



TROPICAL BIOLOGY ASSOCIATION

Issue No. 13 July 2010  
*Newsletter*

*The Tropical Biology Association is developing capacity and building links for biodiversity research and conservation in Africa and South East Asia. Through its training courses and follow-up support, the TBA is creating an informed, motivated community of tropical biologists with the potential to have a significant impact.*

Welcome to the Tropical Biology Association's 2010 newsletter. We are always overwhelmed with news from our many and varied alumni, so it is a struggle to fit in all the interesting articles that land on the TBA desk. Nevertheless, we have managed to pack in a large selection of fascinating articles ranging from accounts of the recent TBA field courses held in 2009, to reports on what people are doing fifteen years after their course.

We also include news from the second ever course held in Danum valley, Borneo. This was a truly multi-national event where we met students for the first time from Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, and Laos and where two of the teachers had been students on the original TBA Danum course in 1995. Written by different people from different countries, the messages emerging from the articles are the same. They tell us that TBA courses and workshops make a difference to people's lives, that they provide an education that they did not get access to and that the valuable contacts they make continue to last well beyond the course. And then there are the surprises that tropical field work brings that no text book has prepared them for as illustrated by one of the articles that describes the challenge of staying upright in order to collect field data in a muddy, slippery forest in the pouring rain.



Over 87% of TBA's 1,229 alumni regularly keep in touch with our office. This astonishing number is a great vote of confidence for the practical training we offer young conservation scientists, and for the supportive professional network they join afterwards. Of those who keep in touch with us, 98% of our alumni work in conservation related fields. Many are now high achievers with major roles in conservation in their home countries. We have included interviews of two such individuals for this newsletter.

Another measure of the TBA's impact is that there are now 13 African alumni groups, formed by past TBA trainees who wished to share their new-found knowledge and skills with the next generation of conservationists in their home countries. Since the last newsletter, the TBA launched a small grants programme to help these alumni groups achieve their aims. The first four grants were won by groups in Cameroon Madagascar, Nigeria and Uganda. We will share their news next year when their projects have been completed.

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity, launched to celebrate the rich diversity of life on earth as well as to highlight the challenge of conserving biodiversity and the life support systems it provides us. One of the most important lessons that my work at TBA has taught me is that conservation succeeds where there are motivated knowledgeable people who lead others by example. We have had the privilege of training some of these people and you can read about them in the pages that follow.

**Dr Rosie Trevelyan, Director**



## TBA member institutions

### AUSTRALIA

School of Life and Environmental Sciences,  
**Deakin University, Melbourne**

### AUSTRIA

Institute of Zoology, **Karl-Franzens University, Graz**  
Institute of Ecology, **University of Innsbruck**  
Institute of Zoology, **Paris-Lodron University, Salzburg**  
Faculty of Life Sciences, **University of Vienna**

### DENMARK

Institute of Biological Sciences, **University of Aarhus**

### FRANCE

Centre d'Études Biologiques de Chizé, **CNRS, Chizé**

### GERMANY

Department of Sociobiology, **German Primate Centre, Göttingen**  
Institute of Systematic Botany, **University of Munich**  
Department of Animal Ecology and Tropical Biology, **University of Würzburg**

### IRELAND

Department of Botany, **National University of Ireland, Galway**  
Environmental Science Unit, **National University of Ireland, Galway**  
Department of Zoology, **Trinity College Dublin**  
School of Natural Sciences, **Trinity College Dublin**  
Department of Zoology, **University College Dublin**

### NETHERLANDS

Community and Conservation Ecology, **University of Groningen**  
Institute of Biology, **University of Leiden**  
Resource Ecology Group, **Wageningen University and Research**

### The TBA is grateful for support from:

The BAT Biodiversity Partnership  
The Ben Voysey Scholarship Fund  
The British Ecological Society  
Zoology Department of the University of Cambridge  
The British High Commission Uganda  
The British High Commission Kenya

### The TBA also thanks its partner organisations:

The National Museums of Kenya  
Nature Kenya  
Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya  
Makerere University Institute of Environment and Natural Resources, Uganda  
Makerere University Biological Field Station, Uganda  
Nature Uganda  
Amani Nature Reserve, Tanzania  
Tanzania Forestry Research Institute, Tanzania  
Forestry and Beekeeping Division of the Ministry of Nature Resources and Tourism, Tanzania  
Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania  
Faculty of Sciences, University of Antananarivo, Madagascar  
Ministre Eaux et Forêts and Ministre de l'Environnement, Madagascar  
Centre National de Formation, d'Études et de Recherche en Environnement et Forêt, Madagascar

**The TBA thanks those who have provided photos for this newsletter, including Dan Metcalfe and Dina Garner**

### POLAND

Institute of Environmental Sciences, **Jagiellonian University, Cracow**  
Environmental Biology Departments, **Warsaw University**

