



The Status of Conservation Education in Africa

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Editorial

Conservation and education are like twins trying to surmount all odds in many countries of Africa. Right slap bang in the middle is the Ebola virus threatening to undo years of hard work done by a legion of conservationists and educators for biodiversity conservation. Being the cradle of human civilization confers some resilience to the fragile continent.

There are 5 global eco-regions regarded as top conservation priorities in Africa, and each one has a center for conservation studies. Established in 1962, the College of Wildlife Management at Mweka, Tanzania, has trained more than 5000 wildlife managers from 52 countries till date in the Eastern Arc Montane eco-region. The Upper and Lower Guinea eco-region is represented by the Sapo Conservation Center (SCC) in the eponymous National Park in Liberia and the A.P. Levenits Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI), Jos, Nigeria. The SCC offers training programs of up to 2 weeks duration, 2 to 3 times a year for students and academic instructors from the University of Liberia, Monrovia, Forestry Training Institute, Tubmanburg and Nimba County Community College, Nimba. The APLORI, founded in 2002, is a premier institute of ornithological research and conservation training in West Africa, and 66 graduates have left its portals to take up crucial responsibilities in the government, civil society and academia in Africa. The Cape Fynbos eco-region famed for its restioid, ericoid and proteoid components hosts the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) for training managers and conservationists in diverse fields such as nature-based tourism, trans-frontier conservation area management and capacity building at the community level. SAWC is

situated in South Africa in a natural low veld environment, 10km west of the Orpen Gate of the Kruger National Park. The Albertine Rift Montane eco-region with flagship endangered species such as the Mountain and Eastern Lowland gorillas, saw the launch of a conservation primary school in Ilima, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in September 2013; building 14 other unique primary schools over a period of 10 years in key landscapes in Africa is a commitment of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF). Last but not the least, the Ethiopian highlands eco-region, houses species like the Ethiopian wolf and is served by the Wondo Genet College of Forestry in southern Ethiopia to train conservation professionals in the Horn of Africa region and beyond.

It is easy to suppose good conservation science originates from the West, and hard to fathom if a pan-African curriculum would work well, given that conservation is mired in political compulsions, economic challenges and social upheavals across Africa. Much as each program is contextually different, a unifying theme would be the best practices in developing and delivering a curriculum in conservation biology that would provide equal opportunities to conservation professionals across Africa. Yet there are some remarkable success stories in conservation education. It's a pointer that Africa is not just a safari destination, but also, a place for conservation practitioners.

Given that conservation education is a top priority for a new generation of educated Africans aware of biodiversity benefits, food security and alternate livelihoods, it would be timely if conservation educators improved upon the content, delivery and scope of programs in conservation biology with a Pan-African curriculum.