



**BIODIVERSITY  
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



## **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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024**

**Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.**

**Submit to: [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.**

<b>Project reference</b>	IWT122
<b>Project title</b>	Furs for Life – Preserving Culture, Protecting Nature
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Zambia, South Africa
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Panthera
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Nazareth Baptist Church eBuhleni (commonly known as the Shembe Church), Barotse Royal Establishment
<b>Project leader</b>	Gareth Whittington-Jones
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://panthera.org/furs-life">https://panthera.org/furs-life</a>

**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).**

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 Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE) and has now attracted the attention of other user groups in South Africa, Zambia, Malawi and Eswatini. 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 to expand the project.

The establishment of the Shembe tailoring enterprise in South Africa continued to be a challenge this half of the year, due to the continued internal politics. At the end of September 2024, we finally received the go ahead to start producing Heritage Furs and were told we could

start selling them at the next gathering in Eshowe (town in northern KwaZulu Natal, South Africa) in October. The upcoming sales were announced by a reverend to the churches followers at a gathering in September. The start of the sales will be paired with the release of our behavioural change campaign materials such as the sales gazebo, pull-up banners and feather banners. We are also waiting to hear where we can put up the four billboards at eBuhleni (main church grounds).

To date we have trained 58 woman and two men in tailoring and provided them with the hardware, initial stock and support to have their own tailoring enterprises. Thirty-six women are from three different areas in Zambia, 20 women are from the African Congregational Church (ACC), three are part of the Shembe enterprise and one male is a private trader. The sales of Heritage Fur, Heritage Fur products and other products outside of the Shembe church in South Africa and Zambia continues to grow. The largest growth in tailoring products has come from the 20 women trained within the ACC. These women have produced over 2,500 garments of 15 different types including the Heritage Fur hats. The Zambian tailors have produced over 600 garments of nine different types. Twenty of the Zambian woman are still in training as their course was not completed due to safety concerns as their poacher husbands did not want them to continue. This issue is being dealt with by area leaders. Tailors outside of the Shembe church are also continuing to produce and sell garments at church gatherings as well as privately.

Retail sites are all still in progress, however Heritage Fur garments and other garments produced are informally sold, directly from tailors or at tailor's private stands when they attend gatherings. The Shembe church will be trading out of branded gazebo's as they tour with the leader. Once the building, on the main grounds in eBuhleni, is complete this will also house as a retail area. We have secured a retail site in Livingstone, Zambia, and we are busy with business licenses and interior shelving. This site is located inside another popular business that houses a restaurant and ice-cream shop, which are frequently visited. We are currently looking for a site in Mongu where we can utilize a space inside a current retail business as we have done in Livingstone. The reason for this method is to reduce costs and risks of renting a building solely for this project. If the small concepts prove successful then we can look at expanding.

The completion of the Zambia business plan by the enterprise development expert has been significantly delayed. Zambia is currently experiencing a severe drought which is not only affecting the economy and food security but also the electricity power supply. Eighty percent of electricity in Zambia is produced through hydroelectrical plants and with the drought these are not functioning, resulting in 20 hours of load shedding per day. The expert assisting with this component did not only have large communication, battery life and functioning complexities but he also asked to delay our deadline to focus on the dire situation in Zambia as he has many business interests in Zambia, and his skills are sought after by other businesses. This business plan is back on his immediate agenda, which we are currently working on. This power issues has forced us to invest in solar systems for administration staff so we can continue to function in Zambia.

The production of the 600m of the luxury Heritage Fur from ECOPEL has finally been completed. This will be used for the luxury Shembe and Ngoni Heritage Fur *Amambatha* garment as standard cost price of the material is more than double the price of the Heritage Fur pile fabric previously acquired. Working with ECOPEL 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 received plain leopard fur print in this version which we are currently making into some garments to compare to the previous Heritage Fur designs.

The Kuomboka took place this year in April where we were able to roll out our behavioural change materials to the paddler audience and public. This included the billboards, the song on the radio, the song at concerts at the Kuomboka, the song at sensitization stands at the

Kuomboka and other items like T-shirts and badges. 110 paddler and 179 public surveys were conducted to better understand the opinion of the users and public to the Heritage Furs and the marketing materials. We also conducted an actual count of how many paddlers were wearing authentic skins compared to Heritage Fur. The count showed that 96% wore Heritage Furs on the boat, the survey showed that over 80% of paddlers did not want to acquire authentic wildcat skins and 96% had a positive opinion on the Heritage Furs. The sensitisation stands we erected, the billboards and songs really stood out as the main form of relaying the message and about the Heritage Furs. This helps us understand where we need to direct our energy when it comes to the behavioural change messaging and raising awareness. We have also started producing the Zambian children's book with a publisher. The release date for the book is set up for around February 2025.

