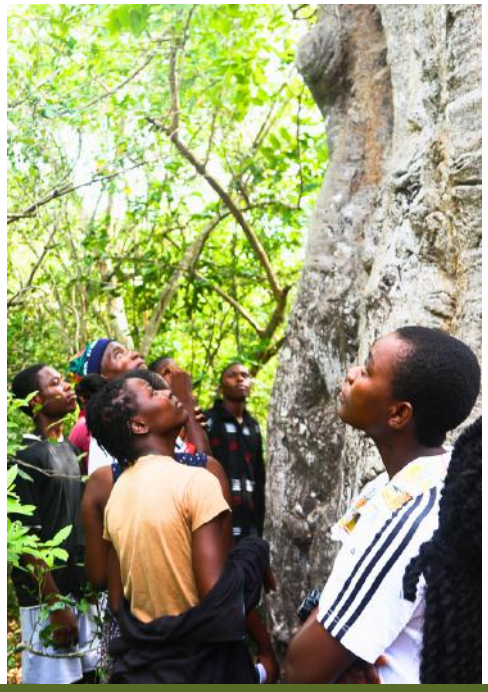
ANNUAL REVIEW 2024

A ROCHA KENYA


25
YEARS


A ROCHA
KENYA
Racing
for
Conservation


A ROCHA
KENYA



DISCOVER A ROCHA KENYA

A Rocha Kenya (ARK) is one of 21 national organisations of A Rocha, an international Christian conservation organisation that is **committed to practical biodiversity conservation** through scientific research, environmental education and sustainable community-based conservation programmes.

A Rocha bases its work on the recognition that the Bible clearly teaches about the importance of caring for the environment as God's creation.

The Bible speaks about **God's love for his world and of our responsibility to look after it**. Ours is a mandate to care for the earth. To use it, yes, but wisely and not to over-exploit, destroy or degrade it.

Our Vision, Mission & Core Commitments

VISION

Nature conserved & people transformed

MISSION

To conserve and restore threatened habitats and biodiversity through research, environmental action, advocacy and community empowerment

We follow Jesus Christ, who created the world and calls us to care for it.

We protect and restore nature and are committed to local places and people over the long term.

We celebrate the insights, perspectives and solutions offered by our diverse cultures.

We invest in good relationships through our commitment to God, one another and the wider creation.

We seek to work with anyone who shares our vision.

Cover image

A Golden Pipit taken during the 2024 Ngulia bird ringing session. Photo: Mark Cutts

OUR PROGRAMMES

Conservation Science

- Terrestrial Science
- Marine Science

Community Conservation

- Marine Governance
- Alternative Livelihoods
- ASSETS

Environmental Education

- Dakatcha Education
- Arabuko-Sokoke Education
- Marine Education

Practical Conservation

- Dakatcha Nature Reserve
- Crows No More! Project
- Coral Gardening

Conservation Centres

- Mwamba Centre
- Karara (Nairobi)
- Dakatcha

2024, Celebrating 25 years of God's Faithfulness

May 1999 marked the inaugural conference for launching A Rocha Kenya at Nairobi Baptist Church. We were honored to have Rev. Dr. John Stott as our main speaker, which attracted over 300 participants. Years later, I met someone who remembered attending that 'John Stott meeting' - but they apparently had never heard of A Rocha! Working as a small, often overlooked conservation organization has been a significant part of A Rocha Kenya's story over the past 25 years, yet what the A Rocha Kenya team has accomplished has been substantial and often far-reaching in terms of impact.

It is therefore with deep thankfulness that we have celebrated 25 years of God's amazing faithfulness.

As a relatively small organisation, we have been blessed with outrageous resources: a team of dedicated and passionate people; a stunning beach-front property in Watamu perfectly positioned for marine studies and conservation in Africa's oldest protected marine habitat; the privilege of owning and protecting a large plot of beautiful threatened highland forest on the edge of Nairobi as well as what is now over 9,000 acres of threatened coastal forest in Dakatcha Woodland holding >40 globally threatened species of plant and animal.

But it is way more than resources that speak of God's enabling since 1999. It is the people whose lives have been transformed through spending time with our team, the habitats and species saved through our work, the unfolding of some of the mysteries of creation through our conservation science ('thinking God's thoughts after him' to quote Johann Kepler) and providing a sustainable option for communities to thrive on. It has also been the story of God sticking with us when we've not had the desired impact, have failed partners or lost data. Through thick and thin, it is a story of faithfulness.

2024 has seen further advances - the first coral restoration project inside a Kenyan protected area, the long-awaited and demanded alien House Crow eradication programme and the launch of the 'Kenya Bird Trends' (KBT) tool for tracking changes in bird distribution across Kenya. All of these are a response to human degradation of creation, be it coral damage through pollution and climate change reducing the capacity of corals to survive; or House Crows as an alien species introduced to Africa in 1892 that have wreaked havoc on African biodiversity and economies; and the KBT tool that allows us to measure and track changes in bird species distribution over the past 50 years and help us to plan how to reverse range reduction trends.

All these initiatives also demonstrate our desire to collaborate with government partners (KWS, KFS), other partner conservation organisations (Coral Reef Care, Tropical Biology Association) and businesses and individuals (the Crow project has been amazing at bringing together diverse people, hotels, other corporates and groups to work for a single conservation objective). In all this, it is a privilege to seek to be a blessing and to share God's goodness with others.

Thank you to all those who have joined us in this journey and have contributed financially or in kind.

Dr. Colin Jackson, Founder and Director, A Rocha Kenya

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A ROCHA KENYA @ 25

2024 marked the 25th year anniversary of A Rocha Kenya - a milestone we celebrated with our staff, friends and partners!

Ninety friends, family, staff, and volunteers gathered for a joyful day of celebration. Beach games kicked off the festivities, followed by refreshing drinks, lively dance sessions, and a delicious feast. As the day cooled, the group gathered to hear Stanley and Colin share heartwarming stories from A Rocha Kenya's early days. Their reminiscing highlighted the incredible journey of growth, from a small team of three to a thriving organization of forty-five. The event was a true testament of God's faithfulness.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

1998

Early beginnings out of Turtle Bay Beach Club.

Beginning of Mida waterbird counts

1999

Launch conference with Dr. John Stott in Nairobi.

Official NGO Certificate is issued.

ARK joins the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Management Team.

2000

First office of ARK at Plot 22.

First ARK volunteer.

2001

Stanley and Tsofa join A Rocha Kenya.

Later in 2001, the **ASSETS** programme is launched.

First grant received - GEF Small Grants to get ASSETS going.

2002

Moved to Plot 28: "Mwamba Centre".

First student enrolled into **ASSETS.**

Boardwalk completed at Mida.

2003

Karara property in Nairobi acquired.

Treehouse built by Arabuko Swamp.

2007

A Rocha International team leaders forum held in Watamu.

Treehouse built in Gede Ruins.

2008

Kuvuka community centre & tree nursery acquired.

2012

Launch of the Marine programme.

2013

Clarke's Weaver breeding site discovered by NatureKenya in Dakatcha & described by ARK.

2014

Construction of Environmental Education offices.

First plot of land purchased in Dakatcha.

2015

1st colour-flagged wader recovered (in India: 4,318 km away!).

2016

A Rocha Kenya takes the lead on the Ngulia Bird Migration Project.

2017

First A Rocha dataset published on GBIF.

2024

Crows No More Project re-started.

Research offices finalized.

