

Darwin Initiative Main Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources-for-projects/information-notes-learning-notes-briefing-papers-and-reviews/>).

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum** of 20 pages in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2022

Darwin Initiative Project Information

Project reference	Flexi-Grant Reference: DIR27S2\1032 Project Reference No: 28-001
Project title	Building wetland resilience in Madagascar; Community-based conservation of Lake Tseny
Country/ies	Madagascar
Lead partner	Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)
Project partner(s)	Madagasikara Voakajy (“Mavoja”)
Darwin grant value	£339,943.00
Start/end dates of project	01 July 2021 to 30 June 2024
Reporting period	Annual Report 1, Apr 2021 – Mar 2022
Project Leader name	Mark Grindley, Senior Project Manager, International
Project website/blog/social media	n/a
Report author(s) and date	WWT: Mark Grindley, Harison Andriambelo Mavoja: Jelot Hernandez

1. Project summary

In the last 50 years, around 60% of Madagascar’s wetlands have been heavily degraded or completely destroyed. Those remaining are subject to array of pervasive threats from sedimentation, pollution, burning, invasive species and over-harvesting. Despite similar rates of species endemism as the country’s forests, and providing vital ecosystem services to millions of impoverished people, the wetlands of Madagascar receive little attention, with the National Ramsar Committee and relevant government departments under-resourced, and lacking a representative examples of best-practice wetland conservation management.

This project generates foundations for long-term resilient conservation management of just one of those important wetlands, Lake Tseny in Port-Bergé, Sofia Region. Lake Tseny is the most intact wetland within the Port Berge KBA, and home to at least eight Threatened species of fish and reptile, and 5,000 people, the majority of whom are dependent upon natural systems for drinking water, sanitation, timber, fuel, livelihoods and wellbeing.

The project is providing resilient ecosystem services and sustainable livelihood opportunities for these communities, securing healthy habitat for increasing populations of native biodiversity, and inspiring resilience planning for wetlands nationally. The tools and approaches adopted in this project will be showcased nationally.

