

## The Rufford Foundation Final Report

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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](mailto:jane@rufford.org).

Thank you for your help.

**Josh Cole, Grants Director**

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Grant Recipient Details	
<b>Your name</b>	Miguel Iñiguez Bessega
<b>Project title</b>	Awareness-raising, eco-tourism and research: Conservation of Franciscana ( <i>Pontoporia blainvillei</i> ) and Bottlenosed dolphins ( <i>Tursiops truncates</i> ) of Rio Negro
<b>RSG reference</b>	15030-1
<b>Reporting period</b>	July 2014-June 2015
<b>Amount of grant</b>	£5,000
<b>Your email address</b>	miguel.iniguez@cethus.org
<b>Date of this report</b>	27 <sup>th</sup> June 2015

**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
<p>Increase the scientific understanding of Franciscana and bottlenose dolphins in the Rio Negro Estuary (RNE) by assessing biological and ecological parameters.</p>		X		<p>-21 days from March to June 2015 of fieldwork were done.</p> <p>-Of a total of 21 bottlenose dolphins photo identified and catalogued, 50% were reidentifications.</p> <p>-30 groups of bottlenose dolphins feeding and travelling were reported. This year, calves were not reported and groups were smaller than last year (&lt;5 individuals). We are concerned about this because it supports the conclusion expressed by Vermeuler and Brager (2015) based on bottlenose dolphins from Bahía San Antonio, which also apply to RNE dolphins, that this is a small population and declining.</p> <p>-7 groups of Franciscana were recorded including 3 mother-calf groups.</p> <p>-4 stranded Franciscana (one complete and three incomplete) were found.</p> <p>-New genetic evidences gathered as part of this project highlight the genetic uniqueness of this population and the importance to protect this population. This is a joint project with the Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales "Bernardino Rivadavia" and uses samples from stranded individuals.</p> <p>- The first acoustic detector software of Franciscana was created (<a href="http://www.internationalwhalewhisperer.com/projects/">http://www.internationalwhalewhisperer.com/projects/</a>).</p> <p>-Samples for further analyses on genetics, heavy metals, histopathology and diet were collected and are still being analyzed.</p> <p>-This item was partially achieved - because fieldwork planned for December 2014 was postponed to June 2015 due to weather conditions (El Niño Phenomenon). In order to save cost we are collecting as much samples as possible to analyse altogether. We estimate that by the end of the year we would be providing results of these analysis.</p>
<p>Strengthen community stewardship and build local capacity, so local people</p>			X	<p>- Expanded the educational program, giving 21 lectures and reaching more than 2,000 students and teachers.</p> <p>- Each school received a printed material for students and teachers and a talk by the biologist M. Failla.</p> <p>- Under the slogan "Knowing our dolphins and learning to protect them", 600 students and teachers from 3 RNE</p>

<p>understand the value of abundant natural resources and are skilled to deliver the conservation work.</p>				<p>neighboring cities visited the beaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A total of 50 participants representing 2 institutions (from 8 neighboring towns) attended the environmental education workshop organized in conjunction with the Universidad Nacional de Río Negro and the Municipality of Viedma.</li> <li>- A workshop entitled "environmental education for our dolphins" attended by 31 future teachers was given at the Instituto de Formación Docente de Patagones (main teacher training center in the RNE region).</li> <li>- The Carmen de Patagones Council declared the educational and scientific activities of the Delfines del Río Negro project (Legal ruling #2232/2014) of public interest, which will help to include this program as part of its formal curricula in future years.</li> <li>- More than 100 reports on the project were made by local, regional and national media.</li> <li>-20,000 brochures called "Río Negro: Agua de delfines" were printed and distributed in schools, tourism agencies, local stores, public agencies and touristic spots in the neighboring towns of the RNE.</li> <li>-On the 29th November 2014 local institutions organized the second RNE beach cleaning.</li> </ul>
<p>Establish land based responsible whale watching using the best practices based on worldwide experience.</p>			X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two double-sided RNE dolphins' interpretations signs were installed in the Balneario El Cóndor to promote the conservation and responsible land-based dolphin watching.</li> <li>- A total of 70 participants from 10 institutions of 7 neighboring towns attended the responsible land-based whale watching workshop.</li> </ul>
<p>Advocate for the establishment of a Regional Nature Reserve through collaboration with Provincial and local authorities and in consensus with local stakeholders including the fishing community</p>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Municipality of Viedma introduced for the third year a ban on the use of gillnets in order to mitigate bycatch between December 2013 and March 2015 which coincides with the breeding season of Franciscana. The local fishermen agreed with this ban because it is not prohibiting fishing in those areas where Franciscana are not reported.</li> <li>- Meeting with authorities of the Municipality of Viedma, Municipality of Carmen de Patagones and the Río Negro province environmental authorities to advocate for the establishment of a Regional Nature Reserve. Authorities expressed interest to create the reserve.</li> </ul>

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

Due to unfavourable weather conditions (dominated by the phenomenon of El Niño with frequent rain and windstorms) the field work planned for December 2014 was held in late June 2015.

