

## Study Abroad at Udzungwa Mountains National Park



## Parks and People: Conservation of Community and Nature



## 2013 Student Experiences and Reflections



## Introduction

Six weeks in Tanzania proved to be an incredible journey for everyone involved. From our arrival in the busy city of Dar es Salaam, to our transition to the developing Morogoro, to our final home at the Ecological Monitoring Centre nestled between the small, rural villages and the Udzungwa mountains, everything was an adventure. Add in our stops on safari at Mikumi National Park and at Stonetown in Zanzibar and it is hard to imagine a trip that covers a more varied set of landscapes and the cultures that fill them. Each place had its own lessons and experiences, along with many, many memories, that we all will take with us for the rest of our lives.



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## Dar Es Salaam

Our first taste of Tanzania came in the form of its largest city. We got to settle in at the Italian run CEFA hostel where we had rooftop views out over the city and Indian Ocean. We explored the sprawling city's beaches, downtown, and fish market, which held some eye-opening surprises as I think we all learned a little more about the local seafood than we wanted to know. We indulged in the new cuisines, like Indian and Ethiopian, which were a mix of the local cultures. We shopped, which was wild interacting with a developing country's cultural tendencies mixed into their version of a first-world shopping mall. It wasn't all exploration though, as our visit to the University of Dar es Salaam gave us our first taste of the ecology and wildlife that we would be working with in the coming weeks.



T. Mazurczyk

## Morogoro

Our stop in Morogoro began the transition to a more rural setting, which meant replacing the views of the Indian Oceans with the Uluguru mountains. Not exactly a bad trade off. Our trip up into the mountains showed us the rugged settings in which the locals make their living farming, something we all agreed we were in no physical shape to do. Our free time let us explore the post-colonial town further as we checked out the marketplace where a mix of everything is available; clothes, food, bed frames, along with the constant surprise of low ceilings. The structure of the town and our first assignment of a visual assessment of its structure showed the mixed colonial-era roundabout, Islamic mosques, and shanty-like shops and street vendors all crammed together creating a setting unlike anything that could be found in America.



A. McCay



E. Lyons



A. McCay

***“The barefoot passerby and the tattered clothed kids selling peanuts along the sides of major roads confirmed that despite the strange idea I had of big cities being mostly the same across continents, Tanzania, and most of the developing world’s cities are quite different.”***

## Ecological Monitoring Centre

The Monitoring Centre was our home away from home for four weeks. It was a summer camp structure with mountainous rainforests and Tanzanian villages as neighbors. We lived right in the middle of everything. The staff was ever friendly and a lot of the Swahili we picked up was through chats with staff as we bounced around working and waiting for our traditional Tanzanian meals. With a main road running right through the centre into Man'gula we had direct access to this new world we lived in. Visiting the village market and street side vendors became a daily activity, and the overwhelming friendliness of the villagers had us feeling very welcome and at home in our new setting. Some of the group even took up jogging on the main road, much to the entertainment of the locals, and to their assistance in one case as a student was flagged down to help push a tractor out of a ditch.



## Udzungwa Mountains National Park

Right across the street from our bunks, and staring us in the face every morning that we woke up were the towering mountains of the National Park. Covered in rainforest and one of the most biodiverse places on the planet we got to see firsthand the awesome nature of the place our projects were trying to save. We were lucky enough to enjoy what we all considered once-in-a-lifetime treks walking next to a group of Sanje Mangabey monkeys, swimming in the bottom of gigantic waterfalls, and camping overnight at the top of Sanje Falls. With the park's many overlooks into the valley it was easy to feel like we were on top of the world and we all have the pictures to prove it, too. Our proximity allowed us to meet and talk to the park director and lead ecologist, as well as get their feedback on our final projects. Something none of us expected but were pleasantly surprised by.