EXPLORING LIFE ON LAND

The Terrestrial Science Programme grew in both scope and scale in 2024, reflecting our deepening commitment to understanding and safeguarding our planet's diverse terrestrial ecosystems.

We witnessed notable progress in ongoing initiatives, particularly the surveys for the endangered **Sokoke Scops Owl** and the detailed mapping of common bird populations in Dakatcha. These projects are essential components of our broader mission: **to rigorously monitor biodiversity, accurately assess environmental change, and contribute to the development of effective conservation strategies.**

Our common bird surveys in A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve have yielded valuable data. We used the Time Species Count (TSC) method in our 1km x 1km research grids, dedicating up to one hour per grid to document all bird species observed and heard.

This systematic approach has resulted in a detailed species list for each grid and a comprehensive checklist for the entire reserve. To date, we've surveyed **75 out of 140 grids**, with records of up to 60 species in a single survey.

This comprehensive effort has resulted in a total of **188 bird species** documented through TSCs across ARDNR, offering a baseline of the reserve's rich avian diversity.

UNVEILING DAKATCHA'S DIMINUTIVE TREASURES

Imagine a tiny bird, the Sokoke Scops Owl (SSO), struggling to survive in a world where its forest home is shrinking. The SSO, a creature facing the real threat of habitat loss, has been a central focus of our work in 2024. We intensified our surveys within the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve, seeking to understand the nuances of their habitat preferences. **It was encouraging to confirm them in places we didn't expect, not just their usual *Cynometra* forest, but in other mixed areas too.**

Beyond our research, we've extended our expertise to support national conservation efforts. We trained the Friends of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest staff in how to conduct SSO population studies. This training will directly contribute to the development of a comprehensive national recovery plan, a crucial initiative spearheaded by a national technical committee, where A Rocha Kenya plays a key role.

WINGS OF DAKATCHA: THE HIDDEN WORLD OF INSECTS

Beyond birds, our exploration of Dakatcha's biodiversity has ventured into the fascinating world of insects. This year marked a significant step forward, with four dedicated insect surveys conducted between June and December. To capture the variety of these tiny creatures, we employed a range of methods: sweep nets, butterfly traps, and pitfall traps, each designed to reveal different aspects of the insect community

Our focus on *Lepidoptera* – **butterflies and moths** – yielded some remarkable findings. Butterfly surveys, conducted throughout the year in both Mwamba and Dakatcha, utilized sweep nets, photographs, and traps baited with rotten banana strategically placed to sample diverse vegetation types. This has significantly increased our knowledge and revealed a vibrant tapestry of 148 butterfly species, with the *Charaxes jahlusa kenyensis (*Common name- **Pearl-spotted emperor**) standing out as a frequent visitor to our 'banana traps'.

Moths, often overlooked, proved equally captivating. Using moth box light traps and portable LED light traps, we identified **58 species in Dakatcha** (with *many* more yet to be identified!). Notably, the Gold-banded Etiella moth, a leguminous pest, was recorded in high numbers.


Pearl-spotted emperor (underside)


Silver-marked Nephele


Caterpillar


Dragonfly


African Monarch


Christmas butterfly

These surveys aren't just about counting insects; they help build a foundation for future research. The data collected helps to develop standardized protocols for Lepidoptera surveys in both Mwamba and Dakatcha, ensuring a more structured and efficient approach to understanding these vital components of the ecosystem.

PLANT PHENOLOGY

Our treks through the reserve and nature trails also provide an opportunity to observe the intricate dance of life within the plant community. Each week at Mwamba, we examined 77 trees, noting their stages of growth – flowering, fruiting, leafing, and budding – and documenting the presence of potential pollinators.
We were heartened to see a healthy display of flowering and fruiting across many of the plant species we studied. However, nature often presents us with puzzles...

Cola minor

This tree produced a stunning abundance of flowers, yet none of the ten trees we observed yielded any fruit. A reminder that flowering doesn't always guarantee fruiting and that many things can impact the process.

The Bope tree

This tree demonstrated remarkable resilience. Though significantly stressed by intense sunlight, it responded rapidly to even the slightest rainfall, showcasing its ability to thrive under challenging conditions.

Suregada tree

This tree had the highest number of buds and flowers, promising a bountiful harvest. Yet, surprisingly, it failed to produce any fruit. This unexpected outcome underscores the complexity of plant reproduction and the delicate balance required for successful fruit development.

TANGA WADER RINGING 2.0

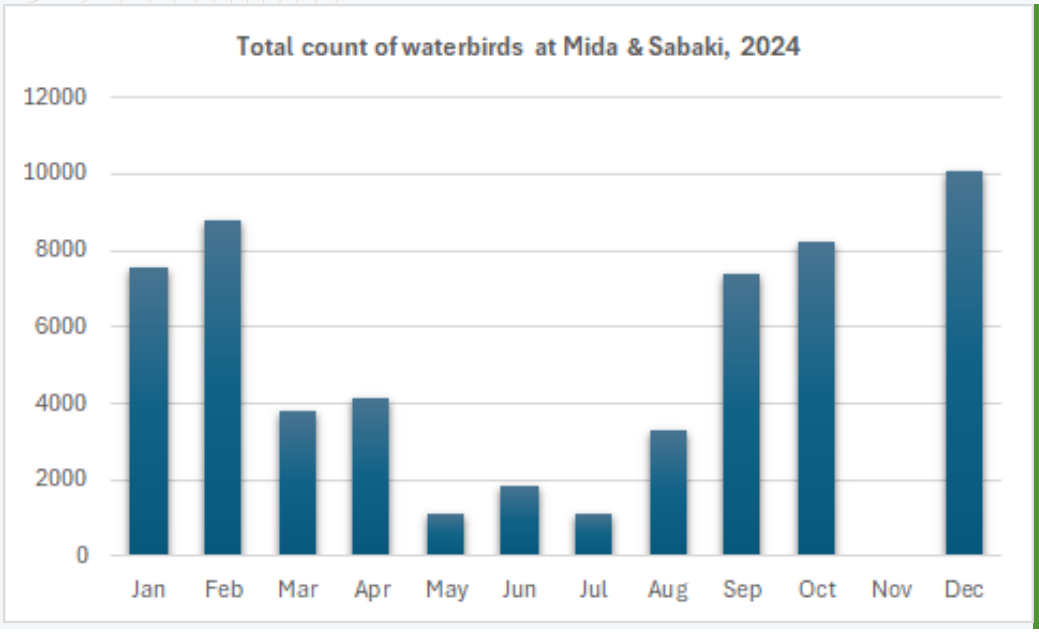
This year, our collaboration crossed borders as we participated in the second Tanga wader ringing project in northern Tanzania. This international effort successfully ringed 713 birds, including 49 retraps from our 2023 mission, highlighting the importance of long-term monitoring and waterbird presence in the region.

We colour-ringed 280 waders and satellite tagged 65, providing crucial data for tracking movements and understanding migratory patterns. **A highlight was the capture of three Eurasian Oystercatchers, the first of this species ringed in East Africa!**

This project significantly enhances our knowledge of wader populations and emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in conservation. The data collected will inform future strategies, vital for protecting these migratory birds and their habitats.

The return route of a Grey Plover from Kuwait to Tanga that was caught in 2023 and was still transmitting in 2024 (orange = 2023 track, red = 2024)

WHERE WATERBIRDS THRIVE



Counts of waterbirds at Sabaki River Mouth and Mida Creek clearly show the migration pattern of what are mostly Palearctic migrant waders. Arriving in numbers in September, numbers peak in December and start leaving on migration as early as late February. From May to July it is really only a few non-breeding first year birds that are present together with some local Afrotropical species.

