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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 has clear teaching about the importance of the environment as God's creation, of his love for it and of our responsibility to look after it and not over exploit, destroy or degrade it.

OPENING Words

2020 will, of course, be remembered as the year that COVID-19 brought the world to its knees. For A Rocha Kenya it certainly impacted particularly visitor numbers at our Conservation Centre, Mwamba, in Watamu which, for the first time in several years, was doing well and was full in Feb/March. This changed overnight and we were left with just three or four volunteers for the rest of the year. This heavily impacted general funds available for core costs and like many others globally we had to instigate staff cuts and reduce salaries.

However, all this only proved once again what an incredible crew of committed people we have on board 'the ARK'. Despite the challenges, while work paused briefly in March and April especially for public meetings, it then got going again slowly but surely and, as you will read in these pages, an amazing amount of real impact work was achieved, people's lives changed and improved, boundaries of science pushed back, partnerships developed, funds raised and real progress made through the different programmes.

The key activity to suffer most was our Environmental Education programme given that all schools nationwide were closed from March to the end of the year – though partnerships were started with both the Shark Conservation Fund (SCF) and the Kenya Community Development Foundation towards the end of the year which included funding for environmental education activities to be implemented in the year ahead. Our Marine Governance initiative with Kenya Wildlife Service and St Andrews University also suffered with cancelled workshops and travel plans likewise. A huge spinoff blessing from this, however, was the donor, GCRF, agreeing that unused funds could be used to purchase new IT





equipment, something that was desperately needed.

With reduced fieldwork it meant more time to focus on data management and... fundraising. In particular, the work in Dakatcha Woodlands to create a nature reserve and thus protect rare and threatened wildlife became a key focus of our work for the year. We were humbled and delighted to build relationships with individuals and organisations who were keen to support our efforts. IUCN Netherlands, Rainforest Trust, World Land Trust, Lordship Africa, CARU Containers, Eden Wildlife Trust and several individuals generously gave time and money to help – thank you! By 31 December an additional 463 acres had been added to the reserve and funds for a further 800 secured and species lists developed for mammals, butterflies, birds and trees together with a good idea of where they occur.

Mike Clifton, a legendary entomologist from the National Museums of Kenya who ended up locked down with us through COVID carried out three butterfly surveys per day and by Christmas had recorded over 26,000 butterfly observations around Mwamba of over 170 species – and must be one of the leading lepidoptera datasets in Africa!

We ended 2020 with great thanks to God for his care and provision through a difficult year. Challenges remained but grants had come in from SCF for shark surveys and awareness work, for land purchase in Dakatcha and we even had an almost full centre of guests over Christmas and New Year.

Dr. Colin Jackson A Rocha Kenya Founder and Director

PROGRAMMES

Scientific Research and Monitoring	Terrestrial Research	
	Marine Research	
Community Conservation	ASSETS	
	Environmental Education	
	Marine Governance	
	Creation Care	
	Farming God's Way	
Conservation centres	Karara Conservation Centre	
	Mwamba Guesthouse	
	Dakatcha office	



TABLE OF CONTENTS

2020 Spotlights

Racing to protect a woodland under imminent threat p.8 Uncovering the migration route of two Afro-tropical migrants p.10 An innovative partnership to tackle the local impacts of Covid 19 p.12 Over half a million birds counted - Results from 20 years of waterbird counts p.14 Monitoring coral bleaching in Watamu National Park p.16

Programme Updates

Community Conservation p.18 Terrestrial Science p.20 Marine Education p.22 Marine Research p.24 Finances p.26

Dakatcha Woodland

Targeted ARK Nature Reserve

Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

Mwamba Watamu Marine Reserve



RACING TO PROTECT A WOODLAND UNDER IMMINENT THREAT

2020 saw an acceleration of forest destruction as people turned to charcoal burning to make up for lost livelihoods due to the pandemic

The Dakatcha Woodlands, a hidden-away rich biodiversity hotspot on the coast of Kenya, has been suffering tremendous destruction, and, if left unprotected, is likely to have disappeared in just a few years. It lies within the fragmented Coastal Forests of Eastern Africa, which are among the ten most threatened forest hotspots in the world. Dakatcha itself is listed as an IBA in Danger, with a very high threat score and a low action score.

