

Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/resources/information-notes/>)

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 20 pages** in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2024

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line

IWT Challenge Fund Project Information

Project reference	IWT110
Project title	Combating illegal trade of bears and diversifying livelihoods in Laos
Country/ies	Laos
Lead Partner	Free the Bears
Project partner(s)	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO), Luang Prabang
IWTFCF grant value	£355,113
Start/end dates of project	01/07/2022 – 31/03/2025
Reporting period (e.g. April 2023-Mar 2024) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	April 2023 – March 2024 Annual Report 2
Project Leader name	Brian [REDACTED]
Project website/blog/social media	https://freethebears.org/ https://www.facebook.com/freethebearsfund https://twitter.com/freethebears
Report author(s) and date	Brian [REDACTED], 30 th April 2024

1. .Project summary

The placement of confiscated wildlife remains a major obstacle to effective law enforcement in Laos. By rapidly increasing capacity to house confiscated bears, this project will enable responsible government agencies to effectively implement legal deterrents in order to end the trafficking of bears in Laos and help maintain the ecological intactness of forest ecosystems. Additionally, we will demonstrate the role that well-run wildlife sanctuaries can play in poverty reduction through the creation of diverse livelihood and educational opportunities.

Laos is a major source and transit point for IWT. Asiatic black bears and sun bears are highly sought-after for use in Traditional Medicines and to replenish stocks on bile farms domestically and internationally. Both species are CITES Appendix 1. Despite legal protection, populations are declining, with illegal hunting and trade recognised as the most immediate threats. Without adequate infrastructure for placement of animals, there is low political will to enforce existing laws which, as a result, fail to act as effective deterrents to IWT.

Working in partnership with the Lao government since 2003, Free the Bears established a dedicated bear rescue centre and, since 2017, has been developing Laos' first official government-owned wildlife sanctuary in order to help combat IWT. Free the Bears has helped in the placement of 145 confiscated bears, the majority of which have been seized since 2017. This has effectively stemmed to flow of bear cubs into illegal bile farms (where captive breeding does not occur) and has prevented growth of bear bile farming in Laos. However, development of facilities in which to place bears has struggled to keep pace with confiscation rates. Without ample sanctuary facilities available, political will for law enforcement agencies to close illegal bear bile farms containing large numbers of live bears may be lacking and advocating for increased effort is challenging. This project will strengthen wildlife law enforcement and ensure effective legal deterrents in Laos by rapidly increasing capacity to provide immediate short-term housing for confiscated bears such that Lao authorities can be further encouraged and have the ability to confiscate bears from bile farms whilst continuing to prevent further bears from entering farms through effective investigation and rapid interdiction.

This project is focused on Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, 17 km from Luang Prabang City, and the six villages closest to the sanctuary, which are all adjoining or within Protection Forest. Livelihood options are limited in this area and, as such, the sanctuary is an important and secure source of income and a resource for the communities. Development and operation of the Wildlife Sanctuary benefits the local communities through direct and indirect livelihood opportunities, supporting a holistic approach which demonstrates how wildlife conservation actions combined with sustainable wildlife tourism have the potential to contribute significantly to the development of the region. Development of the sanctuary will provide livelihood opportunities for at least the next 30 years through the provision of life-long care to bears and associated requirements for skilled labour and opportunities for tourism.



2. Project stakeholders/ partners

Free the Bears has been collaborating with government partners in Southeast Asia to provide world-class facilities for the placement of bears confiscated from illegal trade since 1997. While several models of wildlife rescue center and sanctuary management exist, all Free the Bears-supported facilities are specifically owned by local and national government partners to ensure commitment to long-term success. Free the Bears' main project partner in Laos is the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry (PAFO). Under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, PAFO is mandated to manage, protect and conserve the country's natural resources, including wildlife, within Luang Prabang Province for the present

and future generations. The Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, which is the focus of the proposed project, is owned by PAFO and receives financial and technical support from Free the Bears. PAFO representatives sit on the Project Management Committee (PMC) of Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary along with representatives from the Governor's Office, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Forestry Inspection and the Department of Planning and Cooperation. The Project Management Committee is responsible for monitoring implementation of the projects and approving project reports. See most recent report in Annex 4.1.

The Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary is an important flagship project for both PAFO and MAF, being Laos' first and only government-owned multi-species wildlife rescue facility and frequently hosts capacity building workshops and visits from high-ranking officials. For this project, PAFO is responsible for ensuring the legal transfer of confiscated wildlife from the point of interdiction to the sanctuary and, for certain suitable individuals following rehabilitation, release back to appropriate protected habitat in Laos.

Other stakeholders of the project include the 15.7 Working Group – a collection of representatives from organisations working on illegal wildlife trade in Laos as well as UK, EU and US embassy partners. Through this Working Group, members were invited by the Department of Forestry to review and comment on a draft revision of Laos' Wildlife and Aquatic Law in order to strengthen species protection under the law.

During 2023, Free the Bears collaborated with the Elephant Conservation Centre (ECC, Xayaboury) and Lao Conservation Trust for Wildlife (LCTW, Vientiane) to develop a 2-week long wildlife medicine module for veterinary students at the National University of Laos (NUoL). Students were divided into 3 groups with each group spending 3 days on-site at each of the three facilities (FTB, LCTW and ECC) on rotation, enabling them to experience first-hand the work of wildlife veterinarians through a mixture of lectures and practical exercises. This module - the first of its kind in Laos - was delivered from 27th March - 6th April 2023, with the Faculty staff spending one week with sanctuary staff in advance of the students arriving on-site in order to familiarize themselves with the topics to be covered. The course provided training for forty 6th year Veterinary students (16 female and 24 male). Students received technical and academic training in various subjects related to wildlife health, conservation, and animal welfare across a range of taxa found throughout Laos. Training was provided through a mixture of lectures and practical exercises taught at each sanctuary, with students spending 3 days at each location. The Wildlife Medicine module will be repeated in 2024.

A short video highlighting aspects of this first wildlife medicine module is available to watch on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Vl2m4D1oS8>

In May 2023, the Diplomatic tour was hosted by the UK Embassy in Vientiane and included a visit to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary. The group was made up of 16 people (plus two staff from Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vientiane who joined) and included six Ambassadors (UK, EU, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines) and staff from eight different embassies, plus the UN Resident Coordinator and an expert from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The tour was hosted by John Pearson, then British Ambassador to Laos, and highlighted the support provided by the IWTCF grant. Towards the end of his diplomatic mission in Laos Ambassador Pearson further highlighted this support in local news media: <https://laotiantimes.com/2023/06/12/from-diplomacy-to-sustainability-british-ambassador-john-pearsons-remarkable-tenure-in-laos/?fbclid=IwAR09cPhHpjtb15mdmU2EPDVwTHja3d0aBPZLncmYteTipDD15Asg8ZYw9us>

In February 2024, new British Ambassador to Laos, Mel Barlow, visited Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary to learn more about the project funded by IWTCF, as well as the breadth of activities Free the Bears is involved in and about how this work contributes to the local communities. On Twitter, the British Embassy in Laos posted about Ambassador Mel Barlow's visit to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary. <https://twitter.com/UKinLaos/status/1757040021608202405>

Between the 15-26th May 2023, The Institute of Legal support and technical assistance (ILSTA) and the Lao Customs Department jointly organized training in wildlife crime investigation techniques which included a visit to the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary. The training was attended by 36 law enforcement officers, from northern provinces, including Environmental Police, Customs, DOFI, POFI and prosecutors. In March 2024, the Environmental Police led on an operation that resulted in the confiscation of 16 Asiatic black bear cubs from a single location, with support from Free the Bears. It is likely that the person responsible for buying these bears intended to establish a new bile farm with these bears. At the time of reporting, the investigation is ongoing.

