

Owl for a Penny

I will share with you on this subject my own experiences and will use our conservation programmes to highlight aspects of this topic “nature protection” and I hope you can draw parallels for application across the diverse situations represented in this forum.

I will first describe as an example, the uniqueness of the ecosystem we are working to protect at the coast of Kenya.

I will then highlight some of the challenges it is facing, and some of the interventions we are employing to protect nature.

Finally, I will discuss the faith aspect in nature protection; albeit from the Christian perspective from which parallels can be drawn across other faiths.

Slide one

At the coast of Kenya lies a complex ecosystem that brings together diverse habitats and unique biodiversity in an intrinsic relationship. This ecosystem is designated as a

- UNESCO Biosphere reserve
- Key Biodiversity Area
- Important Bird Area
- Forest Reserve
- Marine Reserve

In this ecosystem, Africa’s oldest Marine park comprising of a very rich coral reef is connected to one of Africa’s most important forests for bird conservation (Arabuko-Sokoke Forest) by an inter-tidal zone known to be one of the world’s most productive mangrove ecosystem (Mida Creek)

However, let me concentrate on the forest side due to time constraints.

Slide two

- At 420 km sq, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is the largest remnant of coastal dry forest that once spanned the entire East African Coast from Somali to the North down to Mozambique to the South...
- It is now survived by small patches of which Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is the largest.
- It has very interesting vegetation types ranging from Mangrove forest to the South East to a dense thicket (Cynometra) to the West
- The vegetation types dramatically change with the soil types
 - Mixed Forest – on the eastern side on the wetter coastal sands – supports a diversity of tree species
 - Brachystegia Forest – a central belt of open woodland on infertile, white sands
 - Cyanometra Thicket – largest area of dense, shady forest

Slide three

It is home for six threatened bird species.....

- The smallest owl in Africa (about 15 cm in full length) prefers the dense cynometra forest to the north and western sides of the forest. Among the many mysteries about the Sokoke scops owl is the fact that its nest has not yet been discovered. (In Dec we saw the youngest SSO ever in the forest). It likely breeds in holes of the Silver oak (*brachylaena huilensis*). This owl is also found in Usambara mountains in Tanzania.
- The Clarke's weaver – endemic to the Kenya coast. Its nest was only discovered in 2013 in sedges in seasonal swamps in Dakatcha woodland; the only other habitat where it occurs.

Slide Four - An elephant nor a shrew

- The Golden-rumped sengi was known as the Golden-rumped elephant shrew until it was recently re-classified. Sengis are not related to shrews but in fact distantly related to elephants. They are known to have been around for at least 50 million years
- These are found in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and the Dakatcha Woodland
- There are many other very interesting stories of wildlife that we can talk about.....

Slide Six

Local people have depended on the forest resources for their livelihoods for many years.....

- **Wood Products** - The Silver oak (remember is most preferred by the scops owl) is the most sought for its quality wood carvings that have a ready market in the tourist driven economy of the coast region (souvenirs)
- **Agricultural expansion** - The cynometra thicket preferred by the owls grows in the best soils for pineapple production (one of the main crops).
- **An adjudication process** is fast fragmenting the Dakatcha woodland and threatening the existence of all the three species mentioned.
- **Energy needs** - Indigenous hardwoods produce the best charcoal. The most sought for wood; *Newtonia hildebrandtii* is almost completely logged out of Dakatcha woodland

These are normal genuine needs that need to be met everyday. The pressure however keeps increasing due to various factors that include....

- Population growth
- Technological advancement
- Monetization of the economy

Slide Seven

Humans activities are the main reason the environment is getting degraded this first.

- For poor local communities that live on daily earning's, conservation is seen as an unnecessary luxury.
- To the government the main question is how much does the owl contribute to the GDP?
- The issue we are dealing with here is the drivers of our values.

- What drives the choices we make?

Slide Eight

People will value what they know very well...

Awareness and Education – A Rocha has been engaging students and Community Groups in environmental education for the past 20 years. There has been significant outcomes of this intervention with many students opting to study environmental studies.

However the rate of degradation surpasses the impact of environmental education.

Slide Nine

Direct benefits can motivate people to protect nature - It is only the “useful” that have names.

- Poor people needing to satisfy immediate needs will not prioritize nature protection
- How can we have our cake and eat it?

However, The “want more” phenomenon still push people to exploit the resources

Slide Ten

This brings us to the fundamental question: What does the owner say about His earth?

This is where true transformation takes place

Biblical-base Creation Stewardship Trainings in churches

- ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.**’ [Gen 2:15]
- Genesis 1: 26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, **so that** they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

Farming God’s Way with communities

Six Biblical Keys

- Acknowledge God and God Alone - Proverbs 3:5,6
- Consider your Ways - Haggai 1:2-11
- Understanding God's All Sufficiency - 2Corinthians 9:8
- What you Sow you Will Reap - 2Thessalonians 3:10
- Bringing the Tithes and Offerings to God - Matthew 6:21
- Stake your Claim - 2 Chronicles 7:14