Our commitment to understanding the role of wetlands in supporting waterbird populations has led us to conduct **extensive surveys across 18 sites** over 25 years. The dynamic ecosystems of Mida Creek and the Sabaki River are surveyed monthly and serve as key focal points in our research. These repeat visits allow us to track bird population fluctuations and abundance with greater precision, providing insights into the health of these critical habitats.

During 2024 a total of **105 waterbird species** were recorded on the waterbird counts and we recorded **78,469 individual birds** across all counts, a testament to the rich biodiversity these wetlands support. Sabaki River stands out with an impressive 69 species, due largely to the rich feeding area. But there are signs of dwindling numbers over the years - Curlew Sandpiper, for example were regularly found in numbers over 4,000 birds at Sabaki in the early 2000s, but over the past 15 years there has only been one count of this size. Further analysis is to be done but a cursory view of results can be found here: ARK Waterbird count summary

Beyond these numbers, we documented several noteworthy sightings: Greater Frigatebird and the Green Sandpiper were recorded in Sabaki, while an elusive Lesser Moorhen graced the Arabuko Swamp. Tana Delta revealed the now-uncommon Red-billed Teal and Saddle-billed Stork and Krystalline Salt Works produced a rare Red-necked Phalarope.

While our wetland and insect surveys revealed a tapestry of biodiversity, our monitoring efforts at Whale Island presented a stark contrast. The 2024 tern breeding season proved to be one of those years when they *didn't* breed. We observed a mere 50 Roseate terns, down from the usual 1,200-1,500 birds in a normal breeding year.

Interestingly, the island hosted a surprisingly high number of Brown Noddy (70) despite it not breeding here. Lesser Noddy were down from previous years with 33 birds in 2024 from c.100 in 2023. It is still a puzzle as to why these occur here but don't breed.

The scarcity of nesting activity was reminiscent of the early 2000s when the Roseate Terns appeared to only breed in alternate years. This is a very unusual breeding pattern and one we are yet do not understand - opening up a host of research opportunities! This year's observations illustrate the dynamic nature of wildlife populations and the importance of long-term monitoring. These data provide valuable evidence of factors influencing tern breeding success and help in informing future conservation strategies.

CROWS NO MORE

Under the leadership of KWS, the "Crows No More!" project took flight in 2024, tackling the challenge of the highly invasive House Crows. It employs a science-based methodology and a carefully tested and highly specific avicide; baiting locations are carefully selected, consistent feeding routines established, and crow behaviour is diligently observed and recorded. This disciplined approach ensures the project's effectiveness while minimizing risks to other wildlife.

After careful planning and securing necessary approvals, the project launched its first trial in Watamu. The innovative approach involved a strategic pre-baiting phase, offering tempting meat scraps to draw crows to designated feeding areas, safely away from communities. This clever tactic, combined with monitoring of crow activity, paved the way for the targeted application of the Starlicide poison.

The initial trial proved successful, significantly reducing local crow populations. The project quickly expanded its reach, bringing on board a dedicated team of 25 staff and volunteers. We are grateful to the overwhelming support we have received from the hotels, individuals, organizations and the government.

What did we achieve in 2024?

A cumulative total of **10,219 House crows** killed in all the locations.

Poisoning carried out in **6 locations:** Malindi, Watamu, Kilifi, Matsangoni, Gede and Vipingo.

A total of **Ksh 5,497,656 raised** towards the Crows No More ! campaign.

A total of **Ksh 5,334,285 spent** on the poison and other project expenses.

KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE

The Crows No More! project is a Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) project.

BIRD MIGRATION STUDIES IN TSAVO

2024 marked the **56th** year of studying and monitoring bird migration at Tsavo West National Park from Ngulia Safari Lodge. The 'Ngulia Phenomenon' of thousands of migrant birds caught and ringed at the lodge has become well-known in bird migration research circles, and it is a great privilege for A Rocha Kenya to now lead this project in collaboration with KWS.

After several somewhat mediocre years, 2024 was different. A total of **13,329 Palearctic** migrants was recorded—the highest total since 2017 and more than 3,400 above the average for the past ten years. Among the more frequent migrants, the totals for Common Whitethroat and Garden Warbler were at their highest in 19 years, while those for Marsh and River Warbler reached their highest in 11 years. In contrast, the totals for both Olive-tree Warbler and Basra Reed Warbler were well below average. The record numbers of Tree Pipit (80) and Eurasian Golden Oriole (4; previous records were 77 and 3 respectively) were a direct result of successful sound-luring and likely did not reflect genuine increases in the populations of either species.

Infrequently-ringed species trapped this year included the **third-ever Common Swift**, the 14th to 17th Corncrakes, the 14th Common Redstart, the 17th Western Yellow Wagtail, and the 18th Eurasian Scops Owl.

It was also a very good year for Afrotropical species with the total of 965 ringed being the highest since 2002. **Banded Parisoma** and **House Sparrow** were both new species for the Ngulia ringing list; additionally, **White-necked Raven, Yellow-billed Oxpecker** and **White-headed Buffalo Weaver** had each been ringed only once before and a **Narina Trogon** was the third ever.

While no birds with foreign rings were caught, we hope to have several birds recovered and reported from along their migration route to add to our knowledge of their migration strategies.

Once again without the excellent support of KWS and Ngulia lodge this project would not be possible - and, of course, of almost 50 volunteers who gave up time and resources to help with the hard work. Thank you!

A stunning African Green Pigeon - one of five ringed, the highest total in any single year at Ngulia

EXPLORING LIFE IN THE SEA

Nestled along Kenya's coastline, the Watamu Marine Protected Area (MPA) is a biodiverse treasure trove teeming with marine life.

From its vibrant coral reefs, intricate ecosystems that support a vast array of species, to its bio diverse mangrove creeks, Watamu is a haven for marine enthusiasts and researchers alike. However, as with many coastal ecosystems, the delicate balance of life in these waters, where each species plays a vital role in the health of the whole, faces mounting threats from climate change, pollution, unsustainable coastal development, and destructive fishing. Conservation initiatives and citizen science programmes seek to safeguard this underwater paradise.

SHARK RESEARCH: PROTECTING THE APEX PREDATORS

Through partnerships between local and international marine biologists, local conservation groups e.g. **Bahari Hai** and including the lead manager, **Kenya Wildlife Service** (KWS) and other organisations (**Brevard Zoo** and **Save Our Seas Foundation**), we developed a long-term monitoring programme to track the occurrence of elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) in the Watamu Marine Protected Area.

Data collection efforts help shape policies that promote sustainable marine management, such as fishing regulations and protected area expansions. Shark research in Watamu particularly focuses on species such as **Blacktip Reef Sharks**, the **critically Endangered Halavi Guitarfish**, and **whale sharks**, all of which contribute to the ecological balance of the marine ecosystem.

Sharks are critical to the health of marine ecosystems, yet they are among the most misunderstood and vulnerable (due to overfishing and slow reproductive rates) species in our oceans. Our research focuses on monitoring shark populations, their habitats and ecological needs, and assessing the impacts of fishing pressure on their numbers.

White-tipped Reef Shark in the Watamu reef

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES: CITIZEN SCIENCE

Recognising that **community involvement is pivotal for conservation success**, A Rocha Kenya seeks to engage members of the public in our science programmes. We've actively engaged locals, tourists, and students in projects that provide critical data for research initiatives. Through our structured beach patrol and snorkeling survey programmes, we provide opportunities to empower non-scientists to learn how to record detailed sightings of marine life, including turtles, dolphins, and diverse fish species, contributing to long-term biodiversity trend analysis.

We have also fostered **strong partnerships with local fishermen**, recognising their inherent knowledge of the marine environment. Thanks to long-term collaboration, they have adopted sustainable fishing techniques, diligently report shark and ray sightings, and actively participate in our initiatives focused on reducing bycatch. This collaborative approach cultivates a **profound sense of stewardship within the community**. We are committed to ensuring these conservation efforts are not only ecologically effective but also culturally and economically sustainable, through initiatives that support eco-tourism and respect traditional fishing practices. This work underscores our belief that by empowering communities, we can collectively safeguard the future of Watamu's marine ecosystem.

Read more on how we are celebrating artisanal fishing in our Environmental Education section.

A MODEL FOR MARINE CONSERVATION

The Watamu Marine Protected Area exemplifies how scientific research, community engagement, and conservation initiatives can work in harmony to protect marine biodiversity. The ongoing efforts in shark research, citizen science, and coral reef restoration provide a replicable model for other coastal regions facing similar environmental challenges.

As climate change and human activities continue to exert pressure on marine habitats, the proactive measures taken in Watamu highlights the power of collective action. By cultivating a deeper understanding of marine life and encouraging local participation in conservation, Watamu is paving way for a more sustainable future for our oceans.

Whether you're a marine biologist, a local fisherman, or a passionate traveler, there's a role for everyone in conserving the wonders of Watamu's waters. Conserving our oceans is a shared responsibility — one that begins with awareness, education, and action, and a recognition of the profound interconnectedness of all life. The story of Watamu is one of hope, a living testament to the possibility of harmonious coexistence between humanity and the marine world.

CORAL GARDENING PILOT

Reef Resilience: Revitalizing Watamu's Underwater Gardens

Watamu's coral reefs are an essential habitat for marine life but are increasingly threatened by rising sea temperatures and ocean pollution. Historically, Watamu's coral reef was magnificent with its diverse corals of vibrant colours housing a myriad of fish and other marine life. The 1997 El Nino caused a massive c.90% bleaching of coral and it has never been the same since. Corals have recovered somewhat but continued and more frequent coral bleaching events have been recorded in the region, the most recent one being a severe event from February to August 2024.

This catalysed us into implementing the first Kenyan coral gardening project in a protected area. The restoration pilot in Watamu started in April 2024, in partnership with Coral Reef Care and KWS. With both active planting and tending of coral fragments together with continuous reef health assessments, we can help restore reefs and better understand the factors affecting coral resilience, offering hope for the long-term survival of these critical ecosystems, and providing a powerful reminder of the delicate balance of life that we must strive to protect.

Thank you to our project partners: Coral Reef Care and Kenya Wildlife Services.

Coral Gardening steps

1. ***Collecting coral fragments***. The collected fragments are either Corals of Opportunity, (COOs) - naturally broken fragments found in the ocean from various coral types - or fragments from Thermal Resistant Colonies (TRCs) - colonies that have naturally adapted to withstand higher temperatures without bleaching or suffering mortality.

2. ***Coral 'gardening' and transplantation to the reef***. Collected fragments are taken to underwater nurseries. COOs are glued onto plugs or zip-tied to nursery tables for stabilisation while TRCs from outside the park are placed in nurseries to monitor growth before transplantation. Local TRCs are directly transplanted to reefs after collection. Once the corals in the nurseries have grown to a suitable size, they are carefully transplanted back onto degraded reef areas.

3. ***Monitoring and maintenance***. TRCs are often prioritised for planting in areas most affected by bleaching. The transplanted corals are regularly monitored to track their survival, growth, and health. This includes checking for signs of disease, predation, or bleaching. Our team also weeds the substrate and the nurseries regularly.

ASSETS: VISION TURNED TO ACTION

For over **20 years**, the **Assets programme** has provided **eco-bursaries** to students living near the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, while encouraging environmental awareness and action within their families. In 2024, the programme continued to demonstrate the powerful connection between education, conservation, and community wellbeing.

Students not only progressed in their academic journeys but also participated in a range of conservation-focused activities. During the school holidays, environmental education events, including a guided walk through the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, helped deepen their understanding of local ecosystems and the importance of protecting them.

At the household level, families remained actively involved in **sustainable livelihoods**. Many cared for tree nurseries, contributed to reforestation efforts by planting thousands of trees, and took part in conservation training sessions through the Muvera wa **Assets** parents' association.

The programme also continued to link eco-tourism with community benefits. Proceeds from the Mida Creek boardwalk and bird hide helped support both bursaries and wider conservation work - **ensuring that local tourism directly contributes to education and environmental restoration.**

By combining support for students, families, and nature, **Assets** is helping to build a more resilient and conservation-minded community in the Arabuko-Sokoke region.

Student Success in Numbers

165 students were sponsored by ASSETS in 2024.

Ksh 2,347,000 ($ 18,180) paid in student scholarships in 2024.

Partnerships with 50 schools in 2024, expanding our community impact.

706 students have graduated from ASSETS so far.

Nurturing Nature, Building Livelihoods

9 thriving tree nurseries in 2024 managed by the parents of ASSETS beneficiaries.

A total of 32,324 trees planted: strengthening our forest cover.

Over 20,000 seedlings were raised throughout the year.

A Bridge to Sustainability

A total of 10,614 visitors experienced the Mida boardwalk, connecting people with our vision.

Ksh 2.6 million ($ 20,150) was collected from the boardwalk.

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS: RENOVATING THE BOARDWALK

Since its construction in 2002, the Mida Boardwalk has played a vital role in supporting the **Assets Programme** and offering access to the unique ecosystem of Mida Creek. After more than two decades of service, we are now seeking support for a full renovation to improve its long-term impact and ensure that a greater share of its benefits directly supports our eco-bursary scheme.

We are partnering with Blue Forest Treehouses to redesign the boardwalk using durable, sustainable materials. The new design will reduce ongoing maintenance costs and enhance the boardwalk's appeal, helping attract more visitors. Increased tourism will raise additional funds for the Assets Programme, allowing us to expand access to life-changing eco-bursaries and continue connecting communities with the natural beauty of Mida Creek for generations to come.

Join us in raising enough funds to fully renovate the boardwalk

DONATE

The Shaping of a Future:
Ruth's Reflective Journey with ASSETS

My name is Ruth Makena, and my journey began at Bogamachuko Primary School, close to the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. Growing up in this area, I knew how beautiful the forest was — but I also knew that going to secondary school might not be possible for me. My family couldn't afford it, and I didn't think I would have the chance.

That changed when I became a beneficiary of the Assets programme. Through their eco-bursary, I was able to attend St. John's Girls Secondary School. I completed Form Four in 2024 with a B–, something I'm proud of. Assets didn't just help me financially — they gave me encouragement, guidance, and the belief that I could achieve something bigger.

My parents have also been part of this journey. We have a small woodlot at home, and they help look after it while I'm away at school. Through the 'Muvera wa Assets' group, they've received training in conservation, God-centred farming, fireless cooking, and the benefits of planting trees for both the environment and income. They meet regularly with other parents in our area to share knowledge and support one another in their tree nurseries. I've seen how this has changed our family. They now speak up about environmental issues and help teach our neighbours too. Assets hasn't just supported me — it's helped my whole family see the value of conservation.

