A ROCHA KENYA NEWSLETTER

LONG RAINS, 2025



A ROCHA KENYA

PHOTO GALLERY

Tree planting



At A Rocha Kenya, we believe conservation must be lived, not as a distant ideal, but as a daily choice to walk gently with creation. It is about living with the land in ways that help restore what centuries of neglect and overuse have taken away.

One of the most visible ways we put this into practice is through tree planting. We encourage planting of both exotic and indigenous species. Fast-growing exotics meet practical community needs for firewood, timber, and shade. But it is the indigenous trees that sustain life in deeper, lasting ways. These native species anchor ecosystems, enrich soils, support wildlife, and provide shelter and food for pollinators (bees, butterflies, and birds) that are so easily overlooked.

We do this work not only as scientists or citizens, but as people of faith. People who believe that creation belongs to God, and that caring for it is an act of worship.

In this newsletter, we reflect on the quiet strength of trees, the irreplaceable value of native plants, and what it means to live deeply rooted in hope.

Reflections, Restoration, and Hope

Where I grew up, the paths between fields were alive with wildflowers, buzzing bees, and the songs of birds. Trees offered shade, marked the passing seasons, and stood as quiet witnesses to life unfolding around them. I still remember the small joys of watching a butterfly land, or hearing a bird call across the morning air.

Now, much of that life has changed. Across the country and beyond, native vegetation has been cleared, land has been tidied and tilled, and the small plants and shrubs that once supported insects and birds have disappeared. The silence that follows is more than a loss of beauty; it is the unravelling of an entire living web.

Restoring the land doesn't always mean planting. Sometimes, it means stepping back, leaving a patch of earth to grow wild, letting native plants take root, and allowing ecosystems to heal at their own pace. Other times, carefully planting indigenous trees can anchor this recovery, offering shelter, food, and life to the creatures that sustain us. Each choice adds a thread back into the fabric of life.

In this edition, we share stories of these efforts in practice. We sit down with our long-time colleague Stanley Baya to hear about the forest he has nurtured at home. We highlight our tree and land restoration work in Dakatcha, and through our Living Lightly section, offer practical ways you can make space for life in your own surroundings.



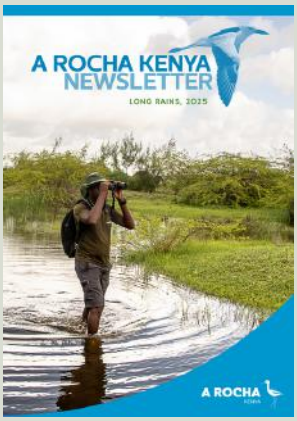
Whether through action or patience, each choice to conserve, restore, or simply let nature be is a step toward a land that breathes again. We hope this newsletter inspires you to notice the wildness around you, and to care for it.

Alex Simiyu, In Charge Communications

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Eric Kinoti, the Crows No More Project Coordinator, during a waterbird count survey at Sabaki River Mouth Estuary.



Where the Forest Came Home

A Conversation with Stanley Baya

I sat down with Stanley on a quiet afternoon at Mwamba, where the sea breeze and bird calls made it easy to talk about trees. Stanley has worked at A Rocha Kenya for over 24 years and currently serves as the Manager for Community Programmes.

As we began, I asked him what drew him to conservation work in the first place, and what has kept him in it for so long. He paused, then smiled. "It started when I was a small boy," he said. "My father was a handyman. He made things, chairs, pestles, bags, anything people needed. And to do that, he'd take me with him into the forest to look for the right kinds of wood. That's how I began interacting with the trees and the natural world."

Those early memories, he explained, were filled with practical knowledge and deep respect for trees, not just as resources, but as part of life. "We didn't cut trees carelessly. You only took what you needed, and you knew what each tree could give. It was part of how we lived."

Stanley's formal conservation journey began with the ASSETS programme, which provides bursaries for secondary school students and supports local livelihoods through alternatives like eco-tourism. But his roots in conservation go much deeper.

Over the years, Stanley has watched the landscape, ecosystem, and the culture around it, shift dramatically. "When I look back at how we lived, it's quite shocking how much has changed," he said. "You had your own space. But now? Families stay crowded in one house for years. The forests are gone. Land is subdivided into tiny pieces. And the way we carry ourselves has changed too, people used to have dignity in how they lived with the land."

