

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: 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 2022

Project reference	DPLUS126
Project title	Advancing Falklands and region-scale management of globally important whale populations
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Falkland Islands
Lead partner	Falklands Conservation
Partner(s)	Alex Zerbini, Jen Jackson, Phil Hammond, Fredrik Christiansen, Ted Cheeseman, Falkland Islands Government
Project leaders	Andrew Stanworth and Caroline Weir
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale

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).

Between April and September, the following progress has been made:

Activity 1.1. Personnel, work permits, and travel arrangements, were made for the southern right whale season in July/August 2022. Planning commenced for arrangements for the next sei whale season in Feb-Apr 2023, with personnel identified.

Activity 1.4. End of season boat and field equipment inventories were completed in September.

Activity 1.5. Planning and execution were successfully achieved for the remainder of the sei whale season in April 2022, and for the full southern right whale season in July/August 2022. The 2022 sei whale season was completed in April, with satellite tags deployed, photo-identification images collected, and biopsy and faecal sampling achieved.

Activity 1.8. Survey data (effort, sightings, and samples) from the two field seasons have been entered into databases and mapped in QGIS.

Activity 1.10. Matching of southern right whales between the Falklands and South Georgia catalogues has commenced.

Activity 2.1. Photo-identification protocols have now been completed for both southern right whales and sei whales (the sei whale had not been completed by the original schedule).

Activities 2.3 and 2.4. Photo-identification images taken during the field seasons are being catalogued and matched with existing catalogues. This has so far focussed on right whales, in order to also facilitate Activity 1.10.

Activity 3.1. A meeting was held with FIG on 4 April about developing the Species Action Plan for sei whales.

Activity 4.3. Although scheduled for 2023, a Watch Group boat trip was organised to see whales on 25 June, and was successful in showing children southern right whales. Opportunity was also taken for an evening educational classroom session to the Watch Group on cetaceans in the Falklands, showing the methods that are being used in DPLUS126 to study whales.

Activity 4.4. Regular fieldwork updates have been posted to the social media site (<https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale>) during the two field seasons.

Activity 4.5. A stakeholder update was distributed in May 2022.

Output 1. Five satellite tags were deployed on sei whales. This progressed to schedule, and the remaining five tags will be deployed in Feb-Apr 2023. All 10 satellite tags were deployed on southern right whales in July 2022. This progressed ahead of schedule.

DPLUS126 is progressing well according to the project logframe, and some activities have been completed ahead of schedule.

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.

Over the last six months we have encountered [REDACTED], but they have largely been overcome within budget and without affecting the delivery of DPLUS126:

We had continued [REDACTED] during the sei whale season [REDACTED]. This resulted in several unsuccessful tag attempts, and under-performance (short attachment duration) of some of the tags that we did deploy. Because of the remoteness of the Falklands, it wasn't possible to simply return the model and get the correct one sent. No lessons can be learnt from this, as it was due to an error by the supplier. However, it is an example of the inherent challenges of working in a remote archipelago.

Due to ongoing issues with COVID and related uncertainty regarding the resumption of commercial flights to the Falklands, we were [REDACTED] for South American-based personnel for the southern right whale season in Yr1 of the project as had been scheduled and budgeted for. Travel arrangements were finally made for the tagger in June 2022, but therefore fell into the Yr2 budget. The use of a local boat driver who did not require international travel or accommodation, and some slight underspend in other budget lines, has compensated for the extra expenditure incurred in Yr2 for the taggers travel.

On 2 August, in the midst of the southern right whale field season, the Cetacean Ecologist tested positive for COVID-19 and was unable to conduct field work for over a week. Fortunately, the satellite-tagging had completed in July, and so only tag follow-ups, photo-identification, and biopsy sampling, were affected. We were able to continue boat work for two weeks longer than expected (to the 25 August) due to availability of the boat driver and budget for boat fuel, which compensated to some extent for that lost time. However, in the lost week we missed follow-up opportunities for several of the tagged whales for which we were missing good identification or biopsy information. This should not affect the overall conclusions reached from the tagging component of the project.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: No

Formal Change Request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance N/A

Change request reference if known: N/A

4a. 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: £

4b. 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 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 if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

No.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response 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 NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**