

## 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: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS188
<b>Project title</b>	Hungry humpbacks: measuring seasonal foraging intensity at South Georgia
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	South Georgia
<b>Lead partner</b>	British Antarctic Survey
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI), Aarhus University, University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), and South Georgia Heritage Trust / Friends of South Georgia Island
<b>Project leader</b>	Dr. Jennifer Jackson
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	October 2023, HYR1
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/hungry-humpbacks/">https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/hungry-humpbacks/</a> , X (Twitter): @wildwaterwhales, Instagram: @hungryhumpbacks

**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).**

The following progress was made against the implementation timetable between April and September 2023:

Fieldwork to measure trends in humpback whale body condition (Output 1):

Output 1.1 (Fieldwork during humpback whale southbound migration from wintering grounds) has been successfully completed, with activity details as follows.

-Project UAV were purchased in May and June (Activity 1.1.1). In June and August, all the arrangements for the Brazilian fieldwork were completed, including boat hire, travel, and accommodation for fieldwork participants (Activities 1.1.2-1.1.3).

--The fieldwork was carried out by Projeto Baleia Jubarte and Dr Fredrik Christiansen from Aarhus University for 14 days between 20 Sept and 17 Oct (Activity 1.1.4). During this time, a total of 121 drone flights were carried out, and more than 200 aerial photographs were taken of individual humpback whales. In addition, 34 skin and blubber biopsy samples were collected to determine the sex and pregnancy status of some of the measured whales. The whales encountered included mothers with calves, sometimes accompanied by an escorting male, singing males, and competitive groups.

Output 1.2 (Fieldwork during humpback whale feeding season at South Georgia) is on track in terms of implementation:

-In April and May, UAV equipment to be used at King Edward Point (KEP) in South Georgia was purchased and shipped to Stanley (Activity 1.1.1). Everything arrived by September and was shipped for South Georgia fieldwork in November.

-All necessary boat-based field equipment, including crossbows, biopsy tips, chemicals, and kit bags, was purchased and received by the end of August (Activity 1.2.1). The majority will arrive at KEP on the Sir David Attenborough's (SDA) first ship call in mid-December (Activity 1.2.4).

-The necessary permits and approval for South Georgia fieldwork have been obtained (Activity 1.2.2). This includes Animal ethics risk assessments. Standard operating procedures, all UAV flight permits and South Georgia Government Regulated Activity Permit (RAP).

-Field team members have conducted the necessary training, which includes sea survival. Both the land-based and the boat-based teams have members who passed the British Antarctic Survey Medical Unit's three-day first-aid training course (Activity 1.2.3).

-Most travel plans for all South Georgia field team members have been finalized (Activity 1.2.5). There is still a potential for changes, and we will continue to work with BAS operations on travel plans.

-The timeline for fieldwork in South Georgia has shifted to start earlier as the end of the season's best return transport option is the SDA ship's last call the last week of March. Therefore, we decided to begin the project two weeks earlier to give the best opportunity for data collection for both the land and boat-based work. The land-based work will now be conducted from mid-November until mid-January. Boat-based work will be from mid-January until late March 2024.

-The project website has been created (Activity 5.1.1) and will continue to be updated with field season reports once they are completed.

-Activity 5.1.2, a whale tracking map is already part of a BAS web page and will be linked to this projects web page (<https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/south-georgia-right-whale-project/south-georgia-right-whale-project-whale-tracking/>).

-Project partner meetings were held in May, September, and October (Activity 5.2.1). Monthly meetings were not viable due to many project partners conducting fieldwork or on leave during the northern summer season. An email update was sent in June, and the project manager was always available to answer questions.

-A stakeholders meeting (Activity 5.3.1) was held in September. Project Partners Amy Kennedy recorded a presentation about satellite tagging and Fredrik Christiansen presented an overview of how drones will be used for body conditions measurements. Project partners and stakeholders from the expedition cruise ship industry attended the virtual meeting.

**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.**

We made two change requests: The first was to revise the first-year budget so that most of the staff time allocated for Project Leader Jen Jackson to be paid instead to the Project Coordinator Stephanie Martin as Jen Jackson was on maternity leave from June.

The second change request was for a change from budgeting for a professional consultant to a student to support the land-based UAV in South Georgia. The budget change was approved to support the student's rent and utility costs while working at KEP from mid-November-mid-January.

Over the austral winter there have been reports of particularly low winter sea ice in the Antarctic, with the Antarctic Peninsula region at record low levels. There is also an El Niño forming in the Pacific which has a high likelihood of becoming a strong event. It is therefore possible that South Georgia will experience significant climatic anomalies this summer which may substantially reduce the number of whales using local waters (i.e. due to less krill). We identified this Risk (#4) in our Risk framework. As planned, we monitored whale activity via reports from observers on vessels in South Georgia waters in winter. These have showed no signs that the season will be unusual for whales, so we have continued with field season planning for the current season, but note our concern. A poor whale year at South Georgia will have significant impact on Outputs 1, 2 and 3. This concern has not been discussed with NIRAS (3) as it was anticipated in the framework, and we continue to monitor the situation.

**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: CR\_Dec22\_DPLUS188\_011223,  
CR\_Aug23\_DPLUS188\_180723

**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?**

**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](mailto: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**