One of my favourite parts of the programme has been the end-of-year camps. I remember one camp in particular — we spent a night camping with students from other schools, watched an inspiring film about trees, and shared stories about our communities. The next morning, we went for a bird walk in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, which was amazing. We also did group discussions about conservation challenges at home, and it was powerful to hear different views and ideas from other students.

I'm so thankful to Assets, the staff, and the people who support the programme. They gave me a chance when I didn't think I had one. To other students, I say: use every opportunity the programme offers and do your best. And to parents: please use what you learn to care for the environment. Together, we can make a real difference.
I'll miss the camps and the friends I've made, but I will always carry those lessons with me. I'm excited to give back and support my community, just as Assets has supported me.

Ruth Makena

RACING FOR CONSERVATION

What an incredible weekend we had at the 2024 Sokoke Forest MTB Challenge! Now in its sixth year, this was undoubtedly the most vibrant and exciting edition yet. We introduced a brand-new two-day format, and it was a roaring success.

Saturday featured a self-directed, **Garmin-based adventure: a 55km** ride through some of the **most stunning and diverse landscapes surrounding the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest**. Riders pedalled through lush coconut plantations, winding trails, and caught glimpses of the majestic forest itself. It was a true journey of exploration and a unique way to connect with nature.

Sunday brought the main event: **the epic 75km challenge**. The atmosphere was electric, with 74 riders—ranging from amateurs to some of Kenya's top mountain bikers—ready to take on the course. The air buzzed with excitement, encouragement echoed from the starting line, and a shared passion for cycling united everyone involved.

What was it all about? Riding for fun, embracing the challenge (yes, there was plenty of sand!), and most importantly—**raising awareness about the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, its conservation**, and supporting local students through education. This year, the event raised enough to fully fund over four Assets bursaries—an incredible achievement that directly supports children living around the forest to attend school and take part in conservation action.

We're already looking ahead to May 2025, full of ideas and excitement. Our goal? **To grow the event, welcome even more riders, and raise even more support for Assets.**

We want to create an experience that not only celebrates the thrill of mountain biking but also showcases the beauty and importance of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. We're looking forward to seeing you all there!

The Sokoke Forest MTB Challenge
WATAMU

LORDSHIP AFRICA

Ocean Sports
WATAMU KENYA

KENYA
Forest Service

TURTLE BAY
Kenya's responsible resort

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

From teacher training, to kitchen garden projects boosting food security, and the Watamu Conservation Festival celebrating local conservation champions, we witnessed tangible impact for conservation in 2024. We are committed to expanding these efforts, ensuring a sustainable future through education and community engagement

WATAMU'S CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS: A FESTIVAL OF ACTION

The 2024 Watamu Conservation Festival served as a dynamic platform for showcasing the impact of community-led conservation efforts. Organised by A Rocha together with local partner Bahari Hai, the event brought together diverse stakeholders, including local communities, schools, and conservation organisations, to celebrate and promote sustainable practices.

The festival's programme was designed to educate and inspire. Activities such as the artisanal fishing competition, women's cooking and potting contests, and exhibitions by local groups highlighted the practical application of sustainable resource management. The interactive environmental education stand provided a space for learning about critical conservation issues, particularly the protection of endangered species such as sharks, rays, and guitarfish. Student performances, incorporating music, drama, and poetry, effectively communicated conservation messages to a wide audience.

A key achievement of the festival was the **recognition of local conservation champions**. Through an awards ceremony, individuals and groups making significant contributions to sustainability were honoured, reinforcing the importance of community involvement in environmental stewardship. The Watamu Conservation Festival demonstrated the effectiveness of engaging local communities in conservation initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for the protection of their natural resources. The festival's success highlights the importance of supporting and empowering local communities in conservation efforts to ensure long-term sustainability.

WEAVING CHANGE: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

With support from A Rocha International, our commitment to environmental education in local schools took a significant step forward with a three-day workshop at the Mwamba. Bringing together 19 teachers from Dakatcha and Arabuko-Sokoke, the workshop focused on equipping educators with practical skills to integrate environmental conservation into their curricula, **with a particular emphasis on the impact of plastics**. The interactive sessions and hands-on activities proved to be highly effective, fostering a deeper understanding of environmental issues and inspiring creative solutions.

The workshop's impact extended beyond the teachers themselves, reaching students and potentially influencing their families and the broader community. By empowering educators to integrate environmental conservation into their teaching, we are fostering a culture of sustainability and nurturing future generations of environmentally conscious citizens. This initiative highlights the crucial role of schools in driving community-based conservation efforts, ensuring a healthier and more sustainable future for the region.

One notable outcome was the initiative taken by a teacher from Mekatilili Primary School. Moved by the discussions on plastic waste, he implemented a practical project, guiding his students in repurposing plastic strings into woven baskets. This initiative demonstrated the power of experiential learning, showcasing how environmental education can lead to tangible, community-relevant outcomes.

BOGAMACHUKO BLOOMS: COMMUNITY KITCHEN GARDENS

In Bogamachuko, a village on the far south-western boundary of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest where there are few if any resources or initiatives by government to help communities, our kitchen garden training directly addressed **food security** and **sustainable land use**. Villagers quickly established lush gardens, demonstrating a strong commitment to sustainable practices. Families shared knowledge, fostering community ownership.

The impact of these kitchen gardens extends far beyond immediate food production. They play a crucial role in **building climate-resilient agriculture**, reducing reliance on external food sources, and strengthening local food systems. This programme demonstrates the effectiveness of practical environmental education in empowering communities to address local challenges and build sustainable livelihoods.

By providing the essential tools and knowledge for self-sufficiency, we are cultivating a **culture of resilience and environmental stewardship** in Bogamachuko, ensuring long-term benefits for both the community and the environment.

BEEKEPING IN DAKATCHA

"Hurdles. Trials. Tribulations.
One might be tempted to call them overwhelming. Yet, we choose to see them as opportunities for growth—a chance to deepen our understanding of nature's delicate balance and our role within it.
This year, Dakatcha's beekeepers faced a symphony of challenges. Erratic rainfall and prolonged drought withered the nectar sources, leaving our hardworking bees without sustenance. Absconding became a heart-wrenching reality. Entire colonies vanished, leaving empty hives and dampened spirits

The trials didn't end there. Wax moths infiltrated hives, destroying combs with silent precision. Pirate wasps, relentless predators, preyed upon already stressed colonies. Then came the wild: a fire swept through two apiaries, and honey badgers destroyed six hives—testing the resilience of both our bees and the dedicated community members who tend them.

But in the face of adversity, hope held firm. We sought guidance from experts, attended workshops, and embraced new knowledge with open hands and open minds. We focused on the fundamentals: improving hive hygiene to reduce absconding, repositioning hives for better resilience, and trialling natural deterrents for pests.
This modest year's harvest—just 3.5 kg of honey—may seem small. But it represents something far greater. It reflects perseverance, learning, and the power of working with nature rather than against it. Most importantly, it underscores why this project matters.

Beekeeping in Dakatcha is not simply about honey. It's about equipping communities with sustainable, low-impact livelihoods that reduce pressure on forests and biodiversity. By strengthening local economies and linking them directly to ecosystem health, we foster a shared responsibility for protecting places like the Dakatcha Woodland—a globally important biodiversity hotspot under threat.
Each challenge we faced has brought us closer to that vision. With every hive, every training, and every drop of honey, we are building a future in which both people and nature can thrive.

