

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus

### Half Year Report

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

**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 2024**

**Please note all projects that were active before 1 October 2024 are required to complete a Half Year Report.**

Submit to: [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.

<b>Project reference</b>	<b>DIR28S2\1070</b>
<b>Project title</b>	Community conservation of critically endangered Hawksbill turtles in Nicaragua
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Nicaragua; Pearl Lagoon RACCS
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	WCS
<b>Partner(s)</b>	5 fishing communities of the Pearl Lagoon basin
<b>Project leader</b>	Karen Joseph
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 31 <sup>st</sup> 2024
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="http://www.wcs.org">www.wcs.org</a>

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end of 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: Hawksbill turtle populations in PCWR increase and show stability (# of nesting females is equal or greater than numbers recorded in 2021 season)**

**1.1** During this period, our team completed 856 surveys cays, averaging 6 to 7 cays visited per day, ensuring systematic patrols of all nine nesting beaches within the PCWR.

**1.2** For the 2024 turtle season (April - September 2024) we recorded 720 turtle clutches. Notably, our protection efforts of the 100% of nest is not available until final excavations or ending of the turtle nesting season of 2024, but based on our current data, we have a 98.06% success rate, with only 14 poached nests, equivalent to 1.94%. Furthermore, we observed 6, 0% nest losses due to natural causes (wash away). Our count indicates that turtles laid a total of 26,275 eggs, with approximately 15,555 eggs successfully hatching, representing 59.2%, including 1,259 hatchlings that required additional support by the team.

**1.3** Over the past decade, our efforts have demonstrated a stable increase in the nesting population of hawksbill turtles in the Pearl Cays, with a yearly rise of at least 10% in both new and returning nesting females. The 2024 nesting season, which runs from April to December, we have recorded 720 new nests up to September 6. While this reflects a 19.46% decrease compared to the same period last year, the season is ongoing, and we are optimistic about recording additional nests by the end of December 2024.

**1.4** Previously, the average emerging success rate in the previous year stood at 63.7%. Presently, we have achieved an average emerging success of 65.02%, based on the number of excavated nests, and 65.55% nest success based on the number of nest nests recorded until September 6. We calculate an average of 192 female turtle emerge during the season until September 6, taking into account 144 individual as lower number and 240 as higher number of female turtles, this is base on studies that says Hawksbill turtles generally lay three to five nests per season.

**1.5** In our previous report, we highlighted the significant impact of our activities across all educational levels, surpassing our initial goals. Building on this progress, we continued our school initiatives with the following steps: Starting April 15, we met with school directors to coordinate and finalize dates, launching our activities on April 20. All school visits were conducted under the guidance and coordination of the Director of the Ministry of Education (MINED) in Pearl Lagoon. As part of our outreach, we motivated students to participate in a painting and drawing contest on blankets to commemorate World Sea Turtle Day (June 16). The celebration took place on June 18 at a local school. The event featured participation from various basin authorities, including representatives from MINED, INAFOR, the Municipal Mayor's Office, the Political Secretary of the FSLN, MARENA, and the Fire Department.

**Outcome 2:** *Students and key stakeholders in PCWR have increased knowledge of hawksbill turtle protection and conservation through participation in field trips and workshops*

**2.1** We have already achieved this target in 2023 with more than 300 beneficiaries. To assess the progress of the Alternative Livelihood Project, a random survey was conducted with 12 beneficiary women, using five key questions (see attached questionnaire and results analysis).

**2.2** During the 2024 season, eight patrollers were hired to carry out turtle monitoring activities within the Pearl Cays Protected Area. Beyond their direct involvement, these patrollers also serve as primary providers for their households, directly benefiting 7 to 8 family members.

**2.3** The necessary equipment and materials required to reactivate the Kabu Tours Community enterprise have been successfully procured.

As mentioned in a previous report, Kabu Tours have changed their registration from Kabu Tour to Ocean Tours. Ocean Tours have renewed their activities. According to the cooperative representative, tourism is not feasible or rentable anymore, only a few tourists are coming into the areas and requesting their services. So now they are fishing for fish, shrimp and crab, using the boat and outboard engine facilitated by the project.

**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.**

Although we have overcome many challenges stemming from the political situation in Nicaragua, we continue to face obstacles at the territorial level. However, we remain optimistic that these issues will soon be resolved, as they primarily involve technical matters.

