

A ROCHA KENYA NEWSLETTER

LONG RAINS, 2024



A ROCHA
KENYA



Bird Ringing at Mwamba



Bird ringing has always been a core part of A Rocha Kenya's science work. Every Thursday from 7am, Colin and Kirao are joined by volunteers and guests for this amazing activity.

"Bird ringing is a scientific exercise of catching and fitting a light-weight metal tag (ring) to the leg of a bird. There are many reasons why we ring birds. One of these reasons is to understand the lifespan of the different species of birds as each species will be different to others. Where and when birds move or migrate is another valid reason for this exercise. The unique ring allows scientists to know where the bird is coming from or passing through during their migration. All this information is vital for bird conservation."

Kirao, left on the picture above

About 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 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.

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Welcome

When the long rains finally come it is huge relief to the burning heat and sweat of the weeks leading up to it. Now, in the cool of the strong Kas Kazi (south-east trade winds) and lush green vegetation, it's difficult to remember the heat and brown, sun-burnt grass and forest. And then, from where I write, there's the constant background sound of the waves crashing on the beach 80m from the office. I've come to realise over the years that the life of an organisation like A Rocha Kenya is often like that – times of intense stress and dryness followed by periods of cool and abundance but with some things continuing as a solid constant through it all.

This year has definitely contained such contrasts – the continued expansion of the Dakatcha Nature Reserve and growth of good relationships with surrounding communities, significant consolidation of processes and data management for our sharks and rays programme with highlights of sightings of 1.5m long Halavi Guitarfish, and exciting plans taking shape to rebuild the Mida boardwalk 22 years after first building it... to news of a planned railway that will take out a slice of our Nairobi property, Karara, the saying farewell to trusted and steadfast staff like Carol, and several funding proposals turned down for projects badly needing resources...

Ultimately, however, there has been the solid reassurance of a God who cares and is a constant undergirding of what we seek to do within A Rocha. As our team struggles with getting bees to occupy bee-hives and produce honey, or with camera equipment or laptops that yet again stop working, or cancellations of guest bookings or even the mad busyness of full rooms for three weeks non-stop or donations flowing in to fund the 'Crows No More!' project and subsequent pressure to ensure they are indeed no more... then the firm knowledge of Jesus' love for us and his world is a solid anchor and brings incredible hope and confidence in what frequently can feel like pretty hopeless circumstances. Do read on to learn more of what God has enabled our amazing Team ARK to do through thick and thin – and there is much left untold!

Colin Jackson, National Director

Crows No More! Project



An alien pest control programme

An exciting new development has emerged on the control of the alien House Crows which have been nothing short of a plague on the East African coast for more than a hundred years. Counts done by A Rocha Kenya showed that numbers of House Crows had escalated from 30 in Malindi and 5 in Watamu in 2005 (this number was as a result of the Crow control programme that was carried out by A Rocha before 2005), to 31,000 in Malindi and 12,000 in Watamu by June 2024! These huge numbers have had enormous impact not only on the tourism industry but on the agricultural sector as well. Being an alien species which isn't subtle by nature, House Crows have been a great menace to all on the Kenya coast.

They are a nuisance everywhere: they leave droppings on and snatch food off restaurant tables. They feed on chicks, poke out the eyes of new-born calves and feed on young crops leading to great losses to farmers. They are also known to carry up to eight human diseases. In recent years they have ventured into the marine inter-tidal zone and feed on marine organisms during low tides when the reef is exposed.

We have employed four people to help implement this project. Support and funding has come from many sources including local hotels who provide meat for the baiting. The very first poisoning is set to begin in the early days of August. The hope is that after one year of the control programme the House Crows that have plagued us so persistently for so long, will be no more!

The budget to successfully run the programme for a year is close to 16 Million Kenya Shillings - the poison alone costs Ksh. 755, 000 (\$5,800) per kg. If you have any questions or wish to donate, please reach out to us:
+254 718 422 487 | crowsnomore@arocha.org

Poison is back!

Successful control of the crows was carried out by A Rocha in Watamu and Malindi between 1998 and 2005 using a specific avicide known as Starlicide. The process was so successful that we had crow numbers as low as five crows in Watamu and 25–30 in Malindi. But with a continuous influx of crows from further afield, there was a need to keep poisoning them. However, the programme was halted by government in 2005 due to bureaucracies. A Rocha and [Kenya Wildlife Service](#) has been involved in leveraging the government for the return of the poison for the past almost 20 years!

