

Ecology Masterclass: Designing Projects in the Field

15–26 October, 2025

COURSE REPORT



Hosted by Mpala
Research Centre, Kenya

LAUNCHING CAREERS IN CONSERVATION



With threats to nature in the tropics escalating, the need for African professionals to meet their conservation challenges has never been more pressing. In response, this course was developed as a partnership between the Tropical Biology Association and the British Ecological Society, and hosted by the Mpala Research Centre.

The course was designed to fill a specific gap in the education of aspiring African conservation scientists, giving them the skills and know-how to design scientifically robust projects that can underpin sound conservation decisions.

The demand for the course was extraordinary, with applications from more than 900 eligible young African ecologists, highlighting the real need for this kind of training.

"For me, this experience was more than an academic step - it was a chance to connect science with purpose, to learn deeply from nature itself, and to imagine new ways to protect the ecosystems our communities depend on."

Jacques Assumani, Democratic Republic of Congo

FILLING SKILLS GAPS



24 young scientists from 13 African countries made the Mpala Research Centre their home for ten days of learning, inspiration and networking. Such a multi-cultural environment is an effective way to create professional relationships between like minded conservationists that span the continent and the globe.

The course students were at early stages of their careers either at universities (50%); wildlife departments and museums (20%); conservation NGO's (25%); and environmental consultants (5%). They are working on an impressive array of species and habitats, such as large carnivores in Malawi, amphibians in Democratic Republic of Congo, and forest conservation in Nigeria. The course was designed to broaden their skills-sets and approaches to enhance the impact of their conservation work back home.

"This experience was more than just a training - it was a space for collaboration, learning, and growth, surrounded by inspiring minds from across Africa."

Jessica Mashabana, South Africa

"From the very beginning the course has been an amazing experience. It was structured to maximise learning, connections, and networking. I feel like I learned every second of my time here."

Victoria Mulyuu, Namibia

A VIRTUAL BEGINNING

The course included an online component that opened 1-month before arrival. This enabled the students to start their learning and engagement before heading to the field, learning about the programme's topics through interactive and dynamic online resources.

It also provided an excellent introduction to the group, as the students met each other and shared information online before meeting in person.



"It was very impressive to see some work that was done at Mpala even before I arrived. It gave me a headstart of what to expect."

PRACTICAL LEARNING



Learning in the field through a hands-on, practical approach was at the core of this course. We invited leading experts to teach through interactive talks and field-based learning. Students expanded their horizons and learnt cutting edge approaches to topics such as landscape scale ecology, pollination and the role of fire and herbivores in maintaining resilient habitats. An over-arching approach was how to collect and analyse robust data to answer ecological questions. All of the skills and approaches that the students learnt are transferrable – so they can apply them in their own projects and develop them further after the course.

Many of the invited teachers and speakers are TBA alumni, representing a range of career stages from early-career researchers to established leaders in their fields. Their passion for teaching the next generation, and their varied professional journeys created a team that was both relatable and highly experienced. This gave students an exceptional blend of practical insight and diverse viewpoints.

"The course was not just sitting down and listening to presentations - we actually got to learn in a hands-on way, and this makes the material much easier to remember." **Louise Chivwara, Malawi**

"Receiving career guidance from prominent African researchers has shone a light in the right direction for me. To young scientists looking to break-through in biodiversity conservation science, I recommend you this course." **Josue Nsengiyumva, Rwanda**

COLLABORATION AND RESEARCH



A key feature of the course was that students designed and carried out their own field research projects. Students put into practice the suite of research skills they learnt on the course, from how to come up with a research question, through to devising field methods, analysing data and presenting their results. The projects also gave students from different countries a unique opportunity to collaborate, which is an incredibly enriching experience.

Projects also generated new information and insights into the ecology of Mpala, which we were able to share with the scientists at the research station.

CREATING A LASTING IMPACT



The end of these young scientists' time on the Ecology Masterclass course marks a new beginning for their careers in conservation. All 24 participants told us they have greatly improved their project design skills and will apply what they learnt on the course in their work.

The group has created a new network which continues to be active after the course has ended - on social platforms and emails. They have also now joined TBA's wider network of more than 2600 alumni from 70 countries world-wide. TBA's alumni have become leaders in their fields, saving species and protecting habitats, as well as working for decision-making bodies.

There is a real demand for this kind of training from young African scientists who wish to launch their careers. We are looking to run more of these courses so that we can help transform the lives of more of these passionate young people so they can conserve biodiversity across the continent.

THE STUDENTS

Name	Country
Andre Djoubdouna	Cameroon
Beatrice Mwangi	Kenya
Benard Musamba	Uganda
Emmanuel Chibusa	Zambia
Eric Gowero	Malawi
Eunitah Makokha	Kenya
Fetratiana Rakotomanga	Madagascar
Grace Nyathi	South Africa
Irene Chepngetich	Kenya
Isaac Ntabala	Democratic Republic of Congo
Jacques Assumani	Democratic Republic of Congo
Jessica Mashabana	South Africa
Josue Nsengiyumva	Rwanda
Judith Ankamah	Ghana
Karitus Mwansa	Zambia
Kevin Kipngetich	Kenya
Lesibana Sedibana	South Africa
Louise Chivwara	Malawi
Miquilina Abayah	Ghana
Mohamedi Kidogo	Tanzania
Oladapo Adebisi	Nigeria
Oluchi Agodi	Nigeria
Victoria Mulyuu	Namibia
Wanangwa Chavwanga-Phiri	Malawi

THE TEACHERS



DR ROSIE TREVELYAN
TBA, UK



DR FLORA NAMU
Karatina University, Kenya



DR DUNCAN KIMUYU
Karatina University, Kenya



DR MARK OTIENO
University of Embu, Kenya



MARY NGUGI
Nairobi University, Kenya



KIMANI NDUNG'U
Olpejeta Conservancy, Kenya



DR NINA WAMBIJI
Mpala, Kenya



MATT TOWN
BES, UK



DYLAN BYRNE
BES, UK



GREGORY MAINA
TBA, Kenya



DR FRAZER SINCLAIR
TBA, UK

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Kenya 2025



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www.tropical-biology.org

www.britishecologicalsociety.org