

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.

Thank you for your help.

Josh Cole, Grants Director

Grant Recipient Details	
Your name	Gretchen Walters
Project title	Savannas on fire: linking conservation, biology, and traditional knowledge
RSG reference	19.04.06
Reporting period	Final Report
Amount of grant	£4726
Your email address	g.walters@ucl.ac.uk gretchen.walters@mobot.org
Date of this report	1 March 2008

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
Social surveys in 5 villages			X	These results will form the basis of future work in the project to value traditional knowledge of savanna resources related to fire
Bird surveys			X	Two surveys were planned, but three were conducted.
Mammal surveys		X		These surveys were already conducted by another project in the park when the funded was received. Thus, the portion relating to fire and mammal presence has been reanalysed for guidance in the fire plan phase.
Vegetation surveys			X	One mission provided data relative to the colonisation of the savanna by the forest at the edge. Transects and plots within the savanna have elucidated how fire affects regeneration of the dominant species.
Park fire plan meeting	X			During the life of the project, the national parks were reorganised administratively which interrupted work on an official fire plan for several months. Just last week, a general management plan meeting was held in which it was decided to include a fire plan. Thus, this portion of the funding is reserved for this meeting due to now take place in about 4 months time.

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

During the beginning of the project, the National Centre for Scientific and Technical Research introduced new rules for research permits. This delayed the start of the project by several months requiring the request for an extension from Rufford which was granted.

During the final phase of the project, Gabon's National Parks Agency (GNPA) were reorganised delaying the implementation of a fire plan meeting. Last week, the Plateaux Batéke National Park (PBNP) held its first park management meeting during which the need for a fire plan was formalised. A separate meeting for this fire plan, in collaboration with GNPA, will be held in the coming months.

This is an important step as the work of this project will be formally included in the fire plan of the park.

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

- A. Collaboration with PBNP and GNPA: many projects in Gabon seek to help conservation initiatives, however if there isn't a buy-in at the national level, then the results may never be formally adopted. This project required collaborating with local and national authorities guaranteeing the adoption of a collaborative fire plan.
- B. Collaboration with the Western Batéke peoples: This project constituted the first formal consultation with local people about current and past fire practices. It has elucidated the historical importance of the fire frequency, and valued former practice. It has also enumerated the important link between fire and the hunting and gathering of food. Gabon is 80% forest and thus the subject of most conservation and forestry efforts. This leaves savannas undervalued and misunderstood. This project enabled us to identify the importance of fire in the livelihoods of the Western Batéke.
- C. Savanna ecosystem dynamics understood: this project enabled a better understanding of the way in which fire stimulates savanna plant growth, creates important habitat for birds and mammal species, and does not seem to be effective in repressing forest colonisation. From these data, we see that fire is a necessary part of the ecosystem and for its management.

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

We worked in six villages and one town during the life of this project. With two local field assistants/translators, we empowered people to talk about their past and current knowledge and practice of savanna fire ecology. Several were concerned that PBNP was against fire use and were keen that our work represents Batéke fire knowledge. This work also enabled the researchers to become well known in the localities enabling further work.

This project will help with the correct representation of fire use and importance in western Batéke people's cultures and livelihoods. As Carbon Credit project become more popular, favorising forest environment or forestry projects, the valuing of the savanna ecosystems becomes even more important.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes. These are the future plans if there is available financing:

- A. **Fire plan execution:** The purchase of safety equipment for the execution of the fire plan in the Plateaux Batéke National Park
- B. **Fire ecology environmental film:** Based on the results of this project, we hope to create an environmental film about the role of fire in Gabonese savannas. This film will target Gabonese policy makers who have already been presented with the results of this study as well as those in the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Forest and Water. Visual media is an effective way to communicate research and training has already been received by the Oxford Academy of Documentary Film to realise this project once financing

is secured. It will be done in collaboration with Curve Light Films for scientific editing, and a team of 3 Gabonese and American cameramen and cultural editors

- C. **Food and fire Biology study:** A study on the effect of fire on the biology of gathered food such as mushrooms, insects, and plants to determine whether fire plays an active role in creating habit or is a local perception. This will help the park better understand fire and livelihoods.
- D. **Savanna food environmental education campaign:** The valuing of Batéke savanna foods through the researching and creation of a poster to be given out in the province. This would be done in coordination with current PBNP Environmental Education activities.
- E. **A national fire management meeting for national park management:** This will be done in collaboration with GNPA and will involve bringing in fire specialists from other African countries, particularly South Africa. This will serve to better educate managers of protected areas with savannas: many park plans are now calling for a fire plan, but have asked for better understanding fire-savanna ecology before proceeding. This workshop will help fill this gap and may lead to collaboration with the National Forestry School which currently trains park managers.
- F. **Cross border fire dynamics:** The fire ethno-ecology of the Batéke Plateaux stretches from eastern Gabon to central Republic of Congo. PBNP currently deals with Congolese poachers who hunt on a commercial basis and with Gabonese poachers who hunt via vehicle for elite clients. The difference in socio-economics needs to be explored to understand if the same fire dynamics occurs in Congo. They will soon establish a bordering park and this information could help deal with the poaching problem and feed into a fire plan.

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

This work is being shared through reports and presentations to the NGO's involved in the fire management of PBNP and GNPA who wish to establish fire plans for other savanna parks in Gabon. Research presentations are due to be given at Lope National Park's student workshop and the University College London's Geography Department. A presentation has been given at UCL's Human Ecology Research Group. Other presentations will be given to GNPA, Gabon's Institute of Ecological Research, and the Missouri Botanical Garden, USA.

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

The grant was used over a period of 15 months. This exceeded the expectations of the proposed work, but was due to the reorganisation of the National Research body for scientific permits and of GNPA's administrative structure. These delays were unavoidable and uncontrollable.

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
Research Field Assistance	1257	1300	-43	
Translator & other field assistance	754	772	-18	
Animal tracker & park work	314	138	+176	
Ornithological study	1047	687	+360	The ornithologist offered to do the work only for compensation for direct field expenses rather than for a budgeted honorarium plus field expenses. This allowed us to pay for more transport and communication.
Equipment	120	120	0	
Transport & communication	293	838	-545	
Fire plan meeting	941	0	+941	Reserved for upcoming meeting in accordance with new park procedures. The original figure in the budget was miscalculated!
TOTAL	4726	3855	+871	

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

The next steps are to finish the work on PBNP's fire plan, followed by the application. Other parks will benefit from this research and so presentations, reports, and films will be used as a fire-for-management advocacy in Gabon.

Locally, steps need to be taken to understand fire-related livelihoods while also valuing the gathered foods of the savanna.

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. The logo was used whenever reports were made or presentations were made. I will send these reports to you separately for your files.

11. Any other comments?

I would like to thank Rufford for making this work possible. We hope to continue work on fire in Gabon and in the Plateaux Batéke in the coming years as it has become a long-term research and conservation aim.