

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	DPLUS191
Project title	Enabling invasive plant eradications and long-term management in Tristan
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Tristan da Cunha Group
Lead partner	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Partner(s)	Conservation Department, Tristan Government <u>Key Contractors:</u> Indigena Biosecurity International, I-Rigging Solutions
Project leader	Andy Schofield
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	N/A

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.

Activities are only listed below if there has been an update in the last six months:

Output 1. emergent New Zealand Flax plants eradicated from areas of known presence on Inaccessible Island World Heritage Site

1.1.1 Experienced rope access team hired to travel to Inaccessible Island in Q3 of each year to carry out NZ Flax eradication and survey work

1.2.1 NZ Flax team are joined by a Tristanian with rope access experience during each field season

An experienced rope access team has been recruited and will be travelling to Inaccessible in the last week of November. The team will be joined by a Tristanian who has been on the last three flax expeditions to the island.

1.1.2 NZ Flax team Lead receives drone/GIS training in Q2 of Year 1 to guide eradication work and produce updated flax coverage maps each season

The flax lead and another member of the team completed a three-day Introduction to Unmanned Aircraft Systems in July 2023. These individuals will lead all drone work on Inaccessible; having two people trained will ensure the work still goes ahead if one of them is doing something else.

1.1.3 Inaccessible Island equipment/food airdrop takes place during the annual SA Agulhas II Gough Island relief voyage, in each project year

Unfortunately, an airdrop could not go ahead as planned this year. An airdrop was attempted, with the helicopter flying all the way from Tristan to Inaccessible, but due to a combination of supplies not being packed correctly and the pilot being unfamiliar with Inaccessible's terrain, it could not go ahead. These errors will be remedied for next year.

Output 2. All emergent Pōhutukawa trees eradicated from Tristan

2.1.1 Experienced invasive plant specialist hired to assess and map non-native plant species on Tristan, and to deliver plant control and safe herbicide usage training

An invasive plant specialist from Indigena Biosecurity International (IBI) travelled to Tristan in October 2023. During the visit, they assessed and mapped non-native species within and nearby to the settlement. A report will be submitted alongside the annual report reassessing some of the 137 species identified by Niek Gremmen & Ruerdje Lenna Halbertsma in their 2007/2008 field visit. Due to the timing of the visit, it was difficult to find and identify all 137 species, especially annual and pasture species as they weren't in a larger growth stage or flowering. The follow-up visit in year three will be timed for the austral summer to aid identification of the remaining species. 11 species, previously identified as priorities, were re-surveyed for their current extent where possible, and 13 new species were recorded.

Unfortunately, due to reasons stated in Section 2, only certain areas of the island could be visited and training with the Conservation Department team could not be arranged. We are currently working with IBI to produce training documents/presentations/videos, with a plan to deliver them during an RSPB visit in the new year.

2.1.3 Invasive plant specialist creates MS Access database and provides training to 8 Tristanians to use specialist App, so all plant eradication work is recorded

IBI have provided both a database and app to record all plant eradication but unfortunately due to reasons stated in Section 2 and limited internet, they were not able to be installed.

2.2.1 Invasive plant specialist uses drone/GIS software to create a revised map of Pōhutukawa coverage on Tristan

Pōhutukawa was surveyed and its current extent was mapped where possible. Due to reasons stated in Section 2, the full extent was unable to be determined during the visit but the spread up the steep slopes and vertical cliffs around the coast has indicated that full control without the use of helicopter or specialist drone is unlikely to be possible.

The specialist's report highlights areas which should be prioritised for control to limit the spread of the trees. Clearing these areas, as well as continued mapping of its distribution (especially outliers), is the priority for the Conservation Department team.

Output 3. All emergent self-sown Monterey Pine eradicated from Tristan

3.1.1 Tristan Conservation Department staff trained in safe Monterey Pine control – including chainsaw/herbicide usage

3.2.1 Invasive plant specialist provides drone and GIS mapping training to Tristan Conservation Department staff – revised coverage map created in partnership

Due to reasons stated in Section 2, and sea state not allowing a visit to Sandy Point where the pines are located, training and mapping of the species was unable to take place this year. However, the priority to control all seedlings to stop the invaded area increasing year-on-year remains the same.

Output 4. Baseline knowledge and community understanding of existing priority invasive plant species improved through surveys, mapping and F2F discussion

4.1.1 Invasive plant specialist reassesses invasive plant species from 2008 report, feeding back in person to Tristan Government and producing a written report

4.2.1 Invasive plant specialist produces up to date maps of species of concern from 2008 report

See **Output 2**, indicator **2.1.1**

4.3.1 Invasive plant specialist and community engagement lead host annual invasive plant update meeting for the community in Q3

Due to reasons stated in Section 2, it was not appropriate for this to take place. However, both invasive plant specialist and community engagement lead engaged various members of the community during their visit, answering questions about the project.

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.

There has been a relationship breakdown over the last couple of months between Tristan Conservation Department (TCD) and Indigena Biosecurity International (IBI). An invasive plant specialist from IBI visited Tristan in Sep/Oct and frustrations on both sides led to a breakdown of communication and certain planned activities not taking place; the situation escalated, and the specialist left almost two weeks earlier than planned on a different vessel.

As lead partner, we have been working separately with both TDC and IBI to find a resolution. Both parties have indicated that they are committed to the project and to continuing to work together, although a different staff member from IBI will be involved going forwards as the specialist concerned does not want to return to Tristan in year three. We are currently in negotiations with Indigena over their contract due to certain activities not being delivered. Together, we have come up with an alternative plan which has been agreed by all and we will be reaching out to Darwin to get advice on how best to proceed.

As previously mentioned, survey work by the invasive plant specialist showed the distribution of Pōhutukawa to be much greater than anticipated. The species is widespread on inaccessible cliffs and so full eradication as part of this project is unlikely to be possible. However, conversations with IBI and the re-assessment report indicated areas which should be prioritised for control which are likely to slow the spread. We will be submitting a change request in December where we will request a change to the wording of Output 2, with a focus on removing a significant proportion of the trees whilst also concentrating control efforts in the most effective areas to manage the spread of the species.

As previously mentioned, an airdrop on Inaccessible Island did not take place this year. Unfortunately, this means that 2-4 weeks will be lost from survey and clearance work this year as the team will now have to climb all equipment onto the plateau. Mistakes made this year will be resolved to ensure that the airdrop goes ahead next year. More equipment and non-perishable food will be packed than originally planned to maximise the amount of time the team can spend clearing flax plants in years two and three, and as contingency should an airdrop not be possible in the final year.

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	Follow up email to be sent with this report
Formal Change Request submitted:	No	Change request to be submitted in Dec '23
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: [REDACTED]

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: £

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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?

N/A

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**