

ECO JOURNAL

(25th January - 9th February 2026)

Anti Poaching and De-Snaring

Wednesday 28th Jan: Our First Patrol

At 8am we set off with Abu and the rangers to experience and take part in their daily work and conservation efforts.

We drove around the conservancy until midday and whilst (positively) we didn't come face to face with any poachers, we found evidence of poaching activity.

Handerson taught us the skill that is being able to put a date and a time on piki piki tracks and how the tracks will differ from entering the conservancy to leaving, depending on weight (indicating whether or not the people on the bikes came out with bushmeat).

On route we collected any rubbish that was lying around, and came across an incative Boma where most of the plastic resided.

They showed us all of the places they go to for different reasons, whether that be for better viewing during day or night, where snares are most commonly placed, or which gates the poachers use depending on moonlight, activity and time of day.

We came across an injured zebra and it was incredible to see how fast the team move to save it; using their knowledge as rangers to assess the severity, calling the vet, mentally noting time and exact location, all within a matter of minutes.

Wherever we went, Abu and the rangers' knowledge was unmistakable, they recognised every track to every tree.

Friday 30th Jan: Our First Night Patrol

We left the Lodge at 7pm and went via Lumo Conservancy to pick up a few of their rangers to create 'strength in numbers', something Abu told us was the most crucial factor in their patrols. We divided between 3 gates, 2 groups on foot but armed and then us, unarmed but with the car. The car was tucked into the bushes, the stars came out and the waiting begun.

Abu told us all about what we were looking out for and his past experiences, where I realised just how much effort is behind their work, all fueled by an unwavering passion for his job.

Every question, observation or concern I had (of which there were many), Abu had the answer.

KWS dropped a couple of their rangers with us and it was so interesting to speak to them and hear all of their different stories.

Not even 5 minutes later there it was, the torch. We mimiced the immediate movements of the rangers and before the roar of the piki piki engine begun, they were off. In that moment, all bravery in me disappeared and I stuck close to the car. But every second timed to perfection, every movement intentional, Abu came running back to tell us they had succeeded. I joined him in picking everyone else up from their gates and when we returned, at least 15 rangers were surrounding the bike. Unfortunately as soon as the poachers saw Abu they ran, they all know him. Retrieving all that we did was just as much a success, and although there was disappointment, the pride on their faces far outshone it. Every single sign Abu told us about,

happened. It was like a perfect demonstration and I found myself mentally ticking off every stage we were told to look out for until the win.

I have such conflicting feelings though, as the majority of these people have *nothing*. They are doing all it takes to provide for their families and put food on the table, to feed their villages and maybe earn a few shillings. For me to be a part of making sure that doesn't happen, feels very wrong. I spoke to Abu about this, and he reminded me that by interfering with the poachers, we are removing potential health risks for communities like parasites, we're deterring other poachers, opening up an opportunity for them to redirect their money-making paths, and more importantly, we are protecting the lives of every single animal that lives in this conservancy.

Never in my life have I experienced anything like that and I feel extremely privileged to have been a part of the team that night.

Sunday 1st Feb: Our Second Night Patrol

This time in two cars, we set off from Lions Bluff, collected the rangers from Lumo (and a volunteer of theirs) and headed to the other side of the conservancy for this evening's patrol.

This time we were on the other side of the conservancy, where Abu and the team had previously been (and been informed) of recent poaching activity. Having split into 3 groups again, we were told that going by foot with the other rangers was too dangerous due to our location being one frequently visited by the elephants, so we stuck with the car for maximum safety. It was exciting to be with the other volunteer as we were single-handedly able to answer almost all of her questions, using all of the knowledge and wisdom that the rangers had shared previously this week!

After some time, patience and many group discussions, we were hit with the sudden sound of elephants, just in the bushes in front of us... we decided staying inside the car was probably the best decision and this happened a few times before Abu decided to call the on-foot rangers as it was just getting too dangerous. Our window of opportunity for the ambush had almost come to a close, so the night came to an end once the rangers had returned.

Though slightly less hair-raising, it was a brilliant opportunity for us to teach our fellow volunteer all that we had learnt and get to know each ranger, and their story, that bit better. Every patrol night is a positive no matter the outcome as we headed back knowing the animals would sleep soundly and the whole conservancy was safe.

