

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 2024

Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

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

Project reference	DPLUS215
Project title	Assessing BVI habitat recovery from soil seedbanks following invasives removal
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	British Virgin Islands
Lead Organisation	Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (Kew)
Partner(s)	National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands (NPTVI)
Project leader	Rosemary Newton
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/assessing-bvi-habitat-recovery Twitter/X: #DPLUS215 Facebook: National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands

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).

Activities have been proceeding well and we have made substantial progress towards the outputs. During meetings we have referred to the Logical Framework and BCF Workplan for the project and have used these as a basis to evaluate the progress towards the outputs and project outcome. The first steering group meeting was held on 7 May 2024, with the next scheduled for 4 October 2024, and a formal project team meeting took place on 9 August 2024. In addition to these minuted meetings, regular email contact has been maintained with our partner and project progress has been discussed at weekly Kew UKOTs team meetings. Our indicators remain relevant, and our assumptions are still valid. Progress over the past six months is detailed below.

Output 1: Non-native plant species DNA sequence data for BVI generated and accessioned in secure collections

A non-native plant species list has been compiled from several BVI plant species lists held by Kew and then checked against the Flora of the West Indies and Plants of the World Online for

non-native status. This list currently consists of 190 species, with 65 requiring further clarification of native / non-native status. This is underway and should be completed by December (Activity 1.1). Vegetative samples for these species will then primarily be sourced from Kew herbarium material (Activity 1.2).

Output 2: Database and reference document for all emergent native and non-native plant seedlings created to enable seedling identification

Sampling methods and protocols were discussed and agreed with the team, and a Letter of Authority to work with BVI soil in the Quarantine House at Kew was obtained from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) on 19 August 2024 (Activity 2.1). The first field trip proceeded without disruption as planned (Assumption 2.1) and 70 soil samples (5 replicates from 14 sites) were collected from Great Tobago on 5, 10 and 11 June 2024. Thirty soil samples from Little Tobago are scheduled to be collected on 5 October 2024 (Activity 2.2). Great Tobago soil samples arrived at Kew on 3 September 2024 (Activity 2.3).

Soil samples from all 14 Great Tobago sites from replicates 1 – 3 (42 soil samples in total) were sown on 16 September (replicates 1-3). Replicate 4 soil samples will be sown during October and Replicate 5 with Little Tobago soil samples in November. Germination has occurred in most trays, with at least 6 different species already distinguishable and many (>50 seedlings) in a few trays, indicating that soil storage conditions were suitable, and seeds therein remained viable (Assumption 2.2). Emergent seedlings are being photographed (Activity 2.4) and larger seedlings are being harvested for DNA analysis (Activity 2.5).

Output 3: The risk of non-native plant species persisting and the potential for native plant species recovering from the soil seedbank quantified

When sufficient (c. several hundred) seedlings have been harvested and dried in silica gel in the Quarantine House at Kew, they will be sent to the Jodrell Laboratory where they will be accessioned and processed for DNA extraction (Activity 3.1).

Output 4: Capacity built for soil seedbank monitoring to enable effective non-native plant species management; outreach activities undertaken to raise the awareness of invasive plant species

Training plans for Terrestrial Warden Simeon Cabral (NPTVI) to visit Kew for two weeks have been finalised. He is due to arrive on 6 October and spend the first week at Wakehurst in the Millennium Seed Bank and Wakehurst Nursery and second week at Kew in the Quarantine House, Herbarium, Jodrell Laboratory and with the Tree Gang in the Arboretum (Activity 4.1). Project activities and progress have been disseminated via social media (Twitter/X and Facebook) and a DPLUS215 project page has been set up:
<https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/assessing-bvi-habitat-recovery>

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.

A mismatch between the DPLUS215 budget, log frame and workplan was discovered, which occurred between Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the project application when training plans were changed after discussions with our project partner. The mismatch was that partner training at Kew was scheduled for Y1 and Y2, but the training budget was for Y2 and Y3. This was discovered in May 2024 and NIRAS was contacted. A change request to bring the training budget forward from Y2 to Y1 and Y3 to Y2 was submitted and approved by Defra. There has consequently been no impact on the project.

There have been issues with maintaining high temperatures and humidity representative of the BVI climate within the Quarantine House for seed germination. The cause of this has been identified but replacement parts to repair the heating are no longer available and so alternatives are being sourced. In the interim, relative humidity is being adequately maintained by using seed tray lids and temperature by using two mobile heaters within the Bay. Seed germination

has been prolific and seedling growth strong, with no apparent or expected impact on the project activities, budget or timetable.	
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
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> CR24-036	

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)
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 2025)?
Yes No

4c. If you expect and 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. 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 BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?
No

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report. If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

Our response to reviewers' feedback will be submitted with our First Annual Report.

Our Risk Register has been attached to this report.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	