### PORTUGAL

Centre for Environmental Biology, **University of Lisbon**

### SWEDEN

Department of Biology, **Gothenberg University**  
Department of Ecology, **Lund University**  
Centre for Research and Natural Resources, and the Department of Systems Ecology, **Stockholm University**

### SWITZERLAND

Swiss Tropical Institute, **Basel**  
Department of Integrative Biology, **University of Basel**  
Department of Biology, **University of Bern**  
Department of Biology, Ecology and Evolution, **University of Fribourg**  
Department of Ecology and Evolution, **University of Lausanne**  
Institute for Integrative Biology, **ETH Zurich**  
Institute of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies, **University of Zurich**

### UNITED KINGDOM

School of Biological Sciences, **University of Aberdeen**  
School of Applied Sciences, **Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge**  
Department of Plant Sciences, **University of Cambridge**  
Department of Zoology, **University of Cambridge**  
Institute of Evolutionary Biology, **University of Edinburgh**  
School of Geosciences, **University of Edinburgh**  
Faculty of Biological Sciences Graduate School, **University of Leeds**  
School of Biological Sciences, **University of Liverpool**  
Department of Biology, **University College London**  
Institute of Zoology, **Zoological Society of London**  
School of Biology, **University of Nottingham**  
Department of Zoology, **University of Oxford**  
School of Environment and Life Sciences, **Salford University**  
School of Biology, **University of St Andrews**

### USA

Faculty of Arts and Sciences, **Yale University**

### European Office

tba@tropical-biology.org  
The Tropical Biology Association  
Department of Zoology, Downing Street  
Cambridge CB2 3EJ  
United Kingdom

Tel. + 44 (0)1223 336619 Fax. + 44 (0)1223 336676

### African Office

tba-africa@tropical-biology.org  
The Tropical Biology Association  
PO BOX 44486, 00100 - Nairobi  
Kenya

Tel. +254 (0) 20 3749957 / 3746090

Fax. +254 (0) 20 3741049



## TBA achievers

### Mr Paul Matiku

Executive Director,  
Nature Kenya

**Education:** MPhil,  
Environmental studies,  
currently undertaking a PhD  
at Kenyatta University

**TBA course:**  
TBA 97/1 Kibale, Uganda



Through Paul's leadership, Nature Kenya has become a major player in Kenya's conservation scene. Nature Kenya, Kenya's Birdlife partner, has received several awards nationally and internationally for involving local communities in conservation through the Important Bird Areas (IBA) programme. In the 10 years Paul has been at the helm, annual funding generated for conservation has increased to 3 million dollars while staff have increased from 10 to 50. In this interview, we find out what drives him and his advice to young conservationists.

**Can you think of any instances that influenced your choice of a career in conservation?** I grew up in Makueni District in an area that was declared a settlement scheme after Kenya's independence. My parents competed with rhinos, elephants, buffaloes and giraffes for scarce natural resources. It was only when I was seven years old that I discovered that all the meat I ate was game meat. In time, the animals began disappearing and by the time I left secondary school, game meat had become scarce. I realised there was a problem so when my eyes came across Wildlife Management, offered by Moi University, I became convinced that I would spend the rest of my career saving species and protecting habitats.

**You are currently in a very senior position in your career. How did you manage to reach there? What motivates you or drives you?** Life is short, so if I have to make a tangible legacy before I die, I have to work hard. I think I am successful not only because of working hard but maybe because of being a very lucky person. Managing Nature Kenya has not been about conflict management but rather about focusing on a vision and that is the most important recipe for organisational success.

**Would you say the TBA course helped shape your career? How?** Yes. The TBA course gave me a rare opportunity to be out of Kenya, into Uganda, where I interacted with TBA students from all over the world. I learned that as an African conservationist, my skills are competitive internationally. That gave me confidence that I can make a difference not only in Kenya but also globally.

**What is your advice to young upcoming African conservationists who have recently attended a TBA course?** Work hard. Conservation is not easy and without hard work it is not possible to make a difference.

### Dr Cecilia Maliwichi-Nyirenda

Training Coordinator,  
Leadership for Environment and  
Development – South and Eastern  
Africa (LEAD-SEA)

**Education:** MSc in Ethnobotany  
and PhD in Conservation Biology,  
University of Plymouth, UK

**TBA course:**  
TBA 97/1, Kibale, Uganda



Cecilia is a trailblazer for female botanists in Malawi, having become the first female scientist to join the National Botanic Gardens in Malawi. In addition to her work at LEAD, she is the founder of a non-profit making organisation, Indigenous Knowledge Centre, whose aim is to compile Malawi's rich indigenous knowledge, culture, traditions and beliefs. She is a prolific publisher in her field. This is what she had to say about her success.

