



**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: 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	DPLUS196
Project title	Habitat Restoration of Great & Little Tobago National Parks (BVI)
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	British Virgin Islands (BVI)
Lead Organisation	RSPB
Partner(s)	National Parks Trust Virgin Islands (NPTVI), Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (Kew)
Project Leader	Andrew Callender
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	

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 monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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.

Very good progress has been made by the partnership across all outstanding activities and indicators, with the exception of the goat eradication component on Great Tobago as outlined in detail in the Year 2 Annual Report. The efforts diverted towards goat eradication on Little Tobago has, however, yielded significant progress and are outlined in greater detail below.

Vegetation assessments, training and the clearance of invasive plants on Great Tobago has been carried out successfully (Outputs 2.2 and 2.3): The NPTVI field team conducted vegetation assessments for invasive species with the Kew and Indigena teams during three trips to Great Tobago National Park in June 2025. This also included training in eradication techniques using agrochemicals and active destruction of live invasive plants, including all

Calotropis procera and *Aloe vera* that have been recorded on Great Tobago National Park. It was mutually agreed by Indigena, Kew and NPTVI that no attempt would be made to eradicate *Arivela viscosa* which was much less dominant this year due to the consistent rain that has occurred in 2025. This has allowed the native Croton shrubs and *Pipticoma antillana* to flourish.

Agrochemical and chainsaw training was conducted by Indigena in June 2025 for seven NPTVI staff (3 women and 4 men) (Output 3.1 continued, Output 3.3). This training took place on Tortola at three national parks, including the JR O'Neal Botanic Garden, Sage Mountain and Shark Bay. This provided technical training that will benefit the Terrestrial Wardens in their everyday work activities as well as the DPLUS 196 Tobago's invasive plant eradication work. This represents good value for money as it builds capacity within the NPTVI that will extend beyond the project. This was refresher training for 3 staff members as they had participated in the Year 1 activities with Indigena, but by Year 3 there were 4 new staff who joined NPTVI.

NPTVI also took a film crew from Silhouette/EyeKast Media (St. Lucia-based) to Great Tobago National Park over a weeklong period (output 1.3). The goal was to collect drone footage of the island, video and still footage of the invasive plant and animal threats, the impact on the colony of Magnificent Frigatebirds (*Fregata magnificens*) and Brown Boobies (*Sula leucogaster*) and the work that NPTVI has been doing in collaboration with all of the project partners. Kew joined NPTVI and the film crew on one day so that the plant work could be documented. Interviews were also conducted with the NPTVI and Kew team to explain what activities have been taking place and what actions were still needed to successfully restore the islands. This trip was just to collect footage, with no additional editing or video production.

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.

Logistics, despite being an obvious potential source of risk, continue to run smoothly thanks to the expertise of NPTVI and professionalism of other project partners. Similarly, unexpected loss of key personnel is always a potential key risk for any project, and one that had been identified by the project, specifically relating to hunting capacity. When one of the hunters became unavailable for the second visit in 2025, NPTVI and APHA worked on an alternative plan, utilising a NPTVI Senior Marine Warden as a scout and safety personnel to accompany the remaining APHA hunter. This resulted in the successful completion of two weeks fieldwork carrying out the continuation of the goat eradication in July and August. Game cameras now in place for follow up monitoring.

However, there was also a positive unexpected development over the reporting period, with the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force (RVIPF), at the request of NPTVI, permitting overnight camping on the island. This reflects the level of support that the RVIPF has for the project, within the boundaries of the Firearms legislation. RVIPF has also allowed the APHA team to conduct the fieldwork unaccompanied, in that a RVIPF escort was not required as per the original firearms terms of use. This has allowed the APHA team to set their schedule with the NPTVI Marine Wardens and travel whenever the weather is suitable, which was also very favourable this field season with only one day lost to bad weather.

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: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

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)?

Yes ☐ **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 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

None

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

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

No ☒

If yes, please provide further information, ensuring no sensitive data is included within responses.

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.

In response to the observation that GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) sensitivities were reported as not yet considered in this project in our year 2 annual report, we would like to provide further clarification and justification.

While our reporting may not have fully reflected it, gender and inclusion considerations were integrated into the project's design and implementation. During project development, the RSPB team worked closely with female leadership at the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands (the Director and Deputy Directors). These individuals played an active role in shaping the project's scope and approach. However, regardless of gender, this project required senior-level engagement and relied on the institutional knowledge and expertise of staff with experience in past biodiversity restoration projects on the Tobago islands, including previous goat eradication efforts.

Output 1 – Fieldwork Training and Capacity Building:

This component focused on training and building capacity in invasive plant identification, monitoring, and compiling a comprehensive botanical inventory of Great Tobago. It was led by Kew Gardens' team (Sara Barrios and Tom Hellier) and involved **six National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands (NPTVI) staff (3 male, 3 female)**. Local staff were selected by project leads based on prior experience (e.g., involvement in related previous Darwin Plus projects) and their roles within NPTVI. The team comprised both experienced personnel and newer participants, allowing for skill transfer and capacity development.

Output 2 – Goat Eradication Operations:

This component was highly technical and required the use of licensed firearms for goat removal. Due to stringent legal and safety requirements, it was not feasible to build this specialized capacity locally within the project timeframe. External expertise was therefore provided by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) team (two males), selected for their prior experience working on the Tobago Islands and their specific technical competence, both essential to ensuring the success of this output. Local field staff supporting APHA were chosen based on relevant field and shooting experience. Given the nature of this activity, participation was necessarily limited to those meeting the legal, safety, and technical criteria. For this output it was not suitable for broad or inclusive participation.

Output 3 – Invasive Plant Eradication and Capacity Building:

This component provided a stronger opportunity to promote local capacity development. Under the guidance of local project leads, staff were selected to receive hands-on training. Here, we exceeded our original training targets, expanding participation from **3 males and 2 females** to **4 males and 3 females**. All participants reported that the training was engaging and valuable, and they expressed interest in further follow-up sessions, this feedback that will inform future project planning and in-house-capacity building.

Project leadership, the project steering group led by RSPB in collaboration with National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands and Royal Botanic Kew Gardens was composed of a 50/50 gender split. The project team was aware of the projects potential low GESI score and discussed ways to incorporate GESI approach, which we have achieved in the capacity building components of this project.

In summary, while certain project components by their technical nature offered limited scope for full GESI integration, gender considerations were nonetheless embedded in project design, team selection, and capacity-building efforts.

Checklist for submission

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