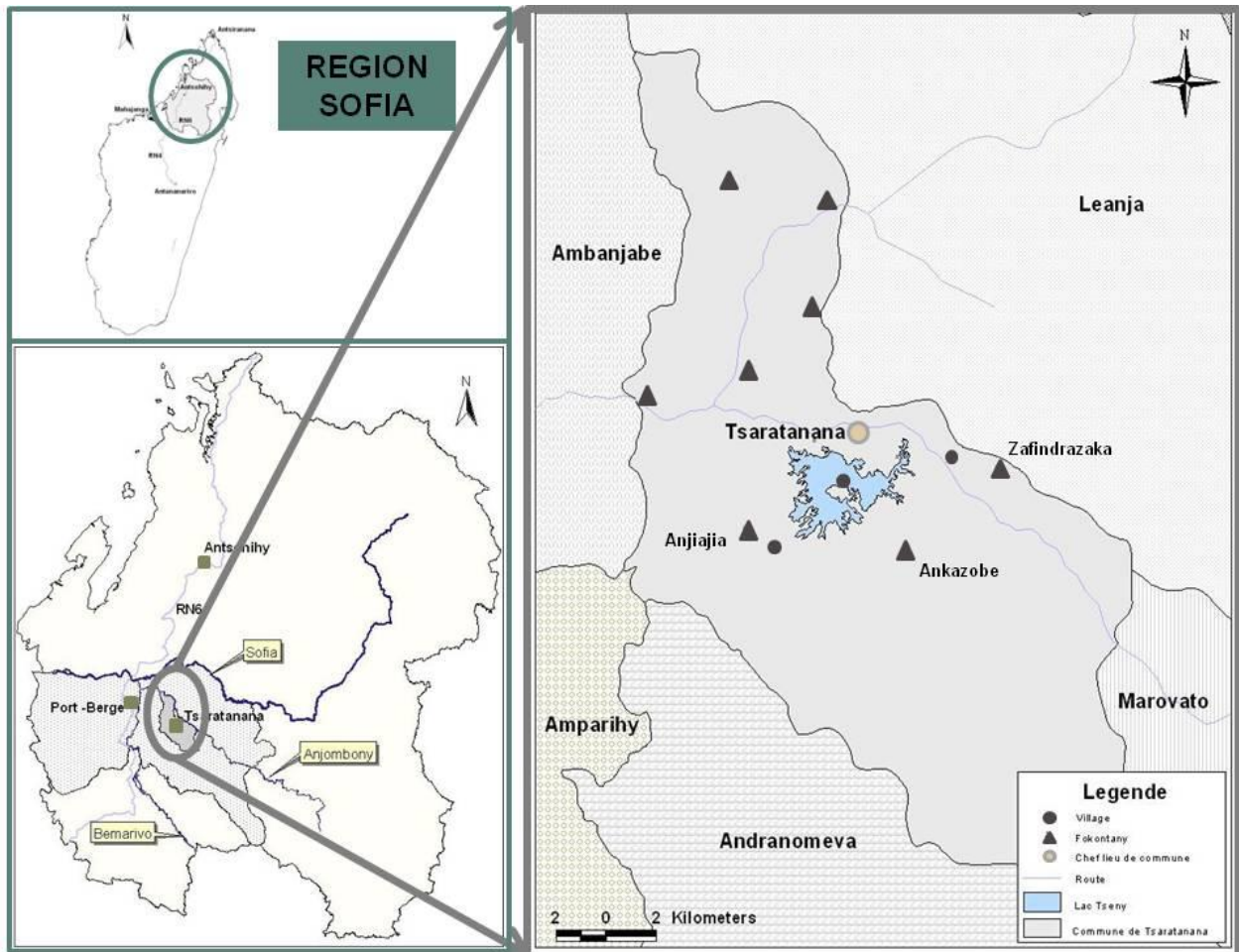


Figure 1. Location and site map

2. Project stakeholders/ partners

The project is being implemented by WWT in cooperation with three main institutional partners.

Madagasikara Voakajy (Mavoa)

With years of relevant experience, Mavoa is leading on setting up local community groups and negotiating and putting in place formal management transfer agreements between them and the government, as well as providing capacity building for them. They will also manage the environmental education and awareness initiatives and the fishery enhancement work.

MAVOA is implementing these activities under a sub-grant agreement that was finalised with WWT as part of the project inception work during the reporting period. They prepare annual workplans with us, in consultation with the other partners, and we hold monthly coordination meetings with them at site level. Mavoa also sits on the project management steering committee, which meets quarterly to monitor progress.

Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (DWCT)

DWCT has a small technical role, guiding species assessments, habitat requirements for ecological restoration, and biodiversity monitoring, with a particular focus on the Madagascar big-headed turtle. This is provided through one member of their technical staff, though their involvement during the first year of the project has been quite limited while the necessary baseline information is being collected.

As DWCT inputs are only for some staff time, they are operating under a simple Contract for Services directly to WWT, which was negotiated and signed during the project inception.

Relevant Government departments (fisheries, forestry and environment, agriculture,)

WWT and Mavoia were already working with the relevant government departments in Sofia region, so we were readily able to consult with them during project design. During the inception, we agreed to formalise a mechanism for their engagement on project monitoring, steering and planning for joint activities, with the department of fisheries as the lead from their side. This resulted in a written *Accord de Collaboration*, outlining the implementation arrangements and responsibilities.

Other partners

The project involves the establishment of new resource management groups in communities at the site. The progress towards their formation and official establishment is detailed below, but as the project progresses they will be increasingly involved in directing and implementing relevant activities, primarily through annual and quarterly planning meetings. This was conveyed during initial consultations and has been incorporated into the project workplan.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Output 1: Five sustainably financed CBNRM Associations are representing the breadth of local society and providing efficient, and legally recognised, management of natural resources in and around Lake Tseny

Under this Output, the project partners initiated consultations with the 11 communities living around the lake, as well as the regional Departments of the Environment (DREDD), Fisheries (DRPEB), DREN and DRAE, the governments of Sofia Region and Port-Bergé District, Tsaratanana I Commune and Port-Bergé district MPs, and the gendarmerie (ie, police) of Port-Bergé District. These consultations led to agreement on the overall objectives and approach of the project, and thus provided us with a mandate to pursue the establishment of local community resource management bodies (VOIs).