**Can you think of any instances that influenced your choice of a career in conservation?** I was raised in a village by my grandparents where we relied on plant and animal resources for a living. Due to the important role that these resources played in my life especially for medical care, food, income and construction, I realised that without them, I would not have survived. I therefore decided to give a hand in conserving these unique resources.

**You are currently in a very senior position in your career. How did you manage to reach there? What motivates you or drives you?** I managed to reach where I am through hard work, confidence, discipline and being focussed. I always believed that I had the capacity to achieve what men can achieve; that is why I am the first woman scientist to join the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens of Malawi. I am also the first woman to attain a PhD there.

**Would you say the TBA course helped shape your career? How?** Definitely yes! My time in Kibale forest reserve enabled me to refocus on my career path. By undergoing an intensive TBA training course led by renowned experts, my interest in conservation biology increased. Spending time with trainees and trainers from different disciplines widened my horizon. This has enabled me to undertake research not only focussing on hardcore science but also social aspects. The contacts I established from fellow TBA trainees and trainers and the research skills I acquired built my confidence. That is why today I am proud to hold a PhD in conservation biology, something I never dreamt of before my TBA course.

**What is your advice to young upcoming African conservationists who have recently attended a TBA course?** Be proud that you are part of this prestigious TBA family. Maintain your energy levels and apply the skills you have learnt to contribute to global conservation efforts especially as part of the sustainable development agenda. It is rewarding and a blessing to take a role in this noble cause and ultimately conserve our world for the benefit of the present and future generations.

### One of my favourite times

One of my favourite times on the TBA course, funnily enough, was one of the wettest days that we spent out in the forest. We were studying the trees of Amani, including the invasive species *Maesopsis eminii*. As I have a great interest in invasive species I found this both interesting and educational. A group of us spent hours in the dense, now wet and muddy, forest, slipping and sliding trying to work our way down, while collecting data. It was very comical, we were all trying to be professional and do our data collecting in the pouring rain, while trying to stay upright. One thing I have learnt from this experience is that sometimes you can be out in the field in the worst conditions and still have one of the greatest and most entertaining days. Thank you TBA for this experience.

**Brittanie Broughton, UK (09/2 Amani)**

### A unique experience

I was one of the participants of the tropical forests ecosystems course in Madagascar. I learned important issues such as the conservation of the unique and diverse biodiversity and habitats of Madagascar, climate and human impact on ecosystems, ecological monitoring as a tool in biodiversity conservation, thinking of questions in biology, statistics, and how to write and present a research project.

This course was amazing, a unique experience in my life that I'll never forget. The most enjoyable aspects of the course were the excellent lectures and teachers, the great organisation, and the opportunity to work and discuss our ideas with completely different people from Africa and Europe (with whom I still keep in touch!).

**Ana Rita Mateus, Portugal (09/4 Madagascar)**



### TBA makes a difference

There are some people you meet who just make a difference in your life. Tropical Biology Association has been that to me. There is just so much TBA has taught me in the field of conservation. It has helped me a lot in project design and writing. I have also learned the importance of statistical packages used in analysis. During the course, the input I had from the participants greatly improved my thesis and knowledge in conservation generally. This is a powerful strength of TBA, bringing people from different backgrounds with different experiences for a common goal of training people to be conservation leaders.

I was amazed at how much work could be done within a short time during the course and the final projects. The network of participants has been very helpful as you get to share experiences with the participants in different areas. As I look forward to creating an impact in my world, I am considering pursuing a Masters programme in a Wildlife Management discipline. Long live TBA and best wishes to the alumni and staff.

**Victor Chik Fosah, Cameroon (09/2 Amani)**

### Brilliantly educative

I am always exhilarated to talk about the kind of training I received from the TBA course especially in areas of field inventory, data management and statistical exploration. The course was brilliantly educative and thoroughly fulfilling. The field exercises in herpetology really deepened my interest in amphibian conservation and I am currently leading a group to conserve the critically endangered frog, *Conraua derooi*, in Ghana. In fact, the TBA course is worth speaking about for years!

**Evans Ewald Nkrumah, Ghana (09/2 Amani)**

## Life on a 2009 TBA course

### Multi-purpose course

It was a dream for me to attend a course outside my country to improve my knowledge and research skills. I called this training course a multi-purpose course. Beside the great scientific benefits we gained, the course also showed how different people from varied cultures, traditions, religions, departments and behaviors can enjoy working together.

I spent the last ten days of the course fasting as it was the start of Ramadan (Fasting Month) and I was afraid of how other participants from other religions would respect mine, but I found nice people who appreciated my faith and even reminded me when I forgot the time for breakfast. I am very proud as I have more than 20 friends from different countries sharing information, cultures, knowledge and experience and all this because of TBA.

