



**BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS**



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 | DPLUS177 |
| Project title | Humpback Whales of the Pitcairn Islands |
| Country(ies)/territory(ies) | Pitcairn Islands |
| Lead Organisation | King's College London, UK |
| Partner(s) | Government of Pitcairn Island, Morigenos, Marine Management Organisation, University of St. Andrews |
| Project leader | Terence Dawson |
| Report date and number (e.g. HYR1) | 29 Oct 2024 HYR3 |
| Project website/blog/social media | https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/humpback-whales-of-the-pitcairn-islands |

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.

Our second fieldwork and community engagement campaign were conducted on Pitcairn Island from 1st to 24 September 2024 having completed the following activities and outputs for this reporting period:

Project Outputs 1, 2, and 3: The scientific team (Prof. Terry Dawson, Dr Tilen Genov and Miss Katherine McCoy), supported by the local community, were able to collect 234.5 hours of hydrophone recordings across 4 separate days. In addition to this, 18 hours of sighting effort was carried out and recorded from observation points on land and from boat. Sightings included a variety of behaviours and displays including breaching, fin slapping, lobtailing and general milling/travelling with breaching being very common. Of a total of 17 recorded humpback whale sightings, ID photographs of tail flukes, dorsal fins and surface behaviours were collected on seven separate days both from land and boat. From the photographs taken

and uploaded to the catalogue, two different individuals have been successfully identified so far using automated fluke recognition through HappyWhale.com. One individual was identified as new to the database and the other was successfully matched with an individual previously sighted in Niue (island nation near Tonga). Results from this analysis provide further evidence that the humpback whales observed in the Pitcairn Islands are appearing in other Pacific regions.

Mother-calf pairs were sighted relatively frequently around the island; all appeared to be young calves likely born on/around Pitcairn Island this breeding season. The most common group composition sighted was mother-calf pair with escort. A single biopsy sample was collected from a juvenile whale, which adds to the two biopsies collected by the team in 2018. A beta version of the citizen science phone app was completed in September 2024 and is currently being tested by selected individuals for assessment.

Project Output 4: Following the September 2023 on-island consultations with the Pitcairn Islands Travel Coordinator and the On-island Service Provider to discuss the development of marine nature-based tourism in the Pitcairn Islands, together with an analysis of tourist visitor surveys, a draft *Strategy and Action Plan for nature-based tourism in the MPA* was developed and circulated to island stakeholders. The draft was presented and discussed with staff from both the Environment, Conservation and Natural Resources Division and Pitcairn Islands Tourism during the September 2024 visit. Detailed discussions with the Pitcairn Islands Travel Coordinator highlighted that there was a need for training for local tour guides, so a training course was developed during the current period and delivered on island at the Marine Science Base on 22nd September 2024 to 12 islanders focusing on land-based whale watching.

Outreach activities from April to October 2024 include:

- McCoy, K., Genov, T., Dawson, T., Chadwick, M., Letessier, T. and Horswill, C, The enigmatic humpback whales of the Pitcairn Islands, *Proceedings of the 35th annual European Cetacean Society Conference*, Catania (Sicily, Italy), April 10-12, 2024, CO-20, 382 (<https://www.marecamp.com/>).
- Hardman, E. (2024). *Advice on a Strategy and Action Plan for marine nature-based tourism in the Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area (MPA)*, Draft report No. iv + 22 pp.
- Article published in the Pitcairn Miscellany, *The humpback whale team return to Pitcairn for another season of whale research*, VOLUME 67, ISSUE 9, September 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.

As was experienced during our fieldwork campaign 2023, this year's activities were challenged by poor weather, specifically very strong wind conditions which limited our time on the water. This was despite the fact that we delayed our visit until September, which is the onset of the austral spring season (in 2023, we conducted our whale surveys in July). Whilst this ultimately limited our total data collected for the project, we have sufficient material to conclude the research with satisfactory outcomes on all our stated science deliverables.

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/ No |
| Formal Change Request submitted: | Yes/ No |
| Received confirmation of change acceptance: | Yes/ No N/A |

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

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.

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 request from the last AR (2024) review was that further supporting evidence needs to be provided, which will be provided in the final annual report (AR 2025). A change request application was also suggested when we were unsure about the need for a proposed training course delivery. However, a need was identified, and the training workshop was presented to the island community this year.

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. | |
|--|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| If not already submitted, have you attached your risk register ? | |
|---|--|

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. | Y |
| 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? | Y |
| 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 |