



**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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025**

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

**Submit to: [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS208
<b>Project title</b>	Conserving cetacean biodiversity in the Falkland Islands
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Falkland Islands
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Falklands Conservation
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Falkland Islands Government, British Antarctic Survey, Aarhus University, Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme
<b>Project Leader</b>	Caroline Weir
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	31 October 2025 (HYR1)
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale">https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale</a>

**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.

Between April and September 2025, the following progress has been made against the project implementation timetable:

Activity 1.1.4 and Indicator 1.1. A draft National Red List for Cetaceans was produced with decisions made over which IUCN protocol to follow and how best to apply that protocol to the Falklands.

Activity 1.4.1. All logistics (travel, accommodation etc) were organised for the Project Leader's visit to the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) in Cambridge for the genetic work. Travel to the UK was subsequently undertaken in September.

Activity 2.1.2. Agreement was reached with Falkland Islands Maritime Authority for locations inside Stanley Harbour that we could safely deploy the four FPODS, and they successfully deployed on 29 May. They will be recovered in June 2026.

Activity 2.2. Drafting has begun on the seismic mitigation guidelines.

Activity 2.3. The draft piling mitigation guidance was completed and will shortly be circulated to FIG for comment.

Activity 3.2.1 and 3.2.2. A training course in sampling dead cetaceans in the Falklands was carried out in May 2025 with 21 attendees. The course made the opportunity of having two dead dolphins to necropsy, and was therefore ‘hands-on’ practical training rather than a classroom session. Feedback from attendees was positive.

Activity 3.6.1. The Project Leader met with Dan Jarvis (BDLMR) at their Cornwall seal rehabilitation centre on 23 September to discuss logistics and course content for the 2026 visit of BDLMR to the Falklands for training. Provisional dates were discussed, and travel will be booked as soon as BDLMR confirm dates and personnel.

Indicator 3.4. In early September, five cetacean sampling kits were shipped to remoter parts of the Islands including: (1) New Island; (2) Pebble Island; (3) Sea Lion Island; (4) Dunbar Farm (West Falkland); and (5) Spring Point Farm (West Falkland).

DPLUS208 is progressing well according to the project logframe, and all Activities are on track to be completed as scheduled. Our Indicators remain relevant for the project.

**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.**

The project has generally run smoothly and adhered well to the project timeframe. The only unexpected occurrence was the early departure of the sei whales from our study site in Berkeley Sound in 2025 compared with other years, which brought the UAV work to an early finish. We are currently analysing the data to understand whether we reached our stated target of measuring 50 individuals, but have already discussed running a short additional sei whale season in 2026 in order to improve the sample size. Therefore, we expect to meet the target of 50 animals across the two field seasons, keeping the project on track.

**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, but will happen before Christmas
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	No
Change Request reference if known: N/A	

**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.

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)**

**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 2026)?**

Yes ☐ No ☒ Estimated underspend: £

**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.

**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 31<sup>st</sup> 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. 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 BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

Suspensions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to [fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk](mailto:fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk)

No.

## **6. Project risk management**

**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.**

N/A

**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](mailto:ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk)

N/A

**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.**

Our responses to reviewer feedback on AR1 are provided below, with the reviewer comments in bold and our responses below.

**Comment 1: Consider synergies with DPLUS205 in South Georgia.**

BAS are one of our project partners and the project leads of DPLUS205 and DPLUS208 are currently working together on whale genetic analysis in the laboratories at BAS in Cambridge. There is therefore already a regular exchange of information between the people working on these two projects. We note that the scale and type of anthropogenic activities impacting whales in South Georgia and the Falklands are rather different, owing to the dominant roles of

the krill fishery and expedition vessels in South Georgia versus the wider suite of impacts (e.g. port developments and other coastal construction, oil extraction, salmon farming etc) associated with the long-standing human settlement in the Falklands.

**Comment 2: Can the project contribute towards policies on whale conservation by CCAMLR?**

As noted by the reviewer, the Falkland Islands Government is not a signatory to CCAMLR, and the waters around the Falkland Islands are not part of the CCAMLR Convention area. This is why CCAMLR was not mentioned in our project application or outputs. The fishing/cetacean interactions mentioned in the CCAMLR website relate to depredation of fishing gear by sperm whales and killer whales which are not the target species for DPLUS208. Therefore, we don't expect that our findings would contribute significantly towards CCAMLR policies on whale conservation. However, we do keep in regular contact with BAS about their whale projects in South Georgia, and opportunities are taken to collaborate across the wider region wherever possible.

**Comment 3: Consider whether access to advanced veterinary facilities could improve autopsy diagnoses. Consider whether this project can contribute to knowledge on incidence and impact of POPs in cetaceans.**

Access to advanced veterinary facilities would of course improve autopsy diagnoses, as would the involvement of vets trained in pathology. However, we are limited by funding and by what is available in the Falklands, and by the fact that the majority of strandings reported are large baleen whales that have to be sampled in situ on remote coasts and could not be transported to a veterinary facility. The samples we collect from cetaceans can certainly be used in the future to investigate POPs, and we have also expanded efforts to sample important organs such as the liver where heavy metal burdens are usually investigated as well as providing blubber samples to an investigation looking at microplastics.



## Checklist for submission

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