The threats

Satellite imagery shows a 40% decline in forest in the area in the past 10 years, equivalent to 710 football pitches every year. This destruction tragically took a new turn for the worse in 2020, as many who had lost jobs in tourism due to the pandemic crisis turned to the forest as a source of quick cash. This was further compounded by the start of land adjudication in the area in September 2020, setting off an unprecedented rush of people purchasing land for charcoal burning that is decimating the forest and destroying the home of rare and endangered wildlife. The high demand for charcoal and easy availability of power saws to cut trees and motorbikes to transport charcoal bags to Malindi has exasperated the situation further.

At a regional level, the pressure on land is only expected to intensify as population increases, small-holders and industrial agriculture expand, and coastal urban developments multiply.

Our response

With the rapid rate of forest destruction, we have focused our efforts on extending the A Rocha Nature Reserve to a core of approximately 2,000 acres of an eventual 12,000 acres, in order to maintain viable populations of Sokoke Scops Owl and Goldenrumped Elephant-shrew. Our team in Dakatcha is focusing on securing parcels that our field surveys have confirmed hold populations of at least one of the three Endangered species: Sokoke Scops Owl, Golden-rumped Elephantshrew and Sokoke Pipit. Our strategy is to connect all the land parcels we currently own to

create a single continuous reserve, facilitating both connectivity for dispersal and efficient reserve management.

Katisho and Albert regularly meet with local farmers and families who currently own the land, explaining Rocha's strategy to Α protect the forest and demonstrating the value of the forest for their longterm future. Local buy-in is critical in order to for local communities to be actively involved in the protection of the forest. In addition, we plan to restore damaged areas through the removal of invasive species, replanting of cut trees and managed natural regeneration.

Find out more

Click or scan the QR code below to read more about this project!









UNCOVERING THE MIGRATION ROUTE OF TWO AFRO-TROPICAL MIGRANTS

2020 saw the launch of an exciting 4 year bird-tracking project in partnership with the Swiss Ornithological Institute

Bird migration is a fascinating and mysterious phenomenon, which, by its very nature, is hard to study. Great progress has been made in the past 50 years in our understanding of global bird migration strategies thanks to data from bird ringing, ground observations, and more recently, new technologies such as geolocators, GPS trackers and weather radar.

Yet while we have learned much on the migration patterns of Palearctic migrants (birds breeding in Eurasia and wintering in Africa), little is known still about intra-African migration. Indeed, we estimate that close to 600 bird species migrate within the African continent, but their route, patterns and strategies are largely unknown.

Why does this matter?

Understanding these migration patterns is essential for conservation purposes. Human population growth and the resulting habitat fragmentation are strongly threatening migratory birds, as key migratory stop-over sites as well as non-breeding grounds are transformed. This change in landscape is no less apparent on the coast around Watamu, where the expansion of agriculture, urban areas and hotels has led to a decline in coastal forest and indigenous habitat.

What's more, while Palearctic migration closely follows Northern hemisphere seasons,



migration patterns within Africa are more complex. Afro-tropical migrants are highly sensitive to rainfall for their migration, which has become increasingly unpredictable due to climate change.

Mapping migration routes is an important first step to be able to identify and protect key habitats and stopover sites used by birds.

In 2020, our Terrestrial Science Team started an exciting four year study to uncover the migration patterns of two Afro-tropical migrants: the **Red-capped Robin Chat** and the **Mangrove Kingfisher**. These are both species that we find on the Coast of Kenya from April-May to October-November. Outside these months, we don't know where they go.

How do we plan on getting this information?

To track birds, we equipped them with geolocators, a lightweight tracking device used to map migration routes and identify important staging areas.

« Just as scientists can determine the sunrise and sunset time based on location, they can also use sunrise and sunset times to predict a location. Light-level geolocators are tracking devices that





use daylight to estimate location. They include a light sensor, an internal clock, a battery and a computer that stores a measurement of the amount of light that the sensor is exposed to. Recording light levels does not require a lot of electricity, so batteries for these devices can be very small and last over a year. Because of this, these devices are incredibly light (just 0.3 grams) and can be placed on any bird that weighs more than 7 grams ».

