

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	Alasdair Harris
Project title	The status and exploitation of marine turtle species in south west Madagascar
RSG reference	17.08.06
Reporting period	January 2007 to May 2008
Amount of grant	£3500
Your email address	al@blueventures.org
Date of this report	13.08.08

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
Provide essential baseline data on the current status and exploitation of turtle populations in the region			✓	The turtle fisheries in 12 villages in the region have been monitored since November 2006. Data shows the number, species and size of individuals caught. The data of over 600 turtles has been recorded.
Conduct socioeconomic assessments to determine the importance of the fishery to the community			✓	Questionnaires and socioeconomic interviews have been conducted in each of the 12 villages included in the monitoring project.
Assess the level of nesting and monitor the use of nesting sites		✓		The frequency of turtle nesting in the region was much lower than anticipated. The majority of villages claimed there had been no nesting near their village for at least 5 years.
Produce educational materials		✓		Posters and guides to spotting and reporting turtle nesting have been produced. Further educational materials are planned.
Assess turtle mortality through the level of egg collection			✓	As a result of egg collection and targeting nesting females, there is consequently a low level of nesting in the region. There were only two cases of egg collection reported during this monitoring period.
Facilitate the development of community-led management strategies for turtle conservation		✓		The first stage of this has been completed with the new marine protected area (MPA) committee in the region. Some villages have already started to implement a local conservation strategy. This objective will form the basis of the next year of this project.
Increase awareness of marine turtle conservation issues		✓		Awareness-raising has been achieved through stakeholder meetings, meetings in villages and environmental open days with children. However, there are still many people that are still not fully aware of the conservation issues surrounding marine turtles. This objective will also form the basis of the next year of this project.
Evaluate current awareness of turtle protection legislation			✓	Interviews with local fishermen established the level of awareness of protection of marine turtles.

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

There are several traditional and cultural beliefs attached to hunting turtles, which could have made fishermen less willing to talk about their hunting activities and potential management of the turtle fishery. However, by employing local villagers to act as intermediary data collectors we were able to ensure that fishermen were more willing to report their turtle catch and to answer questions. By starting the project in collaboration with the local community we were able to gain fishermen's trust. This has allowed us to discuss possible conservation measures after the initial monitoring had been running steadily, as the fishermen did not have fear of any legal consequences.

A dispute amongst village elders in one village originally included in the monitoring programme caused problems with employing a suitable local data collector. Therefore, monitoring had to be abandoned in the village and alternate village sought.

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

Provision of the first accurate account of the numbers, size and species of turtles caught in the region

By training and employing a system of local data collectors in twelve villages in the region we have been able to effectively monitor approximately 70% of all turtles landed in our study area. Over 650 turtles have been recorded as part of the fisheries monitoring along with vital information such as species, sex, size and location caught. The level of turtles caught in the region was previously unknown, along with the species, sex or size ratio. This data also provides a vital baseline from which to measure the future success of conservation plans as well as providing important biological information for the wider turtle conservation community.

Hatching of two turtle nests in the project region

Two green turtle nests were reported to Blue Ventures as a direct result of an awareness raising campaign in each village. Posters asking villagers to report any turtle nests they found were given to the president of each village and displayed. Although most villages when questioned maintained that there had been no nesting in the region for at least 5 years, two nests were reported in April 2008 on the same beach, near the village of Lamboara. The nests were then protected for the duration of the incubation period by the village of Lamboara. Both nests hatched successfully and over 140 hatchlings were calculated to have emerged.

(Please see the press release and photos attached.)

Protection of first nesting beach in the region and the local ban on targeted turtle fishing

After the successful hatching of the two turtle nests a meeting was held with all members of the marine protected area (MPA) committee from the region. At the meeting Blue Ventures' Malagasy scientists presented information on the biology and conservation of turtles, including the fact that nesting females will return to the same beach to lay eggs and that hatchlings from these nests also return to the same region to nest in the future.

As a result of the meeting, the President of Lamboara held a special meeting between all the fishermen in the village. It was decided that the nesting beach should be protected and that targeted turtle fishing in the vicinity of the beach should be banned. A local law was produced and has been incorporated into the framework of the MPA statute to ensure that the village's decision was disseminated throughout the MPA community.

