

The Rufford Small Grants Foundation

Final Report

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. 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 | Adrián B. Azpiroz |
| Project title | Pampas meadowlark: using a flagship species to promote conservation of the South American grasslands |
| RSG reference | 41.05.08 |
| Reporting period | September 2008 - April 2010 |
| Amount of grant | £5980 |
| Your email address | avesuru_1999@yahoo.com |
| Date of this report | 8 April 2010 |

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 |
|---|--------------|--------------------|----------------|--|
| OBJECTIVE 1. Gather critical information on biology of pampas meadowlark | | | X | Key information on population numbers, breeding biology and habitat requirements was obtained. |
| Activity 1A. Establish the total area of occupancy of pampas meadowlark | | | X | A thorough search of pampas meadowlark breeding colonies revealed an area of occupancy of < 30 km ² and an extent of occurrence of ca. 160 km ² . |
| Activity 1B. Determine pampas meadowlark population size and productivity | | | X | Simultaneous counts at breeding colonies and recordings of breeding males resulted in an estimated size range of 250-300 mature individuals for the whole Uruguayan population. |
| Activity 1Bi. Obtain high-quality song recordings of breeding males | | | X | More than 100 males were recorded. These may represent > 75% of the whole adult male population. |
| Activity 1Bii. Band fledglings at the end of the breeding season | | | X | More than 25 fledglings were coloured banded. |
| OBJECTIVE 2. Use pampas meadowlark as a flagship species to promote grassland conservation in the region | | | X | More than 10 talks and presentations on pampas meadowlark ecology and grassland conservation were delivered. Three more presentations will be delivered in April 2010 (different from the ones mentioned below). |
| Activity 2Ai. Visit seven rural schools to deliver talks | | X | | Because of floods only three local schools could be visited. Visits to three additional schools have been rescheduled for April 2010. |
| Activity 2Aii. Deliver talks to local communities and NGOs | | | X | Apart from presentations at schools, two talks were given to local people. One additional presentation will be delivered in Salto City in April 2010. |
| Activity 2B. Meet government officials to inform them about the project's results | | | X | Government officials from the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture were informed of the results of the project. Conservation alternatives for the study area were discussed. |
| Activity 2C. Prepare a brochure to distribute during public awareness activities | | X | | Funds to print a new brochure were not enough (these were not provided by Rufford SGF). Copies of another brochure (available from a previous related project) were distributed among with posters of grassland birds. Also, more than 100 large size colour photos of grassland birds were printed and distributed among children at schools. |

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

The only unforeseen difficulties were related to the unusual rainy weather during the second field season and forced us to redirect our research efforts. During the 2008 breeding season the most

time-consuming activity was nest searching and monitoring. Because of the effects of heavy rain many pampas meadowlark breeding pairs did not attempt to nest in 2009. This resulted in substantial free time to conduct other activities. We opted for territory mapping. During the breeding season we were able to map more than 20 pampas meadowlark territories with the aid of GPS receivers (as far as we know, this is the first time this type of information is gathered for any pampas grassland threatened bird). With this information we produced a geo-referenced map of meadowlark territories.

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

- 1) Conservation Outcomes – Through a government-supported programme the owner of the land where a large proportion of the pampas meadowlark population breed has been able to apply for funds that will be used to manage his grasslands in a way that benefit this threatened species. At the same time this opportunity will allow a more efficient management of cattle. This represents a clear signal to landowners that wildlife conservation can bring direct benefits to them. Thanks to the pampas meadowlark project this ranch was identified as a priority site by authorities of the government-supported programme (PPR – “Responsible Production Programme”).
- 2) Research Outcomes - We were able to record the songs of more than 100 pampas meadowlark males during two breeding seasons. With this information we have created a pampas meadowlark song library that contains sonograms of each recorded male. Because each male has a distinct song, the library will be extremely useful during future monitoring activities. In the future, any new pampas meadowlark male recording will be checked against those included in the library. This will provide an effective tool to calculate key demographic parameters and to monitor the breeding population in the long term. Other results included the finding of 70+ pampas meadowlark nests and colour-banding of 30 pampas meadowlarks.
- 3) Awareness on Conservation - Public awareness in the study area has improved very substantially in the last few years as a direct result of several research/conservation initiatives such as the pampas meadowlark project. This is evident from: a) the attitude of private landowners who grant permission, and in fact, many times encourage our research team to work on their lands; b) children (and teachers) at local schools who are fully aware of our research work and easily recognize our target species; and c) very positive opinions and interest from other members of local communities in our work.

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

We interacted with local communities in several ways. The group that benefited the most from the project’s activities were local schools. This was particularly true at Cerros de Vera town, where the Principal of the school offered housing for our team during both field seasons. We gave several talks and organized other educational activities at this and other schools in the area. All schools received colour posters and brochures in advance, and during our talks we distributed dozens of colour pictures of grassland birds among kids.

