

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	29-031
<b>Project title</b>	Improved Conservation and Community Benefits in Kenya's Critical Mountain Forests
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Kenya: Aberdare and South Western Mau
<b>Lead partner</b>	The Rhino Ark Kenya Charitable Trust
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)
<b>Project leader</b>	Christian Lambrechts
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 31, 2023 HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://rhinoark.org/">https://rhinoark.org/</a> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/rhino.ark/">https://www.instagram.com/rhino.ark/</a> <a href="https://twitter.com/RhinoArk">https://twitter.com/RhinoArk</a> <a href="https://web.facebook.com/RhinoArk">https://web.facebook.com/RhinoArk</a> <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/rhino-ark-charitable-trust/">https://www.linkedin.com/company/rhino-ark-charitable-trust/</a>

**Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable**

### **Aberdare**

**GETA INDIGENOUS TREE NURSERY** - We have increased the indigenous tree nursery seedlings capacity from 30,115 to 80,200, surpassing our target of 60,085 seedlings.

**REHABILITATION PROJECT** - we have planted a total of 24,450 indigenous tree species and carried annual survival count on the seedlings. The survival rate was 78% and we replaced the dead seedlings.

**ECOTOURISM PROJECT** - We have procured the hiking and camping gear for 29 local guides, porters, and cooks and completed training for these individuals. We have also completed the installation of the trail markers and are currently working on the key point and way finding signage

**GETA CFA REBUILDING** - We facilitated successful Geta CFA elections and Geta CFA leaders' induction training. We also facilitated handing-over of powers and helped the officials in legal registration process through the office of the registrar according to the Kenya law. We are also currently doing registration and membership drive and so far, we have registered more than 1600 individual members.

**CONSERVATION FENCE** - We have procured the fencing posts and HT wires for the fence. We are currently planning for a community sensitization meeting for the construction of the fence.

### **South Western Mau**

**FOREST RESTORATION** - Korabariet is under active maintenance, including spot weeding and bush clearing. Severe drought resulted in seedling survival rate of 43.5% (survival check done in April). To address this, 13,200 seedlings added to bring survival rate to 70%. Korabariet rehabilitation site seedling survival was raised to 70% after the beating up (replacement) of seedlings lost during the drought. 89 community members were engaged in site maintenance over the period.

**COMMUNITY TREE NURSERY** - This project had been pushed from 2022/23 to 2023/24 period to allow capacity building for the CFA, which was a critical step in ensuring the CFA is better equipped to undertake management of the nursery. Construction of the community tree nursery, at Ndoinet Forest Station, was completed on 30 July 2023. A total of 16,000 seedlings have been sown and potted.

**COMMUNITY FOREST ASSOCIATION REBUILDING** - The Ndoinet CFA underwent a process of change of office bearers and Rhino Ark provided support in these processes, including the Management Plan negotiation process between KFS and the CFA conducted through a 2-day workshop in June 2023. On 31 August 2023, the Plan and Forest Management Agreement were officially launched at Ndoinet Forest Station.

**JOINT SURVEILLANCE UNIT** - The KFS, the CFA and Rhino Ark recruited 8 persons M (6), F (2) for the SW Joint Surveillance Unit. On 1 August the scouts commenced a 3-month training at the KWS Law Enforcement Academy. As the scouts' deployment to their station is awaited, Rhino Ark and KFS have jointly organized deep forest patrols with community scouts and conservation champions to perfect the operational protocols for extended forest operations that the incoming JSU team will undertake.

**FOREST OUTPOSTS** - Construction of Bosta forest outpost was completed on 17 September 2023, and was officially handed over to KFS on 4th October 2023.

**BEEKEEPING PROJECT** - Continuing to engage with local beekeepers.

**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.**

**1. Unavailability of certified seeds and those available had a low germination rate.**

**Lesson learnt** - We adopted use of local seed collection and use of vegetative materials. Our seed collectors were trained at KEFRI Nyeri and by Forester Geta, KFS.

**Impacts** - The locally collected seeds are doing excellent due to suitability of area, the germination percentage of the seeds is 98% compared to KEFRI seeds which was 5% and unreliable.

**2. Unpredictable rainfall pattern**

**Lesson learnt** - Adopting a flexible regime until such a time when the planting conditions are favourable; we moved our planting from April to July.

**Impact** - No significant impact on the project timetable because we were able to adapt quickly.

**3. Transport of seedlings is human labour intensive which has increased the cost of transportation.**

**4. Seedling depredation by small sized antelopes**

**Lesson learnt** - Adjusting to less desirable tree species for which antelopes had less desire to browse on.

**Impact** - No significant impact on the project timetable because we were able to adapt quickly.

**5. Steep terrain and strenuous routes increased the time to clear the trails.**

**6. Prolonged wet conditions on the mountain degraded the wooden trail markers**

**Lesson learnt** - Use of locals who are highly experienced with the local terrain saves time and engages with the community who are passionate about the area. Implemented plastic posts instead of wooden stakes as these would not rot even in wet conditions.

**Impacts** - There is an increase with project costs due to an increase in working days in the field because of very adverse weather conditions and long distances.

**7. Large geographic area in which to properly engage key community members**

Geta Forest Station covers the entire Mt. Kipipiri and part of Northwest of Aberdare Forest. The area is vast and characterized with dense human population.

**Lesson learnt** - This means more effort and time is required to reach out to each member of the CFA.

**Impact** - We were able to carry out community sensitization meetings across the 15No. Forest Beats across the five Geta Forest blocks and the exercise was successful.

**8. Delay in set up of implementation at Korabariet site due to the national general election held in August 2022 and the subsequent supreme court case contesting the verdict.**

**Impact** - The team will fast track some activities to mitigate the election related delays. It is envisaged that the site will be implemented within the budget and timeline.

<b>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</b>	
Discussed with NIRAS:	No
Formal Change Request submitted:	No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	No
Change request reference if known:	

<p><b>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)</b></p> <p>Actual spend: <span style="background-color: black; color: black;">██████████</span></p> <p><b>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)?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £</p> <p><b>4c. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.</b> Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.</p> <p><b>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.</b></p> <p><b>NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.</b></p> <p><b>5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</b></p> <p>No.</p>
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**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](mailto: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**