

The Rufford Foundation Final Report

Congratulations on the completion of your project that was supported by The Rufford 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	Mátyás Prommer
Project title	Continuation of Saker Falcon and Steppe Biodiversity Conservation in Ukraine
RSG reference	17326-2
Reporting period	01/06/2015 – 01/11/2016
Amount of grant	£4995
Your email address	mprommer@yahoo.com
Date of this report	16/11/2016

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
Population and conservation status of saker falcon will be identified in west Ukraine and Moldova			X	We have up-to-date population estimates on the species' population in the region
Stakeholders will be aware of the value of the species and the biodiversity due to education activities carried out by the project team		X		See more details in Section 3.
There will be successful breeding in the camera-trap guarded nests and juvenile sakers fledge successfully		X		See more details in Section 3.
Ten more artificial nests will be installed for saker falcons in nest-free, but otherwise favourable areas			X	See more details in Section 3.
Data sets of two satellite-tracked adult saker falcons will be compiled during the project in order to identify threats on adults and prepare appropriate conservation measures		X		See more details in Section 3.
Major threats on the migration routes will be identified and contacts will be made to local conservationists to prepare plan to eliminate / minimise identified threats		X		See more details in Section 3.
Population monitoring will provide us with information on population trend and dynamics helping to understand recent population status			X	New data form part of a data set on the population indicating trends

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

After a long period, the field work for the project 17326-2 'Continuation of Saker Falcon and Steppe Biodiversity Conservation in Ukraine' (www.rufford.org/projects/mátyás_prommer) was launched in spring 2016. The reason of the relative late start was that the original project proposal included only Ukraine and the Crimea within, however due to the political and military actions in Crimea in 2014, we had to re-consider the proposal. Crimea was left out in the revised proposal, but Moldova was added to west Ukraine covering an area yet almost unknown from the saker falcon population point of view.

Unfortunately, the new proposal was submitted too late to be decided upon before the field season in 2015. Thus, although the green light was on from the Board, we could start the active field work only in spring 2016.

In 2016 we had further unforeseen difficulties with the production of loggers (they arrived late) and then late delivery and customs caused other problems that prevented us to complete some of the field work. We could not carry out camera trapping at nests and tagging of birds in nests in June 2016. Therefore, we had the "next best plan" that was to trap and tag birds in the autumn (October-November 2016). Unfortunately, technical problems and severe snowfall in Ukraine prevented us to implement that plan. In January 2017, another attempt will be made to trap and tag sakers in Moldova and Ukraine. If that did not work out, we will tag fledglings in June 2017.

For obvious reasons, camera trapping will be carried out in 2017 breeding season.

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

(1) Population survey

Population survey in (west) Ukraine and Moldova provided data on the status of the species.

Ukraine - In Ukraine, the Ukrainian colleagues, Yuriy Milobog and Maxim Gavriyuk covered more than 1000 so far to check Kirovograd, Mykolaiv and Odessa regions. Unfortunately, they did not find any sakers in the northernmost range (Kirovograd region) of species, which likely indicates the withdrawal of the species from the previous population edges. We do not know, however, whether this phenomenon is an indication of long term negative changes, or it fits the natural fluctuation pattern of the population (due to weather, lack of prey, etc.). The coming years will answer that question.

In Mykolaiv and Odessa regions, the monitoring brought more success: seven pairs of saker falcons were found, which is still less than earlier. The reasons need to be investigated in that case too.

It would have been important to monitor also the regions between Dnister and Danube in the southwest corner of Ukraine, however the car of the Ukrainian colleagues broke down on the way near Odessa. It could be repaired only partly, so they had to return to Kryvyi Rih and Cherkassy their base cities. Twelve pairs were found, which was less than earlier according to previous monitoring data. Also one pair was found in Moldova near the border with Ukraine.

Republic of Moldova - In the southern part of the Republic of Moldova, the entire grid was monitored by Emanuel Baltag and his colleagues. Only four active breeding pairs were recorded, however the monitoring was very important, as there had not been done any survey targeting saker falcons. Now, we have the baseline data set due to Rufford Small Grant Programme.

All four pairs laid eggs, but only three pairs were successful. The number of chicks were: two pairs had two chicks and one pair had four chicks that makes eight chicks in the monitored area. The fourth pair did not have chicks, but they were in their eyrie in June.

(2) Artificial nests

During the monitoring trips, locations for artificial nests were chosen both in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova and artificial nests will be built also in the autumn season. In Moldova, the absence of appropriate nests (as falcons do not build own nest) is an important problem. Saker falcons in the monitored area use only anchor pylons of high voltage power lines for nesting. It is a special type of pylon, which is used when the high electric voltage network is going in a valley or is turning left or right, a kind of pylons which are very strong, larger than the others. That makes nest boxes to be a very important step in species conservation in the area.

