

Close Encounters of the Endangered Kind



Episode IX: The 10% Plan by Tricia Berry

After our made-to-order breakfast at the guest cottage, we popped over to the hangar where the Tsavo pilots keep their four reconnaissance planes. As luck would have it, we were visiting just weeks before the four-seater leased plane was being replaced by a fourth two-seater. That meant Debbie, Joe and I could all fly together during a typical day's flight to survey the park. From the plane we spotted the larger animals: giraffes, Cape buffalo, and many elephants. We thought some looked to be Big Tuskers, but Nick told us they were "emerging" tuskers, younger bulls that still needed a few years of growth in overall size and tusk length to be classified as a big tusker.

We saw areas of Tsavo that were flat and other areas of undulating hills and gorges. From the air looking south, above an invisible bank of clouds, we saw the snowy peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, the dormant volcano just over the border in Tanzania. It is the highest single free-standing mountain above sea level in the world. Very impressive. Hats off to anyone who gets in shape to climb it!



The trusty four-seater plane we used to help survey Tsavo from the air

After we landed, we met with another crucial member of the Tsavo Trust conservation team, Nicholas Njogu.

The rest of our day was spent with Nicholas visiting the Kamungi Community Conservancy, (a village of more than 1,100 people) on the northern boundary of the Tsavo Conservancy Area near where the Tsavo Trust headquarters are located.

Critical to the success of conservation efforts to protect endangered species, such as elephants, is listening to and engaging with communities living next to national parks. If the people living close to these animals don't find benefits to their

lives and livelihoods, they are less likely to be supportive of conservation efforts. Nicholas is currently Tsavo Trust's link to that community engagement.

We traveled with Nicholas to see the Kamungi community's projects developed and coordinated by Tsavo Trust. Most everyone we ran into on those dusty red roads knew Nicholas and he knew them and their circumstances. First stop was the small Kamungi Community Center. It was built around a bore hole that provided water to anyone in the community who brought water cans to fill. Water is a precious commodity in this arid region of Africa.

Joe asked one man how many times a week he rode his bicycle, his only form of transportation, to fill the two large yellow, plastic containers he was ferrying back and forth from home. This man said he needed to make five bicycle trips a day to get enough water for his home and family.

We met the woman in charge of the Community Center and she proudly gave us a tour. One area had a demonstration garden which taught climate-smart farming practices and introduced the community to various types of plants that could make the farmers money but not be attractive to elephants. As we left we met two young men interning to be chefs. They were making us lunch for when we returned later that day.



Getting a tour of the Tsavo Trust Community Center, a hub for climate-smart agriculture.

Next we visited a privately owned farm that was part of Tsavo Trust's innovative new program call the 10% Plan. The plan was devised by Richard Moller to ameliorate human-elephant conflict between farmers and crop-raiding elephants. Farmers are afraid of and dislike elephants because they come onto their property and feed on and trample crops, break into grain storage buildings, destroy homes, and sometimes injure and kill people. Due to this, many farmers have no interest in protecting elephants and would prefer to see them all eradicated. Finding solutions to human-elephant conflict goes a long way towards ensuring the protection of elephants and other wildlife.

The 10% plan is an agreement between Tsavo Trust and a farmer. The Trust agrees to erect and manage an elephant-proof fence on 10% of the farmer's land if the farmer agrees to allow elephants and other wildlife free access to the remaining 90% of his land. The farmer lives, plants crops and raises livestock in his 10% of land within the electric fencing. The fence provides protection for his livestock, house and family, as well as his crops, which grow and mature to the harvesting stage without being eaten or trampled. The families participating are also given a small solar panel to provide electricity to their homes.

Where the "10% Plan" has been employed, the farmers have experienced a higher crop yield and greater earnings than if the

crops had been planted on 100% of the unprotected property. This is a win-win solution and more and more local farmers are requesting a chance to participate, the only limiting factor is the money needed to do it. We all hope the success of Richard's "10% Plan" in Tsavo might lead to adoption of the program throughout elephant-range countries to the benefit of farmers and elephants alike. I was humbled imagining the impact Richard's experiment may have on reducing current and future human-elephant conflict.



We came to understand that elephants are not always welcome visitors.

Next Episode:

Wheelbarrows and Scorpions

They told him they had been sent home to get the money their parents owed the school before they could continue their studies. One boy on a bike, the only one not wearing the school uniform, was asked why he wasn't in school.

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