

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	Wouter Vansteelant
Project title	Conservation of Migratory Raptors in a Geographical Convergence Zone at the Eastern Black Sea in Southwest Georgia
RSG reference	10493-1
Reporting period	August 2011 – February 2012
Amount of grant	£6,000
Your email address	W.M.G.Vansteelant@uva.nl
Date of this report	5.03.2012

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
Maintain monitoring of autumn migration			X	High quality data were collected, and protocol was followed very well.
Improve quality of counts through count coordinators		X	X	Both apply because we achieved the quality of counts, we were aiming for. However, this was only so because the poor work of at least two coordinators was compensated by the four others. Better selection procedures needed, and stricter on-site coordination of coordinators required!
Research		X		All research projects mentioned in our application are underway and guaranteed to be published in 2012 as PhD and MSc papers/dissertations. International collaboration with other monitoring sites has received some delay though BRC has received all data to start on pan-European analysis in migration trends.
Student Education: gain interest for bird migration among participating students			X	All participating students are highly motivated and now active in field conservation projects in Turkey and/or Armenia.
Student Education: support dissertation projects proposed by former BRC students			X	Georgian Marcin Zaremba and two Armenian students Meri Nasilyan and Rozita Aghmamalyan as well as Armenian student coach Siranush Tumanyan are now strongly involved in organizing future BRC activities. They offered assistance voluntarily which we happily accepted.
Student Education: increase skills of students			X	Most of the research course was successful though we had expected a higher level of understanding of

				scientific protocol among students. We dealt with this well in 2011 by adapting the plans to the reality of the situation, and in future years the course should reduce the level of self-reliance in the mini research project for students, with stronger supervision and well-defined exercises.
Additional activities not funded with RSGF: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ecotourism - project development/capacity-building - publicity/website 			X	All scheduled activities were conducted successfully and as detailed further in this report the outcomes of these are now providing many new and important opportunities for BRC to affect attitudes towards conservation in SW Georgia.

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

- budget: oil price: the price of some commodities like oil can change a lot over the course of a year. In 2011 we had to ask volunteers for a slightly higher (1 EUR) daily fee for their participation than anticipated. Not a big deal since everyone gladly did so, but important because transportation and food costs amount to a significant part of the monitoring budget. We should do what we can to make sure our estimated price represents better realistic increases in price of day-to-day services and goods in Georgia. We have however improved our already great relationship with the local community with whom we have now even more regular and good communication about their expectations.
- related to the point about hosts made above. There have been small ‘incidents’ at a cultural level during the duration of the project. A dog in the village bit two volunteers (small injuries), people forget to wash hands before dinner or take off shoes when entering a house. These and other similar to some extent expected but unpredictable issues were all dealt with appropriately though some could have been avoided (e.g., an unchained bite-eager dog). We intend to stay in this community in future years and they are excited to keep having us and very much appreciate our attitude towards them and our attempts to make the whole experience an enjoyable one for all the people affected by our presence. We expect to be able to count on their full cooperation in making small adjustments to improve infrastructure for hosting groups of volunteers and tourists.
- related to budget: ecotourism income. After setting prices for ecotourism (this was organised in addition to but outside of the RSGF 2011 grant for BRC) we had to realise that we could not pay the full price we charged tourists to the host families without

compromising our own deals for accommodation service with other families in the same community. We solved this issue by openly communicating about this poor judgment on our behalf with both tourists and the host families involved. We came to a consensus whereby a fixed price was set for accommodation service or cooking prices to tourists and volunteers alike. Of the price paid by tourist BRC receives a small part to invest in its conservation work. All parties involved were more than happy with this settlement and for the future this arrangement is clearly mentioned on our ecotourism webpage.

