

Rufford Conference Report
RUFFORD SMALL GRANTS CONFERENCE IN EGYPT
"Connect for Nature Conservation"



33 Conservationists from 2 Countries in one safe place
2020 and 2021

Funded by





Conference One



Conference Two



Regardless the wearing of face masks and social distancing, the Participants could interact and feel reconnected



Being a small team, every recipient had enough time to share experience and deeply learn from others



Recipients felt motivated and reconnected with likeminded people



Outdoor Discussions: Participants had much deep learning from each other

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My special thanks go to **The Rufford Foundation** for fully funding this conference and more specifically **Mr. Josh Cole, the director of the Rufford Small Grants**, for guiding the organizing of this conference.

I want to thank all the participants and recognise an important role **the Organising Team played** to make this conference a success. My heartfelt appreciation goes to the individuals below for their resourcefulness, time and effort committed to organising and making this conference a success:

Dr. Ahmed M. Shawky,
Mr. Alaa El-Deen Ismail,
Mr. Ayman Ali Youssef, and

Thank You All Once Again!

Alphonse Karenzi
The RSG Egypt Conference Coordinator

I. BACKGROUND

Due to the Covid 19 and social distancing measures, The Rufford Conference in Egypt was held in two small groups instead of the usual Rufford large meetings in African. These were two-day experience sharing meetings were fully funded by the Rufford Foundation for its Grant Recipients to share experience and best practices, discuss conservation and project issues, and create direct communications among themselves.

The Rufford conferences are much more needed now than ever as the current Covid 19 situation has caused the highest level of isolation among the conservationists. Indeed, these two conferences made a huge timely impact. First of all, being in small groups, there was much experience sharing by each participant and much learning from each other. And being the first attended conference for most of the participants, they admitted that everything was new and interesting. Secondly, by providing a secure physical environment for them to meet up and share experience, the Recipients felt very encouraged and cared for by the foundation and most importantly reconnected with likeminded conservationists. So, all the Participants expressed their appreciation to the foundation for this timely opportunity of meeting up in the times of high isolation.

II. THE CONFERENCE THEME, OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

This conference had a theme of “Connect for Nature Conservation” and two main objectives below:

1. To enhance the direct communication and partnership between the regional RSG recipients by providing a forum for them to know each other in person, discuss ideas and issues; share the best practices and strengthen the regional RSG network.
2. To discuss on how Covid 19 has affected conservation and RSG projects and to guide and encourage the Conservationists and Project Leaders to keep up with their good work of conserving nature during and after the Covid19.

Below are some of the results and impact that the Egypt conference made:

1. 33 Isolated Conservationists Connected

Covid 19 caused disconnection and isolation among many conservationists. This conference has been able to bring together and connect thirty-three (33) conservationists from different fields and parties of Africa. **The participants felt reconnected to like-minded people.**

2. A safe place to share experience in the midst of a pandemic

The conference was organised in a safe outdoor environment of the Amin Hotel, a hotel authorised by the Egyptian Ministry of Health to host a gathering of up to 50 people and in a relevant area (Cairo) full of beautiful Sceneries and tourism attractions. The venue enabled the achievement of the conference objectives of connecting and experience sharing through creative activities such as social distanced group discussions.

3. Much Knowledge Sharing and Much Learning

The ability to organise this conference in two small groups enabled much sharing and learning among the participants. The format of the workshops was also flexible and creative enough to enable the participants maximise their sharing and learning capacity. It included formal presentations, group discussions and one on one interactions. For instance, for some power-point presentations worked best for sharing or leaning, for others group discussions worked best, and for others one-on-one interactions did best.

4. Much Motivation and Courage for Better Field Results

Especially young conservationists were discouraged and felt disconnected. But through meeting with others, sharing experiences, getting encouragement from the senior conservationists, sharing contacts and proposing partnerships and networks, they all felt more courage. Many Participants expressed sincere appreciation for the Rufford Foundation to consider them, provide a safe place for them and bring them together in such a time of isolation. They promised to do better in their work during and after covid19 pandemic.

5. RSG Impacts, Common Challenges and Recommendations Made

The IV Section of this conference contains the proceedings of this conference. It features the impacts that the RSGs have made, the common challenges the Recipients meet, and the recommendations made. All this was the outcome of good discussions.

6. Ongoing Direct Communications and Partnerships

Apart from the observed maximum sharing of contacts and devising of partnerships at one-on-one level, there also has been an organization by the organizers more specifically Dr. Ahmed M. Shawky to create a network and partnerships of the RSG Recipients starting from the conference participants.

III. THE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

This conference brought together thirty-three (33) participants in total. 17 from 2 countries namely Egypt and Rwanda for the first group and 16 from Egypt for the second group. More details of the participants are in the Annex Section of this report.