Exciting news it that this year, after many meetings and prayers, the green light has been given by the government for the control to start up once again. A Rocha Kenya, in partnership with [Kenya Wildlife Service \(KWS\)](#), has been commissioned to carry out the crow control on the north coast of Kenya, while another organisation, Little Kenya Gardens, will be responsible for the south coast.

Rescuing injured raptors – a new facility



The Watamu Raptor Rehabilitation Centre was constructed out of necessity. A Rocha Kenya has been receiving injured birds of prey (raptors) from people locally for many years and has therefore already assisted various rescue and rehabilitation efforts. But we have never had the necessary facilities to do it well, and often birds haven't survived.

The Kenya Bird of Prey Trust, based in Naivasha, encouraged us to develop a proper rehab facility. Led by Watamu enthusiasts Roy Bealey and Bea Anderson, we now have a beautiful facility fully dedicated to raptor rehabilitation on Plot 22 (where A Rocha first started in Watamu, interestingly!) and are looking forward to rescuing many more birds.

The first bird taken in was a Southern Banded Snake Eagle, a Red Listed forest raptor, found in an open septic tank in Gede Ruins forest with a broken bill such that it was thin and weak. After a remarkable surgery at the KBoPT Naivasha facility, it returned to Watamu and was later released by KWS Warden back into Gede Ruins with a satellite tracker.

Bea Anderson generously provided the land for the facility and covered all the construction costs. Roy Bealey, who has much raptor experience as a falconer in Zimbabwe, runs the centre with help from ARK staff member, Eric Kinoti and other volunteers when needed.



The surgery

The surgery was carried out by a team of leading experts in this field. Great caution and care was taken during this procedure.

Being a bird of prey, the Eagle entirely depends on its mandible for food. Thus, a functional strong mandible is necessary for the bird's survival.

The pictures below show the before, during and after the surgery.

Caution : Sensitive pictures



Typically, when you break the thick succulent leaves of aloes, a thick, cream-coloured sap oozes out. However, during a recent visit to the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve with Mwambire from the National Herbarium, we came across an aloe with very different but wonderful traits. When the leaf was broken, a successive number of colours were observed. Can you spot the change in the sap colour in the images below? We are still not sure if it is a new aloe species, but it is the first time Mwambire has ever seen this. We are still awaiting clarification from specialists whom we expect will visit the reserve soon.



Restoring Wrecked Reefs

In May, together with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), we were delighted to roll out the first ever coral restoration project in a marine protected area in Kenya. The park has been under KWS protection since 1968 but is suffering from climate change with severe bleaching events in 1998, 2016, 2020 and 2024 which have greatly reduced coral cover. Despite some thermally resistant colonies surviving, many have died and natural recruitment of new baby corals is very low.

In addition, fast-growing algae settle where corals have left space on the reef. Once algae are abundant, chances for corals to return decline. A Rocha has been studying the effects locally since 2012 and was asked by KWS to start coral gardening (restoration) in the park. The coral gardening process involves both 'farming' coral fragments under controlled conditions, weeding out algae and planting coral fragments back onto the reef.

Corals that are more tolerant to warm water were chosen for propagation because they are more resistant to bleaching. These corals were identified by A Rocha during prior research carried out in the park.

Having planted the first corals in early May, by June we were keen to see how they had done. Our team carried out the first dive to check on the corals they had planted and clean the nurseries, inspect how many corals were surviving and growing, and replace the ones that had died. We were excited to find many alive and well. The algae weeding and coral fragment out-planting on natural reef to assist natural recovery will continue into the long-term.

Many thanks to Coral Reef Care for funds and superb training and guidance, and to the Anglican Diocese of Derby, UK, for additional funds.



Coral fragments in a coral "garden"



Coral fragments planted in reef



Progress, 2 months later

Scout Training

Owning 8,000 acres of forest reserve comes with big responsibility. A Rocha Kenya has therefore employed ten scouts from the local community who have been doing an amazing job. A few months ago, they were trained and are now using SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool), a conservation monitoring app, with great results.

SMART is software that allows us to monitor, evaluate and improve conservation management of the Dakatcha Nature Reserve. A Rocha has developed a programme specific to our Dakatcha project, with data collection options in English, Swahili and Giriama (the local language).

A Rocha spent eight weeks with the scouts, teaching them how to use the app, receiving feedback, and making improvements. The scouts now use this app every day in the reserve to collect data and report on illegal activities (e.g. poaching), management actions (e.g. road repairs) and interesting observations (e.g. Golden-rumped Sengi nests). Using SMART effectively will change the way the Nature Reserve is managed.



Conservation Through Education

People living beside areas of natural habitat invariably have an impact on it. Hunger and school fees are key drivers of forest destruction in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest (ASF) and Mida Creek, habitats renowned for their rich biodiversity and beauty and two of A Rocha's focal sites for conservation. This is what gave birth to ASSETS, our eco-bursary scheme that does more than just sponsor kids through school.

ASF is not merely a beautiful landscape; it stands as a testament to nature's splendor, harboring over 482 bird species, including the elusive Sokoke Scops Owl. This unique dry coastal forest also shelters endangered species like the Golden-rumped Sengi. Yet, amid its natural wonders, A Rocha has identified alarming threats such as rampant logging, charcoal burning, and deforestation—a perilous trajectory that imperils the forest's very existence within the next few years.

Central to A Rocha's strategy is community engagement, a cornerstone in our efforts to safeguard this ecosystem (and many more like Dakatcha Woodland). By collaborating closely with local communities in areas such as Bogamachuko, Mida, Kahingoni, and Mijomboni, A Rocha addresses the intertwined challenges of environmental degradation and access to education. Many families in these communities struggle to make ends meet, often resorting to unsustainable practices like tree logging to pay for their children's education—a cycle perpetuated by poverty and lack of alternatives.

The introduction of eco-bursaries by A Rocha has helped bring a much needed solution. By alleviating the financial burden of school fees for hundreds of students, these bursaries have not only opened doors to education but have also stemmed the tide of deforestation driven by economic desperation. Witnessing the impact first hand, around 800 young beneficiaries have not only pursued academic excellence but have also cultivated a profound appreciation for environmental conservation—a lesson that resonates far beyond their classrooms.

Sand, sand and... more sand!

Once again we held a successful Mountain Bike Challenge on 25th and 26th May. This is our sixth event which is held in order to raise funds for our eco-bursary scheme ASSETS and to raise the profile of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in Kenya. This year for the first time, we had a two-day event, with the first day being a self-directed Garmin-based race (55Kms) and the second hosting the main challenge (75Kms).

The race was excellent on all accounts, as we had a good turn out with a total of 74 participants registering for both day one and two. We were able to raise Ksh 252,000- an equivalent of four full-year eco-bursaries. We also attracted some of the top Kenyan mountain bikers from around the country which strengthened the profile of the race.

A big thank you to Lordship Africa and Turtle Bay Beach Club for their generous donation and hosting of the event respectively, which enabled the race to take place. Our eyes are now focused on next year's event which will be held in May 2025. We are looking to find ways to increase the funds that this upcoming race will generate for ASSETS.



Nature's hero



Viola is an inspiring young lady: she has her own garden, where she has planted over 300 trees! The trees are of different species and were planted at different times.

Viola is a Junior High student at Mida Primary, one of the partner schools that we actively work with. She lives in Mida, a village in Kilifi County and is one of the keen students who has really benefited from our environmental education classes.

Her enthusiasm and her motivation to plant trees is drawn from the inner satisfaction of wanting to simply sit under a tree's shade and enjoy some peace and quiet in a beautiful setting. She loves and appreciates the beauty that these trees provide not only to her homestead, but to the entire environment. God's creation is the ultimate inspiration.

We are encouraged to see such young and vibrant conservationists take on this noble cause, whether through their participation in their environmental clubs or by taking a step further and planting their own tree gardens.



Living Lightly

People treat things in a way that reflects what they believe about them. If you believe it is valuable, there's a good chance you'll care for it. As Christians, we understand that the world was not only created by God but belongs to him – as the Psalmist puts it "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" – and as such it has tremendous and innate value.

As humans we impact the earth simply by living – we create a 'footprint', but some more than others. 'Living Lightly' simply means seeking to live lives that leave a light footprint on God's incredible creation – a lifestyle that advocates for responsible and sustainable use of the limited resources we have.

In this Living lightly space, we aim to explore simple ideas and tips for day to day habits or larger projects that you can do in your home, office, school or church that will contribute to helping reduce our impact on the environment. Most, if not all, of these ideas can be found by searching the internet – but we hope that by having them here, we can all be stimulated to engage further in living lightly...

Turning your lights off when not in use

In this issue, we focus on one of the common energy-saving ways: turning off your lights when they are not in use. Contrary to the common belief, turning your lights off and on, even if it is just for a few seconds, doesn't consume more energy.

Some bulbs, **like incandescent bulbs** (round bulbs with yellow light) use a metal filament that is heated until it glows. The energy to do this is primarily given off as heat, with only about 10% going towards the lighting! Incandescent bulbs require a lot of electricity, anywhere from 25-100 watts of electricity per hour. That is at least **12.5 Kilowatts for every 500 hours!**

In addition, turning incandescent bulbs on and off every time reduces the lifespan of the bulb. In the long run, if you are using these types of bulbs, it is better to limit frequent switching.

Latest in the market and more efficient, **LED bulbs are the recommended bulbs to use these days**. They are energy-savers and their lifespan is not affected by the frequent switching on and off. That being said, they still consume between 2 to 18W of electricity every hour, so you can still save by turning your bulb when it is not in use!

More about bulbs

In addition to **incandescent** and **LED bulbs**, we also have **fluorescent bulbs** and **halogen bulbs**.

Standard **fluorescent bulbs** come in tubes and are common in institutions and industries. In general, they are more efficient than incandescent bulbs. However, their lifespan is also reduced every time they are switched on and off. They also need an initial voltage to ignite the bulb. As a result, it is best to turn them off if you are leaving the room for at least 15 minutes.

Halogen bulbs on the other hand are only about 10-20% effective, meaning over 80% of energy is released as heat. However, they are slightly better than incandescent bulbs because of the halogen inside the bulb. The halogen prevents the build up of soot from the burning metal filament, thus increasing the lifespan of the bulb.

Bottom line

Incandescent bulbs are cheap to buy but expensive to use! Their lifespan is reduced with every on and off switch and they consume a lot. LEDs are your best friend: they save energy, and are not impacted by the on-off switch. Although slightly more expensive to purchase, you will make up the initial investment with lower electricity costs. With them, we can leave a lighter footprint!

Mwamba Eco-lodge

The heart of our conservation work and a vibrant hospitality centre, Mwamba Eco-lodge is considered by many a 'home away from home'. This season, we hosted a wide range of guests and volunteers from all walks of life who have again been a tremendous support to our conservation work and contribute to the joyful atmosphere of A Rocha Kenya.



Upgrades

The last few months have seen some long awaited renovations at Mwamba. The first was a beautiful face-lift in the form of some new green 'mabati' (tin) roofs replacing the old asbestos roofing on the two main accommodation blocks.

Additionally, thanks to the generous support from our friends, we added two floors to the Environmental Education building, making it a three story structure. This was a timely blessing as the number of our staff members has increased over recent years and office space had become limited. With these new office spaces, we are now able to accommodate new staff members in good work conditions.

The second floor of the building contains a beautifully designed workspace for our research team. It has three spacious offices and an open plan central component with built in workbenches. True to the style of the Environmental Education building it has wonderfully designed burglar guards fashioned into the shape of local wildlife.

The third storey is an open-air flat roof with a small shaded thatched section which will host large gatherings and provides a great vantage point for fanatical birders. The view from the top floor is breathtaking, with a full 360 degree sweep of the ocean, the coastal forest and the coconut plantations. You are all most welcome to come and experience it with us!

Hear from our visitors

“

It has been such a blessing to spend time here and get to know a little more of the work of A Rocha. A special place, with a special team of people. Thank you for welcoming us into your lives for the time we were here.

Really interesting how you created a low pace relaxing centre with such hospitality, welcoming feel while still running a conservation research centre. Keep this going please! We will be back! Oh, and GREAT food too!