This then led to the establishment of four associations, comprising members of the 11 target communities. These VOIs have a combined total of 439 founder members, and together cover the whole lake area, and some bordering land in the catchment. Leaders have now been elected for the VOIs, and formal 'request dossiers' for their official creation have been submitted to the DREDD. Copies of the dossiers were retained by the associations, and the project also supported the applicants to provide copies to the local community administrations ('fokontany') and municipality.

Output 2: Fishing regulations are in place and being followed by local and migrant fishers, which, alongside fish habitat restoration areas, is increasing the productivity of the fishery. Fishing communities have new knowledge on value chains and the potential to increase profitability

Under this Output, Mavoia began collection of socio-economic data of the fisheries, specifically a baseline on legal and illegal fishing use in Lake Tseny, information on the mode of management of renewable natural resources in and around the lake, and initial suggestions for how to restore the populations of endemic and endangered species. After selection survey methods and sampling frame, Mavoia then tested their questionnaire-based survey method and selected and trained local enumerators from the participating communities. The sample size was around one third of the 2,477 households across the ten villages. There are also around 488 fishers from those villages, of whom we hope to survey a similar proportion on fishing practices. Most of the surveys were conducted during the reporting period and we hope to complete the surveys and analyse and write-up the results during quarter two of 2022. These results will then inform the design of several of the other activities under this Output, as well as providing a baseline for monitoring project impacts.

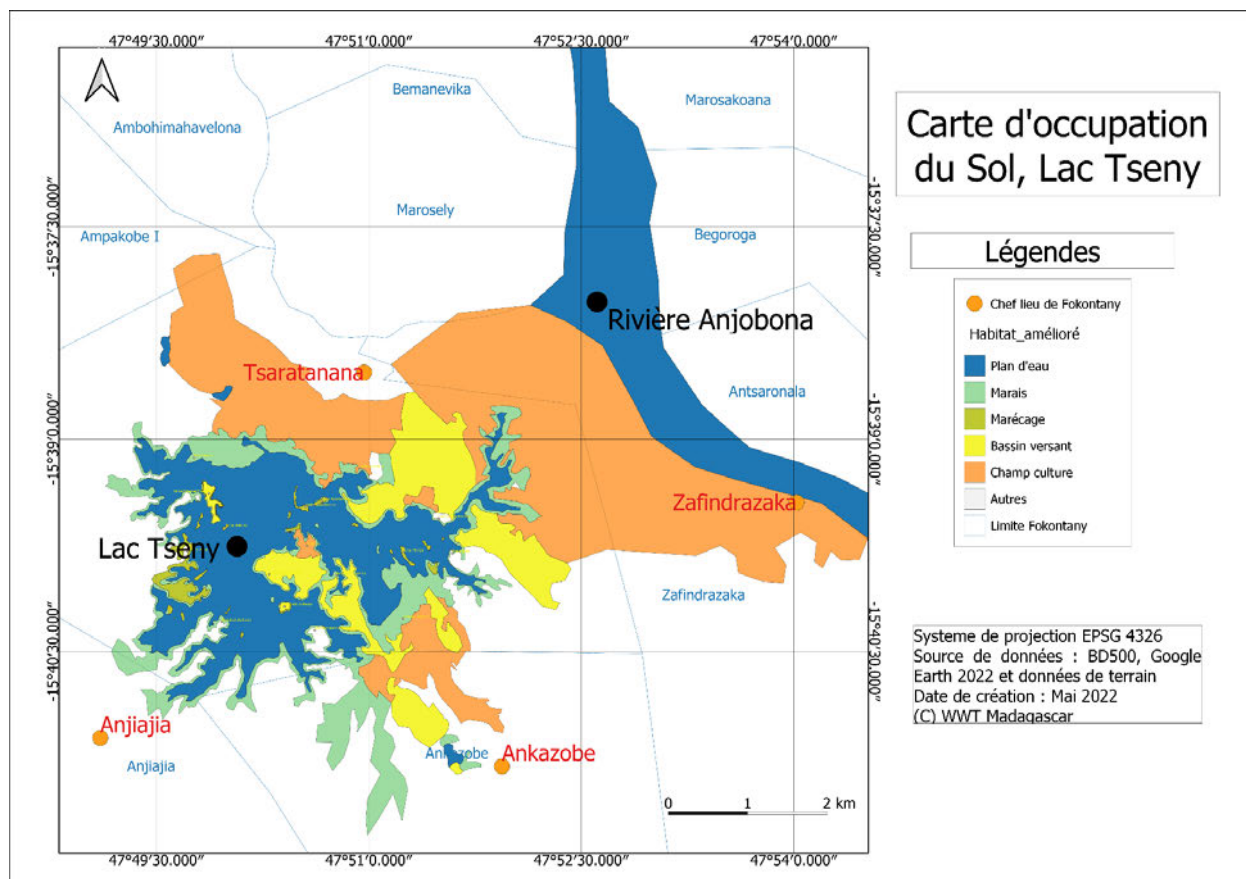
Output 3: Quality and extent of aquatic and lakeside habitat increased

