

## 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. 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. 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

<b>Your name</b>	Jo Marie Acebes
<b>Project title</b>	Humpback whales in the Babuyan Islands: research, education and conservation.
<b>RSG reference</b>	9801-1
<b>Reporting period</b>	May 2011 to May 2012
<b>Amount of grant</b>	£6,000
<b>Your email address</b>	<a href="mailto:jomacebes@yahoo.com">jomacebes@yahoo.com</a>
<b>Date of this report</b>	12 June 2012

**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
Describe the current status of humpback whales in the Philippines.		10%	90%	There are 160 humpback whales in the Philippine fluke catalogue representing a minimum population number of whales breeding around the Babuyan Islands. With an average of 11 new photo-identified whales each year it is anticipated that this number will still increase with continued annual monitoring. With what is so far known about the nature of this population, which is considered an 'open population' and the limitations in the capacity to survey the entire area consistently, a population abundance estimate cannot be determined as of this time.
Further substantiate links with other populations in the western north Pacific through comparisons of fluke photos and songs.		10%	90%	Through fluke photo-identification we were able to find four matches with humpback whales feeding in the Commander Islands region. This further substantiates the link with the western north Pacific population with additional new insights on the significance of the Babuyan Islands as possibly the 'missing breeding ground' for North Pacific humpback whales. Comparison and analysis of songs between the Philippines, Japan and Hawaii have not been completed yet by our research collaborator in Hawaii. There have been delays in getting recordings from Japan. Target date of completion is before the end of 2012.
Assess current threats to cetaceans in the area.			100%	Threats to cetaceans in Babuyan Island group are primarily drift net and long-line fishing. Increased ship and boat traffic is a potential threat particularly to humpback whales and their calves.
Contribute to the municipality's integrated coastal resources management plan.			100%	The humpback data gathered by this project provided the basis for demarcating the proposed humpback whale conservation area in Camiguin Island. This is part of the municipality's integrated coastal resources

				management plan. Guidelines on fishing activities and ship/boat speed limits were also provided by this project.
Provide recommendations for the marine ecotourism plan		10%	90%	Recommendations regarding whale watching and other marine tourism activities around the Island were provided by the project. However, the planned whale watching training-workshop was postponed upon the request of the local stakeholders. They wanted to wait for the results of the municipal council hearing regarding the designation of the Marine Protected and Humpback whale Conservation Area in Camiguin. Further local hearings are scheduled in June 2012. 100 brochures on whale watching guidelines in the local dialect were produced and distributed to locals in the region.
Increase awareness and knowledge of island locals and the general Filipino public on cetacean research and conservation through an educational outreach program and a website.		5%	95%	Educational outreach activities for elementary and high school students in Camiguin Island were conducted, reaching a total of over 160 students. Meetings with island officials and the fisherfolk association were conducted. The project participated in the annual Bohol Dolphin Festival 2012 in Tagbilaran City where people from all walks of life attended. Updates on the project's work were consistently updated on social media pages (Facebook pages of Balyena.org and Marine Wildlife Watch Philippines). The Balyena.org website went on-line on May 31 <sup>st</sup> however, some links need to be adjusted. The website is targeted to be fully operational by the end of June 2012.

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

The grant money was not received until May 31st, 2011 which was several weeks later than anticipated. Hence, the project had to solicit for support/donation from volunteers to conduct the field survey season in April 2011. The project laptop broke down at the beginning of the 2012 survey season and needed to be repaired. Volunteer researchers brought their personal laptops and were used for the first half of the season.

Adverse weather conditions prevented the crossing to the project site during the last quarter of 2011. This postponed the educational outreach activities significantly. In addition, matters arose which deemed it necessary for the project to seek a new educational outreach officer as well as a new field research assistant. This took a couple of months to settle but was resolved. Significant delays in the website development were experienced due to illness by the web designer. The project regularly checked the progress of the website and sought updates from the designer. In the meantime, the project's facebook page was used to disseminate information. The website is now online and will be regularly updated.

