



**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 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	DPLPS001
Project title	Building skills & capacity to monitor microscopic marine life, Gibraltar
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Gibraltar
Lead Organisation	University of Gibraltar
Partner(s)	n/a
Project Leader	Dr Awantha Dissanayake
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1 – October 2025
Project website/blog/social media	Project news article: https://www.unigib.edu.gi/news/university-of-gibraltar-receives-darwin-plus-funding-for-marine-life-monitoring-and-coral-restoration-projects/

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 monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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 project started on 1st September 2025 as planned and the activities outlined in the agreed project implementation timetable are underway. The following progress has been made:

- Project partners and an external specialist were informed of the successful outcome of the application. A virtual meeting with the external specialist has been arranged.
- The scope of the project is being assessed to ensure that data collection and operating procedures are specific, relevant, replicable and sustainable.
- Field and laboratory procedures are being established and arrangements for a pilot study (scheduled for November 2025) have been made. This pilot study will involve fieldwork (plankton trawl) and laboratory analysis (microscope assessment and imaging). This will provide an invaluable opportunity to test equipment and its deployment to ensure that any items purchased will be fit for purpose.
- Available data have been collated and assessed. Much of this relates to past and ongoing monitoring undertaken by HM Government of Gibraltar's Department of the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Heritage (DESCCH) and student research projects that were undertaken as part of the University of Gibraltar's MSc Marine Science and Climate Change programme.
- Familiarisation with Biigle (a free web service for rapid annotation of images/videos, designed for marine environmental monitoring and capable of machine learning) and establishing a suitable framework for its use within this project.
- The text for a project website has been drafted. Images to support this text will be collected during the upcoming pilot project, after which the website can be published. Details will be provided in our first Annual Report.
- Monthly (and more frequent) meetings have been arranged and undertaken between SA (Beneficiary) and AD (Project Lead). Additional meetings with DF (Project Partner - UniGib) and SW (Project Partner - DESCCH), will continue as the project develops.
- The workplan is being expanded to include monitoring, evaluation, learning and project management milestones. These will be detailed in our first Annual Report. Importantly, these will include further consideration of skills enhancement opportunities for the Beneficiary.

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.

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/ No

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes/ No

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Yes/ 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*

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

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 2026)?

Yes ☐ No ☒ Estimated underspend: £

4c. If you expect an 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, and not later than 31st December. 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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Suspicion or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk

No.

6. Project risk management

6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.

n/a

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If yes, please provide further information, ensuring no sensitive data is included within responses.

Suspicion or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

n/a

7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.

We detailed our Whistleblowing, Code of Conduct, and Safeguarding/Protection from SEAH Policies. We described how policies are made available to stakeholders and the language used for the policies.



Additional comments made by the Darwin Plus Advisory Group, which were outlined in the letter of confirmation will be addressed in full in our first Annual Report, as requested.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	n/a
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	n/a
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Done
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	Done
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Ok