

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects

Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

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 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

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

Project reference	IWT115
Project title	Demand reduction for threatened tortoises and freshwater turtles (TFTs) in Bangladesh
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Bangladesh
Lead Organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society, Bangladesh
Partner(s)	Not Applicable
Project Leader	Md. Zahangir Alom, Country Director, WCS Bangladesh
Report date and number	30 October 2025 (HYR4)
Project website/blog/social media	Not Applicable

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end of September).

Progress under this project has continued throughout the six months of the report in line with the latest approved timeline (December 2024, see Y3 report).

Output 1: Behavioural change strategy developed for reducing the demand for TFTs based on improved understanding of market dynamics and consumer motivations.

Activity 1.1: Media search and data analysis to identify TFT consumption and trade hotspots and continue monitoring of seizures.

Media data collection continued throughout the period of this report (April 1 to September 30). Twenty-two incidents of illegal TFT trade were recorded from media reports, involving 1,907 individuals from 8 species, including 25 individuals where the species was not noted. Most of the animals seized were confiscated alive. Indicator 1.1 was achieved in Year 1, with additional data allowing continued identification of trade hotspots and identification of emerging locations.

Activity 1.2: TFT market surveys.

Market surveys were conducted during the current reporting period. Market surveys to measure the current presence of turtles in identified markets and as ongoing monitoring following the surveys in Year 1 and Year 2. Year 4 survey started in September 2025. These surveys will be completed throughout October. By the end of September, 244 markets were surveyed. This time of year, was selected for the surveys as it includes the Hindu festival season (Durga puja and Kali puja), when TFTs are most likely to be observed for sale in the markets. This activity continues to add to Indicator 1.1.

Activity 1.3: completed in Y1. See Y1 Annual Report. Indicator 1.1 achieved in Year 1.

Activity 1.4: completed in Y1. See Y2 Annual Report.

Activity 1.5: Activity completed in Y1. See Y1 and Y2 Annual Reports. Indicator 1.2 achieved.

Activity 1.6: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report.

Activity 1.7: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 and Y3 Annual Reports.

Activity 1.8: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report. Indicator 1.3 achieved in Year 2 with approval of the strategy by government partners.

Activity 1.9: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report. Indicator 1.4 achieved in Year 2.

Activity 1.10: Repeat market surveys throughout project to monitor any drop in size of market to support indication of reduced demand.

The repeat market surveys (Year 4) are currently underway (see Activity 1.2). Results from the surveys conducted in September indicate the presence of TFTs in 14 markets across six districts from 244 markets through 374 surveys. 96 TFT individuals belonging to three species- Indian flapshell turtle *Lissemys punctata* (25), Indian roofed turtle *Pangshura tecta* (67), and exotic red-eared sliders *Trachemys scripta elegans* (4) were observed.

Output 2: Behaviour change strategy implemented resulting in measurable changes to knowledge, attitudes and practices of TFT consumers, and lessons learned to improve future campaigns.

Activity 2.1: Develop awareness raising key messages and materials.

The development of awareness-raising key messages and materials has been completed as planned. A set of Bangla-language communication materials, including posters, flyers, booklets, stickers, t-shirts, and fridge magnets, was finalized and distributed as part of the campaign activity in Year 3. Key messages for the materials were developed in Year 2 to inform the design of the items that were distributed. These messages were also used in the design of radio broadcasts, public announcements and community events. See Y2 and Y3 Annual Reports. The messages and materials continue to be used to sustain community engagement and reinforce key messages on TFT conservation in Year 4.

Activity 2.2: The TFT documentary film production was completed (Y3Q2) and incorporated into both the pilot (Y3Q3) and final campaign (Y3Q4). (See Y3 Half-year and Annual reports)

Activity 2.3: The TFT demand reduction campaign was designed, piloted (Y3Q3), and implemented in Year 3 as planned (Activity 2.4). (See Y3 Annual Report)

Activity 2.4: Execute campaign in identified TFT consumption and trade hotspots.

The TFT demand reduction campaign, targeting identified TFT consumers and trade hotspots, was delivered in Year 3 (February 2025) and achieved a wide reach through household visits, school programs, entertainment activities, religious engagement, and community media. (See Y3 Annual Report)

The campaign, strengthened by community-driven approaches such as the Pot Song, radio broadcasts, and public announcements, has been rolled out effectively.

As part of our ongoing efforts, WCS has been holding bi-monthly mentoring sessions with the 92 religious leaders who were consulted during the development and implementation of the demand reduction campaign. These leaders continue to motivate Hindu community members to consume TFTs. We are continuing the miking activities across the campaign areas, covering a total of 463 kilometres, 639 kilometres, and 589 kilometres in May, June, and September 2025, respectively.

Efforts to measure the number of people exposed to the campaign are ongoing (Indicator IWTGF-C05)

Activity 2.5: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report.

Activity 2.6: Conduct post-KAP surveys in the areas where TFT demand reduction campaign took place.

