



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	IWT134
Project title	Reducing medicinal plant illegal harvesting through cultivation and good governance
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	South Africa
Lead Organisation	The Endangered Wildlife Trust
Partner(s)	South African National Biodiversity Institute
Project Leader	Jenny Botha
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	1 April — 30 September 2025 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://ewt.org/

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 monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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.

Output 1. 1. Stakeholders (traditional healers living near hotspot and/or protected areas and traders and harvesters in six regional markets) alleviate pressure on wild medicinal plant populations by growing and harvesting plants *ex situ*.

We are well on our way to achieving our targets for Output 1 and have exceeded them in the case of the number of traditional healers who are participating, and the number of people who have received training in plant cultivation so far. These activities are extremely popular so we will continue to implement them in all the project areas.

Traditional healers have been eager to participate from the outset, and we are gradually building trust with the traders. As at end of September 2025, we are engaging with approximately 170 traditional healers and 64 traders in three provinces [Limpopo (4), Gauteng (43) and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) (17)].

Traders

Two of the traders we previously worked with in Limpopo sadly passed, and several others have moved or are no longer working in the markets. We anticipated that establishing trust with the traders would take longer in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, as they previously had negative experiences with conservation officials, and were negative, sometimes hostile, towards researchers, partly due to research fatigue and partly because they had not derived benefits through research over the years. According to Ezemevelo KZN Wildlife officials, Durban and Umlazi traders are even reportedly more negative than those in Mona. The former are, however, in direct contact with traders from Gauteng and Mona, so we are first building relations in these markets, and will then start working in Durban and Umlazi (in the first quarter of 2026).

Faraday

Over the last six months, we focused on building relations and improving our understanding of the challenges Faraday traders are experiencing in accessing medicinal plants, together with exploring potential solutions. With the South African Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) team, we conducted two visits for Faraday traders to the Walter Sisulu Botanic Gardens in Johannesburg, both of which were well attended (38 traders on the first visit, and 43 on the second).

During the second visit, we conducted a participatory planning workshop, which included a session designed to enable traders to assess changes in the availability of different medicinal plant species over time, as well as the impact on areas plants were sourced from and related costs to their business. Through this, we all gained further insights into factors causing these changes, which ranged from depletion of wild populations to the impacts of Covid, amongst other factors.

They are, as previously reported, open to cultivation and we set the first horticultural training workshop date for October. Many traders lack access to land however, although a few can grow at their homes in KwaZulu-Natal. One trader shared with the project lead privately [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The land issue needs to be further assessed with the traders to develop practical solutions. The EWT has started exploring potential options with corporate partners where they work with local communities. We also need to explore the practical logistics of such an initiative were land to become available with the traders, including distribution of plants. Unfortunately, the horticultural training workshop was postponed at the last moment to November due to challenges experienced on the traders' side.

Nongoma

Following engagement with leaders and traditional healers in Nongoma, we co-hosted a 3-day training course for 30 traditional healers and 17 traders (total of 47). As always, they received starter kits and seedlings to plant at home, and we will be following up with them to monitor

planting and survival rates in November. Cumulatively, just under 250 Traditional healers, traders and harvesters have attended five 3-day plant cultivation training courses to date.

We are further engaging with leaders and communities from Thaba Chweu (Mpumalanga) and Blouberg (Limpopo). Two training courses have been scheduled for traditional healers and harvesters in Blouberg in November 2025.

Output 2. Increased awareness of wildlife legislation and the impacts of wildlife offences

We have conducted preliminary engagements with the South African Police Services and leaders in the Western Soutpansberg regarding legislation and the impacts of illegal wildlife offences in the area. A workshop on wildlife legislation is scheduled for mid-November 2025, in collaboration with LEDET officials. This will be followed by further engagement with the Chief, Indunas, councillors and other local leaders to develop processes to address wildlife offences through customary law, and as far as possible, follow restorative justice protocols to address offences. As previously stated, our goal is to incorporate illegal medicinal plant harvesters into the project, creating affordable legal alternatives through cultivation and engage with them to collaborate on the assessment of threats to wild populations (Output 3). We are also engaging with Community Policing Fora.

Best practice guides/knowledge products

(i) In collaboration with horticulturalists from SANBI, we have developed a booklet on the cultivation of medicinal plants which has been translated into Venda and Zulu. It will also be translated into SeSotho and SePedi.

