



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	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)	HYR2
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 progressing well, and we have made good headway within all outputs. During formal meetings comparison with the Logical Framework and BCF Workplan for the project has been used to evaluate progress towards the outputs and project outcome. The third steering group meeting was held on 28 May 2025 and the fourth on 19 September 2025. A formal project team meeting to discuss Output 1 took place on 13 May 2025. Project activities have been discussed at weekly Kew UKOTs team meetings and regular email contact has been maintained with Nancy Woodfield-Pascoe, Deputy Director at the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands. 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

Suitable vegetative samples from the non-native plant species list of 280 species (Activity 1.1) are being identified in the DNA and Tissue Bank and Herbarium for sampling to create a

reference library of non-native plant species in BVI. (Activity 1.2). DNA has been extracted from 90 of these species so far, which have been sent to Neogene for processing (Activity 1.3).

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

The second field trip to Great Tobago National Park proceeded without disruption as planned (Assumption 2.1) and 70 soil samples (5 replicates from 14 sites) were collected in June 2025. Thirty soil samples from Little Tobago National Park are scheduled to be collected in November 2025 (Activity 2.2). Great Tobago National Park soil samples arrived at Kew on 28 August 2025 (Activity 2.3).

Soil samples from all 14 Great Tobago National Park sites from replicates 1 and 2 (28 soil samples in total) were sown on 2 and 4 September, respectively. Replicate 3 soil samples will be sown in early October with Terrestrial Warden Dequan Leonard from the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands (NPTVI) when he is at Kew for training. Replicate 4 will also be sown in October or November and Replicate 5 will be sown with the Little Tobago National Park soil samples in December 2025.

Germination has occurred in most trays, with at least 15 different species distinguishable (many the same as observed in 2024). 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

Seedlings emerging and harvested from 2024 collected soil totalled 3754. All of these have been accessioned and already 240 seedlings have been individually processed, specifically chosen to represent different species from each tray. Many of the remaining seedlings have been assigned to a group or mix (of the same species from the same tray) and tissue sampling for these seedlings has been taking place. The DNA extracted from these mixes will be analysed to confirm that they are the same species as well as the identification, thus reducing the time and cost of individual seedling sequencing (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

Terrestrial Warden Dequan Leonard arrived in the UK on 28 September, with the first training week scheduled 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). This training has complemented training Dequan received in May this year when he attended the 2 week-long Tropical Plant Identification Course held at Kew. Development of his skills will be continued by the NPTVI with the recently received award of DPLPS002 funding to enable capacity building for environmental management in BVI.

Project activities and progress have been disseminated via social media (Twitter/X and Facebook) and a DPLUS215 project page has been set up on the Kew website:
<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.

The sudden resignation of the Terrestrial Warden scheduled to attend training at Kew was an unexpected development. However, NPTVI were able to select Terrestrial Warden Dequan Leonard to take his place and so the UK training activities were able to proceed as planned.

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:	N/A
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>	

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 <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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?
Suspicions 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.
N/A
6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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

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

N/A

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.

Response to feedback in the next annual report

Checklist for submission

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