



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

Half Year Report

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	DPLUS192
Project title	Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Montserrat
Lead Organisation	UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and the Montserrat National Trust
Partner(s)	Montserrat National Trust (MNT), Government of Montserrat Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Housing and Environment, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Meise Botanic Gardens and the Species Recovery Trust
Project Leader	Mrs Catherine Wensink
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	Y3HR1
Project website/blog/social media	www.ukotcf.org.uk www.montserratnationaltrust.ms Montserrat National Trust Facebook page

1. Outline of progress over the last 6 months (April – September); Note headings used here reflect the broad aims of the project in a format that is appropriate for the half-year report.

1.1 Project Team Coordination

UKOTCF, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and the team's volunteer entomologist visited Montserrat in June 2025, to continue work with the Montserrat National Trust (MNT), particularly in training requested by the Department of Environment on identification techniques on invertebrates for their junior staff members.

The visiting members of the team met with the local project partners, Montserrat National Trust (MNT) and Montserrat Department of Environment (DoE) to finalise plans for the visit. The majority of the trip was focussed on knowledge-sharing across the teams. Alan gave several talks to share with colleagues the uses of open data for conservation and red-listing. These talks brought together several topics raised during the last 2.5 years, around data, data-storage and how data can be used to help conservation e.g. Red-Listing with some training sessions being discussed with the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. The audience of these talks included interns from the DoE, DoE staff, MNT personnel and the Montserrat GIS team. Alan gave a talk also on his work with RSPB and SHRI, SHNT and others for the Cloud Forest on St Helena, funded by Darwin and FCDO. Several discussions, including with the Governor and the Director of the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, over the course of the trip took place around

the similarities between St Helena and Montserrat and ways to look for synergies between the island organisations and possible future cross-UKOT collaboration given both islands resilience on Cloud Forests for water provision.

Project partners from MNT, UKOTCF, Meise Botanic Gardens, Species Recovery Trust and other individual team members met for a Full Team meeting in September to discuss all aspects of the project, to review the last period and plan for the next 6 months of the project.

1.2 Biodiversity & Well-being Toolkit

A fact-sheet on grasses (output 1) has been created bringing together botanical knowledge, traditional uses, and detailed illustrations by a botanical artist and design by the Field Studies Council to build appreciation for these important species. It includes a QR code to the iNaturalist galleries created during the project, which includes over 70 species of grasses and sedges; adding to the knowledge base in the toolkit. It was designed to be a practical field-guide for anyone interested in Montserrat's natural heritage – from school-groups and farmers to tourists. This was presented at the UKOTCF conference in the poster session.

Biological Monitoring (output 2): In collaboration with UKCEH, a Montserrat-adapted Flower-Insect Timed (FIT) Count app has been developed to support short surveys of pollinating insect abundance. The survey uses common local plants—native, invasive, and medicinal—and has been trialled with 35 surveys. It provides a simple tool for citizen scientists to monitor pollinators and engage with nature. A paper version is available for non-smartphone users, and details were shared via an MNT Facebook post.

Opportunities to highlight the toolkit (output 3), included in April, during World Earth Day (22nd), the MNT team joined hands with the staff of Glendon Hospital to make a meaningful impact on the local environment and community well-being. Together they planted: 30 medicinal 'tea-bush' plants – including Aloe, Catmint, Basil, Lemongrass, Peppermint, Rosemary and Ram Goat Bush – adjacent to the hospital's kitchen, promoting natural remedies and preserving traditional knowledge. 60 assorted ornamental plants, such as Yellow Allamanda, Blue Daze, Plumbago, and Marigold were planted in front of the newly operational building (formerly the Margetson Memorial Home), enhancing the space with beauty and biodiversity. Images of the work were posted on MNT's Facebook page.

Illustrations for the educational material (output 1) are under development with outline drawings for all created and feedback from MNT received. These will be used in (1) the children's activity book (2) the insect pollinator information sheet (3) vertebrate pollinator and seed disperser information sheet (4) the final toolkit. On educational materials, these have been added to the UKOTCF website (which will be copied to the MNT website). These relate to the Montserrat National Curriculum and are highly local contextualised.

1.3 MNT Youth & Education Programme

The Monty's Ambassadors, established under the project (output 3), provides a framework in which young persons can be represented within the MNT's work programmes. A planning session took place during the summer. This event enabled Ambassadors shared their ambitions and proposals for events to help connect with the young people on island. The team discussed future projects, tips, grant-writing and how to build networks. The UK visitors got a chance to be involved in the meeting and were extremely impressed with the vision the Ambassadors have with regard to connecting with young Montserradians.

MNT welcomed a Youth & Outreach Officer, bringing over 10 years' experience in education. Their role will be to promote public engagement with Montserrat's natural and cultural heritage, working with the MNT team to design and deliver outreach programmes that connect young people to the environment. They will work to strengthen youth involvement through Monty's Ambassadors, Monty's Messengers, and the DPLUS 192 project. A profile was featured in [SOS Montserrat](#)

An art and relaxation event took place at the Trust in August organised by the Monty's Ambassadors with over 20 persons attending. One Ambassador said the event: "*created a*

refreshing space where creativity met conversation. From [colourful] canvases to meaningful connections, the afternoon was truly one of beauty, joy, and community spirit."

