

The Rufford Small Grants Foundation

Final Report

Congratulations on the completion of your project that was supported by The Rufford Small Grants 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.

Thank you for your help.

Josh Cole, Grants Director

Your name	Chittaranjan Baruah
Project title	<i>In situ</i> conservation of endangered freshwater turtles through community participation programmes in the riverine chars (islands) of Brahmaputra, Assam, India
RSG reference	50.11.08
Reporting period	April 2009 to July 2010
Amount of grant	£5700
Your email address	chittaranjan_21@yahoo.co.in ; tcprnortheast@gmail.com
Date of this report	9 th October, 2010

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
To assess the present habitat structure of endangered turtle species.		85 %		Habitat structure along with status and distribution of Assam roofed turtle (<i>Pangshura sylhetensis</i>) were conducted successfully. The findings were presented in the national conferences and reported in <i>ENVIS Bulletin</i> (Govt. of India).
To determine current threats to turtle population and their habitats			100%	The study documented the major threats to Assam roofed turtle (<i>Pangshura sylhetensis</i>) along with black softshell turtle (<i>Nilssonina nigricans</i>) and narrow-headed softshell turtle (<i>Chitra indica</i>). Some of the findings on soft shell turtles were reported in a special issue of journal <i>Chéloniens</i> (vol 18, June 2010).
To conduct conservation education and awareness programmes for local communities and document the perception of local people towards turtle conservation.			100%	Conservation education, awareness and community participation programmes were initiated to start turtle conservation programme in a number of wetlands and in the riverine islands (chars) of the Brahmaputra river system. Over 3,000 people from 21 villages were excited for turtle conservation, and 12 local youths have been introduced to field techniques. Former poachers have been motivated to be field assistants in the future turtle conservation project. Oral and poster/brochure presentations were conducted among local communities.
To start a participatory endangered turtle species conservation programme.		75 %		Capacity building programmes are being carried out among the riparian communities. An <i>in situ</i> hatchery was set up in a riverine island in the river Brahmaputra, Morigaon District, Assam with the active participation of local people. Several local volunteers participated in various activities of turtle conservation viz. survey, egg collection, and hatchery management. Additionally, more than 300 turtle eggs were rescued with the participation of local communities. (Egg protection programme)

2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

Some of the project activities were hampered by local climatic conditions (high flood) and political conditions at some stages of the project.

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

a. Linkage development: Through this project we developed a very good linkage with the local communities residing in and around identified important turtle habitats across Brahmaputra Valley.

b. Awareness increase: With the help of our trained members of “Turtle Conservation & Research Programme (TCRP)”, we conducted awareness campaign simultaneously in and around the riverine islands (chars) of Brahmaputra, which increased the level of awareness among local communities towards protecting ‘their’ nearest turtle habitats.

c. Enhancing the endangered turtle species protection: Our experience over last 2 years turtle conservation in the riverine islands (chars) of Brahmaputra in Assam teach us that involving the local communities residing around turtle habitats is the best approach at the current situation in Brahmaputra Valley. Therefore, we involved them in the protection of turtles, the result of which was reflected in the *in situ* turtle conservation and nest protection programme.

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

We have undertaken questionnaire survey which involved the knowledge of local people in assessing the presence and population status of freshwater turtles.

This project was being proposed to initiate an effort to conserve the endangered freshwater turtles in Brahmaputra river system (in Assam, India) through the involvement of local communities residing in and around of the most prioritised identified habitats. It was because the fact that due to the very remoteness of the existed turtle habitats and inadequate management influence in and around most of these habitats to protect the turtles, community-based conservation initiative is the best practice for the long term survival of the species in Brahmaputra river system.

With the help of this project we have: (a) identified those communities residing in and around the most prioritized turtle habitats across riverine islands (chars) of Brahmaputra; (b) involved the most motivated and skilled youths from those communities as a member to the Turtle Conservation and Research Programme (TCRP) after providing proper training; (c) involved the selected community youths in monitoring and protecting their nearest turtle habitats as well as in the awareness raising among the communities from where they belonged and closely guided their activities; (d) rewarded the best participants and best youth team, who helped in nest protection programme; and (e) provided a small financial support to local project assistant and two local field assistants for the valuation of the time they provided for turtle conservation. Therefore, this project involved the local communities residing in and around important turtle habitats in the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries in all its stages and thus the local communities got maximum benefits (both directly and indirectly) from this project.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes. We are continuing our work with financial support provided by the 2010 Conservation Leadership Program (CLP) Award, jointly awarded by the Conservation International, Fauna & Flora International, Birdlife International and Wildlife Conservation Society. We are looking forward to secure more funds so that the survey and conservation could be extended to other parts of northeast India and covering the protected areas as well. A second Rufford Small Grant will be requested for continuation of the conservation activities.

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

We are analysing our survey data which will be published in the form of a technical project report, with due acknowledgement to Rufford Small Grants as the sole funding agency. We are publishing the conservation account of the endangered turtle species. Moreover, we will also communicate scientific papers to peer reviewed journals. We will compile our selected findings in local languages for the benefit of local people and to raise more awareness on turtle conservation.

7. Timescale: Over what period was the RSG used? How does this compare to the anticipated or actual length of the project?

April 2009 to July 2010 and the proposed period was January 2009 to March 2010.

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
Travel/Survey	1000	1450	-450	The vehicle and boat expenditure exceeded by £ 450 due to rate hike than during project preparation and more monitoring days than proposed.
Subsistence	3200	3200	0	A local project assistant and two local field assistants along with two rehabilitated ex-poachers were benefited.
Equipment				
GPS	139	202	- 63	One GPS (Garmin 72) was purchased.
Digital Camera	113	163	- 50	One digital camera (Canon A110) was purchased.
Nets (for egg protection) , tents etc.	300	250	50	The excess amount was spent for adjustment of expense in the digital camera.
Publication of Education material	500	300	200	Less expenditure than estimated, which later adjusted for travel expense.
Reporting	248	0	248	The amount was spent for repeat survey.
Miscellaneous	200	140	60	The excess amount was spent for reimbursement of excess expenditure for GPS.
Total	5700	5705	-5	

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

1. Intensive Conservation Education Programme covering all the sections of the community to motivate and to disseminate the information of turtles in particular and other wildlife in general.
2. Launch of community- based conservation programme in the riverine forested areas.

3. Rehabilitation of poachers and to find out alternative means of supporting livelihoods of many impoverished rural communities.
4. Strengthening the capacity of Turtle Conservation Network- "TCRP" (Turtle Conservation & Research Programme), for sustainable long-term turtle conservation.

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

Yes. We have used RSG logo in the awareness campaign banners, leaflets, educational material, national and international conference presentations on our findings and the final technical project report.

11. Any other comments?

Financial support from The Rufford Small Grant Foundation can bring changes in the conservation scenario of this region. Being a turtle priority conservation area, continuous long-term support is essential for conserving the imperilled turtle fauna of northeast India.