

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 (extension granted: 30th November 2023)

Project reference	IWT099
Project title	Securing Chitwan-Sindhuli Green Corridor; strengthening community stewardship and law enforcement
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead partner	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Himalayan Nature and Mithila Wildlife Trust
Project leader	<i>Monica Wrobel/Bhagawan Raj Dahal</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 2023/HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	

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 project team have continued implementing third year activities as planned in the project document. The project has prioritized Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, with 79% female and 56% from indigenous and disadvantaged groups. As we approach the end of the project time frame, we have been making excellent progress i.e., 76% soft loan access (target 85%), reached 200 cooperative members (target 200 members), 31% seed fund increase (target 50%), 148 patrols (target 120 patrols), 11 quarterly meeting (target 12 meetings). The detail of progress is as below:

Output 1: Intelligence-sharing and collaboration between national and transboundary law enforcement agencies to combat IWT is deepened, enabled through capacity building and technology improvement, resulting in actions taken along suspected trade routes and border points.

The project partially supported the third national workshop of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) in June 2023 (*Activity 1.2*), attended by 86 participants, predominantly male (83) but also female (3), representing various conservation, security, and government agencies. The workshop emphasized the need to strengthen policy, legislative frameworks, cross-sectoral collaboration, regional and international cooperation, sustainable financing, and alignment with national goals. These discussions have laid the foundations to develop a 10-year strategic plan (2023-2034), through a participatory and multi-stakeholder approach by considering the diverse perspectives.

Output 3: Two Community Managed Pangolin Conservation Areas (CMPCAs) established within the Chitwan-Sindhuli corridor promote participatory pangolin conservation and protect pangolins and other traded species, reducing IWT at its source.

A three-day training program (*Activity 3.6*) was conducted for 28 members (53.5% female and 36% indigenous and disadvantaged groups) of the Community Based Pangolin Conservation Unit (CBPCU) with the aim of equipping them with essential patrolling techniques for pangolin conservation and habitat management. The training successfully enhanced (40% increase in

both knowledge and confidence levels; post-test score) their skills in equipment handling, GPS usage, camera trapping, and wildlife research and monitoring. In addition, we conducted three site-level quarterly meetings (*Activity 3.9*), to promote intelligence sharing and networking between CMPCAs, Protected Areas (PAs), and District Forest Offices (DFOs). These meetings were attended by 105 members, with 72% female participants, and 65% from indigenous and disadvantaged groups.

In promoting positive attitudes to conservation in the community, we continued to develop various IEC materials (radio jingle, animated video, comic book, wall painting, mounted poster, and information board) (*Activity 3.10*) in coordination with the concerned stakeholders. An animated video, illustrating the importance and necessity of pangolin conservation, has been widely promoted at project events and uploaded to Himalayan Nature's YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/TsaOy2Scrs8>), reaching 313 views to date. Moreover, we printed and distributed 2000 copies of comic/story books targeting school children. Additionally, three information boards were strategically installed to constantly remind the community about the importance of conservation. Likewise, a radio jingle conveying the message about pangolin conservation and the role of the local community was aired 2520 times (1800 times in Makwanpur and 720 times in Dhanusa) through local radio stations (*Mithlanchal FM 105 MHz* in Dhanusa and *Hetauda FM 96.6 MHz* in Makwanpur), reaching a broader audience beyond our project sites. Furthermore, in our effort to raise awareness among school students, awareness programs were organized at two community schools attended by 61 students (87% female). A post-test conducted in Makwanpur showed an impressive increase in students' knowledge, with an average rise from 6.42% during the pre-test to 84.57%, reflecting the success of the event. These collective actions have contributed to safeguarding pangolin habitats and forest resources, prohibiting intruders, reducing suspicious anthropogenic activities, and promoting in-situ conservation approaches.

Output 4: Vulnerable community members are accessing sustainable livelihood options, ensuring economic resiliency, reducing the economic drivers of poaching and IWT related activities.

A three-day training program on group management and account-keeping (*Activity 4.4*) was conducted for the new members of Chetana Women Income generating group (CWIGG) and Bhatighari Chure Women Income generation Group (BCWIGG), with 71 participants (93% females). Practical exercises improved participants' confidence, leading to a 27% increase in their knowledge. Furthermore, the secretary and co-secretary of BCWIGG embarked on a six-month computer diploma course to acquire accounting software skills as they plan to run the cooperative transaction via accounting software. Similarly, two capacity-building events aimed at diversifying livelihood skills (livestock rearing and doll and cushion making) (*Activity 4.6*) for cooperative members was carried out with 72 participants (65 females) in which 90% being female and 67% from indigenous and disadvantaged groups. Similarly, 106 alternative energy (*Activity 4.9*) i.e., electric cooking stoves (100) LP gas (6) were distributed to the forest dependant members of Bhatighari Chure CFUG.

It was witnessed that the executive members have been adopting good governance practices; transparency, accountability, inclusion, participation, responsibility, and responsiveness in the functioning and operation of the women's group (*Activity 4.7*). Two inclusive women-led cooperatives established in the first year saw significant growth, with the membership increasing from 133 to 200 members during this reporting period (*Activity 4.3*). Of these 200 members, 76% (152 members) have accessed a soft loan, enabling them to engage in income-generating activities like livestock farming, agriculture, and small enterprises. With the regular savings and repayment, the seed fund (*Activity 4.5*) has increased by 31% against the target of 50% (32.6% increase in CWIGG, 29.6% in BCWIGG) and has grown to NPR 45,65,682 (NPR 25,76,747 in CWIGG, NPR 19,88,935 in BCWIGG). An educational exposure visit (*Act 4.8*) to Parsa and Nawalpur district took place from September 21-24, 2023, involving 44 stakeholders from various backgrounds. The visit emphasized the significance of agroforestry, demonstrated farming techniques, and facilitated collaboration and networking while enhancing community banking and women's group management skills.

The trained CBPCU conducted regular patrolling to understand the existing conditions of forest and the habitat of wild animals. A total of 99 forest patrols were carried out in the past six months

demonstrating a consistent commitment to monitoring and safeguarding the forest. During each event, the team members recorded all the relevant information in the patrolling data sheet.	
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.	
None	
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: £ ██████████	
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 <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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?	
None	

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.

No feedback was provided to the year two annual report.

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**