

## DAVIS EXPEDITION FUND

### REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT

**Expedition/Project Title:** Tropical Biology Association Kenya 2013

**Travel Dates:** 31/08/2012 – 02/10/2012

**Location:** Segera Ranch, Laikipia Country, Kenya

**Group Members:** Catherine McNicol

**Aims:** To learn about savannah ecosystems & to design, carry out and present a short research project

---

#### **Outcome (not less than 300 words):-**

The course with the Tropical Biology Association was a hugely beneficial and enjoyable learning experience. To study savannah ecology is interesting in itself, but to be able to learn about theories in the classroom then immediately test them in the field was a unique opportunity. This learning environment allowed me to apply survey techniques and discover their benefits and flaws with the support of experienced researchers.

The range of knowledge provided by lecturers was outstanding and I felt the course covered all areas of interest, from insect pollination to elephant management. This allowed me to learn about areas of savannah ecology I had never considered for example the medicinal uses of plants. We were also fortunate enough to receive lectures from guest speakers from external organisations including African Wildlife Foundation. The discussions that arose from all lectures were always interesting due to the range of students' knowledge and the enthusiasm of the lecturers about their own research. This was definitely a bonus for everyone involved. As well as ecological education, I found the course improved my ability to interpret data and perform simple statistics, a skill I will continue to find useful.

Segera Ranch where we were situated was excellent for our studies due to its well documented history of burning and cattle grazing. This allowed us to make direct comparisons and understand what shaped the vegetation patterns we could see. The area was also host to a vast array of wildlife which enable me to improve my bird and mammal identification and tracking skills.

As a result I focussed my research project on mammal abundance in relation to cattle herding activity. This was performed in the latter half of the course in small groups. The exercise was extremely interesting and allowed us to design a project from start to finish. It was a good learning experience and taught us to plan to a tight schedule but be flexible with weather conditions and techniques. Furthermore it allowed us to make mistakes, find out how to rectify them and approach our question from different angles. I thoroughly enjoyed this aspect and find the best lessons are learned from mistakes and experience.

The continued group work and cooperation was extremely enjoyable and allowed me to form close bonds with the students on the course. The mixture of African and European students meant that conversation was never lacking and I learned more than I could have imagined about other cultures and countries. This social aspect of the course made the experience all the more enjoyable and I am confident that the connections I have made, both personally and academically, will remain strong.

I hope that the Tropical Biology Association continue to educate like-minded individuals from around the world and I would strongly recommend their courses. I would like to thank the Davis Expedition Fund once again for its financial support, without which this opportunity would not have been possible.