



Life as a teacher and **Lolesha Luangwa** mentor

If somebody had told me on my birthday last August that the following year I'd be living in the middle of a remote National Park in Zambia, I'd barely have believed them.

Aine Higgins | Lolesha Luangwa mentor and teacher, North Luangwa Conservation Programme

I literally have to pinch myself these days as I look outside my house and see lions, have close encounters with elephants, see impala from my classroom window, and remind myself this is my life and not a television documentary that I'm wishing I was part of. I am here and relishing every moment.

Of all the teaching jobs I've had, this is certainly the most diverse. My days consist of teaching Ed and Claire's children in the morning, and spending afternoons working on North Luangwa's Conservation Education Programme, Lolesha Luangwa, or meeting with the Education officers to mentor them and help plan lessons.

I've had the opportunity to observe the education officers Sylvester and Michael deliver the curriculum to schools surrounding the Park, staying with them in their local village, and watching the recent conservation day celebrations in two villages. These are some of my best and most memorable experiences yet.

This year we did something completely different for conservation day, taking on a theatre group to perform the thought-provoking 'Horn of Sorrow'. It was a simple but highly effective show, performed with props like wooden rhino horns, a steering wheel and drums. After watching the show and listening to what locals had to say, we knew our message of conservation and its importance was delivered.

Since I arrived in February, we have been working in conjunction with ZSL, Save the Rhino, and SRI patron and designer Alex Rhind, on plans for a new education centre, funded by the Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and the de Brie Charitable Trust. Our vision is to create a space for children that allows them to see and feel the magic and beauty of the world they live in. The interior of the centre, the North Luangwa ecosystem, will be a self-exploratory exhibition space but will double up as an interactive space for teaching lessons about conservation, the water cycle, food chains, wildlife and more. The idea is to have the four corners of the room represent the different aspects of our ecosystem, the village, water, plants and trees and animals. In the middle is the Park – the link between these areas. We also hope to use a 3D rhino as the narrator and teaching aid, taking the children on a footprint-led journey around the room.

Outside the education centre, we would like the black rhino to take centre stage with a life-size cut-out.

Currently, Sylvester, Michael and I are making some minor adjustments to the programme. We are always looking to improve with self-reflective evaluations, feedback from teachers and my observations proving valuable. The schools' responses are overall very positive; the children are eager learners and we feel the right message is now being delivered to them. We are working on making the lessons more interactive this year, through the use of colourful resources, games, group work and discussions.

There has been extensive building since March and we will soon have beautiful newly constructed dorms, toilets, showers, kitchen and dining area for the teachers and children for their Park visits.

Our next step is to look at the Park visits, how they are planned and run, what lessons we are teaching and how we can make them better. Before the end of the year I plan to give the Education Officers training on basic computing and lesson planning. So far, I have worked with them on creating and editing PowerPoint. I feel their confidence and performance has hugely improved over my seven months here and I really look forward to seeing more changes and progress over the next year.

Grants

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Since November 2014, Save the Rhino has sent £31,819 for Lolesha Luangwa. Including \$19,550 from Disney Conservation Fund, \$26,350 from USFWS, and other miscellaneous donations and our own core funds.



Above: School children participate in a learning activity as part of the Lolesha Luangwa programme

Main: The 'Horn of Sorrow' theatre play performed as part of the annual conservation celebration day



ALL IMAGES: NORTH LUANGWA CONSERVATION PROGRAMME