IV. THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Through PowerPoint presentations and social distanced group discussions, the participants expressed the impact the Rufford Small Grants have made on their personal and career development, the education and research, the local and regional nature conservation, and the local community capacity building. They also discussed the challenges they face and made some recommendations to the fellow conservationists and the Rufford Foundation.

The majority of the participants appreciated how the conference was organized especially the mix of outdoor presentations, group discussions and one on one interactions. Some stated in their group discussion notes *“Unlike the traditional conferences of a whole day boring presentations, the outdoor small group experience sharing enabled us to have much learning at a personal level.* The Participants also requested that there should be a Rufford annual conference every year in Egypt and thanked the Rufford Foundation for funding them through the RSGs and for bringing them together through the conferences. Below is a summary of the key points made during the discussions.

SECTION A: THE IMPACT OF THE RUFFORD SMALL GRANTS

During presentations and discussions, the recipients kept reflecting on the Rufford Small grants Impacts. Below are some of the RSG Impacts mentioned:

1. Rufford Grant as a seed funding:

The Rufford grants have provided seed funding to build capacity, identify conservation needs and develop replicable models for future projects. The majority of the presenters used the Rufford Grant as their first grant for researching about a problem, training their teams and connecting with the community.

For instance: *Dr Alaa El-Deen Ismail stated that the RSG was his first project at international level, and it opened doors to many other opportunities as it taught him how to write a project proposal and spend the funds effectively and enabled him to build a strong team and approach the local communities, build a good relationship with community and other partners, and gain their trust.*

2. Support Early Career Conservationists:

The Rufford support has enabled early career conservationists achieve their goals and expand their projects/ impact. In fact, most of the RSG Recipients in Egypt have acquired or are studying PhD and they admit the role that the Rufford first grants/ research played in helping them get admissions and scholarships. For instance:

Micol Montagna shared that receiving the Rufford grant and running the project as planned has been a crucial step in her career as a conservationist and biologist,

Dr. Ahmed Shawky shared how the three RSGs helped him get PhD on dugong and become a known regional dugong specialist, a member of IUCN Sirenian Group and a Dugong Conservation Specialty Instructor PADI”, and

Dr Alaa El-Deen mentioned that “Receiving the Rufford Funds has given much weight to his CV and was important factor to his getting the post Graduate scholarships”.

3. Publications:

The Rufford grantees have published important biodiversity information including field and academic research and professional knowledge products. As an example.

Dr, Ahmed Shawky developed a PADI Dugong Conservation Specialty, and a special course entitled “Stranding Response of Marine Megafauna”. He published it in different media and is now using the webinar to educate many people in both Arabic and English. *He said “More data is collected about the Egyptian Dugong that bridges the great knowledge gap of the mysterious Dugong species. Most of high-profile people and specialists from all over the world contact me to get information, photos and videos. Anyone can search on google about the dugong in the Red Sea, he will get the information that all has been collected by our projects.*

4. Train the future conservationists:

The majority of projects presented had youth and student training components. In fact, we received many applications, from Egyptian college students, for attending this conference, stating how they want to learn more about and apply for the RSG as they esteem the RSG projects to be one of the best training venues accessible to Egyptian younger conservationists for career growth.

CHALLENGES FACED AND ISSUES RAISED

Apart from the impact of the Rufford Funding, the participants also discussed the challenges they face during the course of their projects. Below are some of the common challenges that the RSG Participants mentioned:

- 1. The insufficient budget and time:** in most cases the conservation project have a wide scope which makes the RSG budget too small and the one-year period too short. Dugongs project by Ahmed was taken as an example. The area of study was very huge, and many sites were needed to cover as the Dugong is a rare species in the Egyptian Red Sea and its places are secrets. It requires more qualified team members to cover 95 locations in different season and study the spatial and

temporal variation of dugongs. This meant much more time; more team members and more funding were still need.

2. **Hard to involve stakeholders and local communities:** the local communities generally have low interest and much resistance towards participating in nature conservation field project. This calls for more time, more effort and more budget for creating awareness, giving incentives and engaging the local communities. *“The hardest part of my first RSG Project was to engage the local communities in my project”* Alaa **El-Deen** said.
3. **Lack of Equipment:** some projects need special materials that need to be imported from outside the country. This calls for much more funds too.
4. **Lack of awareness about the Rufford Foundation** and other grants among the field conservationists and college students. There is a need of more Rufford conferences for not only sharing between the recipients but also for the Rufford Small Grants publicity and awareness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Have strategic plan and scalable targets:

In case of **the wide scope project**, the RSG Recipients and Applicants are advised to have a strategic plan for their projects and start with a scalable target which can be expanded as they apply for the RSG further stages and/or the funds from other sources.

