

Project Impact Report

Rufford Small Grant Project (2018–2019)

Project Title

Status, Distribution, and Abundance of the Vulnerable African White-bellied Pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*) in Human-Dominated Forest Landscapes around the Asukese Forest

Project Overview

Funding Partner: Rufford Foundation (Small Grant)

Duration: November 2018 – December 2019

Location: Asukese Forest Reserve, Ahafo Region, Ghana

Focal Species: White-bellied Pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*)

This project combined scientific research with community-driven conservation to generate baseline data on pangolins while reducing hunting pressure and strengthening local stewardship in a human-dominated forest landscape.

Why This Project Mattered

Pangolins are among the most threatened mammals globally, yet ecological data on their populations in Ghana remains limited. In forest reserves like Asukese—surrounded by farming and hunting communities—pangolins face intense pressure from illegal hunting, habitat degradation, and weak enforcement.

This project addressed both:

- Knowledge gaps (lack of baseline ecological data), and
- Human drivers of decline (hunting and low awareness).

Project Objectives

- Establish baseline data on pangolin presence, distribution, and abundance
- Raise awareness and improve attitudes toward pangolin conservation
- Reduce habitat degradation and hunting pressure
- Promote collaborative forest management rooted in traditional conservation practices
- Encourage voluntary reporting and return of live pangolins
- Integrate local ecological knowledge with scientific methods

What We Did

Field Research & Monitoring

- Conducted field surveys and camera trapping
- Covered 3 forest compartments (≈180 ha)
- Documented hunting indicators (spent cartridges, snares, logging signs) with GPS

Community Engagement

- Held conservation awareness meetings in forest-fringe communities
- Trained 10 former hunters as community conservation guardians

Education & Youth Engagement

- Reached 500+ school children
- Established 4 school-based wildlife conservation clubs

Patrol Support

- Supported monitoring and reporting within the forest reserve



Key Outputs at a Glance

Indicator	Result
Pangolin species recorded	2 species
Communities engaged	10
Former hunters trained	10
School children reached	500+
Wildlife clubs formed	4 clubs (about 80 members)
Forest area surveyed	180 hectares
Spent cartridges documented	500+ (GPS-mapped)
Live pangolins rescued	10+ individuals



Outcomes & Conservation Impact

Reduced Hunting Pressure

- Fewer spent shotgun cartridges recorded six months after project activities
- Decline in reported pangolin killing incidents

Improved Community Behaviour

- Community members voluntarily reported pangolin captures
- Increased willingness to release live pangolins for reintroduction

Species Protection

- More than 10 live pangolins rescued and safely returned to the wild

- Improved protection of pangolins and other wildlife within the reserve

Lasting Awareness

- Strengthened conservation attitudes among adults and school children
- Youth engaged as future conservation ambassadors

Challenges & Learning

Challenge

- Planned transect surveys proved ineffective due to the pangolin's elusive and nocturnal behaviour.

Adaptive Solution

- Relied on local ecological knowledge from experienced field guides
- Adopted opportunistic and random search methods

Key Lesson

- Combining community knowledge with scientific approaches significantly improves research outcomes for cryptic species like pangolins.

Sustainability & Next Steps

To sustain and scale impact, Pangolin-Gh will:

- Expand conservation education in forest-fringe communities
- Co-develop a long-term pangolin conservation roadmap with local stakeholders
- Strengthen school and community learning programmes
- Build on project outcomes through a Second Rufford Grant, already secured

Why This Project Matters

This first Rufford-funded project laid the foundation for:

- Evidence-based pangolin conservation in Ghana
- Strong community ownership of wildlife protection
- Long-term engagement and continued donor support

It demonstrates that small grants can deliver big conservation impact when science and communities work together.

Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the Rufford Foundation, local communities around the Asukese Forest Reserve, community volunteers, and field guides for their commitment to pangolin conservation.