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	Martina Küsters
Project title	Distribution and conservation status of the black-footed cat *Felis nigripes*
RSG reference	15120-2
Reporting period	June 2014 - May 2016
Amount of grant	£5986
Your email address	kusters.m@hotmail.com
Date of this report	11 June 2016

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
Collect historical and recent distribution records of the species (Namibia and South Africa)		X	X	This activity is ongoing and will never be fully achieved/ completed as records are still reported due to educational material in media and awareness through talks and posters. Partnerships with individual farmers have increased reports amongst farming community. Unfortunately most reports are of dead cats, i.e. killed by dogs, gin-traps, shot or roadkill.
Identify potential study areas in Namibia			X	Through the use of posters and media, regional areas have been identified in which the reporting and sighting rate is such that one can expect a stable, but low density population of black-footed cats.
Species awareness and education		X	X	It is a continuous activity and will remain the main objective of the study of black-footed cats in Namibia. This activity has achieved the best result which has enabled the above objectives to be met. The general public as well as the farming community have been crucial in gaining information on the distribution of the species in Namibia.
Collect data on conservation status		X		Through survey questionnaires and communications with farmers, it is clear that the black-footed cat is not well known, but not perceived as a threat to livestock, is rarely seen and occurs at low densities in southern Namibia. The main threats identified in Namibia are: 1)unintentional mortality through predator control measures (i.e. misidentified as a predator of livestock during night hunts; gin traps and cage traps often trap or kill bfcs, hunting dogs often

				kill bfcs, etc.); 2) removal of juveniles and adults from the wild to keep as pets; and 3) no legislative protection.
Tracking and monitoring radio-collared bfcs in South Africa			X	This has been a key activity during 2015-2016, although this proposed work (2nd RSG proposal) would only take up a fraction of the time frame, this activity has become a main activity. This is due to the opportunity for the project leader to obtain her MSc in Nature Conservation through ecological research on the home range, habitat use and prey density of black-footed cats on farmland. This information is crucial for the assessment of the species regionally and the role that private land owners play in the maintenance of habitat and conservation of this small feline predator.

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

As a result of collaboration with the Black-footed Cat Working Group since 2013, I was given the opportunity in 2015 to study the spatial ecology of free-ranging wild black-footed cats (BFC) in South Africa. This work was only partly proposed for in the 2014 RSG proposal. Due to the high number of BFCs fitted with telemetry collars during 2014 and 2015 and the requirements of the MSc (MTech in Nature Conservation) more time was spent on the farmland in South Africa to track and monitor the cats and to collect data on prey density. As a result, less time was spent in Namibia to survey farms. The funds were however used to for field work to collect important data on the black-footed cat.

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

- Distributional data collected during this study has provided knowledge on the species' occurrence in Namibia, data that was not available prior to this study. The conservation status of bfcs in Namibia can be classified as 'vulnerable'. Evidence suggests that population densities are low and may be vulnerable to local extinction, as sightings per area are rare, often only of dead cats and in some areas, BFCs have not been seen for more than 10 years.
- Improved knowledge of the species' ecological requirements on farmland (i.e. home range size, habitat use and prey density) needed to estimate population densities and assessments. This study also provides data on life span, cause-specific mortality and disease in wild populations, important demographic parameters to develop effective regional conservation strategies. I was invited to

be co-assessor for the 2015 *Felis nigripes* IUCN Red List assessment and the Namibian data has contributed to a better assessment.

- Most of the species' range falls within private commercial farmland. With this study, both efforts in Namibia and South Africa have shown that landowner assistance, support and co-operation is vital for the conservation of the black-footed cat regionally. Education can greatly improve the species conservation.

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

Generally farmers are very willing in assisting in research, especially if it's concerning a 'non-problem' animal. The efforts of this project have empowered farmers with more knowledge and skills to make better decisions when it comes to methods of predator control (i.e. use of poison etc.) in order to conserve biodiversity.

The Namibia University of Science and Technology has become involved in the study and one of their nature conservation students has assisted on the project, learning about black-footed cats, their ecology, our conservation efforts and has learned skills needed for field work. From this, the university is developing opportunities for students to work on smaller, lesser studied animals of arid Namibia.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes. The work in Namibia will continue with collecting distributional data, collect specimens for future DNA studies, collaboration with farmers and raising awareness through media, radio, educational material and posters.

The work in South Africa is part of a larger long-term study that is planned to continue indefinitely.

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

Locally, the data on the location records from Namibia are shared with the Ministry of Tourism in an annual progress report and in the extension application of the research permit.

A student from the Namibia University of Science and Technology has assisted on the project, giving her the chance to learn about black-footed cats, their ecology and field work associated with studying small nocturnal carnivores. From this she will pursue her own studies on black-footed cats and other smaller mammals.

The results of my Master's study will be submitted for publication in scientific papers (e.g. South African Journal of Wildlife Research, Journal of Ecology). Magazine articles will be written in a more informative manner to convey the results to a broader audience. Throughout the project's course, the progress/ results have been published in various platforms that are available to the general public (see below for details in point 10).

As member of the Black-footed Cat Working Group, all data collected in Namibia is shared with the group and contributes to the IUCN Red List assessment of Felis nigripes.

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's funds were used over two years as the project is still ongoing and will continue for an indefinite period.

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.