*"It's incredible to see that a community who has radically less material wealth and possessions than we have can be so astoundingly happy and generally healthy too. Certainly life is nowhere near perfect, but they have a sense of community, kinship with neighbors, and overall leisured happiness that I've never seen back in the States."*

## Village Mapping

Our work with Brian and Larry mapping the villages gave us the most prominent feeling of being immersed in the culture of the rural villages we were neighbors to. Divided into groups and sent out with a village elder we quickly learned the sense of community and way of life that these places held. This forced us to communicate and break any apprehension we held about working with a group of people very different than ourselves. By the end it was second nature to walk into a group of villagers and start talking with them. We looked forward to greeting and conversing with the person whose septic tank and latrine we were investigating next. At each day's end we would be cracking jokes with our guide and gathering around for pictures and exchanging contact info. I think they were as excited to spend time with us as we were with them!



B. Orland

## Mang'ula A

We were all a little wary on our first trip gathering data but really got to enjoy ourselves as the day progressed. It didn't hurt that our meeting point was a school, where we got to run, laugh, and play with all the local children. Their fascination with us was fascinating, and we were all wide eyes and smiles on both ends running and playing around like we were at recess ourselves.

## Mang'ula B

Our second journey we all progressed into our comfort zones, and started chatting with the villagers to the point we would run out of what little Swahili we could exchange, to their laughing enjoyment most of the time. To get the work done we crossed rivers, walked miles, and saw the girls receive a few marriage proposals. Anything in the name of complete GIS data!



B. Orland

## Tundu

By far the most developed village, we saw houses with cars, satellite dishes, and even crown molding on one occasion! How good the life of a sugarcane farmer can be! Situated outside of the park boundary the lack of forest was apparent and as we sweated up the hillside to the edges of Tundu we could see how much devastation had been done to the surrounding landscape.

## Kisawasawa

The smallest, and by far the popular choice of our group of the place we would like to settle out of all the villages, Kisawasawa was a quiet village with a little more living space for each person. Our first taste of some form of planning, Kisawasawa is set up on an informal grid, much to the pleasure of our mapping teams as an attack plan without the need for lots of backtracking was finally possible.



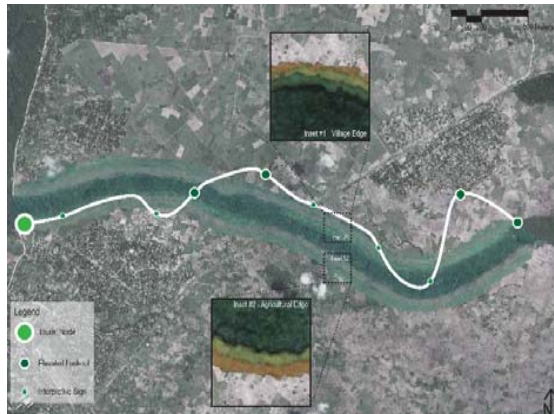
K. Fox

## Student Projects

### Magombero Wildlife Corridor

*Devon Beekler, Leah Grosso, Emily Paskewicz*

Conservation around the Udzungwa Mountains relies heavily on the connection of isolated areas of forest cover. The Magombero Wildlife Corridor looks at reconnecting the Magombero Forest on the valley floor with the National Park by regrowing wildlife habitat between the two. In doing so, the project attempts to re-open travel corridors for wildlife while also including economic opportunities for the bordering villages through agriculture and a tourist destination centered around education about the local culture and wildlife.



### Economic Development & Planning Strategies: Mang'ula A

*Ryan Hitchcock & Thomas Lauro*

With tourism viewed as a possible economic driver of change for the villages and park, planning for future growth inside the current village structure is paramount. By looking at various scenarios of residential planning, road construction, hotel development, and ecotourism development, light can be shed on how these possible scenarios will affect Mang'ula A. This project provides examples of how the above mentioned changes to the village structure can be planned and implemented to best handle possible economic growth.



### Population Growth in Kisawasawa: Implications of Current and Alternative Food Production Methods

*Eric Lyons & Alex McCay*

With the future of food and fuel security threatened by rapid population growth in the villages bordering the park, changing current land-use practices will soon be necessary. By modeling the outcome of scenarios based on current and increased methods of agricultural production, community planning design, and their effect on land-use designation in Kisawasawa, we are able to provide insight for the future. Creating timelines on the village's population capacity, along with introducing agricultural technologies that may provide a more secure future, can begin the conversation on preparation for the local villages.