On 29 June 2023, delegates from the US Embassy in Laos visited Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, and again in December 2023 US Acting Ambassador to Laos, Michelle Outlaw, visited the sanctuary to see the progress that has been made in increasing capacity to house confiscated wildlife.

20th December 2023, Free the Bears Chief Executive, Matt Hunt, and Laos Programme Manager, Sengaloun Vongsay, met with the new Director General, Khamphone Mounlamai, of the Department of Forest Inspection in Vientiane to discuss the need take action to close bear bile farms, specifically a farm in Vientiane and in Luang Prabang. An invitation was extended to the Director General to visit Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, which was due to happen in early 2024 but has yet to be realised.

Between October 2023 and February 2024, a total of 41 wildlife law enforcement officers (12 female, 29 male) participated in two-week Wildlife Care Course for Frontline First Responders. Participants were from wildlife law enforcement agencies from provinces throughout Laos. A video of highlights from the training is available here <https://youtu.be/hoNvZrlelgo>

In 2024, we collaborated with the Luang Prabang Department of Agriculture to deliver training workshops with community members to improve capacity to grow a diversity of crops. See section 3.2 below for further details.

Additionally, social science experts from the Community Engagement Division of San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance led on the preliminary analysis of household survey data which resulted in a poster and oral presentation by a Summer Fellow at SDZWA.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Activities under Output 1 (Increased capacity to house confiscated bears at the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary), have progressed well: Activity 1.1 complete in Y1; Activity 1.2 Fabrication of temporary holding pens is on track, with +8 temporary holding pens complete in Y1, +5 complete and +8 at least on standby in Year 2. See Output 1 below for details.

Activity 1.3 Animal keeper recruitment and training is ongoing. Targets have been surpassed, with 4 keepers hired in Year 1 of the project and five in Year 2. Gender balance of animal keepers is improving, with 11 males and 7 females. Two Team Leaders have been selected from among the keepers: one male and one female.

Activities contributing to Output 2 (Increase in confiscation rates for bears and other protected wildlife throughout Laos.) are progressing. Activity 2.1 complete in Y1. Activity 2.2 Build capacity of government agencies in short-term handling and care of wildlife has been carried out from Y2Q3 onwards. Between October 2023 and February 2024, a total of 41 wildlife law enforcement officers (12 female, 29 male) participated in two-week Wildlife Care Courses for

Frontline First Responders, surpassing the target of at least 20 in year 2 and year 3. Participants were from wildlife law enforcement agencies from provinces throughout Laos, specifically: 1) Luang Prabang; 2) Luang Namtha; 3) Oudomxay; 4) Xayaboury; 5) Vientiane; 6) Bolikhamxay; 7) Savanakheth; 8) Champasak; 9) Phongsaly; 10) Borkeo; 11) Xekong; 12) Attapeu; 13) Khammouane; 14) Houaphan; and 15) Xaysomboun.

Eight bear-safe transportation crates (Activity 2.3) have been distributed to wildlife law enforcement agencies throughout Laos, along with seven specially-made pangolin transport boxes distributed to four provinces. See further details in Section 3.2 below, and Annex 4.2. Five more transport crates suitable for adult bears have been fabricated and will be distributed strategically throughout the country during Year 3 of the project.

Activity 2.4 Assist government agencies in the transportation and placement of confiscated of bears and other protected species, has continued throughout the reporting period, with a record number of **26 bears rescued** during this reporting period. See Annex 4.3. Free the Bears Sanctuary Arrivals Report, 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024.

On 8th May 2023, a member of the Environmental Police contacted Free the Bears to report that a bear cub had been seen running through some land near a market in Luang Prabang town. This turned out to be a 2-month-old Asiatic black bear which evidently escaped from a trader. The bear cub was quickly captured by Free the Bears staff and immediately transferred to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary. A video of this dramatic rescue was shared on Free the Bears' social media: <https://youtu.be/ygkhR2YpFhk?si=arfolqpDkeQT9MZa>

On 18 May, Free the Bears worked with PAFO in Luang Namtha Province to take possession of a 16-year-old Asiatic black bear (LR121 i.e. Lao Rescue number 121). On 22 July, another 3-month-old cub (LR122) arrived in Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary from Vientiane Prefecture. On 3rd August, Free the Bears again worked with Luang Namtha PAFO to take possession of a 2-year-old Asiatic black bear (LR123). On 26th September, a 3-year-old Asiatic black bear (LR124) was voluntarily handed over to Free the Bears after the owner in Vientiane made contact through Facebook. The bear was reportedly bought (illegally) as a cub in Xayaboury Province.

On 1st December 2023, one of the DOFI Officers who had participated in the two-week Wildlife Care Course for Frontline First Responders (Activity 2.2) participated in the handover of a 2-year-old female Asiatic black bear (LR125) in Oudomxay Province.

On 19th February 2024, two male Asiatic black bears (LR126 & LR127) that had been kept as pets were voluntarily surrendered to DOFI in Xayaboury Province and handed over to Free the Bears.

On 19th March 2024, following an investigation by the Environmental Police, 16 Asiatic black bear cubs (LR128 – LR143) were confiscated, with support from Free the Bears, from a premises in Vientiane Capital. Initial reports indicate that these bear cubs were advertised for sale on social media and purchased in order to establish a new bear bile farm. This is believed to be the largest ever rescue of endangered bear cubs worldwide and this operation has helped prevent the growth of the bear bile farming industry in Laos.

Shortly after, on 22nd March 2024, two more Asiatic bear cubs (LR144 & LR145) were confiscated by DOFI in Phongsaly Province in the northeast of the country.

Others arrivals during the reporting period were: LA145 Impresses tortoise confiscated by Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office; LA146 Stump-tailed macaque; LA147 Pig-tailed macaque; LA148 Impressed tortoise; LA149 Pig-tailed macaque; LA150 & LA151 Malayan porcupines; and LA152 a Critically Endangered Sunda Pangolin *Manis javanica* which was confiscated in Luang Prabang province on 6th March 2024.

Activity 2.5 Advocate for bear farm closures and demonstrate increased capacity to house confiscated bears with a site visit to wildlife sanctuary for key government stakeholders, Y2Q2,

has not yet been completed as originally planned. An invitation was extended to the new Director General of the Department of Forest Inspection to visit Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, which was due to happen in early 2024 but has yet to be realised. Currently Bear House 8 and 9 are under construction and plans are underway for the addition of a new bear cub nursery. Once these are complete in 2024, a stakeholder site-visit will be planned. However, a meeting with the Director General was held in Vientiane to advocate for the closure of bear bile farms and several noteworthy visits to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary did occur during this reporting period (see section 2 Project stakeholders/ partners).

All activities contributing to Outcome 3 are complete or on-track for completion within the proposed timeframe. See details in the next section.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1. Increased capacity to house confiscated bears at the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.

1.1 300% increase in capacity to provide immediate short-term housing for confiscated bears, from 10 adult bears in 2021, to 30 by end of year 2, and to 40 by the end of year 3. As of Y2Q4, 13 temporary holding pens have been erected, bringing immediate capacity to 23 by the end of year 2. Temporary holding pens follow a modular design consisting of weld-mesh panels. By the end of year 2, we have sufficient panels for at least 8 more temporary holding pens which could be erected in the event of a large rescue of adult bears. This brings total potential capacity to 31 by the end of year 2. We are currently on track to increase capacity to 40 by Y3Q4.

1.2 Increase animal keeper staff from 9 male, 3 female in 2020, to 9 male, 4 females by Y1Q4, 9 male, 5 females by Y2Q4, and 10 male, 6 females by Y3Q4. Targets have been surpassed, with 4 keepers hired in Year 1 of the project and five in Year 2. Gender balance of animal keepers is improving, with 11 males and 7 females as of Y2Q4 (from 25% female animal keeper staff in 2020 to almost 40% currently). Two Team Leaders have been selected from among the keepers: one male and one female.

