

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS111
<b>Project title</b>	Building resilient, participatory management of marine biodiversity in hurricane-prone BVI
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	British Virgin Islands
<b>Lead partner</b>	Marine Conservation Society (MCS)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Association of Reef Keepers (ARK); Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DOAF), Government of the Virgin Islands; Ministry of Natural Resources, Labour and Immigration (MNRLI), Government of the Virgin Islands; University of Exeter (UE)
<b>Project leader</b>	<i>Peter Richardson</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>HYR2</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.bviark.org/steel-project.html">https://www.bviark.org/steel-project.html</a>

**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).**

**Output 1. Assessment of the status, nature and extent of the traditional turtle fishery:**

The local project team members have been meeting remotely and now regularly meet twice monthly when possible, and the wider team has met once during this reporting period. Data from the socio-economic questionnaire surveys (Activity 1.6) has been transcribed by MCS's UKOT Officer Amdeep Sanghera with analysis and write-up scheduled for Y3Q3. This will provide vital insights into the nature of the turtle fishery, with this understanding supporting the implementation of the CVM film screenings/workshops and informing final project outputs. Two staff from DoAF have participated in the in-water tagging and data collection as a refresher course for monitoring and sampling landed turtles when the season reopens (Activity 1.8).

**Output 2. Development and management of national BVI Sea Turtle Database, including updated assessment of turtle populations and habitats at key index sites**

Ongoing flipper tagging of wild turtle populations led to 27 turtles being captured, including 9 recaptures, 18 first-time captures over a total of 11 survey days during the reporting period. Nesting surveys enabled 7 hawksbill nesting activities to be detected on Virgin Gorda and a hawksbill nest on Tortola (nest was not found but the emergence of hatchlings was detected). Regarding leatherback nesting, a total of 5 activities were detected for the season but only 2 nests hatched with a 50% success rate. These leatherback nesting counts for this season are relatively low. One reason may be due to lighting from coastal developments, and co-lead Dr Shannon Gore is planning to do a series of presentations across resorts regarding best practice on turtle-safe development and lighting practices. Habitat assessments were also completed for Anegada and Deadman's Bay. Anchor damage on seagrass beds continues at Deadman's Bay with photo documentation. This unforeseen impact has resulted in an updated methodology for transects, and drones will not be implemented as part of the protocol. Loss of sea urchins has also been observed to be negatively impacting algal growth.

**Output 3. Recommended amendments to Virgin Islands Fisheries Regulations and Endangered Animals and Plants Ordinance, and revised STRAP:**

Following the MCS fieldwork trip in Y2Q4 where participants across BVI were filmed discussing their views towards turtles and their management, the MCS Community Voice Coordinator (Sue Ranger, MCS) and team have processed all the film data (reformatted for editing and use in analysis software), extracted the audio, and transcribed all 29 interviews. The team have also developed the coding structure for the project in NVIVO (qualitative data analysis computer software) based on the interview guide and coding is now underway. The next steps include completing the coding stage, data analysis, producing a summary report, developing the film narrative, and editing the first draft of the film for partner comment. We will then finalise the film ready for the CVM screenings workshops (scheduled for Y3Q4).

In addition, we continue to compile a preliminary list of issues and recommendations that will be included in the revised STRAP.

#### Output 4. Disseminate project findings to national, regional and international audiences

A presentation was made to a local “Sea Turtle Aquatics” youth group about the STEEL project and general BVI sea turtle conservation efforts in early April. Additionally, a “Turtles 101” online course was set up for the summer sailing teen programmes. The purpose of the course was to explain the importance of tagging turtles and to provide information about identifying new key foraging sites that are not currently known. A project article promoting the STEEL project and conservation efforts in the Territory was also developed and accepted for the *Visit the British Virgin Islands* travel publication (produced for hotels and resorts in the BVI), with publication and dissemination planned for November ‘22. This publication will take the form of a coffee-table style book for visitors. Additionally, social media posts are made at least once a month about the turtle tagging efforts. And a [blog](#) regarding the CVM filming trip to the BVI in February 2022 was also hosted on the MCS website and shared across project partner channels.

#### 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.

Following the recommendations of the British Virgin Islands Commission of Inquiry report and subsequent creation of the National Unity Government of The Virgin Islands, project staff have been regularly communicating regarding developments. The institutional changes that have taken place regarding project partner DOAF, namely having been moved under the Premier's Office, have not affected their capacity to participate in the project.

#### 3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance N/A

Change request reference if known:

#### 4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

No  Estimated underspend: £

**4b. 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.**

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

None

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), 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.**

**Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with NIRAS-LTS International 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](mailto: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**