

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 | Miguel Iniguez Bessega |
| Project title | Awareness, Eco-Tourism and Research: Conservation of Franciscana (<i>Pontoporia blainvillei</i>) and Bottlenose dolphins (<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>) |
| RSG reference | 18425-2 |
| Reporting period | Nov 2015 – Nov 2016 |
| Amount of grant | £5,000 |
| Your email address | miguel.iniguez@cethus.org |
| Date of this report | 11/11/16 |

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 the scientific understanding of Franciscana and bottlenose dolphins in the Rio Negro Estuary (RNE) by assessing biological and ecological parameters.</p> | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 41 days from March to August 2016 of fieldwork were done to study Franciscana and bottlenose dolphins' behaviour. - During April and May 2016, nine boat surveys were made recording 17 hours of dolphins' vocalizations. - 33 groups of bottlenose dolphins feeding and travelling were reported. This year, calves were reported after 2 years. We are concerned about this because it supports the conclusion expressed by Vermeuler et al (in review). This scientific article made are view of the bottlenose dolphins in Argentina, which also include results of our studies at the RNE dolphins. The study is warning that this is a small population that is declining. -Of a total of 21 bottlenose dolphins photo identified and catalogued, 11 were re-identified (52%). -Six new cetacean strandings were analysed (two skeletons of bottlenose dolphins, a living breeding Franciscana, two skeletal remains of two large cetaceans and one sperm whale). - One alive stranded Franciscana calf were rescued and immediately released. |

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| | | | <p>-New genetic evidence gathered as part of this project highlights the genetic uniqueness of this population and the importance to protect this population.</p> <p>-Samples for further analyses on genetics, heavy metals, histopathology and diet were collected and are still being analysed.</p> <p>-Four new peer review papers were published in international journals and there are in review three more papers.</p> <p>-Reports and lectures were also presented at International Whaling Commission (IWC) Scientific Committee (May/June 2015, San Diego, USA and May 2016, Bled, Slovenia), the VIII International Workshop on Franciscana research and conservation (October 2015, Sao Francisco do Sul, Brazil). The information presented at the IWC and the VIII Workshop were used to support the nomination of Franciscana for a Conservation Management Plan of the IWC with the objective to reduce bycatch. We have also attended and provided support information based on the information gathered at the Río Negro Estuary (ERN) in two workshops hosted by the Argentinean Coast Guard to declare Marine Sensitivity Areas of Argentina under the International Maritime Organization (IMO) (Buenos Aires, June 2015 and Bahía Blanca, October 2016). In May 2016, the IUCN organised a</p> |
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| | | | | workshop in Argentina to review the status of conservation of marine fauna of Argentina. The results on sounds of <i>Franciscana</i> were presented in June 2016 at the First Conference for Aquatic Mammals in Latin America, Universidad de Río Grande del Norte, Natal, Brazil. |
| Strengthen community stewardship and build local capacity, so local people understand the value of abundant natural resources and are skilled to deliver the conservation work. | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under the slogan "Kids and beaches", 688 students and teachers from six schools at 4 RNE neighbouring cities visited the beaches and have the chance to learn about Franciscana, bottlenose dolphins and the ERN habitat. - Expanded the educational programme, giving 11 lectures and reaching 643 students and teachers at seven schools, totalling more than 13,000 students and teachers from 55 schools. - In the context of the recent protected area project presented to the Río Negro Provincial Legislature (still under parliamentary work/discussion) and as part of the WDC's "Safe Homes for Whale and Dolphins" initiative, a joint campaign of both institutions (WDC and Fundación Cethus) was carried out asking kids to draw what they consider a safe home for Franciscanas and bottlenose dolphins. Through the period of the campaign (March to September, 2016) almost 1300 drawings were received from eight different national cities. The drawings will be delivered to provincial authorities at the end of October 2016 (in a date to be confirmed with the |

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| | | | <p>authorities).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A workshop entitled "environmental education for our dolphins" attended by 82 future teachers was given at the Instituto de Formación Docente de Patagones (main official teacher training centre in the RNE region). - 71 interviews on the project were made by local, regional and national media. -7,000 brochures called "Río Negro: Agua de delfines" were printed and distributed in schools, tourism agencies, local stores, public agencies and touristic spots in the neighbouring towns of the RNE. -On the 12th December 2015 local institutions organized the third RNE beach cleaning. - Designed and installed four new signs about coastal dolphin watching in Balneario El Cóndor tourism office and Naval Museum at Carmen de Patagones in order to promote the conservation of dolphins. - A total of 95 Argentinean Coast Guard staff from Viedma and Carmen de Patagones attended the environmental workshop organised in conjunction with this institution. |
| Establish land based responsible whale watching using the best practices based on worldwide experience. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four double-sided RNE dolphins' interpretations signs were installed in the Balneario El Cóndor and Carmen de Patagones city to promote the conservation and responsible land-based dolphin watching. - A total of 44 new tourism agents attended the responsible land- |

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| | | | <p>based whale watching workshop which was organised with the Undersecretary of Tourism of Viedma.</p> <p>- In order to go on strengthening the land-based whale watching, a formal case file was initiated at the Ministry of Tourism of Río Negro which included all the technical information gathered by the project (dolphin watching activity in relation with tide, location and hotspot areas).</p> <p>A jaw of a sperm whale was found at Balneario El Condor. Once it was cleaned and with the support of the Department of Tourism of Viedma and with the permit of the Secretaría de Desarrollo Sustentable (SAyDS) of Río Negro, the jaw was prepared to be exhibited at the tourist information office of Balneario El Condor with a support of an informative panel on the species.</p> |
| <p>Advocate for the establishment of a Regional Nature Reserve through collaboration with Provincial and local authorities and in consensus with local stakeholders including the fishing community.</p> | | | <p>- The Municipality of Viedma banned the use of gillnets between December 2015 and March 2016 for 4 consecutive years in order to mitigate bycatch which coincides with the breeding season of Franciscana. The local fishermen agreed with this ban because it is not prohibiting fishing in those areas where Franciscana are not reported.</p> <p>- Meeting with authorities of the Municipality of Viedma, Municipality of Carmen de Patagones and the Río Negro province environmental and tourism authorities to advocate for</p> |

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| | | | | <p>the establishment of a Regional Nature Reserve. Authorities expressed interest to create the reserve.</p> <p>-The project Law No 120/2015 to create the RNE Nature Reserve was presented at the Río Negro Legislature and received the support of all commissions. However it is still waiting to be approved. At the same time, the Buenos Aires province, on the other side of the RNE, began to express its interest to create and expand the reserve.</p> |
| Actively collaborating with the current selection process of sensitive ecological areas organized by the Prefectura Naval Argentina. | | | | <p>We have also attended and provided support information based on the information gathered at the ERN in two workshops hosted by the Argentinean Coast Guard to declare Marine Sensitivity Areas of Argentina under the International Maritime Organization (IMO) (Buenos Aires, June 2015 and Bahía Blanca, October 2016). These two workshops are promoting the creation and establishment of El Rincón sensitivity area which include the RNE.</p> |

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

No difficulties encountered.

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

3.1.) Environmental education activities:

Our new educational activities have been very successful in developing awareness of the marine environment and iconic local species. During the year we delivered 10 talks in seven schools under the programme "Delfines del Río Negro" involving 632 students and 56 teachers from four neighbouring towns of RNE. Additionally, we

organised 11 visits by six schools to the Río Negro Estuary, involving 601 students and 46 teachers. This work is helping us to build a groundswell of support towards our MPA plans, as well as raise awareness of issues and build people's appreciation of their local environment. Please find attached some of the pictures created by local people through our "Safe Homes for Whales and Dolphins" campaign (see also link below):

https://www.facebook.com/FundacionCethus/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1016517351773614) these drawings will be delivered to provincial authorities during November 2016 (in a date to be confirmed) to express local -and national- support to the MPA project (for more information about the campaign please visit: http://www.wdcs.org/wdcskids/es/story_details.php?select=1136). Since the beginning of the educational component of the project in 2011, we have involved 12,000 students and 1,200 teachers from different educational levels.

3.2.) Responsible land-based dolphin watching: The process to establish responsible land-based dolphin watching is progressing well. We have forged excellent working relationships with the authorities of Municipality of Viedma and Tourism Ministry of Río Negro province (TMRN). Both authorities have expressed interest to continue this process in order to better implement this activity through best practice (i.e. strengthen capacity building and elaborate the first draft code of conduct). In addition, a formal case file was initiated in TMRN which are documented and regional and international background summary relating to the development of Responsible land-based dolphin watching. We prepared and sent a technical document that summarizes the main considerations and knowledge about dolphins watching times, areas of greatest sensitivity and potential for this activity in the Río Negro Estuary. This document is the first of its kind at the regional level and was well received and analysed by technicians and officials of that ministry. The main conservation benefits for this activity are the involvement of the community in the conservation of the RNE dolphins and their environment and also the economic benefit of this activity for the community which also acts as an incentive to protect the dolphins. Complementarily we designed and installed four new interpretation panels about coastal dolphin watching in Balneario El Cóndor tourism office and Naval Museum at Carmen de Patagones.

Additionally, during March and May 2016 we worked on capacity building (responsible land-based whale watching and environmental education workshops with visit to the RNE beaches) with 68 tourism college students, two local universities dedicated to training future guides.