The information is stored in the geolocator, but can only be retrieved upon recapturing the same bird. It is therefore important to equip birds that have a high likelihood of returning to the same site the following year. We analysed our 20-year ringing database to determine which birds to equip and when. The Red-capped Robin Chats were caught during weekly ringing sessions at A Rocha's conservation centre, while Mangrove Kingfishers were caught on their territory using strategically placed mist nets together with playback of their call.

We plan to equip 10 Mangrove Kingfishers and 15 Red-capped Robin Chats each year from 2020 to 2022. From 2021 to 2023, we'll be (hopefully) recapturing birds to retrieve the information and learn more about their migratory route!

Project funded by the Swiss Ornithological Institute.

vogelwarte.ch



AN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP TO TACKLE The local impacts of covid-19

Many local communities in coastal Kenya depend on fishing or on the extraction of other resources from the ecosystem to sustain their livelihoods. When Kilifi County was hard-hit by the coronavirus with movement restrictions and border closures, this directly threatened the lives of vulnerable communities.

In collaboration with the University of St Andrews and Local Ocean Conservation (LOC), and with support from Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), A Rocha Kenya designed a twofold project focused on mitigating the local effects of this crisis. The project was funded by the UK Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Scottish Funding Council.



households reached by July 2020



Livelihoods survey

The first part of the project involved a livelihoods and wellbeing survey which provided basic finance to alleviate food and income shortages, communicate Covid-19 messages and review the success of existing alternative livelihoods initiatives. The survey was operationalized via mobile phones in the villages of Mida and Uyombo that border the Watamu Marine Protected Area.

Marine scouts

Further to the livelihood survey, we worked with LOC to develop a **community 'marine scouts' programme** that provided unemployed and less-educated youth over 18 years with training and stipend pay. The programme involved the local youth in collecting data for surveys concerning village elders, community groups, fishermen groups and bird monitoring from the villages adjacent to the Watamu MPA.







Find out more







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OVER HALF A MILLION BIRDS COUNTED! Results from 20 years of waterbird counts



In 2020, we celebrated 20 years of counting waterbirds. This unique dataset is now available on the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, to be freely used for scientific studies and research.

Every month, a team of A Rocha Kenya scientists and volunteers go out and count populations of waterbirds present at two local sites. Over the past 20 years, they have completed 186 surveys at these 2 key sites, counting a total of 693 632 waterbirds, from 113 species.

Where do we count waterbirds?

We monitor waterbird populations at two local sites: the Sabaki River Mouth north of Malindi, which includes a diversity of attractive habitats for waterbirds (sandflats, salt marshes, mudflats, grassland, mangroves, and coastal scrub) and Mida Creek, an intertidal marine area of 580ha surrounded by mangroves.

Both of these areas are **critical passage and non-breeding sites for migrant birds** and hold a significant proportion of resident waterbirds. As such, they are both recognized as International Bird Areas (IBAs).

Why count waterbirds?

Waterbirds are bird species that are ecologically dependent on wetlands (ecological systems permanently or seasonally flooded by water). Since 1900, 64% of wetlands have been lost worldwide, with drastic consequences on waterbird populations. This habitat is also particularly





impacted by global warming, which is expected to have a pronounced effect on tundra and intertidal habitats, with repercussions for waterbirds.

Waterbird monitoring is critical to monitor the effects of these changes on the millions of birds that depend on these habitats, detect any changes and take action to protect habitats accordingly.

Waterbirds are also well-known indicators of the quality of natural environments, their abundance or lack thereof can help flag an alert on the deterioration of an ecosystem, and lead us to take action to better protect it. Wetlands which hold a certain percentage of the global population of a species can benefit from special protection, enabling better conservation of key habitats.

What will this dataset be used for?

This dataset is available in open access, and can be used to:

- monitor waterbird populations at these two migratory stopover and non-breeding sites
- assess short and long-term trends of wader populations
- learn about seasonality patterns in arrival and departure dates of migrant waterbirds (such as this study on the seasonal abundance of waterbirds in Sabaki)
- study the impact of climate change, habitat change, and human disturbance.







