



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



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 2025

Please note all projects that were active before 1st October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.

Submit to: BCF-Reports@niras.com including your project ref in the subject line.

Project reference	DPLUS205
Project title	Creating a sustainable framework for monitoring whales at South Georgia
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	South Georgia
Lead Organisation	British Antarctic Survey
Partner(s)	Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI), International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), HappyWhale, ORCA, Scottish Association for Marine Science, and South Georgia Heritage Trust / Friends of South Georgia Island
Project Leader	Dr Jennifer Jackson
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31/10/25 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/sustained-monitoring-of-whales-at-south-georgia/ Instagram: @wildwaterwhales LinkedIn: @WildWaterWhales BlueSky: @wildwaterwhales.bsky.social

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).

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) 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.

Output 1. Interannual whale density index at South Georgia, used to identify ship-strike risks and environmental drivers, sustained in the long-term by stakeholder partnerships

This output is progressing well. Whale sighting data at South Georgia were successfully collected by ORCA in the summer seasons of 2023/24 and 2024/25 as planned. Data collection in the 2023/24 season (as well as previous seasons) has been published on the ORCA website [here](#). A short report on the sightings of the 2024/2025 summer season is [here](#) and will be published on the ORCA website by the end of the year. Whale density estimates (Outcome 0.1) have been derived from these data and are in the process of being published on the GSGSSI Data Portal (there have been delays due to a global website update).

Cetacean occurrence data is ongoing from Bird Island (BI) this year, and a report for the 2024-2025 season is being finalised (Output 1.2). The Bird Island Whale Sightings Protocol was updated and published on the [project website](#). PM Martin gave a whale identification presentation to the new BI zoological field assistants to encourage them to continue collecting whale sighting data upon their arrival on the island in October 2025.

In addition to the listed project activities, the Bird Island Science Manager secured funding for one person to compile and analyse whale-sighting data from bird and mammal reports, as well as from logs dating back to 1979. A brief summary of the work to date has been added to the project's [website](#). PL Jackson, PM Martin and PP Bennison aim to publish the paper in 2026.

Data from expedition vessels collected in 2023/24 have been analysed by PP Leaper (Outcome 0.2, Output 1.3). These data provided sufficient sample sizes to estimate average strip widths and densities along the expedition vessel tracks for humpback whales and for all large whales combined (including those not identified to species). The first [annual report](#) of ship strike risk for South Georgia whales up to the 2024/25 season has been circulated for discussion with the GSGSSI and is confidential at present. This output is currently on track.

Output 2. Year-round whale occurrence monitored at Cumberland Bay, providing measure of whale co-occurrence with vessel traffic.

The two single soundtrap acoustic moorings that were deployed in January were successfully recovered and redeployed in May 2025 (Indicator 2.1). The two marine biologists, Katie Wells and Rhi Nichols, from King Edward Point (KEP), worked closely with the captain and crew of the GSGSSI fisheries patrol vessel for this operation. Soundtrap data was downloaded and sent back to the UK to PP Risch and Calderan in July. The data was downloaded and checked for quality. PP Risch and Calderan discussed the initial analysis approach, which will combine manual and automated processing of the recordings. Ship noise and humpback vocalisations have been recorded (Indicator 2.2). PP Risch is using PAMGuard processing software to set up files for data processing, and ongoing analysis is underway at SAMS with the aim of delivering initial automated detection results in early December 2025.

The third mooring needed additional development, as a decision was taken to change the originally planned array setup to a four-channel soundtrap. This creates a less bulky system, which would be easier for the KEP team to deploy and turn around. PP Risch and Calderan conducted field trials of the four-channel soundtrap at SAMS until the end of June. PL Jackson and PM Martin worked closely with PP Risch, who visited BAS in July to assist with the array construction. The equipment was sent by sea freight to Stanley in August for anticipated deployment during the next turnaround trip in November. This output is currently on track.

Output 3. GSGSSI ship strike risk reduction measures used to reduce and maintain estimated risk of whale strikes by >50% compared to 2019/20 baseline assessment.

AIS was purchased with additional matching funding from South Georgia Heritage Trust (SGHT), as there were delays in acquiring this from UK government sources. PP Leaper analysed the AIS data, ORCA sightings data, and line-transect survey data from the 2020 DPLUS057 Braveheart survey in a ship strike risk [report](#). (Indicator 3.1). NOTE: This report is currently **confidential** until the GSGSSI agrees to publish it. A ship strike risk workshop will be held in October 2025, with PP Leaper presenting this data and discussions on ship speed restrictions among PP GSGSSI, IAATO, Leaper, PL Jackson, and PM Martin. This output is currently on track.

