

The Rufford Foundation

Final Report

Congratulations on the completion of your project that was supported by The Rufford Foundation.

We ask all grant recipients to complete a Final Report Form that helps us to gauge the success of our grant giving. The Final Report must be sent in **word format** and not PDF format or any other format. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work. Please be as honest as you can in answering the questions – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please complete the form in English and be as clear and concise as you can. Please note that the information may be edited for clarity. We will ask for further information if required. If you have any other materials produced by the project, particularly a few relevant photographs, please send these to us separately.

Please submit your final report to jane@rufford.org.

Thank you for your help.

Josh Cole, Grants Director

Grant Recipient Details	
Your name	Kate Walker
Project title	Tonga Turtle
RSG reference	12073-1
Reporting period	August 2012 – August 2013
Amount of grant	£6,000
Your email address	Kate.on.island@gmail.com
Date of this report	19 th September 2013

1. Please indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Initiate a long term nest monitoring programme on the index beaches of the Vava'u group.		X		The historical and anecdotal data surrounding the nesting beaches of Vava'u was very outdated and our first year's survey determined that all nesting occurs on very remote islands away from any human habitation. Two islands have been identified as potential index beaches in the first year's survey and these can be monitored annually but it will be on the basis of a once or twice annual field visit rather than a daily or weekly monitoring program. During the field visits, the surveys can be extended beyond the index beaches.
Collate existing data, reports, anecdotes and grey literature to provide a form of baseline			X	This report has been produced and has been circulated accordingly within the Tongan government and interested parties.
Conduct an in-water turtle assessment to identify key foraging grounds.			X	Three key foraging grounds for green turtles and one key area for hawksbill turtles have been identified through a programme of sighting collections and in-water observations.
Quantify the illegal activities associated with turtle harvesting in the Vava'u group		X		The project works in conjunction with the Ministry of Fisheries (regulating body for the turtle legislation) to report any illegal landings of turtles. Over the course of the year, six illegally landed turtles have been observed and turned over to the project for tagging and releasing. What we have yet been unable to quantify is the level of illegal harvesting on the remote outer islands. We are making good inroads with this, however, as a local primary school on one of the outer islands is reporting turtle consumption in their homes throughout the year. As this is a sensitive issue, more time is needed to gain the data needed from the outer islands
Initiate a turtle awareness programme in local schools to include			X	We have targeting the primary schools in this outreach programme and the programme has enlisted the services of an empowered young Tongan lady to be the

species specific information as well as broader ecological concepts from the local environment				face of the program and the give the lessons in the local language. These lessons have been a huge success with over 500 students reached so far. There is a great demand for these types of lessons and more are being developed as per the teacher's requests.
Build stakeholder relations between project leaders and local communities to form a foundation from which to build community based initiatives to drive the project forward			X	The project has collected an informal base of stakeholders including town officers, district officers, women's group leaders, government representatives, local business leaders and expatriate residents. Each of these stakeholders has a proven interest in managing the natural resources of Tonga and seeks to do this through community based initiatives.
Develop multi-year strategy for the Tongan Turtle Conservation Project with input from stakeholders (VEPA, community groups, churches, tourism-based businesses, etc)	X			This objective was changed very early in the project when it became apparent that an interim step was needed before this object was achievable. With this in mind, this objective was changed to : 'Build capacity within local communities to facilitate the local ownership of data collection and turtle monitoring'. This new objective has been partially achieved due to the remoteness of many of the study sites and the general 'newness' of the concepts of turtle conservation/natural resource management. There is currently one community involved in the data collection aspect both in terms of sighting data and harvesting data. However, the expatriate and tourist community are fully empowered and involved in the data collection process of the programme and are the main reason that we have developed a greater understanding of the foraging habits of the turtles in Vava'u

2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

Due to the project leader's knowledge of working in remote island nations, no unforeseen difficulties arose.

3. Briefly describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

1. Understanding of habitat use – through the data collected from in-water sighting and the nesting surveys, I have been able to build a detailed map of turtle habitat use in Vava'u. The detail of the map provides an excellent management and outreach tool for decision makers and the project team in terms of what turtle resources are out there and where they are. We now know where the key foraging and nesting sites are and we are able to back this up with data that, up until this project, did not exist.
2. Education programme – from the initial observations, it was clear that the high school age range of Vava'u was already benefitting from an education programme developed by VEPA (Vava'u Environmental Protection Association), however due to language barriers, there were no programmes being undertaken in the many primary schools in the island group. With the help of a young Tongan woman (Salia), I was able to develop a very basic, low-tech lesson which provided an introduction to turtles and some insights into their ecology. These lessons were extremely well received by both pupils and teachers and requests have been made for more lessons on a variety of subjects. These lessons gave us a great insight into the existing level of knowledge about turtles in the local communities and we were very surprised with some of the supposed 'facts' that are being passed down to the children – the most surprising of which was that female turtles wait in the water to eat their babies. Many of the villages also thought that turtles were like fish and grew quickly. Being able to describe the life cycle of the turtle was an invaluable start to our work together.
3. Community support – I have been able to align the project with three communities who are interested in working with me to develop a turtle-based programme on their island. One community has set up the first community managed marine area in the island group and wants to involve the protection of turtles to further encourage ecotourism to their island. One community is interested via its primary school head teacher who wants her pupils to be fully aware of their natural environment and the importance of this and the final community is a new contact who are interested in exploring how the project and the community can benefit from working together. This has all been done in conjunction with the Ministry of Fisheries in Vava'u who are very keen to collaborate with us.

