

**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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS141
<b>Project title</b>	Habitat restoration and wise use for Akrotiri and Cape Pyla
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Cyprus - Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia
<b>Lead partner</b>	BirdLife Cyprus
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Terra Cypria - The Cyprus Conservation Foundation Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas Administration - Environment Department (SBAA ED) Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>Project leader</b>	Martin Hellicar
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 October 2022, HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	(yet to be set up)

**1. 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).**

**Horizontal activities** that have taken place during this period, include:

- Changes within of the project team:

**1. Departures:**

- **Konstantinos Perikleous**, part-time DarwinPlus Project Scientific Officer at Terra Cypria (recruited 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021) left this position on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.
- Konstantinos was immediately replaced by **Panagiotis Georgiou** who became part/time DarwinPlus Project Scientific Officer as of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022, reducing his hours with the project (Panagiotis had been recruited as full-time DarwinPlus Project Conservation & Communication Officer on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021)
- **Theodosios Theodorou**, who was recruited as part/time DarwinPlus Project Scientific Officer at BirdLife Cyprus on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021, left his post in mid-October 2022.

**2. Replacements:**

- **Zoe Markidou** was recruited as full-time DarwinPlus Project Conservation & Communication Officer at Terra Cypria on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022, to replace Panagiotis as he moved to p/t.
- **Recruitment process on-going** to replace Theodosios as p/t project officer at BirdLife Cyprus, with aim of filling post in early November 2022.
- A relevant change request form regarding project officer changes will be submitted in November.

- We do not foresee that the above changes will significantly disrupt project progress in any way, especially as Project Coordinator Phoebe Vayanou remains in post and the project is actively supported – especially during these staff transitions - by Martin Hellicar and Lefkios Sergides, Directors of BirdLife Cyprus and Terra Cypria, respectively.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Project Steering Committee Meeting: This took place on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and all involved team members from the Project Partners participated. Items covered during the meeting were: progress update, discussion & exchange of ideas & thoughts on various project issues and next steps.
- Financial monitoring of the project (templates, time sheets, expenses recording, etc) within and amongst the Project Partners.
- Project promotion communication actions: Social media post about plant conservation actions in Akrotiri (July 2022)
- The organisation of a 2-day workshop concerning the “Akrotiri Peninsula - Biodiversity Monitoring, Status & Trends” is taking place and the workshop is scheduled for the beginning of December 2022.

**Output 1. Support for sustainable management of invasive *Acacia saligna*, with a focus on post clearance habitat restoration on Cape Pyla**

**1.2** During and after the completion of the literature review (December 2021 – Action 1.1), various meetings/ discussions took place with relevant experts and stakeholders to share experience and thoughts on methodologies and experimental field trial plots design. At the same time, a number of meetings were held with SBAA to discuss permitting procedure for establishing experimental plots and with the local community, to ensure they are informed of the experimental field setting.

Despite all the above groundwork contacts, on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022 an email was received from the SBAA Area Office, detailing the preconditions required in order to start the field experiment in Cape Pyla. One of these was the securing of Public Liability Insurance (PLI) in the sum of £ [REDACTED] by BirdLife for this project action. We note that this precondition was never mentioned either at the proposal stage, or at all the consultations during the first months of the project. The SBAA stated that it was new policy of theirs.

To address this issue, a great effort was made by the Project Team to obtain the PLI through contacting a large number of insurance companies in Cyprus and abroad. We also entered discussions with the SBAA if it was possible to remove or change this pre-condition (lower PLI cover sum). This did not prove possible.

After many weeks of efforts, it seems that we will be able to obtain the PLI from an insurance company based abroad. We are hopeful this issue will be resolved in October 2022.

For the above reasons, during the last months (April 2022 – September 2022), no concrete progress was made on the ground on action 1.2 “Trials of selected restoration/acacia methods in plots”. That said, as soon as we get the PLI, the field experiment is ready to be implemented, without seriously jeopardising its implementation schedule or expected results. Budget-wise, there might be some unspent costs, but these will be calculated in the appropriate time (as soon as we know about the PLI) and communicated with the Darwin team, through a possible change request form.

**1.4** The programme for monitoring of illegal mist netting levels by BirdLife Cyprus with RSPB support continues and autumn surveys were carried out successfully in September 2022, with results expected by the end of the year.

**Output 2. Reed management solutions successfully piloted at Zakaki Marsh**

**2.1** The interim report of the Hydrological Study was submitted by IACO Environmental & Water Consultants in September, which gives a very useful overview and description of the existing inputs/outputs and quantitative/qualitative conditions of Lake Makria. Final report is expected in December 2022, after our comments are taken into consideration.

**2.2** The next mechanical reed clearance in front of the existing hide at the marsh is scheduled to take place in February 2023.

