

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	Jo Marie V. Acebes
Project title	Ecosystem-based management of a humpback whale winter breeding ground in the Philippines
RSG reference	18850-D
Reporting period	Final report: 23 February 2016 to 28 February 2017
Amount of grant	£10,000
Your email address	jomacebes@yahoo.com
Date of this report	13 March 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>1. To expand the Philippines humpback fluke catalogue through continued monitoring and increased efforts.</p>			100%	<p>Fewer whales were encountered in the 2016 season than the previous season. There were also fewer humpback whale mother and calf pairs encountered. A total of 24 whales were photo-identified and out of which, only five were new. This is only 20% of new whales photo-identified in the previous season. The humpback whales left earlier this season than the previous. The last humpback whale sighted was on 21st April 2016. We had a total of 40 survey cruise days around Camiguin Norte Island and Fuga Island.</p> <p>The fluke photo-ID catalogue was reviewed and updated resulting in a total of 234 individuals.</p> <p>The catalogue was compared with the Okinawa (Japan) catalogue and 100 matches were found. Preliminary matching with the Russian Far East feeding grounds resulted in 106 matches.</p>
<p>2. To contribute to the world-wide genetics database on humpback whales through biopsy sampling.</p>		80%		<p>A total of two biopsy samples have been collected. Samples have been sent to the NFRDI-BFAR for genetic analysis. Results are still pending.</p>
<p>3. To initiate the study of the occurrence of skin lesions on humpback whales.</p>			100%	<p>The presence of nodular skin lesions on humpback whales was examined by reviewing photos taken from 2003 to 2016. Nodular</p>

				lesions were observed in 101 of photo-identified whales. The cause of these lesions is still unknown.
4. To monitor the status of other cetacean species in the Babuyan marine corridor.			100%	Six other species of cetaceans were encountered: pantropical spotted dolphins, Fraser's dolphins, rough-toothed dolphins, melon-headed whales, false killer whales and dwarf sperm whales. The dorsal fin photo-ID catalogue of rough-toothed dolphins has been expanded.
5. To strengthen the locally-managed Marine Protected and Humpback Whale Conservation Area (MPHWCA).			100%	A follow-up Coastal and Marine Law Enforcement Training for the local law enforcers and other relevant stakeholders of Barangay Balatubat, Naguilian and Minabel on Camiguin Island was held on 7th-9th April 2016 at Brgy. Balatubat. Twenty participants representing the local fisher folk organisation, village officials, the Philippine Coast Guard and village police attended. Participants were trained on the proper procedures for enforcement of various environmental laws in the Philippines, in particular on illegal logging and dynamite fishing. Fisheries data was collected from Camiguin Island through collaboration with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources – Region II. Suggested revisions to the existing MPHWCA management plan. A municipal ordinance endorsing the plan was signed in 2016,
6. To educate a wider audience on the importance of		90%		Educational outreach was conducted at the Camiguin Elementary School for 61 students in

<p>ecosystem management through an integrated and comprehensive environmental education outreach program.</p>		<p>Grade 6 Level and at the Lyceum High School for 80 students in Grades 7 to 11 Levels. The talks focused on humpback whale biology and ecology and the threats to marine biodiversity. It included a discussion on marine debris and other types of pollution and its effect on the marine environment. Humpback whale posters produced by the Project were distributed to all the schools on Camiguin Island, to the Barangay Office and to the Balatubat Fisherfolks Association. An educational outreach programme in the northern coast of mainland Cagayan in Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte was also conducted. Three high schools were visited and 167 Grade 7 and 80 Grade 8 students participated. A pre- and post- evaluation survey was conducted in all schools. The project was featured in a local TV show called "Born To Be Wild". It filmed the survey team while in Camiguin Island showing the work we do on humpback whales and other cetaceans. This was aired nationwide last May 2016. We started an Instagram account last April 2016. This became an additional social media platform for disseminating information about the project and our work. We have 373 followers to date. A poster on humpback whale photo-ID was designed for distribution to local schools and government offices in Cagayan.</p>
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2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

Fewer humpback whales were encountered during the 2016 season and those that came left earlier than normal. This meant less opportunity to conduct biopsy sampling and fewer whales photo-identified.