3.3.) Achievements in favour of the RNE conservation: A) Again and for the 4th consecutive year the Municipality of Viedma introduced for the 3rd year a ban on the summer use of gillnets, between December 2015 and March 2016 at Balneario El

Cóndor – the most popular local beach in the area (4 miles approx.). This regulation protects Franciscana dolphins during their breeding season and is a real step forward to help reducing bycatch, but has to be re-implemented every year. One preliminary way to measure the efficiency of the ban is looking at the number of stakes used to set the gillnet to the bottom. Before the high summer tourist season, stakes were removed from the gillnet free zone during summer time until April when they began to be replaced by recreational fishermen. This decision was well received by the local press (i.e. regional newspaper).

This regulation remains unique in its kind in the Argentina coast. This means the ban on the use of gillnets is to prevent recreational fishermen – people who bought and set a gillnet for few days for fun and as a currently unregulated summer holiday activity - from causing real impact on dolphins and other wildlife. The ban does not prohibit fishing in areas where the five local full-time artisanal fishermen fish during the summer.

B) We held several meetings with authorities of the Municipality of Viedma, Municipality of Carmende Patagones, the Rio Negro province environmental and tourism authorities and local communities' neighbourhood councils, to advocate for the establishment of a regional nature reserve through collaboration with the provincial government and in consensus with the local stakeholders. By now the authorities have received all the scientific evidence that show the importance to create a reserve there. The main conservation management recommendations focused on increasing public awareness. In this regard we highlight:

- 1.) The importance to develop responsible land-based dolphin watching activity,
- 2.) That the local people understand how important it is to protect the RNE. As a concrete result of this action they made in El Pescadero a portal access to the RNE,
- 3.) Maintain the gillnet free zone in summer time but always considering the need of local fishermen, which mean that they have access to fish in those areas where dolphins are not recorded.
- 4.) Organise every year the RNE beach cleaning

C) We participate actively in workshops for coastal planning and management of solid waste RNE. Summoned by Municipality of Viedma and the Universidad de Río Negro, we present the main scientific findings and conservation recommendations related to the most sensitive areas used by dolphins RNE. This process is the first of its kind locally and we hope to continue to support these initiatives sustainable development.

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

Our objective is to include all local communities in our educational and awareness programme, as the best way to reach the recreational fishermen, whose use of gillnets poses one of the greatest threats to dolphins and other species.

During 2015-2016 we expanded the educational programme involving another 13 schools in five locations: Viedma, Balneario El Cóndor, General Roca, Cipolletti and Carmen de Patagones. - Under the slogan "Kids and beaches", 688 students and teachers from six schools at four RNE neighbouring cities visited the beaches. We would like to highlight that some of the participants visited for the first time the sea because the dolphins and even though they live 30 km from it. Also, we expanded the educational program, giving 11 lectures and reaching 643 students and teachers at seven schools, totalling more than 13,000 students and teachers from 55 schools.

"Safe Homes for Whales and Dolphins" campaign reinforced the idea to involved local community (mainly educational community) as a way to spread the need and get local –and national- support for the creation of the MPA above mentioned.

The RNE was the focus of a series of training sessions organised by the Fundación Cethus and the Prefectura Naval Argentina. A total of 95 Argentinean Coast Guard staff from Viedma y Carmen de Patagones attended the environmental workshop organized in conjunction this institution. This training included the following subjects: management of natural heritage, responsible tourism development and environmental education. This workshop lasted a total of 14 hours, including both lectures and hands-on experience.

Responding to the request of Instituto de Formación Docente de Patagones (main teacher-training centre in the RNE region), we did a second edition of a workshop entitled "Environmental education for our dolphins". This workshop was held in October 2015 in the facilities of this institute. Biologist Mauricio Failla coordinated this event, using as a case study the Delfines del Río Negro Education Program. 82 future teachers attended this workshop. Then they visited 11 primary schools and kindergartens Carmen de Patones city doing talks and discussions on the needs of conservation of dolphins RNE. These visits were made as part of their professional practices for 12 days between August and September 2016, reaching more than 1,300 students.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, we would like to develop the 3rd phase of this project (2016-2017):

- 1.) Inviting more of the local Community to visit the beach and learn of the dolphins of the Rio Negro Estuary (RNE) and their environment.
- 2.) Reinforcing the establishment of land-based dolphin watching.
- 3.) Continue working with all stakeholders, including the local fishermen, on the creation of the Regional Nature Reserve at regional and national level.
- 4.) Continue research activities on Franciscana and bottlenose dolphins.

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

The project has been covered by 71 local, regional and national media (newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations). The results of this project were shared with the local Community through 7,000 leaflets ("Río Negro: Agua de Delfines"), two double-sided interpretation signs and workshops. As a result of this project, the local institutions of Balneario El Cóndor organised on the 12th December 2015 the third RNE beach cleaning campaign.

The scientific aspect of the proposal was delivered at the 67th International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee (Bled, Slovenia, June 2016), the VIII International Workshop on Franciscana research and conservation (Univille, Brazil, October 2015), and workshops hosted by the Argentinean Coast Guard to declare Marine Sensitive Area and by the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Source of Argentina to reduce Franciscana bycatch (Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2015), and by the UICN to requalify the conservation status of argentine marine fauna (Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 2016), respectively.

There were published four new scientific publications in international journals and were sent for review three other scientific papers. Two posters and lectures were also presented at international conferences.

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

October 2015 - September 2016.

Considering a year round project help us to work on several aspects at different months and give us some flexibility in developing our activities. For example, education activities were organised in conjunction with the schools and universities in order to fit in with their academic calendar. Also scheduled activities for the

tourism sector and government agents could be organized in conjunction with the referents of these sectors to match your schedule.

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 |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|----------|
| Stipend for researcher | 1502 | 1502 | | |
| Interpretation signs | 500 | 500.13 | -0.13 | |
| Communication | 261 | 260.78 | 0.22 | |
| Lab supplies | 249 | 249.11 | -0.11 | |
| Gasoline | 1089 | 1089 | | |
| Accommodation & meals | 675 | 675.20 | -0.20 | |
| Transportation BA-VDMA | 529 | 529 | | |
| Administrative costs | 195 | 195 | | |
| Total | 5000 | 5000.22 | 0.22 | |

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

A third phase of this project is necessary in order to strengthen those outcomes delivered during phases 1 and 2. For example it is necessary to go on working with the community to strengthen the responsible land-based dolphin watching activities, the work done with regional and national authorities to create a Regional Protected Area and to consolidate the research developed on both species. Research will provide the best support for any decision adopted by the authorities to protect both species in the RNE. Without our continued support and work in this area, we fear that the marine environment and whale and dolphin species will suffer as a result.

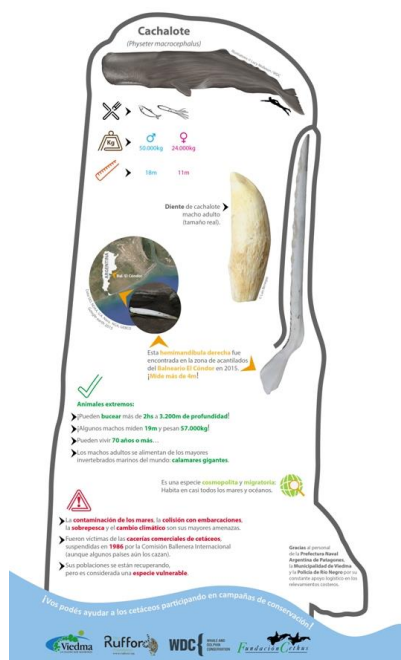
10. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the RSGF receive any publicity during the course of your work?

RSGF logo were used in 7.000 leaflets, in four signs emplaced in public offices and tourist information centres, poster promoting RNE beach cleaning campaign, in 11 lectures given in schools, in two workshops given in local government agencies and in six national and international scientific workshops. RSG is also mentioned in every presentation on the results of this project in massive means of communication. RSGF will also be acknowledged in the scientific articles published on this project in peer review journals.

Annex 1.



Interpretation signs about Franciscana and bottlenose dolphins installed in Balneario el Cóndor and Carmen de Patagones.



Delivery of brochures to tourists in the Tourism Agency of Balneario El Cóndor. Note the sperm whale hemimandible installed from the roof of the office and its corresponding signage.



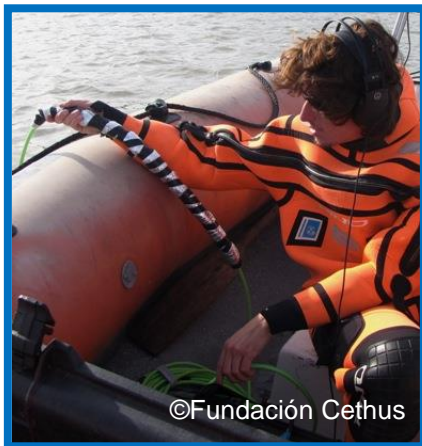
Students and teachers of Viedma and General Roca visiting the RNE beach.



Children participating in the campaign Home for Whales. The nearly 1,300 drawings produced by children and neighbors will be sent to the Legislatura de Río Negro to support the creation of the MPA ERN. Outcomes of activities made by students and teachers for Viedma the community.



Neighbors and municipal employees of tBalneario El Condor during a 3th beach cleaning.



Fundación Cethus researcher recording dolphins at the RNE (right) and an adult and calf of Bottlenose dolphins (left)



Alive stranded Franciscana calf released.



Tourism informants attended the responsible land-based whale watching workshop



Training future teachers of Instituto de Formación Docente de Patagones.