2. Create more awareness about the Rufford Foundation through conferences:

The most common suggestion was to organise more conferences. The conference should be bigger and include both grantees, non-grantee specialists and prospective applicants. There are many suitable applicants for the RSGs but very few people know about Rufford Foundation in Egypt.

3. Invite the project leader and at least one member per project

The RSG Conferences present a great opportunity of learning and improving the field projects. So, there is a need of more than one person per project to attend the conference. **Therefore, the RSG Conference should invite the project leader and at least one project member more especially an active volunteer.**

4. Research Questions and Answers:

Micol Montagna emphasized the importance of research questions and answers for the research project. She also helped the participants to understand how to form them and how to answer them effectively.

5. **Egypt Conference Annually:** the participants requested that the Rufford conference can be organised every year for an opportunity to meet up and catch up with other recipients and learning from each other.

6. Continue Funding the projects and conferences:

Finally, the participants thanked the Rufford Foundation for the funding and for organising such well-organised conferences. They recommended that Rufford should continue to fund the early career Conservationists' projects and to bring them together for knowledge sharing. They promised to accomplish their work effectively and magnify the impact of the RSGs.

V. ANNEX

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The table 1, 2 and 3 below give the details of the 33 Participants who attend the conference.

Table 1: The 17 Participants who attended the first group

No	Name	Email	Country	Number of RSGs/ Role
1	Daniel Niyonsaba	dannsaba@gmail.com	Rwanda	3 Grants Recipient
2	Ahmed Mohamed Shawky	ahmedshawky_7@hotmail.com	Egypt	3 Grants Recipient
3	Alaa El-Deen Ismail	alaaeldeen80@gmail.com	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
4	Micol Montagna	colmicol@gmail.com	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
5	Mohamed Abdelaal Lotfy, represented by Aymen Ali	mohamed_eco2006@yahoo.com	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
6	Marina Soliman Fawzy	marinasoliman2019@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
7	Sara Abdellah Gad	gadsara328@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
8	Ahmed Amiin Mohamed	ahmedamiin49@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
9	Yasmeen Ashraf Ahmed	ya666494@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
10	Kamilia Mohamed Sabry	Kamiliasabry78@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
11	Menna T Allah Waleed Mohamed	melouky1@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
12	Fatma Mohamed Elsayed	fatmaelrazazy@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
13	Rania Abdelfattah	salemr549@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
14	Ahmed Hesham Mohamed Emam	ahmed.hesham.m.emam@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
15	Ahmed Saber Sayed	as662358@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservation Student
16	Ahmed Gad	agad128@yahoo.com	Egypt	Conservation Student
17	Hania Abdul Wahab Khalil	hania_khalil@yahoo.com	Egypt	Conservation Student

Table 2: the 16 Participants who attended the second group

No	Name	Email	country	Number of RSGs/ Role
1	Islam Elsadek Mohammad	islamelsadek2003@yahoo.com	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
2	Ahmed Mohamed Shawky	ahmedshawky_7@hotmail.com	Egypt	3 Grants Recipient
3	Asmaa Ibrahim Abdel represented Ahmed Abbas	asmaaibrahim387@gmail.com	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
4	Bassant Sayed Mohamed represented Basma Sheta	sayedbassant23@gmail.com	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
5	Sarah Gamal represented Hoda Abdelateif Yacoub	saragamal12342@gmail.com	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
6	Abdullah Nagy represented Alaa El-Deen Ismail	A.nagy@azhar.edu.eg	Egypt	1 Grants Recipient
7	Maddalena Fumagalli represented by Abrar Soliman	fumma785@student.otago.ac.nz	Egypt	2 Grants Recipient
8	Ahmed Gad	Agad128@yahoo.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
9	Ahmed Abdelgawad	ahmadgawadm@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
10	Kirollos Medhat Fayeze	kirolsmedhat@yahoo.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
11	Omnia Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein	omnia.g.hussein@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
12	Hania Khalil	hania_khalil@yahoo.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
13	Ahmed Hesham Mohamed Emam	Ahmed.hesham.m.emam@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
14	Mohamed Waleed	Mohamedwaleed@yahoo.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
15	Ayman Ali Youssef	Aymanyoussef1981@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservationist, Prospective Applicant
16	Menna T Allah Waleed	melouky1@gmail.com	Egypt	Conservation Student

Table 3: Organizing Team and attended Prospective RSG Applicants

No	Name	Position / Organization	Country
1	Alphonse Karenzi	The Overall Coordinator	Rwanda
2	Dr. Ahmed M. Shawky,	The Local Contact Person and Mobiliser	Egypt
3	Ayman Ali Youssef,	The Bookings, Logistics, Transport in Charge	Egypt