- from the count coordinators two out of six proved to be not as efficient in their work as we wanted. The problem did not lie with the motivation of the coordinators in question as much as with the fact their actual skill set did not match what we expected from them on paper and through references. We have developed much better and stricter selection procedures with extensive interviews to ensure that the quality of the applications in next years. This was one of the bigger mistakes that could have been avoided in 2011, though the presence of the additional coordinators ensured everything ran smoothly and problems were limited to a minimum.
- after personally arriving as the first BRC member in Georgia in 2011 I was surprised to say the least to find our most coastal monitoring station had disappeared due to big construction works. The traditional route up the mountain (opposite side of the 2011 host village) had been turned in a mud path. It was shocking that none of our local collaborators had warned us about this which we cleared up with the partners in question. We counted from an alternative site in 2011 though this lot is also scheduled to be built upon in the next few years. We are discussing with governmental officials to ensure we will be able to work again from our traditional counting station from 2012 onwards.
- Georgian participation in the Student Course was much too low. All but one of the applicants cancelled their visit at the last moment. We intend to improve our cooperation with Georgian universities to make them engage more in advertising this opportunity among their students, particularly with Batumi State University. This is done through preparatory communication running up to a planning visit by the BRC board to Georgia in April 2012, and afterwards by communication through BRC staff members employed in Georgia (see later, chapter 5)

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

1) we successfully completed the 4th consecutive year of intensive monitoring of migration of 13 raptor species of which several species are of key importance to international nature conservation purposes and agreements. It was clearly stated in the 2011 RSGF application that this monitoring achievement should be viewed in a long-term context to assess its impact given monitoring gains in value as time-series of data lengthen.

At the short-term however, the overall impact of our volunteer-based activities consists of numerous indirect outcomes. I argue that in 2011 the best of these indirect outcomes was a major new boost in international but also regional attention for our work and the important

incentive of former volunteers to take part in the now much larger team behind BRC, leading up to the registration of our project as an NGO in Georgia and the addition of crucially important new connections with local government and other potential partners.

2 & 3) we successfully held the Student Course in Conservation and Research from which a lot was learnt about the actual level at which conservation students from the region can perform scientific studies. The two key outcomes here are that with important feedback of former students the course will be developed to match the needs for students that want to proceed in either conservation science or environmental education. Secondly, some former students are now enthusiastically active in the organisation of BRC activities. This in itself is a big part of the desired impact of our student exchange, namely, to spark interest to work in migratory bird conservation in the Caucasus. Though the immediate impact of three students out of 16 getting involved may not seem high, I consider it significant and motivating enough for our work in student education to mention it as a major outcome of our 2011 RSGF funded activities.

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

Student Course

The students that joined (so all except for the expected Georgians) all showed great enthusiasm and revealed in their feedback to have learnt a great deal about conservation science and/or to have been inspired to do new things or apply techniques they had learnt.

As mentioned above under chapter 3, graduating education students from Armenia (Meri Nasilyan & Rozita Aghalmayan) who joined the course in 2011 are currently designing our pilot project in school education for 2012, which can mean a great start of their career as environmental educators.

Other students are currently completing studies or are still involved in nature conservation in their home countries. Armenian student coach Siranush Tumanyan is still strongly involved for feedback on education activities. We do, however, need to get more Georgian students involved.

Ecotourism

One Georgian language student living in our host village has now been hired part-time on a performance-based rewarding system whereby she receives ca 4-5 % of the total price paid per tourist visiting the home stays. Her responsibilities include the overall management of hosting visitors with different families and serving as a communication point to resolve language conflicts or to be arranging services for tourists such as transportation.

Overall impact BRC 2011

Though I have no official reference, estimating an average Georgian wage at 200 EUR per month seems very reasonable according to our local partners and general experience. We therefore created an overall investment of ca. 92 Georgian monthly wages in a community of ca. 200 households over the course of 2 months during our last project. This includes the income for locals generated directly from ecotourism.

Our strong investment and intensive presence in Georgia promote our seriousness as an organisation with a long-lasting vision towards local communities and policymakers. This is obvious given the success of BRC to solicit for new sources of (governmental) support with the outcomes of this RSGF proposal and additional activities.

We are planning to employ several more local people and increase initiatives among local communities further in 2012.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Our board now includes six members including 3 PhD students working in avian ecology some specialized in movement ecology, two MSc students working in conservation of which one has a previous life as a professional web designer, and lastly one Georgia-based professional financial manager. The full volunteering team now working behind the scenes includes 20 people from nine nationalities, the vast majority active as students or professionals in the field of conservation, dedicating a big part of their spare time to our cause. I already revealed some incentives for future work above in this report. We have already secured funding for part of our 2012 programme in which we will address amongst other things the following issues.

Monitoring

We will expand our efforts to include monitoring of stop-over use of wetlands in the area by wading birds and hunting pressure in those areas.