Under this Output, which is led by WWT, the project has begun to collect the necessary remote sensing data to undertake the habitat mapping. Only limited progress has been made to date

due to staff commitments on other work, but we are ready to make good progress starting in the new financial year.

Quotes have been sought from the local map shop in Antananarivo that stocks older aerial photography images of the country – in this case from the 1960s, and then almost every year from 1990 – as these are the more reliable sources of data on recent historic landcover. These will be purchased and analysed shortly.

An initial rapid vegetation assessment was made in December 2021 to identify the different types of lake vegetation and to better design a strong biological diagnostic. In total, 49 species of wetland plant were identified, and a preliminary vegetation map was made to facilitate zoning with the local communities later in project year two. The current map is presented below, but the results now need to be validated against satellite imagery and the report completed.



We also established the team to carry out the assessment of habitat requirements for threatened animal species, which will be conducted with the contribution of the Regional Office of Environment. Target species remain at present those identified in the original proposal, ie, the CR Madagascar Big-headed Turtle, Pinstripe Damba, Madagascar Fish-eagle and *Arius festinus* fish, plus four more EN and VU fish species, plus the VU Madagascar flying fox.

Output 4: Increased understanding of the importance of natural systems and biodiversity for livelihoods and wellbeing amongst different socio-economic groups using and living around the lake

Under this Output, the project partners initiated consultations with the school district for education for the preparation of the planned schools competition to develop a single unified project logo and slogan promoting 'healthy nature for healthy people'. It was discussed that the competition could be extended to Antsohihy District to sensitize more participants and the logo output should be a simple and hand-made design rather than something made on a computer because most local students do not have access to such tools.

Discussion with the education department also covered the plan for a curriculum-linked environmental education programme, which was endorsed in principle. We will follow-up with further discussions to plan and prepare the necessary tools and materials.

Copies of the VOI establishment dossiers (Activity 1.2) were retained by the VOIs, which are acting as the community information points until this activity is developed further. The main thing is to make project information available to the wider communities

The global and local values of the lake were a key component on the introductory meetings (Activity 1.1). and introductory meetings also emphasised how the project hopes to support local stakeholders to address conservation challenges at the site. Specific messages have not yet been finalised however.

Output 5: Current and future wider threats are understood for the local Tseny catchment, with a conservation strategy developed to mitigate threats into the future, Tseny recognised as a Ramsar Site, and national conservation managers and government staff valuing and able to use tools to plan long-term resilient community-based wetland conservation projects

Under this Output, the project partners conducted an workshop in April 2022 using the Ramsar Management Effectiveness Tracker Tool (RMETT), which collects useful information about threats and about the prior status of the management of the lake and its resources. The results will be written up as background to the management plan. In preparation for management planning, selected project staff joined a similar process for Lake Sofia – another long-term WWT project site in Sofia Region – so they could become familiar with the open standards for conservation planning (see conservationstandards.org). The other activities under this Output will launch in project year two.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1: *Five sustainably financed community institutions (VOIs) are representing the breadth of local society and providing efficient, and legally recognised, management of natural resources in and around Lake Tseny*

Four VOIs have been agreed in principle, covering the same constituencies as the five that were originally planned, the leaders elected and the founding documents submitted to the authorities. With the strong government support we already have for this project, we believe the VOIs will be formally established with objectives and work plans in project year two.

