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Girls dominate the 2017 Simba Scholars intake

When we asked the villagers which benefits they would most value from living alongside wildlife, education was one of the top priorities. Therefore, we invest in primary schools, but also enable poor students to attend secondary school. Each year, six deserving children from pastoral communities are chosen to receive Simba Scholarships, which pay the full way through secondary school (each one costs around US\$2,000). When this programme began, there was a lot of discussion in the community about whether girls should be included, as some villagers felt they might not do as well and should not be invested in. However, there is a huge amount of evidence showing the value of educating girls, so we were insistent that girls be given an equal chance to boys.

This year, the girls proved they were more than capable, and in a dramatic turn of events, FIVE of the six top-scoring students in our entrance exam were girls. This is the first time in the history of the scholarships that this has happened. These scholarships relieve their families of a considerable financial burden so are highly valued in the local area.



Photo: And the winners - holding their gifts of solar lanterns to study at night - are Agness Klelii, a female Maasai student from Makifu village, who is the top achieving student with 91%; Nuruana Daniel, a female Mburu student from Kitisi village, who achieved 88%; Penoi Kanayah, a female Maasai student from Makifu village, who scored 79%; Daudi Petro, a male Barabaig student from Kitisi village, who scored 75%; Leah Ndabali, a female Maasai student from Makifu village, who attained 67%; and Furaha Chilemela, a female student from the Gogo tribe from Mapogoro village, whose 60% score saw her go through as one of the six Simba Scholars for 2017. Well done to all!

Photo credit: Fenrick Msigwa

Village parents are always thrilled when it is announced that their child has been awarded a scholarship to attend secondary school! As a way of thanking RCP, the families of students generously gave us a goat and a chicken. As we currently have no cold storage at camp, the meat was consumed by all at camp, in a feast of thanks and celebration, with no scraps going to waste. All slept quietly that night and woke up feeling languorous from the previous night's celebrations!

From the Field: The rainy season brings relief... but also increased predation on livestock



Photo: As the rains arrive in full force, fieldwork presents its own challenges with roads being washed away. Carnivores follow their prey into village land as they move away from the river in the Park.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

It's a busy time for the entire RCP team, as the advent of the rain scatters the wildlife, which results in carnivores coming onto village land to hunt. This leads to an increase in human-carnivore conflict, so there are more depredation incidents to follow up on at this time of year, more interest in predator-proofing livestock enclosures, more lions to chase away from households, and unfortunately, often more lion hunts for our Lion Defenders to try to prevent.



Photo: Lion Defenders reinforcing Jeremiah's boma in Mparapande.

Photo credit: Mathew Bajuta

While, for certain species, the onset of the rains and the abundant foliage presents an increased cover for moving through, human beings don't seem to be coping as well! Amongst their other roles, our Lion Defenders act as community assistants, so they help conduct social work such as settling disputes, finding lost livestock, reinforcing weakened livestock enclosures and... finding lost people! The rains have brought with them frequent calls for help to look for herders, often young children, lost in the bush. This month, our Lion Defenders have worked extremely hard, and all the lost herders have been found and safely returned to their families!

Lion Defenders in action

In March, Mathew, our Lion Defender Coordinator, and Jacob, one of our Research Assistants, heard about a lion attack on a cow, and there were rumours that lion hunts might occur. After finding the group of hunters Mathew had a long discussion with them, saying that although he understood their anger at their cattle being killed by lions, hunting lions was going against the commitment that their communities had made to conservation. Eventually the warriors calmed down and agreed to go back home, and Mathew and Jacob ensured that the group dispersed and that no-one continued to hunt, or put poison out in the bush. This was excellent community engagement and Mathew and Jacob did a wonderful job.

However, their day was not over... on the way back through an area of thick, unfamiliar bush, Mathew realised that they had become lost. They managed to find an area with phone coverage and told the RCP camp they were lost, but obviously, they could not explain exactly where they were and by then it was getting dark. Eventually they decided to climb a tree and wait there overnight - which seemed like a good idea until they realised there was a leopard in the tree next to them, eyeing them with interest!



