



The Rufford 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.

Thank you for your help.

Josh Cole, Grants Director

Grant Recipient Details	
Your name	Hanyeh Ghaffari
Project title	Enhancing Community Participation in Euphrates Softshell Turtle Conservation
RSG reference	17713-2
Reporting period	August 2015- August 2016
Amount of grant	£5000
Your email address	Ghaffari.hanyeh@gmail.com
Date of this report	24 September 2016

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
Establishing Euphrates Softshell Turtle work-group			*	After more than 8 months of follow-ups, coordination and several meetings with government officials of environmental agencies of Khuzestan counties, especially the Department of Environment of Khuzestan and Reptiles and Amphibians Office of the Environmental Protection Agency and also the local people, the Euphrates Softshell Turtle conservation workgroup was officially formed as the first workgroup of reptiles in Iran. Since in Iran, so far no None Governmental Organisation (NGO) carried out the task of forming a workgroup for endangered species, specifically amphibians and reptiles, as the first experience of forming such a workgroup in the country, in the primary predictions, a much shorter time was allocated to the formation of the Euphrates Softshell Turtle conservation workgroup.
Training local fishers, teachers, rangers and also local children in 3 villages			*	Based on the experiences from the first phase of the Euphrates Softshell Turtle Conservation Project with support from The Rufford Small Grants Foundation and The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP-Iran) and assistance and consultancy of local collaborators, the regions of Shavoor, Hor-e Riahi and Jariyeh-e Seyyed Mohammad were selected as the project's area based on proximity to Euphrates Softshell Turtle habitat and presence of the highest number of illegal fishers who use electricity

				for fishing. In said regions, fifth and sixth grade elementary students consisting of 494 male and female students along with school teachers, fishers and environmental guards were trained. In this phase of the project, the educational materials of the schools were designed, prepared and implemented completely specialised for Euphrates Softshell Turtle conservation for 11 and 12 year old students by the leader of trainers who is a member of Pars herpetologists Institute.
Developing the second edition of the Euphrates Softshell Turtle conservation painting contest and Turtle Festival in Khuzestan Province.		*		The second painting competition for Euphrates Softshell Turtle conservation was held simultaneously with the training of the schools of Shavoor, Hor-e Riahi and Jariyeh-e Seyyed Mohammad in March 2015. The festival of Euphrates Softshell Turtle was postponed to the next academic year and is planned to be held in December of 2016 in north of Khuzestan, Iran.
Gathering turtle faeces and analyse them to obtain Euphrates Softshell Turtle Feeding Habits			*	With help from local fishers, 32 samples of Euphrates Softshell Turtle' faeces were collected from the rivers of Loreh, Balarood, Shavoor, Sabzazb and also Karkhe dam lake located north of Khuzestan to investigate the turtles' diet. Based on the samples, it was discovered that <i>Rafetus euphraticus</i> consumes wide range of food items at the study area. Number of prey categories in each faeces was varied between one and seven. The food items comprised crabs, insects, birds, fish, plants, river bed-material and debris. The turtle has dominantly feed plants and invertebrates. Among invertebrates, crabs were the most eaten item. Fish made up minor parts of the diet.

			<p>Investigation of Euphrates Softshell Turtle' diet was important because one of the reasons for the killing of the turtle by the local fishers is that they believe these turtles only eat fish and are their competitors in fishing. Before this investigation, no scientific study had ever been performed in the entire range of the global distribution of Euphrates Softshell Turtle. This study, as the first study that investigated Euphrates Softshell Turtle's diet, shows that this species is omnivorous. In the next phase of project, we intend to use the information gathered from investigating the diet of this endangered species to train fishers in other regions of Euphrates Softshell Turtle distribution.</p>
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2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

The biggest unpredicted problem during this study was the long and complicated process for the formation of the official Euphrates Softshell Turtle workgroup. It should be noted that it is very vital to form this workgroup for the survival of Euphrates softshell turtle. With numerous written and oral follow-ups and formation of several briefing sessions, after eight months and a half from phase two of the project, we managed to form this workgroup.

Another unpredicted problem was the occurrence of a flood during the training period in schools and cutting off the communication routes of villages. This changed the schedule of the training classes but fortunately, the trainings were provided based on the new planning with a little delay.

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

The main achievement of this conservation project as phase two of Euphrates Softshell Turtle Conservation was the formation of the conservation workgroup for this endangered species in Iran and also the first Euphrates Softshell Turtle Conservation Workgroup in entire range of the global distribution of Euphrates Softshell Turtle.