**2.3** Bird counts at Zakaki Marsh have taken place every month to monitor the occurrence and numbers of the priority species *Aythya nyroca* and *Himantopus himantopus* and also of other birds (resident or migrant visitors) using the wetland.

### **Output 3. Sustainability established for conservation cattle grazing at Akrotiri Marsh**

**3.1** Various meetings, discussions and field visits regularly took place to meet, to discuss issues/problems/ needs, while building/ renewing close cooperation with various stakeholders and mainly the graziers.

Based on the outcome of the above discussions, there is a clear need for better on-going management of the area in order to address various issues. The Darwin team has drafted a proposal for a management actions scheme for key sites at Akrotiri marsh in order to facilitate the formulation and implementation of better management of the area. However, the SBAA states a preference for keeping the management issues of the marsh at an internal consultation/implementation level, at this stage. We will continue dialogue on this issue, with all stakeholders.

Additionally, aerial photos of the marsh were obtained using a drone (May & September 2022), in order to provide up-to-date input on the wet grassland and reed bed areas and update the desired grazing levels.

**3.2.** The Marketing Plan Contract has been signed in August with external consultants (We Are Marketit Limited and C.P Bold Graphic Designs) and various meetings took place that provide input to the formulation of the strategy and plan. The specific consultants were chosen because they have relevant experience on marketing of food related products and their offer was within the required budget.

**3.3 & 3.4** Vegetation surveys & monitoring took place every month and according to the flowering period of each plant. Drone pictures were taken of the area to identify areas where plant species might be present and access is difficult, because of the high-water levels at the marsh and to record the progress of in situ actions.

More than 5000 seeds of *Euphorbia hirsute* were collected and deposited at the already established seed bank of the Agricultural Research Institute, in May 2022. At the same time, seeds of *Euphorbia hirsute* were planted at the Forest Department Nursery in Akrotiri, while cuttings from *Mentha aquatica* and new plants are ready to be planted in situ.

Areas for planting our target species in situ to support existing population were identified based on consultations with involved parties and field visits. There was an existing fenced area for the protection of flora species in the marsh and two additional suitable areas were fenced in June 2022, with permanent fencing (a change request form was sent and approved for this action). In situ actions have been taking place for all four targeted species, with positive outcomes up to now, while managed grazing is practiced.

**3.5** Increased engagement of local graziers in the management of the marsh and in maintaining Cyprus cows on the site is being facilitated through frequent meetings with the graziers in the field in order to discuss issues/problems/ needs they have. Additionally, BirdLife Cyprus drew on own funds to cover urgent repairs to the fencing of the marsh (December 2021 – January 2022) to support the graziers, as part of “bridge-building” efforts, as well as to cover the cost of works for cleaning Marsh drainage channels from reeds (September 22), to aid better drainage of the area.

### **Output 4. Reduced disturbance to key wildlife species, including birds and marine reptiles, through the implementation of an access management plan for sensitive Akrotiri habitats**

**4.1** A spatial mapping has been set up in ArcGIS layout with all the different layers that will act as input for the drafting of the Access Management Plan (i.e. sensitive wildlife areas, access routes, parking areas, recreational areas and facilities, administration boundaries, proposed developments, areas of interest, etc). At the same time, stakeholder identification and mapping have been completed, in order to facilitate the necessary consultation procedures to follow. Internal consultations are taking place to finalise the proposals.

**4.2** Monitoring of birds (occurrence, numbers and breeding activity) took place on a monthly basis.

**4.3** Monitoring of turtle nesting took place by SBAA during the breeding summer-season 2022.

### **Output 5. Eco-tourism opportunities enhanced within Akrotiri peninsula, benefiting in particular the approx. 900 local residents of Akrotiri community**

- 5.1 Automatic visitor counters have been installed at the three bird-hides in Akrotiri in July 2022 and results are been collected every month.
- 5.2 The Contract for the website development was signed in August 2022 and the text/ photos as input to the website development are being drafted.
- 5.4 Internal team meetings have taken place to start planning the 1<sup>st</sup> Spring Akrotiri festival.
- 5.5 Three potential hiking trails were identified and sent to SBAA for consultation in May 2022. In July 2022, the SBAA informed the Darwin project team that it had been decided not to approve them for security reasons, as raised by the British Forces Cyprus. However, the issue is still under consultation with the SBAA authorities and we are hopeful that a solution will be found very soon.
- 5.6 Four potential locations have been identified for the setting of viewing screens along the Lady's mile road. These locations are under consultation with the SBAA and local birdwatchers.

