

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	Shawna K. Natalya Lawrence
Project title	"Engaging Antiguan and Barbudans as conservation stewards in conserving their island biodiversity, including the Critically Endangered Antiguan racer"
RSG reference	18118-1
Reporting period	September, 2015 – September, 2016
Amount of grant	£5,000
Your email address	eagantigua@gmail.com
Date of this report	26 th May, 2017

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
<p>Increase local capacity to conserve and monitor Antiguan racers on Offshore Islands</p>				<p>During the project period, 24 persons, including 10 females, gained capacity to monitor wildlife on our offshore islands, and to detect and deter Invasive alien species. An additional two persons built up their capacity to communicate conservation messages within the country. This is a great accomplishment in a population of 80,000 people who are mostly preoccupied with acquiring a traditional office job, and who see conservation work as primarily a past-time of U.S. and British expatriates.</p>
<p>Increase public understanding of and cooperation for conserving local wildlife.</p>				<p>We believe this was highly successful as we used a variety of methods to reach different sectors of society. Members of my project team are often met and greeted with quotes such as "You are the man I saw on TV talking about the mangroves?" or, "You are the snake lady? You nuh fraid dem? (Local dialect for: Aren't you afraid of [them] snakes?). Me neva know, Antigua hab snake! (local dialect for: I never knew that there were snakes in Antigua)"</p> <p>Another positive result stemming from this project are the numerous requests that the project team receives for radio and television interviews, showing that local media is willing to cooperate to share information on local conservation.</p>

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

There were no difficulties encountered with the actual execution of the project. However, the project team's parent organisation experienced a shortage of personnel during the project period, which led to administrative setbacks and reporting delays for our projects.

Outside of the execution of our project, the team encountered another challenge: a proposed development project, and later actual clearing of land and the start of construction in the marine reserve in which our worksite exists. The development poses threat to terrestrial and aquatic life, and unsurveyed, historical sites within the reserve.

Though this development has been seen as a negative, it has been extremely helpful in assisting our team to educate the public about our country's unique and threatened wildlife, the importance of our worksite (the North East Marine Management Area/NEMMA) to Antiguans and Barbudans for food, protection, health, recreation and a host of other socio-economic, cultural and religious benefits.

The team and other volunteers occupied ourselves with meeting government officials, hosting meetings, publishing information on social media, issuing press releases and participating in several radio and television interviews.

The development has kept the NEMMA in the news and we observe that as our residents and visitors learn more about the area, the more they demand that the developers respect our natural environment. This is exactly the attitude that we want to see in our residents.

See links to a selection of articles in the local media, linked to the aforementioned development,

<http://antiguaobserver.com/guestcommentaryguiana-island-our-last-sanctuary-for-our-fish/>

<http://antiguaobserver.com/guest-comment-what-do-we-benefit-from-yida/>

<http://antiguaobserver.com/overrides-for-yidas-beaches-met-with-criticism/>

<http://antiguaobserver.com/minister-defends-plan-to-override-the-law-protecting-mangroves/>

<http://antiguaobserver.com/former-ag-sayst-special-economic-zone-license-order-cannot-override-environmental-prohibitions/>

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

The focus of the project was educating people of Antigua and Barbuda about the existence of local wildlife and how to conserve them. Remarkably, it was discovered during the course of the project that Antiguans and Barbudans knew very little about our country's flora or fauna and even less about the NEMMA

(Marine Reserve where we conduct environmental conservation work). The three most important outcomes are as follows:

