

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	DPLUS176
Project title	Turning the tide on plastic pollution in St Helena and Ascension
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Ascension and St Helena
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
Partner(s)	Ascension Island Government (AIG), St Helena National Trust (SHNT), St Helena Government (SHG), University of Exeter, Cape Town University, Nelson Mandela University, BLUE Marine Foundation.
Project leader	Rebecca Austin, ZSL (Shauna Young is currently on maternity leave for the remainder of the project)
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.zsl.org/ @ZSLMarine @OfficialZSL @ZSLconservation https://www.ascension.gov.ac/ @AscensionMPA @AIGConservation http://www.trust.org.sh/ @SHnationaltrust

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).

Activity 1.1 and Activity 1.2 - Completed during project Yr1, please see AR1 (Apr 2023) for more detail.

Activity 1.3 - Activities were performed across both islands throughout project Yr2, please see AR2 (Apr 2024) for more details.

On St Helena, the thematic coding of data collected through 1:1 interviews was appraised to validate the findings produced from the initial analysis. This process was initiated by Neil Thorp (SHNT Head of Marine Conservation); please see Activity 1.5 in AR2 (Apr 2024), and concluded under Tobias Capel (current SHNT Project Manager) in Q1 Yr3.

Activity 1.4 - The Ascension Island single-use plastic (SUP) and plastic pollution system map was completed during project Q4 Yr2; please see AR2 (Apr 2024). On St Helena, the system mapping data was evaluated, identifying seven interventions in Q1 Yr3. These interventions and the data used to inform their design were consolidated and presented in a document for the consultation process and validation of findings with local actors in Q2 Yr3.

Activity 1.5 - On St Helena, the consultations to validate the findings from the system mapping and identified interventions were delayed and rescheduled to occur in Q1 Yr3 due to staff changeover. The project team decided to perform consultations directly with key actors who were identified to play significant roles in the single-use plastic system on island. Subsequently, 14 meetings were held on the identified interventions and all but one of the identified actors were consulted, providing feedback on the findings of the system mapping, helping to validate the interventions identified and exploring the scope for further collaboration to co-design and implement a selection of the interventions.

Activity 1.6 – The outcomes of consultations in Activity 1.5 were evaluated, and a decision was made to proceed with the following interventions:

1. Run a pilot scheme to introduce non-plastic or sustainable alternatives for target SUP items with cooperative retailers on St Helena.
2. Work with partners at the St Helena Government (SHG) Environmental Risk Management (ERM) section to conduct an updated options assessment for recyclable materials.
3. Perform educational activities to promote public understanding of ethical waste disposal on St Helena and promote active participation at the household level.
4. Perform a bin infrastructure experiment in Rupert's Bay to promote accessibility to waste disposal and help identify the barriers influencing littering around the BBQ areas.

Activity 2.1 - The reviewed project Log Frame (June 2024) broadened the scope of activity 2.1 to include raising awareness of issues around SUPs and encouraging sustainable practices in the wider community; this led to intervention three. SHG ERM secured funding to distribute wheelie bins for household waste segregation, plastic, paper, cardboard, and cans. This new service will be implemented in the 25/26 financial year, providing the project with an opportunity to promote responsible plastic waste management through collaborating on the design of informative leaflets that will be distributed with the bins to promote compliance with the new service. In addition, ERM and SHNT intend to collaborate on delivering a "design competition" for school children across St Helena to produce graphics to be incorporated into the final design of the leaflets Q3 Yr3/Q3 Yr 4.

Activity 2.2 – Negative perceptions of drinking treated tap water identified during the system mapping were validated during the consultation process in Q2 Yr3. The project team determined that installing fountains would require a complementary social marketing campaign to encourage a systemic behavioural change in the population. Furthermore, water-based interventions could risk exacerbating negative perceptions by reinforcing ideas that treated tap water must be filtered to be palatable or safe to drink. Given the complexity of the perceptions regarding drinking water on St Helena, installing public drinking fountains was deemed unfeasible within this project's remaining capacity. We will be submitting a Darwin change request shortly to reflect this.

Activity 2.3 and 2.4 - We no longer plan to conduct any behaviour change surveys, but project staff are co-designing monitoring and evaluation studies for the chosen interventions as detailed below. This will be reflected in an upcoming Darwin change request.

Intervention 1- Three of the four largest retailers on St Helena have expressed their interest and capacity to participate in Intervention 1. Discussions raised that this intervention should include: (1) a report exploring the current alternatives on the market for SUP products that the retailers either sell or use and (2) an evaluation of the economic feasibility of switching to the alternative products. In addition, the report will capture alternatives already being successfully implemented by retailers to create a standardised approach across retailers for reducing the consumption of SUP.