Photo: Mathew and Jacob (on the bike) with Lion Defenders on a mission to stop the lion hunt, which nearly ended in disaster for them when they got lost in the bush.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

Immediately they received the call, the RCP team swung into action, led by Tanur, the RCP Field Operations Manager. They searched frantically for Mathew and Jacob until nightfall when they were forced to call a halt for the sake of their own safety, but at first light the combined force of the RCP staff, Lion Defenders and villagers were back out looking for the young men. They used a very effective combination of traditional tracking led by the Lion Defenders, and 21st century tracking, which involved using the 'location' feature on WhatsApp to find their phones! Happily, Mathew and Jacob were found in the morning and returned to camp unharmed.

A piki piki saves the 'rainy' day

The rainy season can make travel (even around the villages) treacherous, as discovered by Alphonse Mallya who is in charge of our Livestock Guarding Dog programme. He was heading out to check on Tiger, an Anatolian Shepherd in the field with a Maasai family, but the river between camp and their household was high after the recent rains. Alphonse dutifully waded out to see if he could pass, but eventually he had to resort to a commonly used form of local transport, a motor bike, known locally as a *piki piki*, and took the long route through the bush to do his weekly check on Tiger.



Photo: Alphonse checking the depth of the swollen river, and for any obstacles which may damage the vehicle.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

Community camera-trapping reaps rewards for villages

One of our most important programmes is the community camera-trapping, where villagers place camera-traps on their land, and compete with one another to see which village records most images of wildlife. Each image generates points based on the species and number of wild animals camera-trapped, and every 3 months, the points are converted in healthcare, education and veterinary benefits for the villages. These rewards are given out at large celebrations, known as *sherehes*, which provide a wonderful opportunity to talk with the wider community about what RCP does, and it also provides an extremely clear demonstration that conserving wildlife can generate meaningful benefits for local people. The project has produced extremely valuable benefits to local schools, hospitals and households, and also gives a fascinating insight into wildlife in close proximity to village homes.



CCT Photo: Elephants on village land.

Currently the team is looking at ways in which to ensure better protection for the cameras in the field. We continue to educate the community on how important it is to protect these cameras from thievery, pranksters, wildlife (hyaenas love to chew them and elephants love to scratch against them, both of which can be quite damaging), and the weather, and to work with us to secure the safety of these devices which provide such valuable benefits, and which offer us a peep into the secret world of wildlife! In an interesting insight into how valued these cameras are becoming on village land, several villages are now implementing new bye-law specifically aimed at protecting their camera-traps, which is great to see!

Everyone loves a good shehere

This month the shehere took place at Idodi Primary School, and it was a wonderful day, attended by a visiting journalist, Jessamy Calkin from the UK Telegraph as well as many local people. The villagers choose in advance what they would like to spend their benefits on, and this time, as well as the usual medicines, vaccines, gloves and schoolbooks, the items included office chairs, a printer for the local school and a set of drums which the school children were eyeing very keenly!



Photo 1: The village elders from Idodi village celebrate their rewards, received from diligently recording wildlife on their village land. One of the most novel requests was a set of drums in traditional Tanzanian colours. Seen here in photo is the RCP Director (with drum) and dignitaries from the village.

Photo credit: Penelope Rogers

Photo 2: As a sign of respect for the villagers and the dignitaries present, Dr Amy Dickman gave her speech in Swahili, ably assisted by RCP staff. It was very well received by those present and the connection between conservation, RCP and the villagers was further cemented.

Photo credit: Penelope Rogers



Photo 3: Meritho, who manages the CCT programme, acts as master of ceremonies at the local sheheres, where his natural-born talent for connecting with people, his intimate knowledge of village life and his knowledge of conservation, create a welcoming, festival-like atmosphere. Here Meritho (in the black shirt with the colourful trousers) is seen with local dignitaries from the Idodi village (to his left) and RCP Director and fellow RCP colleagues Hillary and Stanley (to his right).

Photo credit: Penelope Rogers

Photo 4: Camera-traps are clearly essential to running our Community Camera Trap programmes, but we still face challenges such as cameras being stolen by poachers or young herders, destroyed by wildlife or being damaged by the weather. Luckily the RCP Director recently brought in 18 new camera-traps, which are now being distributed to villages as needed. Before distribution, the camera-traps are carefully stored and recorded, with each camera being given a name and number - and where the camera is sponsored, it is linked to the sponsor's name. Stock- and inventory control are critical to keeping the project running smoothly and are valuable indicators of when stock is running low. If you are interested in sponsoring a camera, then please do let us know, via email on margaretroestorf.rcp@gmail.com



CCT Photo: A young lion emerging out the bush, alert and pretty cautious as there definitely seems to be something up ahead that has caught his attention.