4. Briefly describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project (if relevant).

Please see the previous answer for direct community involvement. To date, the benefit has been in knowing that there are resources for them to call upon for help in any nature related query, not just turtles. So far in Tonga, there is very little in the way of environmental support and the turtle project (as a small part of VEPA) has been able to reach out to the involved communities and demonstrate the support available.

Communities not directly involved with the turtle programme have been involved indirectly via the education programme. We were encouraged by how many of the senior teachers attended the lessons and asked so many direct and relevant questions. We were able to set many myths right, were able to clarify the law and were also able to show them that there are resources in Vava'u to help them with managing their own environment. We have been greatly thanked by each village that we visited and have been asked by many to develop more material to return with.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

There are several plans that I would like to continue to carry out. Mainly:

Community work – there are now three communities who are interested in working with the turtle program to either develop their ecotourism product or to develop their own understanding of their natural environment and we need to maintain the momentum and funding to enable this.

Education – the primary schools are hungry for more information and are so keen to learn. We have plans to develop more lessons in a wider variety of subject. Again, funding is needed to secure this momentum. I would like to be able to hire Salia on a more permanent basis as she excels at this programme.

Data collection – this needs to be ongoing for both foraging and nesting turtles to continue to monitoring the status of our turtles, however due to the remoteness of the nesting sites, this needs to be an annually funded field trip.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

All report and data collected are shared regionally with environment bodies such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Program. They are also shared with the SWOT (State of the Worlds Turtles) international database. Additionally, the reports are sent locally to the relevant ministry representatives and other parties. All report will also be made available on the VEPA website.

7. Timescale: Over what period was The Rufford Foundation grant used? How does this compare to the anticipated or actual length of the project?

The grant was budgeted to last from August 2012 – August 2013 and this was achieved on target.

8. Budget: Please provide a breakdown of budgeted versus actual expenditure and the reasons for any differences. All figures should be in £ sterling, indicating the local exchange rate used.

Local currency is in Tongan Pa’anga. Exchange rate as of 24/09/13 is \$TOP1 = £0.35 (xe.com)

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Project leader remuneration	4,500	4,200	-300	The living costs in Vava’u were less than anticipated and the money was able to be allocated elsewhere
Field survey Equipment	450	250	-200	Many of the needed items were donated by the local community rather than being purchased
Educational Materials	0	350	+350	Purchases were necessary to produce the educational materials (printer, paper, laminating, ink, etc) as other funding source was insufficient.

Transportation	500	800	+300	Fuel costs were significantly higher than estimated and the distances needed to travel were greater due to the remote location of the nesting beaches
Local teacher stipend	0	200	+200	A 'per school' stipend was given to the projects local teacher in lieu of a salary
Contingency	550	0	-550	The £200 budget surplus will be allocated to printing and locally distributing hard copies of all reports once the first annual report is completed by the end of October 2013
Total	6,000	5,800	-200	

9. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

The first year of this project was focused primarily on collating data to form an initial baseline for the current state of turtles in Vava'u. Moving forward from this, we now are in a good position to continue this work and expand the reach of the project. To fully assess the current state of the nesting population of Vava'u's turtles, we will need to complete 4 years of nesting monitoring as turtles nest every 2-4 years. This should be a fundamental part of any work undertaken by the project moving forward, therefore funding needs to be secured to provide fuel, boat access, field equipment and provisions for the upcoming years.

Secondly, it is vital that we are able to harness the enthusiasm shown by the local primary schools for environmental education lessons. There is such a large range of topics that can be taught in these schools under the umbrella of turtle conservation and the gaps in knowledge are at such a basic and fundamental level that all information taught is critical to allow people to make informed choices. To enable this to move forward, funding needs to be secured to provide materials and to also provide a small stipend to a young local Tongan woman for each class that she teaches.

Now is also the time to start to disseminate the findings of this year long study to the decision makers and community leaders here in Vava'u. We have established where some of the highest level of legal and illegal turtle consumption occurs and we now need to develop strategies to inform these people as to why a more sustainable approach to their turtle consumption is needed. By placing the information directly in the hands of those responsible for the harvesting and empowering them to make their own informed choices we can hope to turn around the current fishing practices.

10. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the RSGF receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The logo was used in the following settings:

- Public information brochures
- Public outreach posters
- Social media: website and facebook

- All reporting
- Handouts and information documents in government meetings

11. Any other comments?

Figures:

- Number of school children reached: 520
- Number of community leaders directly reached: 55
- Number of government conservation workshops attended: 3
- Number of communities worked with: 3
- Number of international organisations partnered with: 3
- Number of turtles rescued and released: 6