Output 2. Increase in confiscation rates for bears and other protected wildlife throughout Laos.

2.1 Proportion of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from <30% in 2019 to >50% by the end of year 2, and >60% by the end of year 3.

2.2 Proportion of reported protected wildlife trade cases resulting in confiscation/handover increases from >30% in 2019 to >40% by the end of year 2, and >50% by the end of year 3.

While the number of bears confiscated doubled from 13 animals in year 1 (LR107 – LR119) to 26 animals in year 2 (LR120 – LR145), it is challenging at this point to determine the number of cases reported in order to determine what proportion of the trade is interceded. Laos' revised Wildlife Law has recently been approved. However, the CITES Secretariat and development partners highlight that there are some significant gaps and inconsistencies in the Decree (See: CITES SC77 Doc. 33.10) and it is unclear if the decree, will be an improvement in terms of regulating captive breeding of wildlife. The Secretariat notes that significant training and capacity-building continue to take place involving OSPP and DOFI. However, Lao PDR has not reported on any investigations leading to arrests and court proceedings against perpetrators and only very aggregated information on seizures in the report submitted to the Secretariat. It is hoped that this scrutiny from CITES will lead to the issuance of sub-decree the will strengthen wildlife law enforcement; however, the gaps highlighted raise some concerns that some SMART Indicators for this project may need to be reviewed i.e. 2.1 Proportion of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from <30% in 2019 to >50% by the end of year 2, and >60% by the end of year 3; 2.2 Proportion of reported protected wildlife trade cases resulting in confiscation/handover increases from >30% in 2019 to >40% by the end of year 2, and >50% by the end of year 3.

2.3 Bear-safe transportation crates distributed to 6 of 18 provinces/prefecture by Y1Q4. This was completed behind schedule due to postponement of Activity 2.4. However, as of Y2Q4, six

crates suitable to transport confiscated bear cubs and 1 large crate for adult bears have been distributed to six provinces. Oudomxay Province in the far north received 1 large and 1 small crate; Xayaboury in the west, Phongsaly in the northeast, Bokeo in the northwest, Champasak and Attapue in the south each received one small crate, two capture nets and a pair of animal handling gloves. Bokeo, Champasak and Attapue each also received two custom-made pangolin boxes, suitable for short-term holding and transport of confiscated pangolins. Five more transport crates suitable for adult bears have been fabricated and will be distributed strategically throughout the country during Year 3 of the project.

Output 3. Reduce poverty in local communities adjacent to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.

3.1 At least 50% of project annual budget expended within 10km of the sanctuary, and at least 80% with 20km. During Year 2 of this project (April 2023 – March 2024), 18% of total project expenditure was within 10km of the sanctuary and 94%, equivalent to [REDACTED] was within 20km of the sanctuary. A considerable portion of this was for locally-grown produce and labour from communities within the immediate vicinity of the sanctuary, contributing greatly to the local economy.

3.2 Number of full-time employment opportunities for local community members receiving payment for labour increases from 31 (85% male) in 2022 to 40 (80% male) by the end of Year 2. An ongoing challenge to measuring this precisely is that many of the community members do not have personal identification numbers which would facilitate aggregation of payments to individuals. However, in the final quarter of year 2, an average minimum of 36 community members (100% male) received an average payment of 2,592,385 LAK per month, 62% higher than the national minimum wage of 1,600,000 LAK [REDACTED] per month. During this quarter all local labour were men, due to the nature of the work at this time and the traditional division of labour. However, at other times most of the labour employed are female, for example when undergrowth is being cleared to promote growth of trees. Measuring this indicator will be improved in Year 3 of the project and measures will be taken to further improve gender balance.

3.3 Number of local households with contracts to grow produce (fruit, veg, rice) for the sanctuary increases from 50 in 2022 to 70 by the end of year 2. This target was met ahead of schedule. Agreements were signed with an additional 30 households Year 1, bringing the total number of households with formal agreements to 80 by the end of Year 1. However, in Year 2 of the project, households reported that they were facing difficulties meeting agreed crop yields. To address this issue, in Y2Q4, we collaborated with the Provincial Department of Agriculture to hold capacity building workshops with the community. Participating households from two villages joined workshops in Y2Q4, attended by 9 males and 8 females. Further workshops will be held in year 3 of the project and further agreements will be signed based on the needs of the sanctuary and capacity of producers.

3.4 Number of local households deriving income from the production of handicrafts for sale at the sanctuary and associated locations/events increases from 12 in 2020 to 30 by the end of Year 2. We held one handicraft workshops in Year 2 of this project, with a total of 10 female beneficiaries from the 3 communities closest to the sanctuary. This is below the target due to prioritisation of crop growing workshops (3.3 above).

3.5 Number of local households assisted in transporting produce to market increases from 0 per month in 2021, to 16 per month by the end of year 1. This target has not yet been monitored effectively. A full-time dedicated driver was employed in June 2023 to provide more consistent service and better tracking of this indicator. Further improvements will be made in Year 3 to ensure this target is being met and monitored effectively.

3.6 Relative increase in socioeconomic conditions of participating communities from 2017 baseline, 2022 follow-up and 2025 endline household surveys. On track for assessing this indicator. Household surveys were conducted with 397 individuals during Year 1 of this project. In Year 2 for the project, preliminary analysis was conducted in collaboration with social science experts from the Community Engagement Division of San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

Preliminary results are ambiguous in regard to the impact that the sanctuary has on the local communities. Household status was improved by the receipt of income from the wildlife sanctuary, determined by using material assets as a proxy for household status. However, reliance on natural resources was unchanged based on receipt of benefit/income, except in that those who received benefits in the form of sale of produce were less likely to use wood as a main source of energy. We found mixed results on the influence of meeting participation on attitudes towards bear conservation. In year 3 of the project, these and other results will be discussed with the communities to gain a more nuanced understanding of the findings in advance of the endline surveys for this project.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

Outcome: Improved capacity to enforce wildlife laws reduces the number of bears being traded and/or held illegally, and the care of confiscated animals provides opportunities for livelihood diversification in local communities.

0.1 Percentage of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from <30% in 2020 to >50% by the end of year 2, and >60% by the end of Year 3. The number of bears confiscated in Laos increased from 6 in 2020, to 12 in 2021 and 14 in 2022. As mentioned above, while the number of bears confiscated double from 13 in year 1 (LR107 – LR119) to 26 in year 2 (LR120 – LR145), it is challenging at this point to determine the number of cases reported in order to determine what proportion of the trade is interceded. Free the Bears continues to follow-up with the responsible agencies on reports of bear trade. Further attempts will be made in year 3 of this project to access and compile reporting data.

0.2 Number of bears in bile farms in Laos decreases from ca. 100 in 2021, to 80 by end of year 2, and less than 50 by the end of year 3. As the number of bears trade cases intercepted increases, the number of bears on bile farms decreases. Free the Bears has helped in the placement of 145 confiscated bears, the majority of which have been seized since 2017. This has effectively stemmed to flow of bear cubs into illegal bile farms (where captive breeding does not occur) and has prevented growth of bear bile farming in Laos. Unofficial reports indicate that the number of bears on bile farms at the end of Year 2 of this project has decreased to fewer than 80 individuals. The confiscation of 16 Asiatic black bear cubs (LR128 – LR143) from a premises in Vientiane Capital could be considered as shutting down a bear bile farm before it had the opportunity to become fully established, thus helping to prevent the growth of the bear bile farming industry in Laos. Free the Bears will discuss with the relevant government agencies to obtain the latest official numbers.

