



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	DPLUS082
Project title	Conserving Falklands' whale populations: addressing data deficiencies for informed management
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Falkland Islands
Lead organisation	Falklands Conservation
Partner(s)	British Antarctic Survey, University of California Santa Cruz, Sea Mammal Research Unit, Shallow Marine Surveys Group, New England Aquarium, Ketos Ecology, Happy Whale, Fundación MERI
Project leader	Andrew Stanworth
Report date and number	HYR3
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

The period April to September 2020 comprises Quarters 1 and 2 in Year 3 of our Darwin Plus Implementation Timetable. Below we list the outputs that were scheduled for this period, and the progress we have made against them. Please note that we have used the revised implementation timetable that was submitted with AR2.

Output 1.1: Media outputs. Articles on the Darwin whale project were published in the Darwin newsletter in Jun 2020, in the Penguin News during Oct 2020, in the FC newsletter in Jul 2020, and in the FC magazine during Sep 2020.

Output 1.2: Stakeholder and steering group engagement. A steering group meeting was held via Skype on 15 Sep 2020. The meeting minutes and a project update document were circulated via email on 17 Sep. A stakeholder update was also distributed on 17 Sep.

Output 1.3: Social media updates. Numerous fieldwork updates were posted on the project Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/FalklandsWhale>) over this period, which currently (as of 25 Oct 2020) has 2,019 followers.

Output 1.6: Final Technical Report. Work was meant to begin on this during Sep 2020; however, this date has been pushed back due to the COVID-related project extension.

Output 2.3: Volunteer participation in fieldwork trips. Five community volunteers and four FC staff members (in addition to the project leader and boat skipper) assisted on boat surveys between April and September.

Output 2.5: Equipment inventory. A full inventory was completed in Sep 2020.

Output 3.1: Boat surveys. We completed 17 boat surveys for whales between 14 May and 7 Sep, primarily focussed on southern right whales.

Output 3.2: Data analysis. Boat survey data have been checked and inputted into QGIS. Photo-identification analysis is ongoing from Oct 2020 to Jan 2021.

Output 3.3: Technical report of KBA assessment. A Technical Report was finalised during July, and submitted with a KBA application on 29 July 2020. It is currently under review.

Output 3.4: Communications maintained with KBA personnel. Email correspondence with KBA regional coordinator David Díaz was regular between May and July.

Output 4.1: Acoustic deployment plan. An update on the acoustic schedule was provided to the steering group in Sep 2020. The final recovery of the Berkeley Sound acoustic devices is planned for Dec 2020.

Output 4.2: Deployment/recovery of devices. A recovery and redeployment of the Berkeley Sound acoustic devices occurred during Aug 2020. The Falkland Sound device was recovered during May, but was not redeployed due to equipment failure and necessity for repair.

Output 4.3: Ship acoustic data. The data collected from March to August were shipped to Sal Cerchio in the USA in late Aug 2020 and were safely received.

Output 4.4: Acoustic data analysis and classifier development. Acoustic analysis has been ongoing throughout this period, with a draft manuscript on sei whale calls in preparation. A brief update was provided by Sal Cerchio and outlined in the steering group meeting update.

Output 5.3: Collection of faecal samples. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of sei whale boat surveys during April and May, no faecal samples were collected.

Output 5.4: FIG export permit acquisition. Permits were acquired from FIG and used to ship the faecal and parasite samples from the early part of the 2020 season to BAS in April.

Output 5.5: Prey species and stable isotope analysis. Work was meant to begin on this during September 2020; however, this date has now been pushed back due to the COVID-related project extension and current restrictions regarding laboratory access at BAS.

Output 6.2: Biopsy sampling and equipment maintenance. Between May and August, 45 skin/blubber samples were collected from southern right whales via biopsy sampling.

Output 6.3: Processing and storage of tissue samples. The 45 tissue samples were processed on the day of collection, and stored in a freezer at FC. They were moved to a freezer at BAS in Sep 2020 in preparation for a port call by the BAS vessel for shipment to the UK (exact shipment date to be determined, depending on logistics and COVID-19 restrictions).

