

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	29-010
Project title	“Community conservation of critically endangered Hawksbill turtles in Nicaragua”.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nicaragua; Pearl Lagoon RACCS
Lead partner	WCS
Partner(s)	5 fishing communities of the Pearl Lagoon basin
Project leader	Karen Joseph
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>October 31, 2023</i>
Project website/blog/social media	www.wcs.org

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).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your M&E systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

Outcome 1: Conserve hawksbill turtle historical nesting grounds and increase population size through community conservation and increasing education in the Pearl Cays Wildlife Refuge (PCWR):

Our project team has diligently conducted monitoring surveys of hawksbill sea turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in the Pearl Cays Wildlife Refuge (PCWR) on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, in alignment with our planned activities. This report delineates the progress in executing activities and the advancements made toward outlined outputs from April to September 2023, as per our logical framework:

1.1 Nine Protected Nesting Beaches within the PCWR: During this period, our team completed 931 surveys of cays, averaging 6 to 7 cays visited per day, ensuring systematic patrols of all nine nesting beaches within the PCWR.

1.2 At least 92% of nests protected by community patrollers in the PCWR: Over the past 6 months, we recorded 860 new turtle clutches. Notably, our protection efforts have resulted in a 99.18% success rate, with only 7 poached nests, equivalent to 0.82%. Furthermore, we observed no nest losses due to natural causes. Our count indicates that turtles laid a total of 58,382 eggs, with approximately 33,731 eggs successfully hatching, representing 57.78% of hatchlings released into the wild. (These percentages are based on the excavation of 386 nests.)

1.3 Hawksbill turtles nesting population on the Pearl Cays shows stability in increasing in number of at least 10% of new nesting females and 10% in returning females in comparison to previous years: Our efforts have indicated a stable or increasing nesting population of hawksbill turtles in the Pearl Cays, displaying a rise of at least 10% in new nesting females and 10% in returning females compared to previous years. To track these turtles, we tagged 6 individuals using externally placed metal flipper tags. These tagged females were subsequently returned to the sea after being measured.

1.4 Maintenance of Average Emerging Success per Nest throughout the Project Duration: Previously, the average emerging success rate in former years stood at 66%. Presently, we have achieved an average emerging success of 57.7%, based on the excavation of 386 out of the 860 recorded nests. As our nesting season extends until December, we anticipate matching the historical average emerging success from previous years.

1.5 1,500 pupils (50% male, 50% female) in primary and secondary schools in 8 communities and 200 university students (50% male, 50% female) and local government officers impacted through educational activities : Since April 2023 until September 2023, our educational initiatives have made a significant impact on various groups:

- **Primary and Secondary School Pupils:** Educational activities and presentations were conducted in seven schools within the communities, engaging a total of 1,682 students (971 male, 711 female), along with the participation of 22 teachers (18 female, 4 male).
- **Community Members and Leaders:** Participation included 102 community members, fishers, and household members (91 female, 11 male), as well as 9 territorial leaders (7 male, 2 female).
- **University Students and Teachers:** Involvement of 68 university students (36 female, 32 male), 15 marine biology students from the University of BICU (6 male, 9 female), and 1 female teacher from a secondary school, along with 10 primary and secondary school students (7 female, 3 male) who received a one-day training on turtle monitoring and conservation activities on the Pearl Cays.
- **Joint Effort Activities:** A collaborative effort was made with the University of BICU, involving 30 participants for a two-day program and one night. This included 8 primary and secondary students from the Pearl Lagoon basin (3 males, 5 females) and 22 university students from Bluefields on the Pearl Cays (14 female, 8 male). The activities covered topics such as turtle monitoring, mangrove reforestation, and coastal clean-up.

This detailed breakdown demonstrates the diverse reach and substantial impact of our educational activities across different demographics.

	Females	Males	Total	Goal	% Completion
Pupils (primary and secondary)	723	977	1700	1,500	113%
University Students and others	178	76	254	200	127%

Outcome 2: Benefit local communities around the Pearl Cays Wildlife Refuge with direct employment and sustainable livelihood alternatives in exchange for hawksbill protection commitments.

Output 2.1 At least 200 families (60% female and 40% male headed households from 4 communities with influence in the Pearl Cays refuge, benefited by improved seeds of staple crops :

Throughout this reporting period, 91 female heads of households, designated as beneficiaries, were provided with 1 rooster and 4 laying hens of the HI-line breed each. This initiative aims to enhance food security, increase protein levels through the consumption of eggs and poultry meat in the short and long term, and consequently contribute to a reduction in turtle hunting. This builds upon the previous distribution of improved staple crop seeds to 300+ beneficiaries in 2022, surpassing our initial target of 200 beneficiaries.

Output 2.2 Improved livelihoods for 10 people directly and 50 people indirectly through hiring as community patrollers.

Our project successfully hired 11 individuals, exceeding our goal of 10 direct employments. Considering an average family size of 8 members in the area, this employment opportunity directly benefits 88 individuals. Additionally, through the indirect impact of these employments, 50 individuals in the community have experienced improved livelihoods, contributing to a total of 138 beneficiaries.

Output 2.3 Improved livelihoods for 10 families through the reactivation of Kabu Tours community

Enterprise: The necessary equipment and materials required to reactivate the Kabu Tours Community enterprise have been successfully procured. However, owing to an extended period of inactivity, there are additional governmental requirements that need to be fulfilled to complete the reactivation processes. The WCS marine coordinator, in collaboration with the director from the Department of Foreign Affairs at BICU, is actively engaged in identifying viable solutions to overcome this challenge.

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.

As a result of our good relationship with the regional territory leaders, the reliability that WCS staff has demonstrated over the years in Nicaragua and the determination of the colleagues who followed up the process, WCS Nicaragua has been able to successfully implement the project. However, the current political situation in Nicaragua represents a challenge for WCS staff to deliver project activities. Since September 2023, the project field activities have faced delays due to government delays on approval processes, so we could not carry out monitoring throughout the month of October. The project had a one-month hiatus and because of the delay, the monitoring activities will be extended until the end of December and not November as planned. Then we will continue with opportunistic surveys to conduct excavations of the remained nests.

We look forward to continuing with our to-dos for 2023 and beyond.

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?

IN July 2023, we received several comments from an independent reviewer commissioned by DEFRA. In this report, there were several comments that we have addressed in this report:

Comment 1: Please address the comments from the Darwin Committee regarding wording of the Outcome, Output 1 and its measurable indicators, and Output 2 and its measurable indicators. : Measuring behavioral changes within a short project timeframe presents challenges. Due to time constraints and budget limitations, assessing direct changes in pupil behavior towards marine turtles may not be feasible. An independent survey conducted at the project's conclusion among students involved in environmental education activities could serve as a proxy measurement. This survey aims to evaluate their knowledge of marine turtle conservation and their perception of these creatures, offering insights into the impact of our educational efforts.

Comment 2: Please provide Means of verification for the education component (workshop contents, agenda, list of participants, copies of the talks delivered to students). We will send the means of verification of all educational activities, as annexes to this report.

Comment 3: The targets set for the number of students to receive the turtle conservation training/environmental education materials seems over-ambitious. Please evaluate whether these numbers can be reached by EOPThe target were certainly ambitious but with the hiring of a technical assistant for our project we have greatly advance in reaching these targets.

Comment 4: Please ensure that the next report is subject to QA before submission We have reviewed and edited language in this report and we will do so for the yearly report as well.

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**