



**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: 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	DPLUS196
Project title	Habitat Restoration of Great & Little Tobago National Parks (BVI)
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	British Virgin Islands (BVI)
Lead Organisation	RSPB
Partner(s)	National Parks Trust Virgin Islands (NPTVI), Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (Kew)
Project leader	Charlie Butt
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2 – Half-year report (Year 2)
Project website/blog/social media	NA

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.

At the halfway point of Year 2, the project has made significant progress towards completing the main outputs, working with the grain of anticipated issues that were beyond the project's control. The primary focus has been on delivering Outputs 2 and 3, with invasive species eradication trips taking place on the Tobago Islands in June and August. The project partners and consultant successfully met via Teams at the end of Y2Q2 to assess the first six months of Year 2 and ensure the project was on track to meeting its output goals. A visit by the project lead, Charlie Butt, took place 29 Sept – 6 October inclusive, including a site visit to Great and Little Tobago (by boat, but without landing due to sea conditions).

Output 1 Native plant baselines established, invasive plant surveys updated, and pre-eradication visual materials collected for a 'before/after' eradication communications package.

For Output 1, no planned activities were to take place in Year 2 Q1 or Q2, with the majority undertaken in Yr1 (please refer to the Yr1 reports).

Assumptions still hold, vegetation monitoring plots have been utilised and pre-eradication footage has been obtained, with further footage to be obtained locally.

Output 2 Great and Little Tobago National Parks become free from feral goats and the initial consequent impacts on native habitats are recorded.

Activity 2.2 - aims for six field visits by APHA by the project end, and three have been conducted to date. Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA), visited both Great and Little Tobago to conduct the feral goat eradication in Q1 and Q2. Both trips were scheduled for two weeks with the expectation of APHA visiting both Great & Little Tobago. Trips went ahead and resulted in a significant reduction in goat numbers. However, the second trip in Q2 was hindered by extreme weather which meant that APHA could only operate on the Tobago Islands for 5 / 12 days. The project baked in from the outset a higher number of APHA trips than likely would be needed to achieve project success, and there are no new concerns outside of the risk register and current assumptions that lead the project team to believe complete eradication of feral goats from both the Tobago Islands will not be possible by the project end (output 2.1).

In Q2, the project partner, Kew, visited BVI to carry out their work for **activity 2.3**. Over two weeks, Kew conducted vegetation monitoring on Great Tobago, surveying all the monitoring plots that were re-established in year 1 for the project. As discussed in the previous reports, Kew were not able to visit Little Tobago via helicopter, due to dry ground conditions. However, they are scheduled to visit Little Tobago in Yr2Q3.

Assumptions largely hold for Output 2. Average of 2 Island visits per year over 3 years still holds as mitigation. Assumption of helicopter use for Little Tobago needs to be revisited pending assessment of vegetation bounce-back ahead of Yr3 visits.

Output 3 Eradication of all emergent invasive plants achieved and long-term. capacity-built to implement biosecurity and seedbank strategies.

Activities 3.1 relates to Yr1 and **activities 3.2 and 3.6** to Yrs 1 & 3 respectively.

The NPTVI team have been taking every opportunity to visit Great Tobago and actively implement the plant eradication training they received from Indigena in Year 1. During the Y1Q2 visit to Great Tobago with Kew, it was confirmed that no invasive plants had reestablished in the areas where they had previously been removed. This highlights the success of the NPTVI's plant removal techniques developed under Indigena's supervision in effectively eliminating the targeted invasive species. *Arivela viscosa* still remains abundant across the island, however, as mentioned previously, our lead scientists at Kew are firmly of the view that native vegetation will shade out the *Arivela* once the grazing pressure is removed. This has placed even greater emphasis on the main project objective; to remove every goat from the Tobago Islands.

Indigena are planning to produce short training videos for NPTVI staff to maintain momentum with the invasive plant management initiated in Yr1 and Indigena have been working on developing the biosecurity plan (**activity 3.3, 3.4, 3.6**) for the Tobago Islands, and the first draft is currently being reviewed by project partners.

The Trust staff training assumption remains true and the scientific advice we have received is that with a successful goat eradication, native vegetation will replace and outcompete the invasive non-native plants.

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.

Extreme weather has consistently remained a challenge. APHA's August trip coincided with Hurricane Ernesto, preventing access to the island for 7 out of the 12 scheduled days designated the feral goat eradication. The impact of extreme weather has been identified as a key issue for the project from the outset. Extreme weather has, however, had a greater than anticipated impact in terms of the number of on-island days that APHA firearms specialists have had, versus what has been planned. A third in-year trip (planned for October) was postponed due to a further hurricane and associated sea swells. Overall, the issues faced align with the original project assumption, and this is why we have budgeted for at least two trips per year – twice the number of previous near-successful attempts.

As mitigation, during the RSPB visit, discussions were held with NPTVI and the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force (RVIPF), about the possibility of 2-3 RVIPF-only trips in winter / spring 2024/25, when sea conditions permit, as they can mobilise themselves at short notice. Progress will be reported on the outcome of this in the Y2 EoY report.

At this stage in the project, we are unable to confirm the exact impact on the budget and timetable of the project activities. A financial impact is anticipated, as RVIPF and NPTVI are open to upping visitations ahead of APHA's planned May 2025 visit, with possible RVIPF-only Nov and Jan trips. The relevant partners and stakeholders are working together to understand the impact and formulate a mitigation strategy. We expect a change request to be submitted to NIRAS before 31 December 2024 with a clear justification outline of a mitigation plan.

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: *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)?

We are currently working on the financials and will update on this in due course.

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?

None.

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.

N/A – to be answered in the annual report.

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.	N/A
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	N/A
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.	No – Will respond in the Annual report.
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website? No, however project remains sensitive.	
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.	