

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	<i>DPLUS214</i>
Project title	South Atlantic Elephant Seal Population Assessment (SAESPA)
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	South Georgia and British Antarctic Territories
Lead Organisation	British Antarctic Survey
Partner(s)	Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands University of St Andrews University of Exeter
Project leader	<i>Dr Connor Bamford - BAS</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	<i>HYR1 October 2024</i>
Project website/blog/social media	<i>@elephantsealsurvey - instagram</i>

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 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.

Project activities over the past 4 months (project start date shifted to the 1st July 2024 by CR24_030) have been focussed on designing and planning the upcoming Autumn 2024 field season. For this, project personnel will be heading to South Georgia on the 19th September ~20th November 2024. **We project that we are on target according to our SMART indicators and Means of Verification for outputs 1,2 and 3.**

Output 1 – development of an automated approach to scan acquired VHR satellite imagery

1.1: Initial development of methods has been discussed with PP Ellie Bowler, and preliminary stages to the onboarding of a Research Software Engineer (following CR24_030) have begun.
1.2: Processing of existing satellite imagery from DPLUS109 has been conducted to begin the development of a training dataset for the ML approach. Discussions with PP Ellie Bowler regarding the size and type of training data have also begun.

Output 2 – provide counts of SES on breeding beaches:

2.1: Candidate locations UAV flights have been identified and associated permits submitted. These included BAS' internal Animal Welfare & Ethics Review Board (AWERB) and Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) along with Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands' (GSGSSI) Research Activity Permit (RAP).
2.2: First year fieldwork planning has been finalised and underway as of 18th September 2024.
2.3: Final survey flight planning will be conducted in situ, following DPLUS109 protocols. However, initial data-layer processing has begun.

Output 3 – Produce island wide census for SES

3.1: Candidate Area of Interest (AOI) locations for satellite imagery acquisition have been identified for South Georgia, the South Orkneys and the South Shetlands. These locations were determined by reviewing archival data from the 1995 census on South Georgia and from the wider literature for the British Antarctic Territories.
3.2: Plans for submitting the tasking request are underway and will be managed by BAS PP Peter Fretwell as the tasking window coincides with when the PI is conducting the grounds counts in South Georgia.

Output 4 – M&E

4.1: Regular internal project meetings have been conducted, primarily between staff who are involved with the upcoming fieldwork as this has been the main project effort to date.
4.2: An initial project meeting was held on the 24th April when the finding was announced. In attendance were BAS project representatives and members of GSGSSI. The Initial project kick-off meeting was postponed due to delay in official project start date, and subsequently have encountered difficulty with scheduling an all-project kick-off meeting stemming from staff availability over the UK summer. However, individual discussions have been held with PPs in the interim and minutes have been recorded in a log, which will be shared at the annual
4.8: Funds for UAV training have been pulled forward by the submitted change request. This has enabled training to be up in place for the current Science Manager at King Edward Point Research Station and training has begun.

Communications – a project Instagram account has been set up, and regular posts have been made since 01/08/2024.

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.

Transportation of the eBee X RPAS and associated GPS equipment to the Falkland Islands ahead of the October field season encountered some problems. This stemmed from delays in the shipping of this equipment from BAS Cambridge to RAF Brize Norton. All cargo was consigned ahead of time. However, delays with BAS Supply Chain Logistics (SCL) led to the consignments not being shipped to the MOD on time, meaning that they would not arrive in the Falklands to meet the ship. Separate to these issues, the MOD flights in September were also heavily delayed, which posed a risk to the successful deployment of the field team. Consequently, an alternative routing was determined at both the equipment and field team

travelled to the Falklands via a different route. All cargo and personnel arrived on schedule and were able to meet the ship ahead of its departure. No other issues have been encountered to date.

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
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes
Change Request reference if known: CR24_030	

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?

None to date.

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.

The first four months of the project have primarily been focused on the set-up and delivery of the field season. However, we have been able to incorporate and action some of the recommendations of the reviewers, specifically regarding the ‘SMARTening’ of the training on the logframe. This primarily applied to the provision of UAV training to the OT. In change request CR24_030, we pulled forward the funding for this training and have actioned and delivered this output ahead of schedule, as this better aligned with time commitments for the

member of staff. Additionally, we will continue to review the logframe actively as the project progresses and moves away from a singular fieldwork focus.

In respect of the reviewer's comments regarding the wider impact of the data collected and knowledge generated by this project, we will certainly explore how these can be incorporated into the wider population dynamics of this species. Historically, the South Georgia population represented >50% of the world's breeding population, therefore the findings and recommendations made by this study will be of global significance. These will likely feed into the next IUCN assessment for this species (previously conducted in 2014). At its last estimate in 1995 the South Georgia population was deemed to be stable, however, much has changed in the ecosystem over the last 30-years since this assessment was made. We will also, if appropriate, feed these results into the CCAMLR krill risk assessment framework / spatial overlap analysis in subarea 48.3. These data will be highly useful in informing management recommendations and the identification of further research needs. An area that we aim to explore in more detail is the potential impact of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) on this population. This is a pressing and timely issues facing this species in the region and one which will possibly have significant impacts on the population dynamics.

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.	Y
If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ?	Y
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.	n/a
For All Projects	
Include your project reference in the subject line of submission email.	Y
Submit to BCFs-Report@niras.com .	Y
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 ?	Y
Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.	Y