

HAKUNA MATATA

Kenya Newsletter November 2013



Ophélie Bertrand gains valuable experience volunteering at the Conservation Project in Kenya



19-year-old Ophélie Bertrand, from South-Western France, decided to sign up to spend 2 months volunteering at the Projects Abroad Conservation Project in Kenya. As part of a requirement for her last year of studies, Ophélie had to intern in a field relating to animals. "I have always dreamed of becoming a zoo attendant one day so volunteering at the Conservation Project will be a really valuable experience for my future."

During her 2 months stay in Kenya, Ophélie volunteered at the Kigio Wildlife Conservancy. Learning about both animal and environmental conservation, Ophélie has had the privilege to work with a large variety of animal species, however work at the conservancy focuses primarily on the conservation of the Rostchild giraffe.

The Rostchild giraffe, an endangered species, has its home at Kigio where Ophélie and fellow volunteers had the opportunity to observe them closely to record their feeding habits, the company they keep, routes they travel and also continuous identification through their patterns. With the help of the research scientist, Tonny Kipkurui and the rangers, Ophélie has had plenty to do in her days. "We can walk around collecting data from the camera traps, check faults on the fence, bird survey and identification, animal footprints and biomass identification. We also have a tree nursery that we maintain and when they are of age we plant them in the conservancy and even at schools in the area.

Staying with the local staff at Kigio, Ophélie has had the chance to learn about Kenyan culture first hand: "There is a big a difference between the two cultures but we are lucky that the locals we work and stay with here are very helpful in explaining the differences. It took time before I could get used to the language, the transport system is also different but the effort has been worth it."

When she is not at work Ophélie finds time to visit the country: "I've been to different places, the vegetation and nature of this country is breathtaking. The Maasai Mara trip was the peak and seeing the animals so close was tremendous." Her time at the conservancy is nearing an end and as she plans on resuming her studies, Kenya will forever be embedded in her life and memories. Ophélie advises future volunteers to be motivated and have the determination to discover another country.

We hope great stories like these inspire others to help Projects Abroad to make a difference, and by doing so, learn something themselves along the way.

Nick van de Vel gains valuable experience while volunteering at a local school in Kenya

"I've always dreamt of working abroad with kids so this experience has been a dream come true." Before travelling to Kenya, 21-year-old Nick van de Vel from Belgium was living in a small village just outside Antwerp. For the past 3 years Nick has been working in a potato factory and wanted to do something different. For Nick, Projects Abroad presented an opportunity to bring his dreams to reality. With this in mind, Nick signed up to spend 3 months volunteering at the Projects Abroad Care Project in Nakuru.



Throughout his 3 month's stay, Nick worked at the Cherish Exchange Foundation, a care centre and school for the local street and slum children. The help from Nick and other volunteers has been instrumental in the running of the school: "They don't have the money to pay a lot of teachers so with the help from volunteers they can give the kids the attention they need. For the time I've been here we have made a huge difference; my class is improving and I have gotten closer to the children - forming relationships which have made it easier to work and understand them better."

The centre plays a huge role in the community; the main aim is to keep the kids off the street and away from crime and drugs. In addition, the children are taught the foundations of learning, making it easier for them to join formal school later; they are also given a nutritional lunch. "During the school day, I teach subjects like English, maths, science and social studies but also just being there for the kids, playing with them and helping them with personal problems - some kids don't have a family so they need someone around that can give them the attention they need." Apart from his work at the care centre, Nick has immersed himself into the Kenyan way of life despite the existing cultural differences, "There are a lot off differences but that has been one of the most beautiful parts of my stay here - exploring another culture and meeting new people has made it a lovely experience. My host mom has been very helpful, especially in teaching me about Kenyan culture and the local way of life. The people here are always friendly and positive."

After a rewarding 3 months in Kenya, Nick is already making plans to return: "I'm planning to stay and work in Kenya for a couple of years, this experience has helped me figure out what I want with my life - helping people and working in the social sector ." For future volunteers, Nick has this piece of advice to give: "Explore the country and the culture and just enjoy every second that you are in the country."

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Bike Race

Cherish Exchange Foundation is a small placement that partners with Projects Abroad Kenya taking care of over 70 needy children. Recently the foundations organised a bicycle race over the weekend to raise funds for the orphanage. Aware of the existing situation, volunteers working at the placement; Jessica Kenny (USA) and Nick van de Vel (Belgium) recruited other Projects Abroad volunteers and friends in helping to successfully arrange the race.

Having six categories; namely elite, black mamba, ladies, non-g geared bike, juniors, veterans and school students, the race attracted over 50 participants. The top ten winners were awarded with over 100,000 Kenyan shillings.



A new projector for the Conservation Project



Life in Kigio keeps on changing for the better; first it was the camera traps that have helped prove some rare and elusive animals like the leopard and others do exist in the conservancy. Last week while visiting Kenya, Claire Howlett the Operations Manager for Kenya, Peru Tanzania , Bolivia and Ecuador brought with her a projector for the Conservation Project. The projector will help the head research Scientist Tonny Kipkurui in holding PowerPoint presentations on a monthly basis. The first presentation was held on the night of 14th November that showcased all the effort that has been put behind saving the Rothschild giraffe; among other activities taking place in the conservancy. Projects Abroad Conservation volunteers will be involved in preparing these presentations and the projector will be useful especially in the community outreach sessions where they will be wooing the neighboring communities to be more responsible in taking care of the environment. Besides this, the volunteers have been involved in planting trees for free in the environs next to the conservancy. The trees are grown and maintained in a tree nursery in the conservancy. These species of trees are preferred due to their ability of fast growth as well as they are able to provide timber and fire wood, they have been instrumental in complementing and offering an alternative to the indigenous species that are not only hard to grow but also almost in extinction.