



**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>	DPLUS192
<b>Project title</b>	<b>Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development</b>
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Montserrat
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and Montserrat National Trust
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Montserrat National Trust (MNT), Government of Montserrat Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Housing and Environment (MAHLE), UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH), Species Recovery Trust (SRT)
<b>Project leader</b>	Mrs Catherine Wensink
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.ukotcf.org.uk">www.ukotcf.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.montserratnationaltrust.ms">www.montserratnationaltrust.ms</a> Montserrat National Trust Facebook page

**1. 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).**

#### **1.1 Project Team Building and Launch**

Project Officers at UKOTCF, UKCEH, Meise Botanic Garden, SRT and MNT met regularly over the last 6 months to provide updates on activities relating to the project. Senior MNT officers, Sarita Francis and Chris Sealys led on all activities on Montserrat due to the departure of MNT staff. MNT staff changes are currently being addressed by senior MNT staff keeping UKOTCF informed.

A full team meeting with all partners took place at the end of August 2024. Each of the following sections were reported on and task deliverables reviewed as per the M&E.

#### **1.2 Biodiversity & Well-being Toolkit**

The team agreed to host project materials on Linktree (<https://linktr.ee/montserratbiodiversitytoolkit>); an online platform which allows document links to be provided in one place. This is useful as instead of providing a link in a document, which may change location, they can all be listed on one site. The page includes the following published information sources and will be supplemented over the course of the project:

- Garden plan (a publication on a model garden based on a real sustainable, highly-productive garden on Montserrat)
- Host Plant pollinator information sheet
- Microhabitat information sheet
- Management options guide
- A space for addition of other documents

iNaturalist guides have been produced to bring together information about groups of species to help others to identify and learn more about them. These are Native plants -

<https://www.inaturalist.org/guides/19563>, Trees, shrubs and subshrubs

<https://www.inaturalist.org/guides/19564>, Grasses, sedges and ferns

<https://www.inaturalist.org/guides/19565>. As comprehension of the native status of species develops through the project, these lists will be supplemented. The team is meeting with the botanical team at Bard College in October to review plant species status for the island.

A4 and Poster sized versions of the Montserrat Garden Plan have been printed delivered to MNT for dissemination. In addition, in order to provide opportunities for mindfulness as a way to use art for focusing on the moment and reliving stresses, a black & white version was created and printed. These will be used in activities for young persons in Monty's Messengers and Monty's Ambassador groups to promote well-being.

UKOTCF, UKCEH and SRT with MNT reviewed appropriate survey techniques for monitoring biodiversity at trial sites. Some preliminary site visits took place in June/July. Following discussions, a summary table was created with proposed sites, conservation/well-being interests, survey and evaluation methods etc. Site template documents have been created which set out a framework for implementing the management options at the trial sites.

In order to provide tools for biological monitoring and building on the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme application, adapted by UKCEH for Anguilla, the team is expanding this for use on Montserrat. This application records Flower to Insect times counts (or FIT counts) and gives surveyors an opportunity to standardise survey methods across the UKOTs. A list of plant species with id guides is under development for targeting species in Montserrat. The team will also utilise another monitoring application, the European Butterfly Monitoring System (eBMS), also through links with UKCEH. These applications expand the use of citizen science on Montserrat, which has been seen to be a growing interest, given the popularity of iNaturalist over a short time.

The Manx Wildlife Trust, volunteers on the project, visited MNT from July to August 2024 to provide practical training opportunities to MNT staff, DoE staff and wider public including gardeners and landscapers. The training offered included, tree pruning techniques and maintenance, plant care and chemical application (insecticide, fungicide etc), nutrients and garden technique (rooting flowering), best practice use and storage of gardening tools. Sixteen participants were awarded certificates following the training.

### **1.3 MNT Youth & Education Programme**

With the appointment of MNT's new Youth Coordinator, further development of Monty's Messengers and establishment of Monty's Ambassadors for teenagers started in July. See more in the SOSNoM17 newsletter (see link in 1.6)

The launch of Monty's Ambassadors took place at the end of July 2024. This included presentations on the aim and ambitions of the group as well as nomination of roles for the young persons. This was followed by a hike where they were encouraged to use iNaturalist as a Bioblitz along the way to Duck Pond. This included 25 persons from ages 15-18.

MNT is leading regular activities through the Youth Coordinator. One highlight was MNT and Meise Botanic Garden overseeing a group of enthusiastic children for hands-on learning about plants and herbaria at a Monty's Messenger session involving at >20 children in July 2024.

A Higher Education Event took place in July 2024 with presentations and stands from: Durrell Conservation Trust, Montserrat Volcano Observatory, UKCEH, Ministry of Agriculture, Housing, Lands and Environment (MAHLE) and the Governor's Office showcasing their Chevening Scholarships. Another is planned for November 2024 to coincide with the visit of the Environment Education Officer from the Manx Wildlife Trust, Isle of Man (see below).

The MNT are planning for a visit by the Environment Education Officer from the Manx Wildlife Trust, Isle of Man to: explore possible knowledge exchange work, YUNGA (part of the Toolkit) and to support the development of Education programmes on both islands.