**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.**

In setting up this Darwin Project, at the proposal stage, emphasis was placed on consulting fully with the SBAA on all proposed actions. This done, the project received the full support of the SBAA (also through a letter of support for all actions). In the course of project implementation, a number of previously agreed key actions face significant and unforeseen challenges, which can best be attributed to procedural or bureaucratic reasons of the SBAA or the concerns of the military. This has resulted in some project actions having to be abandoned, in delays to project implementation, extra unforeseen costs and much extra effort and time for the project team. Examples are:

- Small scale field trials of selected habitat restoration methods in post acacia removal areas in Cape Pyla – In the course of this action, we were informed well into the 1st year of the project that BirdLife Cyprus needs € [redacted] public liability insurance (PLI) cover to set up and run some simple experimental field plots for acacia management on the Cape. No insurance company in Cyprus was able to provide this insurance. After many efforts, it seems that we will be able to obtain the PLI from an insurance company abroad. Hopefully, this issue will be resolved in October 2022. This has resulted in delay of this action and will entail extra costs that were not budgeted for. However, we do not believe this issue will seriously jeopardise output 1 implementation schedule or expected results.
- Wildlife camera set up in Akrotiri Salt Lake – This action was cancelled over military safety concerns, something that should have been flagged up at the application stage. (Change request form for that was sent and approved).
- Three Akrotiri walking routes for ecotourism – The aim of this action is to help promote eco-tourism in Akrotiri area. This action hit a roadblock after we were informed that we cannot set up the walking trails (one of which was also proposed by the Akrotiri community a while ago), because of military concerns raised by the British Forces Cyprus. No help or guidance has so far been given on alternative solutions/ locations, although we still remain in consultations with the SBAA.
- Management of cattle grazing on Akrotiri Marsh – This key site is suffering from a lack of active management, save that done by the cows and graziers. There seems to be little willingness to try to set up a management scheme structure/ actions. This creates an unsustainable - environmentally, socially, and financially - situation in the specific area, if it is not resolved.

The above challenges for the time being are being addressed through consultations, or minor changes/ adaptations in the project actions etc. Depending on how things develop, e.g. Akrotiri walking routes, or PLI for Acacia field experiment, there might be a need for changes in the budget (i.e. move funds to the next financial year, or move funds to other actions) and we will let the Darwin team know through a Change Request Form.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS:	<i>No</i>
Formal Change Request submitted:	<i>Yes, only for the Wildlife camera in Akrotiri Salt Lake. The rest are still under consultation</i>

Received confirmation of change acceptance      *Yes, for the Wildlife camera in Akrotiri Salt Lake*

Change request reference if known:

**4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**4b. 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.

**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 if necessary. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.****

**5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.**

*(please see next page)*

**Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report.**

## Annual Report (April 2022) Review - Comments

### Comment 3:

*The Zakaki Marsh bird monitoring evidence shows only total numbers of stilts and ferruginous ducks; will the team collect data on likely breeding pairs and immatures (i.e. evidence of breeding as stated in the Logframe)? The reviewer notes that the survey started late in the breeding season, but nevertheless, although the sheet includes columns for males, females and immatures, no data has been entered so far.*

### Response:

We do not consistently collect information on males and females, but occasionally. International research projects in which we participate as part of our involvement in the International Waterbird Census and the Africa-Eurasia Waterbird Agreement, request that information on sex ratio of particular species is collected, hence the presence of the male/female fields. Regarding immatures/juveniles, we consistently collect this information across all our waterbird surveys, with the exception of Greater Flamingos where sheer numbers are a major obstacle to age classification during the survey. Unfortunately, the habitat at Zakaki Marsh in particular is difficult to survey, due to the height and density of the reeds, so it is usually not possible to see any breeding activity, nestlings or hatchlings. We are always on the lookout for immatures of all species during the breeding season. The majority of juvenile Black-winged Stilts are recorded in the Salt Lake and the majority of Ferruginous Duck chicks are recorded at Bishop's Pool. This does not mean that there is no breeding activity at Zakaki Marsh, but that it has not been possible to see and therefore record chicks or breeding behaviour in the thick reed-bed.

### Comment 6:

*The project should consider the specific action relating to benefits and comments made in the award letter (see Section 8) in the next half year report.*

*This is a Year 1 Report, so there are no reviewer's questions to respond to.*

- **6.1** *The award letter requested changes to the Logframe, to 'SMARTen' Output Indicators. With support from Darwin, the project made significant changes to the Logframe to achieve this, but it could more clearly indicate how it intends to quantify proposed livelihood benefits to local people (examples suggested included ecotourism and beef production). This should be addressed in the next half year report.*
- **6.2** *Furthermore, the award letter included queries related to other issues, such as value for money and festivals, that it wished to be addressed in the first half year report. These were not discussed, and should be addressed in the second half year report.*
  - *one objective is to increase ecotourism, but you do not demonstrate that this is required or achievable and whether there is a market for ecotourism*
  - *it is not clear whether the local community asked for the two festivals or whether this has come from another source*
  - *although the cost has reduced since Stage 1, it would have been good to have the value for money set out more clearly*

- **6.3** Finally, the award letter stated that the exit strategy reads as a ‘statement of legacy’, not a statement of what is needed to take the process forward; Darwin requested that this be addressed in the first half year report, however, the exit strategy is restated in the Annual Report – this should also be addressed in the second half year report.

