

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	Aireona Bonnie Raschke
Project title	Caribbean Whale Watching: Local Support for Cetacean Conservation and Marine Tourism
RSG reference	17426-1
Reporting period	2014-2017
Amount of grant	5,000
Your email address	bjraschk@asu.edu
Date of this report	April 2017

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
Data on resident perceptions of whale watching (WW)				Fully achieved for Dominica and the Dominican Republic; Haiti field season cancelled
Vulnerable cetacean species				Literature review
Country characteristics associated with high WW revenue				Literature review and synthesis
Dissemination of results to relevant NGOs				In Progress; currently working on publishing a report with FUNGLODE in the Dominican Republic
Outreach				In Progress and Ongoing

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

(1) My initial plan was to do this study in Dominica, but as is apparent here, I ended up needing to shift my study site focus. While I did gather data in Dominica, I found that there was an overall lack of resources there for me. There is a research station on the island, but it was not appropriate for my study and didn't have any in-house scientists that could assist me. However, I knew that I would need a gatekeeper there, and although I had a lot of help from the Sperm Whale Project there, it turned out to be too difficult to find someone who could consistently aid me in attaining interviewees. At the same time, I had my partnerships in Haiti (although that became problematic, see below) and the Dominican Republic. My final project has interviews in both Dominica and the Dominican Republic, but Rufford's funding ended up primarily supporting my work in the Dominican Republic. This facilitation was integral to my success there, however, and allowed me to visit more field sites and spend more time in the field.

(2) The primary difficulty that I faced during this project was in dealing with the Haiti Ocean Project (HOP), for the component of my research that involved whale watching in Haiti. Essentially, this is the only group carrying out whale watching in Haiti, and thus my ability to gather information on local perceptions of whale watching in the community depended on this group. Their director was extremely enthusiastic about working with me, but ended up cancelling two field seasons first due to injury and then due to the disorganization of HOP. After the first failed attempt at a Haiti field season, I had tried to tackle this problem by rescheduling multiple times (once in the winter and once in the summer), but after she cancelled

on me for the summer (only 2 weeks out from the agreed upon start-date), I determined that she was not a viable partner for my research. For safety reasons, I also determined that I could not travel to Haiti by myself to carry out my interviews.

(3) The other difficulty that I encountered in the field was the sense that I got that local people were telling me what I wanted to hear, rather than the whole truth, due to the fact that I was an outsider. I should have been more prepared for this, but it was hard to fully conceptualise until I had experienced it. Luckily, I did have a gatekeeper in the field in both Dominica (temporary, as explained above) and the Dominican Republic to help with this to some extent, but some of my interviews had to be done on my own, so this solution didn't always work.

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

(1) Data on resident perceptions of whale watching (WW) and associated cetacean conservation. This information is extremely sparse in the WW research literature, but it is essential to our understanding of the role that WW plays in local communities, as well as the industry's ability to enhance conservation efforts. My research showed that local people were very positive about WW, and they appeared to be far more aware of the industry's benefits to them, rather than its costs. However, a key area of concern that was identified was in the realm of social conflict. Issues of corruption and distrust of the government were prevalent in Dominican Republic interviews, with both local people and WW professionals. In both study locations, conflict between WW operators undermined protective regulations/guidelines for cetaceans. It is clear that while WW is well received in these Caribbean communities, social cooperation is necessary for management that will not endanger the target cetaceans, and support the long-term viability of the industry.

(2) Data from my literature review and synthesis of the differing vulnerability of Caribbean cetaceans showed that there are a variety of different reasons for vulnerability among different target species. This strongly illustrates the need for species-specific regulations/guidelines, which are rare in the Caribbean region. However, such protections would help mitigate specific risks that each individual species faces in regards to the whale watching industry. This analysis also showed that some non-target species were vulnerable to the indirect, negative impacts of whale watching, which suggests management needs to address this issue, and that much more research on this problem is needed in the field.

