

Project Update: June 2019

We have pretty much met or exceeded all our project targets for the current round of Rufford funding. Our experimentation with firebreaks has been tremendously successful and demonstrates to me that the best way to conserve forest at Mt Moco is to control fire, with planting trees as a secondary goal to support forest recovery. The firebreaks we have installed have stopped several fires and let none through, with the result that the forest is recovering much more quickly (although will still take many years to come back properly). These firebreaks need to be installed in late May/early June, at the onset of the fire season and before fires become widespread and risk burning the forest.

We have been installing firebreaks by hand for the past 2 years, which is very labour intensive. A much more effective way to control fires will be through controlled burns of the matrix grasslands, and to these ends I have been investigating the options for bringing these skills to the project. I am confident that once we have a trained team on site, that we will be able to protect all of the largest 10 patches of forest on the mountain, rather than just two as we are currently doing.

There is a fire management organisation from South Africa called Working on Fire that is headquartered where I now live (in Nelspruit) and I have been with some of their teams in the field and met the director. Besides providing fire management services in more than 10 countries, they provide training to fire technicians. They even have some Angolans working for them as fire trainers, and I have been discussing the possibility of starting this work at Mt Moco, in late May next year, using their fire trainers to train a team of our villagers.