0.3 Number of households deriving at least the equivalent of minimum wage from the sanctuary increases from 59 in 2020, to at least 120 by the end of year 2, and 160 by the end of year 3. Measures such as formalised producer agreements were put in place in Year 1 of this project which will facilitate verification of this indicator. Challenges in achieving sufficient yields has limited income on this front, which we have attempted to address with the capacity building workshops mentioned above. Currently, as of Y2Q4, approximately 70 individuals are earning more than minimum wage through employment as full-time staff or day labourers at the sanctuary. Further measures will be implemented in year 3 of the project to improving tracking of this indicator.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Assumption 0.1 International scrutiny from, for example CITES Standing Committee and the World Bank, is sufficient to ensure that national wildlife legislation pertaining to keeping bears is not weakened.

Comment: Scrutiny from CITES has resulted in enactment of a complete trade ban in November 2023. It remains to be seen if this sanction will positively impact national wildlife legislation.

Assumption 0.2 Decentralised provincial authorities have the political will to enforce national wildlife legislation and confiscate illegally held bears, and are not impeded by COVID-related travel restriction.

Comment: Holding true. Evidenced by confiscations in, for example, Phongsaly Province in the northeast.

Assumption 0.3 Efforts from those working to improve wildlife law enforcement in Laos, e.g. World Bank, are sufficient to increase awareness among the judiciary as to the serious nature of wildlife crimes and prosecute as such.

Comment: As yet, remains to be seen. Few, if any, wildlife trade cases result in prosecutions at the moment. As highlighted by CITES Secretariat, Lao PDR has not reported on any investigations leading to arrests and court proceedings against perpetrators and only very aggregated information on seizures in the report submitted to the Secretariat.

Assumption 0.4 Free the Bears is successful in securing continual core funding through traditional and novel revenue streams in order to provide long-term care to confiscated wildlife, and thus a continued source of income and livelihoods for local communities.

Comment: Holding true.

Assumption 1.1 Required material and labour can be sourced locally and in a timely manner such that deadlines are met.

Comment: Holding true for materials and unskilled labour. It has been challenging to contract skilled welders. This however has not led to significant delays.

Assumption 1.2 Construction of permanent sanctuary housing allows for smooth flow of rescued bears through temporary housing/Quarantine Station.

Comment: Securing approval of construction company contract led to some delays in initiating construction of permanent housing. Additional permanent housing will be required to accommodate the large number of bear cubs rescued in March 2024. However, funding has been secured and construction will begin as soon as possible.

Assumption 2.1 National wildlife legislation pertaining to keeping bears is not weakened.

Comment: The national wildlife legislation has recently been revised. It is hoped that scrutiny by CITES which has resulted in a trade ban will serve to encourage the closing of potential loopholes and addressing potential gaps through issuance of sub-decrees.

Assumption 2.2 Decentralised provincial authorities have the political will to enforce national wildlife legislation and confiscate illegally held bears.

Comment: Holding true in part, as evidenced by a record number of confiscated bears. However, online trade appears to be continuing unabated.

Assumption 3.1 The number of confiscated bears placed in the sanctuary increases, thus requiring increased labour and food supplies.

Comment: Holding true, as evidenced by the growing number of bears housed at Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, and growing workforce.

Assumption 3.2 Free the Bears is successful in securing continual funding through the existing donor base and novel funding streams efforts in order to provide long-term care to confiscated wildlife, and thus a continued source of income and livelihoods for local communities.

Comment: Currently holding true.

Assumption 3.3 Visitor numbers are sufficient to provide a market for locally made handicraft products.

Comment: Visitor numbers are recovering post-covid. However, to avoid competing with the established handicraft market, it was decided to utilize the traditional weaving skills of the local communities to produce animal enrichment items which are purchased from the community members directly by the sanctuary.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on illegal wildlife trade and poverty reduction

Impact: Reduction in number of bears traded and held in bile farms in Laos, and demonstrable poverty reduction stemming from opportunities created through proper placement of confiscated wildlife.

The first bear bile farm was established in Laos in 2000. The number of bile farm bears peaked in ~ 2012 with a total of 120 bears. Since there is no evidence of breeding on so-called farms, it is suspected that all farms are founded and restocked with wild-caught bears. Free the Bears have worked with the government of Laos to place 145 confiscated bears, effectively stemming the flow of bears from the wild into farms. The confiscation of 16 Asiatic black bear cubs (LR128 – LR143) from a premises in Vientiane Capital in March 2024 could be considered as shutting down a bear bile farm before it had the opportunity to become fully established, thus helping to prevent the growth of the bear bile farming industry in Laos. Unofficial reports indicate that there are now fewer than 80 bears remaining on farms in Laos. Government-owned sanctuaries managed by Free the Bears now house 129 bears which would have otherwise remained in the illegal wildlife trade network.

Through this project, Free the Bears and partners can have higher-level impacts on illegal wildlife trade through advocacy and collaboration with stakeholders, as described in Section 2 above.

Although the human development and wellbeing impact of this project is difficult to measure at this early stage, data has been collected from the participating communities with the view to determine the number of households that perceive receiving benefits from the sanctuary and measure impact in terms of material and subjective wellbeing. The project actively supports crop diversification by serving as a local demand for an array of produce.

With expenditure of [REDACTED] within 20km of the project site within the first nine months of this project, and a further [REDACTED] within 20km of the sanctuary in second year of the project, the development and operation of the sanctuary makes a considerable contribution to the local economy. As the project progresses, we intend to quantify the portion benefiting communities through direct employment and sale of goods or services. In quantifying such benefits, the aim is to demonstrate that sustainable wildlife tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of the region. This will further encourage authorities to shut all bear farms and combat the unsustainable and disreputable illegal wildlife trade in Laos and the region.

4. Thematic focus

This project is focused on:

2. Ensuring effective legal frameworks and deterrents
3. Strengthening law enforcement

Developing adequate infrastructure for the placement of confiscated live animals empowers responsible agencies to enforce existing laws more effectively, serving as potent deterrents against the illegal wildlife trade. During this project, capacity building initiatives targeting wildlife law enforcement officers, coupled with high-level advocacy, are designed to bolster political support, and allocate resources necessary for the robust implementation of legal frameworks aimed at curbing illegal wildlife trade (IWT). Throughout the project duration, our staff facilitate the flow of information among partners, focusing specifically on the investigation and interdiction of live bear trade cases. This effort is critical in preventing the re-stocking of existing bear bile farms or the establishment of new operations.

5. Impact on species in focus

This project is focussed on Asiatic black bears (*Ursus thibetanus*) and sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*), as well as other trade-threatened species such as Pangolin (*Manis sp.*). During this reporting period, a total of 26 Asiatic black bears and no sun bears were transferred into care at Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, bringing the total number of bears rescued by Free the Bears in Laos to 145. Eight individuals of five other species were also rescued during this period, including: Impressed Tortoise: 2 individuals (LA145, LA148); Stump-tailed Macaque: 1 individual (LA146); Pig-tailed Macaque: 2 individuals (LA147, LA149); Malayan Porcupines: 2 individuals (LA150 & LA151); and Critically Endangered Sunda Pangolin: 1 individual (LA152). The pangolin will be released at a suitable time in a protected area. Currently, seven Asiatic black bears that were confiscated since 2022, are housed in custom-built pre-release facilities at Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary as part of a pilot release programme intended to allow confiscated animals to be eventually released into protected forest where they can fulfil their ecological role, helping to maintain healthy forest ecosystems and providing an alternative to life-long care for bears rescued from IWT.

6. Project support for multidimensional poverty reduction

This project is focused on Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, 17 km from Luang Prabang City, and the expected beneficiaries are the six villages closest to the sanctuary, which are all adjoining or within Protection Forest, have limited livelihood options and, as such, the sanctuary is an important and secure source of income and a resource for the communities. Development and operation of the Wildlife Sanctuary will benefit the local communities through direct and indirect livelihood opportunities and will demonstrate that sustainable wildlife tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of the region. With expenditure of [REDACTED] within 20km of the project site within the first nine months of this project, and a further [REDACTED] within 20km of the sanctuary in second year of the project, the development and operation of the sanctuary makes a considerable contribution to the local economy.

