

Project Update: July 2016

The research that the Rufford Foundation has supported has several components, which investigate different aspects of the whale watching industry in the Caribbean. These include looking at the different vulnerabilities of Caribbean cetacean species to the negative impacts of whale watching, country characteristics that impact whale watching direct expenditures, and resident perceptions of the whale watching industry. Specifically, the grant money from Rufford is being used to support a field season in the Caribbean to gather data on resident perceptions. This was planned for the Dominican Republic and Haiti, with supplementary data from a previous research trip to Dominica. These three countries were chosen due to their differing levels of whale watching development, with the Dominican Republic having a large whale watching industry, Dominica a smaller but expanding industry, and Haiti having an NGO (The Haiti Ocean Project) that is working on beginning whale watching in the country.

This interim report will cover the current success of my field season in the Dominican Republic, and the continuing failure in Haiti due to circumstances outside of my control, as discussed in detail below.

For the Dominican Republic, I have attained a research fellowship with the Fundacion Global Democracia Desarrollo (FUNGLODE), which provides me with a mentor in the country with expertise in the area of research that I am carrying out. Rufford's funding has been integral in allowing me to take advantage of this fellowship, as FUNGLODE only supports specific aspects of the field season, which would not have allowed me to afford to stay in the country for an entire summer. However, with this support from Rufford and FUNGLODE I have been able to be very productive in gathering data for the whale watching industry here. In Spring 2015, I was able to travel to Samaná for the end of the whale watching season. While there, I worked with my mentor to gather data from the large whale watching operators of Samaná village as well as smaller operators in Carenero. More importantly, I interviewed locals in Samaná village, Caye Levantado, and Las Galeras about the industry. Finally, during this time I was also able to interview key government figures in the Ministry of Environment, as well as the Ministry of Tourism, and the local NGO, CEBSE. For the summer, I am working on interviewing people in the town of Bayahibe where dolphins are opportunistically watched, as well as finishing off the interview process with key figures in Santo Domingo.

In terms of my fieldwork in Haiti, I will honestly say that I have been met with very disappointing and frustrating results that are out of my control, and which have prevented me from working there. Essentially, the Haiti Ocean Project, the only NGO working on starting whale watching in Haiti is key to my ability to gather relevant data in Haiti. Furthermore, due to the small size and structure of the NGO I require the presence of the NGO director to begin my work as there is no one else in the NGO that can similarly support me in the early stages of my presence there. This director was in an accident in 2015 that has caused her to cancel my field season last minute for 2 years in a row. She has been too optimistic about her ability to return to Haiti after this accident, and has been entirely certain of the field season in both 2015 and 2016 until mere days before I was supposed to leave. Unfortunately, this means that money was lost in the preparation process for these field seasons, specifically in terms of cancelled flights and interview translations. Most disappointingly, this means that I cannot include data on Haiti in my research, and I believe that this was a very interesting aspect of this resident perception research.

Left to right: Bayahibe; Las Galeras, Roseau & Samana.

