

## Final Evaluation Report

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Your Details	
<b>Full Name</b>	Dincy Mariyam
<b>Project Title</b>	Examining perspectives on nature viewing and potential for community-run tourism from India's protected areas
<b>Application ID</b>	31938-1
<b>Date of this Report</b>	16th August 2023

**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
Semi-structured in-person surveys with tourists to identify their nature-viewing preferences				Due to multiple waves of the COVID19 pandemic, we were only able to implement the project in four of the eight sites. In the fourth site, Kaziranga National Park, I had to halt the work as the park closed for tourism due to the pandemic. In the other three sites, we conducted the required number of surveys (210 in Bandipur, 205 - Kanha, 101 - Sundarbans) to make meaningful inferences. Permissions were sought from Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal Forest Departments to implement this project.
Examine tourists' interest in supporting community-run tourism				This objective was achieved simultaneously with the earlier one, hence the same circumstances that affected the previous objective also affected this one. At each of the four project locations, we conducted a shorter survey with the tourists to gauge their interest in supporting local communities through community-run tourism.
Assess how various traveller profiles influence tourists' willingness to pay				We omitted this project objective to make the survey concise and minimise the time spent with tourists during the pandemic.

**2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

**a).** We surveyed 532 tourists visiting Bandipur (210), Kanha (205), Sundarbans (101), and Kaziranga (16). This is one of the few projects from India that has examined the factors that draw visitors to the country's popular reserves. The project has also demonstrated how different socio-demographic, geographic, and protected area-related characteristics affect tourists' preferences for viewing nature. This study revealed that large mammals, like tigers, are what draw people to protected areas. However, younger tourists who are engaged in conservation efforts showed a greater preference for lesser-known species like reptiles and amphibians. Giving individuals opportunities to get involved in conservation at many levels of

governance, especially for tourists while visiting a park, could raise awareness of and interest in all species and the amount of funding available for their conservation. We published a peer-reviewed article based on the results from the project in the journal *Tourism Recreation Research*.

(<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02508281.2022.2114746>)

**b).** This study showed that tourists are interested in supporting community run tourism. More than half of the tourists reported they want to support local communities by staying in a facility they manage. A quarter of the respondents preferred privately run lodges, and 14% said they preferred any type of lodging that was reasonably priced, hygienic, safe, with trained staff, benefited local people, and in a natural setting. When travelling alone, some tourists chose to stay at a local person's home because it is more affordable; but when travelling in a group (such as with family), they prefer to stay at a resort or lodge.

**c).** Facebook and Instagram are the social media platforms that are most frequently used in India for posting content related to nature. Sixty-one percent of surveyed tourists said that they upload nature-based content on social media, with 39% of tourists referring to Facebook and Instagram as their preferred platforms. For the past few years, there has been discussion over the use of these digital platforms for both quantifying visitation statistics and exploring tourists' viewing preferences. In times like a pandemic, analysing these platforms can reduce laborious activities like surveying tourists.

### **3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.**

We planned the project in eight protected areas initially. However, we were able to implement the project completely only in three parks namely, Bandipur, Kanha, and Sundarbans. In 2021, the second wave of the COVID 19 epidemic struck with great severity as we started work in Kaziranga. After a lion in an Indian zoo was found to have COVID19 symptoms, all protected areas in India were indefinitely closed to tourism. The project had to be halted as a result. As a result of the pandemic, we had to take extra steps to ensure that neither the team members nor the tourists contracted COVID19, which caused the project costs to exceed the budgeted amount. However, we were able to gather enough information to draw conclusions that would be useful for conservation efforts.

### **4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.**

Members of the local communities provided logistical support for this project through accommodation and food, for which we compensated them, as well as to some extent helping with the work itself, such as meeting tourists for the surveys. People who contributed to the effort have been acknowledged in the reports and talks, which may pave the way for future collaborations with them. We also involved 12 volunteers, most of them were students from varied backgrounds from within and neighbouring states where the protected area was located. This gave them

exposure to survey techniques, people, wildlife, and landscapes. Some of the volunteers are currently pursuing studies and/or careers in wildlife conservation.

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

The objectives that we had set for this project have been partially met. We intend to carry out the project in the other four sites, subject to future funding prospects. We will be developing programmes in the future that can benefit multiple stakeholders, including local people and tourists, based on the takeaways we acquired through this project. We intend to build a model of nature-based tourism beyond protected areas through public-private partnerships.

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

- In Bandipur, Kanha, and Sundarbans, we submitted a report with the project findings and recommendations to officials of the forest department at various administrative levels, from Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) to Field Director (FD).
- We shared the findings from the project with 238 out of the 532 tourists we surveyed, who expressed interest in learning more about the project. Many of them expressed gratitude for the information shared.
- We published a peer-reviewed article titled "Influence of charismatic species and conservation engagement on the nature-viewing preferences of wildlife tourists" in the journal *Tourism Recreation Research* in September 2022.
- The project was covered in regional and national media
  - <https://www.nature.com/articles/d44151-022-00096-4>
  - <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/west/what-indian-tourists-like-to-see-1142377.html>
- We presented the results of the project at three national and international conferences (Rufford-India 2021, Rufford-Sri Lanka 2022, and British Ecological Society's Annual meeting 2021).
- This project contributed as a PhD chapter towards obtaining a doctoral degree from the Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bengaluru & Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India.

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

The next step is to find ways to leverage some of the project's findings to raise tourists' awareness and to adopt community-run tourism models outside of protected areas to foster connections among tourists and local people.

**8. 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?**

The Rufford Foundation was acknowledged in the conferences where the project results were shared, in the peer-reviewed paper, and also in the doctoral dissertation. The Rufford Foundation has been credited by name and logo in the Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS) annual report, donor reports, and the CWS website.

**9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.**

**Dr Krithi K Karanth** – Supervisor and Doctoral Advisory Committee

**Dr Enrico Di Minin** - Doctoral Advisory Committee

Volunteers (1-2 weeks) - **Ankan Halder, Abhishek Patil, Devika Mahapatra, Sachin H B, Rohan Khan, Milan Suryadipta Das, Muztafizur Rahman, Sampurna Das, Satyam Gupta, Sushma Sharma, Simran Singh, and Srishti Singh**

**10. Any other comments?**

Thank you for the funding and support.



