

## 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>	Application Ref DPR9S2\1006 DPLUS138
<b>Project title</b>	Filling Knowledge Gaps to Enable Rewilding of the Chagos Archipelago
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)
<b>Lead partner</b>	Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	British Indian Ocean Territory Administration (BIOTA) Biodiversity Restoration Specialists Limited (BRS Ltd)
<b>Project leader</b>	Dr Peter Carr
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	Project Year Two - 2022 April – September - Half Year Report CCT-FtKG-Y2HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<p><b>Website:</b> <a href="https://chagos-trust.org/news/expedition-to-chagos-archipelago-completes-chagos-conservation-trusts-rat-e">https://chagos-trust.org/news/expedition-to-chagos-archipelago-completes-chagos-conservation-trusts-rat-e</a></p> <p><b>LinkedIn:</b> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/posts/chagos-conservation-trust_chagos-rewilding-cct-activity-6958046495958827008-ofPd?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=member_desktop">https://www.linkedin.com/posts/chagos-conservation-trust_chagos-rewilding-cct-activity-6958046495958827008-ofPd?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=member_desktop</a> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/posts/chagos-conservation-trust_cct-chagosarchipelago-rewilding-activity-6953673708100050944-2mDu?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=member_desktop">https://www.linkedin.com/posts/chagos-conservation-trust_cct-chagosarchipelago-rewilding-activity-6953673708100050944-2mDu?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=member_desktop</a> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/posts/chagos-conservation-trust_worldoceanday2022-chagosarchipelago-rewilding-activity-6940231198568787968-OPc7?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=member_desktop">https://www.linkedin.com/posts/chagos-conservation-trust_worldoceanday2022-chagosarchipelago-rewilding-activity-6940231198568787968-OPc7?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=member_desktop</a> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6939963509103304706">https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6939963509103304706</a></p> <p><b>Facebook:</b> Posts on 27th July, 15th July, 8th June</p> <p><b>Instagram:</b> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/CghQdOiKf5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link">https://www.instagram.com/p/CghQdOiKf5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link</a> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/CgCBbmKrCWW/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link">https://www.instagram.com/p/CgCBbmKrCWW/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link</a> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/CeihEQHLU9S/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link">https://www.instagram.com/p/CeihEQHLU9S/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link</a></p> <p><b>Twitter:</b> <a href="https://twitter.com/ChagosTrust/status/1534467270537273349?s=20&amp;t=xjrfuFEf2fhY-LTUoMxSBQ">https://twitter.com/ChagosTrust/status/1534467270537273349?s=20&amp;t=xjrfuFEf2fhY-LTUoMxSBQ</a> <a href="https://twitter.com/ChagosTrust/status/1547891999411359745?s=20&amp;t=xjrfuFEf2fhY-LTUoMxSBQ">https://twitter.com/ChagosTrust/status/1547891999411359745?s=20&amp;t=xjrfuFEf2fhY-LTUoMxSBQ</a> <a href="https://twitter.com/ChagosTrust/status/1552293569125285890?s=20">https://twitter.com/ChagosTrust/status/1552293569125285890?s=20</a></p>

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**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).**

To achieve the Outcome, the implementation timetable had the following Activities noted against Outputs 1 and 2 for the period April and September (2022):

- 1.2. Expedition team to collect data from Ile Manoel....in July 2022.
- 1.4. Expedition team to collect data from Ile du Coin....in July 2022.
- 1.7. Baseline data collected on key species by BPMS team in July 2022....
- 1.9. All bi-annual reporting requirements completed by Programme Manager.
- 1.10. Monthly meetings attended by....
- 2.4. Recruit Chagossian research assistant by April 2022.
- 2.5. Expedition team collect data on bait-take off by crabs....in July 2022.
- 2.7. Expedition team collect data on bait application methods....in July 2022.
- 2.9. Chagossian community knowledge surveys completed by April 2022.
- 2.15. All bi-annual reporting requirements completed by Programme Manager.
- 2.16. Monthly meetings attended by....