We had initially planned to initiate our fluke catalogue comparison with Ogasawara, Japan last year. However, delays in finalising the agreement with ELNA (Everlasting Nature of Asia) led us to postpone the activity to September 2017.

The damages caused by Typhoon Lawin that hit the northern Philippines on 20th October 2016 delayed our educational outreach activities in the northern coastal municipalities. The municipalities to be visited were in a state of calamity and there was no electricity in several towns for almost a month. We postponed the activities to February 2017.

The mooring buoys installed last 2015 off Pamoctan Island were lost during the typhoon later that year. The ropes broke off but the concrete base attachments are still intact. It is recommended that a thicker rope and stainless steel swivels and cables be used for a sturdier attachment of the buoys.

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

We were able to update and expand our Philippine humpback fluke catalogue to 234 whales. Photo-identification of new whales each season indicates that the number of whales visiting the Philippines breeding ground is still to be determined and further reiterates the site's potential significance to the western North Pacific population. The collaboration project initiated with Okinawa – Churashima Foundation allowed us to make a comparison with the Okinawa humpback fluke catalogue. We now have 100 matches with Okinawa. This is a 10-fold increase in matches since the last comparison in 2005. We were also able to initiate a collaboration with the Ogasawara humpback research group (ELNA). Comparison of fluke catalogues will begin in September 2017. These new collaborations have increased our understanding of the movements of humpback whales between the Philippines and Japan breeding grounds. The increased in matches strengthens the link between the two breeding grounds. With the additional biopsy samples taken, although still insufficient, further analysis can be done to add to the knowledge on the genetic identity of this distinct population segment of humpback whales.

Strengthening the local capacity to manage the Marine Protected and Humpback Whale Conservation Area (MPHWCA) has been a gradual process. The follow-up

environmental law enforcement training conducted for local enforcers including the barangay officials, *Bantay Dagat*, Fisherfolk Association members and the Philippine Coast Guard increased the local capacity for protecting their environment. Technical advice provided for the revisions for the MPHWCA management plan helped refine the plan which is now a signed municipal ordinance of Calayan.

There has been an increase in general public awareness on BALYENA.ORG and our activities specifically on the project in the past year. We had an increase in social media following through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We received invitations to speak in several environmental-related events in universities in Manila and other regions. We also received over 50 volunteer and research internship applications from all over the Philippines and three other countries. We received requests for technical assistance in conducting whale watching tours from two private entities, one in Fuga Island and another in Camiguin Island.

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

Members of the communities in Camiguin Island benefitted in the environmental law enforcement training, particularly the local law enforcers by increasing their capacity in understanding the environmental laws and the protocols in implementing them. This was demonstrated by several patrolling activities conducted by the *Bantay Dagat* (sea patrol/wardens) after the training.

The wider reach of our environmental educational programme on the island and the mainland benefitted not just the youth of the communities but the local teachers as well. The support of the schools for our environmental education outreach programme was overwhelming. The teachers and students were very responsive and participated actively in the talks and activities. The activity evaluation surveys conducted indicated an increased level of learning on the topics discussed.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

We plan to continue and expand our collaboration with other research groups working on humpback whales in the western North Pacific. We have signed an agreement to work with Okinawa, Japan and the Commander Islands, Russia to investigate the calf mortality of humpbacks. We have also signed an agreement with Ogasawara humpback research group – ELNA (Everlasting Nature of Asia) to conduct a fluke photo-identification catalogue comparison which is scheduled to commence on September 2017.

The local community stakeholders of Camiguin Island, as well as a private company in Fuga Island are requesting for a training on ecotourism. With the renewed interests in establishing whale watching tours, we deemed it pertinent to conduct this training to promote responsible whale and dolphin watching activities.

