

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	DPLUS163
Project title	Preserving endemic threatened wildlife populations through effective protected area management
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Grand Cayman
Lead partner	National Trust of the Cayman Islands (NTCI)
Partner(s)	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Project leader	Annette Gunn
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	March 2023 – October 2023; HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://nationaltrust.org.ky/our-work/conservation/ Facebook/Instagram: @BluelguanaConservation @nationaltrustcayman

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:

A Field Officer was recruited in July but did not stay in post, leaving in September 2023. The Assistant Field Officer continued in post and is successfully working towards completion of grant activities alongside the Project Lead until a new staff member is appointed for the remaining duration of the grant to fulfil the Field Officer activities (Output 1.1). Training has been carried out by NTCI and the Cayman Islands Government Department of Environment, such as invasive species trapping training on Little Cayman, and plant and bird species identification training has increased necessary skills for in-Territory staff and volunteers. Bi-monthly meetings with RSPB have enabled discussions regarding plans for training and a schedule has been created to include skills such as ArcGIS and using drones for conservation (Output 1.2). Knowledge from the training course has enabled confidence in flora and fauna amongst the staff and volunteers, and results of this will be reflected in upcoming grant outputs.

Disease screening from Year 1 resulted in the publication (Calle *et al.* 2023) confirming the presence of Helicobacter in the invasive green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) (Output 1.3). Since this publication, we have moved focus to an invasive anole (*Anolis carolinensis*) which will be sampled in YR2 Q3 by veterinarians from Wildlife Conservation Society (Output 1.4, 1.5), as we have identified that this species is now breeding and populating protected areas (PAs) within Grand Cayman and could be putting Cayman's native species at risk.

PA patrols have been carried out in and around the PAs (Output 1.6). In September, an adult male blue iguana was found dead near the entrance to the Salina Reserve during a PA patrol. Both PAs have been observed using drone technology to identify any areas of illegal activity or encroachment.

Climate data is being recorded from purpose-built weather stations in the PAs (Output 1.8). There have been some difficulties with receiving the data which has resulted in necessary maintenance checks and rebooting of the weather station systems.

Boundary patrols have been delayed but DoE staff have been invited to assist with identifying acute and accurate coordinates for PA boundaries close to private land and blue iguana corridors using special technology (Output 1.6 and (Output 1.10). Boundary markers have been erected in areas that are accessible and have already been clearly identified. Trail clearing in Colliers Wilderness Reserve has not yet been completed due to staffing issues (Output 1.9).

Output 2:

Meetings amongst NTCI staff and with RSPB about monitoring plans have occurred ready for Year 3 and staff identified to support putting the plans together (Output 2.1, 2.2). An 80 m² camera grid has been created for Colliers Wilderness Reserve in advance for the blue iguana abundance camera trap survey in March 2024 (Output 2.3, 2.5). Further equipment has been ordered for radio-tracking iguanas (Output 2.6 and 2.7) and trials are planned for Q3 prior to released animals in Q4.

Output 3:

An IAV trapping schedule and methodology was identified and adjusted using recommendations from a MSc student who used cat-trapping data from our previous grant (Output 3.1). IAV trapping and removal has been occurring in two PAs as we are delayed with trail clearing in Colliers Wilderness Reserve. Over 60 green iguanas, 6 chickens and 2 feral cats have been removed from in and around PAs between July and October. Biodiversity surveys have occurred in numerous NTCI sites, including Colliers Wilderness Reserve and Salina Reserve (Output 3.3).

A public education campaign was launched on social media in October to reiterate the importance of PAs and discussing threats (Output 3.4). Public response and engagement is being analysed to inform behavioural change campaigns further in this grant.

Educational signage for PAs have been designed for 4 different NTCI sites and is awaiting printing (Output 3.6). The volunteer programme continues to expand, with many assisting with data entry (Output 3.5). A targeted training day has been arranged for prospective volunteers at the end of November to ensure growth of the initiative.

The E-guana citizen science app continues to climb in downloads and sightings reported (Output 3.7). The app is being promoted on social media, printed literature, in schools and at public NTCI events, but we aim to promote this further on local radio stations and community events in the upcoming months.

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.

This grant has had unexpected personnel changes in the past 6 months.

The previous Project Lead left post in May, and the current Project Lead was in post in July. The impact of this was mitigated well as the new Project Lead is familiar with the grant and has made up for lost time on various grant activities where possible to prevent falling further behind.

A Field Officer was hired and began in July, but was not successful in the post, departing the NTCI in September. Whilst the FO did not achieve many grant activities during this time, adverse weather also affected some specific fieldwork activities. July was the hottest month on record in the Cayman Islands, so fieldwork took longer to achieve at this time to ensure safer working conditions. Conversely, the storm season brought rain and flooding at points during late summer, further slowing fieldwork. Additionally, there was a delay in advertising for the Field Officer position and a change request will be submitted to reform this position to fit the activities better as the grant evolves. The Project Lead has supervised and supported the Assistant Field Officer in working towards the grant activities in the interim.

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:	

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?

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**