Another achievement was investigation of Euphrates softshell turtle's diet which will help us increase the knowledge of local fishers in the next phases. Knowing that Euphrates softshell turtle is omnivorous and eats a variety of the riverbed materials, shows that this endangered reptile has an important role in keeping the rivers of its habitats clean. Transfer of this knowledge to local fishers will significantly decrease their conflict with Euphrates softshell turtle. Another valuable achievement of this project, is the continuous training of local communities in north of Khuzestan where half of the habitats of Euphrates softshell turtle of Iran are located.

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

The local fishers actively participated in the investigation of the Euphrates softshell turtle's diet, the teachers, school authorities, environmental guards and students participated in the training of students and also the authorities of the environment and local people participated in the training workshops. The most important use of this plan for locals was increased awareness and knowledge regarding the importance of Euphrates Softshell Turtle and its habitats.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Surely this participatory conservation project will continue. The continuity of the Euphrates Softshell Turtle Conservation Participatory Plan will lead to its long term effectiveness in Khuzestan Province and help with the survival of the only softshell turtle species of Iran. Since 2009 when phase one of this project started until today that phase two ended, much effort has been put to increasing the knowledge of local people regarding the importance of Euphrates softshell turtle by Pars herpetologists Institute. The other part of this plan that focused on studying the unknown biological characteristics and habitat requirements of this species, helped with the further understanding of the parameters required by Euphrates softshell turtle in its natural habitats. These two aspects of the Community-based Conservation the turtle and further understanding of the needs of Euphrates softshell turtle will result in the preparation of a comprehensive conservation management plan for this endangered reptile.

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

The results of this project were presented in national and international meetings and we have a book on Euphrates softshell turtle in preparation that will partly consist of the activities and results of this project. Two travels to Iraq and Turkey have been planned so in the habitats of Euphrates softshell turtle of these two countries, the results of our project will be provided as a model to them.

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

We did not exceed the timescale, except one activity. Based on the schedule, the second festival of Euphrates softshell turtle was postponed to the next academic year and is planned to be held in December of 2016.

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
Preparation of educational awareness and training materials	800	800	0	-
Workshops	1750	1900	-150	-
Festival and turtle painting contest	550	250	+300	The festival was postponed to the next academic year and is planned to be held in December of 2016.
Travels and living expenses	800	650	+150	Less money was spent for living expenses because locals kindly provided accommodation for our team.
Food and lodging	900	900	0	-
Communication and reporting	200	200	0	-
TOTAL	5000	4700	+300	



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

The first two phases of this Conservation Project were limited to the north of Khuzestan. In the next step, we intend to apply the lessons learned from these two participatory conservation phases to the south of Khuzestan. In addition to the training part of the plan, the section for investigating the characteristics of the species and its habitats will continue. Use of advanced transmitters will be included in the next phase for the completion of the studies of the home range and investigation of the habitat characteristics of the south of Khuzestan. More importantly, we need to estimate the population of Euphrates softshell turtle since no information is available about it.

We also hope that a national operational plan for Euphrates softshell turtle conservation will be prepared in the next year as a result of the formation of Euphrates Softshell Turtle workgroup and holding regular sessions for it.

There is much to do to protect this iconic endangered species. In the next phase, with cooperation from the representatives of the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, we intend to hold a regional meeting for the preparation of an action plan with help from the representatives of other countries, which is the habitat of this species.

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 Rufford Small Grants Foundation's logo was used in all the national and international meetings that we presented the project results. It was also printed on linen bags designed and prepared to promote less use of plastic bags.

11. Any other comments?

The fact is, 90% of the conservation budgets in Iran are limited to the projects focusing on the conservation of big carnivores followed by birds. Under these circumstances, it is really difficult to convince government authorities, particularly environmental authorities, that the conservation of a turtle species is as important as the conservation of cheetah, leopard or bear. For these authorities, it is difficult to understand that it takes long term planning for the conservation of Euphrates softshell turtle. In spite of all these years, my efforts as the leader of the Euphrates Softshell Turtle Conservation Project and the efforts of all the members of Pars herpetologists Institute as the team of this participatory conservation project, have



not been stopped to help the survival of this endangered species. The Rufford Small Grants Foundation, along with The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP-Iran), played an important role in success of these efforts put into the survival of Euphrates softshell turtle.