

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

Half Year Report

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2025

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

Project reference	<i>IWT 135</i>
Project title	<i>Combating IWT: Strengthening Partnerships and Promoting Resiliency of Local Communities</i>
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN), Himalayan Nature (HN)
Project Leader	<i>Dr. Bhagawan Raj Dahal</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR2</i>
Project website/blog/social media	

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).

Output 1: As part of the project’s strategic objective to strengthen institutional capacity for combating illegal wildlife trade (IWT) and improving enforcement mechanisms, a six-day training titled “Wildlife Crime Investigation to Prosecution” was conducted from 11 to 16 August 2025 in Sauraha, Chitwan. The training was designed to equip newly recruited enforcement officials with the legal, procedural, and technical skills necessary to investigate and prosecute wildlife crimes effectively. This cohort consisted primarily of 27 newly appointed forest officers and rangers (37% women) who had recently joined their respective institutions in Bagmati and Gandaki provinces under the Divisional Forest Office, Chitwan National Park (CNP), and Parsa National Park (PNP) (Annex 1.1). A mock investigation exercise allowed participants to simulate real-world crime scene handling and present case files to a panel of legal and conservation experts (Annex 1.2, 1.3). Targeting newly recruited personnel, the training ensured that foundational knowledge and skills were instilled early in their careers, aligning with the project’s goal of building a robust and responsive wildlife crime control system in Nepal.

Output 2: Under this output, inter-agency coordination and information-sharing mechanisms were further strengthened to promote a unified and collaborative approach to combating wildlife crime. As CNP spans across Bagmati and Gandaki Provinces and covers the districts of Chitwan, Makwanpur, and Nawalparasi, a joint Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) coordination meeting was held, along with another meeting between the Joint Operational Cell (JOC) and WCCB Nawalparasi (Annex 2.1, 2.2, 2.3). During these meetings, the JOC reported that the park has continued to maintain zero rhino poaching, demonstrating the effectiveness of proactive enforcement and advanced surveillance systems. It was also discussed that Makwanpur was identified as a major transit route for wildlife trafficking, requiring enhanced investigative skills, increased surveillance, and extensive community engagement and awareness activities. Likewise, in Nawalparasi, Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC) remained high, and it is recommended to increase investment in predator-proof coral (PPC) and mesh wire fencing, which are proven effective in reducing HWC. To strengthen real-time monitoring,

These integrated efforts—

combining technology, intelligence sharing, and field enforcement—have substantially enhanced surveillance capacity, strengthened prosecution support, and advanced a more coordinated, result-driven approach to combating wildlife crime in the Chitwan landscape.

Output 3: To strengthen community resilience to HWC and promote coexistence, the project continued to implement a series of integrated interventions across HWC hotspot villages. Four community workshops facilitated by conservation professionals and wildlife rescuers engaged 211 residents, including 56% women and 79% indigenous and marginalized groups (Annex 4.1, 4.2). Participants received practical information on wildlife behaviour, early warning signs, conflict avoidance strategies, and snakebite management. Complementing these efforts, two school awareness events reached 122 students, including 57% girls and 93% indigenous and marginalized students (Annex 4.1, 4.3). Further, to operationalize the three-year HWC mitigation plans endorsed by BZUCs during Y1, two inclusive planning meetings were held, of which 13% of participants were women and 69% were from indigenous and marginalized groups (Annex 5.1), helping prioritize activities that align with local needs and practical feasibility. Awareness was further reinforced through the establishment of the HWC Learning Centre, which received new materials and facility improvements, including four illuminated boards detailing conflict avoidance strategies for tigers, bears, and rhinoceroses (Annex 6). Three additional information boards were installed at community settlements and the Nepal-India transboundary bridge, providing visual guidance on HWC, IWT, and safe practices in Nepali, English, and Hindi (Annex 7). Further, the project held community capacity-building events on IWT, HWC mitigation, and snakebite management, reaching 69 participants, mostly women and marginalized groups (Annex 8.1, 8.2). The project also observed Global Tiger Day on 29 July 2025 at CNP, themed “Co-existence and Income Generation: Change Human Behaviour for Tiger Conservation,” emphasizing sustainable livelihoods (Annex 8.3). The event featured the launch of Wildlife Rescue in Nepal, highlighting techniques for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation efforts. Likewise, to facilitate reduced human-wildlife encounters linked to forest dependency, 120 infra-ray electric stoves were distributed to 120 households (644 individuals), 87% of whom were indigenous or marginalized, along with wiring upgrades to 87 HHs and demonstrations to ensure safe and effective use (Annex 9.1, 9.3). Prior to distributing the E-cooking equipment, a household survey was conducted to assess forest dependency, energy use, and electrical compatibility, revealing that 13 households relied solely on firewood while 107 used both firewood and LPG, collectively consuming 14.33 tons of firewood monthly (Annex 9.2).

