

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	<i>DARCC042</i>
Project title	Strengthening conservation organisations' capacity to drive Eastern Malagasy forest restoration.
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Madagascar
Lead Organisation	The North England Zoological Society (Chester Zoo)
Partner(s)	Madagasikara Voakajy, Madagascar Fauna & Flora Group, Missouri Botanical Garden
Project leader	<i>Charles Wheeler</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR1 DARCC042
Project website/blog/social media	Madagasikara Nursery Exchange Network Facebook

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).

According to the implementation timetable & revised log frame submitted as part of the proposal, the activities listed below were planned for the first semester of Year 1.

1.1.1 / 2.2 Develop and deliver workshop knowledge & skill assessment survey & task at each workshop.

Ongoing.

The practical evaluation test showed that there is an improvement from 91% to -minus 3.45% from the pre survey on banana leaves. On average, they gained 37% of knowledge for the biopot production.

first session was held from August 27 to September 4, 2024, which included pre- and post-training assessments. Two evaluations measured participants' knowledge and skills using the KoboCollect app on smartphones and iPads at Mangabe and Ivoloina.

All participants completed a 17-question survey before and after the knowledge-sharing sessions. To streamline data entry, four teams from MV managed the responses while conducting the surveys, which took about 5–10 minutes each.

The second evaluation focused on practical skills from last year's workshop, specifically making biological pots from banana bark, a technique introduced in Ranomafana in 2023. Seven groups of 3–4 participants, mixing returning attendees and newcomers, competed to create the most pots in 15 minutes, using two bottles and three banana barks per group.

Judging criteria included seven key factors for pot quality, with audience members scoring without influence from the creators. After voting, the highest-scoring group shared their techniques. This evaluation took place before and after sessions in Mangabe, providing insights into participants' progress.

The practical test indicated an improvement in knowledge, with a 37% average gain in biopot production skills, despite a slight decrease of 3.45% in banana leaf knowledge from the pre-survey.

I.1.1 Gather results into one centralised database.

Ongoing. All results collected during the pre and post knowledge and skill assessments are stored on the Kobotoolbox sever. We collected a total of 90 survey responses which have been translated into English and are being transferred on to the Chester Zoo PowerBI sever dashboard for analysis.

1.2.1 Project team meetings to plan and design content for vocational resources (training videos & guide)

Ongoing. Between April and September, the project team have met six times to discuss and plan the content for vocational resources (training videos and themes for the guide of best practice). During these meetings all partner organisations voiced which training themes they can deliver, areas of training their teams would benefit from, and the key training themes to be included in the vocational resources. For workshop 1, five training themes were selected to be filmed for the development of training videos: I. Origin of seeds, II. Compost & CAM, (Champignon Arbuscule Mycorhyziens) - A mushroom that help absorption of the nutrients in the compost/ in the mixture, III. Liquid fertilisers & biopesticides, IV. Biopots – *Melaleuca tree bark*, V. Biochar production.

Content and technical reports from the workshop 1 will be compiled to form the content for the guide of best practice. Diagrams and visual aids will be produced to supplement the guide in Q4 Y1.

During one of this meetings (May 2024) , we presented the gap of training and recommendations from last year and address those needs by proposing the content of the WS.

1.2.2 CZ nursery videos filmed with help from plant team.

Completed. June 2024, Charles Wheeler (CZ) hired an external videographer to capture footage of five training elements at the CZ plant nursery.

I. Air layering , II. Cuttings, III. Grafting, IV. Soil testing, V. Tools & maintenance.

The videographer will edit the five videos captured at the Zoo and all of the footage collected during both workshops in Madagascar to create a series of 15 training videos.

1.2.3 Madagascar videographer contracted and film videos for WS1 & WS2

Ongoing. A Malagasy videographer has been contracted. During Workshop 1, 27th August – 4th September video recordings documented the workshop and training videos. The objectives were to capture key moments of the exchanges, the interactions between participants, and the outcomes of the practical demonstrations. Interviews played a crucial role in capturing the essence of the workshop. Each day, specific themes were addressed during the sessions, and relevant participants were selected for interviews. These interviews focused on explaining the theme, best practices, and lessons learned. A total of eleven interviews were conducted, alternating between participants from MV, MGB, and MFG. These interviews helped provide more detailed explanations on the workshop topics and are aligned with the objectives of the videos produced during this project. Through each interview, the audience will gain knowledge on topics such as nursery management, forest restoration, and the use of biodegradable pots. For Workshop 1, there were five training elements (previously listed) filmed for the purpose of vocational training resources.

1.2.4 Training video series edited and created.

Ongoing. All footage collected so far at CZ and in Madagascar is with both Videographers for the editing process.

1.3.1 CZ and partner organisation staff receive Train-The-Trainer training.

Completed. Over two sessions, Chester Zoo staff—including Charles Wheeler, Project Officer for Madagascar & Mascarenes Field Programmes, and three members of the Plant team—collaborated with Sydonie Rabarison from Madagasikara Voakajy to participate in Train the Trainer training facilitated by the Chester Zoo science department. The primary objective of this training was to enhance their capacity to plan and deliver effective training in the context of conservation. Through a cascading approach, they will be equipped to empower nurserymen and restoration leaders, enabling them to effectively disseminate knowledge to local communities.

