

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: 31st 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 including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	31-005
Project title	Socially and ecologically coherent freshwater protection in Northern Philippines
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Philippines
Lead Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Partner(s)	Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture – Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
Project leader	Alejandro A. Belen
Report date and number	HYRY1
Project website/blog/social media	Http://www.zsl.org

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).

The project has made significant progress since its inception, with several key activities completed and ongoing. We have successfully conducted the project inception phase, including a project presentation and focus group discussions (FGDs) with partners, stakeholders, and representatives from barangays in potential sites along the Pared River Catchment. A Project Technical Working Group (PTWG) has been established, bringing together key local representatives, including the legislative members of local government units (LGUs), Councillor Committee Chair on Environment and Natural Resources, Councillor Chair for Agriculture and Fisheries, Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officer (MENRO), Municipal Agriculturist (MA), Tourism Officers from the three municipalities involved, the Freshwater Sanctuary Manager of Baggao, as well as officials from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR-CENRO). Additionally, the biological assessment of the Pared River Catchment has been completed, along with land use mapping and an inventory of invasive flora and fauna in the area. As included in the target activities of the project, strengthening the management board of the existing sanctuaries within the PRC initiated, through conducting a Freshwater Sanctuary Management Board (FSMB) meeting, with a focus on presenting the new project, reviewing the roles and responsibilities of FSMB members, and addressing important matters such as

amending the FS Municipal Ordinance to expand the protected areas, updating the FS management plan, re-installing markers and signages, monitoring activities by the CMG/River wardens, and discussing incentives for the wardens. In terms of site identification, ten potential locations for establishing new FS have been identified within the Pared River Catchment and its tributaries, covering an estimated area of 175 hectares. Regarding invasive species, three invasive flora species—*Gmelina arborea* (G-Melina), *Leucaena leucocephala* (Ipil-ipil), and *Swietenia macrophylla* (Mahogany)—were identified along the catchment, with a total count of 5,246 trees. An application for a Cutting Permit has been submitted to DENR’s Regional Director for approval, and the inventory report for invasive flora species has been prepared. 54 native tree species and 59 bird species have been recorded and identified in the project area. In collaboration with the LGU of Baggao, the project team also co-facilitated a refresher course for river wardens on law enforcement to strengthen the protection of the Pared River.

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.

The availability of a functioning drone has impacted the approach and timing of our land use mapping activity, shifting it to Q3Y1. Initially, land use mapping was conducted using the base map available in Barangays along the PRC, which was then validated on the ground by the team. Participatory land use planning and mapping are now scheduled for Q3, contingent on the DENR drone’s repair, which has now been completed.

The recruitment of the full project team has taken longer than anticipated, due to sourcing qualified candidates and the need to align recruitment efforts with the specific skill sets required for the project. This has led to an underspend in the budget allocated for salaries. To address this issue, we are exploring the possibility of requesting to carry over the allocated funds into an additional financial year (FY4) to ensure that the project can be properly resourced and implemented as intended. We plan to submit a formal financial change request in due course to seek approval for this adjustment.

The continued commitment of LGU Baggao to strengthen and institutionalize their river wardens/Community Management Groups (CMGs) and the Freshwater Sanctuary Management Board (FSMB), with support from BFAR, has been a vital step toward sustainable freshwater sanctuary management. Recently, LGU Baggao conducted a refresher course on law enforcement for the river wardens and established a consistent incentive system for them through the Municipal Ecotourism Office’s regular fund. As we look toward the project’s exit, we will consider these achievements to ensure the legacy and lasting impact of effective freshwater sanctuary stewardship. Additionally, BFAR has extended its efforts to establish FS in other areas. There has been a request for ZSL and BFAR to assist in site assessments for proposed locations, and ZSL is expected to participate soon. ZSL will also support the development of management plans for these new sites.

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: *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

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?

n/a

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.

To ensure a coherent network, site selection and prioritization are being guided by assessments and led by local communities to align with local priorities and needs. We have further refined our Pathway to Change and will share details in the annual report. Livelihood diversification is guided by our project team's technical expertise to ensure options are both climate-resilient and sustainable, meeting community needs. DENR remains an active project partner under an MoU which is currently in development, and we are collaborating closely on river basin and catchment approaches.

Additionally, to address watershed protection concerns, we are implementing ZSL's FAIRER approach, including grievance mechanisms to safeguard community rights and mitigate risks associated with land and water use conflicts.

Checklist for submission

For New Projects (i.e. starting after 1st April 2024)

Have you responded to any additional feedback (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.	Yes
--	-----

If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	Yes
---	-----

For Existing Projects (i.e. started before 1st April 2024)

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	n/a
--	-----

For All Projects

Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
--	-----

Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	Yes
--	-----

Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	n/a
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes