

Final Project Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF 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 – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Complete the form in English and be as concise as you can. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to jane@rufford.org.

Your Details	
Full Name	Sebastián Aguiar
Project Title	Assessing degradation in Dry Chaco Forests: A key process for the definition of potential conservation areas
Application ID	18133-1
Grant Amount	£4549
Email Address	aguiarse@agro.uba.ar
Date of this Report	September 2017

1. 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
1. Calibrate the CLASlite methodology for seasonally dry forests.				By means of CLASlite, we obtained a mosaic of fractional cover (photosynthetic vegetation, non-photosynthetic vegetation, soil) for Chaco Dry Forests (25 Landsat path-rows) for 2016.
2. Estimate canopy height using a digital surface model (DSM) derived from radar imagery.				We had several technical difficulties with this objective. Actually, we are advancing towards the same goal but using a different source of RADAR imagery.
3. Characterize the actual structural condition of remnant forests				We did two field trips, one in November 2016 and the other in May 2017. During these trips, we gathered >1200 ground control points of natural vegetation types. In 50 of them, we conducted exhaustive vegetation surveys.
4. Determine the extent of degradation of remaining forest in dry Chaco and define potential conservation areas.				We analysed the spatial configuration of remnant forests by means of landscape metrics. The results were presented as a poster presentation at the 2016 Binational Congress of Ecology held in Puerto Iguazú. We are actually combining this information with the one obtained in the first objective. The delay is related to the technical difficulties in objectives 1 and 2.
5. Workshop with local stakeholders				During both field trips, we shared our goals and preliminary results with different stakeholders. Besides, we presented part of our work in a workshop at the National Administration of Native Forests.

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

We had several difficulties that delayed the accomplishment of our goals. The first one was related to bad weather conditions in the moment of doing our field trips. For this reason, we had to postpone both of them. We also had some technical difficulties with CLASlite and RADAR imagery. Currently, we resolved the problems related to CLASlite but in the case of RADAR, we had to change the satellite source.

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

- a) The most important outcome was the implementation of a research project oriented to fill a social and policy demand. The engagement with multiple and diverse stakeholders was fundamental for reorienting our future research agenda. We hope that the results derived from this project will orient policy related to forest conservation in the dry chaco.
- b) Secondly, our project had several technical challenges related to the application of different methodologies for assessing forest degradation. In order to tackle these challenges, this project had high heuristic value since the whole group learned to use several GIS and remote sensing tools. Besides publishing the results related to the use of these tools we are currently teaching students to use them in our faculty.
- c) Finally, the project enabled us to travel through almost all the Argentinean dry chaco and see its complex social-ecological situation. This was of great value for the whole group since it allowed us to discuss our future research agenda and orient it towards the needs of local communities.

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

During our field trips, we discussed our objectives with several stakeholders, not only local communities. Although in some cases our objectives were difficult to transmit, most stakeholders interested in forest conservation were enthusiastic with the idea of our results being used in future zoning schemes of the National Forest Law. In future projects, we aim at identifying conservation priorities of local communities to complement our project with ground-based perceptions of forest conservation. After our first field trip, we made a report summarizing our surveys for the rural extension agents that assisted us.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, we have plans to accomplish the objectives proposed in this project and afterward advance in two complementary directions. First, we aim to characterise the extent and spatial distributions of silvo-pastoral systems. These systems are expanding very fast in the dry chaco and since they do not involve the complete transformation of natural vegetation, they could eventually be habitat for some species. In particular, we aim to assess these livestock production systems in order to equilibrate their balance between food production and forest conservation.

Second, we seek to include social and economic variables which would complement our ecological approach toward the definition of priority conservation areas. This would be oriented towards the upgrade of native forest zoning schemes in the context of the National Forest Law.

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

The results of our work are going to be shared in two ways. On one hand, we are going to publish our results in top leading journals of conservation science, ecology or remote sensing. On the other hand, we are looking forward to sharing our results in academic meetings but also in policy workshops. We are participating in several projects oriented to assist the National Administration of Native Forests in a better implementation of the National Forest Law. So, we hope to share our results in the workshops organized in this context.

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

The RSG was used in two fieldwork periods that took place during the 16 months of the project. The first period of fieldwork was in November 2016 and the second in May 2017. In the first term, the project was delayed by the difficulty of obtaining the grant money due to a difficult national economic situation. Second, bad weather conditions delayed our fieldwork. Finally, technical difficulties related to objectives 1 and 2 also retarded our work schedule. All these reasons explain our delay and implied that the objectives of our project were not accomplished within a year.

8. Budget: 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. It is important that you retain the management accounts and all paid invoices relating to the project for at least 2 years as these may be required for inspection at our discretion.

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Fuel for fieldwork	1500	1985	+485	
Living expenses	1000	1243	+243	
Technical assistant	404	158	-246	
GIS assistance	400	210	-190	
Publishing costs	300	0	-300	
Instruments	505	793	+288	
First Aids Kit	40	40	0	
Workshops material	400	120	-280	
TOTAL	4549	4549		Local exchange rate used for all items: 1 sterling pound = 13.6 argentine pesos

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

Finish the objectives of our project and publish them in a top academic journal. In parallel, share our results and workshops and advance in our future research agenda describes in point 5. For this, we hope to co-design this agenda in a participatory manner with multiple stakeholders such as local communities and landholders, rural extension agents, environmental NGOs, other research groups of the study area and policy-makers of different administrative offices.

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

Yes, I used the RSGF logo in a poster presentation at the 2016 Binational Congress of Ecology held in Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) from 18 to 22 September 2016. The title of my presentation was "Priority conservation areas for the Argentine dry chaco: first steps towards its identification using landscape metrics".

11. Please provide a full list of all the members of your team and briefly what was their role in the project.

12. Any other comments?

Thanks for awarding the grant. It helped me and the group for getting started with this new work line related to the state and trends in forest degradation in Argentine dry chaco. I hope the results derived from this grant will contribute to the conservation of these forests.