As the choice of trialling alternatives sits with the retailers, it was concluded any trial period of products should take place after the finalising of the feasibility report to allow for an informed choice to be made. Due to time constraints, we will look to procure samples of alternatives identified in the report to hold a showcase workshop for the retailers to evaluate the products and decide whether to take any forward to trial beyond the project. As part of this intervention, the team will complete market research within the shops to gather customer input on their views of SUP's and evaluate their willingness to pay for SUP alternatives. We will evaluate the success of this intervention in two ways. Firstly, through the adoption of recommendations made by retailers with commitments made to pilot alternatives or evidenced justification of barriers preventing product switches. Secondly, through successful evaluation of a willingness to pay through community engagement.

Intervention 4 - Littering in Rupert's Bay has created a hotspot of plastic waste leakage, threatening the marine environment. Consultation with SHG ERM identified an opportunity to experiment with different bin infrastructure in the BBQ areas to help explore factors influencing the littering behaviour in this area,

with the aim of reducing the amount of waste littered. We are in the co-design phase of this intervention with SHG ERM. SHNT will perform fortnightly surveys in Rupert's Bay throughout the experiment. This will enable a direct comparison of the volume of waste littered during the experiment to the average volume of litter previously recorded in those areas, accounting for seasonal variation. Secondly, ERM has agreed that during the collection service of the bins, their staff will check compliance with the waste segregation bins deployed, taking a record of the number of segregated bins rejected due to unsegregated waste. After the experimental period, the data will be reviewed to make a recommendation to support or reject the new infrastructure design.

Activity 2.5 - Consultations with SHG ERM identified the need for an updated options assessment for recyclable materials that could provide waste management practitioners with information and mechanisms to establish new sustainable recycling models for waste materials, including plastic. Almost a decade has passed since the first assessment was made in 2015, which inspired numerous changes and advancements in waste management practices on St Helena. In addition, there have been context changes on St Helena, global systemic shifts such as the development of the UN Global Plastic Treaty, and technological innovations, including those trialled in DPL00024 for plastic waste in the British Indian Ocean Territory, that have significantly changed the landscape of plastic waste management. The progress made on the implementation of this intervention by the end of Q2 Yr3 includes the successful co-design on the scope of the appraisal with SHG ERM, the completion of an Invitation to Quote (ITQ) for seeking a contractor with the relevant technical expertise and the submission of an advert in the newspapers on St Helena for the ITQ on island.

Activity 2.6 - The monitoring tools for the chosen interventions (see activity 2.5) will be used to ensure an accurate appraisal of success can be made. This data, alongside information collated in the M&E framework, will be consolidated to make final recommendations for a plastic waste reduction strategy in St Helena by Q4 Yr3.

Activity 2.7 - The scope for developing local policy to reduce SUP was discussed during the consultation with the SHG Legislative Council. Members of the Tax and Revenue Working Group (T&RWG) highlighted several policies already in place to help target SUP, outlining that there are no ongoing policy developments regarding controlling the importation of SUPs. The T&RWG concluded there was insufficient evidence at this time to support the development of novel policy changes. However, through exploring SUP alternatives for retailers, see activity 2.3, an evaluation of the economic feasibility of the alternatives found will be made and shared with members of the T&RWG to evaluate whether a policy change can be justified to overcome any economic barriers identified. In conclusion, developing policy with the government in the lifespan of this project is no longer a project aim. However, there is potential for the data collected to lead to policy change in the future. This will be reflected in an upcoming Darwin change request.

Activity 3.1 – Shoreline monitoring has continued regularly on St Helena at the same sites using approaches outlined in AR1 (Apr 2023) and refined in AR2 (Apr 2024).

Activity 3.2 – Completed during project Yr1, please see HYR1 (Oct 2022) and AR1 (Apr 2023).

Activity 3.3 - A key development to report is the successful completion of a calendar year of surveys on St Helena, representing 22 fortnightly surveys performed between 02/05/23 to 10/05/2024. A total of 957 items (81.19% plastic) were collected from Rupert's Bay Beach, 7000 items (69.80% plastic) were collected from Rupert's Bay BBQ areas, and 25,081 items (97.24% plastic) were collected from Sandy Bay Beach during the 12 month period. In June 2024, a decision was made to reduce the frequency of shoreline surveys to once every four weeks due to the fact that a final output has been produced using shoreline data from St Helena. However, fortnightly surveys will be re-established for Rupert's Bay Beach and BBQ areas to support the delivery of the waste disposal infrastructure intervention between November 2024 and January 2025; please see 2.4.

Activity 3.4 – We are pleased to report that the first shoreline surveys conducted on Ascension Island, in the absence of on-island project staff capacity, were completed in September 2024, as outlined in the Plastic Pollution Monitoring Strategy established as an output of DPLUS176.

Activity 3.5 and activity 3.6

Brown boobies (*Sula laucogaster*) - As reported in AR2 (Apr 2024), the data collection for the brown booby study on Ascension Island concluded in Mar 2024. Initial results show that disturbance caused by removing the plastic for analysis had minimal impact on the breeding success of the birds, compared to standard productivity monitoring methods. Thus, this study was incorporated into a long-term monitoring

plan for this species. A first draft of the study was written up in Q2 Yr3 with the intention to have a submitted manuscript to a journal by Q4 Yr 3.

