

Laikipia makes a difference

The earth's climate is changing. This is most noticeable in the Arctic, where the average temperature is rising at twice the rate as the rest of the world, and affecting people's lives all over the globe*.

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Melting Ice - a Hot Topic was appropriately chosen for this year's World Environment Day. Commemorated every year on 5 June, this event was established in 1972 through the United Nations Environmental Programme to stimulate awareness of the environment and enhance political attention and public action.

Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF), a dynamic membership-driven organisation conserving wildlife outside protected areas across the Ewaso ecosystem in Kenya, celebrated World Environment Day in Rumuruti town, western Laikipia. Linking the *Melting Ice - a Hot Topic* theme to this semi-arid region of Kenya - which has little more than 400mm of rain per year - initially seemed challenging, especially since very few local people have ever

experienced ice, except the occasional distant glimpse of Mount Kenya's snow-capped peaks.

But LWF, along with over 400 schoolchildren and community members, celebrated the day to the full. Transport for the children from faraway schools, and lunch for all students was provided by us: with bursting enthusiasm and participation from all age groups, 450 tree seedlings were planted within the town, giving a clear message that trees can make a tangible difference and are an affordable solution to climate change. A productive clean-up campaign followed, where the simple task of collecting plastic waste made an instant improvement to the immediate environment - something that the entire community could appreciate.

In preparation for this occasion, Martin Kahindi, the LWF Community Liaison Officer for Uaso Narok Unit, gained support from seven schools in the area, encouraging them to interpret climate change through songs or plays. The key messages that came out were the value of conservation, and the importance of trees for rainfall, agriculture, livestock and wildlife - important resources on which they depend. A drama skit highlighted the need for every individual to take responsibility for the environment, and focus on ways not only to reduce human impact, but to help heal the damage. The event was closed with a strong message

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from the District Commissioner, who stated that tomorrow is a new day and the good done must continue in the long term for the benefit of the people.

Each year World Environment Day gives LWF an opportunity to reflect on conservation challenges and the value of natural resources. At the heart of LWF's work is the Community Conservation programme, which assists 40-50 community conservation groups annually in initiating rangeland restoration projects, reforestation projects, community conservation projects and River Water Users' Associations. LWF has also been instrumental in advancing environmental education, and with an education bus and Ephantus Mugendi Mugo, our Environmental Education Officer, links all 274 primary and 60 secondary schools in Laikipia with conservation education centres. None of these achievements would be possible without the dedicated fund raising efforts of Save the Rhino, who, together with Chester Zoo, the EAZA Rhino Campaign, a number of grant-making trusts and foundations and more recently the 3Peaks3Weeks initiative, have supported the Community Conservation programme since 2002 and Environmental Education programme since 2004.

With Save the Rhino's support, LWF strives to maintain the ecosystem integrity, help establish and develop community conservation projects in wildlife dispersal areas and develop wildlife enterprises.

* Source: New Scientist 2 November 2004



Above top:
Environment-themed drama

Above right:
Local schoolchildren
celebrate World Environment
Day

Above:
Laikipia's Environmental
Education bus and Ephantus
Mugo, the EEO