

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	IWT110
Project title	Combating illegal trade of bears and diversifying livelihoods in Laos
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Laos
Lead partner	Free the Bears
Partner(s)	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO), Luang Prabang
Project leader	Brian Crudge
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://freethebears.org/ https://www.facebook.com/freethebearsfund https://twitter.com/freethebears

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).

Reporting period: 01 July 2022 – 30 September 2022

Over the first three months of implementation, the project has progressed largely as planned.

The design of temporary holding pens (Activity 1.1) is underway, with schematic designs drafted. The design is due to be finalised in Y1Q3 when an experienced blacksmith from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland - who are long-term partners of Free the Bears – is expected to spend time at the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary to build the prototype holding pen that will then be replicated by local contracted fabricators.

After careful consideration of available options, a dedicated rescue vehicle was procured in September 2022 (Activity 2.1). Modification to the vehicle to make it suitable for transporting confiscated bears, planned for Y1Q2, will take place during Y1Q3.

Indicator 1.2 of increasing animal keeper staff to from 9 male, 3 female in 2020 to 9 male and 5 females by Y2Q4 was surpassed by September 2022 with the recruitment of new trainee keepers bringing the current balance to 10 males and 5 females. Ongoing effort will continue to be made to reach greater gender balance among employees.

A total of 20 health checks were performed on Asiatic black bears and sun bears by Free the Bears veterinary team during this quarter as well as ongoing treatment for several bears

Throughout this period we have assisted government agencies in the transportation and placement of confiscated of bears and other protected species (Activity 2.4). On 13th July, a female infant Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*, LC, CITES II) was handed over into the care of Free the Bears. Each individual animal rescued is given a unique identifier, in this instance LA134. LA134 had been confiscated by the agency responsible for wildlife law enforcement in

the province - project partners Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office – and placed in the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.

On 2nd August, a Keeled Box Turtle LA135 (*Cuora mouhotii*, EN, CITES II, zero quota) was handed over to Free the Bears from villager in Chomphet District of Luang Prabang. It appears to have been previously kept and released.

On 9th August, Free the Bears received reports of a bear cub being held at a resort in Luang Namtha Province. The report was forwarded by Free the Bears to the Department of Forestry Inspection (DOFI) in Luang Namtha to follow up on. On 29th August, Free the Bears was contacted by Luang Namtha DOFI who had identified two other bears being kept illegally. Free the Bears coordinated with DOFI to confiscate both bears and the third bear reported earlier in the month. On the 30th August, Free the Bears rescue team departed with transport crates for the ten-hour journey Luang Namtha. The rescue operations were conducted on the morning of the 31st with three young Asiatic black bears LR112, LR113 & LR114 (*Ursus thibetanus*, VU, CITES I), which were transferred to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.

On the 19th August 2022, a young pig-tailed macaque LA136 (*Macaca leonina*, VU, CITES II) was handed over to Luang Prabang PAFO and then to Free the Bears.

On 8th September, a 1 month old Mainland serow LA137 (*Capricornis milneedwardsii*, VU, CITES I) was confiscated in Luang Prabang Province and handed over to Free the Bears for care.

On the 13th September 2022, Bokeo Province DOFI confiscated one bear and several turtles. Free the Bears rescue team spent the 14th traveling to Bokeo and the bear was handed over to Free the Bears on the 15th. The young female Asiatic black bear LR115 was confiscated from Ton Pherng District near the King's Roman Casino, an infamous wildlife trade hotspot.

On 21st September, Free the Bears received reports of a juvenile langur handed over to Luang Prabang DOFI. Following some coordination, Free the Bears provided a transport crate to transfer the langur to Lao Conservation Trust for Wildlife in Vientiane.

During this quarter, preparations were also made for activities to be implemented in the coming months e.g.: Materials are being prepared for training government agencies in the short-term handling and care of wildlife; Initial assessment of producer capacity has been conducted in advance of signing household agreements to grow produce.

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.

During this quarter the on-site construction team were occupied working on long-term housing for confiscated bears, therefore on-site accommodation is not yet complete and may impact the planned training in Year 1; however, this can be made up in Y2 and Y3 to meet targets. Impact on budget and timeline will be assessed and if a Change Request is required it will be submitted before 31st December 2022.

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: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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?

Throughout this reporting period Free the Bears continued to engage with key stakeholders to highlight the benefits bestowed to the local communities and draw attention to the issue of bear bile farming. On 28th July 2022, Free the Bears' Chief Executive and Regional Director met online with Cashel Gleeson, Chargé d'affaires, UK Embassy Vientiane to discuss the current IWTCF project (IWT110) and the potential to hold a stakeholder meeting in Vientiane to discuss bear farm closures.

On 7th September 2022, Free the Bears' Chief Executive and Regional Director joined the 15.7 Wildlife Trade Working Group in a meeting chaired by WCS Laos to discuss revisions to the Wildlife and Aquatic Law of Laos.

On 23rd September 2022, British Ambassador to Laos John Pearson and Payolin Razmountry visited Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary for a tour of the facilities and to discuss the current IWTCF project.

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**