Ascension seabird stomachs - As reported in AR2 (Apr 2024), the processing of the seabird stomach samples has been held up by difficulties in obtaining the necessary import and APHA permits. Stomachs were collected and sent to project partners at CEFAS for analysis. Analysis has not yet taken place as there has been a holdup in biosecurity permitting. It is hoped that this research will be completed in Yr3 Q4.

Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) - As reported in AR2 (Apr 2024), the data collection for the green turtle study on Ascension Island concluded in Mar 2024. Currently, there are no plans to write up this short study in the remaining capacity of this project further than the reporting completed for project outputs. However, we are pleased to report that the standardised recording of debris found in the cover-ups of turtle nests or in the sand column and egg chamber has been adopted into the standard monitoring methodology on Ascension Island.

Fish study - As reported in AR2 (Apr 2024), the ethics approval for the sampling on both islands was obtained through the ZSL ethics committee. Subsequently, the sampling was successfully completed during Q1 and Q2 of Yr3: 35 St Helena butterfly fish (*Chaetodon sanctaehelenae*) and 35 Atlantic chub mackerel (*Scomber colias*) on St Helena and 30 Rock Hind Grouper (*Epinephelus adscensionis*), 30 Black Triggerfish (*Melichthys niger*) and 30 Natal rock oysters (*Saccostrea cucullata*) were sampled on Ascension Island. Currently, both partners are in the process of obtaining the necessary export permits and health permits for the exportation.

Activity 3.7- As outlined in activity 3.3, a full 12-month survey period has been completed on St Helena as of Q1 Yr3. This represents a project milestone that at least one year of collecting SUP bottles and lids has been completed on both islands. Analysis of this data is planned for Q3 and Q4 of Yr3.

Activity 3.8 – The team decided not to progress this activity, for reasons outlined in HYR2 (Oct 2023).

Activity 3.9 – The scope for this activity will be explored in Q3 and Q4 of Yr3, pending results from ongoing wildlife monitoring.

Activity 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 - On Wednesday, 18th September 2024 we held our third UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs) Plastic Pollution Network, running two sessions to accommodate different time zones. 118 invitations were sent to contacts across the UKOTs and CDs, resulting in 43 attendees representing seven UKOTs and CD's and seven other organisations. We received an update from DEFRA on the UK's input into the UN Plastic Pollution Treaty. As part of the lead-up to the final negotiation convention for the treaty in South Korea in November 2024. We plan to hold a final meeting within the project duration in early 2025. The Terms of Reference for the group and the network's future format will be agreed upon at this meeting.

General/Other updates:

In July new members of the ZSL project team, Rebecca Austin (Senior Project Manager) and Jessica Vagg (Project Manager) undertook an expedition to St Helena to work with SHNT to finalise interventions on island and support ongoing project delivery.

Rebecca and Jessica were joined by ZSL colleagues Surshti Patel (Senior Technical Specialist) and Lucy Archer (Social safeguarding specialist), who delivered ZSL's FAIRER (Fair, Accountable, Inclusive, Respectful, Ethical, Reflective) training in person to the 25 Trust staff on Island. Their focus was on integrating equitable conservation approaches within the organisation, drawing on ZSL's FAIRER Conservation programme. The training aimed to drive institutional changes at SHNT, which will allow staff to incorporate FAIRER principles and approaches within the ongoing Plastic Project and also in other areas of the Trust's extensive work.

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 team has experienced multiple staff changes over the last six months:

- Rebecca Austin was newly appointed as Zoological Society of London's (ZSL) Senior Marine Projects Manager and project lead whilst Shauna Young takes maternity leave.
- Jessica Vagg was appointed as Zoological Society of London's (ZSL) Marine Project Manager, replacing Jessica Walker
- Hannah Hughes was appointed as the Zoological Society of London's (ZSL) Project Officer.

- Tobias Capel, former Project Coordinator at the Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate (AIGCFD), was newly appointed as the Project Manager at the St Helena National Trust (SHNT), taking up the role in mid-May.

The absence of a project manager at SHNT for five months has caused slight delays in the delivery of on-island components of the project with some activities scheduled for Q1 YR3 occurring in Q2 Y3, see activity 1.4 and 1.5. However, with Tobias Capel taking up the position as project manager at SHNT mid-Q1 Yr3, as well as new project team members at ZSL being appointed at that time, the project has continued to make significant progress across project outputs.

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

A formal change request will be submitted soon after the submission of this report to reflect some amendments required to the text of the log frame, and request a short no-cost extension to the project as a result of the aforementioned delays incurred to project activities.

Discussed with NIRAS:

No

Formal Change Request submitted:

No

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

No

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

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 ☒ Estimated underspend: £

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?

n/a

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.

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.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes