

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. 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.

Thank you for your help.

Josh Cole, Grants Director

Grant Recipient Details	
Your name	Dr. Mark Pestov
Project title	Study and conservation of the Mediterranean spur-thighed tortoise in the Caucasus (project "Attention: a turtle!"), Russian Federation
RSG reference	7855-B
Reporting period	July 2010 – September 2011
Amount of grant	£6000
Your email address	vipera@dront.ru
Date of this report	15.01.2012

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
An estimation of distribution and number of Mediterranean tortoise at Caucasus, finding key places of it's inhabitation and estimation of their protection;		+		This is a long-term objective planned for several years
Prevention of illegal catching and selling of tortoises in contact with the State structures for Nature Conservation;		+		In 2010 the officials of the Supervisory Natural Recourses Management Service on our initiative confiscated eight young Mediterranean tortoises (aged 1-7 years) from illegal trade in the market (Novorossisk city, Krasnodar area). The animals were transferred to the rehabilitation centre in Safari – park. In 2011, in the cities of Suhum, Pitsunda, Gagri, Adler, Sochi, Tuapse, Gelendzik, Novorossisk and Krasnodar we checked up places of possible trade in turtles (pet-shops and street markets). The facts of illegal trade of Mediterranean tortoises and their derivatives weren't revealed.
Collection of tortoises, which were illegally caught, from their owners and returning them to the wild;		+		In 2010, we returned eight tortoises back to the wild. In 2011, one tortoise
Setting up the centre for rehabilitation and nursery of Mediterranean tortoise. The main task of the centre will be the creation of methodology of this species keeping and reproduction;		+		Work on the foundation of the Center for rehabilitation and nursery of spur-thighed tortoises is successfully being carried on. In 2011, in addition to two earlier constructed open-air cages of the rehabilitation center with about 15 adult Mediterranean tortoises, a new open-air cage was constructed.
Making wide public support of the project (publications, TV- and radio-releases, and so on).			+	We prepared several articles for newspapers and magazines that were published. We created and printed the posters "Attention, a

				<p>Turtle!" (format A2, the circulation of 1000 copies) and the pocket calendars for 2012 (the circulation of 2000 copies) with original author's photos of the Mediterranean tortoises on the front side and the name of the project, logos and the contact dates of RSGF and the Society of the protection of amphibians and reptiles on the back.</p>
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2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

Unfortunately we were unable to continue the part of the project referring to Dagestan in 2010 – 2011 due to military and political complications. Our colleagues in Dagestan advised us to carry on the project there when the situation improves.

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

1. A very important event took place in 2010. The Government of the Russian Federation gave an order (N 1436-r from 2 September, 2010) to found the State Nature Reserve "Utrish" to preserve unique nature communities of dry subtropics of the Mediterranean type on the peninsula Abrau (the Black Sea coast, Krasnodar area, the Russian Federation). The area of this reserve is 10,008 ha. It includes the grounds of the Forest Fund between the cities of Anapa and Novorossiysk. The area of the ground is 9,225 ha with 783 ha of water. The foundation of the reserve is the result of long-term efforts of a lot of experts and organisations. We had been working on this territory long before the reserve was founded. We've been cooperating with the reserve since its foundation. In 2011, we fulfilled the contract on the theme: "The estimation of a contemporary condition of the population of the Mediterranean tortoise (*Testudo graeca nikolskii*) on the territory of the State Nature Reserve "Utrish" and the creation of a complex of recommendations on optimizing the protection of this species".

As a result of our long-term research, it was determined that the peninsula Abrau including the territory of the reserve "Utrish" is the most important habitat of the Mediterranean tortoise of Nikolsky (*T. graeca nikolskii*). A large, stable, at different ages turtles population of about 5-6,000 animals inhabits there. Experts think it can make up about 20-30 % of the total number of this subspecies in the Caucasus. A sexual and aged structure of this population is close to optimum: there are all aged groups and the number of male and female specimens among adults is nearly 1:1.

The state of the natural environment of this species and the essential reduction in the anthropological load on the territory of the reserve "Utrish" that is a result of improving the protection system give us good reasons to predict a stable condition of this species on the peninsula Abrau and a gradual growth of its number within the borders of the reserve.

After analysing the situation, we prepared some recommendations on the protection of the species and its following study. The basic protective recommendations are:

- The preservation of the integrity of the reserve territory. The prevention of its fragmentation as a result of a planned construction of highways through the reserve territory that will lead to the site on the sea coast which is now given to a private commercial firm for a long-term rent to build one more elite recreation centre there.
- The creation of one more new, especially protected, nature territory (the nature reserve) to preserve the second most important habitats of the Mediterranean tortoise of Nikolsky on Markhotskiy ridge between the cities of Novorossiysk and Gelendzik.
- Constant work on raising environmental awareness of the local population and tourists (particularly young people) in the cities of Anapa and Novorossiysk and in the other settlements on Krasnodar area for the popularisation and propagation of the problems of the preservation of the biological diversity of the region and, in particular, the Mediterranean tortoise as a rare and disappearing species.
- The foundation on the basis of the reserve «Utrish» of the rehabilitation center and later - the nursery for the maintenance and cultivation of the Mediterranean tortoises with the purpose of creating a genetic reserve of this species and taking some young turtles back to the native places of dwelling under control of experts.
- Carrying out a complex of actions to prevent the presence domestic and half wild animals (dogs and pigs) on the territory of the reserve.

2. We collected new data on the spur-thighed tortoise's population and its distribution in the Caucasus. In the Republic of Abkhazia the micropopulation of the Mediterranean tortoise has been discovered for the first time on the right (western) bank of the river Bzyb which is an insuperable barrier to turtles. On the territory of Krasnodar dwelling of the species on the southern slope of Kotsekhur ridge near Aderbievka village to the north from Gelendzik town has been first confirmed.

3. In 2010, the officials of the Supervisory Natural Recourses Management Service on our initiative confiscated eight young Mediterranean tortoises (aged 1-7 years) from illegal trade in the market (Novorossisk city, Krasnodar area). The animals were transferred to our rehabilitation centre in "Safari – park".

In 2011, in the cities of Suhum, Pitsunda, Gagri, Adler, Sochi, Tuapse, Gelendzik, Novorossisk and Krasnodar we checked up places of possible trade in turtles (pet-shops and street markets). The facts of illegal trade of Mediterranean tortoises and their derivatives weren't revealed.

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

Working on the project we found lots of new friends, partners, and sympathetic people among the locals in the Caucasus. Without their help the search for new tortoises' habitats and prevention of illegal trade would not have been really efficient. In fact, a non-formal network "Tortoises' Friends" has been created.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes surely, we are going to continue working on research and conservation of the spur-thighed tortoises and perhaps some other rare or endangered reptiles in the Caucasus and in other regions of the former USSR.

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

We are distributing the information about results of our project through popular and scientific publications, mass-media, the Internet and during direct dialogue with colleagues.

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

RSG was used over the period of July 2010 – September 2011 as planned.

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.

6000 £ sterling = 282 174,43 the Russian rouble; 1 £ sterling = 47,03 the Russian rouble

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Travel expenses	2900	3391		Specific expenses are not always the same as the budgeted amount, since we had to adjust the actual expenditures to the actual needs. The total of the expenditures is the same as the total of the budget. The amount has been spent exclusively on the project. We have all our expenditures documented and can confirm them.
Equipment	500	524		
Salary for Assistants and Consultants	900	618		
Field Supplies	400	837		
Publication expenses	700	532		
Telephone/fax/postage	300	98		
Miscellaneous	300			
Total	6000	6000	0	

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

We are planning to continue the cooperation with the State Nature Reserves “Utrish” (Russia) and Pitsunda-Myusserskiy (Abkhazia) which are key habitats of *T. graeca Nikolskii* in the north and the south of the inhabited area of this subspecies.

We are planning to continue developing the rehabilitation centre and nursery for turtles in "Safari - park" (Gelendzik town) and we hope to initiate the process of creation of a similar nursery in the State Nature Reserve “Utrish”.

We are planning to continue work in the Republic of Dagestan (northern Caucasus) if the situation in this region becomes more stable.

We are planning to continue searching funds for the continuation of our project in 2012 and next years.

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?

We used the RSGF logo on the posters «Attention, a Turtle! » and the pocket-size calendars with tortoises photos. We always mentioned RSGF as the project sponsor in all publications, TV and radio interviews.

11. Any other comments?

We are deeply thankful to Rufford Small Grants for Nature Conservation for long-term support of our project and are ready to continue the cooperation.

We apologize for the delay in preparing the final report. We continued working on the project (expeditions in the Caucasus) even after the period of the RSG and wanted to show more results for the RSGF.