

## Environmental Education at a National Park in Kenya: A Case Study

### Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to understand how environmental education (EE) is conducted within the national park system of Kenya. Tsavo West National Park was chosen as the subject of this case study. A series of observations, interviews, and surveys were conducted to better understand what students and teachers are experiencing during the park's EE programs both at the park and during outreach programs at schools.

### Introduction

My graduate research was conducted in Kenya this past summer during the months of June and July. I spent those two months at Tsavo West National Park, which is a part of the Tsavo Conservation area, the largest area of protected land in East Africa. The Tsavo Conservation Area spans 16,000 square miles in the southern part of Kenya. Tsavo National Park, which is split into two separate national parks (east and west), comprises most of the conservation area. Most of my work was concentrated in Tsavo West and the surrounding communities, but I also visited Tsavo East for comparison.

The national parks in Kenya are managed by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). There are many departments within the KWS. The department I worked most closely with was the Conservation Education\*\* (CE) Department. The CE Department is headquartered at the Visitor Information Center (VIC) which is located at the entrance of the park within the park boundaries. It is the responsibility of the CE Department to manage the VIC and conduct various outreach activities outside the park. The main function of the VIC is to provide general information about the park and its history as well as information concerning conservation of the park's natural resources—with emphasis on the two most endangered animals, the African Elephant and the Black Rhinoceros. Currently, there are three staff members within the CE Department: Education Warden (Ms. Silvia Wangeci), Education Corporal (Mr. Jason Munyoki), and Attendant (Mr. Hassan Mamo). I worked closely with these three individuals to understand the various CE activities that Tsavo West conducts on a daily basis.

### Methods

In order to understand the park's CE programs, I spent a lot of time interviewing the CE staff and observing their interactions with visitors (mainly primary/secondary students and teachers). Most of my time was spent at the VIC. The VIC was the first stop for most school groups that visited the park. Students and teachers would be toured around the center and given a brief overview of the park and its history. The main attraction of the center was its extensive collection of animal specimens (bones, teeth, droppings, skins, and preserved animals in jars). This gave students the opportunity to see some of the

\*\*Note: In the context of this paper, conservation education is synonymous with environmental education. Conservation education was the more specific term used in Kenya by the KWS, but the dominate term in the US is the more broad term environmental education.

animals they might see in the park close-up. Unfortunately, visitors only stayed at the VIC for a short period of time (at most 20-30 minutes). This did not give me enough time to interview or survey any of the visitors that came to the park. All the school groups I observed were very eager to start their trip through the park, which often took a whole day to finish. I was able to accompany one school group on their trip through the park, so that I could experience what an average group does and sees while they are in the park. It is impossible to see the whole park in one day, so groups are often advised of a few "main attractions" that they can see over the course of a day.

The main portion of my study focused on the CE Department's outreach programs. The outreach programs focused on primary and secondary schools within the five regions that surrounded the park. It was customary to conduct two outreach programs over the course of a day. A primary school was visited in the morning for about four hours and a secondary school was visited in the afternoon for another four hours. Since the outreach programs were stretched out over longer period of time, I was able to spend more time with the participants. I decided to create a survey (with help from the park's staff) for students and teachers to evaluate what participants experienced during the outreach sessions. From students, besides wanting to know demographic info (gender, age, grade, etc.), I wanted to know if they had learned anything new, if their feelings towards the environment had changed, if they felt empowered to make the environment better, what they felt was the importance of conservation, and what their favorite and least favorite part of the program was. From teachers, I asked many of the same questions, but I also wanted to know if they felt like the program was age/grade appropriate, if the material was fun to learn, and if the program inspired them to learn/teach more about the environment in their classes (despite their subject). I was able to survey about 150 teachers and students combined.

### Challenges

Despite being at Tsavo West for two months, I was only able to survey three schools. I had hoped to survey more schools, so that I could get a wider range of perspectives, but transportation was a major issue. Due to a lack of funding from KWS for the education department, there was often not a park vehicle available to transport the staff (plus me) to schools for outreach programs. In fact, in the two months I was there, there were no more than five outreach programs conducted. This was not because there were a lack of schools requesting programs. There were many schools that had requested an outreach program, but most of the schools were either far away or very hard to get to without a 4WD park vehicle. The staff also had a lot of equipment they brought with them to outreach programs (projector, screen, speaker, generator, laptop, curtains, surge protectors, and extension cords), which was hard to transport without a park vehicle. Due to the lack of transportation, I was not able to get a wide range of students and teachers to participate in my study, but I was able to get firm data from three separate schools.