

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Oleksandra Oskyrko
Project Title	Setting conservation priorities for reptiles and their habitats in the Ukrainian Bessarabia
Application ID	34322-2
Date of this Report	10.10.2022

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
Collected data on the distribution of reptiles in the studied territory				We collected >500 records for this territory. The fieldwork corresponding to this objective was completed. We produced a species inventory of reptiles, with accompanying voucher specimens, for future scientific work. Sampling sites were also georeferenced for future monitoring of habitat health
Validate ambiguous old records and study of "white spots" in the Ukrainian Bessarabia				Many sites where data on the distribution of reptiles were available were checked. The distribution of some species is questionable. Also we collected new data for alien reptiles in this territory
Understanded the diversity of herpetofauna in Ukrainian Bessarabia, their assemblage and habitat association				Our fieldwork resulted in the initial identification of species, new distribution records and ecological characteristics for reptiles in this region. And we identified the most important habitats for the conservation of reptiles. Although the statistical analyses are still ongoing, these will surely provide a better understanding of the species' assemblage and habitat associations once done
Parasitological analysis for introduced reptile populations				Such a study was conducted for the first time for reptiles on the territory of Ukraine. As a result, no serious threat to local herpetofauna was identified, however, introduced populations require further research and monitoring
The production and distribution of the promotional and educational materials				In this project, we did not change the logo just to slightly modify it. After all, we wanted to show the continuation of research from the previous project in the new territory. We prepared promotional and

				educational material (150 t-shirts and 100 stickers). The t-shirts and stickers show the project logo
Internet activity and sharing information				We had our educational activities through social networks (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube). We published various posts on the topic of reptiles. Our team also actively disseminated media information. We talked about the rules of behaviour with snakes, gave recommendations to people, talked about invasive species of reptiles and their impact on the environment. Also, the results and actions of the project were presented at four conferences
Publication of manuscripts				We published one paper during the implementation of the project. We also plan to publish at least three more manuscripts with the obtained results as part of the project
Online course for journalists				Cancelled due to the start of the war in Ukraine
Special lectures for students at the biological university, members of local organizations				Cancelled due to the start of the war in Ukraine

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

a). Inventory of reptiles in Ukrainian Bessarabia. The project provides a glimpse of the herpetological community of Ukraine which is currently sorely lacking in the scientific literature. Also, our data will help provide informed conservation assessments, especially for rare species.

b). Assessment of important habitats for reptiles within Ukrainian Bessarabia for further action to conserve biodiversity in this region. The data make a good baseline for future ecological and monitoring studies in Ukrainian Bessarabia, exploring the effects of land-use change and climate change to its now known herpetological community which is a good indicator of habitat health.

c). The positive effect was achieved during this project's education activity and dissemination of information about our project not only in Ukraine and abroad. Many of the people were involved in distribution of published materials. We got a large and very active audience.

The most significant achievement of the present study is to provide new data and fill gaps by making updated distribution maps for herpetofauna in the Ukrainian

Bessarabia. This area is particularly valuable for local herpetofauna species, most of which are protected on national or international level. The information collected can be used to find the best solutions for the conservation and protection of fauna of this area.

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

The biggest difficulty was the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Due to this situation in the country, we have cancelled the online course for journalists and public lectures. We hope that soon the hostilities will end in Ukraine, and we will be able to carry out these activities. Now, we only have informational activities in social networks because all others are impossible.

Also, because of the war in Ukraine, the prices of food and fuel have increased, which also affected our budget. But we used the funds for field expeditions that were planned for an online course for journalists. This helped us to complete most of the planned expeditions. We should say that this fact didn't have a big influence on the volume of work.

We had changes in timescale because of the war in Ukraine. The project was supposed to end in June 2022. But we expected that the hostilities would end soon, and we would be able to continue our project. However, the war in Ukraine continues and the implementation of the project in such conditions is dangerous and difficult. However, we tried to continue our project, partial field work, data processing and analysis, activity in social networks and dissemination of information at international conferences.

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

The participation of local communities was very positive. Local people are quite open to collaborate with us, and everyone gave us the permits to work on their land. We talked with a lot of local people about these animals, as they are generally misunderstood, and local people usually think that most species are dangerous. So, we believe that our talks helped to change a little bit the mind about this ecologically relevant group of species.

