

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	29-017
Project title	Sustainable management of wetlands and grasslands: enhancing biodiversity and livelihoods.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nepal
Lead partner	Bird Conservation Nepal
Partner(s)	Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (KTWR) Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve Buffer Zone Management Committee
Project leader	<i>Ishana Thapa</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>30 October 2023 (HYR2)</i>
Project website/blog/social media	www.birdlifeneal.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).

Three interaction meetings were carried out with local stakeholders to deliberate on the achievement of project objectives. These meetings include discussions with Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve staff at the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (KTWR) office on June 15, a meeting with the Buffer Zone Management Council and Buffer Zone User Community at the field office on July 26, and an interaction program for the coordination of International Vulture Awareness Day at the Tharu Community Homestay meeting hall in Saptari district on 1 September, 2023. Following a coordination meeting, International Vulture Awareness Day was celebrated on 7 September, 2023.

In our efforts to identify appropriate locations for the restoration of grasslands and wetlands within the buffer zone of KTWR, *Dakshin Duban area* and *Bhagalpur area* have been selected as grassland restoration sites. Following consultations with KTWR office, the Buffer Zone Management Council, Buffer zone management committees and input from various local stakeholders within the buffer zone area, restoration of grasslands have been initiated in these two areas.

The "One Household, One Fish Pond" program, an essential project activity, has been officially initiated for the Year Two. Households were selected based on set criteria and in consultation with the relevant Buffer Zone User Committee for the implementation of this initiative. Unfortunately, due to adverse weather conditions during the rainy season as well as extended monsoon, construction activities were delayed. Training on aquaculture accompanied by the support in establishment of fish ponds for 38 households has encouraged local farmers to initiate aquaculture. Among these households, almost all households have started aquaculture; nearly half have already harvested their first yield with approximately 15-20 kilograms per fish pond. These harvested fish were sold for around Nepali rupees 300-350 per kilogram in the local market.

Alternative Energy Promotion has also been started which includes support for the installation of Improved cooking stoves, reducing the fuel wood collection pressure in the reserve. The promotion of stall feeding has been carried with support of grass cutting machines minimizing the over grazing pressure in the reserve. Due to rainy season these works are also being delayed. The installation of 400 improved cooking stoves in Paremara, Pathari, and Pipara villages of Kanchanrup municipality (Saptari district) has led to a reduction in fuel wood and *guitha* (dried cow dung) usage. This has not only contributed to reduce resources extraction from park but also helped to alleviate grazing problems in the area, as fewer cattle are needed for *guitha* production. Community feedback has also indicated that these stoves produce less smoke, reducing indoor air pollution risks, and they are more fuel-efficient, making them cost-effective and eco-friendly.

Message to raise awareness on importance and conservation of grassland and wetland dependent birds has been continuously aired through local radio FM. In addition to this, posters having information and pictures of important bird species in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve have been continuously distributed to project stakeholders and local communities as well as they are displayed in major gathering places of local people.

Altogether 54 households within four Bufferzone units in Saptari district, namely Beruwa Barmajhiya, Badgama Jagatpur, Puba Pipra Dharampur Ghoganpur, and Odraha Kamalpur, received grass cutting machines last year. This distribution has had a positive impact on the community, as it has made stall feeding more accessible. While some people continue to graze their cattle directly in the grasslands, this initiative has inspired many to shift towards stall feeding. It has also encouraged them to rear high-breed cattle for increased milk and meat production.

As a result of training on women entrepreneurships and co-operatives, women entrepreneurs have ventured into various income-generating activities, such as selling bamboo stools for Nepali rupees 250 in the local market. Furthermore, they have also diversified their product offerings by crafting and selling bags in the local market, priced between Nepali rupees 30 to 50.

Ms. Sadikshya Subedi and Dilip Khanal, M. Sc. Students were selected to carry out research work related to grasslands and wetlands dependent birds and provided assistance in completing their research proposals. They have now started their field work.

Following the resignation of project officer, we took the initiative to appoint a new project officer- Avas Pradhan, and this transition was successfully completed on September 15.

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.

In the past six months, our project encountered a need to recruit a new project officer, with the resignation of project officer, Saroj Rai. However, we have successfully onboarded a new project officer Mr. Aavas Pradhan with smooth handing over from the outgoing staff. The main challenge we faced was related to the extended monsoon season with heavy rains, which prevented us from conducting on-site ground truthing for the identified grassland and wetland

restoration sites, even though the potential restoration locations had been identified. Once weather conditions permit, we are fully prepared to commence the restoration efforts.

Despite minor weather delays, the community's enthusiastic response remains positive, with no significant impact on the budget or timeline reported so far.

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?

None.

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**