**Esmat Elhassan, Sudan (09/2 Amani)**

### A bridge to my research career

I know the TBA course is my entry point to learn more about conservation issues and build my network for my career in the future. I had a great experience in one month with the participants and mentors from 10 different countries.

Now I am writing my thesis about populations of giant frog, *Limnodynastes dorsalis* in south east Sulawesi, Indonesia. My experience with TBA makes me feel challenged to write a good thesis and publish the results in an international journal. TBA opened my mind about research in environment, conservation and how to be a good scientist. After that course, I realise I am not working alone to save nature and environment.

**Dwi Susanto, Indonesia (09/3 Danum Valley)**



### The TBA family

TBA is a continuously expanding family with all the members sharing proud memories of their courses. These memories are always associated with the unique things that participants encounter for the first time in the course, which are in turn a reflection of a well designed programme. Top in my memories are the calibre and diversity of both instructors and participants and the style of conducting the courses (i.e. practical, highly team oriented and time bound, with each day neatly concluded with group presentations and soothing social evenings). Lots of skills are acquired and unforgettable lessons are learnt. One important lesson that I learnt is that huge amounts of work can be accomplished in a relatively short time. Such memories bind the alumni together and provide us with a sense of belonging.

**Imran Ejotre, Uganda (09/1 Kibale)**

### It opened a lot of doors

I had only heard the best about the TBA's courses and my expectations were very high. Now I can say that my expectations were exceeded by far. Everyone on this course was so dedicated and motivated but it was still possible to sit together in the evenings and have a good time. I think it was this mixture that made our course so special. I enjoyed the last week of the course the most, where we were responsible for our own projects. To experience how an idea turns into a plan which becomes a project which becomes part of actual science totally changed my ideas of what can be achieved in only a few days.

I often think back to the great time in Amani and I am so happy that I am a member of the TBA family. I suppose I will only be able to estimate the impact this course had on my life in a few years' time, but even now I am sure that it opened a lot of doors for me.

**Iris Starnberger, Austria (09/2 Amani)**

### Fifteen years on: Alumni from 1995 report on their current activities

#### **Chimwemwe Mhango, Malawi**

The TBA course of 1995 was indeed a launch pad for my career in tropical conservation. Since then I have been involved in a lot of conservation work in Malawi. In 1996, I was one of the scientists that carried out research work aimed at designating Lake Chilwa Wetland as the first RAMSAR site in Malawi. In 1997, I was a consultant in the Malawi Biodiversity Country Study documenting wild and indigenous animals of Malawi and their conservation status. In 1998, I was also involved in drawing up the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for wild and indigenous animals. In 2000, I graduated from my MSc. in Human Ecology at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel with a Distinction. At this stage I made up my mind that being a good conservationist requires both scientific and social knowledge.

In 2004, I was one of the global fellows in Conservation Biology at Duke University, USA. I was then awarded a Commonwealth scholarship to do my PhD in Biodiversity Management at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at the University of Kent where I graduated in 2009 with specialisation in policy and law. Currently, I am involved in the production of the Malawi State of Environment Outlook Report in the biodiversity theme and the ecosystem services sub-theme. My current research interests include: in situ conservation of indigenous agro-biodiversity, wildlife conservation, gender and natural resource management and conservation policy and law.

**95/2 Kibale**

#### **Jean Nduwamungu, Rwanda**

The TBA course was of great help to my career. The knowledge I acquired during this one month training enabled me to refine my MSc research project and implement it successfully. My dissertation was so highly regarded that it served as a major reference for forestry staff and students for several years afterwards. In recognition of this achievement, I was awarded a PhD scholarship in 1997 and graduated in 2001 from Sokoine University of Agriculture. Afterwards I taught at the same University until 2006. In 2006, I was recruited to become the Director of the Land and Forestry Research Center and Head of the Forest Management Program at the Agricultural Research Institute of Rwanda.

In 2008, I secured a full time position at the National University of Rwanda as Director of the Centre for Geographic Information and Remote Sensing, the position I still hold today. The TBA course in 1995 introduced me to research methods in natural resource conservation and management and since then I have carried out several research studies in related fields. Fifteen years later, I can humbly say that I owe a great deal of my career achievements to the TBA course.