In Year 1, project partners, Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office, conducted 397 interviews with members of households in the six focal communities to determine the number of households that perceive receiving benefits from the sanctuary and to determine the scale of the impact of this project in terms material and subjective wellbeing, food insecurity, and awareness about the value of wildlife. In Year 2 for the project, preliminary analysis was conducted in collaboration with social science experts from the Community Engagement Division of San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

Preliminary results are ambiguous regarding the impact that the sanctuary has on the local communities. Household status was improved by the receipt of income from the wildlife sanctuary, determined by using material assets as a proxy for household status. However, reliance on natural resources was unchanged based on receipt of benefit/income, except in that those who received benefits in the form of sale of produce were less likely to use wood as a main source of energy. We found mixed results on the influence of meeting participation on attitudes towards bear conservation. In year 3 of the project, these and other results will be discussed with the communities to gain a more nuanced understanding of the findings in advance of the endline surveys for this project. Following the endline surveys, data will be analysed to determine the impact of sanctuary development over this period and with the results published in an international peer-reviewed journal in order strengthening the knowledge base related to this aspect of biodiversity conservation and how it contributes to poverty reduction.

7. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Please quantify the proportion of women on the Project Board ¹ .	FTB UK Board 2:3 (f:m) FTB AU Board 3:1 (f:m)
Please quantify the proportion of project partners that are led by women, or which have a senior leadership team consisting of at least 50% women ² .	1

GESI Scale	Description	Put X where you think your project is on the scale
Not yet sensitive	The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn't quite meeting the requirements of a 'sensitive' approach	
Sensitive	The GESI context has been considered and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities.	X
Empowering	The project has all the characteristics of a 'sensitive' approach whilst also increasing equal access to assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups	
Transformative	The project has all the characteristics of an 'empowering' approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change	

The Project Management Committee overseeing Free the Bears activities in Laos is comprised of various individuals from difference agencies such as: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry; Department of Forest Inspection, Luang Prabang Province Agriculture and Forestry Office, Department of Finance, etc. The Committee is currently chaired by the Vice Governor of Luang Prabang Province, Mrs Siliphone SUPHANTHONG.

Throughout this project, Free the Bears is cognizant of the need to consider the needs of at-risk individuals and marginalised groups. Free the Bears' workforce in Laos consists largely of ethnic minority individuals. Free the Bears is actively working towards improving gender balance within the team and, to date, has appointed one female team leader (and one male team leader). When selecting community members to participate in workshops, we strive for having at least 50% female participation, and discuss with community leaders to identify individuals most in need of benefitting from the project.

¹ A Project Board has overall authority for the project, is accountable for its success or failure, and supports the senior project manager to successfully deliver the project.

² Partners that have formal governance role in the project, and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

Annual monitoring and evaluation of this project is conducted by the Project Management Committee which is overseen by project partners, Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office. PAFO representatives sit on the Project Management Committee (PMC) of Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary along with representatives from the Governor's Office, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Forestry Inspection and the Department of Planning and Cooperation. Over the past year, Free the Bears Laos Programme Manager met with representatives of the PMC throughout the year to finalise the report on previous years activities (Annex 4.1) and prepare an MOU for the next phase of activities. The Project Management Committee conducted a site inspection of Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary on 17th Aug 2023.

The Project Lead is responsible for M&E of this project, with the assistance of Free the Bears Laos Programme Manager. Progress towards delivering the outputs of this project is assessed on an ongoing basis during Free the Bears Laos Programme monthly meetings, and in monthly reports, as well as biannual internal Welfare Audits which details the percent occupancy of total housing capacity for each sanctuary.

Free the Bears maintains a secure Animal Records Database and Monthly Reports for each country programme which clearly details the size of the current animal population, including and arrivals, transfers and deaths. Department of Forest Inspection are responsible for conducting annual audits of captive prohibition category wildlife. However, obtaining official numbers of bears kept in other facilities throughout Laos is not easily possible at regular intervals. During Year 3 of the project, we will discuss this issue with project partners and other stakeholders to identify a solution.

At the outset of the project, new systems were introduced to track the proximity of expenditure to the sanctuary and surrounding communities. During Year 2 of this project, systems were put in place to better track payments to individuals benefiting directly from the sanctuary such that we can better monitor and evaluate this. Further improvements will be made during year 3 of the project to ensure that all relevant information is captured.

Risks to the delivery of the project will be reviewed regularly using the risk register, with risks and mitigation measures updated and adapted as required. Annual and Half Year progress reports and a Final Project report complying with IWT CF requirements will be submitted by Free the Bears for review. These reports will provide robust reporting against the intended objectives and outputs indicators detailed in the logframe. A complete audit will be conducted in the final year of the project and submitted to IWTCF.

9. Lessons learnt

Training of wildlife law enforcement officers on-site at the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary appears to have been a success at improving the understanding of officers, as well as in building stronger networks between law enforcement officers throughout Laos and Free the Bears Lao staff who are crucial to delivery of the training. Training will continue in year 3 of the project with additional refresher training being considered for those who have participated in year 2. Participant evaluation forms will be reviewed in order to identify gaps in areas of interest.

Some challenges in tracking payments to individuals for labour and produce have yet to be ironed out. These need to be addressed in order to help demonstrate the impact that the project is having in terms of household income. These challenges are not insurmountable but have not received sufficient attention to date.

A change request will be submitted following review of this report in order to change the activity numbers to reflect the outcomes to which they contribute, as well as some outcome indicators that are proving difficult to measure.

10. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Reviewer requested evidence to back up the M& E process. To address this, a copy of the final project document, 2022 – 2023, which has been signed off by the Project Management Committee is attached as Annex 4.1. Monthly meeting minutes may contain sensitive information regarding ongoing investigations and/or bear confiscations so cannot be shared openly.

Reviewer requested information on the gender split of the lead and partner organizations. Gender balance of Project Partner leadership will be provided in the next half year report. Free the Bears is governed by two boards: one in UK and one in Australia. Gender balance of Free the Bears UK Board is 2 females to 3 males, and Free the Bear Australian Board is currently 3 females to 1 male, for an overall balance of 5:4. Free the Bears Laos Programme is comprised of 16 females to 37 males.

11. Risk Management

One unanticipated risk emerged in the year 1 of the project. A privately-owned facility near Vientiane which takes in some confiscated wildlife houses 2 sun bears and 23 Asiatic black bears. In January 2023 it was learned that the facility would have to move off the land that it was on, would have to relocate the facility, and may not have the capacity to continue housing bears. As the only other organisation in Laos with the capacity to care for this large number of bears, it was possible that the bears might have been transferred to a Free the Bears facility (Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary or Tat Kuang Si Bear Rescue Centre). As well as requiring significant additional resources, this influx of bears would have limited the space available for newly confiscated bears. After careful consideration, it was decided that the best resolution to this issue would be for Free the Bears to offer support, if needed, to the other organisation to house the bears at the new facility. This risk has now been avoided and the risk register has been updated accordingly, Annex 4.4

12. Sustainability and legacy

Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary is an important flagship project for both PAFO and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, being Laos' first and only government-owned multi-species wildlife rescue facility. The sanctuary frequently hosts capacity building workshops and visits from high-ranking officials. Section 2, above, highlights some important stakeholder engagement during the year.

Free the Bears continues efforts to attaining accreditation by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries for Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary which will further differentiate this model from commercial wildlife facilities in Laos and provided a platform with which to advocated for minimum standards legally required to house captive wildlife.

Tat Kuang Si Bear Rescue Centre, also managed by Free the Bears, typically welcomes over 300,000 local and international visitors each year. This provides an important opportunity for raising awareness about the project.

In the final year of the project, Free the Bears plans to host the Wild Animal Rescue Network conference in Luang Prabang. This is an important opportunity for wildlife rescue organisations in the region to meet and discuss emerging challenges and recent successes. During this conference, Free the Bears will highlight the strong focus on combining wildlife law enforcement with sustainable community development.

