



**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: 31<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.**

<b>Project reference</b>	<i>DPLUS190</i>
<b>Project title</b>	Improving St. Helena's grasslands for the benefit of people and wildlife
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Saint Helena
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Saint Helena National Trust
<b>Partner(s)</b>	RSPB, SHG
<b>Project leader</b>	Helena Bennett
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<u><a href="#">St Helena National Trust – "The built, cultural and natural heritage of St Helena for all, for ever"</a></u>

**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.

1.4 Management at all high priority sites has either been completed or is ongoing. Sites that were managed by rotavating were a one-off, and are finished. Sites involving herbicide application were completed, and intensive grazing of one site is ongoing.

1.5 Vegetation and invertebrate surveys completed on 2 of the medium priority sites. The third, Woody Ridge, has been surveyed for invertebrates, but will get surveyed for vegetation once the management technique has been finalised.

2.7 After completing 2.3 and consulting with the project steering group and the agriculture sector of the Chamber of Commerce, 2 livelihood initiatives are being assessed for feasibility to assist with water storage on pasture lands and introducing bee keeping as another means of income.

3.3. We have given rabbit shooters new data collection forms, but haven't received data back yet.

3.7 Whilst we have difficulty identifying the flag numbers with binoculars, we have had some re-sightings of birds flagged in 2023. Flag numbers 1, 15, 21, 44, 18 and 31 have been seen in the territories where they were flagged. Chick number 76 flagged on the Golf Course was seen on Deadwood. We have had 3 nests with flagged birds but were unable to see the number on the flags. The most interesting find was a nest at South West Point, this nest was made by a bird ringed in 2009 at Broadbottom. The ring combination was Red/Blue Lime/Metal. Whilst some of the coloured rings was missing the serial number on the metal ring confirmed the colour combination. To help with identifying flag numbers a high-powered camera has been ordered, following a change request.

4.4 The Wirebird Species Action Plan workshop was conducted at "Anne's Place" on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of September. This event was well attended with 26 attendees on both days, including private and public sector people from various actor groups as identified in an internal actor analysis conducted earlier this year.

4.6 Ten individuals from farming syndicates have signed up undertake herbicide application training scheduled for December 2024. Another 9 members have signed up to undertake site visits to our high priority sites to learn and discuss pasture management techniques.

4.7 The past half year has seen the team produce 14 social media posts via Facebook with 3 radio shows highlighting the DPLUS190 project, 2 on Saint FM and 1 on SAMS radio. Two newspaper articles were also produced during this period.

4.8 The team continues to take video clips and still images whilst conducting day to day tasks. These will assist the film crew that is contracted to make the film, whom are returning in January this year.

4.10 No tourists have booked tours during the last six months, however one tour was given to Year 5 pupils from Harford Primary School. Although we have already reached our projects target for number of people taken on tours, we have a number of tours booked for October and November 2024.

Through an M&E workshop held with members of the steering group in July the project found that the indicators and assumptions made on the original project documents are still true and relevant. There is an additional assumption made for Activity 3.3 in the Logistical Framework document, which is that the invertebrate team at the Saint Helena National Trust (SHNT) have the time required to carry out the invertebrate surveys in the final year.

We are able to increase our reporting on the standard indicator "Area of degraded or converted ecosystems that are under active restoration" by 2 hectares.

**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.**

A few issues came about while trying to manage our priority sites at Man and Horse. First, we had an issue with our topper mower not starting, this was fixed with a new battery. Second, we realised that a few parts were missing from the delivery of our weedwiper, which were then ordered, which took about a month to arrive. While we were waiting, the farming syndicate in this area moved their sheep into the paddock we were going to apply herbicide to. To mitigate this, we planned to enclose the treated area with electric fence, but when we arrived the electric pump on our weedwiper stopped pumping as it should. After fixing that issue, we went back only to find that the residual herbicide that was in the weed wiper's tank had congealed and was blocking the filters, stopping the pump from working. After giving the system a good flush, the sheep had been removed from the paddock and we finally got to complete this trial. This didn't affect the timetable of project activities, although it may be that some of the surveying in that area in year 3 might be affected as there will be less time for the management to take effect.

There was an issue in another of our high priority sites where a sheep farmer put his flock into a paddock that was adjacent to our electric fence (as we were to begin intensive grazing within a few days). Somehow, a sheep became entangled in the electric fence and died. The farmer was understanding and well spirited provided he gets compensation (a small amount) and the trials will continue without this incident having any effect. This incident was added to the risk register, which itself was reviewed. Legal advice is being sought whether we need to have written agreements with other landowners and farmers.

In one of our medium priority sites, we had an initial meeting with the landowners, and it was decided to explore the idea of having free range pigs as means of managing the pasture. This was presented to the project board and the landowner (Solomon's, a large company). There were a few queries and concern about things such as planning permission, potential affect to the pigs, logistical operation and other things initiating a feasibility study on the project. This is ongoing. There is the possibility that this is simply not a feasible project, in which case it will be abandoned and there will be no chance of managing land through livestock in the second year (as the rest of the sites have already been agreed). This won't incur any serious changes to budget or timetable. If it is feasible, there might need to be a change request submitted to allocate funds towards the cost of setting up the trial.

As mentioned in section 1; the leg flags put on birds in year 1 of the project have been hard to identify using the binoculars available. We discussed this issue with the project steering group and the group expert from RSPB suggested that he often does this work with a camera. As a result, we have submitted a change request that was agreed with NIRAS on 11/09/2024. The change request moved funds to allow for the purchase of a camera, increased conference costs to accommodate the Wirebird Species Action Plan Workshop, and increased vehicle insurance costs as a result of a dramatic rise in our insurance.

### 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: <i>unknown</i>	

### 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?**

Not at this time

**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.

There were no queries made by BCF for addressing in this Half Year report. There were 4 queries to be addressed in the Annual report for 2024 to 2025.

## Checklist for submission

### For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

X

### For All Projects

Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	x
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	x