

## The Rufford Foundation

### Final Report

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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](mailto:jane@rufford.org).

Thank you for your help.

**Josh Cole, Grants Director**

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Grant Recipient Details	
Your name	Nataša Nikpaljević
Project title	From research to policy implications; minimizing negative human impact on cetaceans and their vulnerable habitats in the South Adriatic
RSG reference	27086 - 2
Reporting period	January 2019 – January 2020
Amount of grant	£ 4,982
Your email address	natasa.nikpaljevic@gmail.com
Date of this report	April 2020

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
Population statuses update of bottlenose dolphins and striped dolphins.				Population status of bottlenose dolphins has been investigated and the results are ready for publication. However, due to the restrictions, we could only conduct three offshore surveys which limited the assessment of the striped dolphin population.
Establishing if offshore cetacean populations are present				Limited offshore surveys revealed the presence of striped dolphins within the south Adriatic. Yet, the number of offshore surveys were limited to assess their residency to the area.
Annual and seasonal estimation of abundance and encounter rate of bottlenose dolphins				The results are ready for publication. Due to the Rufford Grant, we have realised a noticeable decline on the estimated bottlenose dolphin populations from 110 to less than 80 individuals within Montenegro which we urge the decision makers for immediate actions.
Contributing to the photo- ID catalogue				During this period, we updated our photo- ID catalogue which helped us to estimate abundance, movement pattern, individual health of bottlenose dolphins.
Creating first sighting and stranding network.				We have created the first stranding network named "SANCET" ( <a href="https://www.sancet.org/">https://www.sancet.org/</a> ) in aim to collect citizen science data and to inform the public on the causes and results of strandings not only in Adriatic but throughout the world.
Creating the guidelines for species specific regulation measures.				We are preparing an action plan which include the general biology and ecology of cetacean species of Adriatic, results on our continuous research since 2016, threat assessments for each species,

				proposed mitigation and conservation strategies. The action plan will be ready before June 2020.
Institutional collaborations				We have developed a mutually respectful relationship with the other NGOs in Montenegro, such as MedCEM, Green Home and Center for protection and research of birds of Montenegro (CZIP).
Providing guidelines for stake holders and policy maker				We are currently in the preparation phase of the guidelines. We have produced a guide for seismic surveys and will be distributed to the stakeholders
Stimulating the implementation of MPAs with continuing studies and sharing results with Ministries and Environmental Agency				We have shared our entire dataset with the Ministry of Environmental Agency to strengthen the implementation of proposed MPAs in Montenegro. However, the biggest barrier of the current project was the relatively weak interest and collaboration steps of decision makers.
Outreach activities				During this project, we organised and joined to many public events. We have done seven beach clean ups, have had six presentations in schools and have visited three kindergartens where we shared our knowledge about cetaceans and their importance as well as the major threats. Also, we have organised a Community Day where we held a presentation about marine mammals in Montenegro and we had work on arts and crafts for the kids.
Fishermen enrolment				We have prepared questionnaires for small scale fishermen boats, and we have put GPS devices which were anonymous, which aim to learn if fishing areas overlap with dolphin sightings and to understand their impact on marine mammals.
Citizen science				As we mentioned before, we have created a stranding network named SANCET which is available for other people to report any stranding.

				Besides, we have received from local people photos and videos of dolphins.
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**2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).**

The biggest difficulty we had was the unwillingness of Institute of Marine Biology, which is one of the most important institute on marine protection in Montenegro, to cooperate with Montenegro Dolphin Research despite our multiple attempts. We are aware of the importance of the institute and their hard work on marine conservation, yet their closeness to cetacean research made it difficult for the project to carry its activities in full capacities. Further, due to their cancellation of our research permit, this limited our capacity to do boat surveys within the territorial and offshore waters of Montenegro. Knowing that there is a considerable decline on sightings as well as a rapid increase of seismic explorations within the same waters, dedicated research and conservation effort with collaborative approaches holds a vital importance on the marine ecosystem protection.

Further, the locals weren't keen to involve on marine conservation efforts, indicating the limited knowledge on the importance of marine ecosystems by public.

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

With a big help of Rufford Foundation, we have continued our long-term research and conservation effort of marine mammals in Montenegro which helped us to gain more information about it. The most important outcomes are:

Dedicated survey efforts are the first steps and key components of any conservation strategies as it provides the "scientific knowledge" to understand the well-being of the population of concern. The dedicated and continuous effort (over 500 days of surveys within Montenegro) of MDR, revealed a declining trend of estimated population size of bottlenose dolphins. The population lost 30% of its size during the 4 years of survey effort and without the current project the notable decline would go unnoticed. Common dolphins, once known to be the most common species of Adriatic, were categorised as extinct in the area currently. If the immediate actions are not taken on the protection of bottlenose dolphins, it is predicted that the decline may continue on a level that reach to critical for the population survival.

Due to the population decline, management and conservation measures have to be taken now. However, the implications that don't trust on science and stakeholder involvement, is likely to stay on file with no real-life consequences. Therefore, MDR is creating the first Species Conservation Action Plan to minimise the population decline, while our public outreach activities increased the awareness on the subject.