That sense of loss is part of what motivates him now, not just to conserve what remains, but to restore it, starting at home. And in Stanley's case, "home" is not just a house. It's a small, flourishing forest.



Stanley's home

"I live on about three-quarters of an acre," he told me. "When I bought the land in 2004, it was completely bare. Just dry, degraded ground. So the first thing I did was stop anyone from cutting anything, I just let what was there grow. Then I started planting indigenous trees. Most of the ones I have now, I grew from seed. I picked them myself. I planted them myself. And now, I have a small forest." He paused, then added, "People come to my place and say, 'You live in a forest!' I reply, exactly. That's the idea."

There's a quiet joy in the way Stanley describes his land. Not just in what it looks like, but in how it lives. "I have birds all over. I've seen the Golden Oriole, Narina Trogon, lots of Bulbuls and Robin-chats. I've made little bird bags for them. They seem to like those."

Do you ever cut down trees?

When I asked Stanley if he ever allows anyone to cut any trees at his home, he laughed gently and said. "Only after we've had a conversation. The first instruction I give to anyone helping me at home is, you don't cut trees without asking. And I prune my Neem trees for firewood. I dry the branches and use them for cooking, sometimes even for a barbecue. It works."

But more than just practicality, Stanley sees indigenous trees as holding the key to true ecological restoration. "We lost indigenous trees because they were valuable," he said. "Now we replace them with exotics that don't serve the same purpose, they're fast-growing, commercial, ornamental. But they don't support life in the same way."

He gave the example of butterflies. "Each butterfly species needs a specific plant to lay eggs and breed. If that plant disappears, the butterfly disappears. So when we replace indigenous trees, we're removing whole species. It's not just a tree, it's a whole web of life." That's why, for Stanley, real restoration means returning the land to what it used to be, or as close as we can get.

You can begin creating your own forest today!

"When I walk into the forest and see a mature Mbambakofi or Mrihi, it fills me with something I can't explain. They're majestic. And we can have that at home, even on a small scale. You don't need to fill the whole shamba (land) with trees, just pick a corner. Let something grow."

He paused again, and then affirmatively said. "I planted my trees in 2007. People say indigenous trees grow slowly, but that's not true. Mine are tall now. Strong. Maybe I won't harvest them, but someone in the next generation will. As long as they plant more."

As we wrapped up, I asked him what he'd say to someone thinking about planting trees at home. "Think ahead," he said. "Start small, and start now. Don't wait until you have everything. Just begin. And plant the trees that belong. They'll bring the birds, the butterflies, and maybe even the dignity we lost along the way."

Threatened Trees Restoration





Focus Area: A Rocha Kenya Dakatcha Nature Reserve

In the Dakatcha Nature Reserve, signs of renewal are quietly emerging. After the rains, trees are leafing, birds are calling, and the land feels alive again. Yet for many indigenous tree species, recovery is far from certain. Some have become so scarce that encountering one feels extraordinary.

Once common, these trees have vanished from much of the landscape, a challenge at the heart of Dakatcha Woodland's conservation crisis.

To address this, A Rocha Kenya has launched a three-year initiative, Conserving and Restoring Threatened Species in Dakatcha, funded by the Franklinia Foundation. The project targets 20 tree species listed as threatened on the IUCN Red List, focusing conservation and restoration efforts within and around the reserve.

> ***In the past, trees were many and found everywhere, but nowadays, if you say you've seen a certain tree, you must first prove it.***
>
> **Reflected one elder in Dakatcha**

Work began with mapping where these trees still grow and estimating how many remain. Half of the reserve has already been surveyed, and phenology studies are underway.

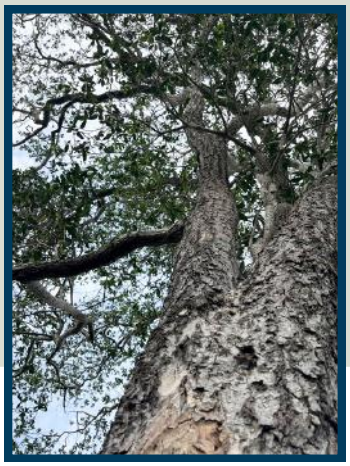
Restoration preparations are also progressing. A new tree nursery site has been established, and seed collection from both inside and outside the reserve will follow. In collaboration with the Centre for Ecosystem Restoration Kenya (CER-K), degraded areas will be identified for targeted enrichment planting and woodland restoration.

