

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	Ivaylo Angelov
Project title	Conservation measures for a flagship bird species in the east of Bulgaria - the Egyptian vulture
RSG reference	41.04.09
Reporting period	9 th July 2009 to 9 th July 2010
Amount of grant	£5905
Your email address	ivailoangelov@abv.bg
Date of this report	9 th July 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
Supplementary feeding to the population in Rusenski Lom.		√		30 supplementary feedings were provided, supporting 6 pairs of the small and most endangered sub-population in north Bulgaria during April-July 2010.
Toxicology sampling and colour ringing of 10 juveniles			√	10 juvenile Egyptian vultures from north and south Bulgaria were sampled and ringed.
Training and involvement of local team members			√	Four students from areas where the species breeds were trained and substantially involved in direct conservation activities for the species in north and south Bulgaria.
Local communities and authorities awareness rising			√	More than 900 copies of a promotional calendar aiming to raise awareness on preserving Egyptian vulture were disseminated among various stakeholders (village majors, shepherds, farmers, hunters etc.)

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

The colleagues from the Natural History Museum in Madrid, Spain, who are leading experts in the field of vulture toxicology analyses kindly agreed to help with the toxicology analyses. However, in the summer of 2009 it turned out that, due to budget constraints of the laboratory, it became clear that the samples taken from the juvenile vultures could not be analysed free of charge. As this was not envisaged in the budget, we just sent the samples to the laboratory where they are now safely stored. However, we managed to secure funding from other sources and the analysing of the Bulgarian samples is scheduled for January 2011.

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

- The knowledge base on the species has increased: 10 juveniles were ringed with colour and metal rings and toxicology sampled. The colour ringing is part of a long-term programme of BSPB initiated in 2007. In 2009, all 25 juveniles recorded in Bulgaria were ringed, 10 of which within the frames of the current project. In the long term the colour ringing provides opportunity to study and assess a number of important parameters like survival, dispersal, mate and territory changes, age of first breeding, lifetime reproductive success, inbreeding etc. Toxicology samples (4, 5 ml blood and secretions from the eye, throat and cloaca) were taken from all 10 juveniles ringed within the frames of this project. The samples were sent for analysing to the Natural History Museum in Madrid. The juveniles were measured and weighted.

- The most threatened sub-population located in north-eastern Bulgaria was supported and contribution to the pairs breeding success made, through pilot implementation of new method for supplementary feeding: We have provided 30 supplementary feedings, supporting 6 nests in north Bulgaria. The supplementary feeding of one pair was more intensive because the male disappeared temporarily during the incubation period. We managed to notice this thanks to the daily guarding of the nest we have organised. The male disappeared 5 days before hatching, while the female kept laying on the eggs not even eating. We supplied small portions of food very close to the nest, thus allowing the female to raise the juvenile. Surprisingly 20 days after the disappearance, the male returned with injured right wing. We are not sure what happened with him, but definitely our supplementary feeding helped him too a lot to recover and at the end of June and beginning of July 2010 it was flying much better, while in early August it almost recovered its previous mode. The supplementary feeding was implemented by using small quantities of food and disposing them on the nest cliff, making them easily accessible to the birds. It was absolutely successful.
- Capacity to work for species conservation enhanced: Four students, living in the breeding range of the species in Bulgaria, were trained in specific field conservation techniques, colour ringing, toxicology sampling, monitoring, nest searching, as well as got acquainted to the awareness raising work among the local communities through direct participation in that. The number of people trained (4) was lower than the originally planned (6) because we decided that the proposed number would increase the risk of disturbance each of the birds during ringing. Moreover, the more compact team we formed allowed everyone take direct part in the field work; especially the ringing and they got better trained. In addition, we have continued disseminating information and promoting the need for and importance of the species conservation among local stakeholders, especially mayors and farmers. We produced 1,000 copies of a full-colour poster-calendar and have already disseminated 900 of these in mayoralty houses, shops and public pubs, schools, cultural clubs, agrochemical pharmacies and among citizens with various professions.

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

Although the work with local communities was not the direct focus of this project, the team used every opportunity for direct interaction with local people. We decided to disseminate the poster-calendar ourselves and met hundreds of people. This contact was used to inform local audience about the importance of the protection of Egyptian vulture and the key threats to it, like the accidental poisoning at waste dumps, for example. Apart from this project the project team contributed to justifying inclusion of Egyptian vulture in the list of species for which agri-environmental subsidies are due. So during the direct meetings with local people from the key range territories in Bulgaria we informed them on the benefits arising from the agri-environmental schemes. The stakeholders were also informed for the possibility to contact BSPB 'extension team' for assistance, advice or help for applying under the agri-environment schemes and advised to contact our field teams in case if any environmental problem.

In addition, the students trained under Activity 3 were representatives of local communities; they benefited from the project and developed skills, abilities and knowledge that will help them a lot in the future. The work was attractive to other young people who showed willingness to help and join our volunteer programme. We shall certainly involve them in our future work.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

There is an urgent need to analyse the collected toxicology samples (already sent to Spain). The results will be published in a joint publication presenting data from Spain and Bulgaria but possibly also Greece and Turkey. This study will show the correlation between the health status and contaminants in the juveniles and other factors such as genetics and diet. This is likely to significantly contribute to enhancing the knowledge about the mortality caused by poisoning, as now susceptibility to specific poisons is unknown.

