



## The Rufford Small Grants Foundation Final Report

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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](mailto:jane@rufford.org).

Thank you for your help.

**Josh Cole, Grants Director**

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Grant Recipient Details	
Your name	Christopher Justin Proctor
Project title	<i>Securing the longevity of the Golden Swallow Project in the Dominican Republic by means of integration with the Caribbean Birding Trail in Parque Valle Nuevo</i>
RSG reference	17956-2
Reporting period	September 2015 – August 2016
Amount of grant	£4723
Your email address	c.justin.proctor@gmail.com
Date of this report	July 28 <sup>th</sup> , 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
1. Interpretive Guide Training Workshop			x	6 days, 24 participants extremely well received
2. Integration of GOSW Project with CBT		x		Collaboration has grown considerably, although instability at joint study site (Parque Valle Nuevo) caused some projects to be relocated, and thus subsequently delayed.
3. Scholarship Programme			x	5 week scholarship, one Dominican student, one Haitian student, one artist, a fantastic
4. Side projects			x	2016 field season monitoring GOSW nest boxes was a success, as have been the beginning stages of a nest dissection project in collaboration with the Museum of Natural History in Santo Domingo

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

Since beginning our work with golden swallows in Parque Valle Nuevo, DR in 2012, there has been the formidable challenge of integrating the project with all interested local organisations while at the same time maintaining neutrality in ongoing political and geographic contention between the national park's stakeholders. Parque Nacional Juan Bautista Pérez Rancier, locally referred to as Parque Valle Nuevo, is approximately 910 km<sup>2</sup> in size and situated in the heart of Hispaniola's highest and most extensive mountain chain, La Cordillera Central. The park was decreed a protected area under the category of Scientific Reserve in 1983 and in 1996 became a national park overseen by the Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales of the Dominican Republic government and co-managed by Fundación Propagas. However, despite national park status, Valle Nuevo is still home to several small farming communities that have been on those lands for generations. Amongst those families, one in particular has grown large enough to become a considerable stakeholder in the north end of the



national park. Tension between this family (and the interests of the communities they represent) and Fundación Propagas (representing the laws of the park) [note that the Ministry of Nature is extremely laissez-faire in this part of the country] has continued to escalate over the past decade. Between 2012 and 2014, we spent considerable time and effort promoting the ideology that the Golden Swallow Project (and thus science in general) could only move forward through open collaboration. Unfortunately, despite being able to keep the peace around the Golden Swallow Project for three consecutive field seasons, over the past year stakeholders from all sides (a third foundation, Fundación Moscoso Puello, came into the scene as well) have become increasingly more aggressive in “claiming their own territories” within the park. Seeing as the tangible piece of the Golden Swallow Project – 200 nest boxes – are spread across 20 km of park, each group is attempting to take ownership over nest boxes that fall within their unsubstantiated territories. With help from the Ministry of Nature, we have attempted (many times) to mitigate the situation in a variety of ways, however, the rivalry between stakeholders that has grown up and around the periphery of the Golden Swallow Project has reached an uncomfortably toxic level. Multiple collaborators of the Golden Swallow Project – located in other regions of the Dominican Republic – have urged us to step out of the national park until the escalating situation can be resolved. Concurrently, BirdsCaribbean – by far the most widespread and influential avian NGO in the Caribbean, and also a close partner with the Golden Swallow Project – was pushed out of Valle Nuevo because of their open collaboration policy that found them partnering with opposing stakeholders. Point in case, Parque Valle Nuevo has reached a level of instability to the point that scientific investigation cannot properly function.

Our physical withdrawal from Parque Valle Nuevo (for the time being) has been a slow and calculated one so as to ensure that the longevity of the nest box monitoring programme was secured. After considerable difficulty, we have finally been able to reach a compromise with local stakeholders as to who will oversee different geographic regions containing nest boxes. We are excited to say that nest boxes are being cared for and maintained, and the largest known breeding site for these endemic, endangered swallows carries on. All data continues to be recorded in the same format and is funneled back to the Golden Swallow Project to be compiled and analysed.

After much deliberation and careful planning, BirdsCaribbean has decided to relocate their efforts to the Ebano Verde Scientific Reserve, located about 35 km to the north. Seeing as golden swallows have been observed breeding within the reserve (as have other aerial insectivores), and local partners there are extremely neutral and supportive, we will likely shift any long-term, future studies to Ebano Verde until things calm down in Valle Nuevo.



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

Despite the aforementioned situation, we were able to fully accomplish the majority of our objectives in the 2015-2016 time period.

#### 1. *Interpretive Guide Training Workshop*

In collaboration with BirdsCaribbean (BC) and the [Caribbean Birding Trail](#) (CBT), we executed a 6-day training workshop that focused on: (a) bird identification and being a bird guide, (b) environmental interpretation and (c) the conservation imperative of birds and their habitat.

The workshop attracted 24 participants (23 Dominicans, one Haitian) from a variety of backgrounds, including tour guides, environmental educators, hotel managers and park rangers.

With so few avenues available to Hispaniolans interested in pursuing careers in sustainable ecotourism, workshops of this duration and calibre are extremely important and sought after. Attendees not only walked away from the workshop with a better understanding and connection with their island's avifauna, they were better equipped with many of the tools they would need in order to better integrate birdwatching and ornithology into their current professions as well as their future career goals.

We recognise that many of the active avian field researchers around Hispaniola today got their start through similar workshops held by NGOs in the past, and so we were excited to help in continuing to grow those numbers.



## ***2. Integration of GOSW Project with the Caribbean Birding Trail***

The underlying mission of the Caribbean Birding Trail – essentially to connect people and their livelihoods with birds in a way that both sides benefit – is one that not only resonates strongly with the original framework of the Golden Swallow Project, but also helps to orient the future direction of the project.

The Golden Swallow Project is fortunate in that our avian species of study is a secondary cavity nester capable of nesting in artificial nest boxes. This behaviour opens up a tremendous amount of tangible outreach possibilities. Most nesting locations for forest-dwelling bird species are fairly cryptic and hard to find, thus making it difficult to develop a methodology for connecting people with that species. The nest boxes that golden swallows use to raise their offspring, however, not only serve as barriers against predation by invasive mammals as well as nesting real estate where there otherwise is a paucity, they are an obvious visual and physical tool for sparking a connection between people and the natural world. This formula for teaching stewardship was very positively received by the Caribbean Birding Trail, who has encouraged us to continue growing our nest box network – and subsequent education programmes – at all of the applicable locations that they both have worked and plan to work.



As the CBT and BirdsCaribbean begin to plan a series of capacity building events in Ebano Verde, the Golden Swallow Project plans to be an integral part of that effort from the very beginning.

### 3. *Scholarship Programme*

We are particularly excited to share with the Rufford Foundation highlights of our summer 2016 scholarship programme. In January 2016, we advertised two scholarships that would fully fund Dominican or Haitian students to conduct research of their own design related to the natural history and breeding biology of golden swallows for 1 month in Parque Valle Nuevo. After receiving a healthy handful of applications (with project proposals included), we chose Yulissa Reyes (DR) and Frantz Valminord (Haiti) as winners of the scholarship.

We organised a 3-day training workshop in Santo Domingo in late May 2016, during which Yulissa and Frantz were introduced to the discipline of ornithology. They met and interacted with experienced local ornithologists, while also having the chance to network with members of different NGOs, foundations, museums and universities. With guidance from the entire Golden Swallow Project team, Yulissa and Frantz were given the opportunity to design their own study related to golden swallows. They decided to investigate the topic of natural cavity availability and how it relates to forest type, climate, Hispaniolan woodpecker distribution, and many other ecological variables connected to the high-altitude pine forests of Hispaniola.

Yulissa and Frantz spent approximately 1 month undertaking their investigation in Parque Valle Nuevo. Throughout their time there, they were guided by Andrea Thomen, staff from the national park and other local collaborators. Most importantly, they were given considerable independence in order to develop the project themselves. Beyond the research objectives, the goal of the project was to begin developing two young students into capable field biologists. At the end of their fieldwork, both students participated in a 2-day debrief workshop back in Santo Domingo in order to prepare them for how to analyse their data and begin writing up their results.

Additionally, we had strong interest from a local artist named Rada Martinez, who we were able to bring up to Parque Valle Nuevo for a 2-week stint to work on a series of illustrations that will be used as visuals for educational outreach.



As of the date of the submission of this report, Yulissa and Frantz are working on the second draft of the manuscript they are writing together that speaks to the fieldwork they conducted in Parque Valle Nuevo. Both have grown considerably as young scientists and are actively seeking other intern positions that are currently available through other avian projects underway in Hispaniola. Rada has produced seven illustrations of golden swallows that capture many details of the morphology and natural history of the species, including subtle plumage differences between adult males and females, nestling stages of development, and flight behaviours.

#### 4. *Side projects*

The 2016 golden swallow breeding season was overseen by two local stakeholders, Fundación Propagas and Fundación Jose Delio Guzman. Both were responsible for recording data at 2-week intervals over the 3-month breeding season at pre-established regions of nest boxes. Data is contiguous with previous data sets that have been collected since 2012.

In collaboration with the Museum of Natural History in Santo Domingo and Fundación Propagas, several Dominican students have been mentored in leading a lab-based project focused on dissecting golden swallow nest contents. The students pulled 100+ old golden swallow nests from nest boxes at the end of the 2015 breeding season and are currently identifying and quantifying all of the different materials that the swallows use to construct their nests. The students are also looking for any signs of parasites. This project has been a great opportunity for the Museum of Natural History to highlight the golden swallow to their visitors.