Most of the planned activities implemented with the active participation of local people were not organised due to the war in Ukraine. But some of the locals were providing us with useful information about the reptiles in this region. Also, Local national parks took an active part in collecting data and disseminating information about the project among local people. The project topic and the events are actively discussed on social networks. Moreover, not only the local community but people from all over Ukraine joined the discussion and shared their opinion and information.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, in future we are planning to continue this study. After the end of the war in Ukraine, we plan to implement all activities that were cancelled. We also consider that this research can become a basis for researching the impact of war on herpetofauna. Because we collected a lot of data before the start of the war, and it will help us to evaluate and compare the consequences after its end.

Also, we are planning to enlarge the number of public and education activities among the local people. We will continue our educational activities with the local population because this type of activity requires constant activities to get good results. We will try to keep our project active and alive on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube. We plan to publish our data in the peer reviewed journals and will also participate in the international conferences and symposia on biology and nature conservation.

Today Ukraine is preparing to join the European Union. One of the conditions is the development and creation of the Emerald Network for Ukraine. Now the law on Emerald is in the process of being approved by the Ukrainian Government. This will give impetus to work on management plans and their implementation (so far Emerald sites are not legalised in Ukraine). Our data will be very useful for use in the development of a management plan and future conservation of reptiles in this territory.

We also collected a lot of new data about alien species of reptiles in this territory. Invasive species are one of the main threats to rare animal species in the world. Therefore, we will continue to monitor this issue and investigate the impact of alien species on local species.

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

We plan to make publications in the press (Ukrainian, regional, district newspapers and data portals), scientific and popular science editions. We will analyse and publish project data in journals to disseminate information in scientific circles. Also, we plan to attend more conferences, symposia where we will present the results of our project. We will try to keep our project active on social networks.

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

Now the most important thing is to end the war in Ukraine, because it is very difficult to have any research or environmental protection activities. When the war in Ukraine ends, we will firstly organise an online course for journalists. We also organise scheduled special lectures. After that, we plan to have a project about the effect of military operations on the local herpetofauna. This will help us understand the consequences and effects of war on animals where new research methods will be developed.

Development of management plans for the new protected areas is one of the main priorities for the results of this project. Today Ukraine is preparing to join the European Union. One of the conditions is the development and creation of the Emerald Network for Ukraine. The data on herpetofauna are very limited, especially reptiles. Ukrainian Bessarabia is one of the least known territories for reptiles. At the same time, it is one of the most ruined areas for agriculture. Therefore, we will be actively involved in developing management plans for reptiles for Emerald sites. It is planned to include new territories and the results of our project will be able to help speed up this process.

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 logo was added to the project's logo that we created. All the published materials (t-shirts and stickers) were provided with the Rufford Foundation logo. In the publications in the press The Rufford Foundation support was mentioned. In future all the materials (based on the data collected during the project) will be provided with the reference or the Rufford Foundation logo. We will also use the logo of the foundation in all future publications and presentations of this project.

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

Oleksandra Oskyrko - team leader; Roles: fieldwork, maps and data processing, and analysis, field key preparation, lecture, media and eco-educative activities, scientific articles preparation.

Roman Lysenko: field researcher, student of the ESC "Institute of Biology and Medicine", T. Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; Roles: field work, the study of museum collections, maps and data processing and analysis; project data is included in his master's thesis.

Daryna Obikhod: field researcher, student of the ESC "Institute of Biology and Medicine", T. Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; Roles: field work; passing educational practice during field works.

Oleksandr Gaydash: field researcher, Danube Biosphere Reserve; Roles: field work, media and eco-educative activities with local people.

Maksym Yakovlev: field researcher, Danube Biosphere Reserve; Roles: field work, media and eco-educative activities with local people.

Yuriy Kuzmin and Ivanna Dmytrieva: parasitologists, I. I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology, NAS of Ukraine; Roles: study and analysis of helminths in introduced reptile populations.

Oleksii Vasyliuk - leader of the non-governmental organization Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG); Roles: assistance with project financial management, Facebook and blog support, management of printing published materials.

Tetiana Shamina - communicator of the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group; Roles: media and eco-educative activities, Facebook, Instagram support, work with the press.

The administration and all employers of Tuzly Lagoons National Nature Park and Danube Biosphere Reserve – fieldwork and eco-educative activities.

We thank all volunteers for the help in the field research and data collections.

10. Any other comments?

We would like to thank The Rufford Foundation for the financial support and the opportunity given to all of us in this project. It was and still is an unmeasurably valuable experience which could never happen without The Rufford Foundation backing us up. The Rufford Foundation did not only support the team's professional growth but also provided the opportunity for Ukrainian's wildlife diversity to be appreciated. We are looking forward to working with you again soon.

As the team leader, I want to thank my teammates and volunteers for the support, energy, patience and time invested into this project. I hope that this project will stand as a base to the much larger nature conservation actions in Ukraine.





