

**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 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 including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	IWT133
Project title	Supporting conservation and sustainable trade of threatened timber tree species
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Gabon, Ghana, Madagascar
Lead Organisation	Botanic Gardens Conservation International
Partner(s)	Missouri Botanical Garden – Gabon Programme IUCN SSC Madagascar Plant Specialist Group (Including staff from The University of Antananarivo and Missouri Botanical Garden Madagascar Programme) Forestry Research Institute Ghana (CSIR-FORIG)
Project leader	<i>Malin Rivers and Megan Barstow (Project Manager)</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>Not yet in place</i>

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).

Work towards our project began in August 2024. In the two months of this project (August 2024-September 2024), we have prepared project partner contracts, held our first Steering committee meeting and project partners have completed financial training given by BGCI. We are also in the process of preparing a second change request. The Project Manager attended the NIRAS webinars in August 2024. One project partner staff member, Daniel Ofori, also attended the NIRAS Finance, Administration and Technical Reporting Webinar.

Steering Committee Meeting

We have hosted, online, our first steering committee meeting and agreed a standing agenda (**Annex 1**) for future meetings. These meetings will be held every other month, with meetings hosted in between to discuss specific project products with the steering committee or to have supplementary meetings with project partners as needed. Our next meeting is scheduled for 14th November 2024.

Finance Training

Finance training has been delivered by Nicole Lee (BGCI Head of Finance) to representatives of the three project partners. This was a one-hour session with a presentation and reporting walk through being delivered and question session. Training was delivered to ensure correct delivery of financial reporting including documentation of expenditure, recording of staff hours and budget lines. Training was attended by project partners Missouri Plant Specialist Group (1 attendee), CSIR-FORIG (3 attendees) and Missouri Botanical Garden (1 attendee).

Project Activities and Progress

BGCI

Work is progressing on activity 1.1.1. A total of 54 datasets were checked for their relevance to NDFs, IUCN Red List Methodology and the data collection protocol needs (results given in **Annex 3**). Availability of data and relevance was then considered and marked to be available, insufficient or unavailable (Activity 1.1.3). This will be used to guide the questions for the stakeholder survey and ultimately the data collection protocol (Activity 1.1.2, 1.1.5; MoV 1.1a and 2.1a).

Madagascar

In August, partners in Madagascar began the process of acquiring the documents needed to request access to protected areas to carry out future project survey work. These have been submitted to the Ministry of the Environment for processing and approval. Documentation on previously submitted NDF's for *Dalbergia lemurica* and *Dalbergia suaresensis* has been provided to BGCI.

In September, several meetings have been hosted:

- between MPSG and Missouri Botanical Garden to plan project activities, collaborations and ideas/considerations for the data collection protocol.
- With the Malagasy Precious Woods Consortia, ministry departments and departments of the University of Antananarivo to discuss the project and complimentary actions, share thoughts on project species selection, provide insight to data gaps and ensure access to scientific information as needed for the project
- With the CITES Scientific Authority to update them on the project and acquire any lessons learnt
- With BGCI to discuss contracts and project implementation.

Gabon

Our partners for Gabon, Missouri Botanical Gardens (MBG), have been working internally to familiarise the team with the project as well as MBG representative and director of the National Herbarium of Gabon- Archange Boupoya. They also hosted a meeting with partners in Madagascar (please see above); the meeting also highlighted difference between implementation and research needs in Madagascar and Gabon.

Ghana

Project partners in Ghana began extensive stakeholder mapping to identify official data sources for the project in August and September. The project team also had an official visit to two major state agencies who are potential data contributors. These include the Timber Industry Development Department (TIDD) of the Forestry Commission (FC) and the Resource Management Support Centre (RMSC). Additionally partners in Ghana have also undertaken the following specific activities towards achieving project objectives:

- Prepared Official request for permit to undertake surveys in targeted forest reserves.
- Held two planning meetings to familiarise themselves with the Technical and Financial Reporting format of the project
- Identified forest reserves for future fieldwork activities

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.

Contract Delays

Setting up contracts has taken longer than anticipated. So far, our partners in Ghana have signed the contract and received their first payment. Gabon signed their contract while preparing this HYR. Online meetings are being held with our partners in Madagascar to confirm the contracts and budgets for this year of activities. Fortunately as much of the partner project contribution will begin in 2025 this has not caused major delays to project implementation.

Changes to Workplan

The current workplan as delivered as part of Change Request CR24-045 was not aligned to BCF financial years. During August 2024, the work plan has been revised to align with the budget and log frame so that all activities are related to BCF financial years, rather than running 12 months from the start of the project (August 2024-August 2025). This slightly slowed partner engagement and timelines as preparing partner contracts took longer than anticipated, as contracts also needed to be realigned per financial year rather than for the length of the project. Fortunately, as much of the first two quarter activities are being led by BGCI this has not delayed progress on the workplan. The updated workplan is available in **Annex 2** and will be shared in an upcoming change request.

Changes to BGCI Project Staff

Megan Barstow has been instated as the Project Leader, to replace Dr Malin Rivers. As Megan is the Project Manager for IWT133, this has already been assimilated into her project role and responsibilities. This will not cause delays to the timetable and workplan for the project. This will be formalised in an upcoming change request.

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/ No

Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ No
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ No
Change Request reference if known: CR24-045	

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)?
Yes No Estimated underspend: £

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?
N/A

6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.

In our Change Request (CR24-045) we responded to feedback given in Feedback Letter March 2024. Prior to submitting the change request we also submitted a letter in June 2024, prior to our formal offer letter, addressing the feedback given to us in our March 2024 Letter. This is attached in **Annex 4** (and was sent to NIRAS on 20th June 2024).

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to any additional feedback (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	Yes
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	Already submitted
For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)	
Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	NA
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	yes
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	yes
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	yes