(ii) We have also developed a poster and brochure on the impacts of wildlife offences and wildlife legislation regulations for distribution during engagement and training workshops with police officials, leaders, and communities.

Output 3. Strengthened governance and institutional capacity of community leaders in three harvesting areas

We are engaging with three communities in the Eastern Soutpansberg where harvesting levels are extremely high (see Photographs). This has taken longer than initially envisaged but we are on track to conduct a planning workshop with harvesters and traditional healers in the area to begin implementing the citizen projects with students from the University of Venda.

In a preliminary assessment of the populations that were conducted with a local harvester, it was evident that extensive harvesting is occurring and targeting species such as the weeping Boer-bean tree (*Schotia brachypetala*), Bushveld saffron (*Elaeodendron transvaalense*), Buffalo thorn (*Ziziphus mucronata*), Apple leaf (*Philenoptera violacea*), Moepel (*Mimusops zeyheri*), Wormwood Albizia (*Albizia anthelmintica*), and Kooboo Berry (*Mystroxylon aethiopicum*). *Aloe marlothii* is also being heavily harvested, with whole plants removed, for the horticultural trade (see Photographs).

In Blouberg, a conservation official reported a reduction in the extent of illegal harvesting on the reserve due to the implementation of regular patrols. We have scheduled plant cultivation training with THPs and, hopefully, harvesters, and will engage with them on their sources of medicinal plants as a first step in developing citizen science monitoring systems.

Output 4. Wider community benefits and awareness sessions. We had hoped to start working with schools in the Western Soutpansberg in the previous quarter, but this was unfortunately delayed. In the Eastern Soutpansberg, we are conducting a tree planting and talk with three primary schools in November, as rains have just started. During this engagement, we will schedule Education for Sustainable Development support for three primary schools in 2026.

Our team is also presenting the project at community meetings to ensure the wider community is aware of the project, and to engage with people on the values of medicinal plants and other species, the rich diversity of wildlife in the Soutpansberg and threats to its survival. These and similar engagements are important to lay foundation for future sessions on wildlife legislation.

Output 5. Learning and Best Practice.

1. In July 2025, the project lead conducted a 3.5-day training workshop entitled “*Strengthening partnerships for Conservation Action. Approaches, techniques and tools*” which included teams from the EWT and SANBI. The training incorporated an introduction to various tools designed to increase active participation of community partners, with a practical on the third day to enable them to implement these techniques under the guidance of a trainer with community partners.

Feedback from the training has been extremely positive, and participants are keen for follow up training to further build on these skills.

2. We also presented a paper entitled “*The Strategic Conservation of the Pepper-bark Tree*” at the Indigenous Plant Use Forum on 14 August 2025, which included the work that we are implementing with Traditional healers, traders and harvesters in this project.

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.

Delays in our permit applications are hindering distribution of Threatened and Protected (TOPS) listed species in Limpopo and KZN.

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

Discussed with NIRAS:

Received confirmation of change acceptance:	N/A yet.
Change Request reference if known: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

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)?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

4c. If you expect an 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, 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?

No thanks

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

Not at this stage

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.

N/A

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

Y [REDACTED]

Suspicions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to
ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

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.

We would like to thank the reviewer for their constructive feedback on the project.

Dates on the Annual Report have been corrected, and the report resubmitted.

Recommendation Section 4.4. To improve impact, the project could go into more depth with landscape level coordination amongst communities and deepen collaboration with law enforcement earlier.

This is an important point and we have been in discussions with traders in each of the markets regarding their linkages with their counterparts in other regions. We are planning to lever the social capital built in Mona and Faraday to gain acceptance by traders in Durban and Umlazi.

THPs in Limpopo are also keen to meet their counterparts in different areas so we are planning exchange visits in the last year of the project.

Section 10

Monitoring and evaluation – Outcome and impact attrition especially reductions in illegal harvesting and improved species populations are not substantiated.

Baseline assessments will be conducted during the last quarter, with ongoing monitoring during the third year of the project. Community engagement took longer than envisaged as is frequently the case, but we are on track in the Eastern Soutpansberg and Blouberg to begin accomplishing this.

We are establishing feedback loops to more clearly link lessons to adaptions in approach, for example, lessons learned from training and seedling planting monitoring. This will be conducted over the next 18 months, together with lessons on strengthened governance of medicinal plant populations and addressing illegal harvesting. (see 1.6.3 ; 1.8.2 ; 3.1.3 in Logframe).

Section 12