Local knowledge is central to this work. Many threatened trees hold deep cultural significance, woven into livelihoods and traditions. Elders are sharing their understanding of how these species were once valued and protected, ensuring that traditional wisdom informs modern conservation strategies. These insights will also be incorporated into environmental education for schools, equipping the next generation with both scientific and cultural tools they need to safeguard these species.

As the project advances, mapping will continue, community nursery training will begin, and planting will restore degraded sites. Each tree recorded and replanted is a step toward a healthier woodland, one that can once again be home to thriving wildlife and a living link between people and the land they call home.

Species in the Spotlight: *Warburgia stuhlmannii*







Warburgia stuhlmannii is a threatened tree species, listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. Once common across Dakatcha Woodland, it has become increasingly scarce due to habitat loss and unsustainable harvesting.

Locally, this tree is renowned for its potent medicinal properties. Its thick, aromatic bark has long been used as a natural remedy for coughs, colds, toothaches, and body pain.

However, demand for its bark has come at a heavy cost. Harvesting often involves stripping large sections from the trunk, a method that weakens or kills the tree. When A Rocha Kenya first surveyed the 9,000+ acres of the Dakatcha Nature Reserve, only three mature stands of Warburgia remained, all heavily debarked before the land was protected.

In early 2025, a new survey brought encouraging news: more than 20 previously undocumented stands were mapped inside the reserve. Seven of these are now being closely monitored to record their flowering, fruiting, and leafing cycles, knowledge that will guide future restoration and conservation.

Community engagement is also central to the species' survival. Local discussions are exploring sustainable bark-harvesting methods that allow medicinal use without endangering the tree, ensuring it can continue to meet community needs while regenerating naturally.

By safeguarding these remaining stands and supporting natural regeneration, we aim to ensure that Warburgia stuhlmannii remains both an ecological cornerstone and a cultural resource for the people of Dakatcha, not only today, but for generations to come.

DID YOU KNOW?

Warburgia stuhlmannii is one of 20 threatened tree species being restored through A Rocha Kenya's work in Dakatcha. Conserving these trees means preserving both biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Living Lightly: Leaving lighter footprints



God's Mandate to us

Creation is not just a backdrop for human life; it is a divine gift entrusted to us by God. As the Psalmist reminds us, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."

This truth carries weight: everything in creation has inherent value, and we are called to care for it responsibly. Recognising this is the first step in stewardship.

How we treat the world reflects what we believe about it; if we see creation as precious, we are far more likely to act with care and thoughtfulness. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true.

Until we truly see creation as God's handiwork, and acknowledge that we have been tasked to care for it, there is only so much we can do to nurture it. Understanding that the earth is the Lord's, and that it pleases Him when we care for it, gives us motivation to take even the smallest steps. Recognising that caring for creation is part of our identity is the first step in living in ways that give nature space to breathe.

It is in the every day life

In this Living Lightly space, we explore practical, everyday activities that, when done thoughtfully, can make a real difference for the creation around us.

With so much going wrong, and so much already lost, it is easy to feel stuck or paralysed by negative news. Yet every action we take leaves a mark, a footprint, on God's creation.

From the food we eat to the energy we use, our daily choices either ease or increase pressure on the environment. How we live affects the world around us; in a positive way or a negative way.

Living lightly is about intentionally reducing the footprint we leave, however small it may seem. It means using resources wisely, avoiding unnecessary waste, and considering the long-term impact of our habits. Living lightly is not about perfection or a single dramatic action; it is a lifestyle of consistent, thoughtful choices. From choosing to turn off the lights when leaving the room to avoiding any single-use plastics.

Mulching and Composting at home





Healthy Soil, Healthy Trees

Healthy soil is one of God's quiet miracles. From it, trees rise, food grows, and entire ecosystems are sustained. In this issue, our focus is on a simple but powerful practice: mulching and composting, two easy ways to turn organic waste into a resource that nourishes the soil, helps trees thrive, and reduces pressure on natural habitats.

Mulching

Mulching involves placing a layer of organic material such as dry leaves, grass clippings, or wood chips around the base of plants. This layer locks in moisture, suppresses weeds, feeds the soil as it breaks down, and shields roots from extreme temperatures. Mulching is a low-cost way to give trees and plants a strong start, especially during dry periods.

