

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	DPLUS154
Project title	Sustainable management planning for St Helena's National Conservation Areas
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	St Helena
Lead partner	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
Partner(s)	St Helena Government, SAERI (Falklands) Ltd (SFL)
Project leader	Dr Megan Tierney
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	October 2023, HYR3 - <i>should be 2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	Project website under development. Social Media handles: @JNCC_UK, @StHelenaGovt, @SAERI_FI @Darwin_Defra

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.

DPLUS154 is a 2.75-year project which commenced in December 2021. This half-yearly report therefore outlines progress made to date on activities that were scheduled for Year 3 (Y3) of the project (April-September 2023). Please note that we have used the revised Logframe and Implementation timetable which were approved through a formal Change Request (CR22-129) in Year 2 (Y2) of the project. Progress against each output is detailed below, but as an over-arching summary, progress has been steady against most of the planned activities, especially since the Project Officer was onboarded in May 2023. However, it has been necessary to put some activities on hold until decisions are made on whether they need to be amended in light of a need to address some emerging priorities, and which may impact on how the NCA Management Plans are taken forward.

Output 1: 13 NCA Management Plans, which include governance arrangements, submitted to SHG for adoption and legal endorsement (WP1)

With the Project Officer (PO) now recruited (end of Y2; see further details in Output 5), and in place on St Helena (as of June 2023), the primary activities under this Output in this reporting period has been the continuation of collecting and collating historic and existing data for each of the 13 nature National Conservation Areas (NCAs) (**Activity 1.1**) and identifying any further relevant and pressures or threats they may face (**Activity 1.2**). These have been incorporated into the draft Baseline Reports (**Activity 1.4 – completed Y2**), and together with feedback from stakeholders (see further details in Output 4 below),

the baseline reports have been finalised (**Activity 4.4**). The baseline reports will be made accessible on the project webpage, which is currently under development.

The other primary activity under this Output was to be conducting field work in order to collect new data to help fill data gaps which had been identified through compilation of the baseline reports (**Activity 1.5**). Although there are data gaps, discussion amongst the Project Management Group (PMG) has concluded that attempting to fill these data gaps through a single season of fieldwork will not advance the development of the Management Plans significantly, and that more substantive field or monitoring programmes will likely be needed – it is anticipated these will be included as a recommendation/action in the respective Management Plans. As such, the PO has been exploring options as to what would give better value for money in terms of a data-related end-product, and which would also benefit the development and eventual implementation of the Management Plans. Discussions have been initiated with key stakeholder St Helena National Trust (SHNT) in regard to providing resource to digitise, and incorporate into the St Helena Data Portal, the data records they have on beetle distribution – an important identified gap in currently accessible data. Once details are agreed, a Change Request will be submitted proposing a change to Activity 1.5, 2.1 (which relates to training for field staff) and 5.4 (which relates to the recruitment of data collectors), and associated financial resource.

All other activities were either ongoing (**Activity 1.3**) or not due to commence in this reporting period (**Activities 1.8 – 1.11**).

Output 2: Trained SHG/National Trust Officers able to manage, monitor, assess, report, intervene and undertake future reviews of Management Plans and determine the effectiveness of NCA sites (capacity, guidance and tools)

The primary activities which were to be undertaken for this Output in this reporting period was training of field staff in relevant field data skills (**Activity 2.1**) and training in invertebrate identification (**Activity 2.3**). As noted above, it has been decided that field work is now unlikely to bring great benefit to the project, and discussions are ongoing as to establish an alternate Activity 2.1. This decision also influences Activity 2.3. At the time of writing the project proposal, it was anticipated that invertebrate identification training would be a natural follow-on to elements of the field work. However, as no new field data will be collected, the PMG and SHNT are also discussing whether such training is still considered a priority at this time. If so, the aim will be to conduct the training before the end of the FY; if not, proposed changes will be incorporated into a Change Request for approval.

All other activities have either been completed in previous reporting periods (**Activity 2.2**), ongoing (**Activity 2.6**) or not due to commence in this reporting period (**Activities 2.3**). Note, changes to Activity 2.3 may need to be proposed – see more details under Output 3.

Output 3: Modelling and testing management options for effective and sustainable Management Plans to achieve better nature conservation and socio-economic outcomes

The activities which were due to commence under this Output in this reporting period (**Activities 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4**) have been put on hold. This is because it may be necessary to amend them, so as to address an issue which has arisen in relation to the agreed boundaries of the NCAs. Project Partner SHG has highlighted that it may be necessary to review the NCA boundaries to ensure they can be legally adopted and for the Management Plans to be developed correctly. The PMG are currently considering if such a boundary review can and/or should be undertaken as part of this project or a separate exercise. If the decision is taken to make it a part of this project, this will require amending the activities under Output 3, as it won't be possible within current time-frames and resources to undertake both the boundary review (which would become the priority exercise) and the activities as they are currently described. If the decision is to undertake the boundary review outside of this project, and continue with Output 3 as originally planned, the timetable of activities will need to be amended to account for the time they have been put on hold. Both scenarios may also have some financial implications. Any changes will be proposed through a formal Change Request.