Nature Walks and Wildlife Education

Tuesday 27th Jan: Nature Walk

Day 2 brought us the excitement of an early morning nature walk, where we met Abu and his team of rangers: Handerson, Titus and Alex. We strolled through the bush, passing by lots of surrounding wildlife like zebras, wildebeest and antelope. The scenery was beautiful and it was

such a cool feeling to be walking around in the same view we see from our room. Abu followed behind in the car and picked us up for the start of our soft patrol of the conservancy. We were lucky enough to spot some incredible wildlife: a family of giraffes, buffalo, zebras, wildebeest, gazelles, elephants and a lioness. This was all accompanied by a huge variety of stunning birds of which, the team told us, there are more than 300 different species that live within Lumo. This being my first time in Africa, I was pretty speechless that this was the reality of driving through the bush and spent most of the time trying to take it all in!

We then stopped by Salt Lick Lodge to visit their watering hole and it was otherworldly to me. The most pictureque scene filled with zebra, waterbuck, wildebeest, and an enormous herd of elephants, all peacefully going about their day and living in such harmony. Then strolled in the most beautiful elephant, who came to wash, drink and splash around in the water. The closer we looked, we realised that she only had one tusk. I was fascinated by a one-tusked elephant and I kept thinking about how she came to be this way and what her life has been like since. She didn't appear weak or distressed, if anything, she seemed steady and capable. Drawing her helped me slow down and really notice her: the shape of her face, the balance of her body - a small record of how every living being carries a different story.

On our way back to the lodge, we stopped by Bura Dam to check on its water levels, survey the area and of course, tried to spot the resident crocodile. This area felt much more jungle-like, which was incredible as the dry savannah was just around the corner.

It was natural beauty after natural beauty and an incredible introduction to the conservancy.

Tree Planting and Water Conservation

Tuesday 27th Jan: Planting Our Tree

This afternoon, after being toured around the gardens, we were able to applaud the fabulous work of the gardeners, and see where lots of what is on our plates, is grown. We were then given the amazing opportunity to plant a tree of our own, together with Laurent and Nazia, we dug the hole, planted our small Acacia seedling and filled the entire thing with water. We then went walking around the lodge and documented each and every tree that had been planted by previous guests, so we could send them an update on their growth. It's a really clever initiative for people to both honour a memory with a tree whilst simultaneously strengthening and helping the environment with new life.

We were then taught how to use the Laser Engraving Machine so we could create a sign, we engraved the name and date, and planted it beside our tree for a keepsake and to aid documentation in the future! If I'm ever lucky enough to return to this incredible place, it will be so special to be able to see the mark we have left here.

Another thing I have been struck by is the incredible water conservation work that the lodge do, to use, reuse and recycle. A bucket is placed in the shower in every single room, to catch the cold water before it runs hot and any excess water inbetween, this is then collected and

used to water plants or anything growing in the surrounding area. Something so small, but shows how every detail is carefully thought through, and how every person is leaving as little a print on the environment as possible.

Hospitality

Monday 26th Jan: Reception Work

This morning, Bella gave us a rundown on how the system works, and we had a go at checking guests in and noting down important guest information. After we had got to grips with that process, we started prepping the welcome towels given to the guests upon arrival – placing them in a bucket of cold water and essential oils. We were taught the way to roll and place each towel in the basket, then later delivered them to guests when they arrived.

Bella gave us the information booklet so we could answer any questions that guests might ask us, from meal timings, pool and hot water timings, to game drives and a night in the hide. We were quizzed all day until we had it nailed!

In the afternoon we did a couple of guest room checks, where we made sure the Bitings and bug spray cans were full, the towels, curtains and windows weren't dirty or stained, the safe, telephone, electrics and plug sockets were working, the slippers and robes were provided, the soaps, body wash and hair products were restocked and much more. Once this is done, if any of those things weren't quite right, we would call up Michael (Head of Housekeeping) and let him know. It was amazing to see and be a part of just how much goes on behind the scenes to make sure that these rooms are in perfect condition for the guests.

Thursday 29th Jan: Shop Stock and Fleeces

After Bella taught us how to carefully fold each blanket for the game drives, we were taken into the shop with Maggie to check all of the stock. This definitely took longer than we were expecting but using the checklist, we managed to make our way through everything out on display and stored in the drawers.

It got a lot easier the more we did it as we knew where each item was on the list, the names of everything and how many we had previously counted, but I think this system could definitely be made easier for the staff. Perhaps by logging it online or in an Excel spreadsheet, in alphabetical order or in the order of the shops layout it would speed up the process but also allow for keeping on top of everything with quicker and clearer editing.

