

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	Darren Pietersen
Project title	Life history, conservation status and management for Yellow-breasted Pipits (<i>Anthus chloris</i>) and other bird communities in Moist Highland Grassland
RSG reference	16316-1
Reporting period	22 September 2014 – 21 June 2016
Amount of grant	£4991
Your email address	pietersen.darren@gmail.com
Date of this report	22 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
Determine the current extent of this species' distribution (Extent of Occurrence and Area of Occupancy)			√	We covered the entire known and predicted distribution of this species and recorded its presence and absence throughout. These results have been written up as a data chapter which has been sent to my co-workers for their comments, and should be submitted for publication soon.
Determine this species' entire population size		√		We have gathered all of the required data and are currently busy analysing these data. We expect to have fully achieved this objective by the end of 2016.
Determine the habitat requirements of this species		√		We have gathered all of the necessary data, but are still busy identifying the plant species that were sampled, after which we will analyse these data. We expect to have fully achieved this objective by the end of 2016.
Determine whether yellow-breasted pipits and other bird species can be used as indicators of Moist Highland Grassland ecological integrity		√		All of the data have been gathered and are currently being analysed. We expect to fully achieve this objective by the end of 2016.
Revision of the IUCN Conservation Status (Red List Status) of this species		√		We have been requested by BirdLife International to review the current global conservation status of this species. We are using the data that we have gathered during this project to inform our decisions and

				to improve the current assessment. As not all of our data have been analysed yet we cannot include all of it, although these new data that we have gathered will play a large part in guiding our review. The revised assessment is due to be submitted by 4 July 2016, and we believe that we will fully achieve this objective.
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2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

The largest unforeseen difficulty in the larger project, of which this funding application formed a component, was the unexpected difficulty we experienced in capturing this species. We therefore could not fit telemetry to as many individuals as originally intended to determine their ecology. Similarly, our efforts to monitor their nesting success were unsuccessful. These setbacks necessitated the addition of a large molecular component to the project, which has increased the project duration by one year. Student riots at South African Universities resulted in the field assistant not being able to start fieldwork as soon as intended during the second field season, which resulted in delays. We still managed to visit nearly as many sites as during the first season, but had hoped to visit a greater number of sites during the second season.

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

Our data suggest that the Area of Occupancy, Extent of Occurrence and total population size of this species may be substantially smaller than previously reported, and an initial review suggests that this species may be approaching the threshold for *Endangered* status on the IUCN Red List. After a more thorough review (underway), it may be found that this species does in fact meet the criteria for being listed as *Endangered*, which would require it being uplisted from its current status of *Vulnerable*.

Our data suggest that this species is only using a moderate portion of its fundamental niche, and we are exploring possible reasons for this. The most plausible explanations are incompatible grazing and fire regimens being employed on private land, which thereby renders these areas unsuitable for this species. Our results support earlier findings which were done at a local scale, that burning and fire regimens are a major limiting factor across this species' entire range.

Our data suggest that the yellow-breasted pipit may be more threatened than previously believed, and is in need of greater conservation effort. We believe that our results will guide conservation actions and future research in this regard.

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

Farmers were directly engaged to obtain permission to work on their land, while the project outline and objectives were also explained to them. We also explained to them how their management decisions, especially their choice of fire and burning regimens, affects this species. It is expected that additional farmer involvement will be implemented in the future to ensure the continued survival of this species.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

This project will continue until the end of 2016 to ensure that all data are analysed, written up and submitted for publication. The results of this work will be used to guide conservation actions required to protect this species, including engaging with farmers, provincial and national conservation authorities and other interested and affected parties to ensure the protection of this species. Additional studies to better understand the ecology of this species may be implemented if a more feasible way can be developed to successfully capture this species.

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

The results of this work will form a component of a PhD thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a PhD Zoology at the University of Pretoria. All results will also be compiled into manuscripts that will be submitted for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals. These data will additionally be used to revise the global conservation status (Global IUCN Red List Status) of this species, and will be incorporated into popular media by a major South African NGO (The Endangered Wildlife Trust), who will engage with farmers and local communities to improve the conservation status of this species. The results of this study were presented at a national ornithological conference, and will be presented on at least another two occasions.

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 used over a period of 18 months (two summer field seasons). The entire project was anticipated to run for 27 months, but due to difficulties

experienced in some ecological components of this study this has been increased to 39 months.

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
Fuel	1 333.33	1 649.82	-316.49	The over-expenditure on fuel is mainly due to a fuel price that rose more than expected during the project period, while we also travelled more than anticipated during this study.
Accommodation	1 464.00	1 214.06	+249.94	We managed to save on accommodation by making use of cheaper accommodation wherever available, and managing to stay free of charge with some of the farmers.
Subsistence	1 073.60	949.71	+123.89	We spent less on food than anticipated.
Implementation costs	1 120.00	1 120.00	0	These costs were agreed with the field assistant beforehand.
Sundry	0.00	82.63	-82.63	We did not budget for unforeseen expenditures, but made use of the savings on some of the other components to cover these.
Total	4 990.93	5 016.22	-25.29	The excess amount was covered from project funds from one of the other project components.

*We used an exchange rate of 1GBP = 18 ZAR, which was the exchange rate when the grant was received.

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

Completing the Global Conservation Assessment (Global IUCN Red List Assessment) is critical, as this will enable us to determine whether this species' conservation status really has deteriorated and will guide the conservation actions that will need to be implemented. Engaging with farmers and stakeholders is critical in order to find a way to develop and adopt land management strategies that are compatible with, or favour, this species. This is especially important considering that there are large tracts of apparently suitable habitat that aren't being used, and the most likely reason for this is unsuitable land management.

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 on a poster that was presented at a national ornithological conference, and will be used in at least two upcoming presentations regarding this research. The financial support of The Rufford Small Grants Fund has been verbally acknowledged on a number of occasions to persons and institutions while explaining the scope and aims of this research project, and will also be acknowledged in all publications emanating from this research project.

11. Any other comments?

I am truly grateful for the financial support that was extended to me by The Rufford Small Grant Fund, as this funding has enabled me to conduct meaningful and thorough research on this threatened bird species and will also enable me to successfully complete my PhD Zoology degree at the University of Pretoria. Thank you very much for your assistance.