

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 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 including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	<i>This should be the project reference provided in your offer paperwork and not your application number</i>
Project title	Preserving Endemic Threatened Wildlife Populations through Effective Protected Area Management
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Grand Cayman
Lead organisation	National Trust for the Cayman Islands (NTCI)
Partner(s)	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Project leader	<i>Frank Roulstone</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 2024 – HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	

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 M&E 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.

Progress over the past six months was initially hindered by prolonged staffing vacancies, which affected our ability to advance key project activities. However, with the recent recruitment of a new Blue Iguana Conservation Manager and Protected Areas Project Manager, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands (NTCI) are now equipped to reestablish momentum and address project objectives effectively. These team members bring essential skills in project administration, coordination, and field management, enabling us to refocus our efforts and build toward impactful results within the adjusted timeline.

Output 1: Enhanced in-Territory capability to restore, monitor, and manage protected areas.

Staff retention issues impacted project progress in the first half of 2024, with vacant roles (Manager, Field Officer, and Assistant Field Officer) delaying activities. However, in August and September, key positions were filled with a new Blue Iguana Conservation Manager and Protected Areas Project Manager (Activity 1.1). This Project Manager role, introduced after a March 2024 review with RSPB, replaces the Field Officer role and brings a focus on project management, administration, and coordination, directly supporting the Blue Iguana Conservation Manager, who oversees project strategy and financial management.

In their first month, the Blue Iguana Conservation Manager and Protected Areas Project Manager established bi-weekly check-ins with our Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) partners, and scheduled planning meetings with other partners and NTCI staff, defined a detailed project timeline and workplan, and reviewed budget allocations. Additionally, an October 2024 Change Request has been requested to accommodate a six-month project extension (to 30 September 2025) to allow time for essential fieldwork, data analysis, and reporting. This extension requires no additional funds but requests reallocating existing funds from the 2024/25 fiscal year to the 2025/26 fiscal year.

The Assistant Field Officer position currently remains unfilled, and the October 2024 Change Request details the request to reallocate this salary to seasonal field assistants who can support during peak fieldwork periods (Activity 1.1).

A training plan for project-related tasks has been developed, with courses scheduled to begin shortly, ensuring staff are fully prepared for the final project year (Activity 1.2). Veterinarians from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS – Bronx Zoo) conducted health checks for captive blue iguanas in preparation for their release. During this visit, NTCI staff met with veterinarians from WCS-Bronx Zoo and St. Matthew's University (SMU) to discuss planning for further disease sampling in green iguanas, anoles (endemic and introduced species) and the Cayman racer (Activities 1.4 & 1.5). Samples will be collected during the 2024/25 field season in an effort to determine Helicobacter transmission pathways. Drone surveys of the Colliers Wilderness Reserve were conducted in July, and Salina Reserve surveys are scheduled for the coming months (Activities 1.6 & 1.10).

Output 2: Protected area management plans for Salina and Colliers Wilderness Reserve better protect natural habitat and guide targeted conservation actions for focal species for the Grand Cayman blue iguana.

During this reporting period, the Protected Areas Project Manager met with NTCI's Environmental Policy & Development Officer to review the draft management plans for Salina and Colliers Wilderness Reserves (Activities 2.1 & 2.2). Discussions focused on finalizing community engagement processes for feedback and establishing the approval timeline, alongside identifying any relevant training for protected area management effectiveness evaluation.

In March 2024, wildlife cameras were deployed in the Colliers Wilderness Reserve to monitor blue iguana population abundance estimates (Activity 2.5). Initial analysis of images from 19 out of 23 sites has been completed, providing insights into the population abundance and identifying invasive predators. Further analysis will be undertaken in the coming months, to determine a population estimate. Planning is underway for similar camera trap work in Salina Reserve for 2024/25.

NTCI is currently preparing for GPS tagging of adult wild blue iguanas, with support from the Department of Environment (DoE) and consultation with specialized teams to assist with this work (Activities 2.6 & 2.7).

Output 3: Protected area management improved to support blue iguana and other priority wildlife conservation through effective community engagement and capacity building.

The Protected Areas Project Manager met and consulted with a vegetation expert regarding vegetation surveys completed at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park. They discussed plans to replicate similar surveys in the Salina Reserve and Colliers Wilderness Reserve as part of the biodiversity monitoring efforts (Activity 3.3).

In September, NTCI initiated outreach activities to raise awareness and improve protected area visibility. Collaborations with NTCI's Marketing Manager and Environment Programmes Manager led to an outreach plan detailing informational signage to be developed for the Blue Iguana Education Hub and Colliers Wilderness Reserve (Activities 3.6 & 3.7). The NTCI Educational Newsletter now features invitations for school presentations focused on blue iguana conservation and the importance of protected areas.

Given the Cayman Islands Government's effective green iguana culling program, the original focus on the E-guana App for green iguana monitoring has shifted (Activities 3.7 & 3.8). In October 2024, a Change Request was submitted to redirect focus towards enhancing the NTCI App. Updates are underway and will emphasize the ecological and cultural importance of protected areas, with the goal of engaging and educating the community more effectively on biodiversity conservation and management.

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.

The primary challenge over the past six months has been staff turnover, leading to delays in project milestones and financial planning. With the recent hiring of a Blue Iguana Conservation Manager and Protected Areas (PA) Project Manager, a revised work plan and budget have been developed, and a Change Request was submitted in October 2024. This Change Request seeks additional time to complete activities, proposing a reallocation of funds between fiscal years to accommodate the revised timeline without requiring extra funding.

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

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

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*

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

Actual spend:

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

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?

There is no underspend anticipated if the recent financial Change Request (submitted October 2024) is approved. The request includes a project extension to September 30, 2025, and reallocation of funds into the 2025/26 fiscal year.

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.

N/A – reviewers requested that feedback be addressed in Final Report

Checklist for submission

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