

How to embrace a challenge in 40°C...

From cold dampness to 40°C midday heat, the challenges are many when trying to export your education expertise from Denmark to Zambia.

Tine Stausholm Christiansen | Biologist and Zoo Educator, Givskud Zoo

Children at the Conservation Education Day don't let limited resources hamper their imagination!

ALL IMAGES
TINE STAUSHOLM CHRISTIANSEN



In the summer of 2010 Givskud Zoo, a large safari park in Denmark, responded to a plea for help from Save the Rhino, which asked for inspiration and new inputs for the conservation education programme they support in North Luangwa National Park in Zambia.

As a zoo educator my job is quite varied. In the season I do guided tours and public speeches for the guests in the Zoo. I also assist in maintaining the website and producing newsletters and so on. But the most rewarding part of my job by far is teaching school children about animal behaviour, endangered species and the role of a modern zoo in conservation. For that we can

draw on many different resources. We have access to many props such as elephant tusks and rhino horn, which the children can see and touch. Equally important, we have a well-stocked library and good internet access, which is invaluable when coming across an interesting question from a student that you do not know the answer to.

All this is very easy to take for granted and the biggest challenges in my normal work are to catch and maintain the interest of rather materialistic children who would rather play computer games and watch TV than fight to gain knowledge and information. So being asked to travel to Zambia and give advice on how to teach in

an environment where none of your normal challenges and problems are relevant, is certainly a ... challenge.

So last October, it was with great anticipation that I travelled to North Luangwa, to act as a mentor for Sylvester Kampamba, the Conservation Education Programme Officer, and help him develop teaching materials that would be more directly relevant to the specific conservation goals of the North Luangwa Conservation Programme.

I had hardly left the plane (and stepped into the 40°C heat) when I was thrown into the biggest party of the year: one of the three Conservation Celebration Days that NLCP organises each year. All the schools in a district had been invited to enjoy a day of plays, quizzes, singing and general fun with the underlying aim of inspiring and educating the children about conservation issues. I was amazed to see how much creativity had been put into making rhinos and other props out of virtually nothing. Depressingly, in the children's plays, although the poachers were always caught in the end, it always happened after the rhino were shot dead. A definite challenge for Sylvester is to stress that the purpose of the project is to catch the poachers before they shoot the rhinos.

A few days later I visited one of the local schools with Sylvester to observe him 'do his thing'. There I saw for the first time the poor conditions that the local teachers work under: no power, no text books, and 90 students in a classroom designed for far fewer, with only a blackboard and some chalk. Because it's such a novelty, usually the whole school wants to crowd into one classroom, just to see live pictures on the wall from Sylvester's computer.

Given the limited resources, learning by rote (repetition) is the norm and whilst this gives students a fantastic ability to recall facts and dates, it leaves them confused about abstract concepts like ecosystems. So that's the challenge. Now, back in Denmark, working on new lessons for Sylvester, I am very much aware that new ideas and concepts need to be very thoroughly explained with local examples they can relate to. It's a challenge I'm relishing.

Thanks

Save the Rhino and NLCP would like to thank Givskud Zoo very much indeed for its expertise and technical support for the Conservation Education Programme, as well as USFWS RTCF which has now helped fund the Programme for two years.