

## Final Evaluation Report

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Your Details	
<b>Full Name</b>	Daniel Couceiro Criado
<b>Project Title</b>	A multi-purpose nature trail in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta: Tourism, education and conservation to protect the world's most irreplaceable site
<b>Application ID</b>	35683-1
<b>Date of this Report</b>	05/12/2022

**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
Conservation through Education				<p>The Fly High Bird Club has become a solid, sustainable and long-term environmental education project in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Through a formal partnership with the rural school of La Tagua, it has been blended within the official curricula and been delivered to almost 40 teenagers. Most of these teenagers have deepened their knowledge and awareness of nature around them, developed environmentally-friendly attitudes and behaviours as well as built and applied skills and capacities to engage in conservation efforts and sustainable practices within their communities. Finally, the project keeps living and evolving in the hands of the schoolteachers and students, young local actors and third parties, supported by national and international NGOs and partnerships with private institutions.</p>
Wildlife research				<p>We conducted monthly birdwatching walks around La Tagua, and we found out some interesting data about a few of the endemic, endangered species of the Sierra Nevada. For example, we observed that <i>Antocephala floriceps</i> (Santa Marta blossomcrown) has affinity for the flowers of a plant that grows at the border of creeks and streams in the area (we are in the process of identifying the plant species). Another example is with <i>Clibanornis rufipectus</i> (Santa Marta foliage-gleaner), which according to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, in recent decades it has not been recorded above 1560 m. We noted several observations from two of our project participants and me where we recorded it at 1700 m asl.</p>

			<p>These records appear publicly in eBird. Also, in July 2022, with the help of Fundación Atelopus (project partners) we trained several school participants in frog monitoring, and since then, a group of five teenagers conducts monthly censuses of the population of endemic and endangered frogs in the area. They are being paid for it. Atelopus researchers are convinced that if the monitoring keeps ongoing for a year, scientific notes about abundance and distribution of certain endemic and endangered frog species can be published. Besides, three project participants also participated in the monitoring of the endangered golden winged warbler, an annual monitoring conducted by the NGO SELVA, thus collaborating in professional biodiversity monitoring, and they were paid for it.</p>
Research on environmental education			<p>As mentioned in the proposal, this project is part of my PhD thesis, and the first article will be published before the end of the year in the journal of <i>Environmental Education</i>. This article will talk about the environmental stewardship of the youth of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and the data was collected during the implementation of this project. Of course, Rufford will appear as sponsor in the article.</p>
Sustainable livelihoods and community capacity building			<p>Most of the involved teenagers have deepened their knowledge and awareness of nature around them, developed environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviours as well as built and applied skills and capacities to engage in conservation efforts and sustainable practices within their communities. Specially, we put a lot of emphasis on facilitate the participants to develop skills that they could apply to ecotourism, as they have received training in English, birdwatching, herpetofauna, wildlife photography and nature-oriented muralism. Besides, we implemented a series of informative panels all around the village where key information about the biodiversity and</p>

			<p>sustainability of the area is displayed and can be used for ecotourism purposes. Also, we have supported one of our students to start his own birdwatching company (which is going very well) and another student to start practising with the former's company. Finally, we have also trained several indigenous tourism guides in birdwatching skills, so they can also conduct birdwatching tours within their indigenous communities.</p>
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**2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

- a) The formal partnership between our project and the local school of La Tagua. The Fly High Bird Club, which is the base of the current project, has been integrated within the official curricula of the La Tagua School, which means that from now on it can be delivered by any teacher to students of any grade in the school, adapted to any subject. Also, this partnership means that all activities, projects, and workshops regarding biodiversity conservation can be conducted in the school facilities, and the students have the right to participate on them. Conservation in the area has always come from external people to the community, leaving the locals aside and never involving them. This partnership with the school is the first solid step towards integrating biodiversity conservation in the young, local generations of the Sierra Nevada, in a way that they are capable, motivated, and supported to participate and initiate their own community-based monitoring processes.
  
