

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: 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 2023

Project reference	DPLUS140
Project title	Assessment and conservation of Cayman Islands' deep-water reefs and fishes
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Cayman Islands
Lead partner	Heriot-Watt University (HWU)
Partner(s)	Teresa Fernandes, Tim Austin
Project leader	Mauvis Gore & Austin Gallagher
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	Doe.ky

Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E 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.

Output 1: Database of observations showing diversity and abundance of significant species of deep-reef fish, sharks, hard and soft corals, and of major biotopes

1.1 Deployment of BRUVS at 50-200m around the islands and on offshore "Cayman Bank" on twice yearly basis.
All Deep BRUVS deployments have now been completed and an example of the database is attached (D+140-A)

1.2 Deployment of drop-down camera rigs to 500–2000m around the islands and on offshore "Cayman Bank"
Unfortunately family circumstances have resulted in a delay in receiving any report for this.

1.3 Pelagic BRUVS videos of 100-200m zones around the islands and on offshore "Cayman Bank" on twice yearly basis
Pelagic BRUV deployments have resulted in 50 giving a total of 121 to date.

1.4 Technical dives to 100m at focal areas around Grand Cayman
As discussed in our first Annual Report and with the reviewer of the MTR, the technical dive leader has not been able to recruit a partner to be able to conduct these dives. We have had the opportunity to use data from the BlueBelt BRUVS – open water BRUVS that float and record from the surface to 5 m depth.

1.5 Angling groups and fishers discussion of results and interpretation of data collected
A campaign of talks and discussion was completed in March 2023.

1.6 Viewing and analysis of video footage and annotating records of species and habitats observed

Viewing and analysis of deep BRUVS video footage have been completed for fish and sharks and the substrate analysis continues for the deep BRUVS. Unfortunately family circumstances have resulted in a delay in receiving any report for the drop-down camera footage. Footage from the pelagic BRUVS is being processed with the first 71 analysed.

1.7 Entry of observations into digital database

Data to date from the deep BRUVS has been entered into a digital database and provided to the DOE (see attached example of database).

Unfortunately family circumstances have resulted in a delay in receiving any report for the drop-down camera footage. Results not received as yet for the pelagic BRUVS.

Output 2 Maps showing distribution of species and biotopes including deep-water areas of conservation significance including coral rich biotopes, and fish feeding and spawning areas

2.1 Entry of significant records and observations into pre-existing DoE GIS system

Maps have been prepared for fish, sharks and the substrate variables. Data to date from the Deep BRUVS have been mapped.

2.2 GIS work to generate appropriate outputs

The basis for mapping has been completed and final maps will be generated when the remaining data being analysed have been included. Face to face meetings with the DOE GIS Officer will take place in Oct-Nov 2023 to work towards completing the mapping. See examples of maps D+140-B,C,D,E

Output 3 Scientific report and / or paper on survey and / research findings

3.1 Collation and statistical analysis of data

Data for the Deep BRUVS has been collated for fish, sharks and substrate to date.

Unfortunately family circumstances have resulted in a delay in receiving any report for the drop-down camera footage. Results not received as yet for the pelagic BRUVS.

3.2 Preparation of figures (graphs and images) to be used in scientific report or paper

Figures, images, video clips and maps are being prepared. See attached for one report that has been published; a second report is ready to be submitted.

Output 4. Habitat Action Plan for mesophotic and sub-mesophotic habitats areas and Species Action Plan(s) for deep-water groupers, snappers and elasmobranchs

4.1 Development of policy and recommendations for Habitat Action Plan, including for establishment or new MPA(s) or extensions into deep water of existing ones.

4.2 Development of policy and recommendations for Species Action Plan(s) including for management of deep-water fish stocks

4.3 Discussions of proposed recommendations with DoE administrative and policy staff

4.4 Preparation of Habitat Action Plan for consideration by National Conservation Council (by end of project)

4.5 Preparation of Species Action Plan for consideration by National Conservation Council (by end of project)

4.6 Review of Habitat Action Plan(s) for consideration by National Conservation Council (by end of project)

4.7 Review of Species Action Plan(s) for consideration by National Conservation Council (by end of project)

Discussions have taken place and further in-person meetings for 4.1 to 4.7 will take place to draft the plans together with the Manager for Legislation Implementation & Co-ord Unit.

Output 5 Press / social media releases and talks on project aims and progress directed at strengthening stakeholder support for Action Plans and MPA recommendations

5.1 Preparation of press / media releases

We publicised the project with the publication of the paper on blurred lantern shark 09/06/23 (D+140F). A draft paper on scalloped hammerheads is currently being finalised.

5.2 Distribution of media / press releases and posting on DoE and other websites

5.3 Preparation of talk describing purposes, progress and findings of project
We have prepared talks describing the purpose, progress and findings of the project and given talks based on this material to commercial businesses, government office and schools in a campaign earlier in the year.

5.4 Arranging and giving of talks to relevant stakeholders (DoE, National Conservation Council, local communities and particularly fishers, dive centres)
We plan to meet and work with the DoE in Oct-Nov 2023 and to talk with the NCC and local fishers then. The project partners have met about once a month via Zoom to discuss the progress of the project.

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.

Part of the Deep BRUVS gear was lost on the substrate during deployment in the last 3 months. Time was taken to try and recover gear, without avail. However, we were able to put the remaining gear into a configuration to complete these surveys.

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/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

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 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. If yes, then you need to 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.

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?

A week of the field season was given to the MTR, which limited our ability to function as a team and to carry out necessary field checks and used funds that were not in our original budget.

A response to recommendations in the MTR is attached (D+140G).