

Incredible Schools

Eco-Study trips

By Happyness Jackson

Ecological studies are one of the lively approaches used to introduce youth to ecosystem management and conservation concepts, skills, and experiences that cannot be provided in the classroom. At Landscape and Conservation Mentors Organization (LCMO), we engage both village primary and secondary school pupils in practical environmental learning. In a semi-day walk, pupils study wildlife homes, habitat changes, and species biodiversity, within village reserves, Community-Based Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), and Katavi National Park (KANAPA). About 30% of pupils have been reached through eco-studies in the south of the Katavi-Rukwa ecosystem. Since, 2021 to date, we have visited seven local natural places within or neighboring their home villages: Mpimbwe WMA, KANAPA, Beekeeping Apiary, Majimoto Hot-spring, Village catchments, riverine habitats, and Katete water rapids within Fipa hills.

I remember on one of the eco-study trips when Mirumba primary school pupils gathered at school; enthusiastically waiting for the minibus to pick them up, while I was briefing them on their field trip. When the minibus arrived, it was amazing seeing pupils excitedly scrambling into the bus; everyone wanted to be first to embark on it.



Figure 1: Ms. Happyness, briefing Mirumba primary school club, about the trip into the Wamweru water catchment area at Mirumba.

When we arrived at the Wamweru Water catchment- the remnant which villagers use as a sacred area for rituals. We divided pupils into two groups of 15 members. Then groups walked briefly while observing the habitat and its composition. They identified animals that were observed present at Wamweru. There were a few mammals and several bird species in that area that evening. While watching and examining various birds at a

distance- I heard a voice just beside me, it was Adam Juma, a standard five pupil saying “*I thought a binocular is the big thing that cannot be held by hands, Wow! I can hold it using my hand and see the object...look at that beautiful cock like a bird with strong claws and a large sharp hooked beak! Is it an eagle? It took my mom’s chicks at home last week. I love this binocular*”.



Figure 2: Adam Juma (first right) with his fellow watching birds using binoculars

It’s so funny seeing the ambitious little kids passionately and enthusiastically, identifying and explaining different things they observe in their surrounding environment. “*Outdoor learning is the most effective activity and a vital means of connecting youth amongst themselves and with nature*”, said Dominic, their environment Teacher.

Our eco-study field drives are normally about 15 to 30 minutes return drives followed by

group study walks and activities in visited study sites.

After short walks, pupils with the LCMO team get together under the shade to discuss given questions about flora and fauna conservation or any other topic on that field trip. Some of the pupils’ observations include suggestions to their parents and village government to keep insisting on the importance of protecting and conserving village surroundings by planting trees for regular fuelwoods, future use, and upcoming generation.



Figure 3: Ms. Happyness helps pupils to identify bird species using the field guidebook, while others are recording the data

So far, this activity has been a better platform for students to come up with conservation-driven solutions addressing various environmental challenges.

Most pupils respond positively and promise to take the lead in the village conservation initiatives. *“We are so happy to learn about the natural environment while enjoying its surreal beauty. Now I will actively participate in protecting and conserving our village nature”* said Anna Martin the Mirumba Primary school head girl as she was giving the word of thanks to me and my colleagues from LCMO.

Eco-studies are practical means to instill a conservation mindset within youth in school, such that about 50% of all pupils pass their final exams for further environmental-related studies. And those who go back to the village tend to take part to consciously instill conservation knowledge and practices in their family and village members. Eco-studies are the great and right youth-engaging media of our Youth and Environment Education Program’s purpose to promote youth activity in conservation. From 2022 through 2023, pupils in 25 schools planted about 35,000 trees in schools, water source areas, health centers, and their home surroundings.



Figure 4: Pupils holding tree species saplings ready for planting in Usevya primary school environments

As active activists and advocates -Youth play a crucial role as they contribute to local global biodiversity conservation. Through eco-studies, LCMO feels confident to continue using this such practical and important media and mechanisms to change the youth and connect them to wildlife and mostly lion conservation. Although eco-studies require resources like cameras, binoculars, guidebooks, GPS, and transport coverage, LCMO is ambitious to continue investing in this citizen science-based youth activity. We still have more school villages to reach out to and invite passionate support of direct and indirect involvement of youth in conservation. Anyone interested in eco-studies to positively impact youth can provide generous monetary, material, and facilitation support by volunteering-joining our field team to maximize our youth program.