



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects
Half Year Report
(due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	DPLUS126
Project title	Advancing Falklands and region-scale management of globally important whale populations
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Falkland Islands
Lead organisation	Falklands Conservation
Partner(s)	Alex Zerbini, Jen Jackson, Phil Hammond, Fredrik Christiansen, Ted Cheeseman, Falkland Islands Government
Project leader	<i>Andrew Stanworth/Caroline Weir</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale</i>

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

The project started in July, so this report covers the period July-Sept.

1.1 FC advertised the role in local media in the Falklands during August. The Cetacean Ecologist Caroline Weir was appointed and started work on the project on 1 October as scheduled. Meetings were held with project partner Alex Zerbini during August in order to identify tag personnel who are able to travel to the Falklands during the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. In light of the continued suspension of international flights between the Islands and South America, we have identified a European-based tagger who is available for the first sei whale season. We are in the process of arranging travel and appropriate travel permits.

1.4 Research Permits for the tagging work were obtained from Falkland Islands Government. Main equipment ordered - the boat design was confirmed, and construction is underway. The boat is expected to be shipped to the Falklands in December as planned, and arrangements are in place for this. Whale tags have been ordered from the manufacturer and should be shipped on time to arrive in the Islands for the first sei whale season. Other equipment (e.g. for biopsy sampling) will also arrive in ample time for the field season.

1.5 Skype meetings have been held between the Cetacean Ecologist and project partners Alex Zerbini (tagging) and Jen Jackson (tagging and photo-ID). Project planning has primarily taken into account ongoing COVID-19 restrictions with regard to international travel, which has already affected several components of the project (see Section 2b). Contingencies around this have been discussed and agreed. Two meetings were also held with Rui Prieto, the likely replacement tagger from Europe. Planning of the initial sei whale season will continue through to the end of 2021.

2.1 The Cetacean Ecologist has commenced work on Photo ID protocols, which will be shared with partners and finalised ahead of mark-recapture work.

4.4 An article on whales for the next Falklands Conservation magazine included mention of the new Darwin Plus project – this is prepared but will not be published until November. An announcement on the project was also made on the project Facebook page.

Overall the project is progressing in line with the logframe.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for COVID-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The project has a heavy upfront spending due to the need to purchase a new boat and expensive tags for the whale tagging component. These items could not be ordered in time for the fieldwork unless immediate payment was made, and consequently FC has had to finance these out of organisational budget and ahead of receiving the project grant from Darwin Plus. This has meant additional discussions with Trustees and placed reasonably-significant financial burden on a small organisation. While these will not affect the delivery of the Darwin project, they may have other implications for the organisation.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of COVID-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The ongoing COVID-19 restrictions have already affected the project planning. We had originally planned and budgeted to bring tagging personnel to the Falklands directly from South America, both for cost-efficiency and to optimise collaboration in the south-west Atlantic region. However, it was announced by government on 23 July that suspension of the international flights between South America and the Falklands would continue, and would not be reviewed again until 1 February 2022. Since the first season of fieldwork was scheduled for late February, we concluded that we were unable to risk booking travel by that route. The only confident method of travelling in/out of the Falklands until February 2022 is with the military flight from the UK. We considered sending personnel from Brazil to the UK and then south to the Falklands, but this was prohibitive in terms of budget, unknown/changing quarantine requirements, and Brazil being on the UK COVID-19 Red List at the time. As a result of these combined considerations, we have needed to adapt and will use a (fully vaccinated) European-based tagger for the first batch of fieldwork. We do not currently know what the budget implications are of this change (but we aren't expecting major changes), and we cannot predict ahead to knowing what quarantine requirements may still be in place in the FI by February 2022. Consequently, this situation has also resulted in a delay to us being able to book travel for personnel, as we wanted to wait a few months to increase confidence. However, we have made good progress in considering options and developing contingency plans with project partners and potential taggers, and at this stage we believe that we will be able to conduct the first field season in Feb/Mar 2022 as planned. The planning for the second field season in July/August 2022 will have to be delayed slightly until the situation with flights is clarified by government in February 2022. In addition to personnel arrangements, the situation with the flights has also extended the times taken to ship project equipment (i.e. tags) to the Falklands. However, this was investigated and planned for in August, and we have placed equipment orders well ahead to reduce potential impacts as much as possible.

Overall, we have had a lot of uncertainty, and consequently, time taken in dealing with international logistical and immigration challenges resulting from Covid-19, both for overseas personnel and equipment. Measures have been taken as best as possible and at this stage significant impacts on the project and budget have been mitigated as much as we could foresee.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to 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 rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget 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.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Ltsi-Neras have been very supportive and helpful.

In relation to section 2a, FC have had to meet the financial burden of quite a large capital expenditure, without funding from Darwin, in order to be able to deliver the project. Other organisations may not be in a position to do so. Is it possible to consider developing an approach that could avoid this situation?

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**