13. IWT Challenge Fund identity

IWTCF/BCF was tagged on several social media posts about this project during this past year, for example:

YouTube

- DOFI training <https://youtu.be/hoNvZrlelgo>

Facebook

- Pangolin Rescue <https://fb.watch/rBN0zXws--/>
- DOFI training <https://fb.watch/rBNbSQxTJH/>

Instagram

- Pangolin Rescue
https://www.instagram.com/reel/C4NMtZgAIOD/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==
- DOFI training
https://www.instagram.com/reel/C58R586LZIT/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==

Other:

The British Embassy in Laos also posted about recent rescues on the UK in Laos Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ukinlaos/posts/pfbid0YhgG8kLGsMbtKSqQmhbwtE8kV7wT2sKK93xWujTyMiLSz4K62iuCFfW2EhZ5CRZrl>

On Twitter, the British Embassy in Laos posted about Ambassador Mel Barlow's visit to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary

<https://twitter.com/UKinLaos/status/1757040021608202405>

Towards the end of his diplomatic mission in Laos, British Ambassador Pearson, highlighted the support provided by the UK government to the project in local news media:

<https://laotiantimes.com/2023/06/12/from-diplomacy-to-sustainability-british-ambassador-john-pearsons-remarkable-tenure-in-laos/?fbclid=IwAR09cPhHpjtb15mdmU2EPDVwTHja3d0aBPZLncmYteTipDD15Asg8ZYw9us>

14. Safeguarding

Has your Safeguarding Policy been updated in the past 12 months?	No
Have any concerns been reported in the past 12 months	No
Does your project have a Safeguarding focal point?	Yes. Matt [REDACTED]
Has the focal point attended any formal training in the last 12 months?	No
What proportion (and number) of project staff have received formal training on Safeguarding?	Past: 0% Planned: 0%
<p>Has there been any lessons learnt or challenges on Safeguarding in the past 12 months? Please ensure no sensitive data is included within responses.</p> <p>Nothing to report.</p>	
<p>Does the project have any developments or activities planned around Safeguarding in the coming 12 months? If so please specify.</p> <p>Nothing planned at this time.</p>	
<p>Please describe any community sensitisation that has taken place over the past 12 months; include topics covered and number of participants.</p> <p>Nothing to report.</p>	
<p>Have there been any concerns around Health, Safety and Security of your project over the past year? If yes, please outline how this was resolved.</p> <p>In January 2024, 16 members (12 male: 4 female) of Free the Bears Laos Programme received training in first aid from the Lao Red Cross in order to improve health and safety at the sanctuary. Regular first aid training for staff will be maintained.</p>	

15. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (April 2023-March 2024)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2023/24 Grant (£)	2023/24 Total actual IWT Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)				Negligible
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs				Negligible
Travel and subsistence				Negligible
Operating Costs				
Capital items (see below)				Negligible
Others (see below)				Negligible
TOTAL				133,467

Table 2: Project mobilised or matched funding during the reporting period (1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024)

	Secured to date	Expected by end of project	Sources
Matched funding leveraged by the partners to deliver the project (£)			
Total additional finance mobilised for new activities occurring outside of the project, building on evidence, best practices and the project (£)			Free the Bears funders, including private individuals, foundations, grant makers, etc

16. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

There has been an apparent increase in the volume of bears and other protected species being advertised for sale on social media within Laos. It is as yet unclear if this reflects an increase in hunting pressure or changes in trade mechanisms. This issue will be discussed among members of the 15.7 Wildlife Trade Task Force to develop an intervention strategy.

A change request will be submitted to correct the activity numbers in the logframe to match the output that it will contribute towards. This will be done following the review of this annual report.

17. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes.

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds to edit and use the following for various promotional purposes (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

Wildlife conservation charity Free the Bears has rescued sixteen endangered moon bear cubs, believed to be the largest ever rescue of endangered bear cubs in history. The cubs were confiscated by the Environmental Police in the Laos capital of Vientiane on March 19th 2024. They were taken to the Vientiane Police Headquarters for overnight care by Free the Bears and then transferred to the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary. This sanctuary, one of two operated by Free the Bears in partnership with the Government of Laos, already houses 111 sun bears and moon bears, among other endangered species, all rescued from the illegal wildlife trade.

The rescue followed an investigation by the Environmental Police after neighbours reported hearing the cubs' screams. One female of Lao nationality has been taken into custody and the police are searching for the owners of the house, alleged to be a Chinese national and his Lao wife. The person in custody claims the cubs were mostly sourced from social media groups trading illegal wildlife, according to the police.

Moon bears or Asiatic black bears are classed as Vulnerable to Extinction due primarily to hunting and habitat loss. They are protected from international trade under the CITES convention and given additional protections in Laos where it is illegal to hunt, possess or trade moon bears or their body parts.

Matt Hunt, CEO of Free the Bears, shared, "We're still trying to digest how to cope with this massive rescue, but are so happy 16 of the 17 are alive and have a second chance in our care. Just one month ago we rescued two moon bear cubs and we've just been notified of another two cubs confiscated by our government partners, so our team are once again preparing for another rescue. This is the most bears we've rescued in a single year and we're only three months into 2024. The sheer number of cubs puts immense pressure on our small charity. We'll need to bring in expert cub care staff from our Cambodia sanctuary as well as other specialist help from overseas. We hope to receive support from animal lovers worldwide, who can sign up to be a Bear Carer on our website. Without suitable safe and protected forest for release, we may need to care for them for life, up to 35 years or more", added Mr Hunt.

File Type (Image / Video / Graphic)	File Name or File Location	Caption including description, country and credit	Social media accounts and websites to be tagged (leave blank if none)	Consent of subjects received (delete as necessary)
Image	1. Laos Environmental Police officers confiscate 16 cubs and arrest 1 Laotian female, Vientiane, March 19, 2024	Laos Environmental Police officers confiscate 16 cubs and arrest 1 Laotian female, Laos, Free the Bears	@freethebears	Yes
Image	2. Environmental Police with Free the Bears team, Vientiane, March 20, 2024	Environmental Police with Free the Bears team, Laos, Free the Bears	@freethebears	Yes
Image	3. 16 mouths to feed every 3 hours is a difficult job, Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, Luang Prabang, March 21, 2024	16 mouths to feed every 3 hours is a difficult job, Laos, Free the Bears	@freethebears	Yes
Image	4. Wildlife Law Enforcement First Responders training, group 6, at Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, Laos	Wildlife Law Enforcement First Responders training, group 6, at Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, Laos	@freethebears.org	Yes
Video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7XzgDIITfo&t=320s	From Darkness to Light: 16 Rescued Cubs' Journey to Hope, Laos, Free the Bears	@freethebears	Yes

Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against logframe for Financial Year 2023-2024