**95/3 Kibale**

#### **Robert Jehle, Liechtenstein**

The TBA was one of my main cornerstones to becoming an academic biologist, in a career path that however never ran along any pre-planned route (remember the dynamic TBA timetable that makes the best of given circumstances?). After graduating in a land-locked, rather small country, attending the 1995 course in Borneo was an eye-opener that furnished me with the vital ability of discussing biological problems without geographic, political and cultural frontiers. However, after the TBA course I chose to work on purely temperate species, and spent my time with a white coat in the laboratory, separating DNA fragments from each other, rather than observing plants and animals in the field. Nevertheless my heart never stopped beating the TBA rhythm, and while living in three different European countries as a post-doctoral scientist I became involved in studies on my main animal group of interest (amphibians) from tropical Africa, Asia and South America.

Above everything else, I feel extremely privileged that TBA has asked me to remain involved in its activities over the years. I was a TBA course teacher in 2001, 2005, and 2009, and I have been a TBA Council Member since 2008. Two recent events reminded me that my 1995 course participation has long-lasting and important implications. It was a very special moment in Borneo last October when I was reunited with my former course colleague Bakhtiar Effendi, to deliver lectures in a place where we were at the student side of the auditorium some 15 years ago. A few months later I wrote my letters of recommendation for 2010 course applicants from my home institution, in the hope that some of the students can experience what I did in 1995. The circle has closed, but it is hopefully only a first loop.

**95/1 Danum Valley**

#### **Wilson Munala, Kenya**

After attending the 1995 TBA course at Naivasha I got a job with the government as a fisheries officer in 1997. Currently, I am pursuing an MSc degree in sustainable aquaculture at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia. I believe that after this course, I will be able to return to Kenya and participate in the promotion of sustainable fisheries. I will always be very grateful to the TBA since it has been very beneficial in several aspects. Apart from being a very strong point in my CV, the knowledge obtained during the TBA course has proved very handy in my general fieldwork duties – especially on issues to do with conservation of fisheries and wetland ecosystems. Several issues have come up on the fishing and protection of Lake Kanyaboli and the Yala river system where I work to which I have been able to contribute constructively courtesy of the TBA course.

## The Class of '95

I believe that anyone who has gone through a TBA course should be very proud of the exposure and knowledge acquired. It will come in handy at the time of need. TBA's style of course facilitation and participation always leaves an indelible mark on every participant.

**95/4 Naivasaha**

### **Julia Lehmann, Germany**

TBA is still one of the milestones in my life; in fact, I just returned from a short trip to Nigeria where I looked into the possibilities to study forest baboons. After the TBA I did a PhD in a lab, comforting myself that lab-work would provide me with new skills. After this I moved on to my first postdoc in the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, working with chimpanzees, which finally took me back to Africa. It was a great opportunity and a great time and I have stuck with primatology ever since. From there I went on to work with Robin Dunbar at Liverpool University, and I was lucky enough to get out to the Okavango Delta in Botswana. Currently I am a senior lecturer in Biological Anthropology at Roehampton University in London, and I seem to have reached the stage where I am more likely to send off students to Africa, while I am tied to my desk. But surely I will soon be able to find another excuse to get away and I am sure this edition of the newsletter will revive some of the contacts!

**95/4 Naivasha**

### **Anna Spenceley, UK**

I obtained my PhD and am currently a Senior Tourism Advisor with the Netherlands Development Agency SNV in Rwanda. I have my own consultancy "Spenceley Tourism and Development", based in South Africa. I am a member of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Tourism Specialist Group and the IUCN's Southern African Sustainable Use Specialist Group (SASUSG). I am the editor of two books: "Responsible Tourism: Critical issues for Conservation and Development" and also co-editor of "Evolution and Innovation in Wildlife Conservation".

**95/2 Kibale**

### **Becky Morris, UK**

In the summer of 1995 after many years of dreaming about tropical forests, I finally visited Kibale Forest in Uganda on a TBA course. It was my first time beyond Europe and from the moment I stepped off the plane everything was unfamiliar and exciting and gave me a taste for a future as an intrepid tropical biologist! A few of the highlights included designing elaborate methods to study the pollinators of an orchid for our project; a field trip to Queen Elizabeth National Park; and just sitting quietly listening to the myriad of forest sounds. I've kept in touch with a couple of course participants. After the course I completed my PhD at Imperial College London, studying

insect community ecology. Desperate to travel further afield than my field site at Silwood Park in south east England, I managed a short trip to Belize that inspired my first post doctorate work, studying indirect interactions in tropical insect communities. I'm now at Oxford University funded by a Royal Society University Research Fellowship and firmly established as a tropical ecologist. I'm studying the structure and dynamics of tropical insect communities, and the responses of ecosystem function to environmental change, most recently in Australia and Danum Valley, Borneo. Next stop Papua New Guinea...

**95/3 Kibale**

### **Sikhalazo Dube, Zimbabwe**

I became a senior researcher for the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research – Natural Resources and the Environment in South Africa in 2009. I carry out research in the management and control of invasive plants, impact of invasive plants on hydrology, and rangelands management, soil erosion and degradation. This often involves supervising postgraduate students. In 2009 I was elected the Vice-President of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa. I am a member of the National Range and Forage Working Group where my role has been to provide expert guidance in development of policy in range and livestock management.



