

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: 31st October 2022

Project reference	DPLUS129
Project title	Understanding Ramsar wetland dynamics for marine conservation and environmental resilience
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Turks & Caicos Islands
Lead partner	Environment Systems Ltd
Partner(s)	Turks and Caicos Government Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR); Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC); Marine Conservation Society (MCS); University of Exeter (UoE); Wavehill
Project leader	Katie Medcalf
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.envsys.co.uk/ramsar-wetlands/

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: Documentation, maps, and methods

A dense time-series of Sentinel-1 and Sentinel-2 is continuing to be acquired and processed for analysis. These time-series datasets are routinely being used to update the wetland dynamic models. Additional models analysing shallow-marine suspended sediment are being processed.

DECR ecologists have identified the key components of the Ramsar site's wetland habitats, and the key species that habit them. These have been evaluated for their climatic requirements, such as temperature ranges, rainfall, and their main climatic threats.

Draft Stakeholder Local Ecological Knowledge surveys related to the Ramsar site have been drafted. These aim to identify the knowledge local stakeholders have of the Ramsar site, such as their features, its management, and the threats they face. This will be reviewed by DECR to ensure the questions are suitable for the local population, and by Wavehill to ensure the questions are not leading.

Output 2: Monitoring

DECR have formulated a Field Data Sheet Template in order to transcribe appropriate fieldwork information. This includes information of habitat type, hydrology, substrate, condition indicators, plant form type, plant species, animal species, and management.

DECR staff created several foot trails within certain areas of the North Caicos Ramsar. These will create interconnecting trails to increase accessibility and reduce back-tracking for greater efficiency in the breadth of sampling.

GPS tracks and data sampling points are taken upon reaching blocks of consistent habitats, distinct from others and which may also be visible from satellite imagery.

The level of detail of fieldwork information and photography of the sampled sites continues to be expounded upon with more exposure to environments and their respective conditions.

Output 3: Capacity building

The wetland ecologist is now in post, after further delays related to internal issues on Turks and Caicos. He is now set-up in North Caicos, together with all of the IT equipment required.

Monthly, online GIS surgeries are taking place, led by ESL. This has taken the form of drop-in surgeries following self-taught GIS training modules. Sessions start with each delegate describing their current GIS work/activity, before moving on to individual problems which the group as a whole, led by ESL, aim to solve.

DECR have produced an introductory publicity video of the project, shown via DECR meeting 07 August; to 56 individuals, and at the Kew Library Summer Camp, 27 July to 6 individuals.

The Wetland Ecologist recruited for this project has continued his training in TCI habitats and wetland fieldwork, as well as GIS work, to continuously develop estimations of trail paths, sample sites, habitats, landmarks, and GPS coordinates of interest.

For M&E, a 'Theory of Change' Workshop was led by Wavehill for ESL and DECR. This sets out the things that need to happen to achieve the intended final outcome of a project. It is also a method of identifying the key assumptions, the barriers that need to be overcome, and the enablers for the project to work. The outcome of this workshop is due Y2Q3.

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.

As mentioned in the annual report, there were delays in the receipt of the grant award letter, and significant delays with the partner contracts. This meant limited resources were available for the first six months. There were also delays in the recruitment of the wetland officer with the post having to be advertised twice, and further delays on the relocation of the officer, and their IT equipment as a result of internal issues within Turks and Caicos [REDACTED]

There have been ongoing delays in acquiring key datasets, such as the benthic habitat data, bathymetry and lidar. This is as a result of the availability of the main project partner due to other departmental duties, [REDACTED] and a large backlog of work. This has also impacted the time taken for the project to understand the key components and envelopes of the wetlands, which underpins the majority of the models going forward.

The Wetland's Ecologist is not permitted to operate the Government truck. Therefore, far-distanced field work is limited to the convenience/ availability of local supervisor and environmental officer. Whom have back-logs and other meetings to attend, often taking them off-island.

Hurricane Fiona made landfall on North Caicos on 19-20 September 2022. This resulted in several setbacks:

- Trails have been encumbered or impassable by fallen trees and/or inundation.
- Inundated trails and sample sites became breeding sites for mosquitoes which made subsequent field work unendurable.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the month(s) following the hurricane and storms, the vegetative cover has expanded, especially thorny vines. <p>These additional delays are expected to affect the timetable of project activities, and a formal change request will be submitted.</p>	
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:	Yes/No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/No
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? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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?	
Document DPLUS129_CRF_02.docx outlines the change requests as a result of Section 2 of this half-year report.	

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.

Annual Report Review, Comments and queries for Project Leader

The Report does not discuss how its monitoring and evaluation approach has been employed over the first year, and could address this in the second half year report.

During the first year, regular (near-monthly) meetings, calls, and messages were initiated between the Lead Organisation and main project partner. Previous progress, current issues, and next steps were routinely discussed. A more formal evaluation, involving the M&E partners, Wavehill, was planned for when the Wetland Ecologist was in post. Due to the delays in the recruitment, this could only take place in Y2.

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. 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**