Output 2: *Fishing regulations are in place and being followed by local and migrant fishers, which, alongside fish habitat restoration areas, is increasing the productivity of the fishery. Fishing communities have new knowledge on value chains and the potential to increase profitability.*

Our initial consultations indicate a strong desire to establish regulations so that the fishery productivity may recover. Although baseline surveys have not yet been written up, the successful completion of the survey will allow us to fully understand the dynamics of local fishing practices and value chains to achieve this Output.

Output 3: *Quality and extent of aquatic and lakeside habitat increased.*

We have initially mapped the extent of aquatic and marsh habitat around the lake, but a realistic assessment of the restoration potential still awaits the threats analysis planned for early in project year two. We should then be able to formulate theories of change with the VOIs using the management planning process that are already proposed.

Output 4: Increased understanding of the importance of natural systems and biodiversity for livelihoods and wellbeing amongst different socio-economic groups using and living around the lake.

The degree of interest in the formation of the VOIs suggests we have already made progress towards this output.

Output 5: Current and future wider threats are understood for the local Tseny catchment, with a conservation strategy developed to mitigate threats into the future, and national conservation managers and government staff valuing and able to use tools to plan long-term resilient community-based wetland conservation projects.

This output rather depends on activities that are planned for the second and third years, but the current good progress on VOIs, the RMETT, baseline surveys and vegetation mapping indicate we will be ready to start those discussions soon.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

Outcome: Sustainable, representative, and legally recognised community-based management of Lake Tseny catchment results in improved ecosystem services for 5000 local people and enhanced habitat for threatened biodiversity, with techniques showcased nationally.

There is no demonstrable progress towards the overall project Outcome beyond what can be inferred from the progress made towards the Outputs (see above). This is to be expected, since the project has really only been running for six months.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Assumptions (by level)	Comments
Outcome-level	
The political situation within Madagascar remains stable and no restrictions are imposed on NGOs.	This assumption holds.
Public health restrictions do not prevent project activities from taking place.	Restrictions to travel are now over and project implementation is running much as they were prior to the pandemic.
Project partnership with local government remains strong and all stakeholders remain supportive of management transfer to local communities.	We have established a strong local government liaison and communication, and they are currently very engaged.
Local community associations respect commitments to democratic processes and encourage participation of under-represented groups.	To be determined, but initial support for the VOIs indicates this assumption is reasonable.
Local fishing communities maintain strong relationships with migrant fishers to agree equitable use and management models.	To be determined.
Output-level	
All sectors of society engage with management transfer process and support wider project initiatives, including community-based savings groups and equipment rental schemes, which have been designed to fill existing needs.	To be determined.
Local government honour legal community rights to manage natural resources and do not interfere with democratic processes.	To be determined.
Local and migrant fishers are willing to engage in a long-term process to improve fisheries.	We have sensitized local fishermen to contribute on the long term fishery management, and this seems fair.
Local community association patrolling and enforcement can be done safely and efficiently at the lake.	To be determined.
There are no unforeseen barriers to standard restoration methods that work elsewhere locally.	To be determined.

Assumptions (by level)	Comments
Community members from all villages and sectors of society engage with the project.	To be determined.
Schools continue to support comprehensive programmes of environmental education provided by project staff.	To be determined, but initial progress with the education department shows strong support.
Good climate projection models are made available to the project.	Experience in Lake Sofia suggests the World Bank Climate Knowledge Portal is adequate for site-level assessments.
A full programme of research on wider threats can be undertaken safely and effectively within the project period.	The initial social-economic, fisheries and mapping surveys suggest this remains a fair assumption.
National Ramsar Committee members remain engaged with the capacity building activities identified in the draft National Wetland Strategy.	The national committee is yet to fully reform due to administrative hurdles in the Malagasy public administration, so we are directing efforts at the regional level, as indeed is an objective of the National Wetland Strategy.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and poverty alleviation

Impact: Lake Tseny catchment provides resilient ecosystem services and sustainable livelihood opportunities for communities, secure healthy habitat for increasing populations of native biodiversity, and inspires resilience planning for wetlands throughout Madagascar.

As with the project Outcome, it is still too early to declare any measurable contribution to this level of project outcome. However, we feel our early progress suggests the project can make a meaningful contribution to the stated Impact.

4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

At this early stage the project has not achieved any concrete contribution to Madagascar's international conservation or development commitments. But we expect it to have done so by the project end in the following three areas, paraphrased below.