(3) My analysis of regional whale watching economic data shows that country characteristics do have an impact on the economic success of this ecotourism industry in different locations. This indicates that not all countries can hope for the same success, and in particular, there are different deterministic characteristics for countries with lower levels of overall development, than those Caribbean countries with more development and stronger economies. Whale watch operations that are being developed in countries with low potential for economic success due to country characteristics should seek to address as many issues identified by this analysis in order to improve their chance of attaining economic viability.

Furthermore, this analysis may help identify areas in which whale watching should NOT be developed, so that cetaceans can maintain habitats without whale watching harassment (especially in cases where human well-being is unlikely to see a considerable improvement due to the introduction of the industry).

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

Local communities were central to my primary question concerning resident perceptions of whale watching in the community. They were the source of my data for this part of my research, as I interviewed both whale watching professionals and people that lived in whale watching areas but didn't work in the industry. I also chose the qualitative approach for my social methods, because I wanted to capture details about local perceptions without too much of my own bias about what those perceptions might be.

The results of this part of my research are now in the process of being turned into a report format for dissemination in the Dominican Republic by FUNGLODE, and much of my focus there is on the needs of the local community in terms of the whale watching industry. For instance, calling for the government to increase transparency and educational opportunities for local people, as well as increase support for a local NGO in Samaná (CEBSE), which will support human capacity building in the community. Although it is uncertain that the Dominican government will respond to these suggestions, I will also be sharing my results via conferences and through these I hope to reach out to NGOs and funding organisations that might be able to offer CEBSE increased financial support so that it can continue to serve the Samaná community. I have also tried to give further power to the voice of people in the community with concerns about the impact of whale watching on the whales, as well as conflicts between whale watch operators and government officials, which is detrimental to the sustainability of the industry, but also to the well-being of the professionals involved in this struggle.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

In an ideal world, I would like to continue this work as a professor and researcher. I believe that whale watching can serve as an important case study for the use of ecotourism as a conservation tool. There is still much more to be learned about the social implications of whale watching in the communities of developing countries, which is then integral to whale watching's ability to enhance protections for cetaceans around the world. On a more expansive level, I am interested in researching ecotourism in its many forms to examine its ability to enhance the well-being of communities in developing countries, while also supporting biodiversity conservation. There is an on-going debate about whether or not ecotourism can accomplish its goals (and what constitutes ecotourism), but I think it is now key to examine how it can be improved. It already exists in the world, it already appeals to tourists and investors alike, so in the spirit of conservation biology (often considered a triage discipline), I strongly believe that it is time to move past debating ecotourism's

ability to serve as a conservation and human development tool, and move on to strategizing about how we can make this happen.

However, the reality of academia is that there are not many job opportunities. So, in wanting to balance my needs as a fulfilled person, and those of my career, I am also interested in working for a conservation NGO or the government as a researcher, but this will mean that I have less say over what I carry out research on. Despite this, I believe that my research here will always inform my emphasis on local experiences, and focus on improving conservation strategies that attempt to balance human and environmental needs.

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

There are many academic avenues for sharing my work with other professionals, and I plan on utilising all of them. I have already attended one conference with my early results from the field, and have applied for several other conferences concerning ecotourism and marine mammal conservation. I will also be working on publishing my work in academic journals as soon as my final analyses have been completed.

In terms of sharing my results with the communities that I worked with, I have partnered with NGOs and researchers to aid in this process. FUNGLODE in the Dominican Republic is currently in the process of publishing my social results as a report, and there are also plans for me to travel back to the Dominican Republic with them in order to present. In Dominica, I have maintained relations with the primary sperm whale researcher there, who has close relations with all the whale watching operators of the country. Thus, when my final analyses have been completed, I plan on sharing those results with him and working with him to insure that the industry and community benefits from that.