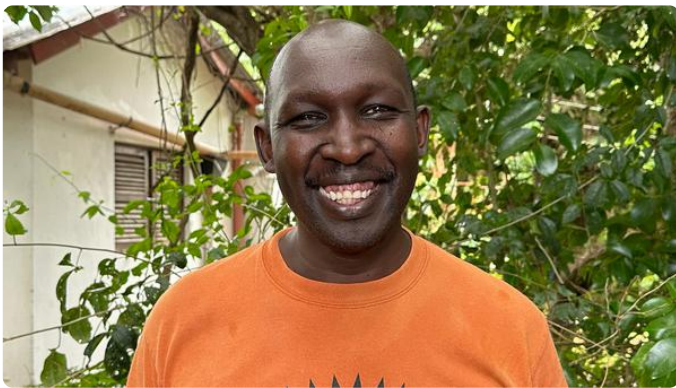
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Meet our amazing team

Welcome back Henry

It has been said that there should be a health warning on A Rocha... once you've been involved in it for any time, you always end up coming back. Well, that has been true for this man with a distinctive laugh and smile, Henry Kigen. He and his wife Belinda managed the Watamu centre for seven years until 2013. Over 10 years later, he is back on the centre as Facilities Manager given his incredible love of and expertise at fixing things and making them run like clockwork.

It has been like a breath of fresh air to have Henry's enthusiasm, obvious love for God and his creation, and his ready kindness and willingness to be a blessing to all he comes across. Karibu tena, Mr Kigen!



Thank you Carol

Most organisations will have people who act as central pillars that things together and provide an anchor through difficult times. Carol Muthoni has definitely been one of those for ARK. Coming as a guest in 2006, she felt called to leave her life in Nairobi and come to Watamu to help organize our finances and admin. Carol grew our finance system from a single spreadsheet to a multi-faceted QuickBooks system and on many occasions, thanks to quick and smart thinking averted potentially disastrous financial decisions by her bird-brained Director! She has decided to move on due to health issues. We pray Jesus' greatest blessings on her as she goes. She is hugely missed – thank you, Carol,



Volunteers' wall

“ It is always heart-wrenching to witness an animal in distress, but there is a particular poignancy when the victim is an eagle- a symbol of strength and elegance, found vulnerable and disfigured.

I was profoundly moved when I learned about the rescue of a snake eagle trapped in a septic tank: its once majestic form now damaged, its spirit understandably shaken, with its beak barely clinging to its face.

During my tenure at the 'Soysambu Raptor Centre', I had the privilege of witnessing a remarkable transformation from despair to hope for this eagle. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the team, led by veterinarians Simon Thomsett and Juliet Waiyaki, the eagle underwent two extensive surgeries, each painstakingly performed over hours. Through their skill and determination, not only was the eagle's beak successfully reattached, but it was also carefully realigned to ensure the best possible chance of long-term survival.

The commitment and resourcefulness displayed by Simon and Juliet were truly inspiring, especially considering the clinic's limited resources and the challenging conditions they worked under. Their unwavering dedication to the welfare of all birds under their care was evident in every aspect of their work. If only more people possessed their level of empathy and devotion to caring for God's creatures, our world would undoubtedly be a kinder and more compassionate place.

In the end, this eagle's story serves as a powerful reminder of resilience and the transformative impact of compassion. It reaffirms the belief that with dedication and care, even the most dire situations can be turned into opportunities for renewed strength and grace.

Jemma Baker, volunteer, 2023

Meet our Board of Directors



Name: Chris Foot

Position: Board Chairman

Chris Foot is an advisor, entrepreneur, farmer, conservationist, nature lover, ex-lawyer, NGO supporter and a former radio/TV host. He took over as the chairman of the board for A Rocha Kenya in January 2019.

Chris is passionate about fly fishing (ancient fishing) and a follower of Christ. He loves outdoors and wilderness. He also loves exploring far-flung parts of Kenya on foot, motorbike, horseback or car.



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A Rocha Kenya's work directly or indirectly contributes to the following Sustainable Development Goals:

2 ZERO HUNGER



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



14 LIFE BELOW WATER



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



15 LIFE ON LAND



Get involved with our work!

Stay with us

Book your holiday or research stay at Mwamba! Write to us today; mwamba@arocha.org

Have fun

Visit our eco-facilities near Watamu such as the **Mida Creek bird observatory and boardwalk.**

Volunteer

We welcome volunteers in a wide range of fields. For more info, contact us at volunteers.kenya@arocha.org

Contact us

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