

## 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 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS181
<b>Project title</b>	East Caicos Wilderness Area: Protecting the Caribbean's largest uninhabited island in the British West Indies
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Turks and Caicos (TCI)
<b>Lead partner</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), Marine Conservation Society (MCS)
<b>Project leader</b>	Simon Busuttil
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 October 2023 HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/eastcaicoswildernessproject/">https://www.instagram.com/eastcaicoswildernessproject/</a>

**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).**

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.

**Overall** the project is progressing well despite some earlier slippages to the timetable (particularly the delay to recruitment). There is no impact on overall outputs (indicators) all of which are still relevant.

Supporting the **Outcome** level:

- The concept of East Caicos' future as nature-based is clearly lodged (if not fully and unambiguously supported yet) with the Country's leadership. This is based on conversations between partner representatives and members of Government including the Premier.
- Detailed discussions on how the Community Conservation Area (CCA) will be created and governed, and how the supporting Management Plan would be most effective, have taken place across the partnership.
- Discussions are taking place with TCI Government regarding possible supporting designations.
- There is some interest from significant business partners in joining and supporting an on-going partnership to support, and as legacy to, this project

## Outputs

The project partners met in June as part of the agreed M&E plan and RAG scored the activities in the Project Implementation Plan (PIP). Whilst a crude tool it is helpful in providing an overview and a focus for project management. Of the 50 project activities, 12% are complete and 54% are making satisfactory progress. 34% were identified as needing greater focus and effort to move forward. Some of the latter of course had not been planned to have started at the half-way stage of the project.

**Outputs 1 and 3** are well on their way to successful completion by the end of the project.

In the past six months, partner TCRF has completed its work program monitoring the East Caicos reef for Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (output 3.9) and RSPB has completed the desk-top ecological literature review (output 3.1). In the case of the latter, significant links have been made to other Darwin projects (specifically DPLUS114 and DPLUS129) and we hope to incorporate the relevant information those projects are collecting, into our project.

TCNT and RSPB have largely completed the collation of heritage and cultural information by engaging with community members with knowledge of East Caicos via two workshops and interviews on South, North and Middle Caicos (24 people engaged so far). The workshops adopted a series of participatory mapping exercises to help communities represent their local, traditional, and spatial knowledge of East Caicos. Satellite maps of the island were shown to local people who were encouraged to draw on the maps to identify places of importance for harvesting and gathering food and materials such as fish and plants, for generating income, for supporting the environment or providing habitats for wildlife, and for cultural value. Follow-up discussions and interviews explored the value of different places to local people, their meaning, and key threats and challenges. The audio information is currently being transcribed and will be synthesised into a report, any mapping data will be digitised for use in the management plan.

Marine Conservation Society has been planning in detail for their work program in October 2023 (outputs 1.3 to 1.7). This has involved a significant amount of preparatory and planning work over the reporting period. Their work programs will be largely completed by the end of the FY.

Progress against outputs 2 and 4 is slower at this half-way stage of the project. Issues are dealt with in the next section.

Good progress has been made in the reporting period towards outputs 2.6 and 2.7, 2.12 and 2.13. Birds Caribbean has been planning in detail for their work program in October 2023 (outputs 2.6 and 2.7). This has involved a significant amount of preparatory and planning work over the reporting period. Their work program will be completed by the end of the FY.

Given limited staffing resource within TCNT, a decision has been made to focus on the two most widely used social media channels (Instagram and Facebook) to deliver the increased awareness under output 4. A local company has created East Caicos Wilderness Project sites, which have been running for three months. The engagement is growing as shown by monthly reports.

**Output 5** is largely to be achieved in the final year of the project. The Community Engagement Officer employed (output 5.1) has been working with the South Caicos community throughout this period. Much of his work is “soft”, preparing the ground for other outputs to “land” more easily and successfully. Having this continuity from a South Caicos resident has made up considerably for the time lost through the delay to recruitment.

Those assumptions that have been tested hold true. Others have not been tested fully yet. These are:

- Participants able to agree on small business development opportunity priorities.

- Fisherfolk interested in and keen to diversify livelihoods, participate in training.
- Tour operators willing to accommodate and optimise East Caicos as part of their offering.
- WHSRN approve East Caicos nomination.
- Community interested and willing to establish a Community Conservation Area for East Caicos.
- Sufficient community participation, input and ownership of East Caicos management plan.
- An adequately gender- and age balanced governance system can be established.
- EFN funding mechanism for core capacity remains available in 2024-5.

**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.**

**Output 2** has some issues potentially constraining successful completion as originally envisaged. Output 2's measurable indicators require a significant amount of the rest of the project to be completed before they are achievable (in terms of "preparing the ground"). Delays in recruitment have a knock-on impact in squeezing the achievement of these into a shorter timeframe. In addition, the indicators require actions on the part of entities over whom we have no direct control (e.g. private businesses); these may need revising.

It may not be possible to achieve all indicators to the level proposed in the project timescale, even though the project will have made considerable progress towards the outcome.

**Output 4**

Reduced staff capacity within TCNT has limited engagement through media channels other than social media which is described above. Progress on outputs 4.1 and 4.3 have thus been limited to date. We hope to "catch-up" in the second half of the project.

These issues noted, we do not expect there to be any significant impact on outcome, outputs or overall budget.

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

Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance	No
Change request reference if known:	N/a

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

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 2024)?

No      Estimated underspend:   £

4c. 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.**

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?

A change request for the transfer of £ across the year end is being submitted (October 2023). The change is requested to minimise financial risk rather than due to a change in the work programme or cost allocation.

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, 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.**

**All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.**

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