#### **1.4 Biological Collections & Information**

In July, MNT with Meise Botanic Garden (during their visit) carried on the critical work of cataloguing and curating the herbarium's collections. This included specimens collected by Richard Howard in the 1970s, as well as specimens that had been held in storage for nearly two decades by Kew, until they could be returned to Montserrat. The herbarium has now been officially registered in the Index Herbariorum. Equipment was sourced and purchased for the herbarium including a specimen dryer (see SOS Nature 17 for full article). Also during the visit of UKOTCF, Meise Botanic Garden and UKCEH a workshop was held with MNT, DoE and other government departments, on island to discuss data collection, access and storage. This resulted in a follow up meeting in September between project partners and representatives of the Global Biodiversity Information System (GBIF.org) based in Denmark and the UK Nodes the National History Museum and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to discuss opportunities to ease searching for biological data held on GBIF. One outcome of the meeting was MNT and DoE discussing the potential of putting forward a formal request to develop a portal page on the GBIF platform for Montserrat.

Other training sessions held during the trip included herbarium mounting and maintenance, digitalisation using the PlutoF platform (see: <https://plutof.ut.ee>) and data storage (see SOS Nature newsletter 17 link below in 1.6).

MNT and Museum staff, working with UKOTCF, have been developing a Darwin Local for a garden at the Museum; one of the toolkit trial sites to be submitted October 2024.

An article was included in SOS Nature of Montserrat (issue 16 see link in 1.6) this outlined citizen science tools for biological recording, specifically iNaturalist. The number of records at time of writing is >6000 observations, including 1405 species by 119 recorders (see <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biodiversity-of-montserrat-d74f33fd-6145-4b47-aa12-ae6870d80113>)

In addition to the monitoring tools mentioned in 1.2, as part of the work to increase the knowledge of pollinators on island, UKCEH visited to conduct lepidoptera (butterfly and moth) surveys 22nd June to 6th July 2024. A full article is in SOS Nature of Montserrat 17 (see link in 1.6). UKCEH and SRT are working together to coordinate invertebrate collections with various experts on and off island to build up a more complete picture of the invertebrate fauna with their associated host plants for the publication materials.

#### **1.5 MNT Botanic Garden Development**

As mentioned, UKOTCF Council Member (and CEO of the Manx Wildlife Trust) Leigh Morris conducted some training in horticulture with MNT's Mr Chris Sealys. Equipment for this was obtained and delivered to Montserrat.

#### **1.6 Communications and Reporting**

As mentioned, SOS Nature of Montserrat issues 16 and 17 were drafted in May and August. They were published and circulated to > 200 persons on island in June and September and online available from: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/project-newsletter-1/> UKOTCF's

newsletter Forum News was drafted in August and September with some articles repeated from SOS Nature in order to extend readership (see: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/forum-newsvers2/>). It is sent via MailChimp to approx.400 persons across the UK, UKOTs and elsewhere.

The statutory free copy of the publication: "Thirty popular medicinal plants from Montserrat" was supplied to the British Library on publication. There are 5 other copyright libraries in the UK Legal Deposit system which requested copies; these are: National Library of Scotland, The Bodleian Library Oxford University, Cambridge University Library, National Library of Wales and The Library of Trinity College Dublin. Digital versions to generate income for MNT are being explored.

**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.**

None to note here.

**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 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.**

None expected.

**5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

None to report here.

**6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report**

An email was sent to NIRAS in advance of HYR2 addressing some issues raised by Reviewer after the first annual report (AR1).

The first concern was related to absence of mention in the AR of two activities expected by the end of Y1. These in fact were two minor errors in the logframe. An explanation of these errors was provided.

The second concern raised was the delay in delivering the annual Higher Education event (anticipated in Year 1). This was unable to go ahead due to staff shortages during the original planned period (March 2024). Two events will be organised in Y2. The first took place in July and the second will take place in November 2024, as part of the visit by the Manx Wildlife Trust.

A response has not yet been received from NIRAS on these points, but should a change request for amendments to the logframe be sought this will be submitted for approval.

Finally, there was concern over the project delivering the number of publications in its lifetime, which we address here. More than half of the anticipated materials are published or in a well-advanced draft and all will be delivered before project end. These are:

1. Thirty popular medicinal plants from Montserrat booklet (published)
2. Illustrated Garden Plan for Montserrat (published)
3. Host plant and pollinator sheet (in advanced draft)
4. Microhabitats for Montserrat Invertebrates (in advanced draft)
5. Management Options for Biodiversity and Well-being (published)
6. Grasses of Montserrat (in discussion)
7. Colouring book of Montserrat's Biodiversity (in discussion)
8. Gardening techniques booklet (in discussion)
9. Interpretation for the well-being garden accompanying leaflet (in discussion)
10. Final toolkit published with results from trial site as case-studies (in advanced drafts)

## Checklist for submission

<b>For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (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 <b>risk register</b> ?	
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	X
<b>For All Projects</b>	
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> .	X
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