1.4 Biological Collections & Information

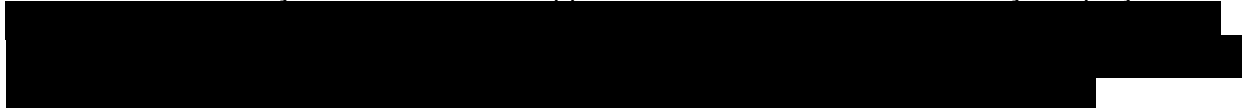
GBIF Data Portal (output 1): A GBIF-hosted data portal for Montserrat was launched in May, following a successful application. In June, Meise Botanic Garden provided training to UKOTCF, MNT, and the GIS Unit on using GitHub, the platform hosting the portal. MNT and DoE have since developed a draft content plan with UKOTCF, and data population will begin in the coming months. A dedicated URL is being secured, with plans to integrate the portal into the Government of Montserrat's system long term.

Plant and Bryophyte Collections: Approximately 30 dried plant specimens from previous expeditions were mounted and transferred to the National Herbarium of Montserrat (MNT) and are now ready for documentation in the Pluto-F database, with data to be published on GBIF. A recent expedition to the Katy Hill cloud forest collected additional specimens, including bryophytes. Under permit and export permissions, these have been arranged for secure curation and identification at the UK Natural History Museum (NHM). Coordination with NHM will continue, with a combined visit to NHM and Kew being considered. An account of the expedition appears in the *SOS Montserrat* Newsletter (see Section 1.6).

Related to this, an Open Access paper has now been published on recommendations for herbarium and biological collections: Groom, Q., Meeus, S., Bárrrios, S., Childs, C., Clubbe, C., Corbett, E., Francis, S., Gray, A., Harding, L., Jackman, A., Machin, R., McGovern, A., Pienkowski, M., Ryan, D., Sealys, C., Wensink, C. & Peyton, J. (2025) '[Capacity building needed to reap the benefits of access to biodiversity collections](#)', *Plants, People, Planet*. doi: 10.1002/ppp3.70029.

iNaturalist records for the [Biodiversity of Montserrat Project](#), as of end of September, are 8841 observations, 1624 species with 163 recorders and 1025 identifiers. This far exceeds the target for the project (2500) as shows embedded into local practice with a DoE and MNT staff members being in the top 10 recorders and the project team leading the top 10. Several additional guides have been created including birds, reptiles and amphibians with several more planned. These records on iNaturalist, once at Research Grade, feed into the records available for [Montserrat on GBIF](#) and will be available also through the Portal. Indeed, iNaturalist records are the [third highest contributor](#) to biological record data for Montserrat after the eBird data set and the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution on GBIF. Also on monitoring tools, The Species Recovery Trust continues to provide support with collating invertebrate records and communications materials. In April, a butterfly habitat list and species was created to assist the team with the development of the Butterfly Monitoring app.

On project legacy, 3 applications to expand the work of the project were made in May. The first was to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) for support in building the GBIF hosted portal. In addition, an application was submitted to the Franklinia Foundation, which aimed to expand the information known about Montserrat's rare trees including detailed taxonomic and survey work. It included support for the MNT technical staff beyond project end.



1.5 MNT Botanic Garden Development

Botanic Garden Interpretation (output 3): Development of new interpretive materials is underway, with draft content prepared for additional areas such as medicinal plants and their links to ongoing projects. These drafts are currently being formatted and refined for installation in the garden.

On upskilling and capacity building, Mr Sealys completed RBG Kew's online Seed Conservation Training, funded through the project. The course enhanced skills in seed collection, processing, storage, and data management following international best practices.

This training strengthens local technical capacity and supports sustainable conservation within the botanic garden, with skills to be shared through on-the-job training.

On additionality, in August the team worked on some technical points in the [National Museum garden](#) Darwin Local project, which has now been awarded funds; enhancing and highlighting the toolkit. A drier for the herbarium was acquired with a grant from the International Plant Taxonomy Association (IPTA) and is now housed which is now housed in the botanic garden.

1.6 Communications and Reporting

As noted, the SOS newsletter was published in September with articles relating to recent activities from across conservation work (output 3) in Montserrat and events see [here](#). The newsletter remains an important way to share information and assists with reporting.

For ethical reasons, the team have chosen not to use 'X' as a marketing platform, due to ongoing concerns around content moderation, misinformation, and the overall direction of the platform's policies. At the recent UKOTCF online conference 2025, a marketing expert highlighted [LinkedIn](#) as a more suitable and values-aligned alternative, particularly for professional engagement and brand credibility. This recommendation will be further explored as we assess its potential to meet our strategic goals for communication during the project while upholding our ethical standards with the potential develop an account for the MNT. Facebook and Instagram are appropriate tools for the majority of demographics on Montserrat.

The project team submitted a poster based on the grasses of Montserrat publication to the UKOTCF Conference 2025 held on Zoom. Over 7 persons were registered from Montserrat. A presentation included some highlights of the project including youth engagement and herbarium work was given by members of the Project Team with over 167 registered delegates.

Copies of the Thirty Medicinal Plant booklets, created during the project, were made available for sale at several events in the UK over the summer marking the 30th anniversary of the volcanic eruptions on Montserrat.

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.

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

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 2026)?

[REDACTED]

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 31st 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

No

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.

No

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Suspensions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

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.

Feedback received in July 2025 proposed that they are addressed in next AR.