An exchange rate of 17.9 Sterling Pounds (£) to the Namibian Dollar (N$)

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Transport & fuel	2398	2474.4	+ 76.4	Fuel costs are high with the weakened SA Rand.
Stipend	2277.6	1977.6	- 300	Difference in funds (project leader's stipend) were used for equipment costs.
Equipment	670.40	974	+ 303.6	Equipment costs were higher than proposed. Equipment used for field work on wild black-footed cat research (prey density studies etc.)
Awareness material	400	320	- 80	Costs for awareness material were less than anticipated. A printer was bought to produce leaflets and information.
Telecommunication	240	240	0	All funds used for telecommunication purposes.
Total	5986	5986	0	

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

- Continue collecting distribution records of BFCs in Namibia through raising awareness and interacting with the farming community.
- Initiate the 'black-footed cat custodian' programme in Namibia, similar to the 'EWT Custodians' programme for various species in South Africa. This programme will work with farmers who voluntarily strive to conserve the black-footed cat and its habitat. The programme will recognize the farmer's commitment to

biodiversity conservation and farm according to the programme's criteria (i.e. practice eco- and predator-friendly control measures). They will receive a sign to display at their farm entrance and receive media coverage to acknowledge their efforts and dedication. It is hoped that this will promote the overall conservation awareness within the farming community.

- To collaborate and consult with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism, the Namibian environmental authority, on possible conservation action and to have the species declared a 'protected species' in Namibia.
- An illustrative children's book is planned to highlight the arid ecosystem and animals of the Nama-Karoo biome, with special emphasis on the black-footed cat and its role in the natural environment.

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 Rufford Foundation logo was used in all printed material, presentations and is also displayed on the field vehicle. The Rufford Foundation was also formally acknowledged at all presentations and printed media. For details of presentations and other material see below:

NEWSPAPERS

- Ein scheuer Räuber. *Allgemeine Zeitung* Tourism Edition March 2015. Windhoek, Namibia.
- Have you seen a black-footed cat? *Pelican Pouch* Newsletter December 2014. Swakopmund, Namibia.
- Kleine Räuber auf leisen Sohlen. *Allgemeine Zeitung* Tourismus Beilage November 2014. Windhoek, Namibia.
- Klein, selten und einzigartig – Die Schwarzfusskatze. 2014. *Allgemeine Zeitung* 12/09/2014. Windhoek, Namibia.
- Bewaringskundige besoek Karoo. *Die Echo*. 21/2/2014, Jaargang 95, no.6. De Aar, Northern Cape, South Africa.

NEWSLETTERS and MAGAZINES

- Sliwa, A., Wilson, B., Küsters, M., Tordiffe, A., Lawrenz, A. & Marais, S. 2016. Report on surveying, catching and monitoring Black-footed cats (Felis nigripes) on Benfontein Nature Reserve, Nuwejaarsfontein and Taaiboschpoort Farms in 2015. Unpublished report by the Black-footed Cat Working Group.
- Have you seen a black-footed cat? *Pelican Pouch* Newsletter December 2014. Swakopmund, Namibia.
- Küsters, M. 2014. Rare, small and elusive – why study the black-footed cat? *Roan News* October 2014. Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society, Windhoek, Namibia.

POSTERS

- Küsters, M. 2015. Het U 'n miershooptier gesien?
- Küsters, M. 2015. Have you seen a black-footed cat?

PRESENTATIONS

- Küsters, M. 2015. Spatial ecology and prey density of black-footed cats on farmland in the Karoo, South Africa. NEWS Annual General Meeting, 18 June 2015. Windhoek, Namibia.

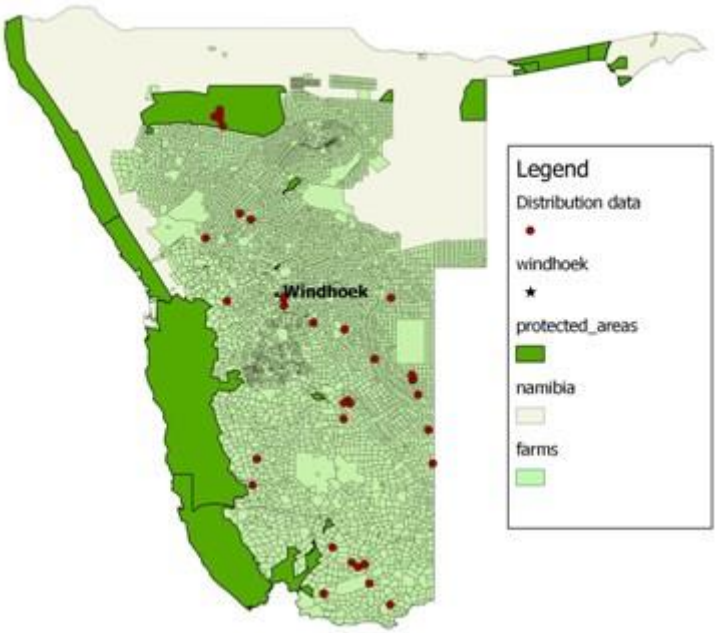
RADIO INTERVIEW

- 'Die miershooptier'. Recorded radio interview on Namibian Broadcasting Corporation Afrikaans Radio Service. 9 July 2015. Windhoek, Namibia.

11. Any other comments?

The Rufford Foundation has contributed significantly to collection of data on distribution and conservation status of *Felis nigripes* in Namibia, to research-based fieldwork to improve the knowledge of wild black-footed cat populations and to the longest running research project of any small wild felid species (by the Black-footed Cat Working Group). The data will allow better assessment of the species' conservation status regionally and estimate status of populations through research on ecological factors that determine distribution and persistence. The involvement of farmers has become one of the main outcomes of the project and will be crucial for the conservation of the unique black-footed cat.

I sincerely thank the Rufford Foundation for their support.



Distribution records of Felis nigripes in Namibia, mainly in farmland (MKusters)

The awareness and reporting poster in 'Afrikaans', a local language spoken by many farmers (MKusters).