

Rafiki wa Faru 'Friend of the rhino'

Rafiki wa Faru is Mkomazi's Environmental Education programme and has been running for five years. The programme brings groups of schoolchildren from the neighbouring areas to the Park for day of learning. Saria (right) describes what a typical day is like.



Elisaria Nnko | Operations Manager, George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust

“An early start, as I have to get to Same town by 7.30am in the Rafiki wa Faru bus and it's slow going through the Park. The bus has been over the workshop-pit for maintenance and Sangito has given it a good clean, which he does after each Rafiki wa Faru trip. We get to the Kibacha Secondary School in the village at 7am and the students are already waiting for us. We set off to the nearest Park entrance and are greeted by the Tanzanian National Park officers and rangers. Zawadi, a lady officer, greets the students and tells them about the Park's history, the work of the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust and the partnership with TANAPA. We then give each student a sheet of birds and animals so they can identify them as we move on towards our base-camp.

When we reach the base-camp, the students are handed their own Rafiki wa Faru activity book. Then they meet Sangito, who takes them to see one of the wild dog breeding compounds and tells them about the dogs and their role in nature. One of the activities is to draw the coat pattern of a wild dog. Culturally, they have not drawn very much during childhood, so it is always good to watch them get going.

Then we look at the workshops and the water catchment projects and they ask questions before we head to the Rhino Sanctuary. Here they are met by our armed guards. I ask the boys if any of them would like to touch the electric fence, which can stop an elephant or a rhino in its tracks – they all shout 'no!' We head onto the education centre where we talk about wildlife and rhinos and they watch a 10-minute DVD. We then do an activity – normally categorising or more recently 'The Rubbish Game', which they all really like. We then break for lunch outside and give them each a pair of monoculars so they can see the huge scope of the Rhino Sanctuary.

After lunch, we do another educational activity and then the students sign the pledge at the back of their Rafiki wa Faru books. We do this as a sort of ceremonial ending to their time with us and they take it very seriously. I often ask the students who would like to work in wildlife conservation when they grow up, and most boys and some girls put their hands up. Semu and I have noticed the girls gaining confidence over the years. Small, but very important changes are taking place.

On the way out, we might be lucky enough to see a rhino. If so, I ask the students to do another activity in their books, which is to draw the shape of the rhino horn. After that, we start the journey home. Lots of the students say that they don't want to leave and they wish they could stay in the Park for longer.

Many of the schools involved have made up their own songs about Mkomazi, which they sing as we are leaving the Park. They are very resonant and poignant songs and listening to them singing is a really good way to end the day.

Thanks

Rafiki wa Faru is supported by Save the Rhino, Chester Zoo and US Fish & Wildlife Services. We are very grateful indeed to Save the Rhino for coordinating this programme and helping to fund it.



Pupils experience a day of interactive learning. A rhino sighting is a true highlight



ALL IMAGES SRI UNLESS NOTED