Project summary	Progress and Achievements April 2023 - March 2024	Actions required/planned for next period
<p>Impact</p> <p>Reduction in number of bears traded and held in bile farms in Laos, and demonstrable poverty reduction stemming from opportunities created through proper placement of confiscated wildlife.</p>	<p>26 bears removed from illegal possession in Laos, including 16 bears from a single premises suspected of being a nascent bear bile farm, thus preventing the growth of the industry in Laos. Work towards demonstrating the impact of the project on poverty reduction is ongoing.</p>	
<p>Outcome Improved capacity to enforce wildlife laws reduces the number of bears being traded and/or held illegally, and the care of confiscated animals provides opportunities for livelihood diversification in local communities.</p>		
<p>Outcome indicator 0.1 Percentage of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from <30% in 2020 to >50% by the end of year 2, and >60% by the end of Year 3.</p>	<p>Confiscations of bears in Laos doubled from 13 in the first year to 26 in year 2. It is challenging at this point to determine the number of cases reported in order to determine what proportion of the trade is interceded.</p>	<p>Free the Bears continues to follow-up with the responsible agencies on reports of bear trade. Further attempts will be made in year 3 of this project to access and compile reporting data.</p>
<p>Outcome indicator 0.2 Number of bears in bile farms in Laos decreases from ca. 100 in 2021, to 80 by end of year 2, and less than 50 by the end of year 3.</p>	<p>Unofficial reports indicate that the number of bears on bile farms at the end of Year 2 of this project has decreased to fewer than 80 individuals.</p>	<p>Free the Bears will continue to support confiscation of bears and discuss with the relevant government agencies to obtain the latest official numbers.</p>
<p>Outcome indicator 0.3 Number of households deriving at least the equivalent of minimum wage from the sanctuary increases from 59 in 2020, to at least 120 by the end of year 2, and 160 by the end of year 3.</p>	<p>As of Y2Q4, approximately 70 individuals are earning more than minimum wage through employment as full-time staff or day labourers at the sanctuary.</p>	<p>Further measures will be implemented in year 3 of the project to improving tracking of this indicator.</p>
<p>Output 1 Increased capacity to house confiscated bears at the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.</p>		
<p>Output indicator 1.1 300% increase in capacity to provide immediate short-term housing for confiscated bears, from 10 adult bears in 2021, to 30 by end of year 2, and to 40 by the end of year 3.</p>	<p>Immediate capacity to be able to house 23 confiscated bears by the end of year 2, with sufficient materials to increase this to 31 at short notice should a large confiscation of adult bears happen.</p>	<p>We are currently on track to increase capacity to 40 by Y3Q4.</p>

Output indicator 1.2 Increase animal keeper staff from 9 male, 3 female in 2020, to 9 male, 4 females by Y1Q4, 9 male, 5 females by Y2Q4, and 10 male, 6 females by Y3Q4.	Targets have been surpassed, with 11 males and 7 females as of Y2Q4.	Continue to improve gender balance with recruitment of female keepers as required.
Output 2. Increase in confiscation rates for bears and other protected wildlife throughout Laos.		
Output indicator 2.1. Proportion of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from <30% in 2019 to >50% by the end of year 2, and >60% by the end of year 3.	While the number of bears confiscated double from 13 in year 1 to 26 in year 2, it is challenging to determine the number of cases reported.	Consider reviewing this output indicator.
Output indicator 2.2. Proportion of reported protected wildlife trade cases resulting in confiscation/handover increases from >30% in 2019 to >40% by the end of year 2, and >50% by the end of year 3.	As is the case with bears, it is challenging to determine the number of cases reported in order to determine proportion of trade interceded.	Consider reviewing this output indicator.
Output indicator 2.3 Bear-safe transportation crates distributed to 6 of 18 provinces/prefecture by Y1Q4.	As of Y2Q4, six crates suitable to transport confiscated bear cubs and 1 large crate for adult bears have been distributed to six provinces.	Five more transport crates suitable for adult bears will be distributed strategically throughout the country during Year 3 of the project.
Output 3. Reduce poverty in local communities adjacent to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.		
Output indicator 3.1 At least 50% of project annual budget expended within 10km of the sanctuary, and at least 80% with 20km.	18% of total project expenditure was within 10km of the sanctuary and 94% was within 20km of the sanctuary in year 2.	Continue to monitor.
Output indicator 3.2 Number of full-time employment opportunities for local community members receiving payment for labour increases from 31 (85% male) in 2022 to 40 (80% male) by the end of Year 2.	in the final quarter of year 2, an average minimum of 36 community members (100% male) received and average payment of 2,592,385 LAK per month	Measuring this indicator will be improved in Year 3 of the project and measures will be taken to further improve gender balance
Output indicator 3.3 Number of local households with contracts to grow produce (fruit, veg, rice) for the sanctuary increases from 50 in 2022 to 70 by the end of year 2.	Agreements were signed with 80 households by the end of Year 1.	Assist household with crop production to increase yield.
Output indicator 3.4 Number of local households deriving income from the production of handicrafts for sale at the sanctuary and associated locations/events increases from 12 in 2020 to 30 by the end of Year 2.	Only one livelihood workshop with 10 females was held during this year.	Project partners will review this activity and output indicator.

<p>Output indicator 3.5 Number of local households assisted in transporting produce to market increases from 0 per month in 2021, to 16 per month by the end of year 1.</p>	<p>This indicator has not yet been monitored effectively.</p>	<p>Improvements will be made in Year 3 to ensure this target is being met and monitored effectively.</p>
<p>Output indicator 3.6 Relative increase in socioeconomic conditions of participating communities from 2017 baseline, 2022 follow-up and 2025 endline household surveys.</p>	<p>Household surveys were conducted with 397 individuals during Year 1.</p>	<p>Endline surveys will be conducted in Year 3, followed by analysis and reporting.</p>

Annex 2: Project’s full current logframe as presented in the application form (unless changes have been agreed)

Project Summary	SMART Indicators	Means of Verification	Important Assumptions
<p>Impact: (Max 30 words) Reduction in number of bears traded and held in bile farms in Laos, and demonstrable poverty reduction stemming from opportunities created through proper placement of confiscated wildlife.</p>			
<p>Outcome: (Max 30 words) Improved capacity to enforce wildlife laws reduces the number of bears being traded and/or held illegally, and the care of confiscated animals provides opportunities for livelihood diversification in local communities.</p>	<p>0.1 Percentage of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from <30% in 2020 to >50% by the end of year 2, and >60% by the end of Year 3.</p> <p>0.2 Number of bears in bile farms in Laos decreases from ca. 100 in 2021, to 80 by end of year 2, and less than 50 by the end of year 3.</p> <p>0.3 Number of households deriving at least the equivalent of minimum wage from the sanctuary increases from 59 in 2020, to at least 120 by the end of year 2, and 160 by the end of year 3.</p>	<p>0.1 Department of Forestry Inspection records and Free the Bears internal annual records of reported cases and their outcome.</p> <p>0.2 Department of Forestry Inspection annual bear farm inventories, as mandated in the Lao Wildlife and Aquatic Law.</p> <p>0.3 Free the Bears internal accounts</p>	<p>0.1 International scrutiny from, for example CITES Standing Committee and the World Bank, is sufficient to ensure that national wildlife legislation pertaining to keeping bears is not weakened.</p> <p>0.2 Decentralised provincial authorities have the political will to enforce national wildlife legislation and confiscate illegally held bears, and are not impeded by COVID-related travel restriction.</p> <p>0.3 Efforts from those working to improve wildlife law enforcement in Laos, e.g. World Bank, are sufficient to increase awareness among the judiciary as to the serious nature of wildlife crimes and prosecute as such.</p> <p>0.4 Free the Bears is successful in securing continual core funding through traditional and novel revenue streams in order to provide long-term care to confiscated wildlife, and thus a continued source of income and livelihoods for local communities.</p>
<p>Outputs: 1. Increased capacity to house confiscated bears at the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.</p>	<p>1.1 300% increase in capacity to provide immediate short-term housing for confiscated bears, from 10 adult bears in</p>	<p>1.1 Actual number of spaces available to house bears, as documented in Free the Bears biannual Welfare Audits and monthly husbandry reports.</p>	<p>1.1 Required material and labour can be sourced locally and in a timely manner such that deadlines are met.</p>

