

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Patience Shito
Project Title	Assessing the feasibility of range-expansion of the Southern Ground hornbill (<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>) population into the Lowveld of South Africa.
Application ID	33805-1
Date of this Report	5/12/2022

1. 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
Perception and belief interviews				1067 interviews were completed at the study site.
Habitat assessments				These were done concurrently with the interviews. There are areas of concern in terms of threats that will require further work for mitigation.
Construction and deployment of an artificial nest				The artificial nest has been constructed and has been installed.

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

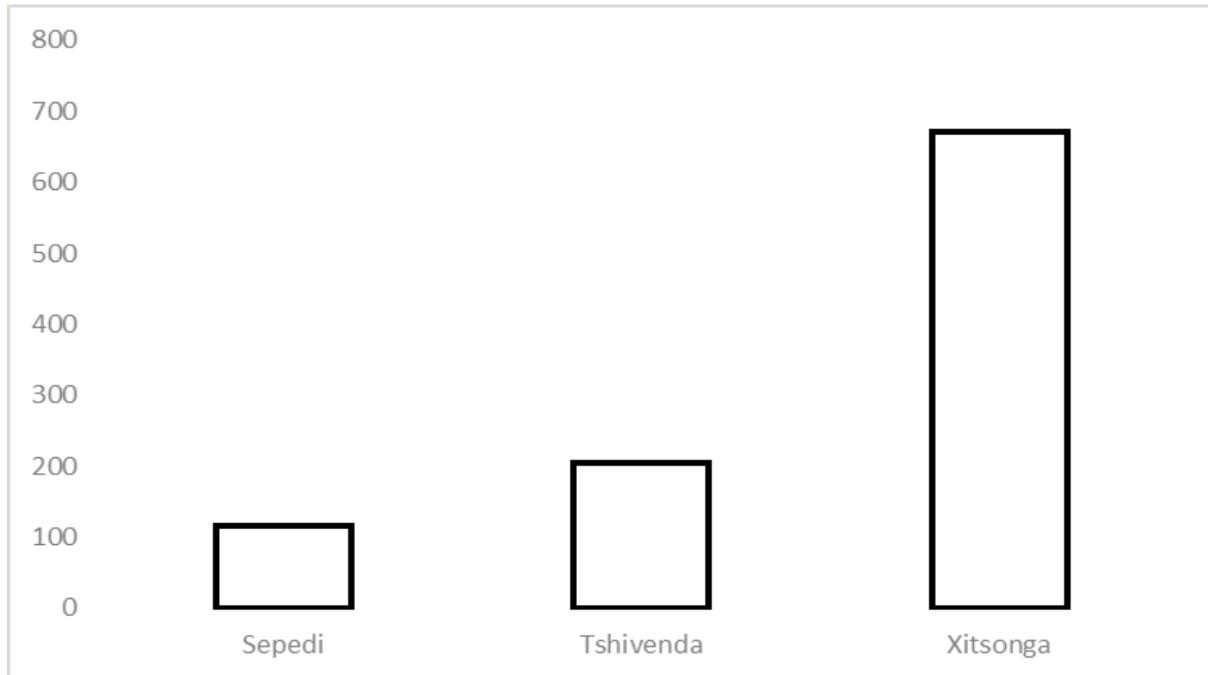
- a). This project has formed the basis of the SGH Lowveld Expansion Programme – the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project (MGHP) has since hired a Lowveld Coordinator: Dr Kyle Mark Middleton, to take this work further.
- b). A comprehensive data set on the beliefs of different language groups from two of the four provinces in the SGH range in South Africa.

Language	Number of interviewees
IsiXhosa	1
Ndau	4
Sepedi	115
Shona	4
Swati	1
Tshivenda	204
Xitsonga	672
Zulu	1
Grand Total	1002

- c). Identification of areas of potential habitat within the study site that could readily support SGH, as well as those that require targeted actions such as the provision of artificial nests and awareness campaigns to make them more habitable for new groups of SGH.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

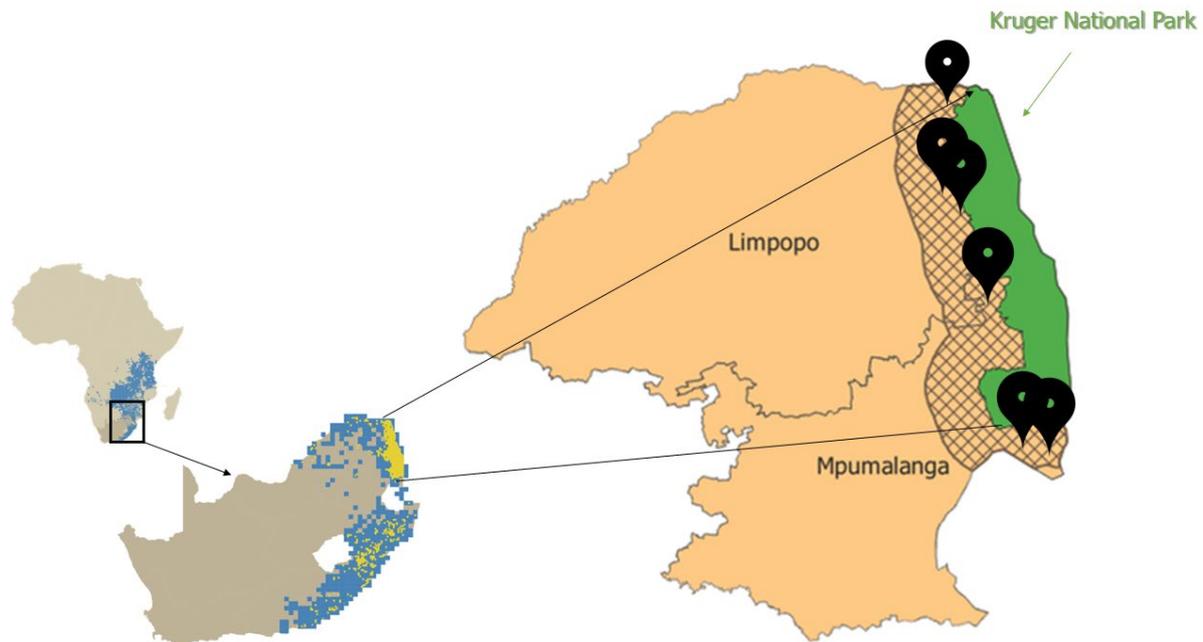
- Our expectations of the languages spoken in the 50 km around Kruger were not correct, as shown by our results below. Most people in the potential habitat zone are Xitsonga-speaking. Thus, we conducted the interviews in a way that would be representative of the distribution of language groups.



- In one instance we were unable to find fully competent field assistants and had to take a few extra days to train them and fully equip them to conduct fieldwork.
- In addition, the sheer burden of work on the project to meet their obligations to the national Biodiversity Management Plan meant that sometimes these were prioritised over the analysis of my data. This was unavoidable but I have done everything possible to ensure I meet all my obligations to Rufford now, albeit slightly delayed. For this, I apologise.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.

The map below shows the areas where research was conducted.



Many people that share their landscape with SGH are largely unaware of the endangered status and numerous threats that the species faces. The long history of antagonism between local communities and conservation organisations has minimised the involvement of local people in conservation interventions. Our approach was to involve them from the outset through the traditional leadership structures, as well as recruit local youths as assistants. This ensured that the communities welcomed us and were willing to share ideas on the conservation of ground hornbills. We worked with 10 young aspiring conservationists from the communities along the western border of the Kruger National Park, two of whom have gone on to obtain employment in conservation after the conclusion of our research. They provided us with translation services during our interview work and were also trained on the behaviour, ecology, and cultural significance of the species. We additionally opportunistically conducted educational talks at both primary and high schools (1227 learners, 41 teachers), in collaboration with local NGOs. In addition to the research, we distributed pamphlets, comic books and posters with information on the SGH as well as how the local communities can get involved in the conservation. We recruited five individuals to join the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project WhatsApp Champions Groups to send in sightings of SGH to add to the national database. We made sure to utilise local facilities for our accommodation where possible to give back to the community.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

This work is the initial phase of a long-term project to eventually ensure that SGHs that disperse from Kruger National Park, which is at capacity, have safe

habitat to occupy outside of protected areas. This is a long-term commitment, due to the species' long-life history. The relationships that we established with local traditional authorities and communities will be grown and developed further to ensure that local communities are actively involved in every step of the process to achieve a safe habitat for SGHs and all other species that share the environment. This will be done through a collaborative effort between the Mabula Ground Hornbill project, government environmental departments, as well as local NGOs. This project seeks to maintain and establish linkages with populations of SGH both within and outside South Africa to ensure the genetic robustness of the southern African population of SGH.

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

I will continue to share my work on social media, as well as produce articles for newsletters and magazines. I presented my work to fellow SGH conservationists at the Southern Ground-hornbill Colloquium in 2021 and one of my papers at the Pan-African Ornithological Congress in November 2022 (Cultural perceptions and associated conservation implications for Southern Ground-hornbill in South Africa). Two scientific papers will be published in peer-reviewed journals.

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

- I. Source further funding to continue the work with an emphasis on empowering local youths with training to foster a love for conservation and enhance their chances of pursuing conservation careers.
- II. To expand and conduct the same type of study along the remaining borders of Kruger where threats might be different.
- III. To implement the actions required for the mitigation of the threats that have been identified and to engage with the communities themselves to formulate practical solutions to the threats.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during your work?

We printed the Rufford logo onto magnetic car signs that were utilised on the field vehicle throughout the project. The logo was used in a presentation made to fellow scientists at the Southern Ground Hornbill Colloquium held on the 21st of October 2021, and at the African Ornithological Congress held on the 21st of November 2022. The Rufford logo was displayed on the pamphlets that we distributed in the communities, as well as on the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project website as a Gold Sponsor.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Advisors and Supervisors

- Academic supervisor: Prof. Neville Pillay.
- Primary supervisor: Dr Lucy Kemp.
- Primary field supervisor: Dr Louise Swemmer.

Ground Team

- Principal researcher: Patience Shito.
- Fieldwork assistant: Nthabiseng Monama.
- SANParks adviser and assistant: Lucas Sibuyi.
- SANParks adviser and facilitator: Tommy Mogakane.
- Project intern/field assistant: Scelo Mathebula (University of Mpumalanga student)
- Translators: Prominent Mabunda, Trace Shabangu, Fikile Mabunda, Nhlamuko Magezi, Etron Mathebula, Fikile Mabunda, Mpfumelelo Chake, Charlie Mogakane, Winnie Netshilindi and Ndivo Sadiki.

10. Any other comments?

I would like to express my gratitude to The Rufford Foundation for making this work possible through the provision of funding. I am in the final stages of thesis write-up and will send through my thesis when approval has been obtained from the University of Witwatersrand.