- Involvement of, newly formed relationships with, and closer working relationships with government agencies for the conservation of our plants and animals.
 - Newly forged partnership: Ministry of Community Development & Social Transformation.
 - Closer partnerships: Department of Environment, Fisheries Division, Forestry Unit, Antigua & Barbuda Broadcasting Services (ABS), Observer Media Group, Minister of Health & Environment.
- Increased local capacity to monitor local biodiversity and to detect and deal with invasive alien species (specifically rats and mongooses). Under this project, 24 Antiguan residents benefitted from this training, including members of the Caribbean Youth Environment Network, members of the Department of Environment, members from the coastal communities that border NEMMA, and members from the Ministry of Community Development & Social Transformation. Training was done both in the classroom and in the field. Persons were introduced to wildlife found on the offshore islands, their current status, the threats to their survival, and the current work that is being undertaken to conserve them. In the field, participants were able to conduct monitoring activities, including using the mark-recapture method of surveying Antiguan Racers.
- Increased public understanding of and cooperation for conserving local wildlife. The project team is confident that 25% of the population (country's population is 80,000) are now aware of our threatened wildlife. The team used varied means to reach different sectors of society including the following:
 - Meetings with Government Ministers (3 during the project period).
 - Training (in the field and in the classroom).
 - Community meetings (Townhall meetings) (one in Seatons, one in Parham and one in Freetown [all communities lying within the NEMMA]).
 - Radio interviews (over 10).
 - Television interviews (four).
 - Newspaper articles, newsletter articles.
 - School and community Presentations and field trips (accounting for over 250 people).
 - A snake tour (taking a racer to several schools and with the Department of Environment before releasing it back into the wild) – one lady asked the project leader about the snake, “Where did you get that? In this Antigua? Are you sure? Since when we have snakes?”
 - Meetings with government staff and the local Technical Advisory Committee (over 10).

- Celebration of World Snake Day (including taking two live racers to the local TV station for a live interview).
- Production of educational material.
- Many social media posts.

In order to gauge our success, we used indicators such as knowledge surveys, increase in membership in our parent organisation (Environmental Awareness Group/EAG), increased attendance at members' meetings, increased social media following, and subtle indicators such as our interaction with people on the street and on the offshore islands, as well as the enthusiasm and continued work of the persons who were trained under this project.

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

Local communities were heavily involved in the project especially those coastal villages that bordered the NEMMA.

- The only way to get to the islands is by boat. The majority of the boat trips were provided by local fishers or tour operators, all found with coastal communities bordering NEMMA. This was beneficial to them financially, as they learnt about our fauna and flora and participated in some training as they taxied us to and from the islands. These same fishers and tour operators have been very vocal in the communities, sharing their knowledge of conservation work on the offshore islands. These fishers and tour operators have also participated in town-hall meetings mentioned in #3 above.
- The Community Development staff became newly and heavily involved as they were surprised by the biodiversity found in Antigua and of the ecosystem services they provide. As examples, the Director of the Community Development (from Freetown, found within NEMMA) noted that she had no idea that mangroves were important until she came in contact with us. Also, one of her staff who was terribly afraid of reptiles gained courage enough to assist with lizard surveys, and another staff gained training in biosecurity procedures. He has now become a regular volunteer with our project team. The director's team is now actively involved in different aspects of our work. Since their involvement with the project team, it is likely that they will discuss environmental issues with the communities with which they so often engage.
- Some of the volunteers trained under this project hail from communities that border the NEMMA. These communities are the project team's eyes and ears. With increased conservation management capacity in the area, these communities can advise us on any activity of conservation concern taking place in the area.
- Landowners from other communities have heard about the conservation work being undertaken and have approached my team to assist them in restoring their private islands and to train them to monitor and care for their own islands. This is also beneficial to the project team as it means more locals with capacity to care for local wildlife, and more area of restored habitat for native wildlife to flourish.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes. The offshore islands are the safest remaining habitat that our country has left for endemic and globally threatened plants and animals. Thankfully, due to the success of this and other projects in the NEMMA, we have been able to leverage funds to save one of our larger, and our most remote offshore island, Redonda, an island designated as top priority for conservation in the region. Furthermore, owners of private offshore islands outside our worksite have approached the team to assist and train them to restore and monitor their islands.

Currently, we are still working to keep the islands in NEMMA a safe habitat for wildlife. To rely less on external funding, the team is just about to launch a symbolic adoption scheme, which will not only pique further interest in the local wildlife, but will at the same time support the conservation of our plants and animals.

Also, with our current restoration of Redonda, and its possible designation as a Marine Protected Area, we are ensuring that there is safer habitat for local wildlife.

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

The results of our work have been shared locally at the members' meeting for our local NGO, the Environmental Awareness Group, with the Minister of Health & Environment in December, 2016 at a UK Overseas Territory meeting in Montserrat in October, 2016 and at a government stakeholder meeting in December, 2016. Additionally, the project team leader will make a presentation on our project work at the BirdsCaribbean International Conference in July, 2017. Though the focus of this organisation is the conservation of Caribbean Birds, stories of engaging the public to appreciate wildlife in general are always welcomed and well-received.

