

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	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)	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Instituto Aqualie, British Antarctic Survey, Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies, Sea Mammal Research Unit, Happy Whale, Falkland Islands Government
Project leader	Caroline Weir and Andrew Stanworth
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	HYR4
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale

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).

Between April and September 2024, the following progress has been made against the project implementation timetable:

Logframe Output 3. The draft Species Action Plan for the sei whale was finalised.

Logframe Output 4. A scientific paper on the southern right whale tagging was produced and submitted to Endangered Species Research. We are currently awaiting the proofs following our revisions.

Activity 1.4. End of season boat and field equipment inventories were completed in September 2024.

Activity 1.5. The planning and execution of the boat survey work was completed for the sei whale season in April/May 2024.

Activity 1.6. The southern right whale aerial survey for July (postponed from 2023) was completed, and analysis carried out to generate the abundance estimates.

Activity 1.8. Survey data (effort, sightings, and samples) from the 2024 sei whale field season have been entered into databases and mapped in QGIS.

Activity 1.9. The KBA Technical Report was produced.

Activity 1.11. Work has begun on the data analysis of all fieldwork components and production for the final DPLUS126 Technical Report.

Activity 2.2. Photo-identification of sei whales was carried out throughout the 2024 field season.

Activity 2.3. Photo-identification images collected during DPLUS126 were catalogued and matched to the earlier catalogues from 2017 to 2021.

Activity 2.4. Data have been prepared and quality controlled for mark-recapture analysis.

Activity 3.1. A meeting was held on 13 September with Falkland Islands Government to discuss the draft SAP.

Activity 3.2. Both the draft and final versions of the SAP have been produced.

Activity 3.3. The list of key stakeholders was produced.

Activity 4.4. Regular fieldwork updates have been posted to the social media site (<https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale>) throughout the 2024 field season, and other outreach completed including FITV and FIRS interviews and FC magazine articles.

Activity 4.5. A stakeholder update was distributed in early October 2024.

Activity 4.7. An IWC paper was produced and submitted to the 2024 IWC meeting in May. It was presented there by project partner Alex Zerbini.

DPLUS126 has progressed well according to the project logframe, and we expect to complete all of the listed Activities.

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.

Once again, the project has experienced weather-related difficulties – this resulted in the planned aerial survey in July taking place over three days instead of the two days that had been budgeted for because of fog that was not predicted by the forecasts. Consequently, our expenditure for the aerial survey was higher than anticipated due to flying for several extra hours, and also because the hourly charter rate for the Falkland Islands Government Air Service had increased compared to 2023. We were able to meet some of this additional cost within the DPLUS126 budget due to small underspends on some budget lines. There are no implications for the project budget or timetable because the aerial surveys were successfully completed on schedule, but it has resulted in some other expenditure that had been originally budgeted to DPLUS126 being instead paid for by Falklands Conservation. As in earlier years of DPLUS126, weather conditions remain an inherent and unpredictable risk to completing whale field work, and we would likely produce future aerial budgets to allow for several ‘spare’ hours of aircraft charter time in case of unexpected fog.

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:	N/A

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.

In their review of AR3 the Reviewer raised one comment/query for the project leader which was: *The tagging of sei whales has been a challenge throughout, whether that be the specialised procedure, adverse weather conditions or the skittish nature of the species. There is a rationale here for locally training a sei whale tagger (e.g. the CE) to guarantee availability during the tagging season. This would contribute to the long-term sustainability of the project including FCs continued work to conserve this endangered species. Is this something that FC foresees as feasible?*

Our response: Yes, indeed for the 2024 sei whale season (Feb-May 2024) then our previous tagging expert was unable to travel to the Falklands and so the CE took on the responsibility for tagging the sei whales based on previous training provided by the expert tagger. The CE succeeded in deploying one tag on a sei whale in 2024. This is certainly an effort that we will continue going forwards, but having an additional tagging expert who has the tag deployments as their sole responsibility during a survey is still considered the optimal approach, because the CE has several other roles onboard the research vessel.

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.	
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	
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.	Yes
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Yes
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	Yes
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	N/A
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	Yes
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Yes