The post-campaign KAP survey remains scheduled for Year 4 Q4, following the full rollout of the TFT demand reduction campaign. This timing ensures that respondents' reports of TFT consumption reflect the period after the campaign interventions and capture the traditional peak festival season. The baseline KAP survey questionnaire was revised to include additional questions assessing the campaign's effectiveness.

Output 3: Establish collaboration for behaviour change for TFTs through sharing of the approach between wildlife managers, law enforcement officials and development agencies in Bangladesh and India on successes and failures in demand reduction.

Activity 3.1: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report.

Activity 3.2: Organise an in-person workshop at Bana Bhaban in Bangladesh with participation by forest officials from Bangladesh and India.

This activity was cancelled following DEFRA's approval of the change request in December 2024 (see Y3 Annual report, Annex 8). Instead of the workshop, we are continuing to explore alternative avenues to share project lessons and sustain transboundary dialogue between India and Bangladesh through virtual platforms and knowledge exchange mechanisms.

Activity 3.3: Organise an in-person workshop at Aranya Bhaban in India with participation by forest officials from Bangladesh and India.

This activity was cancelled following DEFRA's approval of a submitted change request. (See Y3 Annual Report)

Activity 3.4: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report.

Activity 3.5: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report.

Output 4: Bangladesh's national wildlife protection laws strengthened for TFT protection.

Activity 4.1: This activity was completed in Year 1. See Y1 Annual Report.

Activity 4.2: This activity was completed in Year 1. See Y1 Annual Report.

Activity 4.3: Follow-up meetings and engagement with BFD on proposals to list threatened TFT species and clarify definitions of Schedule I and II protected species in the Wildlife Act, 2012.

This activity is progressing as planned. WCS continues to follow up with the BFD on progress, and in this reporting period the species list was revised and updated. At a meeting in August, definitions of Schedule I and II were prepared, and all the species under the Wildlife Act, 2012, were reviewed and finalized for amendment, and a panel of experts was called to revisit these changes and provide recommendations.

Activity 4.4: Activity completed in Y2. See Y2 Annual Report.

Activity 4.5: Follow-up with Customs Agency through meetings and engagement on the proposal.

During this reporting period, our WCS Legal Advisor made several phone calls to Customs officials and held one meeting with them. The purpose of these communications and the meeting was to discuss amendments to the Import Policy Order under the Imports and Exports (Control) Act of 1950. The document is being reviewed at the ministry for final approval.

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.

Although the project experienced unexpected delays and challenges in Year 3 due to political unrest and related sensitivities, all activities have since been completed in line with the revised project activity timeline approved in December 2024. Despite the initial disruptions, scheduled activities were successfully implemented, and the project is on track. No further problems or unexpected developments have arisen in the reporting period.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)

Actual spend: [REDACTED]

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2026)?

No Estimated underspend: £

4c. If you expect an underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible, and not later than 31st December. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes to your project 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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Suspicions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk

No other issues.

6. Project risk management

6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.

Not applicable for this project.

7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.

Feedback from the previous annual report (Year 3) is noted below along with the response.

Feedback: Clarify whether match funding from one source is still available for the project.

WCS BD response: At the time of submission of the proposal 77% of the identified match funding had already been secured. The remaining 23% (£18,175.00) was already identified for

future proposals to expand on the work of the project and through existing funding for salaries of the WCS Regional staff. The match funding for Year 3 has already been covered with most of these costs covering staff and office costs in Bangladesh. The match funding identified for Year 4 is for WCS Regional staff, WCS Bangladesh office costs and, these costs (£5,781.00) will be covered through existing funding support at the regional and country levels.

Please describe your complaints and feedback response mechanism. How is the CFRM made available to all stakeholders and staff/volunteers/interns? (HYR).

WCS has a global grievance redress mechanism (Annex 5) which provides a mechanism for individuals or communities to raise good faith grievances about the impacts of projects or activities undertaken or sponsored by WCS and provides a structure to ensure that human rights and safeguarding grievances are handled, responded to and documented in a fair and timely manner.

Acknowledging that the global GRM may not be accessible to local community members involved in this project WCS Bangladesh has developed a locally accessible system for the submission of grievances. Flyers outlining the options for submission of a grievance were developed and shared in English and Bangla (Annex 6 and 7), including the translation of the Global GRM form into Bangla through a secure submission process.

Further work is being done to finalise the mechanism for the handling of any grievances, including development of a timeline for responses. Any submissions received locally are submitted to the global mechanism to ensure transparency.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Yes
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes

List of Annexes

Number	Title	Location
Annex 1	Standard Indicators for TFT demand reduction project	Attachment
Annex 2	WCS Global Safeguarding Policy Document	Attachment
Annex 3	WCS Sexual and Other Prohibited Harassment Policy	Attachment
Annex 4	WCS Code of Conduct	Attachment
Annex 5	WCS Global Grievance Redress Mechanism	Attachment
Annex 6	Complaints and Feedback Response Mechanism (CFRM) flyer for TFT demand reduction project (English)	Attachment
Annex 7	Complaints and Feedback Response Mechanism (CFRM) flyer for TFT demand reduction project (Bangla)	Attachment