In addition to the above Activities to be reported upon in this Half Yearly Report, the DPLUS 138 Annual Report (2021) – Report Review (dated June 2022) raised the following points:

**2. Comments and queries for Project Leader.** The three queries raised for the Project Leader to expand upon, as per the reviewer’s comments, are to be addressed in the next Annual Report.

**3. Stakeholders/Partners.** Paragraph four states “Chagossian Voices is mentioned as a key stakeholder in the proposal. .... Further detail on work with this stakeholder would be useful”. This query will be addressed under Activities 2.4. and 2.9. above.

**4. Summary of Activities.** The final paragraph of **4.1. Implementation of Activities** states “One omission in the Activity reporting is Activity 2.9. ‘Chagossian community knowledge surveys completed by April 2022.....’. Further details on these activities would be useful”. This query will be addressed under Activities 2.4. and 2.9. above.

The final two paragraphs of **4.2. Progress towards Outputs** states “....(Increase knowledge of conservation in the Chagos Archipelago to Chagossian community)....” and....”AR1 Section 6 notes the recruitment thus far [of a Chagossian research assistant] has not produced a suitable candidate....”. These queries will be addressed under Activities 2.4. and 2.9. above.

The second paragraph of **4.3. Progress towards Outcome** states “ Further detail of evidence for Outcomes 0.3.1. and 0.3.2 would be useful”. (Outcomes 0.3.1. and 0.3.2. are centred upon Chagossian community engagement). This query will be addressed under Activities 2.4. and 2.9. above.

**6. Project support to gender equality issues.** The final paragraph of this section states “It would be useful to have more detail on how this is being implemented....”. This question is addressed below.

**14. General assessment.** The second paragraph of the general assessment states “Further evidence on engagement with Chagossian Voices would be useful, as well as a more detailed review of project assumptions”. The Chagossian Voices query will be dealt with under Activities 2.4. and 2.9. above. A detailed review of Assumptions is conducted below.



(where extensive rodent research has been undertaken) provides extremely strong evidence that mice were never introduced to the Chagos Archipelago. This assumption is now being used in the CA REOP and was critical information to the planning of the eradication operation.

The methodology employed to determine the presence/absence of mice on Ile du Coin and Diamant is available through the Expedition Report to the BIOT Administration – this report now constitutes the “Invasive predator eradication technical strategy” mentioned in Activities 1.3., 1.6., 2.6. and 2.8.

**1.7. Baseline data collected on key species by BPMS team in July 2022 for inclusion into the Chagos Archipelago invasive and native species database and informing the revised Rat Eradication Feasibility Study and Environmental Impact Assessment.** This specific activity was always dependent upon the BPMS team being on expedition in July 2022 which for various reasons they were not. This failure to meet a specified Activity does not in any way detract from any Output or Outcome (and in hindsight should never have been included in the proposal). What the Activity should have stated is “Data collected on key species by BPMS researchers, *throughout the life of DPLUS 138*, will be used by CCT to update all rodent eradication / vegetation management planning documents, if required. **This is what is happening in reality.** For example, in January 2022 a BPMS expedition to the archipelago monitored breeding seabirds on a number of islands. CCT (Dr P Carr) was part of the expedition planning team that determined which islands were to be surveyed and how and, specific to this Activity, the results of the monitoring were passed back to CCT and have already been incorporated in to the Chagos Archipelago breeding seabird database (covering 1886 – present day). It is anticipated that all BPMS expeditions that collect terrestrial ecosystem data will contribute their information to CCT for use in the planning of the ‘rewilding’ of the Chagos Archipelago. The next terrestrial ecosystem-orientated expedition to the archipelago is planned for February 2023 (within the life of DPLUS 138) and CCT is involved with planning of this trip. CCT will receive all the expedition results – which will be included in all of the DPLUS 138 documents of interest.

**1.9. All bi-annual reporting requirements completed by Programme Manager.** With the submission of this Half Year Report by 31 October 2022, all mandatory reports will have been submitted.

