

The Rufford Small Grants Foundation

Final Report

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

We ask all grant recipients to complete a Final Report Form that helps us to gauge the success of our grant giving. 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. 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	Ramit Singal
Project title	Assessment of Faunal Diversity along the Laterite Landscapes of Karnataka's Coastal Plains and Conservation of the Same through Wide Scale Community Involvement
RSG reference	15102-1
Reporting period	August 2014 - August 2015
Amount of grant	£5150
Your email address	ramitsingal@gmail.com
Date of this report	29 August 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
Assessment of faunal biodiversity			Y	We documented a total of 20 mammal species, 21 snake species, 22 frog species and over 180 bird species in the laterite grassland-scrub complex. In the process, we also found what a frog species is possibly new to science as well as several other important sightings and observations.
Involving local communities and authorities		Y		Involvement amongst local village communities was low although they were a valuable source of information about the land's natural history and their perception of it. A total of 45 kids from the local communities were involved in sourcing information or joined us for our survey routes for various periods of time (ranging from a week to almost 6 months). We involved multiple college students from all backgrounds in job roles relevant to their careers. We were featured multiple times in local English dailies. Small ecotourism projects were initiated and the "Backyard Frogwalk" initiative received national publicity. Because of weekly walks and events, nature activities around Manipal now involve over three times as many participants as earlier. We failed to make significant impact with regards to a few of the local authorities mostly since I underestimated the amount of time each process takes within the current framework of such authorities. We hope to make inroads in this regard over the coming years.
Outreach and awareness			Y	We held awareness campaigns involving workshops, nature walks, small events in almost all local English-medium schools, some colleges and over 20 of the community/Kannada-medium schools, reaching out to over 2300 students in the process. We also held various presentations, film screenings, and open discussions etc. for non-student audience. Several posters and charts have been put up in schools, shops, public spaces, etc. Several home-to-home visits were made as well.

				<p>Social media was utilised to disseminate visual data and reached out to over 6000 people. Manipal University Press has agreed to publish two books about birds and frogs, with chapters emphasising the importance of laterite landscapes.</p>
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2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

We applied for permissions to survey several of the laterite grassland patches at night, but our applications were either rejected or upheld for fear of action by local religious groups as we had both males and females in the survey team. Unfortunately, this meant our efforts could not be uniform and survey methods had to be dumped. We continued as an all-male team.

Three of the 10 laterite patches that I surveyed for frogs in the initial months could not be surveyed further as the land was cleared and flattened for construction midway through and the bird surveys could not be conducted. We proceeded with procuring occupancy-based data but could not procure more valuable data (abundance, densities) as we failed to get a large enough sample size.

Rising prices of fuel and food items significantly pushed our budgets but I think we compromised accordingly in the best possible manner.

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

Baseline data - We now have very strong baseline data that should help anyone looking to work on laterite landscapes in the future as well as for us to use to build upon the efforts of the past year.

Local Ecotourism Projects and Capacity Building - We started conducting the first backyard conservation project in the form of the “Manipal Backyard Frogwalk” - an initiative that helps sustain school libraries and benefits local landowners financially. A small number of the youngsters have been trained to carry out surveys and lead tourists around. These efforts have received attention from local and national newspapers.

Outreach and Awareness - We have reached out to a large number of students and taught them about the importance of nature conservation with satisfactory results and responses. A number of schools, clubs and colleges are now very cooperative, and we are looking at building long-term partnerships and modules.

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

With our outreach programs, a number of students got their first exposure to the wildlife around them. An encouraging number expressed keen interest, had their questions answered and were taken for nature walks and took part in the assessment-based surveys.

The ecotourism model now implemented directly benefits landowners financially and funds school libraries. The project and related initiatives have also received nationwide attention and now, there is a steady stream of visitors from across the state and country.

We have six partner schools, one of which has even inculcated conservation education as part of its curriculum. We hold regular events and workshops in these schools with the help of the staff members and school heads.

We have built a network of nature lovers from across several towns in the region, with the aim of having resource people available in as many places as possible to hold nature workshops for local schools in local dialects and languages.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, indeed. This year’s outcome has been very positive, and it is imperative that we must continue the work and expand further in order to have sustained long-term impact. I have further plans for the future, which are elaborated on below.

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

We have a popular Facebook page and twitter handle for sharing the results through social media. Most of what we do is publicised on these pages already.

I have a series of workshops and open seminars lined up where we will be presenting our videos and our results. We have a lot of publication-worthy material that is in the process of being written down and will be sent in for review in due time.

We receive due support from the media and a few of the local dailies continually share and support our work. The videos and documentation from this year-long stint are still used in schools and colleges, with the upcoming books on birds and frogs adding to the list of publications.

We have already published “Mandookavani” - India’s first acoustic guide to the frogs of the country, in which a number of recordings that are used were taken during the project while on assessment surveys.

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

The project was run from 8th August 2014 to 28th August 2015, which is 20 days beyond what we expected this project to run through. Setting up took a week more than I expected and we were hampered by a gap in the monsoon in August 2014, which reduced amphibian activity and delayed our start by almost a fortnight.

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
Camera Traps	450	300	150	Two cameras were bought.

Video Camera, accessories, equipment	500	500	0	For shooting purposes, a DSLR+lens system was purchased.
Transportation	350	450	-100	Prices shot up for 6 months, distances further than expected.
Accommodation	450	600	-150	Most reasonable deal we could find for a period of a year with regards to distance from field sites and Manipal.
Field Assistant Salaries/Stipend	1200	1300	-100	Four assistants and me.
Sampling Equipment	200	300	-100	Rangefinder
Merchandise	500	400	100	A number of posters were printed and distributed, some books and a few t-shirts were printed and given to students.
Events and associated expenses	1500	1200	300	Didn't need to hire projector/screen equipment where facility was available.
Total	5150	5050	100	1 £ = INR 100

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

This year has taught me how to work more efficiently and we really stepped up our pace and impact in the later months. The following are the steps that I would like to see taken as soon as possible in the future:

- a) I am interested in reaching out to more people and places.
- b) We need to set up local clubs for continued monitoring and documentation of natural habitats in the local region.
- c) Setting up of customised local centres to address wildlife-based issues including conflict as well as act as an advisory committee involving a variety of stakeholders to comment on matters regarding the urban expansion on to laterite habitats.
- d) Build a self-sustaining ecotourism model that benefits everyone involved.
- e) Move forward with applications to accord some protection status to the landscape.

Lastly, it is important to expand our reach to nearby areas as well as incorporate a wider range of laterite-based habitats (grasslands, scrub, lowland forest), which as we have seen from our surveys, all rely on each other to continue being relevant to the overall ecosystem.

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

All posters and printed material carried the RSGF logo. These are spread out across the landscape in schools, wildlife departments, shops, etc. Twenty-five t-shirts were printed with the logo. All movies and images used in public screenings and presentations have the logo displayed prominently.

RSGF was mentioned in all media reports (over 20 locally and nationally), while the project was also promoted as an RSGF-funded work at the prestigious Zeiss Wildlife Conservation Awards 2015.

11. Any other comments?

I am extremely thankful to the Rufford Foundation for supporting the project and having faith in our abilities to achieve our vision. The response amongst the locals has mostly been very hopeful and heart-warming. I now have strong reasons to believe that this project has the capacity to become bigger and better and establish meaningful, long-term impact in the coming years. In a place where people and wildlife are found in plenty; and the country's natural landscapes and resources face a stern challenge, it is essential to persevere and constantly remind the citizens about their natural heritage and its importance.