Finally, I have been and continue to be involved with outreach in my day-to-day life, and my research is often relevant in such discussions. Some of the outreach activities that I have been involved with include serving as a speaker for public/free showings of scientific documentaries, serving as a panellist for scientific panels at Phoenix Comicon, and speaking to young school children about STEM careers with the Greenville Zoo.

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

Spring-Summer 2017: Finally analyses completed

Spring-Summer 2016: Field season in the Dominican Republic; planned and cancelled field season in Haiti**

Winter 2015: Planned field season in Haiti (cancelled)

Summer 2015: Planned field season in Haiti (cancelled)

Spring 2015: Field season in Dominica

2014-2015: Rufford Small Grant obtained

The Rufford Small Grant was initially planned to be utilized in the Spring and Summer of 2015. My field season in Dominica was successful, however, I was forced to cancel my research in Haiti that season due to a car accident that the head of the Haiti Ocean Project suffered that year. At this time, I coordinated with Rufford in order to plan on using the grant funds for a new Haitian field season in the summer of 2016, with the assurance of the Haiti Ocean Project that they would be ready for me then. Thus, the time period for the use of the grant was expanded beyond the one year that it was planned for it to be used in.

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
Airfare	700	800	+100	Spring and summer field seasons
Rent	600	0	-600	Covered by FUNGLODE
Per Diem Food	1600	1600	0	
Utilities	400	0	-400	Covered by FUNGLODE
Internet	200	0	-200	Covered by FUNGLODE
Medical Insurance	200	200	0	
Car Rental	600	1000	+400	Cost in the DR; travel to different sites.
Insurance	30	700	+670	Collisions in the DR are common, so insurance is costly.
Car Tax	30	0	-30	Included in rental cost.
Gas/Petrol	300	500	+200	More travel was done in the DR than was planned for Dominica.
Printing Costs	200	0	-200	Covered by ASU and FUNGLODE
Interviewing Equipment	100	100	0	
Translations		100	+100	Didn't account for this when planning for Dominica where English is the official language.
Total	4960	5000		

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

In the immediate future, I am focusing on writing about my analyses, and getting my research out. I am working very closely with my PhD chair as well as my committee

members to make sure that my interpretation of my results is clear and scholarly. I am also working with my advisor in the Dominican Republic to insure that my interviews have been properly interpreted and described. This step is coming close to completion, and that means that I will soon be able to simply focus on writing and sharing my results. This includes writing my dissertation, drafting up papers and working on getting them published, and presenting at conferences. There are also plans in the works to return to the Dominican Republic to share my results, and I will be presenting at Phoenix Comicon with the science panels this May as well.

In the long term, I am hoping that this work will help me to remain in the science field as a researcher, preferably in the academic field, but perhaps in the non-profit or government world. With such a position, I hope to also aid in capacity building in the Caribbean and other developing regions, because my study here has made it clear to me that this is essential to community development and conservation outcomes.

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?

Rufford's logo was used on my poster when I presented at the Graduate Tourism conference in Houston, TX in January 2017. I have also utilised the logo while sharing my research with USAID in relation to the Global Scholars program. So, Rufford has received publicity in both these cases, as well as through articles that I have written for Rufford and for my Centre about my research and the conference that I attended.

I will continue to credit Rufford when I present this research, as well as provide updates on the use and dissemination of this project.

11. Any other comments?

I would like to just express my deepest gratitude towards the Rufford Foundation for supporting my research. Since I applied, I have received other support for different aspects of the work that I have been doing, but Rufford was the first relatively big grant (for a grad student), that I received. The Rufford Foundation took a chance on me, and while there were difficulties due to the Haiti Ocean Project's mismanagement of my field seasons, I believe that my field work has provided some of the most important data for my project overall. Your investment in me has paid off, and I hope that it continues to pay off as I work on sharing my research and carrying my knowledge forward into my career. I am so thankful to you guys.

I would also like to thank Jane for helping me and being so patient with all of my emails. She has helped me every step of the way, and she has been wonderful to work with.