

Project Update: August 2014

By the end of August 2014, I will have spent more than 8 months researching in the Amazonian arc of deforestation, in the extreme north of Mato Grosso state, Brazil. Although extremely hard work, I am delighted with how my project and fieldwork particularly has been progressing. Funding awarded by The Rufford Foundation has been critical to this, so thank you to all at the Foundation.

To re-cap, my project is assisting biodiversity conservation in the region through: investigating how the bird community in Alta Floresta has responded to 30 years of deforestation; contributing to understanding of the local extinction rates of birds; providing data showing the importance of private forest reserves in the preservation of the bird community; and raising awareness amongst landowners of their role in biodiversity protection.

I have now conducted surveys at 30 sites using mist-net captures, point counts and visual recordings (we initially targeted 31 sites but one landowner refused to give access). The specific sites were surveyed 10 years ago and provide a detailed baseline to my project. I am currently in the process of visiting a selection of these a second time to increase my sample sizes and re-engage with landowners.

My average day in the field is to wake up at 4.15am, be in place in the forest with my equipment at 5.30am in time for sunrise. I am invariably in the forest or transferring to another site, all day, through to sunset at 5.30pm. To date and with the end of my fieldwork in sight, I have captured and released more than 1,500 birds, made up of 121 different species (for comparison, there are 596 bird species in the entire UK). The captured birds have been tagged with rings provided by the Brazilian federal government and measurements and biological samples have also been performed. I have recorded 225 hours from more than 900 point counts. I have begun to process my data, trawling through recordings and mist net findings, however this and my analysis more widely will pick up pace when I stop collecting new data.

Awareness raising and outreach are important parts of my project, as mentioned in my application for funding. I have established and developed positive relationships with landowners of the 30 research sites, as well as with the local University, UNEMAT, and the wider community via the Fundação Ecológica Cristalino, a NGO that work with environmental operating in the region. I have delivered 36 one-to-one meetings so far. My findings have also enabled me to develop my connections with University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the University of East Anglia, UK, where I am planning to spend some time later this year, subject to funding. I have also trained three local guides (two are local biology students), plus seven volunteers (four Brazilian and three international).

I have recently put together a YouTube film (four minutes) summarising the transformation of the landscape in and around Alta Floresta, as well as an overview of my project and fieldwork and the responsibility of the local community in relation to biodiversity conservation in the region. The Alta Floresta landowners are the primary audience (hence

the film is in Portuguese) and I have given a hard copy to each of them, along with members of the wider community and others in the region as internet coverage is relatively low. The feedback has been great! The Rufford Foundation is of course credited: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUJxE7hHh8g&feature=youtu.be>.



Left: Point Count: recording birds. Right: Mist net capture bird measuring and banding.