Composting

Closely linked to mulching, composting transforms kitchen and garden waste into nutrient-rich soil that strengthens plants and trees. By combining these two practices, even small-scale efforts at home or in a school garden mirror the work being done in restoration projects, such as those at Dakatcha, where healthy soil is key to tree survival.

DID YOU KNOW?

Up to 50% of household waste is biodegradable. Composting keeps it out of landfills, where it would produce methane, a greenhouse gas over 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Make your own compost

Fruit and vegetable peels, eggshells, coffee grounds, grass cuttings, and dry leaves can all be transformed into compost. A compost improves soil structure, boosts fertility, and supports beneficial organisms like earthworms and microbes.

Start with a simple pit, a wire mesh bin, or a purchased compost bin. Add layers of "greens" (like fresh grass cuttings and fruit peels, which add nitrogen) and "browns" (like dry leaves or cardboard, which add carbon), keeping the pile moist but not soggy, and turning it regularly to allow air in. In 3 - 6 months, you'll have dark, crumbly compost ready to use.

In places like Dakatcha, where A Rocha Kenya works to restore indigenous vegetation, healthy soil is key to tree survival. By mulching and composting at home, you're doing on a small scale what restoration teams do in the field; giving trees the conditions they need to grow strong, store carbon, and support wildlife.

Bottom line: Mulching keeps moisture in and weeds out, composting transforms waste into life-giving soil, and together they reduce the need for chemical fertilisers, save water, and help trees. From potted seedlings in your home compound to indigenous species in restored forests, mulching and composting will help your trees flourish for years to come.

Updates from the field



Colin (right) handing the Long-tailed Skua to Kai during the bird's release back to the skies

A Rare Visitor Returns to the Skies: Long-tailed Skua

Earlier this year, the rehabilitation team in Watamu had the rare opportunity to care for a long-tailed Skua, a species extremely uncommon in Kenya. This individual had been rescued by local residents and brought to the centre after its flight feathers were worn, leaving it unable to feed itself by chasing and stealing food from other birds, a crucial survival behaviour for Skuas.

Over approximately ten days, our team provided care and monitoring to help the bird regain strength. Once it was fit enough, we released it back at the beach, where it took to the skies once more. This release marks only the third record of this species in the Kenya Bird Map and highlights the vital role of community involvement and rehabilitation in conserving rare wildlife.

The Watamu Raptor Rehabilitation Centre, led by Roy Bealey and Bea Anderson, works closely with A Rocha Kenya to rescue and care for injured birds of prey and other species. For many years, A Rocha Kenya received rescued raptors from the community but lacked the facilities to rehabilitate them effectively. Encouraged by the Kenya Bird of Prey Trust, a dedicated centre was built on Plot 22, A Rocha's original Watamu site, through Bea Anderson's generous donation of land and construction costs. The first patient, a Southern Banded Snake Eagle, was found trapped in an open septic tank with a broken bill. After specialist surgery and recovery, it was released with a satellite tracker. Today, the centre provides year-round rescue, treatment, and release for raptors and other birds in need.

Crows No More Project

The invasive Indian House Crow continues to threaten Kenya's coastal biodiversity. In December 2024, field teams estimated around 33,000 individuals in Malindi and 9,000 in Watamu. These were projections based on available data.

Because the birds are highly mobile and often concentrate in certain areas, the actual population was likely even higher. By August 2025, more than 57,600 crows had been removed from the two towns. Yet, because new birds constantly move in from surrounding areas, numbers of the crows still seem steady. Continued management therefore remain essential.

Even so, change is already visible. A trap near Temple Point has shown a steady decline in captures since poisoning operations began, and local residents are noticing the difference.

> "We've noticed at Temple Point the crows haven't come back. Every couple of weeks one or two might caw for a few minutes, but then they leave. They really won't enter our property now, not even our garage. Because of this we're seeing hornbills arrive, small bird populations grow, and our sunrise and sunsets are filled with bird songs, not the annoying caw of crows. It's a glimpse of what the coast of Kenya was always meant to sound like."

Reducing crow numbers not only restores balance for wildlife, but also creates space for communities to experience the richness of native birdlife once again.