(3) Public awareness raising

In Moldova, presence of saker falcons were discussed with the border police in south of Republic of Moldova. Similarly to local people approached, border police did not know about saker falcons and their importance. Although public awareness raising was an important element of the project, we hesitated to go public in some sites. It was partly the extreme low number of pairs and successful breeding, partly because of the global situation of the species (decreasing populations in many areas) and local problems (illegal trapping) in some areas. We should find the best way for communicating the project not to make more harm than good.

Further outcomes:

Satellite tracking - In the frame of the programme, two juvenile birds were to be tagged in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in order to follow their movements and migration. Unfortunately, the loggers were delivered too late for tagging (the juveniles were fledged already), so we could not tag them. However, it may be considered positive, as thus we can tag two adult birds in the same area in the October – February period (autumn-winter is the best time for trapping adults). From conservation point of view, the information on habitat use and movements of adult birds may be even more important, than data from juveniles. For tagging two experts will travel to Moldova and Ukraine to trap and tag birds for satellite tagging. The loggers will provide valuable data on threats and focus areas for conservation.

Camera traps - Two camera traps were purchased with the aim of setting them to saker nests to learn more about their diet. That method for food analyses work very well in Hungary. The camera traps record the movements at nests and after removing them (after the juveniles fledged) photos could be downloaded and analysed. Unfortunately, we could not install the camera trap in Moldova due to bad weather (it is not safe to climb high voltage power line towers in rainy weather). There was 3 weeks of rain in the period when camera traps could have been deployed. After such an unusually long period, there was another attempt, but the juveniles had already well-developed feathers, thus we did not want to risk premature flushing of young from the nest. Although sent at the same time, difficulties to posting to Ukraine, the camera traps were delivered too late for Ukrainian colleagues, so it will be used next years.

It is a lucky co-incidence that the team monitoring the Moldavian population is also working on suslik (*Spermophilus citellus*), which is the favourite prey of saker falcons, thus we will learn more about the predator-prey relations.

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

The most important "saker area" in Moldova is not protected, thus we started the procedure to get legal protection for the area. We sent a report to BirdLife International in order to designate the site as an Important Bird Area. Also, we shared our information with the Ministry of Environment in order to designate the area as a part of EMERALD network (it is a network of conservation areas like Natura 2000, but in the pre-accession countries) site. Our colleagues from the Society for Birds and Nature Protection (a very new NGO from the Republic of Moldova) discussed the problem of this site in the EMERALD seminar in Minsk in order to put

more pressure on the government. The issue was raised again in the EMERALD biogeographical evaluation seminar in Kyiv (6th-8th September 2016).

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

As mentioned earlier, certain activities – camera trapping and satellite tracking – were not carried out in 2016 for unforeseen reasons. Those activities, therefore, will be implemented in 2017. In addition, the project areas will be again surveyed to collect further data on the population to identify the population trends. Also, work for legal protection for the saker dwelling areas in Moldova will be continued.

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

The project contributes to the implementation of the species focused Saker Falcon Global Action Plan or Saker GAP (see: www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/SakerGAP_e.pdf) prepared and coordinated by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Raptors MoU (see: www.cms.int/en/legalinstrument/birds-prey-raptors). According to that the final results of the project will be shared with the Secretariat of CMS Raptors MoU, as well as the responsible ministries (and state institutions) and NGOs in Moldova and Ukraine.

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

The grant was used over a prolonged period compared to the planned period, however some of the activities are still to be completed next year due to unforeseen results (see explanation above).

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
Fuel (Ukraine & Moldova & abroad)	1485	990	495	Due to lack of telemetry data, there was no areas visited outside of the region.
Tracking devices	1800	1800	0	According to plan

Data (GSM service fee for tracking devices)	120	120	0	According to plan
Camera traps	600	600	0	According to plan
Telescope	990	550	0	Less expensive telescope to save for drone
Drone		440	0	Originally not planned, but it makes the nest survey easier and faster and less disturbing for birds (less time needed at nests)
Total	4995	4500	495	

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

The next step is to implement tracking and camera trapping next year, as well as monitor the known population to identify trends. It is also important to reinforce the local "saker team" in Moldova, as we identified the lack of raptor experts as a weakness of nature conservation. Also it is important to keep contact with relevant governmental bodies and NGOs to promote the conservation of saker falcon, as one of the steppes' flagship species. That work, of course, has already started (see Section 4.) Establishing the financial background of all those work is essential and consists of co-operation with international bodies (e.g. CMS), national organisations and private foundations (like RSGF).

10. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the RSGF receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The project was focusing rather on the field work, however RSGF received publicity on the meetings mentioned above and remaining of posters produced in the first project was disseminated giving additional publicity to RSGF. In addition, all credits will be given to RSGF in the reports that are to be submitted to international and national bodies.

11. Any other comments?

Should RSGF Board approve our Final Report, we wish to use the remaining amount (£495) for the field visit early next year to tag sakers in order to track their movements.

All the data compiled will be used for the saker falcon conservation plan in the region. In addition, European Union's International Action Plan for the Saker Falcon needs to be revised and all the information from the RSGP supported projects will be considered.