

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 2022

Project reference	DPLUS143
Project title	What goes thump at night: managing bird-strike in South Georgia
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)
Lead partner	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
Partner(s)	Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) Argos Froyanes Ltd (AFL)
Project leader	Dr Megan Tierney
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	October 2022, HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	@JNCC_UK, @GovSGSSI, @iaato_org, @argosfroyanes, @Darwin_Defra

1. 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).

DPLUS143 is a 2.75-year project which commenced in July 2021. This half-yearly report therefore outlines progress made to date on activities that were scheduled for Year 2 (Y2) of the project (April-September 2022). Please note that we have used the revised Logframe and Implementation timetable which were approved through a formal Change Request in Year 1 (Y1) of the project.

Output 1. GSGSSI and key stakeholders have informed overview of the incidence and causes of bird-strike, and the effectiveness of existing mitigation measures to reduce strike rates used in regions/areas outside of SGSSI.

The literature review on the incidence of bird-strike was completed and reported upon in Y1 (**Activity 1.1**), with the SWOT analysis to identify and assess the effectiveness of bird-strike mitigation measures completed in Q1Y2 (**Activity 1.2**). The report summarising both these activities (first deliverable of **Activity 1.3**) has been drafted, and is just awaiting sign-off by the Project Management Group (PMG), after which it will be published on JNCC and/or partner websites (**Indicator 1a**). It is anticipated this will be complete no later than Y2Q3. Preparation of Information documents for partner and stakeholder networking meetings (second deliverable of **Activity 1.3** and **Indicator 1b**), are not due to commence until Year 3 (Y3) of project.

Output 2. Standardised bird-strike reporting forms that capture all essential information to enable monitoring and assessment of bird-strike in SGSSI MZ developed and presented to GSGSSI for implementation across fleets operating in SGSSI MZ; and

Output 4. Easy-to-follow guidelines for non-bird specialists showing how to handle and care for birds that may be injured after striking and landing on vessels developed and presented to GSGSSI for circulation across fleets operating in SGSSI MZ.

Existing bird-strike reporting forms which are used by vessels in the SGSSI MZ (forming part of **Activity 2.2**), and collation of existing bird-handling and identification guidelines (forming part of **Activity 4.2**) were undertaken and reported upon in Y1. These formed the basis for discussions with stakeholders around format, usability and/or enhancement of the reporting forms and handling guidelines to be developed by this project at an online workshop held in Y2Q1 (5 & 6 May 2022) (**Activity 2.1 and 4.1**). A total of 26 participants, which included representatives with expertise or experience in seabird ecology, seabird/fisheries observers and operators, ships' crew and expedition leaders, attended the workshop (**Annex 1a-c**).

The report summarising the outcomes from the workshop (**Indicator 2.1a and 4.1a**) still needs to be finalised. However all feedback and outcomes from the workshop have been used to develop a 'Beta-version' of the bird-strike reporting form, with the format and content of the form being agreed by project partners (**Activity 2.2; Indicator 2.2a,b; Annex 2a,b**). A feedback form to gather views on the beta-version of the reporting form has also been developed (**Annex 2c**).

The form is now undergoing field-trials (**Activity 2.3**). A total of seven toothfish and krill fishing vessels operating in South Georgia waters, and covering the last two months of the austral winter fishing season (August – September) were invited to take part in the field-trials to test the Beta bird-strike reporting forms (**Annex 3a**). Four individual responses were received, and the project team are in the process of collating comments and feedback to be incorporated into the final version of the reporting forms (**Activity 2.4**; not due to be completed until the end Y3Q2 of the project). Six tourist operators who are members of IAATO also signed up to part-take in field-trials (**Annex 3b**) over the austral summer tourist season (October – March). The Project Leader (Dr Megan Tierney), met with the captain and crew of some of the fishing vessels when they were in Port Stanley, Falkland Islands and prior to steaming to the South Georgia fishing grounds to discuss the trials in more detail and answer any questions they may have had. She has also met with two of the tourist operators when they have been in Port Stanley, prior to their departure for South Georgia, and will meet with other participants as the season progresses and they come through the Falkland Islands. The Project Leader was also invited by Project Partner IAATO, to give a (remote) presentation on the project at the October IAATO field-staff conference to promote the work (**Annex 3c**), and also invite any other IAATO members to take part in the trials. Discussions are also under way with the patrol and research vessels which will be operating in South Georgia waters over the coming months to arrange testing of the forms on these platforms.

Additional time has been required to draft the bird-handling guidelines (**Activity 4.2**) based on feedback from the stakeholder workshop. A graphic designer should be onboarded by mid-November 2022, with the beta-version ready for circulation by mid-late January 2023. The field-trials (**Activity 4.3**) will then be carried out on the tourist vessels in January – March 2022, fishing vessels in May – July 2023, and on research/patrol vessels between January – July 2023. Comments and feedback on the handling guidelines will be incorporated into the final version (**Activity 4.4**), not due for completion by the end Y3Q2 of the project. Note, whether the guidelines can be trialled using real birds will be dependent on current GSGSSI Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) protocols – see more details in Section 2.

