

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	31-010
Project title	Decreasing climate change accelerated human-wildlife conflict in Armenia
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Armenia
Lead Organisation	Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets
Partner(s)	Birdlife Europe
Project leader	<i>Ruben Khachatryan</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	<i>Fpwc.org</i>

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.

Output 1. Local communities are empowered to integrate 4,000 ha of communal lands into a protected area and improve land management practices.

1.1. Target location is transformed into community-based conservation area by the end of Y1

Following the decision of the community council, the targeted areas have been integrated into the FPWC's privately protected area, Caucasus Wildlife Refuge. The land use agreements are finalized and signed. The land use agreements have been finalized and signed, granting the lands to FPWC for conservation purposes in perpetuity through agreements without term limits. This will enable us to develop long-term conservation actions and strategies.

1.2. Protected Area Management Plan elaborated with the input of local communities by the end of Y1

Input from local communities is being gathered, and the process is ongoing. The FPWC team is working on conservation strategy that integrates the conservation actions of Yeghegis. In the coming weeks, the strategy will be finalized, and based on local community input and the strategic priorities, the Management Plan will be adapted and finalized.

1.3 Awareness-raising and educational materials shared with local communities during informational sessions held in target villages and attended by ≥400 active community members interested (minimum 50% women) who have a clearer idea of sustainable practices and behaviors by the end of Y1

To ensure the project is recognizable to local communities, our team developed a special design package for the project's branding. Over the three-year project implementation period, this design will be used to promote a positive attitude towards the conservation and community development actions implemented within this project.

Before the community meetings, FPWC held a kick-off meeting, inviting representatives of all key stakeholder groups, local conservation organizations, community leadership, regional leadership, governmental representatives, as well as the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Armenia. The kick-off meeting took place on May 13th, and was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Environment of Armenia, the Vayots Dzor regional municipality, the Scientific Center of Zoology and Hydroecology of the RA NAS, and various environmental organizations. During the discussion, several important provisions were identified to guide the Foundation's activities. Ambassador John Gallagher, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom to RA, delivered a speech emphasizing the significance of collaborative efforts in project implementation.

Awareness-raising and educational materials have been developed and disseminated. The first community development meeting targeted administrative bodies of the community settlements, regional representatives, and different stakeholders from the local community. The subsequent meetings concentrate on different stakeholder groups, allowing us to have more detailed discussions with participants. Meetings are in process, by the end of Q3 we will have met with all the stakeholder groups.

1.4. At least 400 people (min 50% women) from the most vulnerable households attended meetings on human-bear conflict prevention measures by the end of Y1

The training curriculum is developed, the meetings are scheduled during Q3.

1.5 At least 5 days in a week 4 new rangers patrol the project area and monitoring data is gathered and analyzed by the end of each month.

Four rangers from Yeghegis community were employed by FPWC in the beginning of Q2. They were equipped with the necessary gadgets and outdoor gear and participated in various training sessions. These included early wildfire detection and prevention, mammal and bird identification workshops, first aid and disaster prevention training, and introductions to the human-wildlife conflict. The Conservation Manager works closely with the ranger team to coordinate daily work.

The rangers also received training on the legal frameworks governing conservation and protected areas, covering key national and international laws, regulations, and policies they need to enforce effectively in their daily operations. Topics included themes such as legal protocols for wildlife protection, anti-poaching laws, habitat preservation, and the role of rangers in monitoring and reporting violations. All of these trainings ensure the rangers are well-prepared to protect nature.

Output 2. Land restoration to enhance habitats, expand species range, restore migratory corridor connectivity, and reduce interactions between bears and people.