2.1.1 Register NGO staff interest and availability for workshops.

Completed. An invitation to participate in both Workshop 1 and Workshop 2 was sent to all partner organizations and their nursery teams. Availability was discussed during planning meetings leading up to the workshops. Workshop 1 successfully welcomed 23 attendees. Workshop 2 is scheduled for November 10-20, 2024, with an expected attendance of 30 staff members from all partner organizations. This workshop will also include the participation of four representatives from the local community.

2.1.2 Design and develop two core workshops with structure, content, and logistics. (WS1 nursery management, WS2 out planting and restoration)

Ongoing. Workshop 1 content and logistics were completed in August 2024 prior to its delivery. 3 planning meetings were arranged with all the project team to develop the workshop content, structure and logistics for both sites.

2.1.3 Develop workshop knowledge & skill assessment survey & task for each workshop.

Ongoing. Workshop knowledge & skill assessment surveys and tasks were developed for workshop 1. The knowledge and skill assessment survey consist of 17 questions using the Likert scale format to measure the level of confidence of carrying out a skill or knowledge of a certain topic the participants had before and after the training. A pre & post survey was carried out at each site (Mangabe and Parc Ivoloïna).

2.1.4 Deliver workshop 1 / 2.1.5 Year 1 both workshops delivered to 30 participants (Existing nursery staff) at Mangabe & Parc Ivoloïna.

Completed. To ensure that all proposed themes were covered during the workshop, the event lasted 10 days, including travel between Moramanga and Ivoloïna. Participants included Madagasikara Voakajy (MV) team members from four regions: Diego, Tana, Morondava, and Ambatondrazaka. The restoration leaders from each of these sites were invited to exchange knowledge and experiences. In addition, two teams from Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG) based in Agnalazaha participated. Due to the remote location of Agnalazaha, it took these participants three days to travel to Moramanga. Six teams from Madagascar Fauna and Flora Group (MFG), based in Ivoloïna, travelled to Mangabe to join the workshop. Nurserymen from both MV and MFG participated in the sessions held at both Mangabe and Ivoloïna

3.1.1 Create and/ or upgrade the NREN platforms (Facebook & WhatsApp, tiktok)

Ongoing. The Nursery Restoration Exchange Network Facebook group has been updated with new members and information regarding the new two-year project. The WhatsApp group is no longer in use as it was a platform not commonly used amongst the participants, and a YouTube channel has been developed to house the training videos.

Encourage workshop participants to join platform - Ongoing. At the end of workshop 1 all participants were encouraged to join the Facebook group. 18 new members have joined the group since August 01. 2024

3.2.1 Run social media engagement analysis for reporting.

Ongoing. The Facebook group engagement analysis shows a 71% increase in posts since August 17th 2024.

4.1.1 Design and deliver income & forest dependency (agriculture, sustainable product production, and income generation from this project) surveys.

Ongoing. The income, dependency, and climate resilience surveys have been designed using koboToolbox sever and consist of 83 questions covering five topics: Socio-economics, income, forest dependency, climate change, and future planning. Two social science field technicians have been contracted to carry out these interviews over a two-month period beginning in November.

4.1.2 ID products & demand

Ongoing. The nursery products initiated through this project to be developed and produced have been selected as the Biopots from banana leaves and seed pouches sewn by local women's groups. During Workshop 1 at Mangabe all workshop participants took part in a biopot making session. All participants learnt the skill needed to produce these pots and how to teach others how to make them. 10 nursery men from MV are scheduled to relay these teachings to 5 community women's groups across Mangabe between September and November. Nurserymen will make agreements on biopot monthly quotas and quality control with the trained women's groups to supply and sell biopots to the MV nurseries.

Supporting women's group in their seed pouches production - During the workshop 1 in Mangabe , the project initiated initial expenditures on buying 35 seeds pouches from Miavotra women's group of Mangabe . The seed pouches are a promotional gift bought by MV for another partners.

4.1.3 Run feasibility assessment of products for community groups production.

Completed. A feasibility study into the production of biopots and seed bags has been carried out and put forward to women's groups during community meetings. An agreement is being made between the MV nurseries and 5 women's groups that each biopot will be bought for 400Ar. The feasibility study identified that on average 50 biopots can be made in one day by one person, generating 20,000Ar per person per day, variable to demand.

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.

Our initial goal for Workshop 1 was to have 28-30 nursery staff from all three partner organizations in attendance. However, we achieved 23 attendees. This experience highlighted the importance of sharing workshop details well in advance, allowing participants adequate time to prepare for attendance.

For Workshop 2, scheduled for November, we have proactively ensured that all participants are fully informed of the schedule and have the necessary resources to attend. Additionally, we have extended invitations to other enterprises involved in restoration work within the region, which will help us exceed our target of 30 participants and enhance the learning and exchange opportunities for Malagasy restoration and nursery workers.

Prior to this project starting in April, Charles Wheeler & Sydonie Rabarison attended a Conservation Standards training course to gain skills to build capacity around project management and conservation effectiveness. After this training we submitted a change request to the project Log frame to amend the order of the Smart indicators and activities to improve the monitoring and reporting of project impact.

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?

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.

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

X

HYP (including safeguarding points)? You should respond in section 6, annexes other requested materials as appropriate.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	X
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.	
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	X
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 ?	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X