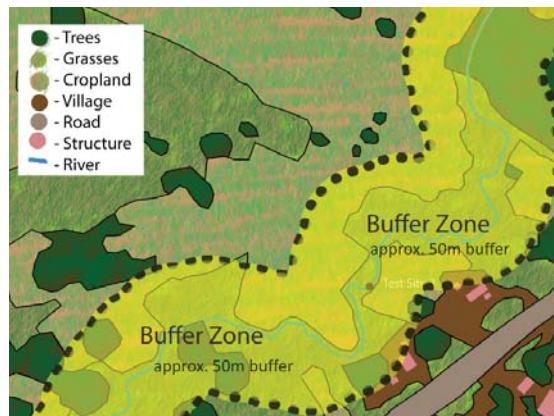


## Student Projects, Cont.

### Understanding Njokamoni

Aaron Dennis

The Njokamoni river runs out of the National Park providing water for consumption and irrigation to Mang'ula A and Mang'ula B. By studying the quality of the water at different points throughout the valley and mapping disturbance and pollution, insight is gained on how activities around the river affect its quality. Addressing these disturbances and the issues they cause through landscape interventions opens the door for the possibility of creating a healthier river system and water supply.



### The Living Village

Tara Mazurczyk

The villager's understanding of how their daily activities effect the local ecosystems is critical to creating a more sustainable interface between the two. A community demonstration center which provides educational opportunities on using natural resources more efficiently creates a centralized area to focus this type of effort. With specific demonstrations on wood consumption, efficient cooking methods, beekeeping, medicinal plants, and thatching grasses, the center provides an area for educational instruction and social interaction.



*“By having the experiences of walking through villages, going on tourist vacations, and reading background information we have reached a level of understanding that most never reach. We have in-depth knowledge about different aspects meaning we can reach conclusions that take on multiple perspectives to accommodate the needs of as many people as possible.”*

*“It is important that students apply knowledge to practical situations that could have a vast impact on communities in need. By immersing myself in a foreign culture, I was able adjust to my surroundings and utilize design theory to develop a solution to an impending issue.”*

*“As a service-working student, my job is not to propose answers, but to create ideas that may light the spark for others. The villager organizations here may never implement my design idea, but it may serve to open up the possibilities for other thoughts and start people imagining.”*

## World Environment Day

Celebrating World Environment Day in the village of Mwaya had its highs and lows. Getting there slightly late and somehow still being 3 hours early was one. Being surrounded by hundreds of school children all fixated on the group of wazungu that walked in was another. It was a mob all trying to play and chase after whichever one of us would start something new with them. Someone would take a picture and get swarmed, another would pick one up on their arm and suddenly have 30 attached to them. One of our favorite parts of the trip by far. Once the event finally started, we were treated to short skits by different school groups competing for cookware and plastic chairs for their school and troupes dancing traditional dances of the area to handmade drums and whistles. It was wild to say the least.



B. Orland

## Mikumi National Park

On Safari we had the chance to get up close and personal with the wildlife that has made Tanzania famous. Elephants, Zebras, Giraffes, and even a very close (but safe) encounter with two large male lions were just part of the overall experience. We stayed in fantastic tented camps on Stanley's Kopje, a slight hill located remotely out in the savanna, which gave our front porches a seemingly endless view out over the grasslands. We all rejoiced to have a few creature comforts such as hot water and sitting toilets for a few days, and couldn't believe it when we had sandwiches with cheese for lunch. By the end our cameras were nearly worn out, and we couldn't believe the amount of other wildlife like birds and insects that were just as interesting as the large animals but fail to garner anywhere near the same amount of attention.



A. McCay

## Zanzibar

The white sand beaches on the island were our reward for a grueling week of work leading up to our final projects and presentations. Staying in Stonetown, surrounded by stunning Islamic architecture, was our final experience of the trip. We took the time to vacation in what we found was a definite tourist destination. A small wooden boat ferried us out to a private island where we snorkeled on coral reefs and lounged on the beach. We took a spice tour to see all the plants that made Zanzibar famous in its heyday. The boys fished for lunch out on the ocean, and returned a little greener than they had started, and everyone weighed their bags down with souvenirs for mom, dad, grandma, and most importantly themselves.



A. McCay



# Study Abroad at Udzungwa Mountains National Park - May 12 to June 21, 2013

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