Plant Phenology

We experienced abundant rainfall in Watamu this year, the longest and wettest season in decades, perhaps even since around 2000.

This exceptional season brought rare findings at Mwamba. During our regular phenology surveys (tracking the flowering, fruiting, and other life cycle stages of trees), we recorded Cola minor fruiting for the first time in our records; in previous years, its flowers would appear and drop within days. Even more remarkably, all six monitored *Afzelia quanzensis* (**Mbambakofi**) trees produced pods, a first in our records.



Mapping Mida Creek's Secret Channels



Mida Creek's deeper channels may be vital nurseries for Kenya's coastal fish. Since June 2024, A Rocha Kenya's Marine Team has been mapping habitats and recording biodiversity in these largely unexplored waters.

This project is designed to building the first comprehensive dataset to guide conservation planning and support stronger appeal for the protection of this unique ecosystem along Kenya's coastline.

Sokoke Scops Owl Studies in Dakatcha

The Sokoke Scops Owl, found only in Kenya's Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Dakatcha Woodland, and a small area of northern Tanzania, is one of the world's rarest owls. Listed as Endangered, it faces severe threats from habitat loss due to deforestation, charcoal burning, and agricultural expansion.

Until this year, no systematic survey had been carried out in Dakatcha to understand how many remain or where they live. In March 2025, A Rocha Kenya launched the first dedicated survey of the species in the Dakatcha Nature Reserve, supported by the African Bird Club and the Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund.

Researchers use early-morning call-playback surveys and night-time AudioMoth recorders to detect these elusive birds, mapping their distribution and recording habitat conditions. Early findings suggest the owls are few, with patchy populations in the woodland. This crucial baseline will guide targeted restoration and help safeguard one of the last refuges for this remarkable species.





DID YOU KNOW?

The Sokoke Scops Owl *(Otus ireneae)* is one of the rarest owls in the world. Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is its most important home.

The owl stands at only 16–17 cm tall, it's smaller than many people's hand. It comes in three colour forms: grey, brown, and rufous. Its soft, frog-like ***"prrrp***" call is often mistaken for an insect. Specialised to live in *Brachylaena huillensis* forest, this Endangered owl's survival depends on conserving its shrinking coastal habitat.

Environmental Education: Growing Tree Knowledge with ASSETS Students

In August 2025, ASSETS student beneficiaries gathered for a week of awareness sessions in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Mida Creek areas. This year's focus was on trees, their classification, importance, and the threats they face.

Earlier in April, students had explored the many benefits of trees, from providing shade, food, and shelter for wildlife to improving soil quality and storing carbon.

Building on that foundation, the August sessions introduced the differences between indigenous, exotic, and invasive species.

Students learned how native trees maintain ecological balance. They also explored the roles and risks of introduced species, and how invasive trees can harm biodiversity.

Practical discussions covered ways to conserve indigenous trees and prevent the spread of harmful species, using local examples and visual aids to bring concepts to life.

By the end of the sessions, students were not only better informed but also inspired to act as conservation ambassadors in their communities, helping safeguard the forests that sustain both people and wildlife.



Kirao with a Red-capped robin-chat

> Having a bird in hand can be challenging, but it's always worth it. It creates a deeply enriching connection and sparks questions you never imagined. The most exciting moment is determining the bird's age based on the shape and structure of its flight feathers. Molt scoring is my favourite part, as it can provide valuable insights into the bird's breeding activity.
>
> **Kirao**

Bird Ringing at Mwamba: Tracking Coastal Migration

Bird ringing is the scientific practice of catching birds and fitting a small, lightweight metal ring (marked with a unique number) around one leg. Each ring acts as an identification tag, allowing researchers to gather information when the bird is recaptured or reported elsewhere. This helps build a picture of where the bird has travelled, how long it has lived, and its patterns of movement within and between habitats.

Every other Thursday morning from 7 to 10 AM, our science team sets up fine mist nets in our nature trail here at Mwamba. Birds are safely caught, carefully removed, ringed and released. The information collected provides valuable insights into migration routes, population trends, and behaviour.

Kirao, our Lead Researcher at A Rocha Kenya, says this: " In bird ringing, each ring is unique, so when that bird is seen again, we can tell where it came from or travelled through. It's one of the best ways to learn about a bird's lifespan, movements, and migration — and that information is vital for conservation."