- b) Local capacity building for conservation: our evaluation results showed that most of the participants feel that they have been acquiring the knowledge, awareness and skills needed to engage in conservation actions within their family business, professional career and daily lives. Also, we have been conducting regular birdwatching training with the students at the school, with a few of them already studying to become professional bird guides in the area. Besides from the job with the school participants, we have been training another six indigenous kids from the Wiwa tribe with the support of the local company Wiwa Tours, in birdwatching oriented towards ecotourism. Furthermore, we supported one indigenous student from the Kogi tribe to start a birdwatching tour company in the region (NuwaBirdlife). His company is a total success, and he is hiring and training other local youngsters from the area. Also, some of the participants have been engaging in scientific monitoring projects for endemic, endangered and migratory species of birds and frogs, and paid for it. Specifically, three students participated for 3 months in the scientific monitoring of the endangered, migratory golden winged warbler with ornithologists from the NGO that has been supporting us the whole time (SELVA, Research for the Conservation in the Neotropics). Another five students (two of them indigenous) are currently participating in the scientific monitoring of endangered endemic species of frogs (most of them from the genus *Atelopus*) of the Sierra in a partnership with Fundación

Atelopus. They are also being paid. These seeds are planted in a long-term planning that will keep employing local youth to monitor these species thanks to the scientific training provided by the workshops conducted during this project.

And not just merely science. We have been implementing a series of workshops dedicated to art for conservation: murals, nature photography exhibitions and naturalist drawings make part of the artistic credentials of this community to display their pride and love for their nature. We have seen how this training (also bird ringing) has been providing a spark for some of the students to pursue a career as birdwatching guides, artists, research assistants and conservationists. Is an important contribution to students' future economic wellbeing and they feel being usefully prepared them for the next stage of their lives.

- c) Setting up the heart of the Sierra Nevada for nature-oriented tourism: we studied the potential of several communal trails for birdwatching purposes, and once identified, we created several information banners around the community. This, along with the community capacity building explained above, sets up the basis for the local development of a sustainable, profitable sector in this region of the Sierra Nevada. Thus, we are providing the scientific and social component of the comprehensive planning necessary for nature-based tourism to generate revenue and support local economic development.

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

One of the biggest difficulties that we had was around money. First, from the original amount of money sent to SELVA, approximately 1 million pesos was lost due to the currency change. We received an amount of \$30.465.000 Colombian pesos. Of this amount, the Colombian Government took 6 million in taxes (that is an insane 20%!!) that nobody knew anything about. I had a visa under the category of "International cooperant" and in this agreement there was no information that taxes would have to be paid just for money to be transferred to my account. Same when payment was made to one of the project assistants. Because of this, we had to reduce the number of workshops given and a bit of the material for workshops.

The most important lesson from our successes has been to be extremely flexible. La Tagua is a rural place where displaced farmers, paramilitary and indigenous people coexist under a complete abandonment from the government. Under these circumstances, I learned to flow with the people, with their needs and suggestions, not sticking to an original preconceived idea. Adapting to what the situation required turned out to be fundamental to gain community trust, to change what needed to be changed and deliver the marked goals. Something like "Be stubborn with your goals but flexible with your methods". And I feel this apply specially to educative projects. Every kid has a talent, a skill, a dream and a personality. You can't offer the same to all of them. Therefore, you must become adaptative, flexible, creative with the way you deliver. I learnt that citizen science is a good tool,

but not the panacea. A lot of kids just don't feel it, so keep in mind other tools that can engage them, like photography, muralism, journaling. Art is a very valuable tool for environmental education projects. And it allows a deep connection with nature because it connects with emotions and feelings. Another very important lesson learnt is about consistency and presence. Especially at the beginning, things may not go the way you want them. It is okay. Keep trying, keep putting your face out there. That shows confidence and eases trust building, particularly in very socially delicate places as rural Colombia (extremely hit by violence). Becoming a presence that brings something beautiful and positive. We showed up every single day to show our commitment with the community. The last lesson in educative projects as this one, to aim for creating a process that can be long-term, improved and adapted by the local people, thus they finally own it.

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

First, we contacted with the director of the school of La Tagua to propose the project to the students, parents and community in general. We had a beautiful meeting where the community, the director, the parents and the students expressed their needs, perspective and visions. With this material in our hands, we shaped the project in a way that we could facilitate everybody's goals while we could comply with our objectives.

