

Tanzania:



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY CATHY DEAN

Above: Pupils on the second school visit saw an amazing variety of animals on their way through the Park
Right: Semu Pallangyo tries to put on a stern face at the entrance to the rhino sanctuary

Third left: The rangers in their uniforms provide great role models for the pupils
Second left: Time to visit the bunker, in the hope of seeing a rhino
Left: Saria dispels the children's negative perceptions about wild dogs

Ambassadors for conservation

Everyone's a critic! That's nowhere more of a truism than when leveled at people working to protect the worlds' natural resources, places of great beauty, or the wild animals that we share this planet with...

Lucy and Tony Fitzjohn
George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust

Good management, law and order, boundaries and fighting against the spin of the "multi purpose land use" advocates seem to enrage a vast section of the world determined to exploit what is left or let it go through sheer lack of interest and neglect. We always seem to have more issues to address than the Chairman of BP.

Sharing the wonders of Nature and promoting the raison d'être for wilderness and unspoilt, if changing, areas might even seem an impossible task within the so-called 'Third

World,' where the demand for land, consumer toys that we take for granted and all the goodies that exist there - grazing, water, mineral rights, timber, the list is endless ...

But it's not. We somehow feel that these places are our spiritual bridges to the past. To bring in local people who have never seen totally wild areas or wild animals before, and to hear them gasping "Mungu, Mungu" (God, God) at the expanse and wonder of it all, puts us all on the same page. The job of crossing the modern day bridges of communications becomes so much easier.

With the right people.

The Government schools do a pretty good job these days. Children have to go to school, they wear uniforms from an early age, and they don't really want to head into the bush with their fathers to go poaching. They are destined for the towns and cities and decision-making areas in their countries. We must simply (though it's not that simple) be the best ambassadors possible what we do, articulating the aesthetics, economics and demographics of it all. The children will do the rest.

I wouldn't know where to start. I'm too old-school and entrenched [Editor's note: this bit is written by Fitz!]. But we do have Elisaria Nnko and Semu Pallangyo who serve as our education officers, and thank God for them. The different groups of children coming in have never had a day like it when they come to Mkomazi.

First the "Rafiki wa Faru" bus picks them up at either Same or Kisiwani. They are then given a brief introduction on the work that we have

done in Mkomazi. But only for a few minutes! Then into the bus they go and after an hour's drive through the wilderness, looking at different types of trees, birds and wildlife, they arrive at the camp. They have a look at the wild dogs, the workshops and water-catchment projects, and then head off to the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary. They meet the rhino guards, see the infrastructure and walk up a small hill into the education centre. Then they have a short lesson, see a 10-minute DVD, have lunch, engage in a classroom activity and then meet more rhino trackers. Then they head off to the Observation Bunker and (fingers crossed) see a rhino. At the end of the day, they are driven back to the starting point and they go home.

We are in the first stages of this programme, and this is the 'pilot' year. We have some wonderful schemes, activities and educational experiences coming up and all of these have been planned and put into effect by Maggie Esson of Chester Zoo, Cathy Dean of SRI and Charlie Mayhew of Tusk. Their advice has been solid and practical. Maggie has unobtrusively given Elisaria and Semu support, ideas and encouragement on teaching methods and how to hold the attention of youngsters very much in awe of their surroundings. As well as Elisaria (who is also our Operations Manager) and Semu (our Rhino Sanctuary Manager), the children have the opportunity to talk to the rhino security guards and trackers, ask questions and look at their radios, binoculars and uniforms.

Chester Zoo is providing resin models, footprints, posters, logos and maybe even a life-size model of a black rhino for those murky days when there is no chance of seeing a rhino in the wild. Save the Rhino has also sent many prizes, rhino-themed stationery and educational materials. Tusk has sent an invaluable book on the environment by PACE, which we are hoping to get translated into Swahili (the main language of Tanzania). Between Chester Zoo, SRI, Tusk and GAWPT, the environmental education programme is shouldered and propelled forwards. Together we planned this programme from inception, bought a wonderful bus, built an education centre and now manage it.

Communications can only be done effectively by people who really believe in what they are talking about. Elisaria and Semu both love what they do and believe vehemently in it - and this gets across to the children. If, after each trip, one or maybe two children look at where they have just been when they are leaving and say "I want to be like them one day", then their job, and our job, is done and we can rest a little easier at night.

Thanks

Save the Rhino would like to congratulate Tony and Lucy, and Elisaria and Semu on the fantastic launch of Rafiki wa Faru; and to thank Maggie Esson in particular for her tremendous input into devising, structuring and delivering the programme. This has been a truly cooperative effort and we are proud to be involved.

Kenya:



Top: More cameras mean that the Chyulus can build up its pictorial ID library

Bottom: The game scouts show off a haul of confiscated weapons



PHOTOGRAPHY MAASAILAND PRESERVATION TRUST

For your ears only...

The saying "Communication is everything" applies to most things in life; it could not be truer when it comes to rhino conservation. Tracing all that is involved in this field to keep a rhino alive in the Chyulus, takes us from high tech cyberspace to the low churring alarm call of a tick bird.

Richard Bonham
Chyulu Hills rhino project

Let us start with cyberspace. Usually, this begins with an email from the Save the Rhino office in London, with another very patient reminder for an overdue report, a spreadsheet for the ranger patrol running costs and budgets, or plans for the next fundraiser and so on. Thankfully SRI has come to terms with this situation and accept that the skills involved in this form of communication are not one of our team's strong points, and relieve us of the mind-boggling though critical link with keeping the funds and information flowing.

In the field, communications get more interesting. The backbone is the good old battered handheld radio attached to the game scout's belt. This is the lifeline that calls in for



anything from a re-supply of rations, reports of a rhino sighting, or for reinforcements and support from the tracker dog unit to follow up on poacher tracks. From here on, things get even more interesting, as you have to communicate without being heard, be it by a rhino or a poacher. Technology now takes a back seat and bushcraft takes over.

Watching a trained ranger unit moving through the bush, following a rhino track or poacher, is akin to a well-rehearsed silent ballet. Each step is controlled and careful, voices are replaced by the clicking of fingers or a low tongue click; hand signals indicate stop, go left, right, back, lie down or freeze. Sometimes, when really close in, even hand signals are a give away and direction is indicated by pouted lips or a cocked eyebrow... even a whisper in these situations can result in a rhino erupting out of a bush or the panicked flight of a poacher.

Rhino themselves have their own intricate communication skills that need to be interpreted. Their dung middens are post boxes, scattered around the bush, letting each other know where they are and who they are. Sometimes they serve as a warning to keep others out of their territory and at other times, it is an advertisement of a lonely heart searching

for mate. A squirt of urine on the trail is the equivalent of Chanel No. 5 in rhino lingo and will help bring suitors at the gallop.

Tick birds are a great example of a symbiotic relationship and understanding the importance of low tech communication skills. They feed on the parasitic ticks and in return give warning of impending danger and have saved many a rhino from a poacher. Their warnings have also saved many a game scout from becoming kebabed on a rhino horn.

Grant

We would like to thank Amnéville Zoo in France, and the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation very much indeed for their grants of 5,000 euros and £5,000 respectively, towards the salary of Richard Kech, who has been billeted to the KWS ranger team in the Chyulu Hills National Park. Kech brings years of experience to this supporting role, and is an invaluable member of the team.