

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	Wouter M.G. Vansteelant
Project title	Bringing together people and birds in Eurasia's largest bottleneck for autumn bird migration
RSG reference	13213-2
Reporting period	
Amount of grant	£6000
Your email address	Vansteelant.wouter@gmail.com
Date of this report	30/01/2014

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
Monitoring migration: conduct a full seasonal count in autumn 2013			X	We successfully monitored the entire migration season on a daily basis, from 1 hour after sunrise till 2 hours before sunset. We recorded > 1,000,000 birds of prey of 35 species. Over 60 volunteers from 12 countries participated in the counts.
Environmental education: organise youth projects using migration counts as a platform for education			X	No less than three camps and youth exchanges were organised in the BRC guest village, just near one of our main watch-sites. We involved 15 regional children between 12 and 14 in a bird camp and no less than 45 students in 2 youth exchanges themed around birds and biodiversity and environmental education, respectively. These projects were all completed successfully and created much scope for several of the participants to return to BRC as volunteers, particularly for working on outreach and education.
Outreach: popularise BRC as a destination of choice for regional stakeholders in conservation organising public events		X		We have repeated collaborations with important regional stakeholders in education and conservation in 2013. These organisations are happy to contribute to projects in which we try to mobilise regional people to visit BRC, and more specifically the migration watch-sites, to learn about bird migration and environmental protection. However, we definitely have a challenge in mobilising people because there is not a strong local culture to visit natural areas purely for the sake of information and learning. Our best chances to further strengthen our position as an environmental education and information centre will be by activating regional schools in collaborative projects, or by popularising our facilities for school trips.
Ecotourism: popularise Georgia as a destination in Europe			X	We have most definitely increased the international awareness of Georgia as a birding destination by breaking former records of daily and seasonal counts of various species, producing regular news for

			social media and our website, by communicating the outcomes of the monitoring and conservation work at conferences and public events. Many dozens of people have already expressed interest in joining the project over coming years. It is worth noting that we are now starting to attract more female visitors, which particularly appreciate the educational component of our conservation work. Many potential visitors are enthused by our conservation work, and their interest to visit increases by the fact that their visit would help support a worthy cause.
Ecotourism: improve capacity and readiness of local guest families to host westerners		X	Practice makes perfect. This definitely also applies to the BRC host families who were able to host new guests in 2013, after having initially hosted few guests in the preceding year. Overall, the quality of several homestays had clearly improved in comparison to the year before. However, based on the outcomes of the 2013 project, we can now continue to further improve the quality of accommodation for western visitors, so as to create maximal satisfaction and good mouth-to-mouth advertisement of Georgia as an ecotourism destination. Because we were able to attract many visitors in 2013, which is possible because of our monitoring results creating high visibility for the site among birders, the local Tourism Department expressed willingness to continue to support the development of our ecotourism scheme, also with respect to building capacity and quality of homestays.
Local involvement: bring down language barriers so that local can permanently participate in BRC activities		X	We did not manage to bring down barriers for participation of local people in 2013 because no suitable candidates were found to assist local residents in learning bird identification or bird ecology. However, through youth projects we did find multiple young people from Georgia who are keen to further develop activities and BRC capacity to popularize bird watching in the region, especially for young people.

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

We had no large unexpected technical difficulties in implementing the monitoring programme. Some small issues arose due to miscommunication about the count protocol between the board of the project and the count coordinators who were responsible for the correct implementation of the protocol. Coordinators made a few adjustments to protocol to cope with challenges they faced in the field. Such were, for example, a change in the way they divided the responsibilities our two main survey stations to count streams of honey buzzards flying at different positions in the counting zone. This facilitated counts for observers but made counts incompatible with a script we have prepared for automatic removal of double counts from our dataset. Usually, this kind of problem would have been spotted immediately, but it took a few to surface. As a result, the board decided to better formalise the interaction and feedback between count coordinators and project managers under the formal of regular meetings. Also, we have made some improvements to the formal introduction phase of new count coordinators, such that they are fully aware of the reasons to count birds in a certain way, which will help to avoid well-intended, but badly executed, decisions on protocol changes in the future.

We also encountered some friction with host families with regard to the habits of some of the international volunteers. Although the overall response to our project is very good, and though we have established good relations with these families, some residents were disturbed by activities of the group at night. We have discussed these concerns with the families and have taken the necessary steps to ensure that the presence of a large group of international visitors (who do not regularly uphold traditional Georgian standards and norms) will not disturb the peacefulness of the guest village. This will include steps to limit consumption of alcohol in the village, and the amount of noise produced by a large group of people at night. The villagers were happy with arrangements to keep the socialising events at a distance from the guest houses of our host families (given families share their house with us). Fortunately, BRC has always paid attention to the values of local residents and we have adequate regulations in place to ensure visitors are well informed about social standards and norms in Sakhalvasho/Georgia. Though this issue may seem trivial, Georgians care deeply about their traditional values and it is important to manage our group appropriately in this respect.