Vincent Onono, Alternative Livelihoods Coordinator, Dakatcha

In addition to beekeeping, we supported seven farmers in using regenerative farming practices, improving yield and reducing the need to clear more land for crops. In partnership with Eden, we presented an opportunity for the community to be involved in biodiversity restoration and protection.

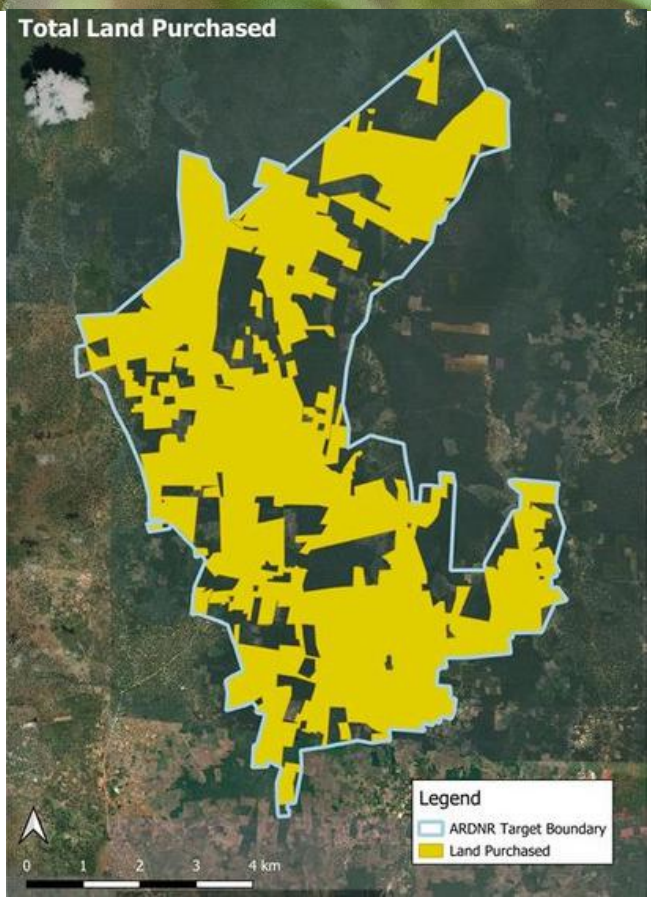
15
BEEKEEPERS
trained in beekeeping as a nature-friendly livelihood

07
FARMERS
supported in regenerative farming techniques

600
COMMUNITY MEMBERS
attended meetings about forest protection and restoration

200
STUDENTS
engaged in our Environmental Education programme

DAKATCHA NATURE RESERVE



2024 presented a chapter of persistence and unexpected turns in our journey to expand the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve. Unlike the sweeping acquisitions of years past, this year presented a mosaic of challenges, a landscape dotted with fragmented parcels and complex negotiations. Where once there were open fields for expansion now stood a market driven by investment, with landowners offering plots at premium prices.

Despite these hurdles, we made significant strides, adding 1,229 acres to the reserve, spread across 70 distinct plots. Each piece, though smaller than anticipated, was a crucial step towards completing the puzzle of our protected area. This brought our total reserve size to 8,828 acres, a testament to our unwavering commitment.

The path was far from smooth. Locating the rightful owners of these fragmented plots proved to be a labyrinth of complexities. Family disputes obscured land titles, and absentee landowners remained elusive, slowing our progress and testing our patience. For nearly a month, our acquisition efforts ground to a halt due to funding constraints, a stark reminder of the reliance on the generosity of our supporters.

Yet, in the face of these obstacles, we persevered. Each handshake, each signed deed, each acre secured was a victory, a tangible step towards safeguarding the endangered species and the rich biodiversity of Dakatcha. We emerged from 2024 with a renewed sense of purpose, our resolve strengthened by the challenges we overcame.

RAINFOREST TRUST
WORLD LAND TRUST
CASSINIA ENVIRONMENTAL
LORDSHIP AFRICA
IUCN National Committee of The Netherlands
THE A. G. LEVENTIS FOUNDATION

Biodiversity Research

Dakatcha is a treasure trove of wildlife! You'll find a stunning array of birds, including some endangered species, and magnificent mammals like Caracals and African Civet. The reserve's plant life is bursting with rare trees, and home to unique butterflies that are usually found far away. It's a truly remarkable place for nature!

Highlights

187 bird, 28 mammal, 538 plant, and 129 butterfly species recorded, including numerous endangered and rare finds, showcasing the reserve's ecological importance.

Reserve Management

The heartbeat of the Reserve lies in the unwavering dedication of our 12 scouts. Day in and day out, they patrol the woodland, guardians of its rich biodiversity. They are the hands that mend and maintain, and the eyes that document the reserve's remarkable wildlife, making them an indispensable part of our conservation efforts.

Highlights

8,369 kilometers patrolled, 658 patrols conducted, and 8 poachers apprehended, ensuring the reserve's security and biodiversity, showcasing the role of our dedicated scouts.

SMART Training

SMART empowers Dakatcha's scouts, driving data-driven decisions for our nature reserve. Their strong work ethic fuels daily patrols, yielding detailed geo-tagged observations. This demonstrated determination in data collection highlights their relentless efforts, ensuring sustainable management and conservation success.

Highlights

Increased data collection and utilization by scouts, demonstrated by extensive geo-tagged observations and patrol tracks, showcasing the effectiveness of SMART training.

Building Partnerships

A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve forms part of the wider Dakatcha Key Biodiversity Area, making stakeholder engagement within the landscape crucial for effective governance. This collaborative approach fosters biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and the well-being of local communities.

Highlights

Crucial stakeholder engagement within the Dakatcha Key Biodiversity Area, fostering collaborative governance for biodiversity conservation and sustainable community well-being.

Throughout the year, our scouts recorded a total of 293 incidents of illegal activity within the reserve. The majority of these were related to livestock encroachment, accounting for 183 cases. This was followed by the discovery of 78 tree stumps, highlighting the ongoing challenge of illegal logging. While charcoal kilns (17), poachers (8), and snares (7) were found less frequently, they still pose a significant threat when encountered and are addressed with urgency to mitigate their impact in our reserve.

ARK COMMUNITY

At the heart of A Rocha Kenya lies a vibrant, interconnected community - **a family bound by a shared passion for conservation and a deep-rooted Christian faith**. We are more than just colleagues; we are a global family, spanning diverse backgrounds and expertise, united in our commitment to protect and restore God's creation.

From the bustling offices in Nairobi to the serene landscapes of Dakatcha and the coastal haven of Watamu, our team embodies a spirit of collaboration and dedication. We work shoulder to shoulder, sharing knowledge, supporting one another, and celebrating the small victories that contribute to our larger mission. **Our faith is the bedrock of our work**, guiding our actions and inspiring us to serve both the environment and the communities we partner with.

We are a team of scientists, educators, community developers, and passionate advocates, each contributing unique skills and perspectives. Yet, we are also a family that shares meals, laughter, and prayer, creating a nurturing environment where everyone feels valued and supported. It is this unique blend of professionalism and genuine care that sets A Rocha Kenya apart, making us a beacon of hope and a model for sustainable conservation.

We invite you to join our family, to experience the warmth and dedication that define A Rocha Kenya. Whether you are a partner, a supporter, or a fellow conservationist, you will find a welcoming community united in faith and driven by a shared vision of a world where nature thrives and communities flourish. Together, we can make a lasting difference, guided by our faith and inspired by the beauty of God's creation.