Response:

- **6.1** The updated logframe includes indicators that measure a) the visitation numbers to Akrotiri Peninsula (through the automatic visitor counters) and b) the interest of people to visit the Peninsula (through the statistics of the dedicated Akrotiri eco-tourism website). These indicators are direct measures of the effectiveness of the various actions of the project to increase the eco-tourists in the area, which are related to both a) the creation of new ecotourism “hot-spots”, i.e. walking trails, bird-watching viewing screens and b) the promotion of the area as a wildlife friendly destination, i.e. promotional website, mobile application, spring festivals. Indirect livelihood benefits to local people will involve the use of local facilities, like b&b, restaurants and coffee shops, which is not easy to measure and quantify, and especially in relation to the project actions, and in the longer term, might enhance the local market for more ecotourism related business activities, such as guided tours, which again it is not that easy and within the project timescale to quantify.
- At the same time, another input of the project to the increase of livelihoods is the Marketing Plan for the wildlife-friendly Akrotiri Marsh beef. This will help the graziers to increase their income from the grazing of the cows. However, the project action is the formulation of the plan in close cooperation with the graziers, but then it is on their own hands to implement the next steps in order to sell the beef. So again, it is not something that could be quantified in the timeframe of the project. However, the project would definitely report on the number of graziers that were involved in the Plan and might benefit from it, as well as on the next steps that will potentially be done by the graziers.
- **6.2** Concerning the objective to increase ecotourism in Akrotiri Peninsula, the area is one of the best areas in Cyprus for bird-watching, but also for seeing rare plants, for enjoying a unique landscape (salt lake, marsh with free grazing cows, beautiful beaches, sand dunes, sunset hot spots, etc). The area attracts many visitors, either under the eco-tourism model, in order to enjoy the value of nature, culture and landscape, or under the more mass tourism pattern, in order to swim, enjoy water sports and dine in large restaurants by the sea. So, the area can definitely offer the “product” for ecotourism, and the market exists both within Cyprus and from abroad, since more and more people are looking for alternative tourism activities. At the same time, through the branding and promotion of the area as such, both the awareness of the value of the Peninsula and the wise use of the area are promoted.
- At the proposal stage of the project, consultations were made also with the local community and the two spring festivals came up as an idea for the promotion of the area for ecotourism both by project partners and the Akrotiri community.
- Value for money parameters. The project aims to put in place or lay the groundwork for conservation management solutions that hold the clear potential to reduce costs in the long-term in three key areas:
  - 1. Acacia management currently involves considerable on-going expenses for regular control management, especially of Acacia re-growth. Identifying methods for the long-term management of Acacia has the potential to significantly reduce the long-term costs associated with the

management of this highly invasive species. Identifying implementable approaches for managing Acacia also contributes to delivering in support of the zero-tolerance policy to illegal bird trapping and will potentially reduce wider resource implications associated with this issue in the SBAs.

- 2. Reed management: identification of sustainable reed management solutions for key wetlands, including through the building of sustainability into the grazing management of Akrotiri Marsh (including through exploring marketing options for Akrotiri Marsh beef) holds the potential to significantly reduce cost of management interventions in future. It is clear that finding such solutions is critical, given the limited resources the SBA authorities are able to commit to long-term management of sites.
- 3. Access management for key wildlife sites: The development of improved access management will reduce impacts of disturbance on species, while identifying and linking to activities that support wider eco-tourism, recreation and community requirements. With an agreed access management plan in place, future resources, such as wardening and site manager capacity, can be shifted from reactive to proactive management for the benefit of key habitats and species.
- **6.3** Concerning the project exit strategy: engagement in the current project reinforces the partnership between BirdLife Cyprus, Terra Cypria, the RSPB and the SBAA Environment team. Project engagement and activities also serve to re-establish and take forward engagement with key local stakeholders, such as the Akrotiri community and the Akrotiri Marsh graziers in particular. This engagement reinforces the momentum for securing agreed long-term management of key wildlife sites, for which the partnership approach and a level of consensus among involved stakeholders are crucial elements. With SBA resources for site management limited – a factor that is becoming increasingly clear though the process of implementing the current project, it is clear that securing relevant funding to continue actions similar to those of the current project (and building on these) will be crucial. The partnerships and understandings being reinforced and built under the current project will be crucial in this regard.