Staff fleeces arrived and we went through to double check there was the same amount and of each size, that the supplier had sent. We then bagged them up depending on their size and put them in the store room ready for later collection.

Monday 2nd Feb: Cleaning and Housekeeping

We started our morning off by dusting and mopping around the shop, office and reception area. Phyllis told us we were making our lives difficult by mopping the wrong way... and quickly put us to shame with her mopping skills which, of course, made the rest of the cleaning very quick and much more effective.

We then met Michael in one of the guest rooms where he taught us how they clean and make up the rooms, we were stunned as to how much detail goes into making it look perfect! Making the beds was a whole other story, it was borderline impossible to make the beds look as good as Michaels and it took a whole lot of strength and precision to make it look half as nice. He then took the time to show us how they would lay out a honeymoon suite, beautifully making swans out of the towels and carefully picking leaves from outside to decorate them, then masterfully folding the toilet paper into the most delicate rose. I took photos of each process with the intention of trying this all out when I'm home but it's going to be hard to try and replicate his!

I've been so blown away with the kindness and patience of all of the staff both at Lions Bluff and CWC but Michael really solidified it for me, taking the time to lay everything out perfectly, then letting us have a go - all morning. He is a natural teacher and I hope I manage to use everything I've learned, once I go home.

Friday 30th Jan: Kitchen Help

This morning we went to the kitchen to help Grace, the pastry chef, where she had just begun making a Tarte Tatin. She showed us how they peeled and chopped the apples for the tart, we then mixed in the sugar and cinnamon, heated it all up, poured it into the tin and covered it with puff pastry. Then we got a lesson in kneading bread dough, plaiting it and making buns. It's safe to say some were better than others... but we quickly got the hang of it.

I think being in the kitchen has been my favourite part of hospitality so far, we had such a fun time chatting to the chefs, hearing about their lives and learning some Kiswahili too, of course. I've written down the recipe for the tart so I can make it for the rest of my life and always be reminded of my time here, it was absolutely delicious (if I do say so myself).

Saturday 31st Jan: Dinner Lay Up

This afternoon we joined Chulla in the restaurant for him to teach us how they lay up for dinner and what goes on behind the scenes to make it perfect for the guests. He brought out 3 types of knife, different forks, different spoons and it quickly got quite confusing. Luckily, we had a very good teacher and soon got into a good rhythm; Cat on knives, me on forks. More goes into it than one might originally presume, for example, we had to go through each guest and what they had ordered for dinner, to be able to lay the table appropriately. Just by watching Chulla, you could see that every place is laid with such intent and precision, it's almost an art with the way that he checks every place mat is central, every knife and spoon

parallel and each fork at a different height. I learnt so much more than I thought I could, and won't ever lay my tables the same all thanks to Chulla instilling what he has learnt over the years, onto us.

We were then given a mountain of napkins to fold, and after switching our design, then switching again, we went with a LBL classic, and I think it's fair to say we are rather skilled in that area now - another thing learnt!

Special mention to Chulla, Cosmos, Duncan and Joshua for being the most attentive, kind, entertaining bar staff team out there - every meal time was an absolute highlight!

Tuesday 3rd Feb: Canva Skills

This morning we helped Adam (Lodge Manager) in both designing and choosing the menu for the new Soroi property in Diani. He taught us how to use Canva and gave us the both the opportunity to design the front of the menu, whilst we helped him with coordinating the drinks menu. It was so interesting to see the thought that goes behind something like this, drinks changing depending on location, but also clientele nationality and classic staples. Learning how to use Canva was always something that was on my 'to-do' list but had never done, so I am so glad I am more familiar with it as I know it'll be so useful down the line.

We spent another morning with Adam creating both the Kids Activities programme and getting the Drinks Menu finalised on Excel. I was pleased to be able to put my new excel skills into play, creating equations for pricing and profiting. I also thoroughly enjoyed coming up with ideas for Kids Activities, working out which Staff Member could assist, what materials might be needed and rough timings of the activities. It was so interesting being able to step into the Manager's head for a couple of mornings, and learning all about what sort of work it entails.