Output 3. Standardised data input and storage facilities and guidelines for data returned in bird-strike reporting forms, and which integrates with the existing national information management system of GSGSSI, is developed.

Existing bird-strike data is submitted by GSGSSI to the [UK Polar Data Centre](#) who curates and manages the data on behalf of GSGSSI. A series of meetings were held in Y2Q1 with the Head of the Data Centre (Helen Peat) to discuss current procedures and implications that would need to be taken into consideration regarding changes to data fields and format which might be instigated during the development of the new bird-strike reporting forms (**Activity 3.1**). A specific session on data flow (from capture to reporting) was also included in the stakeholder workshop to both provide a greater understanding to data collectors and end-users about how the data is managed, the process of how data

is submitted, and to receive feedback on future requirements in terms of use and accessibility etc. (**Annex 1c**). The beta-version of the form was shared with the Head of the Data Centre prior to the field-trials commencing to ensure it conformed with current capabilities of the Data Centre to receive and curate the data (**Activity 3.1; Indicator 3.1a; Annex 2a**). Testing and finalising data input and storage procedures will take place once the trials are completed in Y3 of the project (**Activities 3.2 and 3.3**).

Output 5. Strategic programme of prioritised research to advance use and/or development of mitigation measures to reduce bird-strike in SGSSI MZ, including identification of resourcing options, is formulated.

There were no deliverables due for this output during the reporting period and no work was due to commence.

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 would like to take this opportunity to provide both an update and a note on two separate unexpected developments which could have had or may impact on project activities.

1. Cancellation of longlining fishing season(s).

It was noted in the Y1 Annual Report (AR1) that there were some uncertainties (political/regulatory; beyond the control of this project) regarding whether there would be a longlining toothfish fishing season in South Georgia waters in 2022, and thereby rendering it not possible to use these particular vessels to trial the beta versions of the bird-strike reporting forms and bird-handling guidelines (Activities 2.3 and 4.3). As such Assumption 2.6 and 4.6 were modified to: *In regard to engaging sufficient fishing company volunteers to participate in the [bird-strike reporting form and bird-handling guideline] trials, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic does not interrupt fishing operations. (In the 2020 fishing season, Covid-19 did present operational challenges to GSGSSI and licensed fishing companies, but the fishing season did proceed). Further, if there is no longline fishing for toothfish in South Georgia waters in 2022, all field trials on fishing vessels will occur on krill and/or ice-fish trawlers instead of across both longliners and trawlers as originally planned.*

Whilst the AR1 Reviewer advised that the project team discuss any implications this may have on the project, we are pleased to report that a contracted (July – September; as opposed to May – September) toothfish fishing season was permitted within SGSSI waters, and that several longlining vessels partook in trailing the beta bird-strike reporting forms (see details summarised in Section 1, Output 2). At this stage it is hoped that the 2023 toothfish season will progress as normal, which will enable the longlining vessels to trial the bird-handling guidelines. If this situation changes, we will discuss with the DPLUS Team any implications on the project and the best way forwards.

2. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

The Darwin Plus Team will no doubt be aware of the current outbreak of the H5N1 strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the Northern Hemisphere, the south of Africa and around the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans which has caused high mortality in wild seabird populations. It is expected that this outbreak will spread to Southern Ocean bird populations in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 austral summers. In readiness for this, GSGSSI has developed a set of guidance on HPAI risk and response in the Territory. The guidance describes what enhanced biosecurity procedures, signs to be vigilant for, how to report these to the GSGSSI and what action the government will take on receiving that report – see full details in the [GSGSSI Biosecurity Handbook](#). These guidelines cover actions/response to a bird-strike event. As it may not be possible to determine if a bird has signs of HPAI or not, the guidelines state that a precautionary approach should be adopted, including releasing live birds as soon as practical in order to minimise time personnel are in contact/exposed – as opposed to more standard practice of potentially

housing a bird for a period of time to allow recovery and then release at a time when there would be minimal risk of predation.

Given these revised protocols, in the event of a bird-strike event occurring on vessels during the 2022-23 seasons, in-depth trials of the bird-handling guidelines may not be possible. Instead, participants in the trial, may only be able to review and comment without necessarily putting proposed procedures into practice.

The HPAI situation will be constantly monitored by GSGSSI throughout the season and has advised that the biosecurity guidelines may be reviewed/amended depending on the situation. Likewise, the project team will discuss any major impacts HPAI may have on the project as the situation evolves. At the time of writing this report, HPAI had not yet been detected in any SGSSI seabird population, but all vessels involved with the field-trials will be following the current GSGSSI biosecurity guidelines until advised otherwise.

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

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS:	Yes/No
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/No
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes/No N/A
Change request reference if known: N/A	

4a. 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: £

4b. 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.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Responses to comments received in the AR1 Review are provided in **Annex 4.**

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), 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.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with NIRAS-LTS International 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**