In July 2024, the main Shembe gathering was attended for the bi-annual count of the Mgidi dancers. We encountered the same result with the adoption of Heritage Furs hovering around the 50% mark. We are hoping this will change once the furs are being sold by the church and we can present the behavioural change marketing materials for the Shembe church. This will also allow us to start conducting surveys with the followers. We were allowed to attend the July gathering with a film crew as a start to the Shembe video where we filmed groups dancing in Heritage Furs and the spectacle of the Mgidi. Next, we will film the tailors making Heritage Fur products, the sales with the branding and interviews with relevant church members and tailors. The next count will be in January 2025.

One of our setbacks was the passing away of the Lozi Senior Chief, His Royal Highness Inyambo Yeto in July 2023. He was one of the champions of the project within the BRE and was the initiator of the Heritage Furs within the BRE. During this last half of the year, the new senior chief His Royal Highness was appointed whom we managed to meet during our last visit to introduce ourselves and the project to him. He was very aware of the project and a great supporter of our efforts even before he was installed as the senior chief. He agreed to continue to support the project as did his predecessor and he was happy to sign a letter of support for our annual report. We are still waiting for the instillation of the Queen of the North which should take place in November 2024. The queen is also annually moved in a barge where the paddlers wear Heritage Fur garments.

In February we attended the eastern Zambian Ngoni event known as the Ncwala Festival which was reported on in the annual report. This partnership with the king Mpezeni of the Ngoni Royal Establishment (NRE) has strengthened through the year, and we are currently supplying the 13 chiefs with Heritage Fur regalia on instruction from the king. We were also invited by the NRA to attend the northern Malawi Ncwala Festival under king M'mbelwa V in a separate kingdom to assess if we could introduce our project into this Ngoni kingdom. This trip allowed us to conduct initial counts at this gathering to provide us with a better understanding of how we need to adjust our survey methodologies for future gatherings. This invitation was then extended to attend a gathering in Eswatini to meet the king there, but we turned this down as we are engaging with the conservation authorities there first. The Zambian Ngoni king wore our Heritage Furs when he went to meet the Eswatini king which was an achievement on its own for the program. The relationship with king Mpezeni has opened doors to meet more chiefs and kings throughout southern Africa. Through the NRE there is mention of next year visiting the southern Malawi Ngoni festival as well as investigating northern Mozambique. This new group can be subjected to our scaling assessments and if needed we can start to engage with these groups. We will continue to build these strong relationships with these leaders.

The positive results from the behavioural change campaign help in Western Zambia with the Lozi attracted the attention of the behavioural change contracted company RARE. We were invited to RARE's BeHive conference to present on our findings in Washington DC. The presentation can be seen here

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEgaoBWM2Zo&list=PLgbKIQiViuLSQ8Fvfe4YswmkWD42B\\_R9&index=24&t=207s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEgaoBWM2Zo&list=PLgbKIQiViuLSQ8Fvfe4YswmkWD42B_R9&index=24&t=207s)

**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.**

The project has been exposed to more opportunities in more user groups over the last six months. The Zambian Ngoni king is so impressed with the project and its potential, that he is putting pressure on us to meet new groups and expand work within his kingdom. Although this is very exciting for the program, there is danger in expanding too fast, as this may result in funding challenges. Each group will have to be analysed and funds raised if we are going to expand into these groups, and at the same temporal scale as we have done with the Shembe and Lozi.

We are still working at maintaining sustainability within the tailors in Zambia as they have remained in groups, which has added expenses to the model such as rent and electricity. We are continuing to assist and “tailor” make solutions to different areas. The Shembe building is still not complete therefore we have not had an official opening by the leader of the church. Even though they will produce and sell Heritage Furs, the opening event is a form of endorsement that we would like to get from the leader.

We have still not employed a Zambia co-ordinator and this role to date has been covered by Tristan Dickerson as per our previous change request at the end of 2023. We have employed a consultant to investigate the eastern Zambia Ngoni kingdom which we are hoping will become a Ngoni community officer permanent position, replacing the Zambian co-ordinator position as per the budget. We are going to submitting a change request in November for this possible change to help with our scaling.

**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 2024 – 30 September 2024)**

**Actual spend:**

**4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2025)?**

☒ No ☐

**4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should 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 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 BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

No.

