



**BIODIVERSITY  
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



## **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 2025**

**Please note all projects that were active before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025 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>	<b>DPLUS181</b>
<b>Project title</b>	East Caicos Wilderness Areas: Protecting the Caribbean's largest uninhabited in the British West Indies
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Turks and Caicos
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), Marine Conservation Society (MCS)
<b>Project Leader</b>	<i>Louise Soanes</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>HYR4</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<i>N/A</i>

**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).**

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

As the project approaches completion, efforts over the past 6 months have focused on consolidating outcomes and establishing a foundation for future development and implementation. Since the recruitment of regional expert Ms. Zakiya Uzoma-Wadada, national expert Ms. Oshin Whyte, and the appointment of Ms. Jasmine Thomas, Executive Director for the Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), the initiative has gained significant momentum and is now being driven predominantly by local leadership.

The data collected throughout the project has informed the development of a Vision document for East Caicos, prepared by TCIslander Ms. Oshin Whyte, which reflects local perspectives on the island's cultural, historical, and ecological heritage values. In August 2025, Ms. Uzoma-Wadada conducted her second mission to the Turks and Caicos Islands to facilitate a series of consultations with the TCNT Board and local stakeholders these workshops and discussions

focused on defining a strategic pathway for implementing the shared vision for East Caicos. The Vision document for East Caicos was also informed by an analysis of stakeholder feedback regarding the Community Voice Method recommendations that were presented to communities in March 2025.

The Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands has also been actively engaged in these discussions. Following positive dialogue, the Turks and Caicos National Trust have been invited to submit a Cabinet Paper for Ministerial review this marks an important step toward formalising and the Vision for East Caicos.

**Output 2: Sustainable, long-term, locally owned and designed small business and nature-based tourism plans developed for East Caicos.** Building on the eco-tourism and nature-based enterprise training conducted in previous project phases, the Turks and Caicos National Trust has begun discussions with Salterra Resort and Spa, which has expressed interest in supporting future initiatives in East Caicos. This emerging partnership represents a positive outcome of the project's efforts, demonstrating that local tourism stakeholders are increasingly recognising the value of sustainable use and biodiversity as well as eco-tourism approaches. The engagement of private sector actors such as Salterra indicates growing local ownership and commitment to the development of sustainable, nature-based tourism opportunities for East Caicos.

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

The majority of the ecological, cultural, and historic baseline data were collected during the first two years of the project. Recently, additional floral data collected by the Royal Botanic Gardens, and the designation of East Caicos as one of TCI's Tropical Important Plants Areas (TIPAs) by Kew and local partners (Under DPLUS114) has further enhanced this knowledge base. To support knowledge sharing and community engagement, an ArcGIS StoryMap is currently in development to visually present and integrate the ecological, cultural, and heritage data collected through the project.

**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 East Caicos.** Led locally by Dr. Della Higgs of the Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT), this project continues to raise awareness of East Caicos. Over the past six months, outreach efforts have included radio programmes and public film screenings of the *East Caicos* documentary, that was produced through this project. during the August 2025 Emancipation Day celebrations and at the annual TCI Film Festival. The documentary was also featured at an educational event on North Caicos and presented to the Musgrave family during their Emancipation Day/family reunion celebrations, underscoring the deep community interest in East Caicos and its importance to local heritage and family lineage. Aspects of the East Caicos Project were also presented by MCS's Amdeep Sanghera at the recent Inter-Island Environment Meeting held in Isle of Man, with the conference also being live-streamed.

**Output 5: Strengthened capacity of national project partners, TCI citizens and local communities to effectively manage and protect East Caicos wilderness area.** Two workshops hosted by regional consultant Ms Zakiya Uzoma-Wadada continued to build capacity in terms of strategic paction planning, SWOT analysis and project delivery.