Explore the dataset:





MONITORING CORAL BLEACHING IN WATAMU MARINE NATIONAL PARK

Coral bleaching is the biggest threat facing coral reefs today. A Rocha Kenya has been monitoring coral reefs in Watamu Marine National Park (WMNP) in collaboration with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) for the past 10 years.

During abnormally hot conditions, brightly coloured corals lose their symbiotic algae that gave them their colours, turn bone white and eventually die because of the heat stress. Corals create the habitat that all other reef dwellers rely on, like trees in a forest, so losing corals is like a forest fire for the marine ecosystem.

Almost every reef in the world has experienced bleaching over the last 25 years, including the reefs of Watamu Marine National Park. Just as forests can recover from fires, reefs can recover from bleaching, especially when protected in national parks like Watamu. However, the ecosystem needs time to recover, hence the frequency of these catastrophic events is important to the trajectory of the reef community.

With global climate change well underway, it is expected that these events will become much more common in the future, with many areas expected to get annual severe bleaching events by 2100. Our marine team recorded bleaching in 2013 and 2016, but with low levels (<10%) of mortality for most corals. This gave some hope that Watamu's corals may be adapting to better cope with heat stress, but as these events were not as hot as 1998, this was not certain. In 2020, the reefs were bleaching again and the A Rocha team, in partnership with KWS, went back out on the reef.





Using permanent quadrats, the same patch of reef is photographed every month during the event, and the status of each coral is observed from bleaching response to eventual mortality or survival. These data are then used to assess whether the reefs can survive bleaching every 3-4 years, as we've seen in the past decade, what changes can be observed in the ecological community, and what this means for local people who rely on the reef in Watamu.

There is reason for hope. Overall coral cover has increased from 10% in 2011 to 20% in 2020 (before bleaching), showing that despite two bleaching events the reef recovered slowly towards its pre-1998 state with 40-50% coral cover. Also the crucially important branching *Acropora* or staghorn corals, which are normally very sensitive to thermal stress, are showing signs of resistance to bleaching during this event. There are many examples of colonies retaining their colour and some regaining it.

So might the reef become resistant?

Possibly, but there are still many colonies looking that are unhappy and some that are starting to die. According to scientists, if we can propagate the resistant colonies that survive bleaching via coral gardening we help repopulate can the reef with thermally tolerant corals, and give a much needed boost to this ailing ecosystem. This may be what is needed to get these ecosystems through the next hundred years or so, until the world can lower CO₂ emissions,



the ultimate cause for the coral's calamity.



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COMMUNITY CONSERVATION



Arabuko-Sokoke Schools and Eco-Tourism Scheme (ASSETS)

ASSETS is a conservation programme that uses funds generated from ecotourism and direct donations to provide eco-bursaries for local children to attend secondary school. These ecobursaries are closely tied to the conservation of threatened habitats and species. In 2020, we supported 130 students, bringing the total number of beneficiaries supported since 2001 to 701.

In response to ASSETS, the parents of beneficiaries are registered to a conservation association called Muvera WA ASSETS (*Thank you ASSETS*) which works to reduce pressure on the forest and creek through sustainable alternative sources of income. We conducted limited meetings with the beneficiaries and their parents as a result of Covid 19 challenge.

We used the period of restricted movements and low tourism due to the pandemic to repair the Mida Creek boardwalk, one of the eco-tourism facilities through which funds are raised for the eco-bursaries.



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Muvera Wa ASSETS

In Collaboration with the Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), we conducted activities with the beneficiaries and their parents such as the **establishment of tree nurseries** where we trained them on how to mix the soil for effective growth of the seedlings. The members showed their motivation by taking care of the tree nurseries and watering the seedlings of indigenous trees. Furthermore, this activity unified the five cluster groups. The parents appreciated the fact that conservation is a key component in the programme, beyond simply disbursement.

Parents also actively helped restore Arabuko-Sokoke Forest by planting 500 indigenous trees.



Farming God's Way

Farming God's Way is a tool that seeks to bring back principles found in a natural forest ecosystem. In 2020, we planted maize, *Amaranthus spp* (mchicha) and egg plant in our demonstration plot. We were happy to harvest good yields and used this example to train and encourage our farmers.