Discussions regarding the agreement between WCS and the Pearl Lagoon Territorial Government are currently underway, with the situation actively on the agenda awaiting final resolution. In the meantime, this has posed challenges for WCS staff in carrying out project activities.

Since July, field activities have experienced significant delays, with limited activities conducted during 2.5-month hiatus. To compensate for this interruption in our monitoring activities we will request two months extension of the project to meet its goals and objectives.

**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:	N/A

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)**

**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 2025)?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend:

**4c. If you expect and underspend, then you should 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 to your project 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?**

Due to delays in completing and signing the Indigenous Territorial Government Agreement, we are requesting a two-month extension for the completion of the monitoring and closing activities.

**6. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent annual report.** If your project was subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment please use this space to comment on any changes to international human rights risks, and to address any additional mitigations outlined in your offer letters. Please provide the comment and then your response. If you have already provided a response, please confirm when.

**Comment 1:** Please provide information regarding number of high-schools involved in the education programme; the location(s) of these schools, the number of students benefitting from these, and the dates. Please submit Means of Verification for the high-school training and for the training delivered to University students. See attachments: Lists of participants by grade and by school desegregated (C1.A); List of participants by grade and school (C1.B); Videos of students' feedback (C1.C1-C5); Pictures of students during workshops at schools. (C1.D1); Pictures of drawing competition per school. (C1.E)

**Comment 2:** Please submit the content of the training delivered on SMART for the 8 trainees. See attachment (C2.A1-A2)

**Comment 3:** The report is very confusing when providing information regarding the training element for Output 2.2. Please clarify: (1) whether the project has delivered training to government officers or not, and (2) whether the 8 people trained this year are additional to the 24 community leaders trained in Y1. AR1 indicates that 24 Indigenous leaders and government officers had participated in workshop on hawksbill conservation and monitoring, yet in AR2 it is stated that the team has not managed to involve any government officers in the training. Annex 1 does not indicate progress against the set targets for this indicator.

The 24 leaders mentioned in the Year 1 (Y1) report did not receive SMART training. However, they participated in workshops covering the following topics: a) Livelihood Project – WCS and the Darwin Initiative; b) Technical Specifications for Hi-Line Chicken Management. C) WCS Engagement in Pearl Lagoon – including presentations on the Hawksbill Turtle.

As a result of these workshops, the leaders of territory and beneficiary communities assumed responsibility for signing letters of agreement on behalf of the Territorial Government. They also committed to ensuring that the four Communal Governments, who have benefited from the project, complete the necessary signings. Five letters of agreement were signed 1: one from the Territorial Government and four from community leaders representing Pearl Lagoon, Awas, Raitipura, and Haulover.

Nicaraguan government currently prohibits public employees from receiving training from any NGOs, a circumstance beyond the project's control. We anticipate that this situation will change by 2025, enabling future projects to proceed without this restriction.

Indigenous leaders and government officers represent distinct roles in the region and independent in decision making, as defined by Law 28 (Autonomy Law) and Law 445 (Law on the Property Regime of Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples). Territorial leaders are elected by and from within the members of the 12 communities, comprising individuals born and raised in those communities. In contrast, government officers are appointed directly by the central government or elected through national or regional elections, representing institutions such as MARENA, INPESCA, INAFOR, and the Municipal Government. This was a misuse of the term government officers, as we considered the territorial government as government employees, because they are funded by the central government.

The eight individuals referenced in our report are field patrollers and are not government officers nor indigenous leaders. These patrollers receive annual training at the beginning of each season, particularly for onboarding new recruits into the patrolling teams. SMART training was provided exclusively to the eight patrollers, the coordinator, and the technical assistant.

In summary, we have not provided training to central government officers, we provided SMART training to eight community patrollers that support monitoring, these are not included in the 24 indigenous leaders training.

**Comment 4:** The report is very hard to read in several places; it doesn't make sense grammatically and it is unclear whether activities and achievements are for the reporting year or cumulative. Please ensure that your reports go through QA before submission.

The current and future reports have and will be QA by WCS.

**Comment 6:** Please provide a copy of the results from the second baseline survey; the evidence provided is actually a list of the beneficiaries for the hen donation programme.

Attached the baseline report generated by the consultant. C5.A1 – A2

**Comment 7:** Please address all the issues highlighted in AR1R and here.

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.

