

Rufford Conference, Cambodia
8-9 January 2018
Final report

Conference proceedings

The Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology (DICE), in partnership with the Rufford Foundation, ran a two day conference from 8-9 January 2018 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The conference focussed on bringing together Rufford Small Grant (RSG) recipients from Southeast Asian countries to discuss their projects and share their challenges, successes, lessons learned and next steps whilst also providing an opportunity to form networks with other grant recipients.

Some 20 participants from six countries were selected with 16 participants in attendance. The conference was designed and run by Jeanne McKay (DICE Research Associate) and Matthew Linkie (WCS's Terrestrial Director-Indonesia Programme) with the following aims:

- Provide a forum for RSG recipients to discuss ideas, challenges and issues, and create networking opportunities;
- Exchange knowledge, ideas, and experience in conducting conservation research and project management; and,
- Increase communication amongst RSG recipients.

The conference was structured in a way that gave the participants time to present their projects and answer questions. Each afternoon provided an opportunity for the participants to form groups to discuss thematic topics related to:

- Project conservation outputs and outcomes and;
- Project conservation sustainability.

A summary of the conference proceedings follows with an emphasis placed on describing Rufford's added value as both an initial donor and longer term partner, but also on the inspiring conservationists who have been supported by RSG to champion their cause.

- 1)** The RSG, although relatively small in size, has been used to leverage disproportionately large and tangible conservation impacts. For example,
- Truong Quang Nguyen conducted a population assessment of the psychedelic rock gecko (*Cnemaspis psychedelica*) in southern Vietnam which led to it being included on CITES Appendix I and listed as Endangered in the IUCN Red List, in addition to a proposed inclusion of the species in a Governmental of Vietnam decree. He has also been able to use the Rufford grant as match funding towards creating an *in-situ* captive breeding facility for this species.

- Vinh Quang Luu discovered 12 new species to science whilst studying the Taxonomy, phylogeny, geography and evolution of bent-toed Geckos along the Annamite Mountain Range. One of the species was even named after Rufford (*Cyrtodactylus rufford*). He also re-discovered a population of Critically Endangered Siamese crocodiles, previously thought to be extinct in the area.
- Sengdeuane Wayakone's research on the population status of the Siamese crocodile in Laos led to the establishment of the 2007 ha Khammuane Siamese Crocodile Conservation Area in Ban Soc, as well as the discovery of a new species of gecko, the Ban Soc Bent-toed Gecko (*Cyrtodactylus bansocensis*).

2) Rufford has enabled emerging conservationists to **explore and test** their own locally developed approaches to biodiversity management.

- Sheema Abdul Aziz used an RSG to set up an NGO to protect flying foxes in Tioman Island, Malaysia, which brought together farmers and other members of the local community along with professional tree climbers to conduct the first ever population surveys, as well as raise local awareness for this species and the benefits it offers through seed dispersal and pollination services.
- Jo Leen Yap's project on the habitat use of Dusty Leaf Monkeys in Penang, Malaysia, has evolved into her starting her own NGO which is testing a novel approach of using fire hoses to combat high mortality rates due to habitat fragmentation whilst supporting a long-term field monitoring team, a community watch group and educating school children through social media, films and field trips.
- Chantaran Pin's project was the first detailed study of the variables influencing wildlife utilization of waterholes in a dry dipterocarp forest in Cambodia.
- Suwat Jutapruet studied the impacts of tourism on Bryde's Whales and Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins in the Gulf of Thailand. Working with local fisherman he is trying to improve the sustainability of existing and proposed future tourism sites.
- Lou Vanny has developed a framework for locally appropriate and sustainable livelihoods to address climate change-induced changes in water levels for communities living along the Mekong River in the Stung Treng Ramsar Site, Cambodia.
- Now working for the Cambodian Ministry of Forestry, Heng Hong's project was the first to raise awareness amongst 700 households bordering Lumpat Wildlife Sanctuary about the importance of protecting the giant ibis and white-shouldered ibis.

3) Rufford has enabled early career conservationists to get that **all important first start** and mobilized sooner than they would have done otherwise.

- As part of her PhD thesis, Darshana Chellaiah secured Rufford funding to begin investigating the ecosystem health of buffer zones around water ways in various oil palm plantations in Malaysia. Still under analysis, she

intends to include her findings in a management plan for oil palm managers to either emulate current best practices or substantially improve the health of their riparian ecosystems.

- With an RSG grant Supatchaya Techachoocher was able to use radio telemetry as part of her PhD thesis to study the population, size and ecology of the giant nuthatch in Thailand.
- Tony Yon (representing RSG recipient Benjamin Hayes) presented his work on establishing community-based patrolling to protect the endangered Indochinese silvered langur in Phnom Kulen National Park, Cambodia. He was so inspired by the Rufford recipients and attending his first international meeting that he hopes to apply for a Rufford project of his own and pursue his graduate degree.

4) Rufford fills a funding gap in supporting projects that focus on species and ecosystems that are traditionally difficult to fund raise for, but nonetheless have high conservation value.

- After taking a 14 year hiatus from conservation research to teach, Michael Soh returned to his original study sites in peninsular Malaysia with RSG funding to re-assess the effects of habitat degradation and climate change. He gratefully acknowledged that receiving a Rufford grant helped him to secure additional funding both for his research and PhD studies.
- Sapai Min's second small grant enabled her to expand her study to include Myanmar-Thailand border cities providing the first baseline study of trade routes and traded species.. With this information she plans to raise awareness and work with law enforcement agencies to block commonly used trade routes.

