Photography Inspiring Children in Conservation

Thank you, PICC Donors and Friends, for your support this year!

2024 East Africa– Rwanda and Uganda

Our PICC Sessions support our conservation partners with essential skills and resources to sustainably enhance their conservation communication capacity. We recently returned from Rwanda and Uganda where we were teaching groups of school children and wildlife clubs about animal behavior, ecology, and conservation issues and solutions through our interactive sessions with photography, field sketching and storytelling.

We deeply appreciate the existing respect for wildlife and their habitats shown by our partner organizations, and our workshops are designed to build upon that foundation. Our sessions not only focused on technical skills in photography and drawing but also emphasize the importance of ethical conduct in capturing wildlife images. We also actively involved elders, teachers and community leaders, integrating their wealth of knowledge and the invaluable traditional wisdom they hold regarding local animals and ecosystems.

> *We aim to foster a mindful approach, including a greater understanding of animal behavior and ecology, to ensure that our interactions with wildlife are respectful and non-intrusive. We also stress that being a good photographer transcends technical proficiency and gadgetry. It hinges on demonstrating respect for wildlife, upholding ethical standards, and effectively* ***conveying one's passion for animals and a commitment to conservation efforts through the images captured.***



Our project aims are to build capacity in teachers and staff of local program partners so that they can be successful in conservation communication long after we leave. It was a pleasure to share our experience with the CHT staff and Teacher Alex, who were all deeply engaged with the concepts presented and teaching photography skills.

Rwanda 2024:

On June 27, 28 and 29, 2024, the PICC Team collaborated with our partner at Conservation-Heritage Turambe (CHT), Director Valerie Akuredusenge. CHT is located in NW Rwanda in Musanze, near Volcanoes National Park. We held a photography and art workshop with the staff, and thanks to your support, were able to gift them a Canon DSLR camera with a zoom lens, a high quality photo printer, and other resources.

The following day the PICC team and CHT staff went to GS Kagano primary school near Volcanoes National Park to meet with a group of 10 young conservation club students. The children greeted us with a high-energy traditional welcome, singing and dancing, and were completely engaged with learning photography, field sketching, and primate ecology, behavior and conservation. Each child received their own



CHT Director Valerie Akuredusenge with the GS Kagano students.

copy of the PICC Mountain Gorilla Coloring and Activity book and a drawing journal. We were impressed with how much they already knew about mountain gorillas and were delighted with the wildlife stories they shared with us. A morning of classroom learning and outdoor photography was followed by treating the students and staff to a delicious lunch at a local restaurant and then an afternoon of art with their journals and field identification books.



Image by KS Kagano student Angelique



On June 29 we met the students and their teachers at the Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund Center, in Volcanoes National Park. The interactive displays were fun and informative and we all learned so much about mountain gorillas! Outside of the visitor center are beautiful grounds and the students were able to build on their photo skills by capturing images of birds, flowers, classmates, teachers and the volcanoes.

Each student later received an enlarged print of their best photograph and will have access to a camera to continue developing their skills. We will be putting their photographs and their artwork on a project page on the PICC website soon!

Uganda 2024

We returned to the village of Buhoma, at the northern gate to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, to build on the photography and conservation skills from PICC 2022.



Rubona school children welcoming us to their school, with the Bwindi mountains in the background. Press play!



We visited the **Rubona Primary School**, a government-funded school with 350 children walking long distances to attend school and receive 2 meals a day. The kids ranged in age from three years old to their teens. There were 265 kids at school the day we visited. They welcomed us with joyful songs and dances!

Our visit included a wonderful meeting under the shade of a tree with the school director, Simon, other teachers, and a reformed poacher that was very knowledgable of the mountain gorillas. While we were at

the school a mountain gorilla family was visiting right up the road as the school is located on the edge of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.



Rubona Primary School children

Classes included around 150 of the youngest students gathered in one classroom to learn about wildlife conservation. Each child got a worksheet to color and happily used the colored pencils. There were more than 100 older students in two classrooms. We led them through the coloring book and the purpose of our visit and they each received a coloring book and colored with the watercolor pencils (the pencils remained at the school for continued use). They shared many stories about their experiences and enjoyed sharing their knowledge of mountain gorillas and the forest habitat.

The PICC team then joined in a collaboration with 40 art students and two teachers at **Bwindi Heritage High School** in Buhoma. Each student received a copy of the Mountain Gorilla Coloring and Activity book and an art journal. We discussed primates, conservation, shared stories of wildlife interactions, and learned how to use the Canon DSLR cameras. They practiced how to focus on nature photography with quiet attentiveness, capturing images of chickens, flycatchers, chats, and each other. Teachers noted that *"they were offered photography skills to help them appreciate nature in all dimensions and which can also be further done professionally in our tourism world and be a source of income"*. Back in the classroom the students and teachers used the watercolor pencils and field identification resources to make beautiful illustrations while we continued to have discussions about primate behavior and conservation. A few days later we returned with over 30 enlarged prints of their best photography and held a gallery exhibit in their classroom. They each proudly received a PICC Conservation Ambassador certificate and celebrated their success in both photography and art.



Heritage students along with teacher, Sam Irankunda.





Students learning photography and Caleb working on a sketch.



Julie Vogt, an invaluable PICC team member,, here pictured teaching the art teacher how to use the camera.



Heritage High School students admiring their photo exhibit.

Conservation Youth, Buhoma

Thanks to your incredible support, we were able to purchase resources designed to expand opportunities for youth that are working towards developing skills in guiding – bird watching, gorilla trekking, and nature walks — as a sustainable and conservation-compatible career in their communities.



Julie helping the students understand technical aspects of the DSLR cameras.