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

The most crucial outcome is that we managed to maintain monitoring of raptor migration for the 6th year in a row, using the same standardised protocol for 4 years now. Probably one of the main outcomes of 2013 is that we managed to attract many more candidates to participate in youth projects than we were able to accept as participants and from the participants we had, many have expressed strong interest to commit to BRC projects in a volunteering capacity. This creates much scope for growth in the aspect of outreach and education toward coming years.

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

Please see the last two objectives in the summary table above, and the comments therewith.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Certainly, the autumn monitoring of raptor migration is scheduled to continue in 2014 and later years. Preparations for this have already started. By now (almost 6 months after the project ended) we also made a pilot project to expand the monitoring program to spring, and we have made similar efforts with our education working group.

Currently, the Batumi Raptor Count has finished on deliberating on the most urgent improvements and working priorities for coming years. New steps are being taken to expand on educational activities and to strengthen involvement of local residents in the project. We expect to apply for a follow-up grant with RSG to support such initiatives if we receive a positive evaluation on the current report.

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

The outcomes of this year’s activities have been presented together with those of preceding years on various conferences and birding events around Europe and elsewhere. Also, we have regularly reported through social media and our website about ongoing affairs in this project. Please find more details about these in our response to the 10th question in this report.

We are planning a publication of the outcomes of the monitoring of 2013 and preceding years for the main ornithological journal covering the Caucaus region, namely ‘Sandgrouse’. Also, we have scheduled a publication on our work in the popular German magazine ‘Der Falke’. We currently do not plan a peer-reviewed scientific publication on the outcomes of our conservation approach. However, the effect of the overall conservation approach of BRC is being monitored with support of a Disney Conservation Grant over the following 5 years, thus also the effects of this year’s activities will be reviewed based on surveys of social awareness of migrating birds and public readiness to participate in conservation or sustainable livelihood strategies that safeguard migrating birds from excessive hunting.

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

We used the grant to implement activities between August and October 2013, as expected according to the grant. However, follow-up by project organisers and efforts to report about our project outcomes have continued up until this date (June 2014) and will continue several years into the future.

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.

Item	Budgeted Amount (Budgeted Cost)	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Local transportation	1700 (1700)	1700 (1930)	0 (+230)	Some unexpected drives increased the cost of transport relative to the original budget

Accommodation international volunteers	1100 (1600)	1100 (1900)	0 (+300)	Volunteers spent slightly more nights than expected in host accommodation
Accommodation coordinators and board	2700 (4720)	2700 (3650)	0 (-1070)	Fewer coordinators were involved than expected.
Equipment and materials	500 (1100)	500 (1400)	0 (+ 300)	We had to invest in some more field materials than originally expected.
Total	6000 (9120)	6000 (8880)	0 (- 240)	

* In the table above, we provide amounts as applicable to this 2nd RSG and between brackets the total amounts including additional funding resources. We spent the same amounts of our RSG as was budgeted in the proposal.

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

Some things can improve at the level of project management and funding. In order to make this project effective on the long-term we should develop a flow of funding which can guarantee the continuation of volunteer-based migration monitoring of raptor migration. If we can do so, we effectively maintain the platform around which to develop ecotourism as a sustainable alternative to hunting, and around which to implement environmental education and outreach activities. There are several opportunities to do this, mainly by continuing the expansion of the ecotourism branch of the BRC, the revenues of which should ultimately cover all costs involved with monitoring the migration. By doing so, we can reserve grant applications for RSG and other foundations focused to implement education activities themselves. The RSG grant is instrumental to secure the first years of monitoring for this ambitious project, however, other means will be required to ensure viability of monitoring in the long run.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need for stronger involvement of local residents from Georgia into our conservation work. Because villagers often have limited knowledge of species identification and ecology, and because of strong language barriers, sufficient involvement of local people is still a problematic hurdle. Follow-up projects should have a very strong focus on local involvement, e.g., by securing a Georgian 'conservation coach' who could work to engage people from local communities.

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 RSG logo appeared in the box with sponsors on the BRC website (www.batimiraptorcount.org) for the whole of the year over which your grant has been used. Furthermore, several blog posts were written for the website about the education projects that were enabled by your support, mentioning clearly the contribution of RSG, as well as your logo. These blog posts were then shared further through social media like Facebook. Because we have a base of around 1,000 followers around the time we published those reports, many of these articles have been read by hundreds of people from all over the world.

Furthermore, we presented the migration monitoring and conservation work of BRC at various conferences and public events across Europe through which we have established a strong reputation as a holistic conservation initiative, commanding great appreciation for our work. The Rufford logo has been visible on all presentations which we gave, including talks at the Annual Meeting of the

Ornithological Society of the Middle East in Thetford (July 2013), at the 1st ever Ethno-ornithology symposium at the 9th Conference of the EOU in Norwich (August 2013), at the Worldwide Raptor Conference in Bariloche, Argentina (October 2013) and at birding fairs in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and so forth.

The data collected with support of RSG were not yet used for scientific publications, but RSG will be acknowledged for its support for migration monitoring when publications do appear.