Although the MPHWC management plan has already been endorsed as a municipal ordinance, further refinement is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the plan. We plan to conduct a consultation-workshop with the local stakeholders on the island to discuss their needs in effectively implementing the plan. This will also include a training workshop on responsible ecotourism.

We plan to continue our environmental education outreach programme on the islands and the coastal municipalities. We are also redesigning our website to adapt to the more technically savvy general audience.

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

We will present the results of our research on the movement of humpback whales between the Okinawa and Philippines breeding ground at the 22nd Society for Marine Mammalogy Conference in Halifax, Canada on October 2017. This conference presentation will be the basis for a manuscript aimed for publication on 2018.

A manuscript entitled "Photo-identification matches of humpback whales from feeding areas in Russian Far East and breeding grounds in the North Pacific" is currently under review and is anticipated to be published in mid-2017.

We have participated in several public events such as the Animal Welfare Week at the Ateneo de Manila University, the Dive and Resort Travel show last September 2016 in Manila and the World Wildlife Day 2017 celebration in Tagbilaran, Bohol. This gave us the opportunity to showcase our work to the public.

We have consistently published posts regarding the work of the Project through Face Book, Twitter and Instagram, increasing our social media presence. We have 5,679 followers on FB, 324 followers on Twitter and 373 followers on Instagram. We have about 3,000 post reach on FB each week.

Annual Project Reports have been sent to the Local Government Units, the BFAR-Region II and the DENR-Region II offices.

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 Rufford Foundation grant was used from 23rd February 2016 to 10th March 2017. This is slightly longer than the actual length of the project. We were able to extend the use of the grant because of the postponement of some activities to 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.

The exchange rate used is 63 Philippine pesos to 1£ sterling. This is a rate slightly lower than the rate used when the proposal was submitted (70 PhP = 1£ sterling).

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Boat hire & fuel for survey	3,961	4,401	440	Difference in exchange rate from originally proposed budget.
Transportation to & from field site	400	444	44	Difference in exchange rate from originally proposed budget.
Food & accommodation for researchers on field	2,588	2,873	285	Difference in exchange rate from originally proposed budget.
Training-workshop costs	978	952	-26	Part of the cost was covered by a small counterpart funding from the local community.
Education outreach costs & communication	658	732	74	Difference in exchange rate from originally proposed budget.
Field supplies & equipment	947	703	244	A laptop was donated to us hence, we no longer bought one. We used some of the money to buy another handheld GPS instead.
Web & email hosting	111	123	12	Difference in exchange rate from originally proposed budget.
Print educational materials	357	317	-40	We were able to find a cheaper yet suitable material for printing the posters.
Total	10,000	10,545	-545	

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

With the municipal ordinance endorsing the Marine Protected and Humpback Whale Conservation Area Plan (MPHWCA), the next important step is to ensure that the communities are able to implement the plan. An integral part of implementation is having sustainable funding for the activities in the plan. Thus, we seek to assist the Fisherfolk Association in finding financial support for the marking of the zones of the MPHWCA and the sea patrolling activities.

Based on the MPHWCA plan, the community intends to develop tourism on the island. Hence, we aim to assist them by conducting a training workshop on developing responsible ecotourism. This will include not just training for the proper conduct of whale watching tours but other nature-based tourism as well, such as bird watching and hiking. We believe it is necessary to elevate the level of understanding of the people on the benefits of having a working MPHWCA plan. Follow-up community consultations is important.

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?

Yes. We used The Rufford Foundation logo in our visual materials during presentations such as the poster presentation at the 21st Society for Marine Mammal Conference and educational outreach activities in schools. The logo was also used in print materials such as the posters for the humpback whale photo-ID study and for the photo exhibit during the 21st Society for Marine Mammalogy Conference and the Animal Welfare Week.

11. Any other comments?