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

A)

3.1.) *Environmental education activities:* Several educational activities were developed including: talks in schools under the program "Delfines del Río Negro", organized visits by 6 schools to the Río Negro Estuary and working on capacity building (responsible land-based whale watching and environmental education workshops) as well training future teachers. This kind of activities allowed us to undertake environmental educational activities for all ages.

3.2.) *Responsible land-based dolphin watching:* Based on the research results and working together through workshops with the Municipality of Viedma and the Universidad Nacional de Río Negro, the process to establish responsible land-based dolphin watching began. The Municipality of Viedma expressed its interest to continue this process in order to better implement this activity through best practice (i.e. strengthen capacity building and elaborate the first draft code of conduct). The main conservation benefits for this activity are the involvement of the Community in the conservation of the RNE dolphins and their environment and also the economic benefit of this activity for the Community which also acts as an incentive to protect the dolphins.

3.3.) A) *Achievements in favour of the RNE conservation:* the Municipality of Viedma introduced for the third year a ban on the summer use of gillnets, between December 2013 and March 2015 at Balneario El Cóndor – the most popular local beach in the area (4 miles approx.). This regulation protects Franciscana dolphins during their breeding season and is a real step forward to help reducing bycatch, but has to be re-implemented every year. One preliminary way to measure the efficiency of the ban is looking at the number of stakes used to set the gillnet to the bottom. This year, stakes were removed from the gillnet free zone during summer time until April when they began to be replaced by recreational fishermen. We assume this will happen until December, when the ban on the use of gillnet would be introduced again. We would like to develop a way to improve monitoring gillnet use (section 5).

The ban on the use of gillnets is to prevent recreational fishermen – people who bought and set a gillnet for few days for fun and as a currently unregulated summer holiday activity - from causing real impact on dolphins and other wildlife. This is why we work with the whole community through an educational program and campaigns (e.g. clean beach). The ban does not prohibit fishing in areas where Franciscanas are not reported and does not affect the 5 local full-time fishermen. This decision was well received by the local press (i.e. regional newspaper as Noticias de la Costa, La Palabra, ADN noticias, El Día plus radio station), and the local public reflected this on the social networks.

B)

We held several meetings with authorities of the Municipality of Viedma, Municipality of Carmen de Patagones, the Río Negro province environmental authorities and local Communities' neighbourhood councils, to advocate for the establishment of a Regional Nature Reserve through collaboration with the Provincial government and in consensus with the local stakeholders. Governmental authorities expressed their interest to create the protected area which would comprise the estuary and nearby

areas. By now the authorities have received all the scientific evidence that show the importance to create a reserve there. The main conservation management recommendations focused on increase public awareness. In this regard we highlight:

- 1.) the importance to develop responsible land-based dolphin watching activity,
- 2.) that the local people understand how important it is to protect the RNE. As a concrete result of this action they made in El Pescadero a portal access to the RNE,
- 3.) Maintain the gillnet free zone in Summer time but always considering the need of local fishermen, which mean that they have access to fish in those areas where dolphins are not recorded.
- 4.) Organize every year the RNE beach cleaning

C)

To facilitate population assessments throughout the Franciscana dolphin distribution in a systematic way, we have created the first free access acoustic detector software in South America. This tool indicates presence or absence of calves and adults of Franciscana dolphins per second of recording. We hope that researchers of other regions use it and give us feedback to improve it and have a unified effort to assess population size and structure of this vulnerable species.

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

Our objective is to include all local communities in our educational and awareness programme, as the best way to reach the recreational fishermen, whose use of gillnets poses one of the greatest threats to dolphins and other species.

During 2014-2015 we expanded the educational program involving another 10 schools in 5 locations: Viedma, Balneario El Condor, General Roca, Carmen de Patagones and Stroeder. We taught 21 lectures reaching more than 2,000 students and teachers. Since the beginning of the educational program, we have reached more than 10,000 students and 1,000 teachers from 50 neighboring schools of RNE, teaching more than 150 lectures. For example, Students of the 1st and 2nd Years of Secondary School (CEM 18, Viedma) send a letter to the editors of a local newspaper requesting the creation of the RNE Protected Area, after visiting the dolphins area (<http://www.diariolapalabra.com.ar/noticia/74603/Cuidemos-las-Franciscanas>). Another primary school (El Juncal, from a small rural community nearby Viedma) made a video about the Franciscana dolphins (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXkOpRwCkbo&feature=youtu.be>) as part of their activity to protect dolphins. In addition, under the slogan "Knowing our dolphins and learning to protect them", 600 students and teachers from 3 RNE neighboring cities visited the beaches. 6 schools participated in 2014 of interpretative tours to the Balneario El Condor. We would like to highlight that some of the participants visited for the first time the sea because the dolphins and even though they live 30km from it.

