

Kenya:

A day in the life of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum's Environmental Education Officer

The idea of a guest speaker coming to school was more exciting than anything that had happened in a long time at Gatirima Primary School.

The children had been eagerly hovering by the gate when I arrived, as planned, at midday. My vehicle windows were blocked by peeping faces, the air full of shrills of joy. Welcomed by the head teacher, Mr Marai, who ushered me through the crowd to his office, we began to discuss the plan for the day. I clarified that I would be giving a lecture and a video show to the two top classes for students ages 11 and 12. Mr Marai had already informed the whole school they would participate - so to avoid huge disappointment, I agreed to include four classes for children aged nine years and above.

Although the smaller children were allowed to go home, none left the compound. Their curiosity grew on seeing me offload the generator and the video projector from the car, and continued to spy through the classroom window for the duration of my presentation.

I entered the classroom, set up the equipment, and was introduced as a teacher from the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, who had come to talk and teach about environmental and wildlife conservation.

In January this year I was employed as the LWF Environmental Education Officer - my position generously funded by a coalition of donors put together by Save the Rhino. Although the Forum has always been very supportive to those institutions involved in environmental education throughout Laikipia, it became obvious that a more proactive system was needed. The Environmental Education Programme, benefiting over 230 primary schools and 40 secondary schools within the district,

will assist teachers with implementing an environmental curriculum. To facilitate this, another Save the Rhino-led coalition of donors has purchased an Environmental Education Bus, which will take school children to Laikipia's game reserves, conservancies and education centres. Education outside the classroom is a vital part of learning.

After a brief introduction on the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and the purposes of the Environmental Education Programme, I presented my lecture topic: "Wildlife and Environmental Conservation". The students were aware that "wildlife" meant "animals found in bushes and forests", and that "environment" was the "things surrounding us such as rivers, mountains, air, plants, buildings and animals".

Although well-experienced in lecturing school children, nothing quite prepared me for the knowledge and opinions these children already had, all from firsthand encounters with wildlife. Overall, they felt that wildlife was more detrimental than beneficial to humans. Loss of livestock and crops to wildlife is a problematic issue, and it is a challenge to present the many advantages wildlife generates. The environmental advantages, which only indirectly benefit them, they recognised as: "tourism, timber, food for their cattle and goats, oxygen, medicinal uses and prevention of soil erosion".

With the students wholly participating, I went on to talk about wildlife and why we need to conserve the environment. By use of a "food web" diagram, I summarised the lesson by describing the

Environmental Education Bus

The Environmental Education Bus has been supported by major donations by Chester Zoo, the Nando Peretti Foundation and Save the Rhino International, with additional support from the Mark Leonard Trust, the Astor Foundation and the Joan Tanner Charitable Foundation.

The costs of a two-year post of Environmental Education Officer (approx £20,500) has been supported by The 1989 Willan Charitable Trust, Chester Zoo, Dance Laikipia, The Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust, Save the Rhino International and The Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation.

Benenden School raised a further £2,597 to buy educational equipment for the Bus, while Rachael Barber, Patrick Haywood, Vic Odden's and Howard Springthorpe all donated binoculars for use by schoolchildren on the Bus.

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1 Giant Leap for the rhino: "Dance Laikipia"

role played by every organism in the ecosystem, each vital to complete the circle of life. To demonstrate the grassland ecosystem I played a 50-minute wildlife video "The Super Predators", after which the children named all the animals they recognised. All too soon the day came to an end and it was time for me to move on. Mr Maraj thanked me, stating his wish for a follow-up visit sometime in the near future.

I am convinced that the Environmental Education Programme will have a positive influence on the conservation of Laikipia's environment and wildlife. One cannot ignore the reality of the lives that these young people lead. By creating awareness and offering a vision for Laikipia's future, with wildlife very much in the mainstream of people's everyday lives, the precious heritage we are so lucky to have will be protected for future generations to cherish.

Ephantus Mugendi Mugo
Environmental Education Officer
Laikipia Wildlife Forum

Duncan Bridgeman, founding member of globetrotting, worldwide-music fusion outfit, 1 Giant Leap, has been good to the rhinos over the years. Duncan first became involved by producing the score for Rhino Drum, Save the Rhino's environmental performing arts road show that toured the UK festivals in 1999 and 2000, culminating with a run at the Edinburgh Festival. Soon afterwards, Duncan formed 1 Giant Leap with Jamie Catto, one of the founding members of Faithless. Together they spent six months visiting 22 different countries with a mobile audio-visual studio and their music collaborations led to a Grammy nominated album and DVD.

Given their international acclaim, we were extremely privileged when 1 Giant Leap agreed to perform at Dance Laikipia, a fundraising party at the Tabernacle in Notting Hill on 6 November 2003, together with their full, 10-piece band. Dance Laikipia evolved out of a desire to raise funds for the Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF) and a party seemed like an appropriate way as well as providing a useful opportunity to raise the profile of the LWF.

On the night 1 Giant Leap were marvelous and excellent support came in the form of Nana Tsiboe and friends, with Doc keeping things funky in between the live acts. The party would not have been possible without our key sponsors: Deliverance, for the wonderful food; and Cobra, for the drinks. As well as raising funds from the ticket sales, a significant amount was raised by a raffle which had just two prizes, although they were pretty special:

the first, a luxury Laikipia Safari with international flights donated by Kenya Airways; and the second a luxury Laikipia Safari. Special thanks are extended to Nicky Dyer, Will Jones, Kenya Airways and all the lodges who contributed to putting these wonderful prizes together.

Nicky Dyer deserves an extra mention for putting together the excellent goody bags given out to all attendees on departure. Other superstars were: Chris Bodker, who proved a most able compère; the committee members; Suzi Bullough, Belinda Oldenburg, Dion Jerling, Lucinda Roberts and Patrick Sherriff for trawling their contact books; the raffle ticket sellers, Tom, Dave and Kirstie; Helen and Alison of Escape for their decorations; Smiley Paul and Mikee Ray for their lighting and projections; Asmed for his dedicated team of waitresses and bar staff; and all those at the Tabernacle.

Profits from Dance Laikipia helped complete the fundraising for the Environmental Education Officer, a fundamental component of the LWF's mission of safeguarding the Laikipia ecosystem, home to over half of Kenya's black rhinos, many other endangered species, and many thousands of people, all of whom are inextricably linked to the well-being of the environment. Our thanks go out to all of those who gave their time and energy to this event and helped us support such a positive and progressive conservation project.

Neil Bridgland
Special Events and Promotions Manager