HEAR FROM OUR STAFF!

Guardians of Dakatcha: Anna's Story of Stewardship

During my conversation with Anna, I was captivated by the deep connection between her life and A Rocha Kenya. Her journey began as a child when she visited Mwamba with her family during a beach vacation, igniting a lasting bond.

Later, she volunteered while in high school with friends, helping Colin repair mist nets and catching Spotted Ground Thrush at Gedi Ruins alongside Albert. She returned once more to conduct behavioural ecology research for her university studies, further enriching her insights into environmental conservation.

Now, **she is the Operations Manager for the A Rocha Kenya team**, reflecting a journey that has truly come full circle. Anna spent several years working in conservation across Kenya and Australia. From tracking elephants in the Mara and using paintballs to study seals to planting trees in degraded areas and managing private conservation sites, her experience is diverse. **Yet, the mission of A Rocha consistently called her back, especially the crucial initiatives in Dakatcha**. It was a calling she felt compelled to answer, driven by a desire to contribute to a meaningful cause.

Her dedication goes beyond her current position. As a founding board member of A Rocha Australia, Anna exemplifies our core values: **stewardship of creation and the importance of sharing that message**. Over the past sixteen months, she has played a pivotal role in strategically managing the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve, applying her expertise to ensure its long-term success.

What resonates most with Anna is the concrete impact on the local community. She is particularly impressed with our efforts in acquiring land for conservation in Dakatcha. This initiative not only benefits the region's rich biodiversity and the local population but also has global implications. However, the most rewarding aspect for her is witnessing the immediate effects on the local residents she collaborates with.

Anna has seen a remarkable shift in the attitudes of many families living near the reserve, largely due to the employment of local scouts. Providing job opportunities to locals, Anna notes, has created a transformative network of change that is truly inspiring. In her own words, "**The scouts love the reserve! They have become its strongest advocates. Thanks to them, many people around the Dakatcha Woodlands have taken an interest in A Rocha Kenya's Reserve.**" Nonetheless, Anna voiced a pressing concern regarding the long-term funding of the reserve. "**We are reaching a point where there's not enough nature left. It's time to start valuing nature, not just through positive sentiments, but also financially.**"

PICTORIAL

1

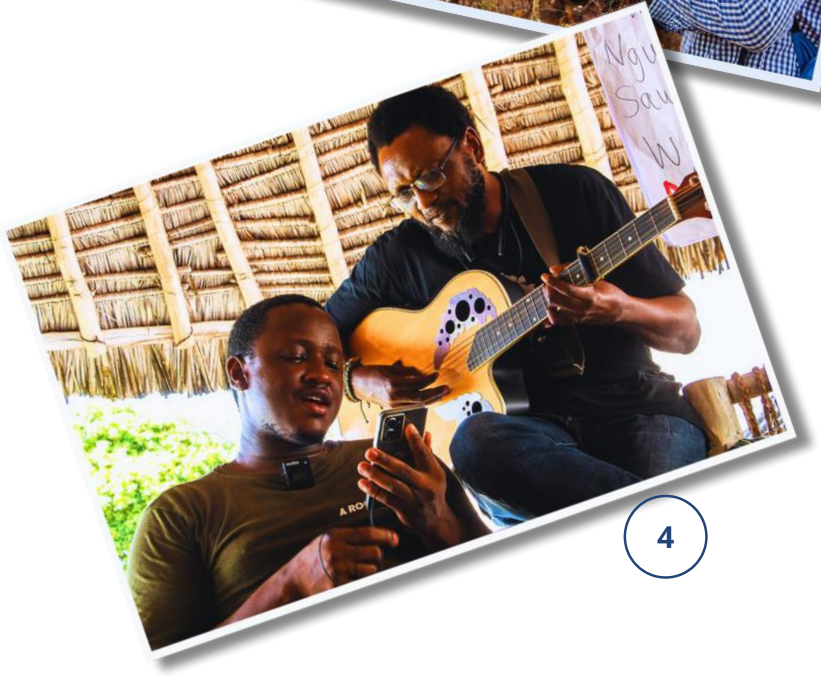
Kirao- left (Lead terrestrial research scientist), Colin- Centre (National Director) and Lempi (volunteer) during a bird ringing session at Mwamba.
June, 2024

2

Uyombo and Mida residents in Kilifi protesting against the proposed Nuclear firm in Uyombo.
October, 2024

3

Nick, Senior Conservation Projects Manager for A Rocha International, during a tree planting exercise at Mangotini primary.
November, 2024



4

Stanley (right), head of Community Conservation, and Jonah, Admin assistant, during a worship session.
November, 2024

ASSETS beneficiaries during the Assets camp week.
December, 2024

5

Vincent, Farming God's Way and Creation Care Facilitator in Dakatcha, visiting bee keeping farmers to check on the progress.
September, 2024

6

Our amazing scouts for the A Rocha Kenya Dakatcha Nature Reserve enjoying a well-deserved rest.
June, 2024

7

Happy guests during a Christmas Eve outdoor dinner at Mwamba.
December, 2024

8

FINANCES AND FUNDRAISING

Celebrating generosity: 2024 income

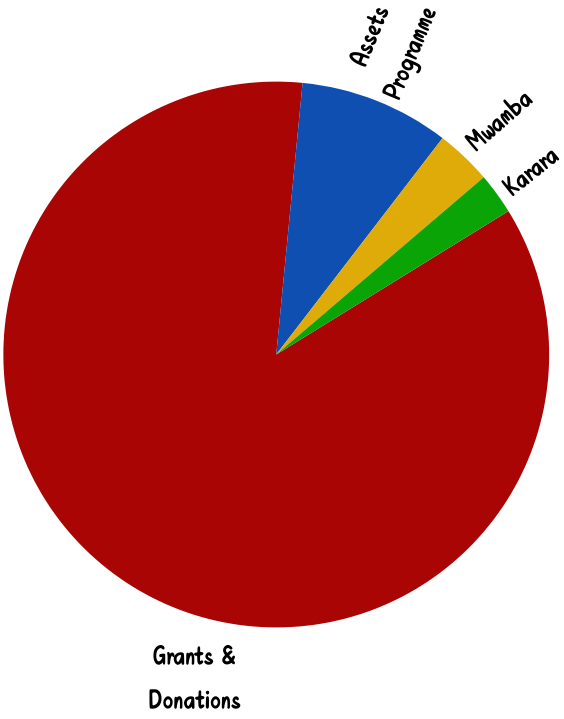
We extend our deepest gratitude for the incredible financial support A Rocha Kenya received in 2024, totaling **Ksh 151,280,236.50**. This generosity fuels our vital work in conservation.

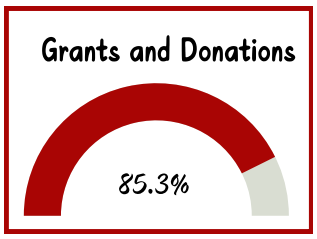
A significant portion of our income, **Ksh 129,109,264.00**, came through dedicated **Grants and Donations**, directly supporting our diverse conservation projects – from buying land in Dakatcha to restoring vital marine ecosystems in the Watamu Marine Protected Area.