From the very beginning, the director of the school and several teachers were involved in the creation and implementation of the educational programme and workshops. Parents asked us very straightforward to commit a significant amount of time to the teaching of English for the students, and so we did (we always taught English within the context of birds, frogs, farming, conservation or related topics). We involved local stakeholders (farmers, business owners, neighbours) when it came to map where the banners with the information oriented towards tourists should be displayed. Regarding the indigenous communities, we listened to the petition of the Wiwa tribe to train some of their young guides into birdwatching, so they can develop their own products within their places. We also asked the Wiwas for permission to work in their territory and to do a payment, so we were in peace with the land when conducting the project. Also, it is very important to note that the participants themselves (the students of the community) were always protagonists of their own learning process, since we were constantly asking them about their preferences regarding the workshops, materials, locations within the community, etc.

For a more detailed description of the benefits for the community, check section **2.b.**

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

Yes, we want to keep this work in the Sierra Nevada, concretely in La Tagua and one close village. A lot of the participants asked us several times to keep working on the area; they want to keep developing skills and abilities related to birdwatching, scientific monitoring, English, ecotourism and art. We have seen the success that this

inclusive approach brings to the community, and we would love to keep refining and expanding it. The school has the doors opened for us to keep working there, the same as the community. Regarding expansion, we have made good partnerships in the area during this year, and several communities and small schools have asked us if we can also create a similar programme for them. We think that with the right economic support we could replicate this project in another nearby community, therefore connecting knowledge, experiences and efforts. My team and I feel that the process just began, and that the local youngsters are just starting to realise their own potential around their territory to make a living while helping their unique biodiversity to thrive. Particularly, we have seen a lot of room for work in the following fields that I will discuss further in section 7: birdwatching, ecological restoration and sustainable coffee farming.

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

First, the results of this work will appear in our website, both in videos and also in small paragraphs that will summarise what we did this year.

Second, all the videos produced during this year that show the different activities, workshops and processes conducted will be uploaded to our channel in Youtube and our Instagram account.

Third, regarding La Tagua, we will organise a community event where we will disseminate the results achieved and undergoing processes with all the local interested stakeholders.

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

First, we want to give continuation to what happened this year. All the stakeholders involved, and the participants agree that this environmental education processes with communities are not effective if just happen for a short period of time.

So, we understand that to keep going, upgrade and expand the project we need to secure funding, and we are in our way. Almost for sure we would apply to a Second Rufford Small Grant to begin with.

Second, we have identified other community needs and issues. We have seen certain places where a big number of endemic and endangered species exist that are being mishandled for cattle ranching and agricultural processes. Also, a significant number of coffee farms are not for shade grown coffee but just monocultures, which has been seen that also impacts the populations of migratory birds. Because of this, we believe that is important to include in the possible expansion of the project aspects about ecological restoration and regenerative agriculture. Both aspects are very well mixed with ecotourism, so we believe that a well planned integration of ecotourism, ecological restoration, community-based conservation and regenerative agriculture can happen together and advance the work already done with the community.

**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?**

Yes, the logo of Rufford Foundation appears in the main promotional video that we created during this year about the project. Also, the logo appears in all the big informative banners that are displayed all along La Tagua. Finally, yes, the support received from Rufford Foundation was mentioned every time that we presented the project to new stakeholders or recipients, or people interested. The logo of Rufford is also displayed in our website, within the "Allies" section.

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

**Camila Gómez:** as described in the proposal, Camila acted as main advisor of the project. She also came for a week to conduct bird-ringing training with the participants.

**Ivona Hristova:** one of the three teachers of the workshops, co-designer of the workshops and the person in charge of spreading out in social media our progress.

**Daniel Cárdenas:** another of the three teachers of the workshops. Also, the main project member behind photography classes and muralism. Co-designer of workshops. Main person acquiring materials for the project. Project member that generated all visual material.

**Carmen Cecilia:** the director of the school was a key piece during the project by facilitating us the school facilities, organizing the parents for community meetings, helping to design the curriculum for the year, proposing activities and constant support in front of the community and also the students.

**Jeferson Villalba:** he trained the young participants in herpetological research techniques as well as conducted with his team a couple of workshops about amphibians.

**10. Any other comments?**

The team and I want to thank Rufford from the heart for the funds given so we could carry out this beautiful work in the fantastic Sierra Nevada. Our deepest gratitude for helping us making this happen.