Kuvuka Tree Nursery

Logging has been a threat to our forests, resulting in loss of habitat for precious wildlife and threatening indigenous trees. To help restore and recover these threatened indigenous trees, we established a tree nursery at the ASSETS office, called Kuvuka.

In 2020, we conducted visits to Dakatcha Woodland Nature Reserve to collect seeds of threatened indigenous trees including *Diospyros bussei* (mkulu) and *Newtonia hildebrantii* (mkami). Including these new seedlings, we had a total of 5000 seedlings.



TERRESTRIAL SCIENCE

A Rocha Kenya continues to collect scientific data for threatened species and habitats and to contribute to national conservation initiatives.

Waterbird counts

A total of 20 sites both on fresh, salt and brackish water were visited from south coast all the way to Tana River Delta, with monthly counts at Mida Creek and Sabaki River Mouth. For the first time, Tana Delta River Mouth was visited in July to search for Madagascar Pratincoles (Vulnerable Species under IUCN whose population has been declining for the past couple of years) after observing over 1500 individuals at one of our count sites. A first breeding record of Pied Avocet was also recorded for the Kenvan coast on the same site where the Madagascar Pratincoles were seen. A total of 105 species were recorded totalling to 131 299 individuals.

Dakatcha Nature Reserve

Being a new reserve, we are conducting baseline studies to understand what we have in the reserve. **Eight intense "BioBlitz" surveys were carried out in 2020** to survey insects (particularly butterflies), birds, plants and reptiles. Camera traps have been deployed to survey mammals. Many more Golden-rumped Elephant-shrews than in 2019 were photographed within and outside the reserve from 48 camera deployments.

Mwamba biodiversity surveys

Daily butterfly surveys in the 8-acre grounds of the conservation centre have produced **171 species**. The surveys are done three times a day along the nature trail. Weekly plant phenology surveys continued to record flowering, fruiting, leafing and pollinator agents on 91 plant individuals from the 12 species marked along the nature trail.

Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

111 surveys emerging from our weekly surveys of monitoring of human disturbances up to 5 km from the edge of the forest revealed **3761 cut stems and 554 snares**. Visits to 10 village chiefs surrounding the forest were made and sensitized on conservation of the forest. Thanks to generous contributions from our donors, David Ngala received a brand new motorbike to help him complete his surveys!











MARINE EDUCATION





In schools

The Marine Education Team carried out awareness and education activities about Elasmobranchs (sharks, rays and guitarfish) with eight schools located around the Marine Watamu National Park. This awareness programme was kindly funded by the Shark Conservation Fund. Children were taught about the values and importance of these precious species such as the Halavi Guitarfish, which is Critically Endangered, as well as how to conserve them. Three lessons were carried out in each of the eight schools totalling 24 visits. The children enjoyed the

stories and videos of the sharks and the sessions helped stimulate their passion and enthusiasmin marine species. The number of children increased in each lesson, indicating that they shared their experience and motivated others to join the environmental club. They refer to themselves as "Shark heroes", and are excited to be a voice for the sharks, shouting loud and clear "Sharks need our love not our fear"! We are glad that the marine programme has unified the marine schools and environmental club patrons leading to a common goal of conserving our Watamu Marine National Park.

With the community

Creating awareness among the fishermen and conservation groups around the Watamu Marine National Park was a key success of 2020. The education program motivated and unified the fishermen around Mida Creek, enabling the fishermen to express their views and share information. One example was sharing the local names used for sharks and rays, e.g. the Cowtail Stingray is called *shupatu*.

We managed to reach out to ten groups, nine fishing groups and one conservation group known as *Msitu Women Conservation Group*. We visited each group twice and discussed the value of conserving sharks, rays and guitarfish and how to do so. The fishing community groups included both old and young men. It is important to **reach out to all generations**, and especially the youth, as they will have a long-term impact on biodiversity. We also reached out to fishmongers (women) at Magangani landing site, as they were keen to start a conservation group.

There was some significant learning happening - some fishermen were surprised by the videos of the sharks giving birth as they thought sharks fell from the sky. They were also shocked to hear that species can become extinct, when we studied the example of the Megalodon shark. We are pleased to have brought the community together and renew their appreciation for and conservation of marine species.





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MARINE RESEARCH

The Marine Programme has experienced several developments in the past year. We have continued to work on priority habitats and species in partnership with the local stakeholders.