Relevant elements of all other activities have either been completed in previous reporting periods (**Activity 3.3**), or not due to commence in this reporting period (**Activities 3.5**); although note, as the latter is related to Activities 3.2 and 3.4, this may also be subject to change.

Output 4: Stakeholder awareness and understanding of the benefits of sustainably managed NCAs to maximise stakeholder buy-in and engagement during development of the Management Plans

In this reporting period the project team have taken the opportunity to further update the Stakeholder Communications and Engagement Strategy (SCES) which had been formulated in Y2 (**Activity 4.1**), particularly in light of now having the PO in place on St Helena. The SCES will be uploaded to the project webpage once that has been created. In terms of delivering the SCES, the project team have promoted or provided information on the project through a variety of means, including a Press Release published in two newspapers, updating the SHG NCA webpage, and news items aired on the local radio. The PO has also spent time meeting individual stakeholders, including SHG Legislative Council, major landowners, SHG staff and NGOs; and/or participated in a range of meetings/workshops that relate or link into the DPLUS154 project.

The 'before' survey to assess the level of change between start and end of project in stakeholder and community understanding of how sustainably managed NCAs can provide long-term benefits to St Helena and its community (**Activity 4.3**) was due to be conducted in this reporting period. However due to a later than originally anticipated trip by one of the JNCC team members to STH to assist with conducting the survey (amongst other activities), the survey has been postponed to October. However, survey questions and format have been drafted, and timing and location(s) of where/how the survey will be conducted have been agreed by the PMG.

Activity 4.7 is ongoing, with data collected when relevant to feed into the gender assessment analysis.

Output 5: Project management, monitoring, and evaluation

The key achievement under this Output for this reporting period is that the PO which was recruited at the end of Y2, commenced their post and were in place on STH by early June 2023 (**Activity 5.1**). Having the PO in place has been extremely beneficial for advancing a number of activities, as outlined above, raising the profile of the project on STH, directly engaging with the range of stakeholders and relieving some of the pressure from the rest of the project team in terms of coordination and planning.

The PMG which was established in Y1 continues to meet regularly (biweekly) to discuss project progress and resolve any emerging issues. The PMG refer to the Monitoring and Evaluation, Risk Register and Issues Log as required during these meetings (**Activity 5.6**) to also help plan and identify any upcoming or ongoing challenges. Structure of the Core Delivery Group (CDG) (**Activity 5.2**) was revised in light of the work done under the SCES, membership agreed by the PMG, and is due to have its first meeting in October 2023.

As noted under Output 1 and 2, it has been agreed that collecting new field data is not necessary; as such no data collectors have been recruited in the reporting period, as was planned (**Activity 5.4**). Related to this is uncertainty as to whether training in invertebrate identification is still required. Therefore, the contract to engage an expert in invertebrate identification has not been awarded, as was also planned for this reporting period (**Activity 5.5**).

Development of a gender monitoring and evaluation methodology was reported upon in Y2 of the project (**Activity 5.7**), and the DPLUS Annual Report for Y2 of the project was shared with the Project Management Group (PMG) and submitted in April 2023 (**Activity 5.8**). The report is available on the DPLUS website: <https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DPLUS154/>.

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.

As noted above there have been some emerging issues in this reporting period which will particularly impact on activities under Output 3 (Modelling and testing management options for effective and sustainable Management Plans to achieve better nature conservation and socio-economic outcomes), and may also impact on the timetable of some of the activities under Output 1 and 4 which relate to drafting and consultation on the NCA management Plans. Specially, Project Partner SHG has highlighted that it may be necessary to review the NCA boundaries to ensure they can be legally adopted, and the Management Plans be developed correctly. The PMG are currently considering if such a boundary review can and/or should be undertaken as part of this project or a separate exercise. If the decision is taken to make it part of this project, this will require amending the activities under Output 3, as it won't be possible within current time-frames and resources to undertake both the boundary review (which would become the priority exercise) and the activities as they are currently described. If the decision is to undertake the boundary review outside of this project, and continue with Output 3 as originally planned, the timetable of activities will need to be amended to account for the time they have been put on hold. As some of this work is also required for shaping the Management Plans, activities which relate to their development in Output 1 and 4 will also need to be reviewed. Both scenarios may have financial implications, particularly in terms of which financial year funds are required – i.e. it may be necessary to move some funds from Y3 to Y4 of the project, and to extend the end-date of the project.

Separately, as existing data has been identified and collated for the baseline reports, it has become evident that it may not be necessary and/or hugely beneficial w.r.t development of the Management Plans to collect additional field data at this point in time. Consequently, funds which have been allocated for these and related activities could be repurposed for alternate activities, and or returned to the funding body. The intention is to submit a Change Request outlining any new approach as soon as possible.

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 – but plan to submit by end-Nov 2023
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/No - N/A
Change request reference if known: N/A	

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

Actual spend: ██████████

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.

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.

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?

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, 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.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS 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**