



NATURE NIGHTS REPORT

MAY 2021



Prepared by:

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Position:

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BACKGROUND

Our Nature Nights (NN) programme is an experiential learning camp that gave 20 of the most active students from our Conservation Clubs a “school camp” type of experience to develop their conservation and life skills. The group camps in tents within Lupande Game Management Area (GMA) with basic facilities. We ran activities such as team building, leadership, communication and conservation exercises, all the while being exposed to the wildlife and nature. The main aim of these camps to enable students to experience nature differently and experience different challenges which build life skills.

We ran our most recent Nature Nights programme from Monday 3rd to Friday the 7th of May with 2 groups of 10 students from Kakumbi and Nsefu zones running back-to-back. Group 1 participated from Monday through to Wednesday then the 2nd group participated from Wednesday to Friday. The special theme for the two trips was Elephants.

The Nature Nights programme is managed by the Conservation Education Manager with 2 Community Conservation Educators (CCEs) who are the facilitators, a professional guide and an armed wildlife scout for nature walks and security. Each group also had a teacher from their school as a chaperone.

PARTICIPANTS

Group 1 – Kakumbi Zone

This 1st group of 10 students from grades 7 - 9 came from 3 different schools in Kakumbi zone: Mwandakwisano Primary, Kakumbi Primary and Katemo Primary schools. Group 1 joined the programme from Monday through to Wednesday. The CCEs running this group were Stanley Mwanza and Daniel Zulu. Our new Conservation Outreach Coordinator, Martin Mulanda, also joined this group. They were chaperoned by Kakumbi Primary teacher Mr Zirimhana Nkhoma.





Group 2 – Nsefu Zone

All 10 students in Group 2 were from Nsefu Day Secondary School from grades 9 - 12. The CCEs facilitating this group were John Sakala and Anderson Chulu and the group was chaperoned by Mrs Tembo from Nsefu Primary School. This group joined the programme from Wednesday to Friday.



Support staff

Andrew Kamanga (Vehicle Supervisor and Logistics Officer) helped facilitate the pick-up and drop-off of students as well as purchasing supplies. Naomi Sakala (Domestic Staff) was the cook for the meals on the programme. Other non-Chipembele staff included Milton Siyapedwa who was our Scout for the programme, Kelvin Zulu was the walking safari guide for the wildlife walks conducted on 4 mornings of the programme.

PROGRAMME CONTENT

Each group of 10 students received the same 3-day programme, which entailed ice-breakers, team building activities, survival skill challenges as well as conservation-based activities.

This year the Nature Nights Programme was themed on Elephants.

Day 1

On arrival the students started with ice breaker games, this helps them to get to know each other better so they can perform well as a team in the upcoming challenges. Students were then required to set up a tent the same as the example provided. The students had never set up a tent before so this builds problem-solving skills as well as attention to detail to ensure everything on the tent is exactly the same as the example. Before lunch, the group received an introduction to the use of field guides and binoculars before going to the nearby lagoon to identify and record the different species they saw. This included elephants in the adjacent lagoon



which provided a tremendous learning opportunity for the students. They learned about elephant biology, behaviour and ecology.



For the afternoon session, the students worked through a series of problem-solving challenges, games and activities which required teamwork, leadership and communication. After the exercises were completed, group discussions were held around topics such as What is good leadership? How do we communicate effectively? How do we work as a team? The day was rounded off with a night drive to view some of the nocturnal species of the area including up-close interactions with elephants. It instigated a discussion on elephant interactions in the villages and fields, and the solutions to human-elephant conflict.



Day 2

For the morning session the groups were split in two with 5 students going on a nature walk with a professional walking safari guide. This gave the students a much different experience with wildlife and nature than they have been exposed to in their home/village environments.



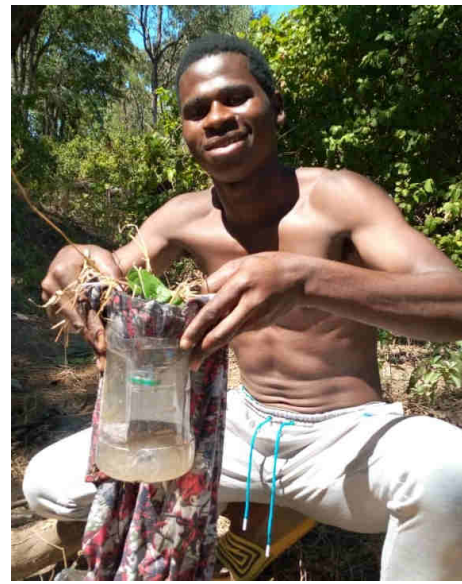
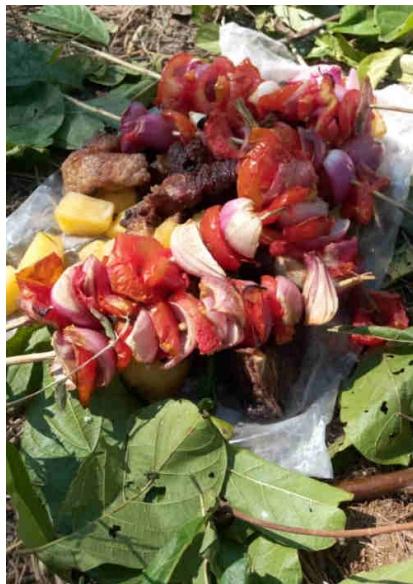
The second half of the group conducted a wildlife survey at the lagoon before doing a track identification and tracking exercise. This group learnt to read the tracks of animals identifying; what it was, the direction it was headed, how many animals there were and how long ago they passed. This not only improves their ID skills it also involves a lot of critical thinking.