CCT Photo: This young male lion is out hunting at night. Often, lions pass through village land with no incidents, but if there are any fears about lions close to households the alert will go up and the RCP Lion Defenders will intervene with spotlights, whistles and a well-practiced drill that will drive the lion away from livestock and villagers' homes.



Photo: Hillary was lucky to spot this Leopard tortoise when out in the field, doing CCT camera work in the Kinyika village. Because of the rains, part of the journey had to be undertaken on foot, and it was then that he spotted the tortoise. Leopard tortoises are fervent travellers and are sometimes known as gypsy tortoises for this reason. They are strict herbivores and feed primarily on mixed types of grasses which must be an excellent diet as they are known to live up to 100 years!
Photo credit: Hillary Mrosso

Sightings Programme

Understanding the dynamics of carnivore populations and movement is very challenging in a landscape as large as Ruaha. We could not collect that data alone, so have a valuable collaboration with the Park lodges, whose drivers collect data and photos from their carnivore sightings. RCP provides a new camera to each driver each year, and once they have recorded 125 sightings in a year, they can keep the camera - so it is a good way for them to get new cameras (which they can keep or sell) and we get excellent data on large carnivores. This month, despite it being near the end of the tourist season, driver Majuto Magela from Ruaha River Lodge www.ruahariverlodge.com/ was able to get these captivating images of large carnivores in the Park.



Photo: This is one of those times when a lioness literally picks up her cub in order to make a quick exit away from potential danger.
Photo credit: Majuto Magela from Ruaha River Lodge www.ruahariverlodge.com/



Photo: Because hyaenas have longer front limbs they are able to raise their heads to detect scents over huge distances. This enables them to detect kills quickly, which is valuable as they compete with jackals, lions, vultures, foxes and whichever other wildlife opportunistically come along to join the feast. However, it is a myth that hyaenas are merely scavengers - in fact, they kill as much as lions do.
Photo credit: Majuto Magela from Ruaha River Lodge www.ruahariverlodge.com/



Photo: Especially in the wet season when there is dense vegetation, good vantage points like the rocks offer valuable vantage points for lions to look out for potential prey.
Photo credit: Majuto Magela from Ruaha River Lodge www.ruahariverlodge.com/



Photo: After having eaten, this pride settles down for a post-lunch snooze in the warm sand of the dry river bed in the hot afternoon sun.
Photo credit: Majuto Magela from Ruaha River Lodge www.ruahariverlodge.com/



*Photo: This tiny leopard cub was spotted tucked away in a cave by its mother while she was out hunting.
Photo credit: Majuto Magela from Ruaha River Lodge www.ruahariverlodge.com/*



*Photo: A beautiful portrait of the fastest land mammal, often seen in more open areas as their method of hunting involves running down their prey. They can often be seen sitting majestically on top of termite mounds which offer excellent aerial views for spotting prey.
Photo credit: Majuto Magela from Ruaha River Lodge www.ruahariverlodge.com/*

Life at camp - part two

Our work and mission is to protect carnivores in the Ruaha landscape. However, a lot goes on behind the scenes - the teams, the challenges, the hard work, the laughs, the difficulties. The RCP team lives as a community in the field camp, with all the quirks and inventiveness that entails! People are often intrigued by how we live in the field, so here we provide the second part of our insights into daily life at camp.



*Photo: Water arriving at the camp. Clean water is a precious commodity. Plans for water to be delivered directly from the village are underway, but until the pipes are functional this novel approach is the only way to get reliable water for drinking and cooking.
Photo credit: Margaret Roestorf*

Our work during the past few weeks and coming months will focus on improving facilities at camp. We are in the process of completing a new garage and Rashid, our mechanic and driver cannot wait to inaugurate this new facility and settle into his new "office"!



*Photo: The new garage building, with storage facilities for spare parts, working areas for the vehicles and a small office for Rashid. The new building includes a pit which will enable Rashid and fellow mechanics to do work under the vehicles.
Photo credit: Margaret Roestorf*

Power has always been one of the biggest challenges at camp - when the project was set up, we had to charge 2 car batteries in town (a 220km round trip) and then use them for a few days till they ran out, and then return to town. Thanks to our partners at the Wildlife Conservation Network Solar Project <https://wildnet.org/solar> a new, solar system will soon be installed at camp, which will be amazing! We will then have power 24 hrs a day to charge camera-trap batteries, laptops and phones (goodbye to the woes of low torch batteries and “not reachable” phones) and maybe even a television to watch football or a fridge for storing perishables as well!



