



**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	DPLUS221
Project title	Rewilding Peros Banhos, Chagos Archipelago
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	British Indian Ocean Territories
Lead Organisation	Chagos Conservation Trust (hereby "CCT")
Partner(s)	ZSL, RBG Kew
Project Leader	Peter Haverson
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31 October 2025 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://chagos-trust.org/our-work/healthyislands

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.

Since the project start in July 2025, the primary focus has been on organising the expedition to complete the rat eradication in November 2025. This has involved

- Securing contract with Orion Conservation Services Ltd (project management and expedition leadership).
- Managing leadership change with the resignation of Peter Carr and promotion of Peter Haverson to project lead from deputy lead.
- Securing contract with Biodiversity Restoration Services (rat eradication specialist)
- Securing contract via Biodiversity Restoration Services for drone technology to deliver rat bait aerially (rat eradication).
- Building expedition team, working with project partners ZSL and Kew for entomology and botany expertise respectively.
- Securing additional entomology and ornithology expert volunteers.

- Securing an expedition doctor and undertaking medical screening of expedition team members.
- Commissioning customs support from Antrac (Male, Maldives) for the transportation of people and ship's cargo to the BIOT fishing patrol vessel, Grampian Endurance.

Furthermore, looking to MEL systems

- Peter Haverson (project leader) has reviewed project management of previous BCF awards, which have been managed by Rachel Jones (deputy project leader) and subsequently adopted similar project management administration tools.
- A gap analysis has been completed on CCT SEAH policies, procedures and team training—identifying gaps in short-term expedition readiness and long-term development/ adherence to global best practice.
- Scientific methodologies have been explored to develop appropriate and repeatable indicators to monitor project outputs. Namely,
 - Novel eDNA insect sampling methods using arachnid webs to minimise spatial/temporal sampling bias.
 - Audio MOTH sampling for Orthoptera (cricket) species identification.
 - Vegetation stable isotope analysis
 - Rat sampling methods to understand if rats are subsequently found on the island during the monitoring period is due to eradication failure verses reintroduction.

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 are no notable problems or unexpected developments in the project that could affect the budget or timetable of activities. The project issue log and risk register will be used to document any such issues and lessons learnt.

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:

NA

Change Request reference if known: NA

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: XXXXXXXXXX

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.

- At this early stage of the project, it is difficult to assess the risk of over/under spending accurately. Costs are roughly as expected at this point.
- Within the award letter it was highlighted that our application did not provide a clear contingency plan for addressing potential funding gaps. The CCT Trustees have subsequently agreed a contingency will be made available if needed (as per point 2 of section 7 below). The budget will be closely monitored, with continued communication between with the CCT Trustees and contractors. Financial risks are highlighted within the Delivery Chain Risk Map. Any arising issues will be logged within the risk register/issues log.

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 at this stage. All concerns relating to safeguarding against SEAH are addressed in other sections of this report.

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.

Project risk management is conducted using a risk register, of which an up-to-date version is attached with this report. The risk register forms a critical part of effective project management and is reviewed periodically.

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

Yes ☐ 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.

1. How will the unintended ecological consequences of invasive species eradication (for example an increase in non-native plants as observed in South Georgia) be monitored and mitigated?

Background - we may see a rapid population response in some of the shorter-lived land crab species in the families *Grapsidae* and *Ocypodidae*; a phenomenon seen after rat removal on other remote coral atolls such as Palmyra. These species can represent a large biomass and may contribute to nutrient cycling in ways that are not yet fully understood. No changes in the coconut crab population are expected, specifically within the lifetime of this project, due to slow life-history traits (long generation times and slow growing). We will be exploring the relationship between rats and crabs using baited camera stations and turtle nest predation surveys, as well as studying the nutrient uptake of plant species over time through stable isotope analysis. An increase in non-native plant species is unlikely because the four target islands have never had a resident population (they were historically copra plantations) and therefore do not have any agricultural plants/vegetable gardens. However, it isn't impossible and with any breach in bio-security, non-native species could arrive (animals or plants).

Monitoring – botanical team will be making baseline assessments of plant diversity and distribution in 2025. We can make a point of ensuring they record non-native species and anything that has the potential to become invasive (native or non-native). Years 2 and 3 will provide repeat sampling in the same fixed plots and should pick up changes in vegetation structure and identify any issues.

Bio-security - the target islands are all in the Strict Nature Reserve which means no visitors are allowed on shore at all without permits from the authorities. Under UK jurisdiction visitors to the island are all required to observe strict bio-security provisions (attached above). Mauritian authorities are well used to enforcing bio-security on islands reserves they manage such as Île aux Aigrettes.

Mitigation – this is outside of the scope of this project. However, we hope to be joined by a Mauritian forestry specialist with experience in native vegetation management and invasives control. Their input will be key to planning Phase II of this work which involves vegetation management.

2. What contingency funding is available to the project?

CCT has agreed to supply a contingency fund for the project.

3. How will the risks of using rodenticide be monitored?

The rodenticide bait is only toxic to mammals and there are no other mammals that inhabit the islands. The bait poses limited risk to humans whilst conducting monitoring trips, as the bait will have degenerated through rain or eaten by crabs.

[Redacted content]

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.	X
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	X
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website? The Treaty with Mauritius is ongoing and the political situation is sensitive. CCT is working hard to build a relationship with Mauritius for the future but there is still some uncertainty. The responses to 4-6 above are sensitive. We are working with the two Mauritian Departments mentioned in 4 with a view to engaging them with the importance and significance of the project.	X
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X