

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2023

Project reference	IWT122
Project title	Furs for Life – Preserving Culture, Protecting Nature
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Zambia, South Africa
Lead partner	Panthera
Partner(s)	Nazareth Baptist Church eBuhleni (commonly known as the Shembe Church), Barotse Royal Establishment
Project leader	Gareth Whittington-Jones
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://panthera.org/furs-life

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

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

Panthera’s Furs for Life project is advancing as expected, and in some areas, we have already surpassed our own expectations. Our demand reduction work continues with promising progress with the Nazareth Baptist Church eBuhleni (Shembe Church) in South Africa and the Baroste Royal Establishment (BRE) and has now attracted the attention of other user groups in South Africa and Zambia. Expansion of the project was always a strategy, and this new interest allows us to start assessing the best ways to achieve this. The addition of this grant to our matched funding gives us a launch pad to have the biggest impact possible on the current user groups and also to expand the project.

The establishment of the first women-led tailoring enterprise in South Africa is well underway, with the training of three staff and the production of the first 213 *Amambatha* (Shembe shoulder garments) in early 2023. The Heritage Furs produced by this enterprise began to be sold at the Ebuhleni Shembe gathering in July. The production of garments within the Shembe enterprise is lower than predicted due to some delays in the construction of their enterprise building on the Shembe Church’s eBuhleni grounds. We are hoping that they will be at full production early in the fourth quarter when they will be making *Amambatha* and other components of the attire. A major highlight of the project is that reverends are now announcing at Church gatherings that followers can purchase Heritage Fur garments from the church office and stating to the traders that it is illegal to trade in authentic leopard furs without a permit.

We have started producing other Heritage Fur attire in South Africa by engaging with tailors and traders who are currently involved in the authentic leopard skin trade. These traders already have trade routes and markets for sales. We donated initial lengths of 5m plain leopard print and 5m *Amambatha* (enough for 10 garments) Heritage Fur pile fabric to them to start making *Amambatha* shoulder capes and other traditional garments that incorporate authentic leopard skin. The tailors/ traders have taken to the Heritage Furs positively with more tailors and traders enquiring if they can also receive Heritage Fur pile fabric. This concept was developed after receiving reports that the Heritage Fur was taking business away from the traders selling authentic leopard skin products. This is potentially an effective approach to introduce or expand Heritage Furs to user groups in future as they already have established trade routes, customers and sales areas.

The first Zambian microenterprise has also been established in Kalabo with six women. These women are from families involved in the poaching and/or trade of leopard skins and have completed their training and established their micro enterprise in the small town of Kalabo. They have already produced their first 40 school uniforms in the month leading up to the end of the report date. The first item that we are training the tailors to make is school uniforms as there is a high demand for those garments. The capacity of the tailors to produce and sell the garments will increase the overall sustainability of their enterprise. They will also produce Heritage Furs, other traditional attire such as *Musisi* and *Siziba* and products for the tourism industry such as bags and pillowcases. This will further increase the sustainability of the microenterprises and facilitate the manufacture of Heritage Furs within Zambia. September also saw the start of the training for the next 10 women in the town of Mwandu, which is about 400km from Kalabo in the south of Zambia. Mwandu is also the location of the late Senior Chief Inyambo Yeta's royal palace. The women chosen to participate in Mwandu training event are also all from poaching families, and we hope this extra income from sewing will provide poverty relief whereby the men do not have to risk being apprehended and incarcerated for poaching.

Overall in South Africa and Zambia we have 10 tailors producing different products including Heritage Furs. To date the enterprises have produced 321 garments comprising eight different products, namely school uniforms (shorts and shirts – girls' skirts are next), *Amambatha*, headbands, waistbands, armbands, ankle bands and crowns.

The retail of garments and products in South Africa is formal and informal. The Shembe sell their garments outside the church office at gatherings. The physical structure whereby the sewing will take place, which will also house a retail section, is not complete. The informal traders and tailors sell their products to the informal trade as they travel around and do not use a specific site. In Zambia we have started the process to acquire two retail spaces in two different parts of the country. The first town is Mongu, situated between the King's palaces at Lealui and Limulunga where the largest Lozi gathering takes place each year. We have a few options but are trying to rent a space on the main street to maximise foot traffic to increase sales and potential educational impact by displaying behavioral change output materials. The second town is Livingstone, which still forms part of the BRE area of influence and is a very popular tourist destination due to its proximity to Victoria Falls. This space will provide an opportunity to sell traditional garments as well as tourist products that are produced by the tailors. We have a space earmarked inside a popular ice cream shop on the main street of Livingstone. We will finalise these two sites in Zambia during late 2023.

One of the significant challenges we have faced over the past year is obtaining permission from the Church to take professional photographs of Shembe followers wearing the Heritage Furs. After overcoming internal Church challenges the photoshoot took place at the July Shembe Gathering and we have now commenced developing Shembe marketing materials. We started with two co-branded gazebos which have been approved by the Shembe leadership and we have ordered one for the church sales area a one for the leader to use at eBuhleni or when he travels to gatherings providing us with a form of endorsement.

