

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS154
<b>Project title</b>	Sustainable management planning for St Helena's National Conservation Areas
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	St Helena
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	St Helena Government (SHG), SAERI (Falklands) Ltd (SFL)
<b>Project leader</b>	Dr Megan Tierney
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 2024, HYR4
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	Website: <a href="https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/St-Helena-NCA-Management-Plans">https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/St-Helena-NCA-Management-Plans</a> Social Media handles: @JNCC_UK, @StHelenaGovt, @SAERI_FI @Darwin_Defra

**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).**

DPLUS154 is jointly led by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the St Helena Government (SHG), with SAERI (Falklands) Limited (SFL) as Project Partners. The primary objective of this project is to develop Management Plans for 13 of St Helena's (STH) 'nature' National Conservation Areas (NCAs). It was originally a 2.75-year project which commenced in December 2021, but has since been extended through Change Requests to a 3.5 year project, and is currently due to conclude at the end of June 2025. This half-yearly report therefore outlines progress made to date on activities that were scheduled for Financial Year 4 (Y4) of the project (April-September 2024). Please note that we have used the revised Logframe and Implementation Timetable which were approved through a formal Change Request in Y4 of the project (see CR24-061).

**Output 1: Up to 13 NCA Management Plans, which include governance arrangements, submitted to SHG for adoption and legal endorsement.**

**Activity 1.3:** The Scope of Work (SoW) for this activity, which aims to identify key environmental and socio-economic indicators to monitor change in key metrics of each of the 13 'nature' NCAs, has been drafted by JNCC. This SoW will be presented to the Project Management Group (PMG) and the Core Delivery Group (CDG) in October for feedback and approval. As such, this activity is on track for completion by end of Y4Q4.

**Activity 1.5:** A contract has been awarded to SHNT to oversee this piece of work and data digitisation is currently ongoing. This activity is on track for completion by end of Y4Q3.

**Activity 1.7:** The Scope of Work (SoW) for this activity, which aims to identify Sustainable Financing Mechanisms for the ongoing implementation of the NCA Management Plans, has been drafted by JNCC and presented to the PMG and CDG for initial feedback. Initially planned to be completed by Y4Q3, but taking onboard feedback from the CDG to ensure the scope aligns with other sustainable finance work ongoing in STH (specifically under the Blue Belt programme), the implementation of this activity is now likely to extend into Y4Q4. It is anticipated that the final SoW will be approved by the PMG and CDG in October and the contractor who will undertake this piece of work will be in place by December 2024.

**Activity 1.8:** Following the resignation of the on-island PO from the project in March 2024 (see Annual Report 3 [AR3] and CR24-061), updated drafts of the five Important Wirebird (IWA) NCA Management Plans have been undertaken by the Project Partners in this reporting period. A SoW was developed by SHG for an external contractor who will draft Management Plans for the remaining eight NCAs in future reporting periods (Y4Q3-Y5Q1) – see **Activity 5.3**. The recruitment process for this contractor is currently underway and due to be awarded early Y4Q3.

The SoW for a separate graphic design contractor (see **Activity 4.2**), to produce engaging graphics and layout of the NCA Management Plans to encourage greater public and stakeholder engagement with the final Management Plan products, has also been prepared and undergoing final approval by the PMG and CDG.

No work was scheduled in this reporting period against **Activities 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.6**. As reported in AR2 and AR3, the 13 NCA baseline reports are complete but will remain as 'living' documents, to be updated throughout the life of the project (**Activity 1.9**) as additional information is collated for the Management Plans following further public and stakeholder consultation activities planned in Y4Q3-Y5Q1 (**Activities 4.5, 4.6**). The final NCA baseline reports (**Activities 1.1, 1.2, 1.4**) will also inform work towards **Activity 1.10**, in a later reporting period.

**Output 2: Trained SHG/National Trust Officers able to manage, monitor, assess, report, intervene and undertake future reviews of Management Plans and determine the effectiveness of NCA sites (capacity, guidance and tools)**

There was no planned work against these activities in this reporting period. **Activity 2.1** was reported upon in Y1. **Activities 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5** will be reported on in a later reporting period. However, planning (i.e. date, content, format) by the Project Partners has commenced for the JNCC-led training in management effectiveness (**Activity 2.2**). Initial scoping of available courses that could help enhance skills of SHG staff (or other stakeholders) in NCA Management Plan implementation, monitoring or updating has also been undertaken for **Activity 2.3**.