Output 4: During this reporting period, out of NPR 38,40,000 provided as seed funding to four community banks in Year 1, NPR 11,75,000 (30.5%) was mobilized to 47 individuals, including 43% women and 94% from indigenous and marginalized groups, to carry out income-generating activities (Annex 10.1, 10.2, 10.3). Livestock rearing emerged as the preferred option, with 13% engaged in buffalo farming, 32% in goat rearing, and 40% in pig rearing (Annex 10.4). Further aligning with community-identified livelihood needs, three tailored training courses—one on Pig Rearing (Annex 11.4, 11.4a, 11.4b), and two vocational trainings on Beautician Skills and Driving—were conducted. The Driving training, which commenced in September, spans two months and equips participants with practical skills for employment in the local transport sector (Annex 11.1, 11.3). Similarly, the Beautician Training, a four-month program launched in September, provides comprehensive instruction in personal grooming and salon management, empowering women to pursue home-based or small-scale entrepreneurial ventures (Annex 11.1, 11.2). A total of 43 individuals participated in these three trainings, of whom 63% were women and 98% belonged to indigenous and marginalized communities. Entrepreneurial capacity was further strengthened through business plan training, benefiting 40 participants (55% women, 80% indigenous and marginalized groups), who developed eight practical plans for vegetable, goat, pig, buffalo, and cow farming, as well as turmeric, ginger, and lemon production (Annex 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4). Together, these trainings contribute to strengthening household resilience, enhancing livelihood diversification, and fostering inclusive development in buffer zone communities. Additionally, a feasibility study on community-level wildlife farming of spotted deer and wild pigs engaged 53 stakeholders, reviewing national policy and socio-economic, cultural, and ecological aspects (Annex 13.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.4). While social acceptance and potential benefits were high, major barriers as per Wildlife Farming Directives 2023 include rigid land and distance requirements (at least 1 hectare of private land and minimum distances of 500 m from highways, 100 m from roads and water bodies, 1 km from forests and protected areas, 100 m from urban centres, and 500 m between farms), high infrastructure costs, and unclear by-product utilization pathways.

In addition, the Mastering Professional Etiquette training held on 12 June 2025 focused on strengthening staff’s soft skills, especially in professional boundaries, communication, and workplace behaviour—crucial for both internal collaboration and community engagement. Delivered through presentations, group discussions, role-playing, and reflective exercises, the session equipped participants with practical tools like the “Personal Boundary Map,” “Reflection Journal,” and “Elevator Pitch” to apply etiquette principles respectfully, particularly when interacting with beneficiaries in the community (Annex 14.1, 14.2).

Monitoring

On 30 June 2025, a coordination meeting was held with the Binayi Tribeni-06 Ward Office to share the project’s first-year activities (August 2024–March 2025) and second-year plans. The Ward President

<p>appreciated the progress, emphasizing continued collaboration and recommending key interventions: PPC construction, e-stove distribution, alternative livelihood trainings, and awareness programs (Annex 15.1). Besides, a Project Management Unit (PMU) meeting was also held to keep the CNP informed about the project progress and gather feedback for the implementation of the program (Annex 15.2).</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>Heavy monsoon rains recently brought widespread flooding across Nepal, damaging infrastructure such as highways and rural roads. These conditions made travel to field sites difficult and, at times, unsafe. Around the same period, an unexpected Gen-Z protest disrupted daily life, further challenging the implementation of planned activities. In response, the project team adjusted and realigned its plans to adapt to the changing situation. Additionally, the new interim government has announced national elections for February 2026, which may also affect the team's community engagement efforts.</p>	
<p>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</p>	
Discussed with NIRAS:	√ Yes
Formal Change Request submitted:	√ Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	√ Yes
Change Request reference if known: N/A	
<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025) Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]</p>	
<p>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)?</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	
<p>4c. If you expect an underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	
<p>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</p>	
N/A	
<p>6. Project risk management</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
N/A	
<p>6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?</p> <p>[REDACTED] <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>Suspicions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk</p>	
N/A	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>i) Please note all changes to the project log frame should be approved via the formal Change Request process. Response: The log-frame change request has now been submitted. We have also responded to the related queries and feedback and are currently awaiting confirmation of acceptance.</p>	
<p>ii) It is noted the project have not responded to the additional feedback points provided in their Stage 2 feedback letter. Please ensure these are responded to in your next Half Year Report. Response: Additional feedback from Stage 2 was addressed in the HYR1 submitted in October 2024 and referenced in Annex 4.31 of AR1. For completeness, the response is once again included in Annex 16.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	