**1.10. Monthly meetings attended by Expedition Team, Programme Manager, Project Leader and BIOTA Environmental Officer.** This Activity was reported upon in the 2021 Annual Report to the satisfaction of the Report reviewer regarding the lack of attendance of the BIOTA EO. Post the June 2022 expedition, there has not been a requirement for monthly meetings of the expedition team (specifically the yacht crew), though very regular meetings were held with the BRS personnel for the month after the trip to confirm results and report writing responsibilities - these have now reduced. With the employment of a CCT Director who is responsible for the delivery of the DPLUS 138 to Trustees, the dynamic of reporting has changed and at present and for the foreseeable future, at least weekly meetings are held between the Programme Manager/Project Leader (Dr Carr) and the Director. As CCT move towards the next phase of its’ Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs venture, the writing of the Chagos Archipelago Vegetation Management Plan, the Strategic Planning Group (SPG) mentioned by the 2021 Annual Report reviewer has been reinvigorated. Meetings of the SPG will recommence in November 2022 after the CCT Board meeting in October 2022. These meetings will discuss the progress of DPLUS 138 in amongst the wider rewilding aspirations.

**2.4. Recruit Chagossian research assistant by April 2022.**

This Activity was not achieved. This lack of achievement does not impact the overall project Outcome or Output 2 which it is directly linked to. It does indirectly impact Measurable Indicator 2.2 (Increase knowledge of threats....of five Chagossian community members.....) and, Means of Verification 2.2.1. and 2.2.2. which are both related to Chagossian community activities. The Important Assumption associated with this Activity recognised that the Chagossian research assistant (RA) had to be recruited in time.

An advertisement for the Chagossian RA was released in December 2022 by the former Programme Manager (previous Chagos Conservation Trust Director), following the recruitment of the DPLUS 138 Project Manager and, the contracting of the yacht for the expedition and the

rodent specialists from New Zealand. The Programme Manager then resigned and the Project Manager was elevated with Darwin Plus approval to be the Programme Manager. The advert for the RA was directed specifically to Chagossian communities based in the UK (for expedition insurance purposes) and was managed by a Chagossian Trustee on the Board of the Chagos Conservation Trust. Despite this targeted approach, only two applications were received for the post, one being disqualified for not residing in the UK, the second candidate did not have the skills requested in the advert.

There was a time constraint surrounding the recruitment of the RA - the permit to enter the Territory had to be submitted to the BIOT Administration no later than 01 March 2023. It transpired that by the time the two applications had been received and rejected, there was no time remaining to re-advertise the position, receive and assess applications and recruit a suitable candidate. The decision was taken to go ahead with the expedition with two participants, the rodent expert and an assistant supplied and employed by BRS Ltd (the contracted company).

In hindsight and following debriefs with the expedition participants, this decision proved favourable because conditions on the yacht traveling to and from the Maldives to the Chagos Archipelago were cramped and a further person would have extenuated these circumstances. More important, the lack of (second) RA, did not detract in any way from achieving the expedition aims.

The unfortunate aspect of the lack of recruitment of the Chagossian RA is that the involvement of the Chagossian community did not come to pass post-expedition. The RA was to lead on the Chagossian workshop and repeated knowledge surveys. These Activities (2.10.) do not fall in this reporting period and will be reported in the Annual Report for 2023.

### **2.9. Chagossian community knowledge surveys completed by April 2022.**

This Activity was not achieved. This lack of achievement does not impact the overall project Outcome or Output 2 which it is directly linked to. The reason this Activity was not achieved was twofold. First, the former Programme Manager and CCT Director was responsible in the DPLUS 138 work-frame for the driving forward of the Chagossian involvement and activities – having personally written them in to the DPLUS application. On her resignation and the advancement of the Project Manager to Programme Manager, there was a knowledge vacuum of how the Chagossian involvement (especially the community surveys) was to be activated and managed – the new incumbent was not a Trustee of CCT and did not have any association with organisations such as Chagossian Voices. In addition, at the same time as the surveys were to be running, there had been little response to the RA advert (2.4.). This indicated that even if the surveys had been distributed to the Chagossian community, the follow-on, repeat surveys were unlikely to happen. The decision was made by the new Programme Manager, with approval by the Chairperson of CCT, that the Chagossian survey aspect of the DPLUS 138 project was not to be pursued.

