

Daniel Wood
3 Anne Greenwood Close
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10th August 2000

Dear The James Rennie Bequest

TROPICAL BIOLOGY ASSOCIATION FIELD COURSE: KENYA

My name is Daniel Wood, a final year student at Edinburgh University. I attended the TBA field course to Kenya from the 21st June to the 22nd July 2000. In this month we covered a broad range of topics which I found very enjoyable and undoubtedly I have never learnt so much in a month.

We started the course by staying a week at the Taita Discovery Centre in the south-east of the country. Here we were given a variety of lectures and field exercises. The highlight at Taita for me (and probably for the course as a whole) was the experience of relating aspects of biology that we were discussing together and then seeing the biology in action in the field. This made learning so much easier and more interesting and worthwhile for me. My favourite exercise of this first week was the day we were practising asking questions. In-groups, we collected a variety of insects from the surrounding area. We then came back to camp and discussed with each other how we thought the insects were adapted to their surroundings by asking questions about them. I found that this exercise was a very helpful introduction into developing ideas for ourselves, which continued throughout the course.

The last three weeks were spent at Lake Navaisha just a couple of hours north of Nairobi. As a result of this long stay I think I have a very good understanding of the regions biology through the course. The diversity of the content of lectures/seminars appealed to me. I found them all a great introduction/overview to different aspects of biology. In particular I really enjoyed a lecture on Restoration Ecology given by an American guest speaker, Truman Young. We took a number of day trips to see the surrounding area. The most memorable for me was the day we visited Lake Nakuro, since I had never been to a national park like this one (e.g. hundreds and thousands of flamingos, Rhinos etc) and I was gob smacked by it all. Another day trip, which I found very interesting, was the day we visited a local wildlife protection group at a place called Kinagop. It helped me understand how conservation work can work at a local community level with the enthusiasm the local people showed but the experience also showed a lot of barriers preventing their enthusiasm (i.e. land use/ownership, money and education).

Probably the greatest thing about the course was the opportunities I got from it. For example the opportunity for me to do a project in Hells Gate National Park was particularly special. The National Park is unusual in that it is possible to explore it on foot. With a partner, I spent two weeks doing a project on the vigilance behaviour of Grants Gazelles in different group's structure. We observed the Gazelle for nearly a week during which we were surrounded by the wildlife of the park, an experience I will never forget.

Another area of the course I feel I gained greatly from was the fact that there were so many people of different nationalities. Not only was it interesting from a biology point of view hearing different personal experiences/views but also from a cultural aspect I think I learnt enormously.

Having completed the TBA course I feel very privileged with the opportunities it has given me, I am now happier and clearer with the biology I want to study and I would highly recommend anyone studying zoology or ecology to do a course like this one. None of this would have been possible without financial help so I owe many thanks to the support you gave me.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to be 'J. Wood'.