**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.**

From the outset, this project was highly ambitious, aiming to achieve complex and transformative goals for East Caicos within a relatively short three-year period. As expected, several challenges emerged that required flexibility and adaptation to local realities. One of the main difficulties stemmed from limited staff capacity within the local partner organisation, which led to some initial delays in project implementation. In addition, uncertainty around the official mandate of the Turks and Caicos National Trust in relation to East Caicos, and the need to determine the most appropriate governance model for both National Trust and community involvement, has slowed progress on establishing a Community Council.

Another significant challenge related to land ownership, which was not fully considered in the original project design. Identifying and engaging the correct landowners proved more complex than anticipated, highlighting the need for stronger stakeholder mapping and early engagement strategies in future initiatives.

Despite these obstacles, the project has made substantial progress toward building a solid foundation for long-term impact. Importantly, the project team prioritised meaningful community participation over speed of delivery. While some outputs could have been expedited to meet reporting milestones, doing so would have compromised the project's central principle of inclusive and locally driven development and implementation of the Vision for East Caicos. Ensuring that the proper mandates, legislation, strategic and governance frameworks are in place before establishing the Community Council remains essential to delivering the long-term, Vision for East Caicos.

A major turning point in this project came with the recruitment of regional expert Ms. Zakiya Uzoma-Wadada, national expert Ms. Oshin Whyte, and after a long gap without a Director the TCNT appointed Ms Jasmine Thomas as their new Executive Director. Their leadership and expertise along with existing TCNT staff, particularly Dr Della Higgs have strengthened local ownership and revitalised project momentum. As a result, the initiative is now predominantly locally led.

Overall, the key lessons learned include the importance of early capacity assessments, clear definition of institutional mandates to achieve project outputs, and allowing sufficient time for community processes to take root. These lessons will be invaluable for guiding future conservation and community-based initiatives in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

### 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:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	N/A
Change Request reference if known: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	

### 4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

Actual spend: XXXXXXXXXX

### 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 2026)?

☐ No ☐ Estimated underspend: £

**4c. If you expect an 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, and not later than 31<sup>st</sup> December. 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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to [fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk](mailto:fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk)

None to report

**6. Project risk management**

**6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.**

N/A

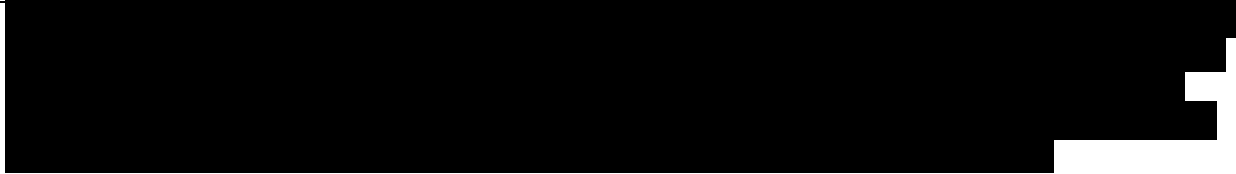
**7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.**

Following review of our 3<sup>rd</sup> year report, we were asked to address the following comments in our next half year report:

- (1) A separate risk for SEAH and appropriate mitigations needs to be added to the risk register which should be submitted with your next half year report
- (2) The project should identify actions that can be taken throughout the project lifecycle to address the risk of SEAH

In response to these comments, we want to assure Darwin Plus that all project partners take the issue of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) extremely seriously. While this risk was not explicitly identified in the original risk assessment, safeguarding considerations have been embedded throughout the project's implementation.

Both the RSPB and the Marine Conservation Society operate under strict safeguarding policies and procedures. Project leads and staff from these organisations who have engaged directly with communities in the Turks and Caicos Islands have completed safeguarding training.



The Turks and Caicos National Trust, as the local partner, also operates under the safeguarding protocols and policies established by the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands, ensuring alignment with national standards.

In light of this feedback, we have updated the project's Risk Assessment to explicitly reference SEAH risks and to document the mitigation and reporting measures that have been implemented across all partner organisations during the course of this project.

## Checklist for submission

Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com">BCF-Reports@niras.com</a>	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	