It should be stressed again that the lack of Chagossian involvement is unfortunate. However, it should also be stressed that the Outcome of DPLUS 138 is “Effective invasive predator management via improved knowledge, increased capacity and appropriate planning to enable the rewilding of the degraded seabird islands of the Chagos Archipelago”. This will be achieved by the completion and submission of the Chagos Archipelago Rat Eradication Operational Plan to the BIOT Administration and the publication of this planning document for other rewilding practitioners to refer to. The lack of Chagossian involvement has not detracted from this mission.

Finally, the reviewer of the DPLUS 138 Annual Report stated “Chagossian Voices is mentioned as a key stakeholder in the proposal. .... Further detail on work with this stakeholder would be useful”. The Chagossian Trustee of CCT who led the advertising of the Research Assistant (Activity 2.4. above) is a key and active member (Treasurer) of Chagossian Voices. The next phase of the CCT ‘Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs’ project (the rewilding of the Chagos Archipelago through rodent eradication and management of non-natural vegetation – abandoned coconut plantations) is to write a Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) for the archipelago, excluding Diego Garcia atoll. There is a privately funded expedition planned for February 2023 that will gather data and information for the VMP. Chagossian Voices in the

form of the CCT Trustee are part of this reconnaissance expedition and will advise the VMP on cultural and heritage issues associated with the proposed vegetation management.

**2.15. All bi-annual reporting requirements completed by Programme Manager.** See 1.9. above.

**2.16. Monthly meetings attended by Expedition Team, Programme Manager, Project Leader and BIOTA Environmental Officer.** See 1.10. above.

**6. Project support to gender equality issues.** The final paragraph of this section states “It would be useful to have more detail on how this is being implemented....”. This question is addressed below by the new Director of CCT.

“Although the Chagos Archipelago is an uninhabited Overseas Territory, and therefore 'working to reduce inequality between persons of different gender' is not necessarily applicable, the Chagos Conservation Trust has a CCT Diversity Policy which ensures equal opportunities in the recruitment of permanent staff, expedition research assistants, volunteers/interns and community involvement. As well as embedding equality and diversity within its strategic decision making, CCT currently has a female Director, Chair, and is funding a female Content Manager from the Chagossian community for a CCT-funded Chagossian community website. And, its Diversity Policy pledges gender inclusivity and to treat all people equally and with respect irrespective of their gender, as well as age, disability, reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation, and will be published on its revamped website due to go live next year (in 2023)”.

**14. General assessment.** The reviewer of the Annual Report (2021) wrote, “...., as well as a more detailed review of project assumptions.” Albeit it is felt the project crux has been passed with the successful execution of the June 2022 expedition, a detailed review of project assumptions follows. [REDACTED]

**Assumption 1 (Outcome):** Continued support from BIOTA for permits to access the outer islands of the archipelago. We believe this will hold true because of a long-standing partnership between CCT and BIOTA and that CCT is fulfilling two of BIOTAs environmental priorities.

This Assumption proved correct. BIOTA supported the permit application and granted access to all islands requested.

**Assumption 2 (Outcome):** Use of the Bertarelli Programme in Marine Science (BPMS) expedition vessel, as in-kind support, to conduct trials and confirm presence/absence of invasive predators. We believe this will hold true because CCT is working alongside the programme and rat eradication is vital to the success of their research.

This Assumption was incorrect. The BPMS expedition programme for 2022 changed and this meant there was no vessel available within the timeframe of the DPLUS 138 project that was operating in the area of the islands that this project needed to assess. This hurdle was overcome by CCT chartering its own vessel (yacht JOCARA) at its own expense to conduct the research necessary to complete the project. This solution, albeit expensive to CCT, provided an ideal outcome due to the independence it provided the DPLUS 138 researchers and the overall control CCT had of the expedition.

