

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	DPLUS 186
Project title	Evidence-based conservation of key biodiversity in the South Sandwich Islands
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands
Lead partner	BAS
Partner(s)	GSGSSI, Oxford Brookes and Edinburgh Universities, Antarctic Research Trust
Project leader	<i>Norman Ratcliffe</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	30 Oct 2023 2023R1
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/zavodovski-expedition/

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.

The centrepiece of this project is a deep-field expedition to Zavodovski Island, an active volcano at the northern limit of the remote South Sandwich Island chain. Organising the complex, multi-disciplinary programme of conservation science work and the logistics to support this has taken a large proportion of the PIs time and attention since the project started in April:

- Agreements with the charter yacht that will take us to the island have been signed and payments have now been completed. It will sail on 25 Nov and return 29 Dec 2023.
- Equipment for the deep field camp, fieldworker kit bags, science equipment and personal protective equipment have been procured, packed and shipped to Stanley, Falklands, for transfer to the yacht in Nov.
- Operating procedures, risk assessments, medical provision and comms have been formulated with BAS field operations, medical unit and H&S. These have been agreed with the partners. A volcanologist, Nicole Richter, has been added to the pax list to manage risks associated with working on an active volcano and to support science that is attempting to understand the threats that eruptions pose to biodiversity on the island.
- All six expedition pax have received training in wilderness first aid and personal sea survival.
- Permit applications for work in the South Sandwich Island special protected area have been completed and agreed by authorising bodies: BAS Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Board (AWERB), BAS Preliminary Environmental Assessment, GSGSSI

<p>Restricted Activities Permit, ASSI AN(OT)O permit (for drone operations). Export and import permits for samples collected on the island are in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agreements with the RAF at Mount Pleasant on the Falklands for the aerial survey of Zavodovski from their A400M aircraft have been reached and photographic equipment compatible with the mission is being sourced. Tasking of satellite images of the island is currently being organised ○ A webpage promoting the project to the public has been posted on the BAS website, including an infographic, project logo and live map of tracks. This will be refreshed with new images and text after the expedition is complete. Fieldworkers have agreed to write blogs about their experiences that will be linked to the page. We have signed a Memorandum of Agreement with a film company, Talesmith, who will be making a film about penguins for National Geographic, which will feature work on the project. They have made a financial contribution to charter costs to extend the expedition by 6 days. ○ Monitoring and Evaluation has continued throughout the project. A kick-off meeting in April brought the wider team together and subsequent meetings during May were within three sub-groups to (logistics, surveys, animal tracking) to keep durations manageable. ○ Several tens of meeting in person or on Zoom have been conducted since between the charter company, BAS support and partners as necessary to push the project planning forward, and thousands of emails have been exchanged. The expedition team all met at the BAS first aid training in Sep where details of the expedition were discussed. A full project meeting to update all partners on progress and identify remaining task was held in early October. ○ The plans for the project were presented in a 5 minute talk at the SGSSI Marine Protected Area Workshop. This generated interest and discussion from the participants and acts as a placeholder to ensure the project's results are considered in the MPA review. ○ In summary, careful planning and a huge amount of collective effort from the team has ensured that the expedition is now fully organised and Outputs 1,2 & 3 will be delivered unless a volcanic eruption or an avian influenza prevents access to the island. M&E since April has ensured consultation across stakeholders, ensuring nothing has been omitted and all involved are fully aware of the project's progress.
<p>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.</p>
<p>The project has rightfully attracted close scrutiny owing to the unusual combination of risks working on the island entails and the special protection status of the archipelago. The number of collaborators has also increased which has added to complications in planning and costs. The initial proposed pax list has changed almost completely (only one of the original pax will still travel), which has required changes in planning and travel costs. There was a significant underspend on expedition equipment as BAS ended up providing much of this in kind, but this has been reassigned to travel of additional pax, tracking devices and photographic equipment. These have been agreed through change requests (see below). The project is completely on track to deliver, but its management has taken a greater amount of the PIs staff time than originally anticipated. This is provided as an additional in-kind contribution from BAS.</p>
<p>3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?</p>
<p>Discussed with NIRAS: <u>Yes</u>/No</p>
<p>Formal Change Request submitted: <u>Yes</u>/No</p>
<p>Received confirmation of change acceptance <u>Yes</u>/No</p>
<p>Change request reference if known: CR23-028; Second request still in review by NIRAS</p>

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

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 2024)?

Yes No Estimated underspend: ██████████

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**