Once the walkers had returned there was a light breakfast before the students undertook the Survival Challenge. The Survival Challenge gives the students 4 hours to complete a set of tasks needed to survive short-term in the bush. The group was split into two groups of 5 and their 1st task was to start a fire using flint. This fire burns through a rope which drops their food rations high up in a tree. The rations include some meat, flour, tomatoes, onions, potatoes and some salt.

The 2nd task was to figure out how to prepare and cook the food without any cooking implements. The 3rd and 4th tasks were to construct a water filtration device and a shelter for their team for the nights.



Once all the tasks were completed the student's shelters were tested for how watertight they were with buckets of water thrown over the shelter with the students inside. This is a fun way to finish the challenge as most shelters are not very watertight. The students then get to enjoy the 'survival meal' they have cooked.





This challenge pushed students out of their comfort zones and tested their resilience. It is very interesting to watch as frustration hits the teams and how they handle it. While probably the most difficult of the tasks the students face at Nature Nights it is also one of their favourite activities.

Once the Survival Challenge was complete the students engaged in a short workshop/discussion around compassion and valuing life.

We conducted an in-camp activity looking at how elephants communicate and the sizes of elephants.

The day ended with a nature study of the lagoon identifying different animal and bird species. Elephants were again seen in the water. The night activity conducted around the campfire looked at peer pressure and how to avoid being pressured into doing things that may not be beneficial to you.

Day 3

Day 3 was a half-day with the groups swapping activities from the day before; wildlife walkers from day 2 doing the tracking exercise and vice versa. Once this was complete there was a group discussion around what they had learnt during the programme, the different emotions they went through and how they handled themselves. We finished up with a monitoring and evaluation questionnaire before packing up and receiving Group 2.

Group 2 received the same programme as Group 1 apart from the tent set-up exercise. Instead, they did the camp pack-up.





MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Students were surveyed with a questionnaire to assess perceptions on skill development as well as find out which activities were most enjoyed and most impactful. Results from the surveys are summarised below:

- All students described the outing as something they will never forget. Some students admitted being frustrated during activities that tested their limits such as water filtration and lighting of a campfire using flint to cook their food. During reflection, they realised why such activities are essential in a survival situation.
- For skill development, students rated themselves as having an overall skill improvement of 38.9%. Broken down to the different skill sets it equates to; leadership skills 33%, communication skills 32.5%, teamwork 41%, problem-solving 41% and knowledge on vegetation and wildlife 47%.
- Notable experiences they enjoyed include sleeping in a tent, taking nature walks, and game drives.
- The activities they enjoyed most were bird watching and identification, tracking, and identifying dung of animals.
- All students rated their overall experience above 5 on a scale of 1-10 (1=poor | 10=excellent). With 40% of the students rating their experience 10/10.
- All students enjoyed learning more about elephants and expressed a greater understanding of elephant conflict issues, why they arise and some of the solutions.
- The most recommended improvement was to increase the number of days of Nature-Night days which resounded at 85%.



CONCLUSION

I am very happy with how the Nature Nights programme has developed in the years I have been overseeing it, we have shifted the programme to be a more experiential learning experience as well as including different activities which improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills. We had two new educators who were involved in the programme for the first time and I am happy with their progress. I firmly believe we achieved our goal of exposing students to nature on a different level, improving their skills which exposing them to new experiences.





Our Elephant themed programme was a success with new elephant communication exercises and great up close and personal elephant experiences on the wildlife walks, night drives and lagoon wildlife surveys. The students from these areas are usually only exposed to the negative side of elephants through crop-raiding and other Human-wildlife conflicts, I believe the students have seen the gentle side of elephants and have been left with increased love and respect for these giants.

Improvements

I believe it is time to update the accompanying student activity booklet which students complete with the programme. A professional revamp could make the booklet more interesting for the students and also be a keepsake for them. We probably have too many different activities for the allocated time, which resulted in some being left out. It is difficult to judge how long it will take students to complete tasks as for some groups it could take 10 minutes and another group 40 minutes. It is important to have back up activities but I think a critical review of activities to ensure the most impactful activities are prioritised and removing low impact activities would be beneficial.

Sponsorship by Future for Elephants

Our sincere thanks go to Future for Elephants for kindly and generously sponsoring this programme.