Ecotourism

The expansion of the ecotourism development project to a larger number of families cooperating with BRC. Families living in other communities will have access to information packages on the development of a home stay to stimulate independent ecotourism development.

Student Course

This will be expanded to a programme offering two courses in two different fields: conservation and research vs. environmental education.

School Education

We start a pilot project on school education in 2012 lead up by two Armenian educators who participated in 2011's autumn course.

Bird Festival

Other new objectives can now be realised after having gained profound interest of the regional (i.e., Ajarian) department of the Georgian Ministry for Environment and Resource Use and the dept. of Tourism. A one-time event in 2012 will be the celebration of 5 years of Batumi Raptor Count under the form of the Batumi Bird Festival. Worldwide renowned experts in raptor migration and conservation Keith Bildstein and Alejandro Onrubio will treat our guests – representatives of many regional and international stakeholders in nature conservation- to interesting lectures during an official dinner hosted by local Georgian families. With field trips

and demonstrations, we will include also the broad public in the festival to demonstrate our dedication to maintaining long-lasting relations in Georgia.

Capacity-building

In preparation of this festival, interested locals will be trained as bird guides over the course of the spring and summer 2012.

The department for the environment has requested BRC to organise a training in basic migration ecology, species identification and conservation legislation for environmental officers. This is to improve their skill set to track down and stop illegal hunting activity by patrolling in the field starting 2012. These poaching controls will be announced in local and regional media in order to make sure that all locals are aware that they run the chance of getting fined if they continue with their illegal activity.

To achieve these ambitious training projects BRC is currently interviewing candidates for the position of an international intern and a Georgian staff member that will be working in Batumi starting mid-April 2012. These people will work in strong cohesion with each other and with our broad network of regional partners in preparation of our autumn 2012 activities (particularly the Bird Festival and giving training programmes). This continuous presence of BRC representatives in Georgia is intended to become permanent. The Georgian staff member will be intensively trained to meet the requirements to take on a long-lasting position as a BRC employee starting 2013. This is in itself an ambitious 'move', but the extraordinary quality and enthusiasm in some of the most impressive applications we received give us much confidence that we are likely to be successful in establishing a permanent presence in Georgia within foreseeable timespan, working through and with Georgian people.

Future with RSGF

We expect to get back to RSGF to solicit for follow-up grants as we finish the waiting time after submission of this report before we can apply for our 2nd round of funding according to RSGF eligibility criteria.

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

Scientific publications

With our monitoring data there are currently two publications in preparation: (1) A short study of local spatial migration dynamics part as a small part of W. Vansteelant's PhD work at the University of Amsterdam, IBED and (2) the MSc thesis of J. Wehrmann on temporal migration dynamics at the eastern Black Sea under supervision of W. Vansteelant and B. Verhelst (PhD-student, Oxford University, UK).

M. Pannucio of MEDRAPTORS has successfully conducted his field work on migratory flight behavior of soaring birds in Batumi. Publication of his work is expected for late 2012.

J. Jansen is close to completing his assessment of the hunting pressure and has already communicated the main conclusions under the form of a very popular report on our website and a presentation (see below).

W. Vansteelant has been granted access to migration count data of most of the large European bottleneck sites and aims to analyze these data in terms of continent-wide patterns in raptor migration phenology as soon as possible. This project has however been delayed due to unexpected problems with timing in Wouter's professional work.

Presentations

A strong presentation by J. Jansen and B. Willaert on the hunting pressure in Batumi at Antwerp (Belgium) received remarkably high attendance for Flemish standards. At the 1st Conference on Raptors and Owls of the Caucasus hosted by the zoology dept. of the Ilia Chavchavadze University in Tbilisi Georgia. J. Jansen gave a convincing overview of his work and results which was a persuasive argument to a joint statement against illegal hunting of raptors in the Caucasus signed by all conference attendees.

Internationally, the BRC project –or research oriented parts of it- have been presented further at the following events in which audiences exceeded 50-60 people: Animal Migration Summer Course (Oct 2011, CANMOVE University Lund, SW), EGI Conference (Jan 2012, Oxford, UK), guest lecture University of East Anglia (Jan, Norwich, UK), NAEM (Feb, Lunteren, NL). Another big lecture is scheduled in March at Wageningen University and Research Center (NL).

Written media

Written publications have been made in birdwatching or bird conservation magazines like *Der Falke* (Germany) and others in Sweden and Finland.