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

Members of El Castillo, the closest located community to our network of nest boxes, are often involved with our work. School children join us for biology lessons *in situ* as we conduct our monitoring programmes, adults from the community help care for nest boxes, and teachers from the community that have been trained in several facets of the Golden Swallow Project assist in training our new field crews and scholarship winners. Local national park guards as well as military personnel act as guides for our field crews and scholarship winners throughout the remote expanses of the park. Community involvement has been a core element of the Golden Swallow Project since its beginning in 2012.

**5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

Absolutely. As the monitoring programme in Parque Valle Nuevo is now overseen by local stakeholders, the Golden Swallow Project is able to expand into other montane regions of Hispaniola, where we are confident that the scientific methodologies as well as the educational outreach models that we've refined in Valle Nuevo will allow us to continue using the golden swallows as a link between community and environmental stewardship. [See Question 9]

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

Our work and results are disseminated in a variety of ways. Work that is publishable is routed through the Journal of Caribbean Ornithology that is free, open source, and widely known throughout the Caribbean. Project reports and educational outreach accomplishments will be summarized in articles published online through BirdsCaribbean and through one of the principle newspapers in Santo Domingo, entitled Listin Diario.

**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 Second Rufford Small Grant was used over the course of about 11 months, which closely holds true to the originally proposed timeline.

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.

\* All prices are in British Pounds (£)

Item	Budgeted Amount*	Actual Amount*	Difference	Comments
1-month, all-inclusive scholarships for two students + 2-week visit for artist	756	4500	3744	Expenses included transportation, accommodation, food, binoculars, field guides,
Training Workshop supplies, transportation	441	400	41	Expenses included
Nest dissection project	0	55	55	Expenses included
Observation tower and interpretive signage	4157	0	4157	Observation tower and interpretive signage were originally intended to be integrated with the Caribbean Birding Trail, however due to instability in Parque Valle Nuevo, funds were re-allocated towards enhancing the scholarship program

Total monies spent: £4955

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

In the Spring 2015, I had the opportunity to lead a 2-month expedition searching the last, unsurveyed regions of Jamaica for the critically endangered Jamaican golden swallow. Although very little outreach was originally built into the expedition proposal, after only a week on the ground in Jamaica we realised that to be a mistake. Local interest in our work was pouring in from all directions. Jamaicans really wanted to be involved. Additionally, we quickly learned that a lot of the historical knowledge on golden swallows – often tucked away in the memories of Jamaican families – was just



as valuable for our search efforts as any of the contemporary data on golden swallows that we were bringing from Hispaniola. Although the fieldwork was overall a success, it would have benefited greatly had we been able to budget the time and money to integrate more local Jamaicans into the search efforts.

With that in mind, and knowing that the most critical data we lack for Hispaniolan golden swallows involves their unknown island-wide breeding distribution (we have very little knowledge of where they are naturally nesting and in what abundance), I believe the next big step for the Golden Swallow Project is to organise a comprehensive census of the high-altitude pine forests across Hispaniola during the golden swallow breeding season. Most importantly, this census will adopt a pace and methodology that allows us to incorporate local students and researchers into the census efforts along the way. As we move across the island, we will coordinate students to join our team for stints of time that allow us to train them in the methods of avian surveys while educating them about their endangered, endemic avifauna. The project will be carried out as a collective, as many students from different parts of the island become part of a bigger team setting out to accomplish a collaborative goal. We have a lot of great ideas as to how the effort can be carried out, and I look forward to digging into them in more detail in my application for a Rufford Booster Grant that I aim to submit to the Rufford Committee in the coming month.

**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?**

Most definitely. The RSGF received recognition through the Golden Swallow Project at a variety of venues, including the 2015 BirdsCaribbean Conference in Kingston, Jamaica and at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology during my Masters Defense. The Rufford Foundation is recognised in my Masters Thesis, as well as in five publications that are stemming from that work (two are reviewed, accepted, and awaiting publication; two others are in review; one is in preparation).

I have been very active in positively promoting the RSGF to colleagues which whom I've felt were conducting work that strongly represented the Rufford mission. Two students that I have been actively mentoring that applied for and received RSGF support include Maya Wilson (Virginia Tech) and Spencer Schubert (Old Dominion).

**11. Any other comments?**

The support of the Rufford Foundation has allowed the Golden Swallow Project to grow itself from a Masters Thesis project into a widely recognised conservation project in the Caribbean. With the help of Rufford, we have been able to: (1) secure the longevity of data collection on the annual breeding success of an endangered bird, (2) help burgeoning science students gain an important foothold into the professional world of ornithology, (3) use birds to promote a sense of environmental stewardship to great



numbers of people, (4) help integrate Hispaniola's avifauna into the Caribbean Birding Trail, and (5) network researchers from not only different Caribbean Islands, but from across the Western Hemisphere as well. I strongly feel that our momentum is high and our future endeavors will continue to have an even greater impact at the interface between science, conservation and community. Thank you.