Most recently I have been involved in curriculum development for Lupane State University in Zimbabwe. I am also a member of the Research Advisory Panel for the Working for Water Program of the Department of Water and Forestry charged with guiding ecological research and related funding.

**95/2 Kibale**

### **Lisa Garnier, France**

After 15 years, I returned to Uganda with my family this February. I was a tourist in Kibale but I could observe *Palisotas* in forest, the plant I worked on for my TBA project and the guides were happy when I told them that I was there 15 years ago. When I say in France that I was in Uganda, everybody ask me why. I respond every time: I did a tropical ecology course there 15 years ago that gave me the virus of tropical forest, that will never leave me.

**95/2 Kibale**

### TBA's 1,000th participant

One of my objectives on the TBA course was to gain the experience and skills that would help me attain a PhD. Today I am a first year PhD student in Botany, Department of Plant and Animal Sciences, University of Buea, Cameroon. I am applying the things I learnt on the course today. Thank you, from TBA's 1,000th participant.

**Lucha Celestine Fonyikhe, Cameroon (07/1 Kibale)**



### TBA gave me research skills

The TBA course was a stepping stone to my goals. Being a TBA alumnus enabled me to get a TBA scholarship for a master's degree in Environmental Science. The one year course work was fantastic and it sharpened my brain in various areas that include research and creativity. The field trips made me explore the world and I realized that there is a lot to conserve.

The second year was challenging because we had to decide on a project topic. I had developed an interest in mangroves during a field trip on the TBA course in Madagascar. So I decided to explore and learn more about them. Currently, I am carrying out research on the "Current status, utilization and succession of mangrove forest in Mida Creek, Coast Province, Kenya". The research skills I gained during the TBA course have helped me a lot. I am eager to complete my studies and become a real conservationist. Thanks to TBA!

**Mary Warui, Kenya (06/4 Kirindy)**

### TBA laid a solid foundation

After reading about TBA on their website, I had a lot of expectations which I am glad to say were met. The experience and knowledge I got from carrying out the research project such as experimental design, data analysis, and presentation was vital for me. I am able to apply them in my current work but I will also use that knowledge during my MSc studies.

The course also challenged me to think in broader terms than I have ever done before. The choice of topics and the teachers gave me a wider view on how to approach different natural resources and conservation issues. During the course, I also appreciated how the host country manages its natural resources. It was particularly exciting to see how Kenyans are proud of their natural resources and environment. This was evident by the large numbers who visited their parks and other protected areas, which is not the case in my country where we think that such areas are mainly for tourists. It's a lesson and challenge to me.

Lastly, I cannot forget climbing Mount Longonot. Every step I took as I was climbing gave me the confidence that I will make it and there is no giving up and TBA has laid a solid foundation. In addition, the TBA staff and alumni, especially here in Malawi, are supportive of me in developing my career in conservation issues. This is a chance I couldn't have had if it were not for TBA.

**Doreen Munthali, Malawi (07/2 Mpala/Naivasha)**





## Life after TBA

### TBA had a profound impact

It seems hard to believe that it's been almost 9 years since I attended a TBA course in Kibale Forest, Uganda. The experience was wonderful – I learned a huge amount in a very short time, and made some great friends in the process. The impact of my TBA experience on my life was profound. Not only did I come away convinced that I wanted to pursue a career in conservation, I had also begun to develop a love of Uganda which has kept me coming back ever since. After the TBA course, I did an MSc in Biology and then decided to take the plunge and enter the world of social science for my PhD, which was in anthropology. For my fieldwork I returned to Uganda to study the impact of tourism at Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, which was a fantastic experience. I found the move to anthropology very difficult at first but as I was interested in how conservation affects local people, I knew I would need social research skills to get the best possible data. It's not something I've ever regretted, and I'm now glad to be an 'interdisciplinary' person who can understand most (but not all) of what conservation biologists and social scientists are saying!

After my PhD, I returned again to Uganda to set up Bwindi AMAGARA – a community based vegetable farming project which supplies food to the tourism industry. It's still going after 3 years and I hope that it's having a positive impact for both conservation and local livelihoods. After a short stint as a post-doc in the Geography department at Cambridge, I'm now back living in Kampala working on a project looking at ape conservation and poverty alleviation across African ape range states. I feel immensely lucky to have done so many interesting things in the last few years. It's fair to say that without TBA it's likely that none of it would have happened, and I'm immensely grateful.