Output 6.4: Acquisition of CITES permits and sample shipment. Permits were acquired from CITES and used to ship whale samples from 2019 and early 2020 to BAS in April. A further set of CITES permits was acquired during Sep/Oct for shipping of the 2020 right whale samples to BAS on the next available vessel (probably in January 2021).

Output 6.5: Genetic and isotope analysis carried out at BAS. Work was meant to begin on this during Sep 2020; however, this date has now been pushed back due to the COVID-related project extension and current restrictions regarding laboratory access at BAS.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Between April and September 2020, the project encountered the following challenges:

1. The cancellation of all fieldwork until 11 May 2020 due to COVID-19 (see 2b).
2. Waterlogging of the acoustic device deployed in Falkland Sound, with the associated loss of seven months of data; and
3. Adverse weather conditions lasting 3.5 weeks during late July and early August, which prevented boat survey work during the peak period for southern right whales.

With regard to the acoustic device, it is unclear what caused the waterlogging; however, the device was sent back to the manufacturer in New Zealand who has since issued a replacement device. The latter arrived back in the Falklands during late September. The loss of the seven months acoustic data in Falkland Sound means that no year-round acoustic information is likely to be available from that site. While it would have been desirable to have the extra data from Falkland Sound, the three devices in Berkeley Sound have worked well and generated a two-year dataset which will allow us to complete the project deliverables. However, together with the loss of boat survey work due to COVID-19 then this has meant that the total data coverage for sei whales at the Falkland Sound site during 2020 has been very poor, with no acoustic data and only two out of the 20 planned boat survey days being achieved. Consequently, we submitted a Change Request to conduct an additional sei whale field season between February and May 2021, which was approved by Darwin Plus (see below).

The 3.5 weeks of adverse weather experienced during Jul/Aug was unexpected, since five boat surveys were completed over the same period in 2019. The loss of this period of peak right whale activity means that fewer animals were photo-identified and fewer biopsy samples acquired than may have otherwise been achieved. However, the total biopsy dataset for 2020 was similar to 2019 due to greater success earlier in the season, and the 2020 right whale fieldwork season should still therefore support the stated project objectives despite being suboptimal.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the boat survey fieldwork carried out during 2020, with a cessation of all non-essential activities being implemented by Falkland Islands Government between 27 March and 11 May 2020. We reported on the initial impacts from this lockdown in AR2. Boat surveys commenced again on the first available weather day following lockdown (14 May), by which time the sei whales had already departed from the east coast of the Falklands. The period of lost fieldwork therefore significantly affected our planned work on sei whales (Feb-May), but did not impact our planned work on southern right whales (Jun-Aug). The loss of the majority of the sei whale season had an impact on the project deliverables, since the data analysis relied on having two full seasons of data with which to compare whale occurrence between years. Additionally, our project partners Jen Jackson (genetic analysis) and Sal Cerchio (acoustic analysis) were unable to gain access to their laboratories during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has introduced challenges with delivering those analysis components according to the original project timeframe.

Consequently, we submitted a Change Request to Darwin on the 16 Sep, which was approved. The Change Request included provision to extend our project to 31 Aug 2021 which will allow us to carry out an additional sei whale field season between February and May 2021, and should allow our project partners greater time to access laboratories and complete their analyses. This project extension has implications for our planned Project Activities (we submitted a revised logframe) and the Project Budget, with a carryover of unspent Darwin funding into 2021-22. Please see our Change Request for additional information.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: Yes

Formal change request submitted:	Yes
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. 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.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

With regard to 3a, we would like to note that our project did have significant underspend for the current financial year (due to COVID-19), but that has already been addressed through a Change Request that was submitted (and approved) during Sep 2020. That change request included an extension of the project deadline to 31 Aug 2021, and the carryover underspend into a fourth financial year (2021/22). Consequently, we have not reported any underspend in this 6-month report, as it has already been addressed.

Please send your **completed report by email** to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**