Data collected from both biosecurity and biodiversity monitoring surveys are being digitised and converted into graphs and reports to share with local and regional conservation decision makers. Some of these data are also being shared with the local Department of Environment to be georeferenced and housed in the Environment Information Management and Advisory System (EIMAS), the national repository for environmental data.

Despite limited staff, we do try and make full use of social media with regular posts to keep our work in the public eye and encourage more persons to become actively involved in the conservation of our plants and animals.

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

Most of the activities under this grant fell within the specified timeline (September 2015 – September 2016). However, a wrap-up government meeting took place in December, 2016. Additionally, post-project knowledge surveys were not collected until February, 2017.

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.

***Rate at which the funds were received: 4.0753

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Boat Trips	2685	2727	-42	Some boat trips were funded from other sources, and others were given free of cost. However, we still fell slightly above our estimated costs.
Stipend for Field Officers	1357	1270	94	Voluntary services rendered by trainees assisted to lower this budget line in favour of other lines that exceeded their estimate.
Stipend for Team Leader	726	726	0	
Stipend for Field Biologist	0	0	0	This was supported by other sources of funds.
Educational Material Design and Printing	120	155	-35	Printing costs slightly increased from our original estimate.
Stationary and Field Notepads	0	0	0	This was supported by other sources of funds.
World Snake Day Celebrations	0	0	0	Boat trips to offshore islands to search for and monitor racers were covered under boat trips. Team leader and field biologist donated everything else towards this celebration. Social media publications were free of cost.
Phone	39	44	-5	
Internet	73	73	0	
Bank Charges (Transfer fees)	0	12	-12	Funds lost in transfer to local account.
Total	£5,000	£5,000		

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

My team's current and major priority is to encourage our government leaders to closely follow the recommendations outlined by the Department of Environment and the Fisheries Division in response to proposed development in the NEMMA.

My team will work with the Fisheries Division to update the NEMMA management plan in order to derive maximum benefits for both the people and the wildlife as a properly functioning Marine Reserve.

Restoring Redonda is high on our priority list as it is so remote and the terrain is so rugged that it makes an excellent place for biodiversity to recover without much human interference. Apart from removing invasive alien species from the island, we hope to have Redonda and its surrounding waters declared a Marine Protected Area with restricted access.

Finally, my team intends to keep our trained volunteers active in the project so that conservation can be spread across the entire country. The team will continue to improve our capacity through training, and will pass on that training to these volunteers and others in order to ensure that our country has a constant source of qualified persons who can be caretakers of our natural environment.

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 team created an Antiguan racer infographic featuring the RSG logo.
- Educational material printed for workshops, and PowerPoint presentations made, featured the RSG logo.
- The project created a newsletter with local circulation which featured the RSG logo.
- RSG was tagged in a social media posts.
- RSG was thanked for its support in publication in Simply Antigua & Barbuda (Coffee table book).
- RSG was also thanked on Radio and Television Interviews.

11. Any other comments?

RSG has allowed my team and me to do something that is close to our hearts. The team is made up of Antiguan who have come from humble beginnings, from a sector of society that is not especially in tune with our natural environment, or preoccupied for its care. With this project, we have been able to share our love for nature with fellow Antiguan, show them that conservation is for everyone, teach them how simple actions affect the natural environment, help them to understand how nature takes care of us, and help them to gain capacity to be stewards of and monitor our environment. We have been so encouraged by the enthusiasm demonstrated by those who benefitted from training under this project.

We know that funding for conservation projects is very competitive and Antigua is one of the more expensive countries to do work in as the cost of living is quite high. With this project, we have been able to reach thousands of persons, helping them to start thinking about the environment.



We say heartfelt thanks for believing in and funding our project, thus giving us the opportunity to share our work with so many people and hopefully, spark conservation management interest in quite a few young minds.

We are honoured and pleased to have been recipients of this grant. Our sincerest thanks to the Rufford Small Grants Programme.