A Rocha Kenya is one of the few organisations conducting regular bird ringing along the Kenyan coast. The findings from these sessions contribute to long-term monitoring in critical habitats like Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Dakatcha Woodland, guiding conservation decisions locally and feeding into global bird migration research.

Species in the Spotlight: Black-bellied starling





Known for its unusual eye colour changes, the Black-bellied Starling can display one yellow eye and one blood-red eye at the same time, especially during breeding or when agitated. Often found in coastal forests and woodland edges, it feeds mainly on fruit high in the canopy, along with insects and nectar.

WELCOME TO MWAMBA



If you have been at Mwamba, you know it is more than just a place to stay. It is a place where the ocean meets community, and conservation becomes part of daily life. Nestled just metres from the Indian Ocean, Mwamba Guesthouse offers a peaceful base for exploring the beauty and biodiversity of Kenya's coast.

Here, mornings begin with the sound of waves and the scent of fresh bread, shared over breakfast with fellow travellers, volunteers, and our team. Throughout the day, guests are welcome to join our conservation activities, from bird ringing every Thursday morning, to marine surveys along Watamu's beaches, to community outreach projects in nearby villages.

In the evenings, stories are swapped under starlit skies, friendships are formed, and the sense of shared purpose deepens. Mwamba is a place where rest and refreshment meet meaningful engagement, and where every stay supports the ongoing work of A Rocha Kenya.

Whether you come for research, relaxation, or a return visit, Mwamba is always ready to welcome you back into its story.

Hear from our visitors



"To the friends I have met,
The wonderful food I have ate
To the glorious sun,
and the endless fun,
The laughs, jokes, memories
And friendships,
The stories shared, the thoughts
and the prayers
The sea, the sky and the land
The bounty so much in hand
I will miss you all
Thank you with all my heart
For my first African adventure."





Welcome to the Team!



Finance Manager



Human Resources

The positions of Finance Manager and Human Resources are ones we have been praying about for some time. That is why welcoming Margaret Njoki as our new Finance Manager and Caren Chebet as our new HR Manager feels like such a timely blessing.

Both bring valuable skills and experience, but more than that, they share in the heart of A Rocha Kenya's vision. We are delighted to have them join the team and look forward to the ways they will strengthen our work and community.







Volunteers' wall

Volunteers are a vital part of our culture, not just at A Rocha Kenya, but across all A Rocha organisations worldwide. Their time with us is more than an opportunity for God to bless our work; it is also a chance for us to bless them in return. We welcome volunteers into our community, offering them space to pause, experience a new culture (for our international volunteers), and reflect on their next steps in life.

Over the years, we've been privileged to host volunteers from all over the world, of different ages, backgrounds, and for varying lengths of time. Whether backpacking through Africa, taking a gap year, on sabbatical, completing a school attachment, or navigating a life transition, each one leaves their mark on Mwamba.

Earlier this year, we welcomed Jonah Lindsell from Australia, spending part of his gap year with us. From the start, Jonah gave his all, bringing dedication, creativity, and enthusiasm. His most memorable contribution was a stunning mural on our newly painted research office wall, featuring a Black tipped shark, Golden rumped sengi, and Sokoke scops owl (see images above). This vibrant artwork will brighten our space for years to come.



Thank you, Jonah, for the energy, creativity, and care you shared during your time here. Your impact will be remembered long after your return to Australia.

Meet our Board of Directors



Name: Bill Dindi

Position: Board Member

Bill Dindi undertook his undergraduate studies at Kenyatta University in Environmental Science and Community Development. He holds Masters' Degrees in Transformational Leadership and Biblical and Theological Studies. He currently heads the Leader Transformation (Practical Ministry) Department at the International Leadership University in Nairobi, Kenya. Bill is passionate about the integration of development and ecological stewardship as well as the interplay of Theology and Ecology.

A Rocha Kenya's work directly or indirectly contributes to the following Sustainable Development Goals:



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ASANTE SANA | THANK YOU SO MUCH

Get involved with our work!

Stay with us

Book your holiday or research stay at Mwamba! Write to us today; **mwamba@arocha.org**

Have fun

Visit our eco-facilities near Watamu such as the **Mida Creek bird observatory and boardwalk.**

Volunteer

We welcome volunteers in a wide range of fields.
For more info, contact us at **volunteers.kenya@arocha.org**

Contact us

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