Photo 1: If you enjoy collecting images of the unusual, then the lavatory throne at the RCP camp has got to be in your collection. It is a simple affair, with a dizzy drop below to a pit, which is home to a menagerie of giant cockroaches and bats.

Photo credit: Margaret Roestorf

Photo 2: Quaint and functional - another photo for your bucket list (pardon the pun) - the camp's bucket showers are based on a simple pulley system which hoists barrels of hot water and provides a lovely hot - albeit quick - bush shower.

Photo credit: Margaret Roestorf

Meet the Team

This month, we introduce Meritho Katei, who is one of our Senior Research Assistants and who primarily manages our Community Camera-trapping programme, as well as being invaluable in many other areas of our community work.

‘My name is Meritho Katei and I’m a Maasai. I come from Arusha and am the first born from my dad’s second wife - he has 6 wives. I was born in 1992 and at that time it wasn’t easy for Maasai kids to go to school because they were expected to grow and work with the livestock. For this reason, I only started primary school when I was 12 years old because my dad didn’t believe in education. When I started, I wasn’t the same age as the other Swahili kids in my class but I quickly caught up and so much liked to be educated.

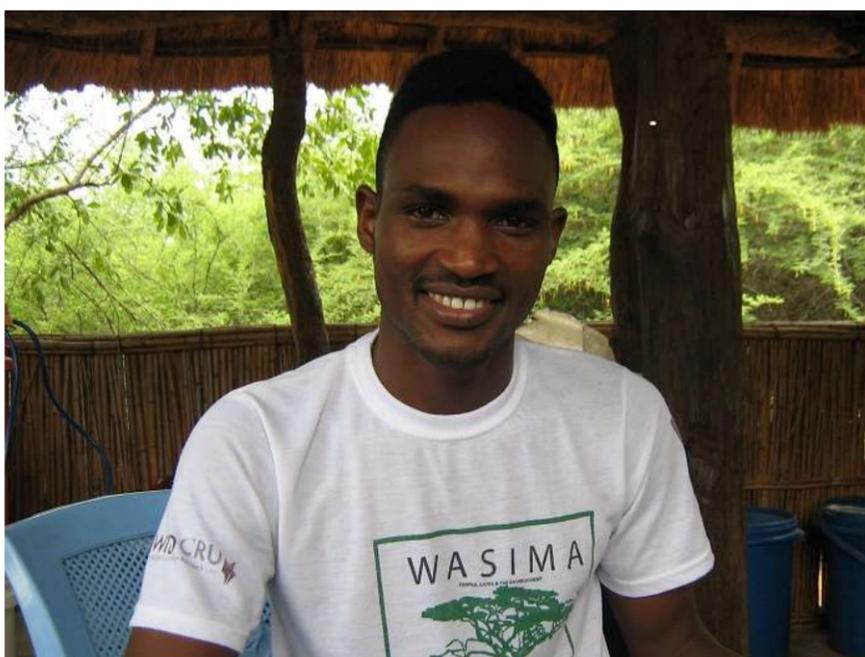


Photo: Meritho Katei

Photo credit: Penelope Rogers

Before I went to school, from when I was four years old, I started herding the animals - first with baby goats, then small livestock - goats and sheep, then onto calves. When I was 9 years old I started herding my dad’s big livestock - going out into the bush every day with them - there were 1,200 livestock so it was a lot of work!

When I was 7 years old I met with up with a group of wild dogs - there were a lot... more than 40 animals, when I was herding the small livestock - goats and sheep. So, because wild dogs are afraid of human beings I defended the livestock and the wild dogs ran away.

When I was defending livestock, I met up with lions quite a few times, in the bush and in the livestock enclosure. And because my dad had taught me how to defend the cattle, I helped them twice to do so when lions attacked. However, one day, when I was nine years old, I was alone when the lions attacked so I didn’t defend them. The lion killed two cattle and ate one completely. I ran home after that!