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

During the initial stages of the project, each village to be included in the monitoring project was visited to outline the objectives. A representative in each village was subsequently employed to act as a data collector to whom fishermen would go to, to report their turtle catch. The data collectors were trained to collect fisheries and biological data including the carapace length and plastron width of the turtles. Data collectors not only benefitted by receiving a payment for their work but also were actively involved training and collecting data and acted as an effective intermediary between Blue Ventures and the village as a whole.

The report and protection of two turtle nests to the vicinity of one village has led to a small ecotourism programme being set up with Blue Ventures volunteers. Volunteers have been staying in the village during the time the eggs are supposed to hatch in the hope they may see the turtles emerging from the nest. This had the dual benefits of showing the local village that tourists were interested in turtles and providing them with the income of housing and feeding tourists each night.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

There are plans to continue this work for the next two years. This will enable us to use the first year of monitoring to act as a baseline from which we can make informed management decisions as well as hopefully seeing any changes or effects in the turtle fisheries over a longer time period.

The project has started to gain real momentum in the last few months with the successful hatching of two turtle nests. Blue Ventures has been able to use this to increase awareness and interest in turtle conservation. A new section in the statute of the MPA in the region has banned targeted turtle fishing and protected the nesting beach. Blue Ventures now has the opportunity to capitalise on the success of the first 18 months of the project and the trust we have gained with the local community to build conservation management plans throughout the region. We will be applying for a Rufford 2nd Grant to help fund this work.

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

A full comprehensive report will be produced by Blue Ventures. It will be made available on our website as well sent directly to all partners, research contacts and volunteers. Results of this work will hopefully ultimately be published in a scientific journal.

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

RSG funding was used between January 2007 to May 2008.

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.

£1 = 3200 Malagasy Ariary

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Personnel	£1800	£1481	+£319	
Travel	£900	£772	+£128	
Equipment	£1690	£662	+£1028	Original cameras brought have not needed to be replaced.
Educational materials	£1700	£130	+£1570	Educational materials less expensive to produce. Also less material produced than anticipated

				in first year of monitoring.
Miscellaneous	£315	£93	+£222	This covered the cost of retrieving turtle tags and hiring a guardian to protect the turtle nests.
Communication	£250	£600	-£350	Contribution to satellite phone calls from research site to London as no other communication available.
TOTAL	£6655	£3738	+£2917	Note: the original budget in the application was £6655, Blue Ventures requested £4855 and received £3500 from Rufford Small Grants.

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

The next steps in this project are to continue to build on the local capacity developed in the first year of this project. This will be achieved by increasing the role of the data collector in each village through training and educational workshops in marine turtle conservation. Workshops will be held for fishermen, woman and children so that all members of the community are aware of the importance of protecting turtles for long-term population sustainability.

This method has already led to the successful protection of a newly discovered nesting beach near the village of Lamboara. The aim will be to encourage other villages to follow their example and report turtle nests so that they too can be protected from poaching.

The meetings held between the new MPA committee in the region will be used as an arena to discuss possible larger management ideas for future marine turtle conservation within the MPA area. It will be important to ensure that any conservation ideas put forward are relevant to the region and likely to be respected. Because of the historical and cultural significance of turtle hunting in the region local attitudes and perceptions must be taken into account whilst developing a conservation strategy.

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 appears on the Blue Ventures website. It will also be on the final project report.

11. Any other comments?

Blue Ventures could not have anticipated the impact that the successful hatching of two Green Turtle would have on this project. Whilst perhaps two nests seems insignificant in terms of increasing the population size of turtles in the region it has allowed us to demonstrate turtle conservation to villages. Through interest shown by Blue Ventures staff and volunteers in the turtle nests, the educational workshops on turtle life history to village members and the resulting emergence of live turtle hatchlings, villages were able to see first hand the results of their conservation efforts. In three months we have witnessed turtle conservation become a reality, even in a region where people consider turtle hunting a cultural and traditional ritual. The integration of a ban on targeted turtle fishing into the statute of the MPA in the region will be the first of its kind in Madagascar.