Output 4. Baleen whale Action Plan published for South Georgia.

PL Jackson and PM Martin met with JNCC to discuss coordinating this Action Plan with upcoming JNCC products in this domain, and plan to bring JNCC representatives formally into the project as Project Partners in Y2 2025/26. We will provide recommendations for a revised polygon for ship-speed reduction based on the data collected to date in the project.

This output is currently on track (Indicator 4.1).

Output 5. Engage visitors to South Georgia and members of the public through whale related citizen science projects including whale sightings reporting and photo-ID collection.

PP Cheeseman and Babey plus PM Martin have held several meetings to discuss ways to increase outreach and engagement from the expedition cruise ship community before the start of the next South Georgia season. A new outreach [website](#) was created for the expedition cruise ship staff members working throughout the upcoming season (Indicator 5.3). It has information and links to PP HappyWhale and ORCA. With PP IAATO we have created a trackable QR [code](#) to enable easy sharing of this website. This code will be included in IAATO's pre-season information, field staff manuals, and their "Icebreaker" newsletter in November. PP Cheesman sent a HappyWhale update [report](#). PM Martin will regularly share information on social media and in WhatsApp groups to encourage more photo submissions to HappyWhale throughout the season. This output is currently on track.

Output 6. Project monitoring and management

Project partners have been regularly consulted through bi-monthly online meetings (Indicator 6.2 and 6.3) held on June 16 and September 11, 2025 (meeting minutes linked [here](#)).

PL Jackson, PM Martin and PP Kershaw gave a presentation about D+205 and D+188 as part of the PP South Georgia Heritage Trust/Friends of South Georgia Island "Whale of a [Weekend](#)" Festival in Dundee, 26-29 June. PP Landau, Neil and Stowe were there, and there was information sharing about D+205 during the weekend. This weekend became the stakeholder workshop by default (Indicator 6.4) as delays in collecting the Soundtrap data did not allow sticking to the original timeline of June 2025 for the workshop. In addition, due to the sensitivity of the ship strike risk data, it was decided to hold the first ship strike workshop in October 2025 at a higher level between GSGSSI, IAATO and BAS.

PP Jackson gave a talk which included an update on the Sustained Monitoring project to the [South Georgia Association](#) on 5 July.

PM Martin participated in the [Creative](#) Tuition Collective Student session on 24 July. She presented the students with a challenge to increase engagement with younger, non-science audiences for the D+ 205 and D+ 188 projects. The Creative Tuition Collective Student Science Manager's feedback said this session was one of the students' favourites.

PM Martin joined the Sir David Attenborough for a media and ministers visit on Monday 6th October, where she highlighted the upcoming whale surveys and underwater moorings being created by the Sustained Monitoring project. This was included in a BAS Press Release [here](#).

PM Martin has regular in-person meetings with PP Gregory from GSGSSI to discuss project progress. This output is currently on track.

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.

Delays to delivery of the Cumberland Bay multichannel soundtrap have occurred due to southbound shipping issues *en route*. We are endeavouring to keep on track and exploring alternative shipping options to get the soundtrap into South Georgia in time for November deployment. If not successful, this will delay delivery of Output 2 by ~2 months.

One person originally named as a staff member on the project could not be employed as staff by SAMS and so became a subcontractor at short notice late in Y1 at short notice. This was agreed with NIRAS and so has not impacted project outputs or timelines.

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 (agreed on 27/3/25)
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No
Change Request reference if known: <i>If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome</i>	

Guidance for Section 4: The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

<p>4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)</p> <p>Actual spend: [REDACTED]</p>
<p>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 2026)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £</p>
<p>4c. If you expect an 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.</p> <p>If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible, and not later than 31st December. 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.</p> <p>Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.</p> <p>NB: if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.</p>
<p>5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</p> <p>Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk</p>
<p>6. Project risk management</p> <p>6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.</p>
<p>NA</p>

6b. Have any concerns or allegations relating to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment been reported in the past 6 months?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If yes, please provide further information, ensuring no sensitive data is included within responses.

Suspensions or allegations related to safeguarding concerns should be reported to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk

7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.

Thank you for your review of our annual report. No feedback was requested for the half year report. We will be in contact with NIRAS regards the two items raised in the report that need discussion with the NIRAS team.

Checklist for submission

Have you responded to feedback from your latest Annual Report Review ? You should respond in section 6, and annexe other requested materials as appropriate.	X
Have you reported against the most up to date information for your project ?	X
Have you clearly highlighted any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?	X
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	X
Submit to BCF-Reports@niras.com	X
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	X