

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

Note: 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 2023

Project reference	28-025
Project title	Stock-proof hedges to improve farming livelihoods and conserve Malagasy forests
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead partner	Chester Zoo
Partner(s)	Missouri Botanical Garden
Project leader	Chris Birkinshaw
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	www.chesterzoo.org/what-we-do/our-projects/stock-proof-hedges-in-southeast-madagascar/

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Following the busy program of activities during YR1 and YR2 of this project, it was planned that little new work would be conducted during YR3 of the project, because, during this time, the hedges would be simply getting established. The only activities planned for YR3 were monitoring and communication about the project. Concerning monitoring, key work included: analysing the social data collected in YR1 of the Project (being conducted by Greg Counsell Social Scientist at CZ); mapping all the fields that have now been fenced and hedged; and continuing to support the 10 student surveyors to track biodiversity trends in the project intervention zone. Communication concerning the project continued on twitter (@c_birkinshaw, and @ClaireRaisin during a site visit) and, now a permanent page on the Chester Zoo website (see above). In YR3 the contracts with the nursery women ended but we are pleased to report that 8 of these women are now producing young plants of fruit and spice trees privately. We have committed to buy these plants (using funds from a different donor) should they be unable to find other purchasers.

In addition to the planned activities, two activities, unplanned for YR3, were also implemented:

1. In August, Claire Raisin provided a demonstration to the participant farmers about hedge-laying. The participants immediately understood the principles of this work and had an intuitive understanding on how the plant stems could be woven together to ultimately create an impenetrable barrier. According to the original timetable this activity should have been implemented in YR2 but was delayed until YR3 due to the slow growth of the hedging plants on the impoverished soils of this site.

2. Between April to August, the nursery staff used excess stock from the nursery to replace tree seedlings that were part of the hedge line that had died. Stems of *Gliricidia* that had not rooted on the poorest soils were replaced with stems of *Jatropha* that, according to the local community, will root well on such soils.

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.

An issue that was already evident in YR2 and reported at this time, was the slow growth of the young plants of native trees when planted on sandy soil. It is clear that by the end of this project we will not have been able to integrate these plants into the hedges. It is therefore fortunate indeed that Chester Zoo have committed to supporting this work for a further 12 months after the conclusion of the BCF funds.

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: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

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 2024)?

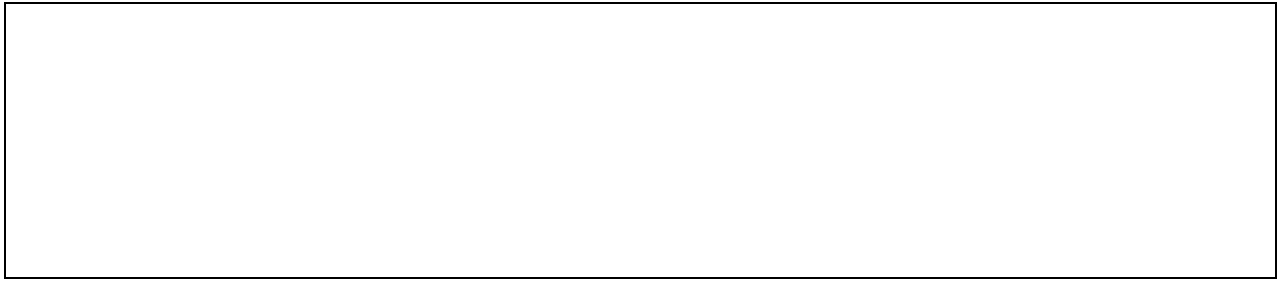
Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4c. If yes, then you need to 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 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?



If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**