



**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>	<i>DPLUS204</i>
<b>Project title</b>	Enhancing Resilience of the Akrotiri Salt lake ecosystem
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	SBAs of Akrotiri & Dhekelia (Cyprus)
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Open University of Cyprus (OUC)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	DICE - Durrell Institute of Conservation & Ecology, University of Kent  SBAA EN - Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas Administration Environment Department
<b>Project Leader</b>	Ioannis Vogiatzakis
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 October 2025, HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.dplus-arise.eu">www.dplus-arise.eu</a>

#### **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).**

Some activities that have taken place during this period include:

- **1<sup>st</sup> Annual Report:** Submitted May 10<sup>th</sup>. The review was received on July 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- **Actual claim:** Submitted May 15<sup>th</sup>.
- **Change Request:** Submitted as a matter of urgency on May 23<sup>rd</sup> requesting to retain the balance of funds. Accepted on June 18<sup>th</sup>.
- **Meetings:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Project Steering Committee meeting took place on June 6<sup>th</sup>. All project partners participated and discussed project's progress, difficulties, and next steps. Monthly online meetings were conducted to facilitate project progress and follow up on field/task activities (e.g. seed collection, Red Data Book plants mapping, restoration works).
- **Dissemination activities:** The project was presented via a poster at the 5<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Plant Conservation Week conducted in Limassol early in April (7-11/04/2025). The 2<sup>nd</sup> policy brief was released on September 2025. The project website was updated ([www.dplus-arise.eu](http://www.dplus-arise.eu)). Organization of a 1-day workshop on Scenario Development of the Akrotiri Salt Lake (ASL) in the Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre on 20<sup>th</sup> October.

- **Financial monitoring:** Detailed monitoring of the budget, timesheets, expenses recording, and preparation of a financial change request.

### **Output 1. Spatial prioritization of restoration areas within ASL**

All activities concerning this output have been completed. Report and Map of the spatial prioritization of restoration areas within the ASL has been prepared. Out of the initial 21 areas, seven were selected (10 ha) for the restoration actions to take place. Five of those areas include both terrestrial and aquatic sites.

### **Output 2. Establishment of a Plant Micro-reserves (PMRs) network across the ASL**

**Ind 2.1** progressing as planned

**Ind 2.2** progressing as planned – the 5 PMRs sites have been identified.

**Act 2.1** Plant sampling and monitoring of the selected 14 plant species for inclusion in the PMRs is an ongoing task that will continue in spring-summer 2026 (*Achillea maritima maritima*, *Cladium mariscus*, *Euphorbia hirsute*, *Helianthemum kahiricum*, *Ifloga spicata*, *Ipomoea imperati*, *Ipomoea sagittata*, *Juncus littoralis*, *Juncus maritimus*, *Linum maritimum*, *Mentha aquatica*, *Neurada procumbens*, *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*, *Silene kotschy*). All but one species *Helianthemum kahiricum* were identified and reported in the field. Due to the conspicuousness and location of this species (within the RAF area), the project team was not able to locate it and will increase efforts in early spring 2026.

**Act 2.2** RDB mapping is well underway with new locations (expansion of distribution) documented for *Ipomoea imperati*, *Linum maritimum* and *Mentha aquatica*. A protocol is in use for recording the threats and pressures on each species and the coordinates are being recorded. All data will be organised in a database and distribution maps will be produced at the end of activity 2.2.

**Act 2.3** Delineation of PMRs sites and reporting – not yet commenced.

**Act 2.4** Placement of signs and fences for PMRs – not yet commenced.

### **Output 3. Restoration of degraded terrestrial and aquatic habitats on ASL**

**Ind 3.1** progressing as planned

**Ind 3.2** The species selection and acquisition of seeds from 3 aquatic (*Cladium mariscus*, *Ipomoea sagittata*, *Mentha aquatica*) and 5 terrestrial (*Achillea maritima maritima*, *Ifloga spicata*, *Ipomoea imperati*, *Neurada procumbens*, *Silene kotschy*) species has been completed. The germination of seeds and propagules will commence in November 2025.

**Ind 3.3** The restoration plans have been approved by SBAA and the stakeholders. Restoration of the first degraded aquatic sites initiated on Sept. 2025. Restoration will continue on 2026.

**Ind 3.4** progressing as planned

**Act 3.1** The selection of terrestrial and aquatic habitats to be restored has been completed. Seven sites (10 ha) were selected and restoration actions have already commenced.

**Act 3.2** Terrestrial and aquatic plant sampling across the restoration sites has been completed, and data are being analysed.

**Act 3.3** Moths and grasshoppers surveys have been completed and species identification is currently in progress. Our request to deploy the Automated Insect Monitoring trap (AMI-trap) within the RAF area and in a suitable habitat (halophytic vegetation) and safe location was rejected over military concerns. The project team, after searching for other suitable locations, decided in collaboration with the Department of Forests to place it within the Fasouri nursery.