My mum was praying for me to become someone in this world and I joined secondary school in 2009 and I completed form four in 2012. When I was in Standard Three (15 years old) I told my mum that I wanted to study wildlife. After that I joined Iringa Tourism college from 2013 up to 2015.

When I was at college I heard a lot about RCP and what they were doing and started chatting to RCP staff members, because I was looking for a place to do my field experience. My principal wrote me a letter asking if I could join RCP for field experience and I came to RCP in 2014 for a 2-week period which was a big opportunity for me. I was the first to do field experience in my level of college. During my field experience, I got really excited and hoped that it could be my future, as it reflects what I’d like to be - to work on wildlife!

I told Amy that I wanted to work at RCP, so while I waited for a position to come up, I worked in Zanzibar and Dar. When the position of junior research assistant became available I got the job.

I started working on all the elements of RCP and I started assisting in 4 programmes - DVD nights, CCT, monthly monitoring and depredation follow ups and carnivore monitoring. I’m so very happy to have got the opportunity to work in RCP - I got a lot of experience on different things. I like so much the experience I get in RCP because I like to work in conservation and wildlife.’

Wildlife at camp

We don't only place camera-traps on village land, we also place them closer to home, and they give us fascinating insight into nocturnal visitors to the camp.



Photos 1 & 2: Snapped by the camera during a full-moon night at the RCP camp. Clearly there is something interesting about the terrain around this bush, as both the hyaena and the black-backed jackal are very interested in it. Black backed jackals are often seen in pairs but this one seemed to be alone.

RCP researcher and PhD student, Leejiah Dorward, delights in the small and beautiful creatures which he finds at camp. One of the things he loves most about being in the field is the huge amount of varied experiences on offer: 'One moment you can be chasing a lion away from a household with a wooden spoon and the next extricating a snake from a tree stump! In between, I spend time making friends from, and learning about, the cultures so different to my own'.



Photo: Meet the armoured cricket... a pretty startling fellow to meet up with in the dead of night (and one which can make irritating cuts in our tents), but which is completely harmless, according to Leejiah!

Photo credit: Leejiah Dorward

RCP's Michael Kimaro's poster in Top Ten at Cambridge Conservation Conference

Michael Kimaro, RCP's very own Tanzanian staff member is currently studying at the University of Oxford and he attended the Student Conference on Conservation Science in Cambridge in March. We were all thrilled when his poster, titled 'Levels and causes of anthropogenic mortalities amongst large carnivores of Tanzania's Ruaha landscape', was chosen as one of the top 10 posters out of the 107 posters presented.

The conference, which brings together young emerging postgraduate conservationists from around the world, was attended by 190 delegates from 63 countries and offered Michael a wonderful opportunity to gain new insights into conservation and to network with fellow conservationists. He was inspired by the conference, took part in workshops and will bring his new knowledge back to share with his colleagues at RCP.



Photo 1: Seen proudly smiling at the entrance to the David Attenborough Building at Cambridge University. According to Michael, 'To be in the David Attenborough building in Cambridge University was a crucial opportunity for me to learn many things during my attendance at the student conference for conservation science'.

Photo 2: A group photo for the emerging student conservationists around the world at Cambridge University. Michael is on the far left in the blue sleeveless jacket - he is still adjusting to the UK weather!

THANK YOU ~ ASANTE SANA

As always, we thank all our donors for their generous and committed support. To dedicate your support click below and fund out more about our programmes:



Ecological research - RCP provides vital data on Ruaha's little-known carnivore populations through camera-trapping and recording carnivore sightings. More than 10,000 carnivore sightings have been recorded to date.



Community camera-trapping - RCP trains and employs local villagers to set up and manage camera-traps on village land in return for community benefits, directly linking conservation with development.



Protecting the livelihoods of villagers living in proximity to carnivores reduces conflict. Fortifying livestock enclosures and placing guarding dogs are proving successful in minimizing conflict.



The RCP Lion Defenders actively prevent and stop lion hunts. These Lion Defenders are chosen from amongst the bravest and most influential warriors.



Kids 4 Cats is a school-twinning programme where local schools are 'adopted' by international schools who raise at least US\$500 annually for them, to buy essential education material and equipment.



Simba Scholars receive full scholarships for all four years of their secondary school. The cost is US\$2,000 per student and RCP is keen to expand the programme to more students.



