting period, the project partners have primarily been focussed on resolving the issues around recruitment of the PO (**Activity 5.3**) and the knock-on effects is having on the project as whole – see further details in Section 2.

Establishing the wider stakeholder group is ongoing (**Activity 5.2**) and the method for gender monitoring and evaluation still needs to be finalised (**Activity 5.4**). The DPLUS Annual Report for Y1 of the project was shared with the Project Management Group (PMG) and submitted in May 2022 (**Activity 5.6**). The report will be available on the DPLUS website: <https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DPLUS154/>.

**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.**

As noted in Section 1, DPLUS154 has continued to face some challenges in recruiting a PO, which has had knock-on effects to the remainder of the project, particularly in terms of completing some of the initial activities upon which subsequent steps are dependent. While the Project Partners have attempted to keep things moving, either by taking on some of the tasks the PO or Data Collectors would have done, spare capacity within the team as a whole has been limited. As such it has not been possible to undertake everything that was planned, and progress has been constrained in this reporting period.

The main hold-up in recruiting the PO has, unfortunately been beyond the control of the Project Partners. The SHG Project Leader has been working with the SHG Human Resources department throughout this reporting period, following the requisite steps to have the post approved, and hence enabling the recruitment process to get underway. However, despite these efforts, the post is still awaiting approval. Therefore, the Project Partners have now formulated an alternative plan, whereby it is proposed that the PO will be employed directly by Project Partner SFL. Since there is precedence for SFL employees to be based in St Helena and work out of SHG offices, it is hoped this will expedite recruitment of the PO. It is acknowledged though, that regardless of how the PO is recruited, there is still the risk that a suitable candidate will not be found. If this is the case, then alternative options for progressing the project will need to be considered.

It is also acknowledged, that irrespective of how the PO is recruited, this will take some time and the PO is unlikely to be in place until Y3Q1 at the earliest. Therefore, in the interim period, and so as to progress the project in some capacity, the Project Partners propose to either reassign some tasks to Project Partner SFL who may have some increased human capacity available towards the end of Y2Q3 and Q4 to dedicate to the project; or if not, to then sub-contract these tasks to a suitable JNCC Business Associate. Tasks would include some of those under Output 1, 3 and 5 which focus on data collation and identification of data gaps, compilation of the baseline assessment reports for each NCA, including identification of pressures and threats, and formalising stakeholder groups. If these tasks can be completed it will put the project in a strong position for the PO to pick up the various work streams when they come online.

The delays encountered to date and the proposed changes to how the PO will be employed will impact on both the existing timetable of activities and the budget. At the time of writing this report, the Project Partners were in the process of reviewing exactly how the timetable and budget would need to be amended. It is anticipated that a formal Change Request will be submitted by the end of November 2022 for consideration by DPLUS.

Despite these challenges, the Project Partners are confident they can be resolved, and once there is both some additional capacity onboard for the remainder of Y2 of the project, and the PO from Y3, momentum will increase substantially and the project will be able to stay on track according to the new plan which is being formulated.

**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
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Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/No – but plan to submit by end-Nov 2022
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Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/No	N/A
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Change request reference if known:	N/A
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**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?**

Responses to comments received in the AR1 Review are provided in **Annex 2**.

**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**