As already mentioned, one landowner also benefited by our research work at his ranch. During the first field season (2008) we established that most of the pampas meadowlark population had moved from previous breeding grounds to a new site within a new ranch. We contacted the owner and he

granted permission to work there. At the same time a government-supported project was launched at our study area (PPR). This project aims to identify wildlife-friendly practices that benefit threatened species. Because of the presence of a significant portion the population of meadowlarks in this ranch, the owner was able to apply for government funds that will be used to manage his ranch in a way that ensures the availability of pampas meadowlark habitat.

Also, other members of local communities benefited from the provision of goods (food) and services (communications) to our research team.

Finally, ranch personnel (“gauchos”) helped voluntarily with nest searching activities. One person in particular informed us of the location of several pampas meadowlark nests that he found during routine activities at the ranch.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, I plan to continue this project in the future. The information gathered during the last few years will be very valuable in terms of directing future research priorities and achieving long-lasting conservation outcomes based on sound scientific results.

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

- 1) Publication - Data collected during the project was used to write a pampas meadowlark species factsheet for the “Birds of Uruguay Red Data Book” which is in a preparation stage, supported by IUCN. Also, a short technical article regarding pampas meadowlark territorial behaviour will be written and submitted to an ornithological journal in 2010. Once the breeding success data are analysed other articles, both technical and non-technical, will follow.
- 2) Presentations – Research findings will be shared with colleagues and wildlife enthusiasts in a series of talks and presentations to be delivered in Uruguay and abroad during 2010.

Additionally, I would like to design a webpage focused on conservation of Uruguayan Birds during 2010. The main results of the pampas meadowlark project will be displayed in this site. Eventually, I also want to write a book on pampas grassland birds that will summarize the research results derived from this and other projects in the region.

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

The RSG was used from September 2008 to April 2010. This was the original anticipated length of the project. Research activities were planned for two consecutive breeding seasons (September - December 2008 and 2009). Public awareness activities were planned to start in 2008 and end by March-May 2009, a few months after completion of research activities. This schedule allowed the presentation of project results to the general public and to government authorities. Additional presentations will be given during 2010.

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 (only items funded by RSGF included) | Budgeted Amount | Actual Amount | Difference | Comments |
|---|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--|
| 1. TRANSPORTATION | | | | |
| a. Car rental | 1650.00 | 1520.00 | -130 | A lower rate per day was obtained. |
| b. Fuel | 1203.50 | 1113.50 | -90 | Fuel prices were higher than expected, but fewer litres than expected were used. |
| c. Bus tickets | 75.00 | 122.00 | +47 | Some extra tickets were used to travel from the study area to Salto City. |
| 2. LIVING EXPENSES | | | | |
| a. Meals ¹ | 1500.00 | 1721.00 | +221 | |
| 3. FIELD EQUIPMENT | | | | |
| a. Recording Equipment ² | 921.15 | 1264.00 | +342,85 | |
| b. GPS Receiver | 53.70 | 53.70 | 0.00 | |
| c. Pocket Scale | 34.50 | 34.50 | 0.00 | |
| d. Banding Materials | 167.00 | 125.90 | -41.10 | Aluminium rings (GDP 41.10) were obtained for free from Dr. John Blake-UMSL. |
| 4. EDUCATION & OUTREACH | | | | |
| a. Multimedia Projector | 374.90 | 374.90 | 00.00 | |
| TOTAL ³ | 5979.75 | 6229.50 | 349.75 | |
| Exchange Rate | 1 GBP = 35.00 Uruguayan Pesos | | | |

¹ Through an agreement with local school authorities (at Cerros de Vera town) we were offered accommodation for free during both field seasons. As a way of gratitude we covered food costs for school staff (three teachers) on several occasions when we had lunch or dinner at the school.

² The recording equipment could not be ordered directly from the manufacturer (in Sweden) because of customs issues. The equipment was bought from a US dealer (Naturesongs.com, <http://www.naturesongs.com/Telinga.html>) who offered it at a higher price.

³ The difference between budgeted and actual costs was partially covered with funds from the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy. The difference regarding the recording equipment costs was covered with personal funds.

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

I believe the most important next steps are:

- 1) Establish a long-term monitoring programme on the basis of the pampas meadowlark song library as a key research tool.
- 2) Keep working with local cattle-ranchers to identify productive alternatives that take pampas meadowlark ecological requirements into account.

- 3) Work towards the incorporation of a representative area of the Arerunguá Region into the National Protected Areas System within the “Protected Landscape” category (an official from the Protected Areas Office, Ministry of Environment has stated that she will support this initiative).

10. Did you use the RSGF logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the RSGF receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The posters and brochures that were distributed among schools and other institutions have both the RSGF logo. The logo was also included in all talks and presentations delivered at schools, workshops (CMS-Grassland Bird Workshop, PPR government-supported Workshop), and meetings with government officials.

11. Any other comments?

I am convinced that the pampas meadowlark project, and previous related initiatives, some of them also supported by RSGF, have resulted in clear conservation benefits to grassland wildlife in the Arerunguá region of Northern Uruguay. This area harbours one of the best preserve tracts of native grasslands in the whole pampas biome. There are still important conservation opportunities here and I would like to apply for a RSGF Booster Grant to continue to work towards the long-term preservation of this wonderful place.