**Act 3.4** The collection of dead plant material for Biological Soil Crust (BSC) restoration conducted on February 2025. In total 29 samples of crusts, 29 samples below crusts, 67 samples of soil were collected. All samples were transferred to the facilities of Rey Juan Carlos University.

**Act 3.5** The BSC samples have been described morphologically, DNA extraction was performed, and key ecosystem functions such as soil respiration and enzymatic activity were measured. Currently, the identification of species composition and diversity analysis is conducted based on metabarcoding, as well as identification of the BSC components in order to proceed with the selection of cyanobacteria to cultivate in vitro and use in the field for BSC restoration. If no delays are encountered the project team will proceed with the application of cyanobacteria inoculation at the end of Year 2 (Jan-March 2026).

**Act 3.6** Restoration actions across the selected sites are currently underway. Removal of alien plant species (Eucalyptus, Acacia) was completed in September 2025 and pond excavation to support habitat enhancement of *Mentha aquatica* in October 2025. The remaining actions (*Tamarix* sp. and waste removal) will be completed at the end of Year 2 (May 2026). All restoration actions were approved by the SBAA as well as with key stakeholders on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025 consultation meeting at the Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre with representatives from the SBAA, Department of Forest, Game and Fund Service, and the Kourion municipality.

**3.7** The collection of seeds and propagules needed for the planting of terrestrial and aquatic plants from the targeted plant species (see 2.1) started in spring 2025 and will continue until the end of October 2025. The team has established a collaboration with the Cyprus Forest Association for the cultivation of plants needed for the restoration areas as well as the PMRs sites. After completion of the collection, and in November 2025, a number of seeds will be transferred to the Agricultural Research Institute and the Forestry Department.

#### **Output 4. Regulated access to conservation priority habitats**

**Ind 4.1** An Access Management Plan (AMP) has been developed to guide sustainable access within the ASL ecosystem. Two online consultation meetings took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2025 with the Kourion Mayor and on 27<sup>th</sup> October with Water Development Department (WDD) officer regarding the approval of the access control measures. The AMP has been approved.

**Ind 4.2** The installation of 4 restriction bars, as well as rock piles and formation of soil embankments, is scheduled to start in November 2025. The quotations from contractors have been approved. During the consultation phase, a concern was raised by the WDD regarding the restriction of two access points needed for their sampling within ASL and an alternative measure was proposed. The project team will proceed with accommodating this request.

**Ind 4.3** The development of the signs will initiate within Q3 2025.

**Act 4.1** Completed. The results were used for compiling the Access Management Plan.

**Act 4.2** Progressing as planned. Expected to be completed within Q3 2025.

#### **Output 5. Implementation of sustainability appraisal**

**Ind 5.1** We are currently collecting information for the report (questionnaire/interviews)

**Ind 5.2** There was a problem with the Google Analytics. The collection of metrics for the usage of our website started on June 2025. Data from June to date indicates a total of 83 viewers.

**Ind 5.3 Attendance sheets have been signed by the 1<sup>st</sup> workshop participants.**

**Ind 5.4 – Ind 5.5.a** Google Analytics indicates 270 count events as a proxy of material downloaded between June and October 2025.

**Ind 5.5b** Seven articles have been published in local newspapers. Radio interviews will start on Q3 2025

**Ind 5.6** not yet commenced

**Act 5.1** A project website ([www.dplus-arise.eu](http://www.dplus-arise.eu)) has been established and is regularly updated.

**Act 5.2** A sustainability report is in preparation to assess and communicate the project's environmental impact and long-term viability.

**Act 5.3** A questionnaire related to the preparation of the sustainability report was open from July to September and collected 30 answers. DICE member Peter Matthews visited Cyprus in October 2025 and completed 21 interviews with various ASL stakeholders.

**Act 5.4** A Scenario Development Workshop was organised in the Akrotiri Environment Education Centre on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2025 (<https://www.dplus-arise.eu/news-events>). Another two workshops will be organised in 2026.

**Act 5.5** The 2<sup>nd</sup> policy brief is available on the project's website. The leaflet has been completed.

**Act 5.6** The Scenario Development Workshop and the project were published in 7 local newspapers in October 2025. Interviews in local radio stations will take place in Q3 2025.

**Act 5.7** Peer-reviewed article – not yet commenced

**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.**

Only minor unexpected developments and delays have been encountered, mainly with acquiring the necessary permits for various tasks (e.g. AMI trap placements, Permanent Access control measures). All matters were resolved after discussion and with the appropriate minor adjustments. The budget and the timetable of the project was not affected.

**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:

Yes

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*

CR24-008 – approved / CR24-134 – approved / CR25-002 - rejected

**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: £

**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 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.**

A Change request has been submitted few days ago (October 27th). If approved we might need to restructure our budget.

**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)

No.

**6. Project risk management**

<p><b>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.</b></p>
<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p><b>6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please provide further information, ensuring no sensitive data is included within responses.</p> <p>Suspensions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to <a href="mailto:ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk">ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>No concerns have been reported.</p>
<p><b>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.</b></p>
<p>All comments concerning the Annual Report will be answered in the next annual report as instructed by the reviewer.</p>

## 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.	✓