Online

An interview is scheduled for the popular raptor website of Markus Jais (europeanraptors.org) and we create quite a buzz on Facebook and other online media among the international birdwatching community.

The attendance of online media is harder to measure in numbers. We have currently 114 members in our Facebook group, but we will develop strong communication to the outside world by integrating much of the popular social media today with a professionally developed new website scheduled to launch in March 2012.

Tourism advertisement

Concrete plans for publicity include a broad international campaign to promote Ajaria as a birdwatching and ecotourism destination in cooperation with private ecotourism companies (e.g., Ecotours Georgia) and the Department of Tourism. Our concept of ecotourism in home stays with local families will thus be broadly advertised.

Future

We continue to accept opportunities to advertise the results of our project at regional and international level.

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

Obviously, the activities of our 2011 application are part of a much larger initiative that is intended to realise effective conservation and sustainable (i.e., controlled) hunting pressure in southwestern Georgia for a long time to come. It takes long because we aim to do so primarily by changing attitudes towards migratory birds and sustainable thinking in the local community through bottom-up initiatives.

The funds of RSGF were used to realise the actual field activities and student education involving a large number of volunteers and students in Georgia from Aug 17th until Oct 16th, 2011. However much of the value of the outcomes of our work lies in what we achieve behind the scenes with our associated researchers and dedicated volunteers, as I clearly stated before in this report, as well in the original application for this project.

This report now comes at a stage in which we have clearly defined our goals for 2012 and the long-term based on our all our outcomes and realisations since 2008. I feel it is appropriate to report for you at this transitional stage which clearly demonstrates the link of our most important 2011 outcomes to the long-term vision we are implementing more and more successfully in Georgia.

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
Personnel	1974	974	1000	Large part of the budgeted stipends for volunteer coordinators were forfeited.
Transportation regional students	0	500	-500	Part of the budget not used for stipends was invested in transport reimbursements for regional students travelling from neighbouring countries with cheap public transport facilities.
Local transport, Accomodation & Food	2631	3150	-520	Larger than expected prices for both transport and food at time of our activities due to change in exchange rates was covered partly with RSGF budget and partly with slightly increased volunteer incentives of 5 to 6 EUR per day
Equipment/Materials	775	775	0	-

Miscellaneous	600	600	0	-
Total	5980 (6,000 GBP granted)	6,000	-20	Total annual budget including all activities comes to a positive balance of 3,350 EUR on a total budget of 20,000 EUR. This includes (additional) costs for purchase of materials, ecotourism activities, overhead and conference attendance. Income generated from PBFN (part still needed for 2012) and volunteer incentives. Unexpectedly ca. 1,000 EUR income was generated from ecotourism (see 2: unexpected problems)

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

This point has been addressed for a large part under question 5 since many of the next steps have already been taken or are underway in light of our intentions to create long-lasting impact in Georgia.

In short creating a continuous permanent presence in Georgia is a key-issue for BRC at this point in order to guarantee our capacity to perform in education and training programs that require strong follow-up in Georgia, also outside of the migration season.

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 was shown as a leading sponsor on all presentations mentioned before under chapter 6. Your name was acknowledged in (most of) published materials. Your logo is clearly visible on our website as a lead sponsor of our 2011 work and will continue to be retrievable in the archives of our website when we start the 2012 campaign in the coming month(s).

11. Any other comments?

Further short updates mostly considering long-term outcomes of this 2011 project will be provided at the address of RSGF for the project webpage until summer 2012.

As leader of this RSGF project I wish to thank BRC president Brecht Verhelst and Treasurer Johannes Jansen for the past years of excellent cooperation leading up to the results described in this report. Further thanks go to Jasper Wehrmann, Danny Heptinstall and Marcin Zaremba for successfully being voted with the formerly mentioned two and myself as the BRC Board 2012. I also thank all other volunteers actively involved in realizing our education, monitoring and



other activities. Thanks go to Prins Bernhard Fund for Nature for co-funding of this project and Swarovski Optics for sponsoring cutting-edge spotting scopes and binoculars to our counting team. Also, thanks to the Ajarian dept. of Tourism and the dept. of the Environment and Natural Resource Use for their enthusiastic attitude towards BRC since the realisation of our 2011 project and the future potential this generates to keep on building towards a long-term presence of BRC in Georgia.