**Output 3: NCA boundaries are reviewed to ensure they align with up-to-date ecological data, and methods for monitoring effectiveness and sustainability of the NCA Management Plans in order to achieve desired nature conservation and socio-economic outcomes are adopted.**

**Activity 3.1:** The prototype of the data portal developed by SFL in Y2 of the project was revisited and approved by the PMG. SFL and SHG will now commence populating the database with existing data and products throughout the remainder of the project. Note, the SFL staff member leading on this activity recently (September) left the organisation but the recruitment process for a new SFL Data Manager is underway. Subject to this role's recruitment, this activity is on track for completion Y4Q4.

**Activity 3.2:** SFL and SHG have initiated planning to identify the requirements and formalise the roles and responsibilities to ensure the ongoing data submission and database maintenance once this project is completed. This activity is on track for completion by Y4Q3.

**Activity 3.3:** The desk-based review of potential land-management tools, led by JNCC, has progressed well during this reporting phase and is now in its final stages. The list of tools with relevance to STH has been refined through further engagement with the CDG and a final output has been drafted for SHG and relevant stakeholders which details suggested tools to utilise in future management. This activity is on track for completion by Y4Q3.

**Activity 3.4 – 3.7:** A Boundary Revision Working Group (BRWG), consisting of members from the Project Partners and all relevant stakeholders, was established in Y3Q4. The BRWG trialled, before formally agreeing with CDG, the process by which the boundaries of the NCAs would be reviewed, thereby completing **Activity 3.4** in Y4Q1. NCA boundary reviews were then undertaken throughout Y4Q1-Q2 (**Activity 3.5 and 3.6**). By the end of October 2024, nine NCA site visits will have been conducted and seven NCA boundary maps will have been reviewed by the CDG, with recommendations made for revised boundaries where appropriate. Three NCA site visits and five NCA boundary reviews are planned for Y4Q3. (Note, it is not feasible or necessary to review the boundaries of The Islands NCA). Therefore **Activity 3.5 and 3.6** are on track for completion by end of Y4Q3. The outputs of these boundary reviews will be compiled for consideration by SHG in Y4Q4 (**Activity 3.7**).

**Output 4: Stakeholder awareness and understanding of the benefits of sustainably managed NCAs to maximise stakeholder buy-in and engagement during the development of the Management Plans.**

No activity was planned for this reporting period against **Activity 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6**.

**Activity 4.2:** Using the stakeholder engagement and communications plan developed previously (**Activity 4.1**), a number of stakeholder events have been delivered by the project – see details in AR1-3. These consultations primarily focused around the five IWA NCA draft Management Plan. Following the resignation of the PO in March 2024, a SoW has been developed by SHG for an external contractor who will manage stakeholder engagement processes for the remaining eight NCA Management Plans throughout the next reporting period (Y4Q3-Q4). The recruitment process for this contractor is currently underway and due to be awarded early Y4Q3. Simultaneously, two SoW for NCA interpretation signage (including graphic design and production) and promotional videography have also been developed by JNCC for advertisement and award to external contractors in Y4Q3. It is anticipated that the final SoWs will be approved by the PMG and CDG in October and the contractors who will undertake these pieces of work will be in place by December 2024. Subject to no delays in appointing contractors, these communications activities are progressing to schedule.

**Activity 4.7:** The gender balance at stakeholder workshops has been monitored and will continue to be considered to ensure equitable engagement. Note, however, no workshops were held within this reporting period.

**Output 5: Project management, monitoring, and evaluation**

**Activity 5.1:** This activity was completed in Y1, and the key Project Partners continue to meet regularly (once every two weeks).

**Activity 5.2:** A CDG was established in Y1. After a hiatus in Y2, meetings were reinstated in Y3 and have been continuing monthly throughout this reporting period.