**Chris Sandbrook, UK (01/3 Kibale)**



### TBA: a stepping stone to professional success

Since the exciting and educative training I gained from TBA in 2008, I have been climbing up my professional career ladder. I have become a Professional Development Fellow of Capacity Development and Linkages for Environmental Assessment in Africa and Ecological Society for Eastern Africa. I have also completed my MSc. in Environment and Natural Resources from Makerere University and I am working hard for PhD opportunities. I am practicing my TBA skills as the Natural Resource Manager of an NGO called Uganda Coalition for Crisis Prevention.

TBA has been very influential in my professional career and I would like to encourage all the young up-coming environmentalists to come out and apply for this educative course as a stepping stone to professional success.

**Irene Nadunga, Uganda (08/2 Kibale)**



### Putting new ideas into practice

I hail from Liberia and work with the Forestry Development Authority as a chief park warden for the Lake Piso Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve, a 97,159 hectare protected area in Western Liberia. Interestingly, I was the first Liberian to attend a TBA course.

Although I have participated in several projects, the TBA experience gave me a detailed insight into the study of tropical biology and built my professional life as a conservationist. Upon my return to Liberia from the TBA course, I became a lead advocate encouraging scientific research into Liberia's biological diversity and have jointly developed several research proposals with international colleagues and lecturers from the TBA Amani course.

TBA provided experienced and knowledgeable lecturers who imparted us with the best knowledge and approaches to contemporary biology and conservation issues. This knowledge will never be forgotten and I can proudly boast of that every day in my country. At the job site, I am considered the most innovative manager and was unanimously chosen by my fellow park managers to head the Protected Areas Network of Liberia, a network of protected area managers in Liberia. All of these are as a result of the knowledge acquired from the TBA course.

**Darlington Saykay Tuagben, Liberia (09/2 Amani)**

## Life after TBA



### Ten Years on from TBA

Professionally, TBA opened a door for me to pursue a career in science. It was pivotal to finding employment with the National Herbarium & Botanic Gardens of Malawi (2001-2007), a Masters programme (University of Oslo 2004-2005), and finally a teaching job at Chancellor College in Malawi. It has also opened a further opportunity to pursue doctoral studies. As a direct result of acacia-ant biology TBA introduced me to in Kenya, I have done a preliminary study into ants that live in twigs and galls of *Terminalia cericea* in Malawi. In *Terminalia* ants, I seek to answer questions like: Is the relationship obligatory or facultative, what are benefits/effects that each party obtains, what ant species are involved, and what is the mechanistic basis of the relationship.

I am now pursuing a PhD in genetics of aging in Jena, Germany. We use *Nothobranchius furzeri* as a new model for age research. These fish are distributed between Sudan and South Africa, with *N. furzeri* coming from Central Mozambique and Zimbabwe. They are highly sought after by hobbyists in Europe because the males are extremely colourful, and can therefore be economically important in that regard.

**Enoch Mlangeni, Malawi (00/1 Naivasha/Taita)**

The alumni section on the TBA website ([www.tropical-biology.org](http://www.tropical-biology.org)) has been expanded with news of TBA achievers, including those who have received scholarships to continue their studies, as well as brief updates on what TBA alumni are now doing. Please send details of your current activities to us: [alumni-updates@tropical-biology.org](mailto:alumni-updates@tropical-biology.org).

There is a section on the TBA associations which have been set up in ten countries and more being established.

### TBA can help you decide the right thing!

I had longed to attend the TBA courses since my days as a third year forestry student at the Sokoine University of Agriculture in 2003. I had some friends who had attended the courses and they would tell me about the ecological discoveries that they made. A year before attending my course, I had started working with the Tanzania Forestry Research Institute (TAFORI) as a researcher in the entomology department. Therefore I thought I would do something related to entomology during the TBA course but I finally found myself increasingly interested in plant invasion.

My decision to be a plant invasion biologist culminated in TBA offering me an MSc. scholarship in 2005 through its Darwin Initiative project on combating alien invasive plants in the East Usambara mountains. Apart from the MSc. studies, TBA granted me opportunities to attend workshops, field visits and seminars on plant invasion where I had opportunities to cement my opinion and become a “real” invasion biologist. I and my fellow TBA alumni carried out a project on the management of an alien plant, *Cedrela odorata*, which now acts as model for management techniques in the Eastern Arc mountains.



Currently, I'm heading the Lushoto Silviculture Research Centre and aspiring to do a PhD on areas of plant invasion and climate change. I'm truly proud of TBA and feel so much indebted for what it has done for me.

**John Richard (05/1 Kibale)**

## TBA alumni associations

### Tanzania TBA Alumni Group: A way to see things happening

Young Tanzanian professionals have been benefiting from the TBA courses and workshops over the last fifteen years. These initiatives are highly cherished by the beneficiaries.