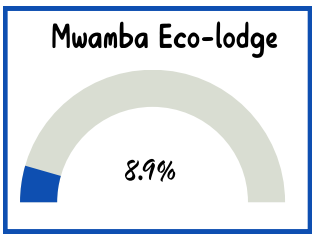
We also received crucial income through our various centres and programmes, including **Ksh 13,447,299.00** from **Mwamba**, **Ksh 3,699,522.00** from **Karara**, and **Ksh 5,024,151.50** from our **Assets Programme fundraising**. These funds enable us to maintain our operational hubs and deliver impactful conservation initiatives.

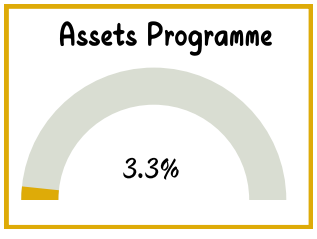
As we celebrate this vital income, we also recognise the critical need for **general, unrestricted funds**. These flexible resources empower us to respond swiftly to emerging conservation challenges, invest in essential infrastructure, and support the core operational costs that underpin all our project work. Your contributions to general funds have a far-reaching impact, enabling us to be agile and effective in our mission to care for God's creation.

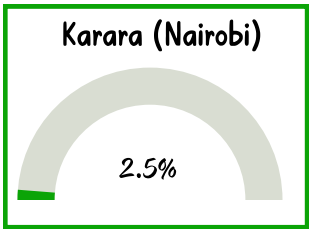
Our numbers



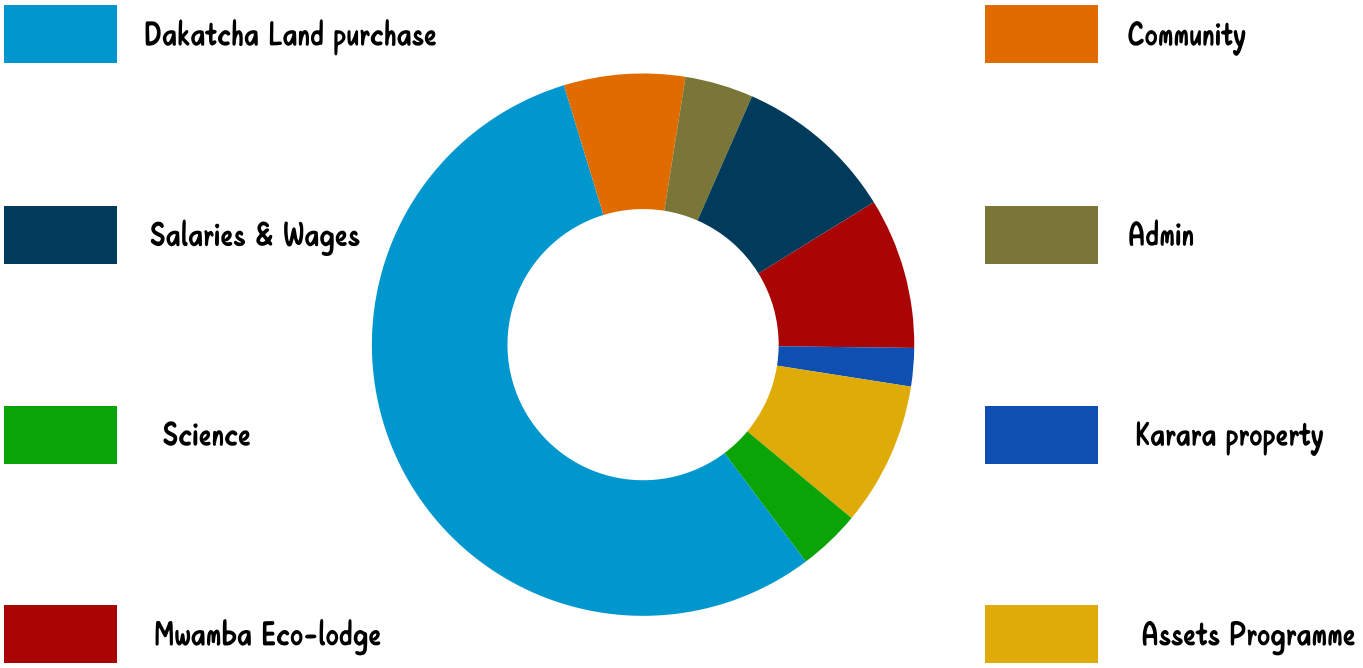








Investing in impact: 2024 expenditure



In 2024, A Rocha Kenya carefully stewarded **Ksh 110,245,144.00** across our key programme areas, ensuring that every shilling contributed works towards tangible conservation outcomes.

Our commitment to on-the-ground conservation is evident in the significant allocation to **Dakatcha (Ksh 61,217,497.00)**, safeguarding this critical coastal forest and its endangered species. We also directed resources to **Community engagement (Ksh 7,958,328.00)**, recognising the vital role of local partnerships in long-term conservation success. Our **marine conservation** efforts at Mwamba accounted for **Ksh 9,920,098.00**, whilst our scientific research, crucial for informed conservation action, totalled **Ksh 4,091,796.00**.

The **Assets Programme** received **Ksh 9,446,477.00**, and **Karara's** operational costs were **Ksh 2,515,878.00**. Essential **Salaries & Wages (Ksh 10,600,072.00)** ensure we have a dedicated and skilled team driving our mission, and **Admin (Ksh 4,494,998.00)** costs support the efficient operation of the entire organisation.

While project-specific funding is crucial for delivering targeted conservation outcomes, flexible, unrestricted contributions are equally vital in empowering A Rocha Kenya's overall effectiveness. These funds provide the agility to address unforeseen conservation priorities, support essential organisational infrastructure that benefits all programmes, and foster innovation across our work. By contributing to our general fund, you enable us to maximise our impact and build a resilient foundation for long-term conservation success across all our endeavours.

See children through secondary school and protect their local environment

Support ASSETS to make a practical difference today

From donating $10 to pay for fast-growing seedlings that parents can sell instead of logging indigenous trees from a protected forest, to $590 to cover all costs for a student for a full year - **your donation makes a difference**. To find out how, learn more about ASSETS, flick back to pp. 13-14 of this Review or go to our dedicated website to read student stories and more:

assets-kenya.org

- **$49/month** covers the monthly stipend for secondary school fees, environmental education activities and conservation activities with students' parents- that's only 12$/week!

- **$40** covers the cost of sending one student to the annual ASSETS camp, where students learn about and go explore their local environment, with rockpooling, and forest excursions, among others!

To donate, simply go to our dedicated Global Giving page by clicking on the button below. The first of all recurring monthly donations will be matched by Global Giving!

Thank you for your generous support.

Click here to donate

DEAR PARTNER...

Our journey in conservation, from the depths of the Indian Ocean to the heart of Dakatcha, is made possible by the unwavering support of amazing people like you. Your generosity, whether through financial contributions or heartfelt prayers, fuels our mission and strengthens our resolve. We stand as a voice for the environment, embracing the mandate entrusted to us.

In 2024, we've walked alongside communities, dived into the vibrant coral reefs, meticulously balanced our accounts, and risen before dawn for bird ringing sessions. Through it all, we've felt the tangible presence of God, guiding our steps and blessing our endeavors. Looking back on the accomplishments of the past year, we are filled with humility and gratitude, knowing that all things have worked together for good.

As we turn our gaze towards 2025, we are filled with anticipation for the exciting adventures that await. With your continued partnership, we will deepen our impact, expand our reach, and further our commitment to caring for God's creation. Thank you for being an integral part of our story, for believing in our mission, and for helping us make a lasting difference in the world.

The work of A Rocha Kenya directly or indirectly contributes towards the following **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs)

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