Sharks, rays and guitarfish monitoring

Sharks, rays and guitarfish are under enormous threat globally. Threats to species found in shallower water on reefs, like in Watamu Marine National Park (WMNP) include overfishing and habitat and behaviour changes through tourism and runoff from land. Several species in WMNP are on the IUCN Red List under various stages of endangeredness. The critically endangered Halavi Guitarfish is relatively common in WMNP and requires high levels of protection as this could be a critically important breeding ground.

With funds from the Shark Conservation Fund, we have also started collecting data in the reef slope area, which is locally not considered to be a part of the National Park, whereas the official gazetted documents indicate it is within the MPA. This could be very important for elasmobranch conservation in the area being the only reef slope that is legally protected from fishing, even if not currently enforced. The data will contribute to conservation measures by working with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) to inform and develop a management strategy for the area.





Beach clean-ups and nurdle hunts

A Rocha Kenya staff have been doing beach clean-ups along the beach in front of the A Rocha centre. This project has been running for a while and we have been able to collect ~kg of plastic which is then taken to the 'Eco-World' project in Watamu where they do recycling.

Nurdles (or plastic pellets) are the raw material of the plastics industry and are used to make nearly all our plastic products. Easily spilled, and not always cleaned up, they are leaking out of the global plastics supply chain, and it has been found that nurdles are polluting our seas and waterways worldwide. The A Rocha Kenya Marine Team organized a nurdle hunt session with one of our partner schools and we collected >1000 nurdles. This has helped raise Kenya's profile in the fight against plastic pollution.

Watamu Marine National Park monitoring

Every end of the month, the Kenya Wildlife Service conducts monitoring of the different habitats in the park. This monitoring is part of the **Strategic Adaptive Management Approach** which helps park managers and communities to link science to active and adaptive management ensuring that the MPA delivers expected ecological and social benefits.

The A Rocha Marine Team has been invited by KWS to assist them with technical help during the monitoring. This has strengthened our working relationship with KWS and we are grateful to work closely with them.



FINANCES AND FUNDRAISING

2020 was marked by an increased in our income, reaching a high of Ksh 66,468,966 (\$583,829), 92% of which was grant income. Our total expenditure was Ksh 39,375,831 (\$345,857).

We are grateful to donors, partners, friends, foundations, organisations and churches that have supported us this far. Every gift that we have received has been helpful in keeping the work of A Rocha going.



Spotlights

Land purchasing in Dakatcha continues to be both the largest expenditure (one third of total expenditure), but also the subject of a number of grants, most notably from the IUCN, World Land Trust, Eden Wildlife Trust, Lordship Africa and CARU Containers, among others. We are grateful for the trust of these funding partners, who have enabled us to expand our work in Dakatcha. We are also thankful for our continued partnership with the Levantis Foundation and for the generous donations of faithful supporters.

The needs remain great and we are always searching for additional funding to accelerate land purchase and secure a protected nature reserve in a dwindling forest.

Our marine projects also benefited from a number of grants in 2020, most notably the Shark Conservation Fund.

Marine Science & Conservation **22%**

Crowdfunding Campaign to renovate Mwamba Kitchen

In the hope to celebrate the 20,000th Mwamba meal (which we calculated would fall on 6 April 2020!) with a refurbished kitchen, we launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise \$3,000.

In the meantime, the pandemic reached the coast, tourists rapidly disappeared, and staff members started working remotely... so the 20,000th meal turned out to be a lot quieter than initially expected!

However, thanks to donors' generous contributions, **we raised a total of \$3,250**, allowing us to replace the fridge and freezer, install an extractor fan, repair the oven and stove, and repaint the walls - all contributing to a refreshed and fully functional kitchen for when tourism would resume!

We used the money to also repaint guestrooms and renew essential equipment.



2020 Appeal: Dakatcha Nature Reserve

Through an international, multi-platform end of year appeal, we raised a total of \$5,145 that will contribute to our land purchase efforts in Dakatcha Woodland. \$3,602 were raised through GoFundMe and a further Ksh 175,560 through M-changa, a Kenyan crowdfunding platform. We are grateful for the generosity and continued support of our donors over the years.





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