

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	IWTEV012
Project title	Understanding the drivers of illegal exotic pet ownership in India
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	India
Lead partner	Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
Partner(s)	WCS-India
Project leader	Uttara Mendiratta
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://india.wcs.org/

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.

Since the inception of the project in April 2023, activities toward Output 1 are on track. We have also made some progress in activities toward Output 2 and Output 3.

Output 1: Detailed baseline of online and physical trade in target species in pet trade in India

Activity 1.1 Conduct consultation meetings with expert veterinarians, biologists, and wildlife rescue centre staff, etc. to develop nuanced understanding of the species in trade, consumers, and challenges.

After an extensive literature review, we developed a questionnaire to understand native and non-native species in pet trade, motivation for their purchase or ownership over conventional pets, and benefits and impacts of exotic pet keeping. After approval from WCS-India's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), we interviewed 21 experts, including exotic animal veterinarians, biologists with experience in wildlife trade, rescuers, and law-enforcement officials. Preliminary results indicate that small parrots, macaws, cockatoos, turtles, and tortoises are most preferred as exotic pets. Within these, a range of species are preferred depending on consumer attributes and considerations, such as socio-economic standing, family structure, experience in exotic pet keeping, and space considerations in homes/farms. Rose-ringed parakeets, African grey parrots, Indian star tortoises, green iguanas, and red-eared sliders were observed to be popular pet species among pet owners. We also observed that hobbyists were inclined to keeping larger species, such as scarlet macaws, hyacinth macaws,

tegus, monitor lizards, and venomous species of native and non-native snakes. We aim to conduct more expert interviews in the next quarter.

Activity 1.2 Conduct preliminary online searches to finalise a list of keywords for social media/e-commerce websites for further data compilation.

We conducted preliminary searches to identify relevant English keywords on YouTube, by examining popular channels and hashtags. Keywords were identified for both the national scale - 'exotic pet sale India' or 'exotic bird sale India' - and cities - 'exotic bird sale Delhi' or 'exotic reptile sale Chennai'. Keywords identified for e-commerce websites include 'exotic pet store India' and 'online exotic bird sale India', among others. We also identified keywords for media-reported seizures, by tallying recurring words from article titles. Species level keywords identified include 'parrot/parrots', 'parakeet/parakeets', 'macaw', 'tortoise/tortoises', and 'turtle/turtles', among others. Action keywords identified were 'seize/seized', 'rescue/rescued', 'exotic', 'illegal/illegally', and 'smuggled/smuggling/smugglers'.

Activity 1.3 Conduct web-scraping to compile data from media reports, CITES database, e-commerce, and social media websites, etc.

We started this activity by conducting manual keyword searches to compile data on exotic pet trade on YouTube. Thirty relevant channels have been identified so far. We also started year-wise data collection of media-reported seizure incidents and collated 42 relevant incidents from 2022. We are currently conducting trials of a web-scraping software, and aim to start automating the process of online data collection shortly.

Activity 1.4 Clean and analyse data from 1.3 to establish a detailed record of the exotic pet species found in online markets, with a focus on Psittaciformes, Squamates, and Testudines.

Cleaning of data is ongoing, alongside data-collection. Preliminary analysis of data collected indicates that advertising/sale on YouTube was primarily in non-native species, with only one video observed of a native parakeet being sold in a store. Birds were better represented on YouTube channels as compared to reptiles. Among parrots, apart from cockatiels and lorikeets, African greys and blue-and-gold macaws were found to be popular.

Activity 1.5 Conduct annual market surveys in target pet markets in two cities in India.

Based on previous records of protected exotic species sale, we identified two markets, Crawford Market in Mumbai and Galiff Street in Kolkata, to conduct surveys. As required by WCS CWT Safety and Security guidelines, we developed an operational plan to conduct surveys in Galiff Street, which was approved by WCS management. We plan to start conducting surveys in Galiff Street in October. We aim to submit an operational plan for a survey in Crawford Market by the end of October.

Output 2: Consumer profiles for target species including their motivations for purchase and triggers for behaviour change

Activity 2.1 Develop the questionnaire (based on existing consumer survey literature) for interviews with owners/collectors and get human studies ethics committee clearance for the same

Based on a literature review, we developed a questionnaire for interviews with exotic pet owners and collectors. The questionnaire aims to understand the owner demographics, psychographics, preference of exotic pets, motivation for the same, and messaging that may change behaviour of exotic pet ownership. The questionnaire and study concept will be submitted to WCS-India's Human Ethics Research Committee (HREC) by the end of October, slightly delayed from the proposed timeline of end of September.

Activity 2.2 Conduct interviews with owners/collectors of exotic pets to further develop questionnaire and refine messaging options to change behaviour.

This start of this activity is slightly delayed, as it depends on completion of Activity 2.1. We are in the process of identifying owners and scheduling their interviews, so that the activity can start as soon as HREC approval is received.

Activity 2.3 Finalize questionnaire for online consumer survey including pre-tested messaging options.

This activity is not due to commence until Y1Q3.

Activity 2.4 Create and run consumer survey website, including promoting it on social media and search engines.

This activity is not due to commence until Y1Q4.

Activity 2.5 Analyse consumer survey data to identify and develop at least 3 key consumer profiles in consultation with behaviour change experts.

This activity is not due to commence until Y2Q2. However, we have reached out to the Behaviour Insights Team (BIT), to have an initial planning meeting by the year end, to discuss preliminary findings and timelines for collaboration.

Output 3: Baseline of public sentiment toward exotic pets to inform strategy and assist with future demand reduction interventions

Activity 3.1 Compile metadata on social media posts of exotic pets (along with 1.3)

Alongside Activity 1.3, we started compiling comments from popular videos selling exotic pets on YouTube.

Activity 3.2 Conduct analysis of meta data to establish an understanding of public sentiment toward exotic pets, against which future interventions can be measured.

This activity is not due to commence until Y1Q4.

Output 4: Behaviour change strategies for priority consumer profiles of target species.

Activity 4.1 Develop behaviour change strategies in consultation with behaviour change experts.

This activity is not due to commence until Y2Q3 and completion of data collection.

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.

- Owing to difficulties in organising meetings with experts given their schedules, we were slightly delayed and could only complete the 20 expert interviews by the first half of October, rather than by the end of September.
- Indicator 2.1 for Output 2 in our logframe is: *Interviews with at least 25 exotic pet owners are completed and analysed by the end of Y1Q3.* However, we anticipate needing additional time (into Y1Q4) to complete at least 25 interviews. To ensure a well-rounded understanding, we aim to interview all types of exotic pet keepers (novice, owners, enthusiasts, hobbyists, among others). While it is easier to find novice keepers and owners who are willing to be interviewed, the process of finding hobbyists who are willing to be interviewed is taking longer than anticipated, as the topic needs to be approached with sensitivity.

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 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: £ [REDACTED]

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?

No

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**