The Tanzania TBA alumni decided to form a professional group to facilitate sharing professional knowledge and experience so as to bring the TBA course objectives to practice. The group strives to strengthen its relationship with her alma mater as well the relationship amongst members. The Tanzania TBA alumni group aims to continue strengthening the relationship between the alumni and their alma mater as well as other TBA alumni groups. It will also continue with efforts to organise a group meeting at the earliest convenience to deliberate on issues so as to stimulate action.

Although as a group we are just beginning, we are proud of the achievements of our individual members who have excelled in their professional careers and have continued to attract research funds and participate in conservation. We are so proud to be part of the TBA society.

As a group, we feel we have a role to ensure that the knowledge and skills imparted to us lives with us and works for others. We also appreciate and commend the efforts made by other countries' alumni to set up their TBA groups.

**Dos Santos Silayo**  
**Interim President – Tz-TBA Alumni Group**

### Madagascar TBA alumni group (MTBA)

Aware of the huge challenge for conservation in Madagascar and acknowledging the value of adequate training, MTBA regularly runs meetings at the University of Antananarivo to inform students about scholarships and other opportunities. Also, a team of MTBA members (Rado, Roma, Iharimbolatiana) received the TBA small grant support for their project on environmental education targeting secondary school students in the vicinity of the eastern rainforest of Madagascar. The short Malagasy title of this educational project is “**Mianatra Miaro ho Maitso**” (Learning, Conserving for a Green Environment).

So far, the team has met the head of district schools and school directors in Anosibe An'Ala concerning the project and has designed the cap which will be distributed to the students and teachers. Another team of MTBA (10 participants so far) is now working on a proposal for a student conference or workshop to be held in Antananarivo in December 2010.

Being scattered all over Madagascar and the world made it quite a challenge for MTBA to meet in person and has restricted our activities so far. Recently, we have experimented with using “Skype conference” to overcome that challenge and it proved to be such an effective tool that MTBA would like to extend the network to TBA alumni in other countries.



*From left to right: Director of the Ampasimaneva School, President of the Collegian's parents, Andrianaivoarivelo Radosoa (MTBA), Rahaingonirina Christophe (President of the Mbarakaly Association)*

## TBA alumni associations

### Malawi TBA Alumni Group

The International Year of Biodiversity 2010 also marks 15 years since the first Malawians, Chimwemwe Mhango-Mawaya and Moses Maliro, participated in a TBA course (Kibale 95/2). They both now hold PhDs and are senior lecturers at the University of Malawi. Nine more Malawians have since attended TBA courses with some also continuing to PhD studies. The two ladies that followed the pioneers, Joyce Bakuwa-Njoloma (Kibale 96/2) and Cecilia Maliwichi-Nyirenda (Kibale 97/1) have both completed their PhDs in biotechnology and ethnobotany respectively. Dr Njoloma is the Deputy Dean for the Faculty of Environmental Science at Bunda College and is currently involved in research in horticulture and agroforestry. Enoch Mlangeni (Naivasha/Taita 00/1) is currently studying for a PhD in genetics at Jena University in Germany.

The Malawi TBA Alumni Group's main goals are to sensitise more graduates about TBA courses and to provide a platform for research experience by including students in our individual studies. Tiwonge Mzumara (Kibale 05/1) leads the way in both goals as she now takes four students from the University of Malawi each year to help her research on birds in southern Malawi. Those of us based in academic institutions also help students in making competitive applications for the TBA courses. The group also hopes to carry out more research



through the TBA Alumni small grants and to ensure university students are actively involved in whatever projects we carry out.

In 2010, our major activity will be establishing a small fund for undergraduate students. This award will go to two students, one at each of the University of Malawi colleges where some TBA alumni are staff members. The award amount will depend on the money raised and will be for their research project. The two students will also get a placement with an ongoing research with one of the alumni.

### Formal launching of TBA-Sierra Leone

The TBA Alumni Association in Sierra Leone (TBA-Sierra Leone) was formally launched on 7th February, 2009. A draft constitution has already been produced. Among the activities planned for the group include having more intensive advertisements of TBA and its programmes in order to increase awareness in Sierra Leone and address the appalling shortage of human resource capacity to undertake scientific research on biodiversity conservation.



The group is thankful for the awards that members have received so far. Members recognise that attendance at TBA courses is not merely to build the personal capacity of the participants but more importantly, to get participants involved in biodiversity conservation and research and to use the skills gained at TBA to contribute to national development. Thus, TBA-Sierra Leone intend to search actively for opportunities for members to work in projects related to biodiversity conservation and use expertise gained during the TBA trainings. TBA-Sierra Leone will publish articles on environmental issues and activities of the group in media such as the TBA newsletter and wishes to feature on the national television programmes on environmental issues.