Elizabeth and Onesmus learning to use binoculars at the Sahaya Guesthouse.

Included in a professional, waterproof canvas bag we provided good quality binoculars, the East African Wildlife Field Guide, the newest edition of the IUCN Guide to East African primates, the IUCN documents for Primate Guide Professionals, a metal, reusable water bottle, and blank notebooks.

The Sahaya Guesthouse, on the edge of the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, was a perfect location to gather together the 4 local youth. We held a photography workshop, discussed mountain gorilla behavior, natural history and conservation, and practiced both our technical skills with the cameras and integrated concepts of ethical wildlife photography and "attentive stillness" into our plans for visiting the mountain gorillas. A special guest speaker was a local leader, Gad Kanyagyeyo, who spent over 20 years as a Uganda Wildlife Authority ranger and habituating mountain gorilla families. He informed and entertained us with stories



Students photographing the Muyambi mountain gorilla family deep in the Bwindi mountains.

about his experiences and made sure that the students were well prepared for their gorilla trekking experience.

On the day of the trek, each of the students had a Canon DSLR camera with a zoom lens and was able to capture incredible photos of the Muyambi mountain gorilla family that we visited high in the Bwindi mountains. The 8-hour hike was filled with interesting discussions, animal sightings and a lot of cheerful fun. They took in the experience fully, from the orientation and dancing at the Visitor Information Center, to learning all they could from the trackers, rangers and guards, to receiving the certificate from the head UWA Ranger, John.

Your financial support was key to us being able to purchase UWA trekking permits for each of the students. It was an opportunity that was deeply meaningful to them as you can read in Onesmus Rutaro's handwritten letter, transcribed here:

> *"Dear Donors:*
> *I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for your generous donation towards my gorilla trekking adventure. Your support has enabled me to experience something truly unforgettable, and I am forever grateful. As a local artist dedicated to gorilla conservation through my carvings, this experience has deepened my connection with these magnificent creatures. Witnessing them in their natural habitat has inspired new ideas and creativity, which I will channel into my art to continue raising awareness and funds for conservation efforts. Your contribution has not only supported my passion but also the conservation of these incredible animals. Your kindness has made a significant impact on my life and the lives of the gorillas I am dedicated to protecting. Thank you for believing in me and my art. I am honored to have supporters like you who share my passion for conservation and art.*
> *Sincerely, Onesmus Rutaro"*

We had an amazing time viewing each student's images on a large screen, and discussed what makes a "good" photo and where we could improve. Isaiah was excited about all the new images he can use for his drawings and paintings; Onesmus was so happy about seeing the gorillas in their habitat and having images that he can use to develop more expressions and body positions for his woodcarvings, and Melorine and Elizabeth were thrilled with the enlarged prints to share with their Batwa community.



A selection of Isaiah's images

The PICC team then traveled north to the **village of Rwenshama, where the team renewed their friendship with the Banyabutumbi Cultural heritage Organization (BACHO-K)**. BACHO-K is led by Akiikih Apollo, a talented dancer, singer and musician, as well as a brilliant leader in feeding, housing, educating, nurturing and loving over 300 orphan children.





With your support we engaged over 120 children with the PICC coloring books, watercolor pencils and story telling sessions where the kids shared personal wildlife stories. With the older youth we held a discussion about animal behavior, conservation, and local wildlife issues. After a long session of powerful personal stories, we headed outdoors to draw. Staying within the BACHO facility brick walls, and under instruction to draw what they saw and not from their imaginations, the children found insects, flowers, and birds to draw. We soon headed inside out of the heat to use the watercolor pencils, field guides and other books from their library shelves to have a wonderful art session where they continued to share stories and create incredible artwork.



Children were found standing on a dirt mound next to the 2m high walls, drawing elephants and buffalo. Asked if they were drawing what they saw, they showed the us the buffalo standing in the field and said that an elephant had just walked by!

Four older youth were trained with the Canon DSLR cameras and went on a game-drive through Queen Elizabeth National Park. Although there are elephants, hippos, buffalo, lions and hyenas in their community and on their soccer field, it is a different experience to see them in their natural habitat and photograph them. We saw so many beautiful animals and watched countless interesting behaviors. Some of the youth are just beginning their training in birds and guiding, and some are already quite accomplished and almost finished with their schooling to become professional guides. We were happy to be able to provide them with binoculars, IUCN resources, and field guides, to encourage their professional development. **This opportunity was again made possible through your generous donations!**





Image by Evaristo

A new conservation partner for the PICC program is with Eric Ndorere, founder and director of the **Save Wildlife Uganda** conservation group. Eric founded and directs the installation of Lights for Lions Uganda deterrent systems, delivers food to children near Queen Elizabeth National Park, developed a community center and gift shop, constructed an instantly successful café in Kihihi, and provides income for the women in his community through the Women in Wildlife program, who are talented weavers and dancers.



They are doing great work in developing conservation-compatible livelihoods in the local population, and providing deterrent systems that have already saved countless lives in the lion population. Eric also runs community education programs and helped to connect us with a group of 15 students from the local school. We had a fun morning with these students, 6 teachers and administrators, and 5 women in the conservation group learning about animal behavior, conservation issues, the value of field sketching, and learning how to truly "see".

We took colored pencils and journals outdoors and found so many beautiful and interesting things to draw. The heat soon drove us back indoors but we continued doing art and learning using the field guides, primate identification guides (IUCN Primate Specialist Group) and bird identification field guide. The students and the women that joined our class had so much fun!



Thank you again for your continued support and friendship – none of this would have been possible without you!

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https://photographyinspiringconservation.org/



We plan to continue our partnership with SWU, to support them in their community outreach and conservation efforts.