Community Work and Projects

Friday 30th Jan: Mlugh School IT Lesson

Having previously been working at a school in Watamu for 2 weeks, it was really interesting to see the initial differences between the two, this for one being in a very different location. Based at the bottom of the Taitan Hills, this beautiful school was a much bigger one, with older children and the stand out, IT Lab.

It was another moment where we were able to physically visit and see the real, life-changing work that CWC do. Together with other charities and companies, they were able to draw in members of the local communities to construct the building and although it's located at Mlugh School, neighbouring schools are also able to utilise this amazing space.

We taught the Grade 9 students the basics of using Word and PowerPoint, one of us projecting our computer screen as a visual and the other, writing down each instruction and step, of which they eagerly noted in their workbooks. The children were understandably shy at

first, but after some time and conversation, they definitely warmed up and started asking questions, which of course we were happy about.

It was a very rewarding experience for me and I hope my impact of teaching them these skills will not only help them now, but in their futures too. Before the lesson had even begun, I noticed just how excited they all were to get inside and use the computers. It made me realise that during my time at school, I was definitely guilty of taking not just our computers, but so much more, for granted. So although we were there to teach them, I feel like, in a way, they also taught me too and I'm very grateful for that.

Tuesday 3rd Feb: Mlugh School 2nd IT Lesson

We were lucky enough to go back to Mlugh to teach them what we didn't manage to fit in last time, Excel. They were definitely more excited this time, and the overall experience was much easier as we all knew each other, and for us, we knew how best they learned and what speed to work at.

Though Cat and I didn't have much previous experience with Excel, Nazia very kindly helped, meaning that we could both wander around the room and help each student individually, when they needed it. I definitely learnt something too, and once the lesson had come to an end we were able to chat to the Grade 9's more personally, which was extra special. They were definitely keen to learn all about England and my life over there, so being able to share that with them was lovely.

It felt like there was much more of a personal element to today's lesson, which made me feel much more at ease, and I felt as though they did too. I wonder, if possible, for future volunteers, they could have time to talk to the children and get to know each other a bit before teaching them. I feel as though, through my experience, knowing each other (i.e. not being complete strangers) beforehand, would be beneficial as they might feel more relaxed asking questions and it would feel more as though it was a friend teaching them, rather than a normal 'lesson'.

Thursday 5th Feb: Village Visit

Before we headed to Mlugh for their second IT lesson, it was a privilege to be able to visit one of the local communities. We were shown around their little village and after visiting their Pigs, we were taken to the soon-to-be fishpond, which was amazing and I was so impressed by the fact they had dug the space out by hand to such an impressive standard.

CWC has funded this project and we had previously been told what benefits this pond would bring to the local communities but it was so lovely to hear from them, first hand, talking about how much it would impact their lives. Its aim is to not only supply food for these families but to decrease the amount of poaching in the conservancy, by providing a place they can freely (and legally) catch these fish, and either sell them or eat them.

We were then taken to one of their huts where they have a bed, formed by lots of dried out sticks, above was an area to dry their maize, and beside was a fireplace with some logs to sit on.

All masterfully crafted by the people who sat in their with us. Next door was a bigger hut that they'd named their Museum, which was home to their incredible drums. They told us about their recent trip to India with UNICEF, where they were given the opportunity to dance, sing and show off their incredible skills. The drums were made with wooden bases and cow hide tops, all made by them in different shapes and sizes, intentional to the sound they each make. He told us about their hopes for the future with CWC where they'd give people the opportunity to spend a night with them, cook, eat, learn and experience what life is like for them, which greatly excited them all.

We returned to one of the villagers so effortlessly climbing one of their mango trees, in tow was a bucket on some rope - designed to make fruit picking easier. They were so ripe, warm from the sun and unlike any mango I've ever tasted, of course made better by enjoying it in such good company.

I am so overwhelmed by not only the kindness and generosity these people showed to us complete strangers, but by their incredible craftsmanship and innovation. They make so much of so little, I'm inspired and in admiration of them and it's something I will take home and carry with me for the rest of my life.

Friday 6th Feb: Kongoni School, Maktau Special School and St Peters School Visit

This morning after (the best kind) of sleepless night in the hide and an incredible morning game drive with Derick, we all piled into the car (along with a generator) and headed to Kongoni School where we were able to join the CWC in checking the progress of the new IT Lab that they're building. This project is the second of its kind, the first being at Mlughu School, and similarly, each of the construction workers was a member of the local community. It is so evident that the work of CWC is *so* carefully thought through, every project better the lives of so many people and in this case, from the start to the process to the final outcome to the future - every step is about them.

