

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	<i>This should be the project reference provided in your offer paperwork and not your application number DPLUS190</i>
Project title	Improving St Helena's grasslands to benefit people and wildlife
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Saint Helena
Lead partner	Saint Helena National Trust
Partner(s)	Royal society for the protection of birds (RSPB) and Saint Helena Government (SHG)
Project leader	<i>Helena Bennett</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1</i>
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.trust.org.sh/ https://www.facebook.com/SHnationaltrust

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 is mostly on schedule, with some minor setbacks:

- 1.1 Denis Leo was recruited as the Senior Project Officer in Q1
- 1.2 Pasture management techniques have not yet been finalized. This is due to initial disagreements with farmers about some of the proposed pasture management techniques and costing for one of the suggested techniques costed way over available budget. However, project team has managed to come to agreements with farmers about these techniques with farmers and project board in October.
- 1.3 trial management plan proposal has been produced by project team. Following above discussions, it is being updated for finalization.
- 1.4 Contract tender advertisement drafted ready for publication to commence intensive management techniques.

Output 2 is on schedule:

- 2.1 Nico Benjamin recruited as Field and Livelihoods Officer

2.2 Repeatable questionnaire has been produced and finalized, and team is in the process of carrying these out with syndicate members.

Output 3 is mostly on schedule, there was a small delay due to knock on from activity 1.2:

3.1 Gavin Ellick employed as the Field and Monitoring Officer

3.2 All but one vegetation survey has been completed through consultation with RSPB partner. The final vegetation survey was delayed due to a delay in agreeing on the final trial site. Data from this has been recorded and is being analysed with RSPB partner.

3.3 rabbit data collection forms have been created, and given to 3 individuals who are permitted shooters at Deadwood plain. These will be collected every 6 months.

3.4 Invertebrate protocol has been drafted and is in process of being finalised. A part is required for the bug-vac needed to carry out this survey and weather has not been favourable therefore there is an anticipated delay to works.

3.5 Nest monitoring has been ongoing since 5th of June. This year there have been a total of 56 nests. 19 of these have produced fledglings, 17 have been predated, and 20 are ongoing. The site with the highest number of nests found is Prosperous Bay, 32. Deadwood follows that with 11.

3.6 RSPB visit to Saint Helena is planned to take place later this year, arriving on the 28th November 2023 until 10^h December 2023 to train project staff on bird ringing, monitoring techniques and advise on trial techniques.

Output 4 is on schedule:

4.1 Project Manager recruitment was delayed until Q2 due to successful candidate, James Fantom was unable to start until September 2023 as applied from the UK.

4.6 No training opportunities have taken place yet, however, plans are in place to offer herbicide application training to stakeholders and partners in Q3 of this year.

4.7 Up until this point, there have been 14 public communication materials published. These are comprised of 1 newspaper article, 7 social media posts, 3 in-person pop-up information stands, and 1 information display in a prominent window front of the tourist office in the main town. These have been met with good feedback from the public.

4.8 A contract has been awarded to Swimming Head Productions to take regular film footage to produce an end of project film about the project. They have previous experience with filming St. Helena's Wildlife, having produced a film for a marine project on the Discovery voyage earlier this year. The first visit of Swimming Head is due to take place in January 2024. In the interim, the project team has been filming project activities using a National Trust GoPro.

4.10 The project team has delivered 10 wirebird tours to 90 people so far during the project, exceeding our target by a 200% increase from original target of 30 persons.

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.

One notable issue we encountered was that we had some difficulty getting farmers to agree to our proposed methods of intensive management; notably, intensive grazing practices. This held up some tasks such as procuring electric fencing equipment, writing management plans, and completing vegetation surveys. Thankfully, it appears that through further discussions we have come to an agreement on this, and that part of the project can now move forward. This is unlikely to have any major impact in the project timetable other than pushing activities 1.2, 1.3, and some of 1.4 back a little bit further into Q3.

Another unexpected development was that the Project Manager was only recruited towards the end of Q2 of the project. This is unlikely to have any major implications, with the project leaders covering the role until that point, however it will cause a slight underspend in Staff Costs.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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**