**Assumption 3 (Outcome):** Covid-19 regulations permit travel through transit countries and to BIOT so travel to the archipelago is possible. Covid-19 related costs have been incorporated into the budget.

This Assumption proved correct and, the Covid-19 costs included in the budget were not required due to the relaxing of quarantine regulations. See section 2.b. below regarding use of these funds.

**Assumption 4 (Outcome):** Reviewers available to review plans and reports. We believe this holds true due to regular established communication between project staff and independent experts.

This Assumption has not been tested yet as all reports and plans are not due until later in the project's life. However, it is believed the Assumption remains true.

**Assumption 5 (Outcome):** Chagossian community are receptive to engaging with the project. We believe this holds true due to the project design, building on previous successes of the Connect Chagos project led by ZSL and CCT's relationship within the community.

This Assumption was not fully tested (see Activities 2.4. and 2.9. above), though it must be assumed that the Chagossian community were not entirely receptive to engaging with the project due to the lack of response to the advert for the research assistant. Why there was such a lack of response remains a question unanswered.

**Assumption 6 (Output 1):** Access to the selected islands is granted by BIOTA. We believe this will hold true because of a long-standing partnership between CCT and BIOTA and that CCT is fulfilling two of BIOTAs environmental priorities.

This Assumption held true – see Assumption 1 above.

**Assumption 7 (Output 1):** Weather allows the expedition to go ahead and technical expert able to confirm presence/absence of mice/rats from visit. We believe this holds true as the expedition is planned for the driest period of the year and therefore risk of a weather-related issue is at a minimum.

This Assumption held true. Weather did not impact the research undertaken by the DPLUS 138 June 2022 expedition.

**Assumption 8 (Output 1):** Use of the Bertarelli Programme in Marine Science expedition vessel, as in-kind support, to conduct trials and confirm presence/absence of predators. We believe this will hold true because CCT is working alongside the programme and rat eradication is vital to the success of their research.

This Assumption was incorrect – see Assumption 2 above.

**Assumption 9 (Output 2):** Programme Manager recruited in time.

This Assumption held true, the Programme Manager was recruited in 2021 as planned.

**Assumption 10 (Output 2):** Technical expert contracted in time.

This Assumption held true, the technical expert (BRS Ltd) were contracted in 2021 as planned.

**Assumption 11 (Output 2):** Chagossian community member recruited in time.

This Assumption proved incorrect – see Activities 2.4. and 2.9. above.

**Assumption 12 (Output 2):** Weather allows expedition to go ahead and technical expert able to confirm rate of bait off-take. We believe this will hold true as the expedition is planned for the driest period of the year and therefore risk of weather-related issues is reduced.

This Assumption held true. Weather did not impact the research undertaken by the DPLUS 138 June 2022 expedition participants.

**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.**

Not a notable problem but as it resulted in CCT submitting a change request I will raise it here. The June 2022 expedition encountered unforeseen problems with Maldivian Customs procedures that resulted in CCT being charged in the region of GB£ 2,000 'import taxes' to cover the release of rodent bait from Customs that was required for the trials conducted on the trip. These costs were not realised when budgeting for the project (e.g. they were not published on the Maldives Customs website). However, the original budget forecast included money for COVID 19 quarantine procedures, primarily for the New Zealand participants but also, if required, the UK personnel. As COVID 19 quarantine has been abolished, this money was no longer needed. Therefore, CCT submitted a change request to have the money budgeted for quarantine released to cover the unforeseen Maldivian Customs expenses. This change request has been approved (see also 2c below). As the request has been approved by Darwin Plus, there is no impact upon the budget or the timetable of project activities.

**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

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: [BCF-Finance@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Finance@niras.com) email of 01 August 2022

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

Yes  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?**

There are no issues that CCT would wish to raise.

**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**