	<p>2021, to 30 by end of year 2, and to 40 by the end of year 3.</p> <p>1.2 Increase animal keeper staff from 9 male, 3 female in 2020, to 9 male, 4 females by Y1Q4, 9 male, 5 females by Y2Q4, and 10 male, 6 females by Y3Q4.</p>	<p>1.2 Free the Bears HR records detailing employment period and sex-disaggregated data.</p>	<p>1.2 Construction of permanent sanctuary housing allows for smooth flow of rescued bears through temporary housing/Quarantine Station.</p>
<p>2. Increase in confiscation rates for bears and other protected wildlife throughout Laos.</p>	<p>2.1 Proportion of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from <30% in 2019 to >50% by the end of year 2, and >60%by the end of year 3.</p> <p>2.2 Proportion of reported protected wildlife trade cases resulting in confiscation/handover increases from >30% in 2019 to >40% by the end of year 2, and >50% by the end of year 3.</p> <p>2.3 Bear-safe transportation crates distributed to 6 of 18 provinces/prefecture by Y1Q4.</p>	<p>2.1 Free the Bears internal reports and official government records form Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of reported cases and their outcomes.</p> <p>2.2 Free the Bears internal reports and official government records form Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of reported cases and their outcomes.</p> <p>2.3 Free the Bears internal reports and signed handover documents.</p>	<p>2.1 National wildlife legislation pertaining to keeping bears is not weakened.</p> <p>2.2 Decentralised provincial authorities have the political will to enforce national wildlife legislation and confiscate illegally held bears.</p>
<p>3. Reduce poverty in local communities adjacent to Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary.</p>	<p>3.1 At least 50% of project annual budget expended within 10km of the sanctuary, and at least 80% with 20km.</p> <p>3.2 Number of full-time employment opportunities for local community members receiving payment for labour increases from 31 (85% male) in 2022 to 40 (80% male) by the end of Year 2.</p> <p>3.3 Number of local households with contracts to grow produce (fruit, veg, rice) for the sanctuary increases from 50 in 2022 to 70 by the end of year 2.</p>	<p>3.1 Free the Bears internal accounting and records.</p> <p>3.2 Free the Bears internal HR records and employment contracts, including details of contract period and sex disaggregated data.</p> <p>3.3 Signed contracts between Free the Bears and farmers, and hard records of payment in monthly accounts.</p>	<p>3.1 The number of confiscated bears placed in the sanctuary increases, thus requiring increased labour and food supplies.</p> <p>3.2 Free the Bears is successful in securing continual funding through the existing donor base and novel funding streams efforts in order to provide long-term care to confiscated wildlife, and thus a continued source of income and livelihoods for local communities.</p>

	<p>3.4 Number of local households deriving income from the production of handicrafts for sale at the sanctuary and associated locations/events increases from 12 in 2020 to 30 by the end of Year 2.</p> <p>3.5 Number of local households assisted in transporting produce to market increases from 0 per month in 2021, to 16 per month by the end of year 1.</p> <p>3.6 Relative increase in socioeconomic conditions of participating communities from 2017 baseline, 2022 follow-up and 2025 endline household surveys..</p>	<p>3.4 Signed agreements between Free the Bears and craftspeople, sales records and revenue-sharing programme data.</p> <p>3.5 Free the Bears Vehicle travel log records detailing assistance provided to specified households in each village.</p> <p>3.6 Baseline data from 2017, National Census statistics from 2015 and 2020, follow-up socioeconomic survey data in 2022, and endline survey data collected in 2025.</p>	<p>3.3 Visitor numbers are sufficient to provide a market for locally made handicraft products.</p>
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Activities (each activity is numbered according to the output that it will contribute towards, for example 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are contributing to Output 1)

- 1.1 Design of temporary modular holding pens, by Y1Q3.
- 1.2 Fabrication of temporary holding pens, +5 by Y1Q4, +15 by Y2Q4, +10 by Y3Q4.
- 1.3 Animal keeper recruitment and training, +2 by Y1Q4, +2 by Y2Q4, +2Y3Q4

- 2.1 Procurement of dedicated rescue vehicle by Y1Q2
- 2.2 Build capacity of government agencies in short-term handling and care of wildlife, through month-long on-site training of at least 20 officers in Y2 and Y3.
- 2.3 Fabricate bear-safe transportation crates and distribute to 6 of 18 provinces by Y1Q4.
- 2.4 Assist government agencies in the transportation and placement of confiscated of bears and other protected species, throughout Y1Q2 – Y3Q4
- 2.5 Advocate for bear farm closures and demonstrate increased capacity to house confiscated bears with a site visit to wildlife sanctuary for key government stakeholders, Y2Q2

- 3.1 Recruit members of the local communities as labour, 40 by Y2Q4
- 3.2 Sign agreements with households to grow produce (fruit, veg, rice) for the sanctuary, +30 by Y1Q4, +20 by Y2Q4
- 3.3 Handicraft workshops, twice per year, attended by at least 15 households from the local communities, with at least 50% female participants.
- 3.4 Agreements made with 4 villages to assist in transporting produce to market, by Y1Q2.
- 3.5 Conduct follow-up and endline socioeconomic surveys in 300 households by Y1Q2 and Y3Q3, respectively.

Table 1 Project Standard Indicators

IWTCF Indicator number	Name of indicator	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
IWTCF-B13	0.1 Number of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from 06 in 2020 to 12 by the end of year 2, and 20 by the end of Year 3.	Number	Species	7 Asiatic black bears; and 1 sun bear	26 Asiatic black bears, 0 sun bears		34	60
IWTCF-B09	0.2 Number of bears in bile farms in Laos decreases from ca. 100 in 2021, to 80 by end of year 2, and less than 50 by the end of year 3.	Number	Estimated number of Individuals; Illegal facility	87	80		80	60
IWTCF-AI3	0.3 Number of households deriving at least the equivalent of minimum wage from the sanctuary increases from 59 in 2020, to at least 120 by the end of year 2, and 160 by the end of year 3.	People	Gender	0	70		1	3
IWTCF-A02	1.2 Increase animal keeper staff from 9 male, 3 female in 2020, to 9 male, 4 females by Y1Q4, 9 male, 5 females by Y2Q4, and 10 male, 6 females by Y3Q4.	People	Gender	10 males: 5 females	11 males and 7 females			
IWTCF-B13	0.1 Number of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from 06 in 2020 to 12 by the end of year 2, and 20 by the end of Year 3.	Number	Species	7 Asiatic black bears; and 1 sun bear	26 Asiatic black bears, 0 sun bears			
IWTCF-B13	0.1 Number of reported bear trade cases resulting in confiscation/hand-over increases from 06 in 2020 to 12 by the end of year 2, and 20 by the end of Year 3.	Number	Species	Ten individuals of 9 species	Eight individuals of five species			
IWTCF-D03	2.3 At least 20 local wildlife law enforcement agencies have improved capability and capacity as a result of training and provision of equipment.	Number of local organisations	Gender of trainees; By agency and province	0	12 female, 29 male			

IWTCF Indicator number	Name of indicator	Units	Disaggregation	Year 1 Total	Year 2 Total	Year 3 Total	Total to date	Total planned during the project
IWTCF-A03	3.3 Number of cooperatives established to grow produce for the sanctuary increase from 8 in 2022 to 13 by end of Year 1, and 17 by end of Year 2.	Number of cooperatives	Household; Produce type; Village	80 Household s; 5 villages; 9 types of produce; 5 villages	0			
IWTCF-A01	3.4 Number of local households that receive training in handicraft production for sale at the sanctuary and associated locations/events increases from 12 in 2020 to 30 by the end of Year 2.	People	Gender of trainee	3 male, 32 female	10 females, 0 males			
IWTCF-A15	3.7 Relative decrease in unsustainable practices in participating communities from 2017 baseline, 2022 follow-up and 2025 endline household surveys.	Percentage	Households; Type of livelihood,	0	n/a			

Table 2 Publications

Title	Type (e.g. journals, best practice manual, blog post, online videos, podcasts, CDs)	Detail (authors, year)	Gender of Lead Author	Nationality of Lead Author	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (e.g. weblink or publisher if not available online)
Strengthening Wildlife Protection in Laos	Online video	Free the Bears, 2024	Male	Dutch	YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoNvZr1elgo

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	X
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If you are submitting photos for publicity purposes, do these meet the outlined requirements (see section 17)?	X
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	X
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	X
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