The whale watching training-workshop planned for April 2012 was postponed upon the request of the local stakeholders. The project accommodated their request and instead conducted consultations to assist the demarcation process of a marine protected area in Camiguin. The project still maintains communication with the stakeholders to assist in the Island's future conservation plans.

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

The most important outcome of the project is the discovery of a new migratory linkage between the humpback whales breeding in the Philippines and those feeding in the Commander Islands region off of Kamchatka, Russia. Results of our study suggest the Philippines may be part of the 'missing breeding ground' for North Pacific humpback whales.

The 2011 and 2012 field seasons provided invaluable data to the long-term photo-identification study of humpback whales in the Philippines. With better weather conditions in 2012, we were able to log almost 134 hours of on-effort survey time compared to 66.5 hours in 2011. While humpback whale sighting numbers were consistent in 2011 and 2012 (98 and 85, respectively), the 2012 team was able to photo-identify 31 individuals compared to 23 in 2011. In 2012, 18 were re-sights and 13 new members were added to the catalogue. The year prior saw nine new individuals and 14 re-sights. There were 13 hours and 43 minutes of audio recordings in 2012, and 10 hours and 29 minutes in 2011. Whether it was attributable to better weather or more survey time, 2012 had almost double the number of sighting of other cetaceans, namely Fraser's dolphins (*Lagenodelphis hosei*), pantropical spotted dolphin (*S. attenuata*), rough-toothed dolphin (*S. bredanensis*), and melon-headed whales (*P. electra*). There were 19 sightings of these species in 2011 and 40 recorded in 2012.

Another important outcome of the project is the delineation of a 9,051.80 ha humpback whale conservation area and a 3,431.94 ha marine reserve off Camiguin Island. Tremendous support from local residents was garnered by the project and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Integrated Coastal Resources Management Project (DENR-ICRMP) in order to achieve this. This is the first whale conservation area in the Philippines and will hopefully set a precedent for other areas. The data gathered by the project was crucial in providing recommendations for the location and size of the conservation area, as well as establishing guidelines for appropriate conduct of boats/ships within the area. The project recommended marine-related tourism activities for the municipality. We will continue to provide support to the local government unit, particularly to the village fisherfolk association, by providing technical advice for a proposed visitor education centre and marine sanctuary monitoring and patrol.

The increased educational outreach of the project was made possible by the development of the Balyena.org website (<http://www.balyena.org.ph>) and the successful delivery of the environmental education campaign. Although the website is still at its early stage, we predict at least 1,000 online users within the first six months of going online from the regular users of the social media pages of Balyena.org, Large Marine Vertebrate Project Philippines (LA.MA.VE.), and Marine Wildlife Watch Philippines (MWWP) which are linked up to the website. The website houses information on cetacean biology and distribution, current research and conservation projects and a database for cetacean sightings and strandings in the Philippines.

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

The project partnered with the regional offices of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Research (BFAR) and the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources' (DENR) Integrated and Coastal Resources Management Project (ICRMP). Each agency sent two members of their staff to participate in the research survey and educational outreach. Their participation in the field increases the capacity of these agencies to conduct cetacean research and gives them the tools to potentially incorporate cetacean research in their work.

The fisherfolk association of the village of Balatubat, Camiguin actively participated in the consultation meetings and workshop. Members of the group also joined the field work for the delineation of the marine protected and humpback whale conservation area. The group recognized the importance of establishing these areas as an investment in their future, especially as fisherfolk. They have expressed concern about the encroachment of fishers from the mainland involved in illegal fishing and have sought the assistance of the Project to enable them to monitor and protect their resources.

The local community on the Island has showed tremendous support for the project through the years. This was especially evident during the field season of 2011 through 2012. The field research team were consistently assisted by locals during the boat surveys, educational outreach activities and particularly during the construction of the land-based monitoring platform on Pamoctan Island.