- Convention on Biodiversity 'Aichi targets' (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14)
- Strategic Goals of the Ramsar 4th Strategic Plan, 2016-24 (Goals 1, 2, 3)
- Global Goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, 15)

Nonetheless, WWT's team in Madagascar has established collaboration with the Ramsar Focal Point, which is a long term relationship established since our first forays into the country. We continue to conduct regular meetings with the FP and her team, and she is taking a close interest in this project due to the contribution it makes to national wetland priorities. This relationship is one reason we included a national demonstration component to the project Impact (inspiring "resilience planning for wetlands throughout Madagascar").

5. Project support to poverty reduction

The project proposal identified a contribution to six sustainable develop goals: Ending poverty (SDG 1), ending hunger (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), water and sanitation (SDG 6), combating climate change (SDG 13) and protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15).

At this point it is too early to indicate a meaningful impact against any of these development goals, but we have no reason to revise them and they will be considered as part of regular project monitoring and evaluation (see section 7).

6. Consideration of gender equality issues

Thus far, our focus with respect to gender equality has been to ensure the project accurately reflects the interests, needs and opinions of both women and men:

- Fair opportunity to participate in planning
- Fair opportunity to participate in project implementation
- Monitoring and evaluation

Notable achievements include the establishment of an Environmental and Social Management System at the very start of the project, which includes mechanisms agreed with the project partners on how to contribute to gender equality as identified in the project proposal, namely:

- Understanding roles, responsibilities and needs of both genders
- Promoting equal participation in project activities
- Setting targets for female participation in VOIs and fisheries management groups
- Seeking to address socio-cultural barriers to women's participation, e.g. by making meetings and trainings accessible
- Collecting gender-disaggregated data during project monitoring
- Through surveys, seeking to understand the different needs and experiences of both women and men

We are also monitoring female participation in project activities. To date, the newly-formed VOIs have a total of 110 female members compared with 295 male members. While this is a ratio of roughly 1:3, it is not a bad start in a male-dominated environment and something that we will aim to build on. In discussion with the VOIs we will now seek to find other ways to improve female representation, eg, in making sure their needs are fairly considered in the VOI priorities and work plans. We will also insist that at least one management committee member of each VOI is female.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Project monitoring systems were agreed and put in place during the project inception period and rely on regular, structured meetings to report on and review progress against the detailed indicators identified in the project log frame. We have three processes for routine monitoring:

- Monthly Project Management Team meetings; these primarily focus on coordination, logistics and budgeting, and monitoring the project at the level of activities.
- Quarterly Project Steering Group (PSG) meetings; these bring together senior managers from the partners to review progress at the Output level against the Output indicators.
- Annual meetings; A wider gathering of stakeholders that where possible includes both local and regional partners, and which will publically review progress towards the project Outcome using the Outcome indicators. This meeting provides the main content for the Darwin Annual Report.

In practice, these combined reporting, monitoring and planning procedures are fairly new to the project partners and stakeholders, and the formats and roles of different participants are still being worked out. However, in the longer-term we see these processes as an essential component of the lake management, and it is therefore considered particularly important to make them work as a key aspect of project sustainability. We may therefore have to modify meeting membership, structure and timing in response to feedback from the project stakeholders so they best deliver for the long-term interests of the site.

8. Lessons learnt

So far we have learned several important lessons from the first few months of project implementation:

1. Clear communication between project partners and stakeholders is vital to smooth implementation. This is reflected in our structured monitoring and evaluation systems.
2. Road degradation is delaying travel between the capital, Antananarivo, and the regional capital, Antsohihy. We now factor those delays into our travel plans and scheduling.
3. The establishment of aquatic resources management transfer need to be considered in addition to the VOI, which is primarily designed forest and grassland habitats. Progress on this modification of the VOI legislation would represent an important, unexpected outcome of the project and contribute to the policy aspects of the project Impact.

9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

The Darwin Expert Committee identified some areas in which our application could have been stronger, and communicated these in our acceptance letter (dated 12 August 2021). Although the comments were not requirements for Darwin grant support, it was suggested they may help strengthen the project and we were recommended to incorporate them. We responded by reviewing the comments with the project partners during the project inception planning and consultations late in 2020, the results of which are described in Annex 5.

10. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

Nothing additional to report.

11. Sustainability and legacy

Although early in project implementation, there has been one new development beyond the sustainability inherent in our overall approach of capacity building for local managers. That is the establishment of a formal collaboration between the project partners and relevant government bodies at the regional level, which came about due to consultations during project inception. These resulted in the *Accord de Collaboration* (implementation agreement) noted above in Section . With the necessary support we believe that this group could in time evolve into a regional representative body of the national wetland committee, which is the devolved administration for wetland management that is envisioned in the new National Wetland Strategy (2022). As the project progresses, we will endeavour to direct and strengthen this regional coordination mechanism by, for example, giving the participation government officers opportunities to visit the site, engage more directly in project planning and implementation, or participate in training opportunities afforded by the project.

12. Darwin identity

WWT held an engagement event in December 2021 to celebrate the 75 anniversary of our founding by Sir Peter Scott. We used the opportunity to promote the new Darwin Initiative project and bring together 50 senior partners in wetland conservation in Madagascar, including managers of most of the country's 23 Ramsar sites and representatives from relevant ministries and the EU. The keynote address was delivered by British Ambassador, HE David Ashley, who outlined the British government's commitment to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in Madagascar. The event was publicised in Madagascar via WWT's Facebook feed and on the Twitter account of HE David Ashley.

We have also thanked DARWIN during several public events that we have organised or participated in since the beginning of the project. These include the final consultations on the National Wetland Strategy, the national celebration of World Wetlands Day, the public visibility

open day run by the European Union in May 2022, and during every meeting held at District level in Antsohiy.

We have also included the Darwin logo on all project-related documentation, including meeting minutes, invitations, participant lists etc.

13. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

Covid restrictions during the reporting period have been modest for national staff, partners and stakeholders, and limited to reduced sizes of consultation meetings and requirements for additional safety measures such as distancing and provision of PPE. The main impact has been on the inability of WWT staff from UK to visit the site due to initial flight cancellations, followed by quarantine restrictions of two weeks on arrival, making it unreasonably demanding on staff time and budgets. We were however able to move to a model of online supervision and support which we will continue to use, and on current trends the international travel restrictions should abate further in project year two so that site visits for technical staff in particular will become feasible where they are justified.

14. Safeguarding

Please tick this box if any safeguarding or human rights violations have occurred during this financial year.

If you have ticked the box, please ensure these are reported to ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk as indicated in the T&Cs.

15. Project expenditure

Please expand and complete Table 1. If all receipts have not yet been received, please provide indicative figures and clearly mark them as Draft. The Actual claim form will be taken as the final accounting for funds.

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2021/22 Grant (£)	2021/22 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)	████████	████████	████████	n/a
Consultancy costs	██████	██████	██████	n/a
Overhead Costs	████████	████████	████████	Additional overhead costs due to moving into a permanent new office in Antananarivo
Travel and subsistence	████████	████████	████████	Reduced travel, especially international, due to COVID-19 pandemic
Operating Costs	████████	████████	████████	Reduced activities in this FY due to delay in start to the project
Capital items (see below)	████████	████████	████████	Motorbike not yet purchase due to limited availability

Others (see below)	████████	████████	██████	n/a
TOTAL	████████	████████		

Highlight any agreed changes to the budget and **fully** explain any variation where this is +/- 10% of the budget. Have these changes been discussed with and approved by Darwin?

We predicted we would underspend the budget in December 2021 and submitted a change request at that time, which was accepted. Those figures are the ones used here. Despite our best efforts, we were however unable to make up the time lost at the start of the project, and the actual under-spend was greater than we had anticipated, at roughly 5% of the revised budget for 2021/22. The under-spends reported here were not discussed and approved by Darwin, and we accept that we may be required to forfeit the balance.

16. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes

I agree for the Darwin Initiative Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

Nothing outstanding to report at this time.

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk putting the project number in the Subject line.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please discuss with Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the Subject line.	No
Have you included means of verification? You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	n/a
Do you have hard copies of material you need to submit with the report? If so, please make this clear in the covering email and ensure all material is marked with the project number. However, we would expect that most material will now be electronic.	n/a
Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	Yes
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	