The planning of the Behavioural Change Campaign for the Lozi in Zambia is well under way. The online component of the workshop is scheduled to take place in late October and the in-person component is provisionally scheduled to take place in Mongu, Zambia towards the end

of November 2023. The workshops will give participants a better understanding of how Behavioural Change Campaigns work and result in the co-development of materials we can use in Zambia (e.g., slogans, songs and graphic designs). The most important part of these materials is that they have appropriate and effective messaging and imagery that increases the acceptance and adoption of Heritage Furs over authentic skins. Workshop participants will include Panthera staff, members of the user groups from poachers to leadership and members of partner conservation organisations (including Department of National Parks and Wildlife) to make sure these materials deliver the most impactful messages.

We are in the process of engaging with an enterprise development expert to assist us with the creation of a business plan for Zambia. Elements that need to be considered include training of tailors, space for tailoring, purchasing and transport of raw materials (e.g., fabric), sewing machine repairs, costs and logistics associated with selling to the informal and retail sectors, garment transport, retail space management, economies of scale and profit margins etc. All aspects of the enterprises need to function efficiently and affordably for long-term sustainability of the project. The training of business managers within the chain is also crucial to the success.

We currently are finalising the technical files for the creation of 600m of the luxury Heritage Fur from ECOPEL. This material is 50% biodegradable, and the backing cotton is made from 100% recycled materials. This will be used for the luxury Shembe Heritage Fur *Amambatha* garment as standard cost price of the material is over double the price of the Heritage Fur pile fabric acquired previously. Working with ECOPEL has also allowed us to trial new ideas for the furs such as testing different pile heights (fur length) and having two different pile heights within the same fur giving the Heritage Fur a third dimension and therefore making it look more like the authentic furs. We have also requested samples of our previous Heritage Fur with some of these changes to improve the more affordable version. We will place an order for 300m of the original fur also once we are happy with the technical files.

Unfortunately, this year the Lozi lost their Queen of the North a few weeks before the Kuomboka ceremony, which consequently was cancelled. In South Africa we attended the July Shembe Gathering at eBuhleni. The highlight was seeing Heritage Furs being sold at the church office and two other traders were also trading in Heritage Furs. It is at this gathering that we were approached by other traders who also wanted Heritage Fur pile fabric to tailor and trade with. Each Shembe gathering we undertake dancer counts to record how many Heritage Furs are being worn in comparison to authentic furs. This July the ratio of Heritage Fur to authentic was 1:1.1, which is similar to previous years. We predict that as we roll out the behavioural change campaign materials, and as the church starts producing and selling more Heritage Furs, plus the help of the reverends announcing the sale of furs, we will see the ratio shift in favour of the Heritage Furs.

It was not only the loss of the Queen of the North that the BRE had to deal with this year, but we are also saddened to inform you of the passing of the Lozi Senior Chief, His Royal Highness Inyambo Yeto in July 2023. The Senior Chief was a hugely influential member of our project and was the person who approached Panthera to assist with establishing the use of Heritage Furs in Zambia in order to conserve wild cats and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Lozi People. HRH was the champion of the project as well as the conservation champion for the Lozi.

In good news, our demand reduction work with the BRE in Zambia was selected as a finalist for the prestigious Herman Goldstein Award for Problem Oriented Policing hosted by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (POP). In August, the project team was invited to present the case study (available [here](#)) at the annual POP conference in Colorado, USA where it was selected as the overall winner. This is an incredible honour and the first time in the 31-year history of the award that an environmental or Africa-based project has ever been nominated.

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.

We were meant to purchase a vehicle for the South African component of the project. We were, however, able to retain a project vehicle from another funded project; therefore, this vehicle is not needed at this time. However, we have established that we will be a vehicle short in Zambia for the Zambian Coordinator and therefore have put in a change request for these funds to be spent in Zambia rather than South Africa. We are also behind on spending of two budget lines "Stipend for retailers/tailors" and "Starter Packs" due to first year delays. We are also requesting some budget from these lines be added to the vehicle purchase as vehicles are more expensive in Zambia than in South Africa.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes, we have notified NIRAS that we wish to request a budget change for the location of the vehicle purchase. We are preparing a Change Request Form, which will be submitted following submission of this report.

Formal Change Request submitted: No, it will follow this report.

Received confirmation of change acceptance:

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]

4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2024)?

No Estimated underspend: £

4c. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

It will be noted that our rate of spending is lower than our original forecast. Administratively-speaking, it took longer than anticipated to establish the grant in our accounting system, and in the interim, the project was supported by matching funds (from Cartier Philanthropy). That said, we are following a detailed expenditure plan for this grant, which reflects an increased rate of spending between now and the end of Year 1, in line with our activities and project needs. According to this plan, we will be on track to fully spend our Year 1 budget on time, including on the behaviour change workshop and utility vehicle, among others.

We will soon be submitting a Change Request Form for the reallocation of some funds between existing budget lines within Year 1.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**