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	Natalia S. Martínez Curci
Project title	Samborombón Bay Assessment: a Shorebirds Bottleneck in the SE Atlantic Coast
RSG reference	10946-1
Reporting period	March 2012 – March 2013
Amount of grant	£5996
Your email address	nanusmc@hotmail.com / nanu@cenpat.edu.ar
Date of this report	29 April 2013

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
Shorebird Habitat Use Patterns			X	We conducted 22 censuses, behavioural observations and identified banded individuals as planned. Additionally we went beyond the proposed objectives, and we started a red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*) banding programme. We banded 36 over-summering individuals.
Shorebird Trophic Ecology			X	We took 216 benthic samples and 162 sediment samples in nine stations with different type of substrate and in two intertidal levels. We estimated more than 150 defecation rates and collected more than 850 feces samples from eight shorebird species.
Awareness Raising and Capacity Building for Local Actors			X	We participated in the "National Week of Science" giving 11 presentations for more than 400 students of all ages; we provided a 2-day training course for 60 teachers from all levels. We offered four presentations for about 100 people from local communities and organised two birding tours for 50 people. We involved technical staff working in protected area management directly in our work. We were invited to be part of the development of the new Management Plan for the area, and we assist to formal meetings with local authorities. We have also generated a project in cooperation with the Provincial Environmental Agency to strengthen conservation actions in Samborombon Bay.

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

There were no significant difficulties to tackle during this phase of the project.

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

This project gave us the first tools to start working with shorebirds, a surrogate group for biodiversity in Samborombon Bay. We gather scientific information that will be used in the new area's Management Plan and we identified priority actions for the future. The project served to strengthen ties between provincial environmental agency, the local government (Municipality), local people and scientists.

Our work had three main components with respective outcomes: research, public awareness and stakeholder involvement; and information transferring.

A- RESEARCH
During this project we gather new data on invertebrate and shorebird ecology that will be very important for management guidelines. We identify the most important and susceptible areas for shorebirds in terms of feeding and resting and critical time windows. This information could be used to specify land-use regulations.

i. Shorebird Abundance and Habitat Use Patterns:
i.a. Censuses: We conducted 22 censuses, establishing migration peaks and identifying the most important areas (related to different micro-habitat types) for feeding and resting. We updated the area's shorebird species list (28 species): three residents (black-necked stilt, American oystercatcher and southern lapwing), 20 Nearctic migrants (American golden-plover, black-bellied plover, semi-palmated plover, short-billed dowitcher, Hudsonian godwit, whimbrel, spotted sandpiper, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, solitary sandpiper, willet, ruddy turnstone, red knot, sanderling, semi-palmated sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, stilt sandpiper, buff-breasted sandpiper and Willson's phalarope) and four Neotropical migrants (two-banded plover, rufous-chested dotterel, tawny-throated dotterel and Magellanic plover).

We confirmed the presence of eastern (*T. s. semipalmata*) and western (*T. s. inornata*) willets in the region for the first time and we are currently writing a paper regarding this.

i.b. Banding campaigns and identification of banded individuals: The red knot is the priority conservation concern shorebird species in the area. We started a banding programme (we banded 36 individuals and got two recaptures) focused on individuals that do not migrate to reproductive areas and remain in Samborombon Bay during austral winter (over-summering). With this programme we expect to shed light on the causes of this behaviour. We also conducted surveys to identify banded shorebirds. This information was used to determine time of residence of each flock and will be informative for long term studies to assess site's fidelity.

ii. Shorebird trophic ecology
ii.a. Food availability at the migratory stopover. We sampled benthic communities and substrate composition in nine sites that we had identified a priori as having different composition of silt and clay. At each site we took 24 benthic and 18 sediment samples in two different tidal levels. We determined species composition and number of individuals present in each sample. Regarding sediment samples we determined percentage of silt and clay and organic matter dissolved.

ii.b. Determination of shorebird diet. We collected more than 850 feces from eight shorebird species and established the main items consumed and their size through the recognition and measurement

of key structures present in feces. We also measure more than 150 defecation rates that were used to estimate daily intake.

B- IMPROVED LEVELS OF PUBLIC AWARENESS RELATED TO SAMBOROMBÓN BAY'S IMPORTANCE AND CURRENT THREATS

We were invited by the local government (Municipality of the Coast) to participate in the "National Science Week". In this context we gave 11 presentations in local schools, high-schools, colleges and universities for 16 teachers and more than 400 students. We also provided a 2-day training course for 60 teachers of all levels and three interviews to local media.