There was an error in the original wording of output 1. The correct phrasing should be "*we maintain a stable increase*" rather than "stability and increase."

We aim to see more turtles nesting on the Pearl Cays each year, as has been observed over the past decade. An increase in the number of nests serves as a reliable indicator of a rising number of female turtles using the PCWR nesting grounds. Each female can lay between 3 to 5 nests per season, so recording more nests suggests a greater number of nesting females.

Regarding nest protection, the reported protection rate of 98.2% specifically reflects protection from poaching. However, when considering all nest losses—including those washed away by tides, destroyed by turtles, dogs, or poachers—the overall nest protection rate is 84.45%. This percentage reflects nests from which at least one hatchling emerged. Notably, this represents a 21% increase in protected nests compared to the previous year.

In terms of hatching success, we documented a total of 97,453 eggs laid, with 62,133 eggs successfully hatching. This corresponds to a hatchling success rate of 63.75%, based on the emergence of hatchlings from at least 50% of the eggshells. This success rate marks a 1.96% improvement compared to the previous year.

- Please provide Means of verification for the education component (workshop contents, agenda, list of participants, copies of the talks delivered to students).  
See attachments C7.A1- A3
- 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 EOP.  
Thanks to the support from the school boards, we have been able to meet our targets.
- Please ensure that the next report is subject to QA before submission.

The comments in section 4. Summary of progress in the AR2R are responded as follows:  
 4.1 The report does not mention any tagging of turtles during this season (Activity 1.3).  
 We had 9 encounters with sea turtles, we tagged 6 turtles, (5 Hawksbill and 1 green turtle).  
 See attach database Turtle tagging 2023.

## Output 2

Indicator 2.1 – *No information was provided about number of high-schools involved, location of these and the number of students benefitting from these talks in each high-school*

See MoVs attached:

1. List of participants was provided per grade and schools.
2. Pictures of students attending the workshop
3. Workshop Methodology.
4. Workshop presentation
5. Pictures of students on field trips

We will not meet the 90 community leaders training goal, because we included government officers initially, who currently are not allowed to be trained by NGOs.

## Output 3.

3.1 The agriculture specialist was contracted in mid of year one, part of the livelihood activities took place in year one such as the buying and delivering of seeds (beans and rice), and plantain corms, in AR2 we report the cumulative results that includes delivery of laying hens and roosters plus the harvest result obtained from the sowing carried out and reported in AR1 (beans, rice and plantain).

See attachments of the consultancy the includes the baseline report C5.A1-A2 and socioeconomic surveys.

## 4.2 Progress toward outputs:

Output 1: *Hawksbill turtle populations in PCWR increase and show stability (# of nesting females is equal or greater than numbers recorded in 2021 season)*

*The Output statement aims for “stability” and “increase” at the same time, lacking specificity.*

There was an error in the wording of this output, the correct writing is “We maintain a stable increase”. Each year, we aim to increase the number of turtles nesting on the Pearl Cays, as we have successfully done over the past 10 years. The rise in the number of nests indicates a growing population of female turtles nesting within the PCWR. Since each turtle can lay between 3 to 5 nests per season, a higher nest count suggests an increase in nesting females.

Regarding nest protection, 98.2% of nests were safeguarded from poaching. When considering all causes of nest loss (such as wash away from high tide, destruction by other turtles, dogs, or poaching), the overall protection rate reached 84.45%, meaning at least one hatchling emerged from these nests. This represents a 21% increase in protected nests compared to the previous year. We currently protect 9 cays; therefore, we protect the 9 beaches on each cay.

From the recorded 97,453 eggs, 62,133 successfully hatched, resulting in a hatchling success rate of 63.75%, based on ≥50% eggshell emergence. This marks a 1.96% improvement from the previous year.

## Checklist for submission

### For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)

Have you <b>responded to any additional feedback</b> (other than caveats) received in the letter you received to say your application was successful which requested response at HYR (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
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If not already submitted, have you attached your <b>risk register</b> ?	
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### For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024)

Have you responded to <b>feedback from your latest Annual Report Review</b> ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
<b>For All Projects</b>	
Include your <b>project reference</b> in the subject line of submission email.	
Submit to <a href="mailto:BCFs-Report@niras.com">BCFs-Report@niras.com</a> .	
Have you <b>clearly highlighted any confidential information</b> within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	
Have you reported against the most <b>up to date information for your project</b> ?	
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	