**6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.** If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

**Comment No.1**

Comment understood and explanation was a bit messy between what has been made and what has been procured/acquired.

**Output indicator 3.1.** Tailoring of 2,000 South African Heritage Fur Culturo-Religious Garments (*Amambatha*, *armbands*, *headbands*, *waistbands* and hats), 400 luxury Heritage Fur *Amambatha* produced and sold by the South African tailoring groups by the end of the project.

**Progress to Date.** 303 South African Heritage Fur Culturo-Religious Garments (*Amambatha*, *armbands*, *headbands*, *waistbands* and hats) produced and sold to date.  
Even though we have procured the Luxury Heritage Fur through the ECOPEL MOU we have still not received it and therefore none of these have been produced yet.

I have also included the Activity 3.1 to support the progress.

**Activity 3.1:** Acquire at least 1,000m of normal Heritage Fur *Amambatha* pile fabric, 200m of luxury Heritage Fur *Amambatha* pile fabric, 500m of Heritage Fur *Lipatelo* and *Mishukwe* pile fabric, 2,000m of vinyl, suede and leather backing fabric, and 1,000m of other fabric for creation of other products including traditional garments and school uniforms.

We had distributed 350m Heritage Fur *amambatha* material and procured and paid for a further 300m totaling **650m** Heritage Fur *amambatha*.

We have procured **600m** Luxury Heritage Fur material through the MOU with ECOPEL.

We have procured and paid for **300m** Plain Leopard Heritage Fur for *Lipatelo* and **200m** for African Congregational Church hats.

We have delivered a total of **750m** vinyl.

**4100m** material for church uniforms donated.

Material	Target	Current	Short/Over
HF Amambatha	1000m	650m	-350m
HF Luxury Amambatha	200m	600m	+400m
HF Plain	500m	300m	-200m
Vinyl, suede, leather	2000m	750m	-1250m
Other materials	1000m	4100m	+3100

**Output indicator 4.4.** Twenty radio segments produced/ broadcast across Zambia and South Africa by the end of Year 3 (10 per community).

**Progress to date.** Segments still needed to be done. We had booked radio interview slots in Zambia starting in April 2023 around the main cultural event, Kuomboka. Doing radio interviews on our program before the announcement of this event is not allowed.

In South Africa we are waiting for the announcement of the program within the Shembe church which has also delayed any radio interviews.

**Activity 4.4:** Continuously monitor the number of people the campaigns have reached as well as the number of people who prefer synthetic Heritage Furs over authentic wild cat skins as a result thereof.

The websites and Facebook pages can be monitored for the number of visits and when they take place. All our materials and campaigns try and direct traffic onto [www.heritagefurs.com](http://www.heritagefurs.com) website so that we can monitor the impact of these campaigns to users who have access to the internet. For people that cannot access the internet we use sensitization stands and the radio where we estimate the number of people our messaging reached.

Activity 5.1. The Case Study was first drafted as a Herman Goldstein Award application and submitted in December 2022. In September 2023, the case study was revised to include additional information and analysis and published on the Problem Oriented Policing Centre website (see [here](#)). Although the document was updated it retained the December 2022 date stamp on the cover page when published online. Furthermore, we have continued collecting additional data and undertaking more detailed analysis and anticipate submitting a paper evaluating the effectiveness of this project to a peer-reviewed scientific journal in late 2024. . The Case Study write up started before we were successful with the grant application and forms an important higher learning output for this grant as it is written for practitioners. The peer review paper will have a higher level of analysis for the academic sector.

#### **Comment 2**

This comment is noted and we will introduce an end of year 2 survey. There is still significant assistance being given to most of the tailoring individuals and groups currently which will continue to the end of year 2 which would not be a true reflection of any success.

#### **Comment 3**

This comment is noted and agreed with. We will add this amendment request to the change request form.

#### **Comment 4**

Thanks for highlighting this as we have not given it enough thought to date. When dealing with people who have extremely low to no incomes it is difficult to incorporate this topic. Currently more production from tailors is not using Heritage Furs but rather other materials to make clothing. A better impact is possibly looking at waste that is produced by the tailors and making sure this is dealt with in an environmentally friendly manner. We can also incorporate some education on synthetic fur's impact on the environment. However, we need to tread carefully as we have messaging that indicates heritage Furs are more environmentally friendly and sustainable than authentic skins.

## **Checklist for submission**

### **For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)**

Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at	
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HYP (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	
<b>For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)</b>	
Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	Yes
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	Yes
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes