

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	Istvan Moldovan
Project title	Survey of breeding sooty falcons (<i>Falco concolor</i>) along the southern Egyptian Red Sea shore
RSG reference	09.04.85
Reporting period	2009-2010
Amount of grant	£5750
Your email address	
Date of this report	21/03/11

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
Assess breeding population of sooty falcon in south-east Egypt			yes	A full breeding population survey was prepared, based on the data collected in the field completed with information collected from published sources, personal inquiries and questionnaires sent.
Survey breeding colonies along southern Red Sea Shore		yes		The survey could not be completed as three important colonies were not accessible due to security reasons. However, these islands were visited in late 2010 by the team of local conservationists trained thanks due to the project in October 2009 and April 2010. This is a remarkable issue as these colonies lay in the border area and where closed to public access in autumn 2009 and the results were only possible due to the ambition and persistence of local conservationists.
Start geo-locator survey			yes	The geolocator survey was started in 2009 and 21 birds were deployed (due to access restrictions, the geo-locators intended to use on the last three colonies have not been used). In August 2011 these birds will return to their breeding sites and the locators should be retrieved to analyse the migratory routes and wintering areas.
Provide training for local national park rangers and volunteers			yes	A total of three rounds of training sessions were organised: June 2009, October 2009, and April 2010. The most successful one (April 2010) lasted 4 days and 21 volunteers took part. Most of these people are rangers in national parks, university students or local conservation practitioners. The training was such an overwhelming success, that it is intended to be organised in every year from then by local participants. (Preparations are underway for the 2011 meeting which will be held in Ain Sokhna in April).

Raise public profile of the species and its habitats		yes		The project intended to use web-based communication to raise profile of the local conservation agenda. Unfortunately local conditions are not favouring web-based information exchange and spreading. Thus, the lack of internet access (even in the national park offices!), local newspaper, local radio and TV stations reduced our success rate. Moreover security reasons (the project area lays on the Red Sea coast, thus in border region) prevented large scale publicity, too. However it is hoped with the recent changes in political regime conditions will improve for such activities.
Assess global conservation status of the species			yes	Although it was not the primary goal of the project, local conservation assessment generated an amount of new information which enabled us to make a global assessment of the sooty falcon. The information collected it is analysed currently and it will be presented to IUCN for the 2011 conservation status assessment. A working group was set up and the collected information will be synthetised and sent to BirdLife International (providing status surveys for IUCN) in November 2011. This date is planned to incorporate the geo-locator data into the assessment.
Communication of information with conservation relevance			yes	A short note was published in <i>Sandgrouse</i> (32/2010), while a full report is under preparation (also to be submitted to <i>Sandgrouse</i>). The data collected on breeding ecology and food selection will be treated by an article in preparation (will be submitted to the <i>Journal of Raptor Research</i>), while the global status assessment is prepared, too.

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

There are two major issues to be noted. The team faced an unexpected problem on 4th October 2009 when all access permits issued for the project were cancelled without any notice. This posed a

major obstacle in completing the project tasks and prevented us to visit the last three breeding colonies. Although we requested new permits immediately it took more than 3 months until the new ones were issued (it was already too late for commencing the remaining geo-locator deployment). The research/access permits were cancelled by the National Coast Guards and the local bureaucratic ways and secrecy was hard to overcome. To prevent such obstacles in the future, all major stakeholders were already contacted for the 2011 August mission, moreover we requested logistical help from the National Coast Guards, which was granted! Thus in the next stage the National Coast Guards will be partner/participant in the project!

A second issue is relating the extremely problematic public outreach in the project area. This is especially burdened by the lack of internet access (even in the national park offices!), local newspaper, local radio and TV stations. For the next level of the project it is intended to target the local school network as a main source of information points.

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

1. A full survey of the most important breeding populations of a globally threatened bird species. Thanks due to our survey a first assessment of the breeding populations of the sooty falcon is under preparation.
2. Geo-locators are deployed for a small raptor to track the migratory route of a long distance migrant and follow their movements in the austral summer.
3. Training for conservation related monitoring of birds in the Red Sea area. The project managed to train a number of 21 volunteers for bird monitoring and early warning sentinels in the highly sensitive biome of Red Sea coral island areas.