**Activity 5.3:** The recruitment process for a PO was undertaken at the end of Y2Q4, with a successful candidate selected and in-post (on STH) by June 2023. However, as noted in AR3 and CR24-061 the on-island Project Officer (PO) resigned from the post and finished working on the project at the end of March 2024. At that stage, due to time restrictions, it was recognised that replacing the PO directly was unlikely to be the best course of action for the project, and it was agreed through a formal Change Request (CR24-061) that several activities would be contracted out locally (**Activity 5.5**). In the interim, and during this reporting period, work on the project has continued with local SHG staff continuing with stakeholder

engagement and data and information collection, supported by JNCC and SFL leads (see progress noted under other Activities above).

**Activity 5.4:** A SHNT Data Officer who is digitising existing invertebrate data is now in post and work is progressing to schedule (see **Activity 1.5**).

**Activity 5.5:** Recruitment of up to four on-island contractors to help progress activities in the absence of a PO is in progress. Due to needing the Change Request which detailed this change approved (i.e. CR24-061) before approaching contractors, recruitment has been delayed until October 2024. This activity will therefore need to be extended into Y4Q3.

**Activity 5.6:** A Monitoring and Evaluation plan, together with a project Risk Register and Issues Log has been developed for the project. These are updated and reviewed regularly by the Project Leader and PMG.

**Activity 5.7:** The development of the methodology for gender monitoring and evaluation has been developed and is being used.

**Activities 5.8:** This activity is ongoing throughout the life of the project. All activity and financial reports have been submitted to DPLUS as required.

**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.**

Since the resignation of the on-island PO from the project in March 2024, work has continued, with Project Partners progressing actions where possible. However, contracting some work out locally was considered to be the most appropriate option, therefore a Change Request (CR24-061) outlining several changes to the planned programme of work and associated budget had to be drafted, agreed by Project Partners and approved by DPLUS. During this period of uncertainty regarding the ongoing timetable, delivery of several project activities (such as drafting the remaining NCA Management Plans) was delayed. However, the CR was approved in September 2024 and delivery should now be able to continue within the most recent budget and timescales agreed.

More recently, there has been a number of other changes/additions to project staff across all three Project Partners. This has necessitated dedicating time to on-board new staff members to ensure they are across all relevant aspects of the project.

**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: CR24-061.

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)**

**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 2025)?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £ ████████

NB: we anticipate submitting a Financial Change Request before 31 Dec 2024, seeking approval to move the projected underspend into next FY.

**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?**

In the event that local contractors on STH can not be recruited to undertake the required tasks, the PMG have agreed that, due to time restrictions, the next best course of action will be to reallocate resource to one or other of the Project Partners to complete these tasks. If this course of action is required, a further Change Request will be submitted.

**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.

We received three comments from the Reviewer on our last Annual Report (AR3). We have been requested to respond to Comment 1 in our next Annual Report, and Comment 2 and 3 in this half-yearly report.

*Comment 2 - Please comment on the plans to explore and support alternative livelihoods in the island:*

- Baseline reports produced for each NCA include documentation of socioeconomic benefits and anthropogenic uses within each area – for example: livestock grazing, recreation and/or planned development. In turn, these will be recognised within NCA Management Plans through inclusion of Management Objectives, Actions, and Development Policies that are respectful of those NCA uses and ensure the proposed management is sensitive and supportive of sustainable local livelihoods. Consultation with local stakeholders and site users will also be achieved through focused workshops and/or the public consultation window.

*Comment 3 - Please clarify the nature of the underspend in the "Other" budget line in section 13 of the report. The amount specified in the "Comments" column does not correspond to the difference in expenditure:*

- The amount in the 'Comments' column should have been £687 instead of £700 and the overall Variance -24% instead of -12%. In 2022-23 we overclaimed by £687, and which it was then agreed (see email chain submitted with 2023-24 Actuals Claim) JNCC would 'pay-back' in the 2023-24 Actuals Claim. This value should have been included as a negative figure in the DPLUS Budget Sheet submitted with CR23-095, but it was a positive. Hence the budgeted figure in the 'Others' Line was inflated by £687, and it appears there was a 24% variance. If the figure had of been

included in the budget sheet correctly, actual spend against this line would have matched that budgeted.

- This explanation was provided with the 2023-24 Actuals Claim (post submission of AR3), and the Actuals Claim approved by DPLUS.

## Checklist for submission

<b>For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (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.	N/A
If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	N/A
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	✓
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	✓
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	N/A
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	✓
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	✓