Another idea and possibility for cost-effective and sustainable monitoring and community-based conservation, is the involvement of local people in the protection of the species. In 2009 and 2010 we met local people, who knew the species very well, moreover they were sympathising with our efforts for its preservation and showed willingness to help actively in the field. Establishment of working network of local caretakers for every nest would be an extremely important future step towards the securing the Egyptian vulture future.

In addition we plan to significantly systematise, enlarge and intensify the education work, particularly with the schools: presentations and work with the eco-clubs in the schools, together with excursions in the nature in order to inspire and attract new active volunteers for the future. Therefore, we plan to approach RSG foundation to support Egyptian vulture conservation effort.

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

Several news items were published on the BSPB website (www.bspb.org), which receives more than 5,000 individual visits monthly. The activities and achievements of the project were already distributed through the electronic bulletins of some ornithological networks like bgraptors@yahoogroups.com (Bulgarian mailing group which includes most of the raptor enthusiasts and professionals working in Bulgaria) and balkanvultures@yahoogroups.com (mailing group focused on the conservation of the vultures species on the Balkans, but which includes also vulture specialists from all over the world). After analysing the results from the toxicology study, they will be published in an international peer reviewed journal. Interview for the status and activities for the Egyptian vulture, where the support of RSGs was explained, was published on the raptor specialised website www.europeanraptors.org, which is very well promoted on all raptor information networks in Europe and visited by raptor specialists throughout Europe and other countries. The experience gained on the conservation of the Egyptian vulture is shared with specialists working on the same species in other countries (Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, and Ethiopia). In 2010 our team helped the colleagues from Doga Dernegi/BirdLife Turkey to start long-term programme for monitoring of the species in Western Anatolia – one of the core territories for this species. In July 2010, we are planning new visits to Turkey and Greece in order to help the colleagues there in collecting of toxicology samples from Egyptian vultures.

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

The RSG project was carried out in the initially planned time scale. The project implementation lasted 1 year. The project activities were reduced during the vultures wintering period when they migrate to Africa (mid-September to late March). However, this time was used to work directly with local communities and disseminate the produced promotion materials and also under different

project part of our team visited Ethiopia as an attempt to identify threats for the species in the wintering areas.

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
Supplementary feeding	1725	1035	690	Due to logistics constraints (availability of cars and highly motivated volunteer to do the job) this activity was not possible to be implemented as intensively as it was planned.
Toxicology sampling	1358	1300	58	The money was used for food, petrol, accommodation and sending the samples for analysing to Spain.
Training and involvement of local team members	1162	1300	-138	The money was used for food, petrol and accommodation.
Local communities and authorities education	1390	1500	-110	The money was used for printing of calendar, food, petrol and accommodation during the distribution of the calendar.
Equipment	270	270	0	Digital camera Canon PowerShot SX200 IS was bought. It was used for documentation of the project activities.
Unforeseen	0	500	500	This amount was used for repairing of my personal car which broke up several times during the implementation of the field activities.
Total	5905	5905	0	

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

The Egyptian vulture is the most endangered and experiencing the most rapid decline raptor in Bulgaria. Its survival is only possible through highly dedicated long-term conservation efforts. The BSPB keeps approaching major EU funding lines to support species conservation, although these usually involve longer and complicated approval process. Till a longer-term and broader-scale funding is secured a very adequate measure is the establishment of network of local caretakers to get involved with constant daily care for as many pairs as possible, which in senescence means also securing funding to continue daily guard and supplementary feeding which need to be specially adapted to the needs of each pair. It is also necessary to continue monitoring, ringing (in order to obtain data for mortality, mating and territory changes, inbreeding, etc.) to adjust and properly plan the activities. Therefore, I intend to apply for second project again focused on the Egyptian vulture

and more oriented towards awareness raising and involvement of the local communities in the conservation.

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?

Yes, the support RSGF was duly acknowledged. The poster-calendar printed in the frame of the project contained well visible logo of RSGF. More than 900 copies of it were distributed in more than 150 populated places. The funding of RSGF is also duly acknowledged on the BSPB website, which gets more than 5,000 individual visits monthly and also in an interview for the Egyptian vulture conservation in Bulgaria, published on the website www.europeanraptors.org.

11. Any other comments?

The Egyptian vulture is a symbol of preserved intact nature. At the same time it is a highly adaptable species inhabiting territories close to human settlements, and therefore the species is not only significant indicator of biodiversity richness, but tests human tolerance to wildlife and nature in general. It has been symbolic to many cultures and societies. Just one example being the fact that it epitomizes the Phoenix – the mythical bird rising to life from its ashes. The current project that became possible through the generous support of the Rufford Small Grants Foundation was an effective step to securing new life to the Phoenix and we would like to share or sincere gratitude for this.

Ivaylo Angelov and the volunteers Tsvetomira Yotsova, Vladimir Dobrev, Dobromir Dobrev, Volen Arkumarev.