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

The local communities were not targeted directly by the project only by the means of conservation training and participatory involvement into research and conservation activities. Twenty-one volunteers (representing universities, national park authorities, protectorate rangers, local tourism agencies and NGO members) were trained for bird monitoring, conservation threat assessment and public relations targeted activities (campaigning and communication).

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

The project has a second phase which will target the already tracked birds (birds carrying geo-locators). These birds will return to their breeding grounds for the first time in their third calendar year, thus returning first time in 2011. We will intend to capture these birds in August-September 2011 and to retrieve the geo-locators. The geo-locators then will be downloaded and the data analysed. This will shed light on the migratory routes used and the wintering territories of young birds, thus completing our knowledge on the birds ecology.

The information collected in the first stage, completed with the data from the questionnaires and the geo-locator analysis will form the basis for the new status assessment, in which we would like to request an upgrade in conservation status of the sooty falcon (from Vulnerable to Endangered).

Moreover, this second stage of the project will have a direct conservation component too. It is intended that 50 artificial nest boxes will be erected on two breeding islands (Showarit and Wadi Gimal). Due to exposure and excessive heat, most nests laying directly on the ground (thus not benefitting from any shade) have lower breeding success than nests concealed by vegetation or rock ledges. However, the number of sheltered nest sites is limited, thus most nest are laid on bare rock, lacking any protective shadow. Birds readily accept any shelter provided, as we witnessed in 2009.

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

The project has a strong interest in publishing its results. Thus, results were already presented in a number of forums (local informal meeting in the project area, reports to relevant conservation institutions in Egypt, NGOs, webpage and raptor study meetings). However, we believe that the most important outcome of the project should be a change in our knowledge of the sooty falcon ecology and conservation status. Therefore we intend to use all the possible forums to increase awareness of this unique but vanishing bird. It is intended to continue with the publishing of our results in academic and conservationist media too. A number of manuscripts are prepared or submitted to conservation/academic journals:

- Survey of Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* colonies along the Southern Red Sea in Egypt – *Sandgrouse*, the Bulletin of OSME.
- Status and population trend of Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* in Egypt – *Zoology in the Middle East*.
- A first survey of the global population size and distribution of the Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* – *Bird Conservation International*
- Diet of the Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* breeding in Wadi Gemal, Egypt – *Journal of Raptor Research*

In each article the financial help of RSG it is acknowledged.

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

The project was intended to run 1 year (September 2009 – September 2010). However, due to restrictions in access to some colonies, a number of activities were completed only later (October and November 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	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
GPS	440	460	-20	The model budgeted initially run out of stock, 2 pieces of Garmin e-Track Legend were bought.
Geo-locators	3300	2977	323	Funds were used to cover local transport/car rental.
Download set for geo-locators	190	190	0	

Airfare	350	435	-85	Price difference.
Car rental	480	600	-120	Due to several trips (because of travel restrictions in 2009)
Local transport (2 cars)	500	603	-103	Due to several trips (because of travel restrictions in 2009)
Local transport (boat for 4 days, 3 hours daily)	240	412	-172	Prices were higher than budgeted due to local price changes.
Food & accommodation	600	620	-20	
Local salaries and services (entry fees, local taxes)	240	150	90	We were granted free access for the second trip in both national parks, thus only £150 was used.
Insurance	90	67.12	22.88	The rest was used to cover local travel costs.
Total	6430	6514.12	-84.12	

The rest of the sum was covered from a sponsorship received from Sovata Town Council to ACONA (200 GBP granted in October 2009).

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

Most important is to complete the status assessment for the global population of the species and publish the results in sound scientific journals to increase profile for the sooty falcon. Next step is to launch the process for upgrading the species conservation status according to IUCN from Vulnerable to Endangered, due to population decline and better knowledge of global population numbers (IUCN 1c and 2a) – due in November 2011.

On research/conservation side in August-September 2011 we plan to visit the colonies in southern Egypt to recover the geo-locators and download the data and to provide nest boxes on two smaller colonies (Showarit and Quaran, islands lacking vegetation, 18-22 pairs). In case it is successful, this approach will be extended to other colonies.

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 RSGF logo is on the webpage of the Egyptian birding community forum, Birding in Egypt (<http://www.birdinginegypt.com/>), where the project is presented. It was used on Nature Conservation Egypt website and information e-bulletin, too.

11. Any other comments?

I'm very grateful for the help provided by RSG both in terms of finance as well as providing a forum for using the conservation community to help a bird, the sooty falcon, to achieve better chances for survival.