

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 2023

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 Zerbin, Jen Jackson, Phil Hammond, Fredrik Christiansen, Ted Cheeseman, Falkland Islands Government
Project leader	Caroline Weir and Andrew Stanworth
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale

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).

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.

Between April and September 2023, the following progress has been made against the project implementation timetable:

Activity 1.4. End of season boat and field equipment inventories were completed in September 2023, and a list made of equipment that needs to be ordered ahead of additional fieldwork.

Activity 1.5. The planning and execution of the boat survey work was completed for the sei whale season in April/May 2023, and for the southern right whale season from June to August 2023. Fieldwork in both field seasons was limited by worse-than-average weather this year.

Activity 1.6. The aerial surveys were planned, training provided to the observer, and the survey leader liaised with the local air service FIGAS to implement the surveys. We managed to complete the planned surveys in June and August but were unable to carry out the July survey due to continuous unsuitable weather over the latter half of July.

Activity 1.7. The pilot Unmanned Aerial Survey (UAV) was completed in July and August with a visit to the Falklands by drone operator Fredrik Christiansen. Aerial images were obtained of over 70 right whales and will be analysed to provide information on their size and body condition.

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

Activity 2.2. Photo-identification of both sei whales and southern right whales was carried out throughout the two field seasons as planned.

Activity 2.3. Photo-identification images collected during DPLUS126 are in the process of being catalogued and matched to the earlier catalogues from 2017 to 2021.

Activity 4.3. This Activity was completed ahead of schedule in June 2023.

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

Activity 4.5. A stakeholder update was distributed in August 2023.

Activity 4.6. Two educational posters have been drafted, one on the research activities being carried out by FC on whales in the Falklands, and a second on the whale Code of Conduct to raise awareness amongst marine users.

Activity 4.7. Due to not all tags being deployed in 2023, this Activity will now occur in 2024 and will be completed prior to the end of the project.

DPLUS126 is progressing well according to the project logframe, and we expect to complete the listed Activities except where specifically indicated in our recently submitted Change Request. Our Indicators remain relevant for the project but will be delivered over a slightly longer timeframe as per the Change Request.

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.

We have experienced a few challenges with the project Activities related to our 2023 whale field seasons, due to below-average weather conditions in 2023. This meant that:

1. We were not able to deploy all of our sei whale satellite tags and consequently have four tags leftover at the end of the planned project fieldwork; and
2. We were not able to complete a July aerial survey; this was the most important of the three planned aerial surveys because we expect peak right whale numbers to occur in that month.

Little could be done to mitigate for this, since the weather in 2023 was simply below average and is an inherent risk for marine fieldwork that remains outside of our control. However, we have submitted a Change Request to DPLUS that would allow us to reallocate the underspend relating to these Activities to the next financial year, so that we could: (1) conduct a sei whale tagging season in March/April 2024 to try and deploy the remaining tags; and (2) carry out a July aerial survey. While this affects the project timetable (with a three-month extension to the project end date), it would provide us with the best opportunity to complete and deliver the entire project.

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: Yes (submitted on 6 Oct 2023)

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

Change request reference if known: N/K (SCO note – 23-057 awaiting approval)

4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023)

Actual spend: £ [REDACTED]

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 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

4c. 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.

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.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response, 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.

All new projects (excluding Darwin Plus Fellowships and IWT Challenge Fund Evidence projects) should submit their Risk Register with this report if they have not already done so.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS 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**