DMAD carried both national and international actions to spread the knowledge on MDR. While two publications were published in high-impact journals, the results were

also shared in three international conferences (ACCOBAMS, WMMC, Adriatic Biodiversity Protection "AdriBioPro2019"). Further, we have developed mutually respectful relationships not only with local NGOs but also with international institutes as in University of Bari, Italy and Vivamar, Croatia. We have followed a bottom-up approach to make sure that the stakeholders are not outsiders of the project, instead right in the centre.

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

As a result of collaboration with local communities, they were interested to join to our outreach activities such as beach cleaning and to share our activities with other people. Also, having presentations in schools and kindergartens we noticed that the kids care for their environment and living beings, which was very inspiring for us to continue and to do every day more. Besides our collaboration with fishermen whose boats we rent for our boat surveys, we continued our collaboration with fishermen through questionnaires and now even with GPS devices which some of them allowed us to put on their boat, helped us to find out more about dolphins.

**5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

This was our second project of studying marine mammals in Montenegrin waters. After gaining more information on dolphins, their population status and sighting rate in Montenegro together with threats they are facing such as hydrocarbon explorations, the most important is to continue with research in aim to follow all changes which can happen in population of this group of animals which are key species and known as the marine engineers for marine ecosystem for being at the top of the food chain. Our continuous research showed that there is a considerable decline from 50% sighting rate in 2016 to below 20% in 2019. The common dolphin, once known as the most common species of the Adriatic, has declined to a level that has not been present in the Adriatic Sea for several decades. To avoid the same destiny for bottlenose dolphins, continuous research and conservation effort are the priorities with increased stakeholder awareness from the bottom to the top.

Our conservation events have shown us that with small steps and with time, public awareness can increase what plays a very important role in marine mammals' conservation in Montenegro and marine ecosystem in general.

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

During this project, we have promoted our activities using our websites and social media tools and we are going to keep sharing the project activities by using websites, Facebook pages, Instagram accounts and of course by organising public awareness activities. Currently we have 2,307 followers on Facebook page and 10,800 followers on Instagram profile of Marine Mammals Research Association (DMAD).

This is promoting and it will continue to promote the project and the Rufford Foundation to a wider community. Until now, we have written two annual reports and published two articles on peer-reviewed journals. We have also presented the results in two different conferences; International Conference: Adriatic Biodiversity Protection "AdriBioPro2019" in Kotor and WMMC conference in Barcelona.

**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 grant was used in the same time frame that was proposed to Rufford Foundation.

**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
Meeting with policy makers	40	86	+46	
Field Laptop (Lenovo Miix 320)	163	133	-30	
GlobalSat ND - 105C Micro USB GPS Receiver	25	35	+10	
Hooway 7x50 Waterproof Binocular's	94	177	+83	
Sigma 70 - 300 mm f4 - 5.6 DG Macro Lens	138		-138	WWF Turkey has donated their lens to the project and the budget spent for the binoculars
Boat surveys	1548	2311	+763	
Offshore surveys	1999	796	-1203	Due to the restriction on our research permit, we couldn't complete our surveys. The budget of the item was transformed to the coastal boat surveys
Land surveys	700	5658	+4958	The additional cost was spent through the donations and participation costs of international volunteers to DMAD.
University / Academic Talks	45	125	+80	The additional cost was spent through the donations and participation costs of

				international volunteers to DMAD.
Conservation and Education at Montenegrin Public Schools	30	53	+23	The additional cost was spent through the donations and participation costs of international volunteers to DMAD.
Report production (Final report and Impact Assessment and Monitoring Guideline)	200		-200	The budget will be spent once the reports will be completed.
<b>TOTAL</b>	4982	9374	+4392	

(\*) The exchange rate EUR 1 = GBP 0,88, which was the rate calculated based on approved project budget in GBP (4.982,00) on 31 of March 2019, was used.

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

- Keeping in mind the noticeable decline on bottlenose dolphin population size estimation and being the only dedicated research effort of the south Adriatic Sea, the project has to continue as the species of concern are long-lived and late maturing animals. Therefore, to have an accurate and precise picture of their life history and population status, the research has to continue
- To follow a bottom-top conservation approach thus carry on the stakeholder involvement, specifically targeting students of all ages, fishermen, general public and local tourist.
- To increase the collaboration number with other institutions and NGOs in Montenegro and other countries
- To understand the reasons behind the unwillingness of collaboration with the Institute of Marine Biology and to develop a mutually respectful relationship with the Institute

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

The Rufford Foundation logo was used in all presentations and posters prepared during this project for our conservation activities such as in primary school presentations, kindergartens, beach clean ups posters, on the presentations during community days which were presented in front of local people, on the presentation and posters for two conferences: International Conference: Adriatic Biodiversity Protection "AdriBioPro2019" in Kotor and WMMC conference in Barcelona.

Rufford Foundation have received publicity during our project activities among local communities and in front of researchers among Mediterranean and entire Europe.

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

**Natasa Nikpaljevic**, Project leader.

**Aylin Akkaya**, scientific director of Marine Mammals Research Association and supervisor of the project activities and results.

**Tim Awbery**, Research Associate and supervisor at Marine Mammals Research Association.

**Backo Jasovic**, an engineer and actively working on infrastructures.

**12. Any other comments?**

Thanks a lot, to Rufford Foundation for supporting our second project. It helped us to continue data collection and to share our knowledge to the local community which is the key role in conservation of marine mammals and marine ecosystem in general.