



**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	DPLUS204
Project title	Enhancing Resilience of the Akrotiri Salt lake ecosystem
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	SBAs of Akrotiri & Dhekelia (Cyprus)
Lead Organisation	Open University of Cyprus (OUC)
Partner(s)	DICE - Durrell Institute of Conservation & Ecology, University of Kent SBAA EN - Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas Administration Environment Department
Project leader	Ioannis Vogiatzakis
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	30 September 2024, HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	www.dplus-arise.eu

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.

The DPLUS204 project started June 1st 2024 while the appointment of the project manager was made on July 1st. Some activities that have taken place during this period include:

- **Project Kick-off Meeting:** Held on July 10th, 2024 during this meeting the project goals, roles, and timelines were discussed.
- **Stakeholder Presentation:** On July 10th, 2024 the DPLUS204 project was introduced to relevant stakeholders, providing a comprehensive overview of project objectives, planned activities, and anticipated outcomes
- **Partner and Stakeholder Meetings and Field Visits:** Five meetings with project partners and/or stakeholders were conducted at the project sites to facilitate activities planning and coordination.
- **Dissemination activities:** A press release was done by OUC. The project's website is up and running (www.dplus-arise.eu). Participation in the European Researchers' night in Nicosia on September 27th 2024 to raise awareness about the project. Networking with DARWIN project DPLUS141
- **Financial request:** The financial request for the project's necessary equipment has been completed.

In addition, the following progress has been made towards achieving the project outputs, as outlined below:

Output 1. Spatial prioritization of restoration areas within ASL: Data collection for spatial prioritization of restoration areas is now complete. Spatial prioritization procedure was applied to identify priority conservation/restoration areas and these prioritized areas were mapped. We have consulted with SBAA EN for the preliminary results and are in the process of finalizing the selection of the restoration areas.

Output 2. Establishment of a Plant Micro-reserves (PMRs) network across the ASL:

Following collaborative meetings with the Agricultural Research Institute and the Forestry Department, we have revised the list of proposed Red Data Book plant species, which will be included in the PMRs network. The revised list includes 18 species. The selection of plant species is based on criteria such as conservation status, distribution across the Akrotiri Peninsula, ease of establishment and environmental/anthropogenic pressures.

Output 3. Restoration of degraded terrestrial and aquatic habitats on ASL: Site visits have been conducted by the project team, guided by the preliminary results of the spatial prioritization procedure. Final site selections are underway, both for terrestrial and aquatic sites. Restoration efforts will target a total of 10 ha. Plant species selection for restoration is underway, with emphasis on plants suitable for each site. Sampling of terrestrial and aquatic plants and insects will start soon. Additionally, we are in communication with UCJR Spain, expert María Prieto Álvaro who is assisting in the development of the Biological Soil Crust restoration plan and will visit Akrotiri to collect soil material.

Output 4. Regulated access to conservation priority habitats: The project team has identified sites needing access management. An Access Management plan is in development to guide sustainable access within the ASL ecosystem.

Output 5. Implementation of sustainability appraisal: A project website (www.dplus-arise.eu) has been established to provide updates and resources for the project. A sustainability report is in preparation to assess and communicate the project's environmental impact and long-term viability. The assumptions outlined in the project proposal have been revised and remain valid as originally stated.

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.

Given the delay in the evaluation process, a change request was submitted to adjust the project start and end date along with corresponding funds from April 2024 to June 1st 2024 and from March 31st 2027 to May 1st 2027 respectively. Additionally, a staff change request was submitted to BCF by OUC concerning the withdrawal of one team member. The request reallocates this individual's responsibilities among three existing team members named in the project proposal, thus effectively covering the gap. Both requests have been approved. These changes will not impact the project deliverables or its budget. Regarding the budget, we are in

the process of revising it to reduce the likelihood of underspending. A change request will be submitted accordingly.

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: *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)?

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?

No.

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.

Not applicable.

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.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	
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.	
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?	
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	✓
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	✓