Siboney Winter

21 July · 🌐

Thank you Antigua's Environmental Awareness Group for the educational opportunity I had interning with your organization. From the variety of office work, field work, and biodiversity monitoring I couldn't have asked for a more eye opening experience! Also proud I got to help find an endangered Antiguan Racer Snake in the wild!!! 🐍🌿 — at 📍 Great Bird Island, Antigua.

👉 Share

👍❤️👏 59

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Amy Lyubov McMurray Wow Siboney!!! I would've ran like crazy lol

21 July at 19:53



Latifa Jaima So proud of you!

21 July at 20:15



Robert Wilson Awesome Sibby! Had no idea there were snakes always thought all the mongoose had killed them off

21 July at 21:04



SherryAnn Dodds-Sears Awesome job Siboney Winter

21 July at 21:30

Siboney Winter holds a rare Antiguan Racer on Rabbit Island – © Siboney Winter



Local Fisher holds an Antigua Racer – © Natalya Lawrence



Local Diver assists to monitor Antigua Racer – © Natalya Lawrence



Endangered Antigua Ground Dragon – ©Natalya Lawrence



Intern surveys birds with Field Biologist – ©Natalya Lawrence



Nesting Brown Noddy – © Natalya Lawrence



Fixed Point Photographs are taken of the islands to monitor changes from year to year – ©Natalya Lawrence



Monitoring Seabirds during the nesting season – © Natalya Lawrence



Volunteer learning to conduct biosecurity monitoring with field officer – © Natalya Lawrence



Field training for monitoring Antiguan Racers – © Natalya Lawrence



Caribbean Elaenia observed on Great Bird Island – © Natalya Lawrence



Yellow Warbler observed on Great Bird Island – © Natalya Lawrence



Snake Monitoring training on Great Bird Island – © Natalya Lawrence



Snake monitoring Training on Great Bird Island – © Natalya Lawrence



Learning to assess a racer – © Natalya Lawrence



Mangrove Cuckoo observed on offshore island – © Natalya Lawrence



Threatened West-Indian Whistling-duck and Brown Noddy observed on offshore island – © Natalya Lawrence



Project team with TV Host on set at Good Morning Antigua & Barbuda with Live Racers – © Natalya Lawrence



Green Heron observed on offshore island – © Natalya Lawrence



ANTIGUAN RACER

(Alsophis antiguae)

FUN FACTS

- Endemic to Antigua & Barbuda.
- Non-venomous and not a constrictor, this snake is NOT dangerous to humans.
- Listed as Critically Endangered under the IUCN Red List.
- This species of snake is oviparous which means it lays eggs.
- The snake plays an important role in the food web and is part of a healthy ecosystem.
- It is unique to Antigua & Barbuda and is a source of national pride and a tourism asset.
- Favourite food of the Antiguan racer is lizards.



SIZE: males get to about 1 meter in length, females get a little bigger.

APPEARANCE:

Differences between males and females: The snake displays sexual dimorphism which is most clearly seen in their younger years. In juveniles it is easy to distinguish between a male and a female. Females have a larger head and are lighter in colour than males of the same age. As they get older these differences become less distinct.

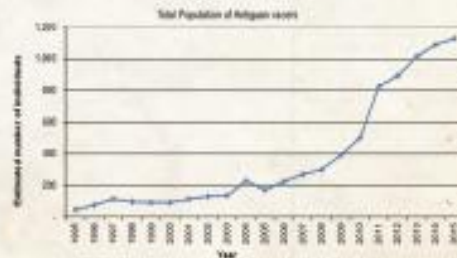
THE RACER'S STORY:

This harmless snake was once found all over Antigua & Barbuda. However, with the introduction of non-native rats and mongooses to the country in the 1800s, the snake population rapidly declined and the species was thought to be extinct, gone forever. Fortunately, the snake found refuge on Great Bird Island. It was in the 1990s that about 50 snakes were discovered on this offshore island, located off the North-East coast of Antigua. A rescue mission began immediately and involved eradication of rats and mongooses from offshore islands and an educational campaign. The successful conservation work continues today and has resulted in an increase of over 1000 snakes in 2015.

THREATS

- Alien invasive species (rats and mongooses)
- Destruction of snake habitat by humans and natural events
- Willful killing by humans

Production made possible by:



Sample educational material produced with support from RSG