

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: 31st October 2023

Project reference	DPLUS196
Project title	Habitat Restoration of Great & Little Tobago National Parks (BVI)
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	British Virgin Islands (BVI)
Lead partner	RSPB
Partner(s)	National Parks Trust Virgin Islands (NPTVI), Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (Kew), Indigena Biosecurity International (Indigena) and Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Project leader	Charlie Butt
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2023, HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	NA

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.

The project was successfully set up and a project partner meeting was held pre-set up to re-establish the project approach. RSPB successfully employed a Project Officer (Jack Whitelegg) to support the project coordination. Throughout Y1Q1 and Q2 RSPB has worked with project partners and contractors to maintain project cohesion and success. In Y1Q2 a successful half-year project meeting took place which was attended by all project partners and the relevant contractors. RSPB has set up a project SharePoint which will enable collaboration and file sharing between project partners.

Output 1 Native plant baselines established, invasive plant surveys updated, and pre-eradication visual materials collected for a ‘before/after’ eradication communications package.

The project partner, Kew, visited the British Virgin Islands (BVI) in June 2023 to provide training to National Parks Trust Virgin Islands’ (NPTVI) staff and to conduct baseline data surveys for both Great and Little Tobago. Kew successfully visited Great Tobago and mapped out the existing invasive plant species, as well as reviewed the suitability of the existing permanent vegetation plots, to provide an effective post removal monitoring scheme. NPTVI staff attended

the visits to Great Tobago with Kew and were trained on plant identification and survey techniques.

Nutshell Production who are contracted to capture pre-eradication film footage also attended the June trips to Great Tobago. They were successful in filming the work conducted by NPTVI and Kew on the island and partly successful in filming the wildlife and landscape. They will be revisiting Great Tobago in October 2023 to complete the remaining filming. In June and the upcoming October trip, Nutshell will have support from local camera operators and provide in-person training on wildlife filmmaking.

Unfortunately, the unforeseen dry weather condition leading up to the trip in June meant that Kew and Nutshell were unable to visit Little Tobago. The island became unsafe for the helicopter to land on the island due to high levels of dust caused by the extensive dry weather. Further details can be found in the second section below.

Output 2 Great and Little Tobago National Parks become free from feral goats and the initial consequent impacts on native habitats are recorded.

The sourcing of firearms and ammunition started in April 2023, however, it hit its first hurdle due to unforeseen UK carrier policies, which meant the firearms needed to be sourced from the US rather than the UK. Working with NPTVI, APHA and the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force (RVIPF) an approved firearms dealer was identified, and an order was placed for the firearms and ammunition in July 2023. Following this, the firearms dealer explained there would be an extensive delay in receiving the firearms due to an unexpected US Government approval backlog due to current global affairs.

A meeting between the relevant partners (NPTVI, APHA and RSPB) was held and it was decided the first field visit would be condensed into one eradication trip in year 1. This eradication trip takes place in October 2023 (Y1Q3) and was extended from 6 to 12 days on the Tobagos to make up for the time lost at the beginning of the year. The firearms and ammunition successfully arrived in the BVI and were processed by RVIPF. Initial feedback is that the eradication activities have gone well, with details to follow in the Yr1AR.

Field surveys have been conducted by Kew (stated above in Output 1) to continue the vegetation monitoring on Great Tobago which were initially conducted annually from 2016-18.

Output 3 Eradication of all emergent invasive plants achieved and long-term capacity-built to implement biosecurity and seedbank strategies.

The contractor, Indigena, is leading on the development of the plant eradication strategy, workplan, spatial management database and biosecurity plan and visit BVI in October 2023; initial activities for Output 3 were moved to Y1Q3.

The equipment for plant management arrived in time for Indigena's October trip. NPTVI has developed a comprehensive schedule for Indigena to carry out visits to Great Tobago and deliver plant management training to NPTVI staff. Once Indigena has completed their October 2023 trip to BVI they will be in a position to start co-developing an emergent plant eradication strategy, workplan, spatial management database and biosecurity plan with NPTVI. Further details to follow in the next report.

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.

There have been two notable challenges, which have both now been resolved, resulting in minimal impact to the project budget and timeline.

Firstly, the weather in June meant that Kew and Nutshell were not able to visit Little Tobago. The expectation was for their trip to Little Tobago to be postponed until Y1Q4, however, the cheaper smaller helicopter budgeted is no longer operational. A more expensive larger helicopter is scheduled to be used; however, the budget only allows for one trip to take place in Y1. It was collectively decided at the Y1Q2 partner meeting that APHA's trip to conduct the goat eradication of Little Tobago should take priority over Kew's and Nutshell's helicopter trip to Little Tobago.

In response, Kew will use historic plant collection data and the UKOTs database to advise on an expected baseline for Little Tobago.

Nutshell will focus filming on Great Tobago and will be able to acquire footage of Little Tobago from a boat.

Secondly, two scheduled eradication trips per year totalling 12 days each year (6 days per trip) were planned for. The delay in firearms has meant that these 12 days have been condensed into one trip in year 1 which takes place in October 2023. APHA's effort in Year 1 therefore remains the same as was originally planned for, with the remaining four trips in years 2 and 3 still expected to be sufficient in successfully eradicating the goat population from both 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: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known:

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)?

Yes 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?

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. 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**