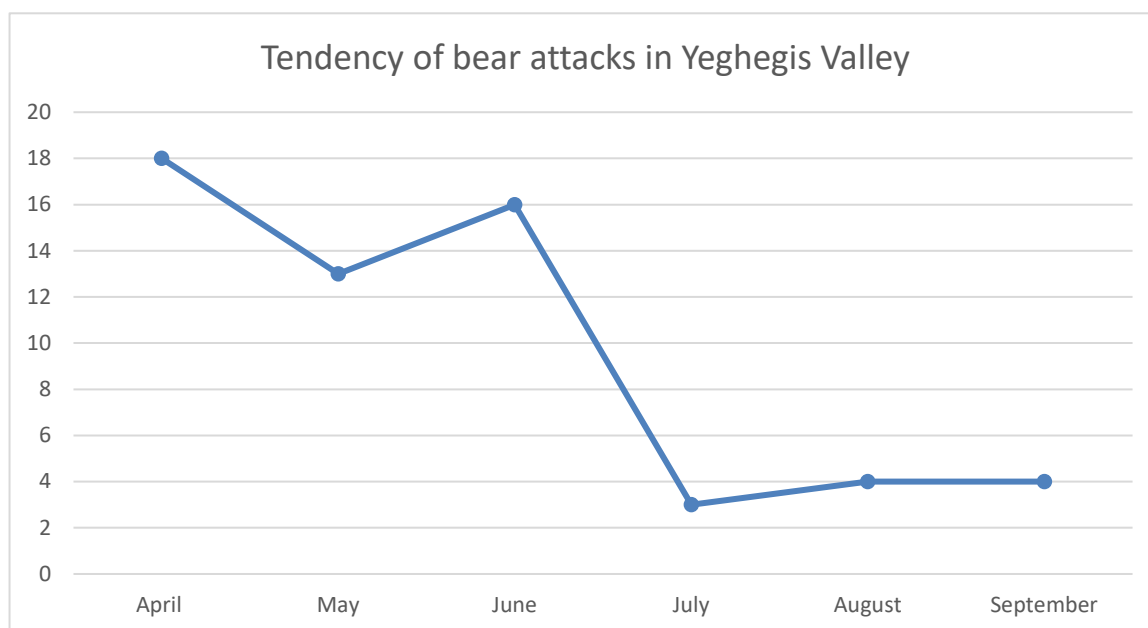
Under this output, the restoration land plots have been identified, and GIS mapping has been implemented. The next action is to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment, and starting from Year2 Q1 the seedlings will be grown in greenhouses in preparation for the Autumn planting. Currently, we have already started gathering seeds to be ready for the growing season, which will finish by the end of October.

2.4 Protection of area, an increase of corridor connectivity and enhancement of habitats; biodiversity monitoring of the area; assessment and monitoring of HWC in Yehegis community/valley; creation of biodiversity database for Yeghegis Valley by the end of Y3

By hiring new rangers, we have initiated the protection of the targeted areas in collaboration with other FPWC rangers. On a monthly basis, the rangers report to the Conservation Manager and share selected photos and videos.

Within the framework of this project, and with the help of our rangers, FPWC has collected data on bear attacks in the Yeghegis Valley over the last six months. FPWC rangers acted as a rapid response team, responding to and verifying each reported bear attack by gathering additional information and evidence, including footage that confirmed the attacks were caused by bears.

In addition, FPWC installed camera traps in the villages of the Yeghegis community to study the age, sex, and behavior patterns of nuisance bears. The team also set up cameras in the protected areas to monitor the wild bear population and better understand the proportion of bears that invade residential areas such as orchards, farms, and private properties.



Based on data collected by FPWC and information provided by official authorities, 108 bear attacks were recorded in the entire Vayots Dzor region, with 58 of these occurring in the Yeghegis community cluster. This indicates that over 50% of the attacks are concentrated in the Yeghegis Valley. Analysis of data gathered by our rangers through interviews, along with information from camera traps, revealed that 17 out of the 58 attacks in Yeghegis were carried out by subadult bears. This means that approximately 30% of the attacks were caused by young bears, aged 2-3 years, searching for food in nearby settlements.

Most of these incidents were recorded in April and May, when bears are actively foraging and often target easy food sources to avoid competition with adult bears.

Due to FPWC's conservation efforts—including the provision of electric fencing and organized meetings with community members—residents were better equipped to protect their private property and implement preventive measures against bear attacks. As a result, the number of bear attacks has decreased by 28% compared to the previous year.

Additionally, the areas incorporated into Caucasus Wildlife Refuge, which are now being protected, have a positive impact by safeguarding natural habitats and foraging grounds for wildlife, thereby helping to minimize human-wildlife conflict in the area.

4.2 Environmental and socioeconomic impact assessments, best practices and lessons learned have been identified and shared with local, regional and international partners (IUCN Congress, WLT Partners meeting, etc.) by the end of Y3 and feedback from international organizations are reflected by the project team for the future engagement.

The baseline socioeconomic and environmental impact assessments are in process. The reports will be prepared during Q3.

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 socioeconomic and environmental impact baseline assessments are not finalized yet, as the process of these assessments takes much longer than we had foreseen. We are planning to finish this activity by mid-November (Q3).

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: *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?

No

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.

Before the project was submitted, FPWC was required to provide details on how it would ensure the risks of harm through sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) and/or health, safety, and security (HSS) risks to people from the delivery of this project are adequately managed and minimized.

At the beginning of the project, the HR manager shared the safeguarding regulations with project staff and held a meeting to discuss all questions and related comments. In addition, HR briefs all the new personal engaged in the project. We have developed an incident log (previously shared with BCF), and created email grievance@fpwc.org which is being managed by FPWC's HR manager. All project-related staff members, contractors, and stakeholders of the project were and will be notified about the email address, and any occurrences will be registered in the incident log and addressed properly.

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 ?	Already submitted
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.	✓
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	✓
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	✓
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	✓
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	✓