

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	29-015
Project title	Valorising Malagasy protected areas as seed sources for forest restoration
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead partner	Missouri Botanical Garden
Partner(s)	
Project leader	Chris Birkinshaw
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	Twitter: @c_birkinshaw

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.

In HY2 good progress was made and we were able to catch up with the delayed implementation of some activities in YR1.

With the supervision of our Assistant Project Manager (Patrice), 12 seed collectors continued to collect high quality and vouchered samples of seeds (Activity 2.4). These were dispatched to the project office at Sakaraha (3.3) where the young entrepreneur (Rado) accessioned these collections and a) sent a subsample to the three nurseries for propagation and b) stored a sub sample in the newly installed storage facilities (for sale) (2.4). In total 181 kg of seeds of 11 different native tree species are currently in storage. With our help, Rado recruited two local assistants (Germain who is responsible for accountancy and client interface; and Fabian who is responsible for facilitating the relationship with FRAM, paying the salary of the teachers that we support, and management of stock) – together this team make up the business unit (3.4). To date 2,427,500 MGA has been generated from the sale of seeds. These funds have not yet been used to support teaching. To add value to our seed samples, in June we engaged a consultant who was tasked with calculating the wood density of each of the target species (2.7). The report is available here

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We think this information will be attractive to tree-planting projects that seek to sequester carbon.

The 12 nursery women have continued their work in the 3 nurseries and currently 4,306 seedlings of 17 target species have been potted-up (2.4). The ability of these species to

survive and grow in degraded habitats will be evaluated in trials that will be installed at the start of the wet season in December 2023. The three trial locations have been identified (2.5).

We have continued to support the parents to support 8 teachers at 3 different schools (1.4). Our monitoring shows that these teachers are present and active but, at one of the schools (Andranoheza), student attendance is sporadic (see below).

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.

There is an unusual degree of animosity between neighbouring villages in the landscape surrounding the Analavelona Protected Area. This probably stems from a long history of “tit for tat” cattle-raiding between villages. We were able to implement this project at three villages only and some of the people in villages that were not beneficiaries were jealous of those who did benefit, and angry with us. This was not unexpected and has been managed to a certain extent by enabling especially motivated teachers to provide courses during holidays for students in one of the villages where parents were particularly unhappy. Conversely, at one of the villages that did benefit from the provision of four part-time teachers (and also had excellent school infrastructure provided by a previous project), student attendance was inconsistent - apparently, according to parents, because they needed their children to work in the fields... “if they don’t work then they will not be able to eat”. The lesson learnt is that the lamentable level of education in much of rural Madagascar is not merely due to lack of infrastructure and lack of properly trained and motivated teachers, but also due to deep food poverty that turns schooling into a luxury accessible only to the relatively well off. Theoretically we could address food poverty by providing a school canteen but, in reality, such an action could not be accommodated, at least on a daily basis, within our budget. However, it might be possible to generate sufficient funds from the sale of seeds to provide a canteen once a week and then concentrate teaching effort on this day.

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?

On 23 August I sent this message to Eilidh Young

Dear Madam

I am writing to ask you advice on the following matter. The site office for the project “Valorising Malagasy protected areas as seed sources for forest restoration” is in a town called Sakaraha in south-west Madagascar. This town boasts just one bank “BOA” and it is here that we transfer funds for field activities after their receipt by our central office in Antananarivo. However, BOA has a policy not to establish accounts for US organisations (such as us – Missouri Botanical Garden) and therefore we set up an account in the name of one of our project staff from which funds can be accessed by a cheque with two signatories (both local staff). However, in retrospect, we think this arrangement may not be acceptable to the Darwin Initiative. The nearest alternative bank is a 4 to 5 hour journey to Tulear such that a withdrawal would result in the loss of two days of work and result in additional travel and subsistence expenses. I should add than funds are transferred from Antananarivo following receipt and validation of an expense report for the previous advance and in line with an itemised request for a new advance. I wonder whether this situation is acceptable to you or whether you would prefer us to use an “MBG-named” account based in Tulear?

Thank you for your advice.

Yours sincerely

Chris Birkinshaw

The reply was received on 29 August 2023, as follows:

Thanks Chris – just waiting to see what Defra says here. I think it sounds reasonable but I think I need them to confirm.

Since this time we have not received an update. We are happy with the current situation but we do want to make sure that the BCF administration are fully aware and totally comfortable.

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**