Though our stay was only brief, we managed to meet lots of the team, including an incredible lady who was a construction worker, I wish we could've spoken more and heard more about her story - but that will have to come at a later visit...

From there, we drove just down the road to Maktau Special School where we were greeted by the principle and handed over to a couple of their teachers for a tour of the school. The school was by no means big but the again, neither was the amount of students (43) and we only saw a few as the rest of them were on a school trip to Mombasa. We said a quick hello to the chef and ventured to the Boarding facilities. It was a very different set up to what I had initially expected, each bed touched the other with little to no room to move inbetween but both the girls' and boys' dormitories had clean bathrooms and made beds. We met one of the caretakers who told us about their hopes to make rooms for some teachers to stay the night too, an initiative which they told us would really help them.

The teachers then toured us around their classrooms, all under one roof with 3 dividers. It was fascinating to learn that they don't teach by age but rather by ability, and they showed us what

kinds of things each stage was learning about. I had lots of questions which the teachers were very good at answering, like their school day: Lessons until Midday then rest in the afternoon or therapy (Physio, Speech etc). Though we didn't get to speak to many of the students, there was lots of waving and very big smiles. I was very moved just walking around the school and it was amazing to hear the work that each of the teachers do, and with such passion.

Then came a very bumpy ride up the hill to St Peters School which sits at one of the highest points in the whole coastal region, at about 2,300 metres above sea level. We introduced ourselves and explained a bit about CWC before we started our talk with some of the older girls ranging from ages 12-16. It was a very special moment to be able to give these girls the 'Days for Girls' packs, knowing just how much it will improve their lives, and now they can live like any girl should be able to. Purity had to do most of the speaking as she is the only one who speaks the local language, so she switched between 3 languages (including Kiswahili and English) so that everyone could understand. They were all listening so intently and carefully and it was very moving to both witness and be a part of. I'm gutted that our stay was cut slightly short, but I can't wait to come back and hopefully visit these girls again soon.

This leads me on to CWC's 'Plastic for Books' initiative which allows schools to exchange plastic waste in return for textbooks. Since the launch, they've managed to collect over 4000kg of plastic which has provided hundreds of textbooks to local schools and communities, the school which has collected the most plastic selects a few children to be rewarded with a Game Drive with the rangers. This benefits both the environment as an effort to tackle plastic waste through community efforts, and the community for educational resources.

Thursday 5th Feb: Tumaini Women's Project

After our Village Visit we went to the Mlughu School IT Lab where we met 10 ladies who are single mothers, from the local community. They work with CWC to create jewellery using Tsavorite, a green or purple coloured gemstone mined and found only in Tsavo, to be sold in Bluff Memories (LBL Shop) and the money that they make goes directly into paying their children's school fees.

All of the stones that were left were too small to make into jewellery so we made Baobab and Acacia trees using cork, wire and Tsavorite. After spending yesterday afternoon coming up with the best way to make these trees and attach the stones, we went to see the ladies with the foundations of each tree made. It was lovely to spend time with them and see how each and every person's trees differed from the other, making them so much more unique and individual. It's another remarkable project that CWC have created, and a beautiful way to involve and improve the lives of local families.

Photo Gallery





Asante Sana

Lastly, I wanted to say how unbelievably grateful I am to every single member of staff at both CWC and Lions Bluff. I have had the most unforgettable 2 weeks of my life, and it wouldn't have been half the experience had it not been for meeting you all and receiving such kindness, joy and warmth from the moment we walked in, right up until the moment we walked out.

I have learnt *so* much, and will carry every bit of knowledge I've gained with me, for the rest of my life. I am in complete admiration at the dedication and passion each of you hold, the pride you take in your work and the level of detail that goes into the smallest things, I've never been a part of anything like it, it's very special.

Somehow these past 2 weeks have felt like a lifetime in the absolute best way possible and I will look back on my time here with a deep, glowing sense of joy and fulfilment for many years to come. It's very hard to put into words just how meaningful this time has been to me, but please know it has left a lasting imprint on my heart.

You have an extremely special community of people surrounding you and I feel incredibly privileged to have experienced just the smallest slice of your lives and remarkable work out here. I know that my role was to leave an impact, but no one's left a bigger impact than all of you, on me, so from the very bottom of my heart, thank you.