The RNE was the focus of a series of training sessions organized by the Fundación Cethus, the National University of Río Negro (UNRN) and the Viedma Municipality. This training included the following subjects: management of natural heritage, responsible tourism development and environmental education. A total of 151 participants from 10 neighboring cities and 18 institutions (government agents, professionals, students and teachers linked to nature conservation and tourism)

participated in those series. Each workshop lasted a total of 14 hours, including both lectures and hands-on experience. The responsible tourism development and environmental education workshops were declared "provincial tourist interest" by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport of Río Negro which shows the importance local authorities are giving to the establishment of this new economical activity.

Responding to the request of Instituto de Formación Docente de Patagones (main teacher-training center in the RNE region), we gave a workshop entitled "Environmental education for our dolphins". This 4-hour workshop was held in September 2014 in the facilities of this institute. Biologist Mauricio Failla coordinated this event, using as a case study the Delfines del Río Negro Education Program. 31 future teachers attended this workshop.

## **5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

Yes, we would like to develop the 2nd phase of this project (2015-2016):

- 1) inviting more of the local Community to visit the beach and learn of the dolphins of the Río Negro Estuary (RNE) and their environment,
- 2) reinforcing the establishment of land-based dolphin watching,
- 3) continue working with all stakeholders, including the local fishermen, on the creation of the Regional Nature Reserve at regional and national level,
- 4) develop a project with the Universidad Nacional de Río Negro to monitor the number of gillnets being set each year,
- 5) continue research activities on Franciscana and Bottlenose dolphins.

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

The results of this project were shared with the local Community through 20,000 leaflets ("Río Negro: Agua de Delfines"), 2 double-sided interpretation signs and workshops. The project has been covered by 30 local, regional and national media (newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations), participating also at the documentary series "South Atlantic" (produced by Canal Encuentro and TV Pública Argentina). 200 students and teachers were filmed and interviewed while participating at the educational program. This program will be released at the end of 2015. As a result of this project, the local institutions of Balneario El Cóndor organized on the 29th November 2014 the second RNE beach cleaning campaign. The scientific aspect of the proposal were delivered at the 66a International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee (May-June 2015, San Diego, EE.UU.). In October 2015 it will be the VIII Workshop on Franciscana in Univil, Brazil where we shall be presenting the results of this project. There are also scientific papers in preparation to be submitted to peer review magazines. The information collected was used in two workshops hosted by the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Source and the Argentinean Coast Guard to declare new Marine Protected Areas and Sensitive Area respectively.

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

July 2014 - June 2015.

Considering a year round project help us to work on several aspects at different months and give us some flexibility in developing our activities. For example education activities were organized in conjunction with the schools and universities in order to fit in with their academic calendar. Due to unfavourable weather conditions (dominated by the phenomenon of El Niño with frequent rain and windstorms) the field work planned for December 2014 was held in late June 2015.

**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	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Stipend for the researcher's time spent on the project (2 researcher's/£629@10hr per week)	1258	1258	0	
A production of an interpretation board (IB) (£620 each)	620	620	0	
Design and printing of educational and information leaflets about Rio Negro dolphins (Size A5) (20,000x£0.0465)	930	930	0	
Communications (Internet & Phone) (£44per monthx6 months)	264	264	0	
Gasoline (350lt for our boat, beach survey & education) (1lt=£0.94)	330	330	0	
Hotel accommodation & meals for 3 researcher (£51.2 per dayx20days)	1024	1024	0	
Transportation Buenos Aires - Viedma (£207.5each x 2)	415	415	0	
Administration costs	159	159	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,000</b>	<b>6,000</b>	<b>0</b>	

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

A second phase of this project is necessary in order to strengthen those outcomes delivered during phase 1. For example it is necessary to go on working with the Community to strengthen the responsible land-based dolphin watching activities, the work done with regional and national authorities to create a Regional Protected Area and to consolidate the research developed on both species. Research will provide the best support for any decision adopted by the authorities to protect both species in the RNE.

## 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?

RSGF logo were used in leaflets, signs, poster promoting RNE beach cleaning campaign, in two workshops and RSG is also mentioned in every presentation on the results of this project and on the website of the acoustic detector software we developed. RSGF will also be acknowledged in the scientific articles published on this project in peer review journals.



Visits to the RNE beach with students and teachers of Viedma and Balneario El Cóndor.



Educative lectures at Viedma and Balneario El Cóndor schools.



Brochure "Río Negro: Agua de delfines".



Delivery of brochures to tourists in the beach (left) and at the Tourism Agency of Patagones (right).



Interpretation signs about Franciscana and bottlenosed dolphins in the Balneario el Cóndor.



National media documenting the Franciscana habitat and our scientific and educational program (left). Students and teachers of Balneario el Cóndor school during a beach cleaning (right).



Navigation in the RNE to conduct acoustic recordings and photo-identification (left); Two Franciscanas' observed from the boat (right).



Franciscana dolphin found stranded during a beach survey (left); Attendants at the environmental education workshop (right).



Maurio Failla dissertation at the environmental education workshop (left); Training future teachers of Instituto de Formación Docente de Patagones.



Participants of the responsible land-based whale watching workshop.