

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 2022

Project reference	DPR9S2\1018
Project title	Bathymetry, and seafloor habitats within Ascension Island's nearshore waters
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Ascension Island
Lead partner	British Geological Survey
Partner(s)	AIG/UKHO
Project leader	<i>Rhys Cooper</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR 1</i>
Project website/blog/social media	

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).

The nearshore habitats of the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area (AI-MPA) comprise high biodiversity and are most at risk from anthropogenic development and climate change. This project will determine the character, distribution, and extent of these key habitats through an integrated programme of hydrographic and ground-truthing surveys. Resulting seafloor habitat maps will provide urgently needed tools to better monitor and protect marine ecosystems, and underpin the evidence-based management of the AI-MPA.

In October 21, a UK Navy survey ship the HMS Protector, spent time surveying the shelf around Ascension. We have been waiting for the UKHO to supply the final data.

The UKHO have confirmed that this data is now available and we are expecting to start work Dec/Jan. We will initially process data and commence a desk study, starting to map the seabed around Ascension. This initial work will also determine the extent & type of fieldwork required to fulfil the deliverables stated in proposal. The Royal Navy survey data will hopefully reduce the extent of bathymetric data required and allow us to spend more time on focussed 'ground-truthing' and high resolution, detailed surveys which will vastly improve the final mapping outputs (seabed substrates & habitats, marine geohazards etc.)

The fieldwork will now be undertaken next FY. We are currently finalising suitable dates with the Ascension Island Government.

In Nov/Dec 2022 Rhys Cooper will inspect and get training in survey equipment required to mobilise the required survey equipment on the boats currently available on Ascension. The original intention was to ship a survey boat from the UK and/or hiring a private charter survey vessel. The proposed new survey capability will provide an extremely mobile and robust marine survey solution for future use in remote areas. It will also allow us to survey in areas not reached by the Royal Navy vessels.

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 initial survey has been subject to continual delays due to covid, availability of flights and accommodation.

In October 21, a UK Navy survey ship the HMS Protector, spent time surveying the shelf around Ascension. This area is coincident with the survey extent proposed by BGS. We had no prior knowledge of the Navy planning to go to Ascension

Two change requests have already been submitted to accommodate – see below.

Delayed start leading to years extension

CR22-049	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Totals	Start/end dates/Comments
Original	239,614	23,334	0	262,948	1-4-22 to 31-3-24
Revised	41,331	138,000	19,700	199,031	1-4-22 to 31-3-25 1year extn
<i>Difference</i>	<i>-198,283</i>	<i>+114,666</i>	<i>+19,700</i>	<i>-63,917</i>	<i>Saving 63k</i>

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: Yes

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes

Change request reference if known: CR22-049

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

No

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?

No

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 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. 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**