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

Plans are currently being drawn up to continue this work for the next 2-3 years. The humpback whale photo-identification and acoustics research was designed to be a long-term monitoring project and is the longest continually run cetacean research site in the Philippines. Boat-based surveys will be planned for the next humpback whale season (2013). The new land-based monitoring component of the project will commence in November this year (2012). An expansion of the research site is also proposed for the 2013 season extending the humpback whale research area to the Ilocos Norte region - a few degrees southwest of the Babuyan channel.

Through continued partnership with the DENR-ICRMP and the BFAR, the project will continue to provide technical support to the Babuyan Islands corridor. Prior to the official declaration of the Marine Protected and Humpback Whale Conservation Area in Camiguin Island, the project will provide information materials for the proposed visitor centre. The project also plans to assist in the installation of mooring buoys and marine sanctuary markers around Pamoctan Island.

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

The results of this work will primarily be shared through our new website and social media pages such as the Facebook pages of Balyena.org and Marine Wildlife Watch Philippines (MWWP). Formal reports will also be sent to concerned government agencies in the region, specifically the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources – Region 2, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Region 2, and the Local Government Unit of the Municipality of Calayan. A manuscript for publication is also being drafted which we aim to be submitted to the Journal of Cetacean Research and Management by the end of July 2012.

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

The RSG was used over the period from May 2011 to May 2012. This is 1 month shorter than the actual period of time anticipated for the project. The actual start date of the project was April 2011, while the RSG was received in May 2011.

## 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.

The exchange rate used is 63.77 Philippine pesos = 1 £ sterling. Foreign exchange rate fluctuations were experienced within the duration of the Project period.

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Boat hire & fuel for survey	1,321.43	1,229.42	92.01	Difference due to fluctuations in fuel prices.
Transportation to & from field site	264.29	279.13	14.84	Difference due to minor changes in transportation rates.
Food & accommodation for researchers on field	1,671.43	1,787.67	116.24	Accommodation on the field was slightly lower than budgeted.
Workshop costs (food, supplies, transport, accommodation)	535.71	172.49	363.22	The workshop was postponed and budget was diverted to costs of smaller consultations, meetings, educational outreach and field supplies.
Education outreach costs & communication	191.43	254.04	62.61	Difference due to additional outreach activities conducted and need for more communication to and from the Project site.
Field supplies & equipment (video camera, batteries, binders)	687.14	837.97	150.83	Difference due to costs of equipment repair and additional field supplies.
Web design, hosting & maintenance	928.57	1,019.29	90.72	Difference due to additional meeting costs to collate materials for the website and following up work with the web designer.

Whale watching brochure & photolD catalogue printing	400	501.80	101.80	Difference due to increase in printing prices and additional print materials produced (i.e. posters).
<b>TOTAL</b>	6,000	<b>6,081.81</b>		

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

It is important that the work initiated in the protection of the coastal area of Camiguin Island for humpback whales and all marine resources is sustained through continued monitoring, support to responsible infrastructure building for ecotourism and capacity-building to the local fisherfolk association and local government unit. It is recommended that the Humpback whale Conservation Area is extended to cover the other islands in the Babuyan Islands group.

It is crucial to continue the annual survey monitoring of humpback whales through photo-identification and sound recordings in order to fully understand this significant subpopulation of the western North Pacific. Furthermore, it is highly recommended that the newly established land-based monitoring program be maintained and strengthened as this will provide valuable data that will fill-in gaps to the knowledge about the seasonality and abundance of humpback whales in the Philippines. If coupled with expanding the monitoring site to the other two Islands, Fuga and Calayan, as well as to the Ilocos Norte region on mainland Luzon, a better understanding of this subpopulation may be achieved.

**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?**

The RSGF logo was used in the website, whale watching guidelines brochure, fisherfolk association's t-shirts, humpback whale fluke print catalogue, and the cetaceans in the Philippines poster as well as in slide presentations about the Project.

**11. Any other comments?**

PDF copies of print materials produced as well as photographs will be sent separately.