5) Rufford grants have often acted as seed funding to establish teams, build local capacity, identify priority biodiversity conservation needs and begin to address these through developing replicable models for future projects.

- Nantida Sutumwong explained that little is known about the effects of climate change on Thailand's biodiversity. Her project therefore built strong collaboration between universities, local NGOs and the national park services to ensure data sharing and continuing long-term research initiatives on climate change impacts across Thailand.

6) Rufford funds have enabled grantees to train up a future generation of conservationists, and often for critically important species or ecosystems that might otherwise have received little attention.

- With a Rufford Follow-up Grant, Khyne U Mar is continuing to train mahouts and a network of local and international vets to ensure the health, safety and fair working conditions for Myanmar's captive elephant population, based on best science.

7) Published important biodiversity information through national and international media. All recipients present had either published their data or plan to do so either in peer reviewed or via popular media.

Participant feedback

A short discussion was held at the end of the conference with the following summary.

The participants shared their perceptions of RSG. Here we summarises several that were commonly shared about Rufford,

- It does not discriminate against applicant age, sex, level of expertise or species/topic.
- It is important in improving the livelihoods local people.
- It is important in leveraging funding (for the project and PhD support).
- It exposes participants to wider conservation issues, such as through the conference talks and workshops.
- It provides a diverse networking opportunity across countries and disciplines.

The participants were all positive about the benefits of engaging in RSG conferences, such as this Cambodia one. A key feature of the conference's success is that it provides an intimate atmosphere and opportunity for each participant to speak and contribute from their personal experience. The participants provided several recommendations for improving future events,

- Invite academic leaders and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to attend conferences and/or workshops held in the country where they are based.
- Host meetings and/or workshops at local universities to encourage greater connection with local partners and students.
- Encourage Rufford Recipients to host/co-host meetings and/or conferences in their respective countries (Sengdeuane Wayakone from Laos proposed himself).
- Promote Rufford recipient peer-reviewed scientific publications on the Rufford website.

Photographs

Photo 1. Rufford conference participants representing seven countries



Photo 2. Participants listening to conservation experiences related to Rufford projects



Photo 3. Rufford recipient Sapai Min presenting her project on illegal wildlife trade in Myanmar



Participant list

#	Name	Sex	Project Country	Project title
1	Chanratana Pin	M	Cambodia	Waterhole use by threatened mammals and large water birds in Mondulkiri Protected Forest, Eastern Plain Landscape, Cambodia
2	Khyne U Mar	F	Myanmar	Establishment of centralized elephant data bank in Myanmar
3	Suwat Jutapruet	M	Thailand	Feeding Area of Bryde's Whales (<i>Balaenoptera brydei</i>) and Indo – Pacific Humpback Dolphins (<i>Sousa chinensis</i>) in Tourism Site of the Gulf of Thailand
4	Sheema Abdul Aziz	F	Malaysia	Project Pteropus: Interactions Between Flying foxes, Plants and People on Tioman Island-Implications for Conservation
5	Sengdeuane Wayakone	M	Laos	The Annamite Mountain Range: An evolutionary barrier for herpetofauna? A case study in the karst forest of the Hin Nam No National Protected Area, central Laos
6	Supatchaya Techachoochert	F	Thailand	Population Size and Ecology of Giant Nuthatch (<i>Sitta magna</i>)
7	Jo Leen Yap	F	Malaysia	Activity Patterns, Habitat Use & Diet of Dusky Leaf Monkeys (<i>Trachypithecus obscurus</i>) in Penang, Malaysia
8	Lou Vanny	M	Cambodia	Building local adaptation to climate change-induced changes in water levels for sustainable livelihoods in Mekong River in Stung Treng Ramsar Site, Cambodia
9	Truong Nguyen	M	Vietnam	The world's most beautiful geckos facing extinction: Population assessment of (<i>Cnemaspis psychedelica</i>) in southern Vietnam and conservation measures
10	Nantida Sutummawong	F	Thailand	Assessing the climate change vulnerability of bird biodiversity in the rainforests of Thailand
11	Malcolm Soh Chu Keong	M	Malaysia	Conserving montane anuran and avian communities in Peninsular Malaysia: investigating the effects of habitat degradation and climate change
12	Darshanaa Chellaiah	F	Malaysia	Response of Stream Functioning to the Replacement of Natural Forests by Exotic Trees- An Assessment of the Impacts of Buffer Zones in Oil Palm Plantations
13	Heng Hong	M	Cambodia	Giant Ibis and Whit-shoulder Ibis Endangered Species Conservation using Conduct Code and Field Patrolling in Lumpat Wildlife Sanctuary, Rattanakiri Cambodia
14	Vinh Quang Luu	M	Vietnam	Taxonomy, phylogeny, geography and evolution of Bent-toed Geckos (<i>Squamata: Gekkonidae</i>) along the Annamite Mountain Range: A case study in Hin Nam No, Laos
15	Tony Yon	M	Cambodia	Establishing community patrolling to protect the endangered Indochinese Silvered Langur, Phnom Kulen National Park, Cambodia
16	Sapai Min	F	Myanmar	Investigation of Wildlife Trade in Myanmar-Thailand Border Cities under Growing Trans-boundary Economic Trade