Porridge Project - No one likes to go to school hungry, so RCP and our partners make sure that local scholars have full tummies when they're at school - this increases attendance and attainment, employs local women and is a major benefit in villages where there is very little food security.



DVD nights and Park trips provide education about conservation and species in a fun, no-threatening environment. To date more than 30 000 attendees have enjoyed DVD nights and more than 1,000 people have been on Park trips.

Should you wish to know more about individual programmes we will happily send you more information. Please contact our communications manager, Margaret Roestorf at margaretroestorf.rcp@gmail.com. Should you wish to speak directly to the Director, Dr. Amy Dickman, please contact her at amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk.

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Until next month - so long... tutaonana

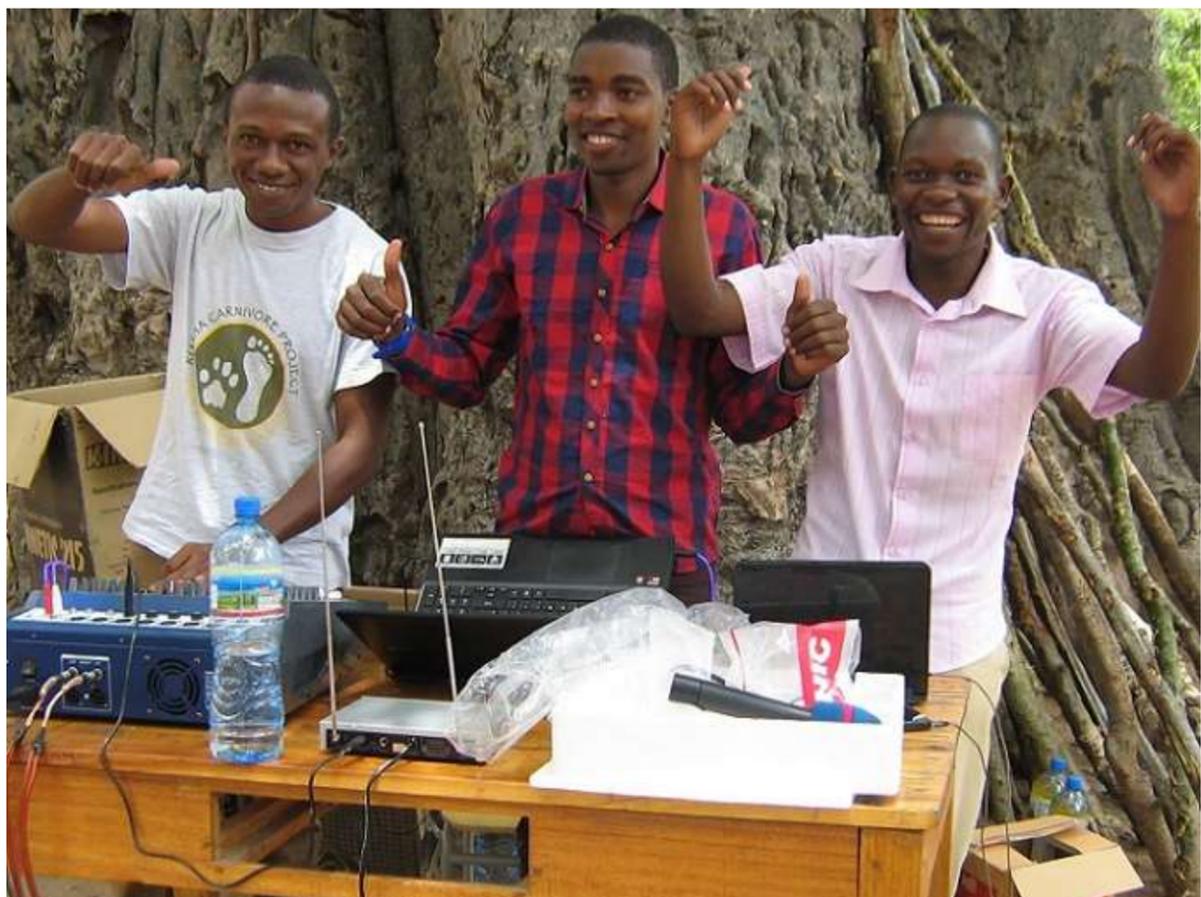


Photo: Party shehere - RCP Style!
 Photo credit: Margaret Roestorf

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