

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	DPLUS181
Project title	East Caicos Wilderness Area: Protecting the Caribbean's largest uninhabited island.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Turks and Caicos (TCI)
Lead Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Partner(s)	Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), Marine Conservation Society (MCS), Turks and Caicos Reef Fund, Birds Caribbean
Project leader	Charlie Butt
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2024 HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.instagram.com/eastcaicoswildernessproject/

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.

Despite some recent staff losses for the TCNT the project is progressing well for the priority outputs and is still on track to achieve its overall outcome of: *“Participatory natural resource management, sustainable livelihoods, awareness and local capacity helps establish the future protection of the unique cultural, historic and natural heritage values of East Caicos”*.

A change request was submitted 25th October. This is to reflect the need to focus our resources and efforts on the outputs and indicators that will ensure the project outcome is achieved, considering the changes that have occurred in this reporting period, and feedback from the YR2 AR.

Notable progress to support this outcome for this reporting period include the following activities:

Output 1: Participatory resource management plan for East Caicos produced via facilitation incorporating local knowledge of priority cultural, historic and ecological heritage values:

Activities 1.1-1.9, 1.12-1.15 have already been achieved in previous reporting periods, while activities 1.10-1.11, 1.16-1.18 are in progress and are on track to be finalised during the next reporting period.

Output 2: Sustainable, long-term, locally owned and designed small business and nature-based tourism plans developed for East Caicos.

This output was to be led primarily locally by the Turks and Caicos National Trust. However, due to institutional instability, significant staff changes including the loss of the executive director in the summer of 2024 (a post that will remain vacant until January 2025), and a shifting economic and political landscape, significant changes have been proposed to output indicators. As such, in our change request of 25.10.24, we have requested that **activities 2.1 – 2.2, 2.5, 2.8, 2.10 & 2.11** be removed.

Activity 2.3 – will be achieved as the project website is up and running and East Caicos has been promoted on social media and this will be evidenced at the end of project report.

Activity 2.4 – has largely been achieved via the CVM workshops and the video hosted on the MCS points to significant local knowledge.

Activity 2.6, 2.7, 2.12 & 2.13 previously completed and reported on (see YR2 reports)

It is proposed that activity 2.9 be modified to focus on information package for tour guides, which aligns with the output and is achievable in the project timeframe.

Output 3. Ecological, cultural and historic baseline established, and presence of non-native species determined and used to inform conservation management and community empowerment.

Activity 3.3 Between the 9-11 August, 2024, field studies were undertaken at East Caicos to assess the extent and density of Critically Endangered Caroline’s pink along with other endemic and range restricted plants and waterfowl, A field report has been produced and the data has been incorporated into the ecological maps being produced.

Activity 3.7 MCS continue to monitor nest beaches into the final year of the project and are working on their 2024 report that will be incorporated into the ecological mapping process.

Output 4: Awareness and appreciation of the cultural, historic and ecological value of East Caicos is increased amongst communities, TCI citizens, the private sector and government stakeholders leading to strengthened support for protected status for E Caicos.

Activity 4.1 – emphasis has been placed on the film, which is in the final stages of production and on track, and on social media outreach rather than traditional media, with Facebook and Instagram posts being the focus of TCNT led media outreach. Indicator 4.1 is subject to the aforementioned 25.10.24 change request, to be considered by Darwin.

Activity 4.3 is proposed to be modified as per the change request, with a focus on the website production, which is now at the team sign-off phase and soon to be launched – good progress.

Activity 4.4. progress slowed following the resignation of the executive director in early July 2024. It is proposed that the TCNT project lead will pick up liaison with the relevant Minister from November 2024, until the new Executive Director is in post.

Activity 4.5 – East Caicos film is now in final stages of production and remains on track for completion before the project end.

Output 5: Strengthened capacity of national project partners, TCI citizens and local communities to effectively manage and protect East Caicos wilderness area

Activity 5.2 – an expert consultant based in Trinidad is in the process of being recruited to the project to help TCNT establish the Community Conservation Area, pending the outcome of the 25.10.24 change request.

With the resignation of the Community Engagement Officer, **Activity 5.3** will be led by TCNT, supported by a global and local consultant, pending the change request outcome.

Activity 5.4 – management plan informed by community-based participatory workshop outputs, is underway. RSPB is supporting TCNT to find a local lead from within the South Caicos Community to prepare and set out the vision for East Caicos. RSPB is supporting remotely and locally with a sabbatical planned for November 2024 to assist with preparation and execution of this activity. Community meetings are planned for early 2025, with the project providing an opportunity for local people to co-design funding bids (**Activity 5.5**).

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.

Unfortunately, following staff resignations – including the Executive Director - the TCNT staff compliment is much reduced, during this reporting period. RSPB has also experienced a temporary drop in capacity with the project manager role change and need to re-allocate resources. We continue to support and work closely with TCNT over this challenging period providing additional support as and when necessary. Working with, and with recommendations from TCNT, we have identified several local / regionally based short-term consultants who can help support the delivery of outstanding activities, so we do not anticipate any notable impact on 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: *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?

Project monitoring has now increased for the remaining project period with bi-monthly meetings held across Marine Conservation Society, Turks and Caicos National Trust and the RSPB. This is to ensure the TCNT has the support it requires from the partnership and all partners keep in focus their roles and responsibilities as regards the project deliverables. Further to this, the RSPB project lead is meeting weekly with the TCNT counterpart to maintain momentum and focus towards achieving the project outcome.

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.

- #1 Logframe has been revised as per 25.10.24 change request regarding indicators around business interest.
- #2 As per above, changes have been proposed in the change request to account for staffing issues at the Turks and Caicos National Trust
- #3 The observation is noted. The possibility of using a local drone pilot can be explored and further comments will be made in the EoY report in this regard.
- #4 Our understanding is that the project pre-dates the requirement to use Standard Indicators. However, if further revisions are required, then we will act accordingly to accommodate these in a subsequent change request.

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.	Yes.
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	N/A
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.	Yes
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 ?	Yes

Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	
--	--