Additionally we offered four presentations for about 100 people of local community and organised two birding tours, one for 24 children and another for 25 local people.

We directly involved technical staff working in protected area management directly in our work. Park rangers helped us in all research activities and we gave them the theoretical bases for our work. We also trained more than 10 volunteers (mainly biology students) from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in research and conservation.

C- STRENGTHENING TIES WITH LOCAL STACKEHOLDERS

We had regular meetings with Municipal authorities for the implementation of the Management Plan for Punta Rasa (southern tip of Samborombon Bay). Additionally, in the course of the project provincial authorities (Provincial Agency for Sustainable Development, OPDS) began to develop a new management plan for Samborombon Bay as a whole and we were invited to contribute providing scientific information and proposing management and conservation measures. In this context we presented in conjunction with OPDS a proposal to the Organization of American States aimed to strengthened conservation actions in Samborombon Bay. The project was founded and will start in the next weeks.

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

The involvement of local communities was stated above, in the components B (improved levels of public awareness related to Samborombon bay's importance and current threats) and C (strengthening ties with local stakeholders) of the project.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

During the project we identified three priority actions and we obtained funding from OAS to pursue these in the following months. First, we will conduct shorebirds aerial censuses to improve the information gathered during this project and to obtain more accurate data to be used in the Management Plan for Samborombon Bay. We will also continue studying shorebird trophic ecology and monitoring red knot. Second, we will strengthen environmental education activities for the local community and tourists. Finally, we will highlight the importance of Punta Rasa by installing new nature interpretation signs and a bird hide in the Natural Reserve. I plan to apply for the next phase of RSG once the project founded by OAS is concluded.

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

I will continue to share the results of my work with the local community through environmental education activities and to involve local park rangers in our work. I will transfer information to technical staff in charge of the Management Plan by attending formal meetings and by providing technical reports with the results of my research.

I will assist to the fifth meeting of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group (in September 2013 in Colombia) and I will offer three presentations about the results of this project. I am also writing a paper about the Willet status in south-eastern South America.

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

As planned, the RSG was used between March 2012 and March 2013.

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	134	108	26	
Neoprene Waders	192	161	31	
Outreach Materials (Design)	60	60	0	
Outreach Materials (Printing)	305	376,5	- 71,5	I budgeted 1000 brochures and I printed 2000
Food	2160	2221,5	- 61,5	
Bus tickets	1105	945,5	159,5	In some cases I was able to travel by car and I used the difference for road tolls and gasoline
Road Tolls	0	88	- 88	
Vehicle	1530	1637.7	- 107.7	
Gasoline	360	1198.4	- 838.4	Gasoline increased more than 40% last year, additionally we conducted more field work than expected
Office Supplies	150	372.7	- 222.7	I included some bird banding supplies in this category
TOTAL	5996	**7169.3**	-1117.3	

The difference of GBP 1173.3 is due to an increase in the exchange rate during the last year. When I wrote the proposal 1GBP was 6.64 ARS; today 1 GBP is 7,57ARS. I did not change all the money to ARS at the beginning of the project and the budget was calculated with the original exchange rate (1 GBP = 6.64 ARS).

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

Regarding field work, the highest priority is to carry out aerial censuses which will be conducted in brief. Depending on the results of these surveys and comparisons with those made 20 years ago, it

may be necessary to repeat them in the next migratory season. It is also important to continue monitoring species of priority concern as the red knot and Hudsonian godwit. Long term studies focused on migration ecology of these species are also needed. Finally, it is important to complete long-term trophic ecology studies that take into account annual variations in food availability and shorebird responses.

I also think that we did a good job with the involvement of local community and public awareness raising. It is very important to continue working in environmental education and strengthening ties between key actors.

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?

I used RSGF logo in 2,000 brochures and in all PowerPoint presentations for local community, on each of these talks RGS support was acknowledged explicitly. I will also use the logo in the presentation that I will offer in Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group Meeting and in any future presentation using the result of the project funded by RSGF.

11. Any other comments?

Hopefully this project was the beginning of long-term conservation work in the area. I am grateful to Rufford Small Grants Foundation for giving us the opportunity to start working for the conservation of Samborombon Bay's habitat and shorebirds.