



**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: 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	IWT141
Project title	Enhancing capability to tackle Trans-Himalayan Illegal Wildlife Trade
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal, India, China
Lead Organisation	Environmental Investigation Agency
Partner(s)	Greenhood Nepal, Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI)
Project leader	<i>Debbie Banks</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1</i>
Project website/blog/social media	EIA does not have separate websites or social media accounts for individual projects as yet but will update EIA's main website and social media accounts with news of this project. Addresses are as follows: https://eia-international.org/ https://www.facebook.com/environmentalinvestigationagency https://www.linkedin.com/company/environmental-investigation-agency/ https://www.instagram.com/eia_news/?hl=en

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).

The OSJA clearance process meant that the grant paperwork for this project was issued on the 10th September 2024. Per the invitation in NIRAS/ DEFRA letter of 27th June, advising of the OSJA process, we submitted a change request, which was approved (CR24-048), to amend the start date of the project from 01 May 2024 to 01 July 2024 and allow retrospective allocation of income upon final approval. In light of the uncertainty over the funding until September however, no major expenditure (e.g. new recruitment, significant travel costs, workshops), could take place. Activity has been largely limited to desk-based tasks, low-cost travel and international travel supported by co-financing.

Key project progress under Output 1 in the reporting period:

Desk-based data collation to establish a baseline regional trade assessment has commenced. This includes extraction of information from pre-project research reports by EIA on regional smuggling routes, methods, commodities, drivers, prices, business profiles and other relevant information to create a “who, what, where, how, why and when” assessment framework. Over 250 crime reports and court case records from China have been accessed so far and this research is ongoing. Relevant information from these records will be used to inform the baseline framework along with insights from the independent wildlife crime databases held by partners. Five trade routes have been identified so far and new information generated by partner field research activities under the project, and through ongoing open-source research, will further shape the assessment as planned. Greenhood Nepal has secured permissions from relevant government agencies for the planned field work.

Key project progress under Output 2 in the reporting period:

WPSI have made progress in information-gathering in key geographic locations. Five field researchers have been deployed under this project to different locations. WPSI’s team is tasked with gathering intelligence on wildlife crime and assisting regional enforcement agencies in detecting instances of Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) in the Trans- Himalayan region. This is an ongoing activity throughout the duration of the project.

Key project progress under Output 3 in the reporting period:

EIA and Greenhood Nepal have made progress with the needs assessment to facilitate the design of the IWT database, and an assessment of the type and format of data based on what is currently available. The mapping of the data structure has also begun, with a discussion and feedback session already held regarding a first version of the data structure. A timetabled plan for database design and data processing (formatting and cleansing) has been prepared and building of the database is on track with face-to-face design and initial construction planned for early December 2024. Greenhood have secured permissions from relevant government agencies to initiate data collection from the field. The OSINT training course has been drafted by EIA in preparation for the face-to-face meeting with partners at the end of November 2024 during which any refinements can be made taking into account the local online trade scenario, prior to the first training workshop. WPSI has maintained contact with State agencies in northern India and scheduling of training workshops with frontline officers in India can take place now that the grant has been approved.

Key project progress under Output 4 in the reporting period:

EIA participated in a South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) workshop for Forest and Customs Officers at the end of July 2024, during which the following themes for cooperation and capacity building were identified by officials: online trade research, information management, analysis and cooperation with the private sector; research on illicit financial flows associated with wildlife crime and cooperation with Financial Intelligence Units and the private sector; CITES implementation and reporting; and identification of species and derivatives. This indicates alignment between the outputs of this project and regional needs.

Overall, our project indicators are still relevant, our assumptions for the project hold true and we do not foresee obstacles to reporting against the Standard Indicators.

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 official start date for this project was changed from 01 May 2024 to 01 July 2024, following an advisory from DEFRA regarding the OSJA process and a subsequently approved change request (CR24-048), approving the retrospective allocation of costs back to 01 July. Uncertainty over award of the grant continued however, until final approval following OSJA clearance was given on the 10th September 2024. Following clarifications over OSJA-related terms and conditions the grant paperwork was signed on the 23rd September 2024. Advance claims were approved on the 4th October 2024. There was no actual spend of DEFRA funds therefore, as of 30 September 2024.

The exercise of retrospectively allocating income received in October 2024 and reviewing the spending profile to 31 Mar 2025 is underway. A face-to-face partners meeting will take place at the end of November 2024 and whilst the intention of all partners is to intensify activity in the remainder of Year 1 to deliver as planned, **IF** any scheduling conflicts arise that require us to revisit the timetable and defer some activity from Year 1 to Year 2, we will discuss with NIRAS and if the need arises, submit a change request within the required timeframe.

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:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes
Change Request reference if known: CR24-048	

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?

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.

Per the terms and conditions letter accompanying the grant paperwork on 10th September we have been asked to provide a risk register with the half year report. This was provided on 29th March 2024 in response to NIRAS/DEFRA letter of 13th March requesting more information on IWTR10S2_1035 and is attached again for convenience.

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.	√
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	√ Resending for convenience
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.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	√
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	√
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	√