

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	29 - 005
Project title	Safeguarding Rennell Island Livelihoods and Biodiversity from Invasive Species
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Solomon Islands & Fiji
Lead partner	BirdLife International
Partner(s)	Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association
Project leader	Steve Cranwell
Report date and number (e.g., HYR1)	31/10/2023 HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	

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).

Output 1

Biodiversity baseline data and baseline data for coconuts, root crops (taro, sweet potato/kumara, tapioca, yam), and fruit and nut crops (cutnut, papaya/pawpaw, pineapple, banana, pumpkin) within the four treatment & non-treatment areas at the East Rennell World Heritage Site (ERWHS) were collated by the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association (LTWHSA) Rangers between March and April. These were recorded as pre-baiting data. This was following a fieldtrip (March 19 – April 4) by BirdLife International (BLI) Project Lead Steve Cranwell, Project Consultant & invasive species expert, Dr. Ray Pierce and USP Masters student Viliame Duavakacagi, whereby hands-on training on monitoring, data collection & reporting was conducted with the Rangers and the Local Project Coordinator (LPC). The Socio-economic Baseline Assessment was conducted for the four ERWHS villages by Local Consultant Christina Nasiu from 15th to 18th August, and a draft report (ERWHS Household Income & Wellbeing Survey Report) has been submitted to BLI. Analysis from this survey and the biodiversity and crop monitoring data should verify whether there has been a reduction in crop damage from rats (because of the rodent control program), and therefore a change in crop yield (or consumption). This should be reported by end of Y2.

The equipment for the rodent control program was finally delivered to Rennell in April. These included track markers, galvanized nails, pack frames for carrying bait buckets/stations, 1180 units of Philproof mini bait stations, 48 units of Pestoff Rodent Blocks (brodifacoum) packed in 10kg pails and 55 units of Pestoff 20R bait (900kgs). The LPC George Tauika ensured transfer & facilitation of consignment from the Solomon Island (SI) Customs Authority and Biosecurity Division onto the ferry to Rennell. This delay in shipment gave the Local Rangers more time to effectively complete marking of bait lines and GPS marking for all bait points around the four 1km² rat treatment grid (1 per village) and the associated non-treatment (control) plots. BLI produced maps of the treatment plots based on the GPS data provided by the Local Rangers, this enabled the team to note the accuracy of marking of bait lines and GPS points. Following review of the GPS maps, some minor corrections (re-alignments) to the bait grid lines had to be made by the Rangers. Given this was the first time to be engaged in such an activity, the Local Rangers did a commendable job in marking the bait grids and GPS-marking each point within the grid.

Baiting of the four rodent control plots commenced in May with the final baiting completed in late July. The timeframe for baiting took longer than expected, due to varying work rate of the Rangers (some worked faster than others); this coupled with competing community obligations which the Rangers had to attend

to during the baiting period (funerals, weddings, birthdays, attending to children/school commitments in Honiara/West Rennell). A monitoring visit in August by BLI Project Manager, Miliana Ravuso ensured that a final round of baiting was completed before monitoring commenced. Rangers submitted their first community-based monitoring data (on indicator biodiversity and agricultural species) and bait monitoring in August and have continued to provide data based on monitoring protocols schedules. Video footage of at least two nests of indicator bird species have been captured through trail cameras deployed within the forest plots. Project Consultant, Dr. Ray Pierce has begun reviewing this data, although a meaningful analysis will be provided after few months of monitoring, to be reported at the end of Y2.

The four ERWHS communities continue to fully support the LTWHSA and the project. To date, over 40 people from the 4 villages have been trained and have the capacity for rodent control implementation and associated crop and biodiversity monitoring. These include 8 women from Hutuna village, 6 from Tegano village, 7 from Niupani village and 5 from Tevaitahe village. Indicators 1.1 to 1.3 have been achieved and Indicators 1.4 and 1.5 are on track to be fulfilled by EOP as scheduled.

Output 2

National preparation towards the 2023 Pacific Games in Solomon Islands has slowed progress in the development of the Renbel biosecurity planning (consultation and workshop). SIG biosecurity officials are committed and focused on national (and provincial) preparedness for biosecurity and quarantine protocols. In hindsight, one-on-one discussions with SI Director of Biosecurity Francis Tsatsia continues to be positive and full support will be provided to the in-country coordinator to lead the biosecurity planning for Renbel Province and ensure project outcomes are fulfilled by EOP.

Output 3

The LTWHSA Capacity Needs Assessment was conducted by Local Consultant Christina Nasiu from 15th to 18th August and a draft report (Capacity Needs Assessment Report) has been submitted, outlining key institutional and individual capacity needs for the LTWHSA Committee. The report provides a capacity development plan, which includes training on governance, project management, financial administration, and grant development/proposal writing, scheduled for January to March 2024. In the meantime, the LPC continues to provide financial and progress reports to BLI, and this capacity will be shared with committee members in the upcoming training. The LPC and four Rangers have been successfully trained in implementing the ERWHS Environmental Monitoring Plan and are reporting to BLI, as per monitoring schedule (mentioned in Output 1). A detailed analysis of the monitoring results will be reported by end of Y2. LTWHSA is in regular communication with the SI Govt and now with the PSC established, regular updates on the condition of the ERWHS will be reported to the State. Indicators 3.1 and 3.4 have been achieved; Indicators 3.2 and 3.3 will be achieved by the end of Y2 (after planned workshop & training is completed) and Indicator 3.5 will be fulfilled by EOP. Live & Learn SI (LLSI) is experiencing delays in their Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) project; however, it is anticipated that with the capacity developed for the LTWHSA Committee and Rangers, Indicator 4.5 is on track to be fulfilled by EOP.

Output 4

Community Mobilization and formation of Women's Savings Clubs was conducted in August by Local Consultant Christina Nasiu. It was found that Niupani and Tevaitahe villages already had existing Women's Savings Clubs, so in addition to measuring income, the focus for them would be training in financial management and empowering the women to make informed decisions and to have a voice in the community. Indicator 4.1 has been achieved, while BLI is reviewing Indicators 4.2 and 4.3 (refer Q2 below) and Indicator 4.4 is on track to be fulfilled by EOP.

Output 5

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting was successfully held on 14th August in Honiara and was hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology (MECCDM). Meeting was attended by representatives from MECCDM Project Management Unit, MECCDM Climate Change Division, MECCDM GEF6 EREPA Project Unit, Live & Learn Honiara, NZ MFAT, a local project consultant and the LTWHSA; and apology given by the Director of SI Biosecurity Division. Meeting outcomes included the endorsement of a PSC Terms of Reference (TOR), Darwin project update from BLI and the LTWHSA; and progress updates from stakeholders implementing complementary work at the ERWHS (Live & Learn, NZ MFAT & GEF6 EREPA). A Google Shared Drive has since been compiled to share project documents, results, and meeting reports. BLI has maintained excellent working relations with all stakeholders; regular deliberations on the project continue to be done via email and where necessary skype/zoom meetings. The next PSC meeting is planned for the end of Darwin FY2 (Feb-March 2024). The Darwin project has been communicated in regional forums including the [PRISMSS](#) network (Samoa; April) where BLI is a Technical Partner and the Kiwa Initiative Community of Practice (Fiji; May & October) in which BLI and its four Pacific Partners are implementing a regional project. A detailed account on the implementation of the Communication Plan will be reported by end of Y2.

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.

Little progress has been made (since beginning of Y2) on discussions with the Solomon Islands Handicraft Association (SIHA), who were the implementing partner to lead handicraft assessment activities under Output 4. This is an unexpected development, with the SIHA Chairman on the National Committee for the 2023 Pacific Games in Solomon Islands (Nov 19th to Dec 2nd). BLI is reviewing activities and indicators and will discuss this with NIRAS/BCF Team as soon as possible, together with a Change in Budget Request for the 2023/24 FY.

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

Discussed with NIRAS: Yes/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/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?

No.

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**