PRINCETON IN 🎙 AFRICA

Fellow Report: 6-month

This report focuses on the details of your fellowship that have changed and evolved since your 3-month report; it also aims to help you begin formulating greater reflections about your fellowship experience. To complete this report, you may find it helpful to have a copy of your 3-month report form nearby.

We will use your comments to assess partner organizations, site placements, stipends, and overall logistics. The information you include may be shared with the Board of Directors and future Fellows. We may use your comments to give feedback to partner organizations as well. Please indicate when information is not to be shared outside of PiAf and rest assured that we will honor your request.

Feel free to attach relevant anecdotes, emails, or photos to supplement the required responses.

Deadlines for this report are as follows:

If you began your fellowship in	Your report is due
June	January 15
July	January 31
August	February 28
September	March 31
October	April 30

Please complete this report in Microsoft Word and email it back to *piaf@princeton.edu*. Confirmation will be sent to you upon receipt.

Your Personal Information

Organization: Mpala Research Centre City, Country: Nanyuki, Kenya

Anticipated fellowship end date:

1. How have you been dealing with money during the course of your Fellowship? Have you opened a bank account? Are you using traveler's checks? Relying on ATMs? Any advice on money/banking issues to share with future Fellows?

I use my American bank account and have relied on ATMs in Nanyuki and that has worked fine. For future fellows I would just make sure you have a debit card or credit card that you can use to withdraw money internationally, and also let your bank know you'll be in Africa for a year.

2. Are you taking or have you taken anti-malarials during your fellowship? If so, what kind and how/where did you acquire them?

I am not taking anti-malarials because Mpala is at a high enough elevation that there is no malaria here. I brought some malarone with me from the US in case I travel to areas with malaria.

Your Work

3. Have your responsibilities evolved or changed since the start of your fellowship? If so, how?

My responsibilities haven't changed very much. Most of my office/admin tasks have remained the same, such as putting together the newsletter, managing the adopt-an-elephant program, maintaining databases etc. I've worked on a variety of field projects, so my responsibilities depend on the project. Helping with camera trapping is somewhat continual and depends on when cameras need to be set, and when cameras come in determines when I start sorting through photos. I've started a hornbill demography study with Margaret in the past couple months and which will likely continue for the rest of my time here. We also just started doing mammal surveys, which involves searching for mammals from atop a car.

4. Please describe in greater detail 1-2 projects that you have undertaken or accomplishments you have made in the last 3 months. (Feel free to update us on a project you have been working on since the beginning of your fellowship or to share information about a new project.)

In October I finished putting Mpala's donor database online, which was a very long and tedious task. However, now Mpala is able to easily update this database, add donation information that comes in, and keep track of who is sent calendar solicitations annually etc. I also created a bunch of reports that can now be very easily updated. This is a big improvement because there is now one, central database of this information rather than the multiple lists (none of which were entirely complete) kept by multiple people.

In the field I've started working on a hornbill demography study. My supervisor would like to figure out if the two hornbill species around here are truly monogamous, as they might be some of the only truly monogamous bird species in the world. For the past couple months I've been heading out searching for hornbills, trapping them, banding them so individuals can be IDed, and then releasing them. I've also been searching for potential nest sites, and searching for active nests. As the hornbills start nesting I'll hopefully be able to find these nests, determine how long the female remains inside the nest (they nest in tree cavities and the female plugs the entrance while she's incubating eggs) and band chicks, so we know to which parents chick belong.

Your Fellowship in the Future

5. Would you recommend that this fellowship position be repeated again in the future? If so, what about your post might be improved upon by/for future Fellows?

Yes, I absolutely recommend continuing this fellowship in the future. The only really frustrating thing I've had to deal with is obtaining my pupil's pass (which allows me to stay in Kenya for the year). My pupil's pass took about 5 months to be processed, and put me passed the 6 months that you can stay here on visitor's visas (which is what I entered Kenya on). I was able to get an extension, but a couple other researchers were forced to leave because their visitor's visas expired and their pupil's passes weren't ready in time. Normally, pupil's passes get processed much faster, but for some reason the immigration office has been taking an exceedingly long time now. I wasted a lot of time and money going back and forth to Nairobi to try and get the immigration office to move more quickly.

To hopefully avoid this problem for future fellows I plan on getting them started on the paperwork for a research permit (which you need before you can apply for the pupil's pass) as soon as the next fellow is chosen. Hopefully, Mpala will also be finding someone new to deal with this immigration office, as the current person is not effective.

6. What would you tell someone who is interested in being the next PiAf Fellow at your post?

I think someone interested in this position needs to be aware that this position isn't all fieldwork, and there is quite a lot of office work, some of which isn't that fun. However, I'm still very much enjoying my time here. You'll certainly get out into the field frequently, so it's not entirely office work. Being the PiAf fellow also puts you in a unique position because you work with a lot of the admin staff, hear/deal some of the running of the researcher center, but also do field work with research assistants and hang out with the researchers here. This means you'll likely hear very different opinions about the good and the bad here.

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I would also tell someone interested in this position that this is a GREAT place to meet people at all stages of their careers and make connections with researchers from many universities. For anyone thinking of graduate school in ecology, conservation biology, etc. this is a great place to network!

Your Reflections

7. Since the beginning of your fellowship, have you returned home (i.e., for the December/January holidays)? If so, how did leaving your posting in Africa affect you and your work?

No, I haven't, which I think was a good choice. I visited a family friend for Christmas who live here in Kenya. It was definitely hard being away from home for Christmas, but I think it might have been difficult to go home for a few weeks in the middle of my time here.

8. What will you do differently in the next 6 months until the conclusion of your fellowship-- at work? Outside of work?

At work I have a couple ideas on ways to improve some of the things I'm in charge of in the office, such as emails lists (perhaps creating a google group for Mpala's researchers), maybe figuring out how to make the newsletter into an e-newsletter. There are a number of things that could be advanced technologically, so if I have the time I'd like to improve them.

Outside of work I will definitely be doing some traveling since I have a couple visitors coming in the next few months. I haven't seen that much of Kenya so far, but I've been waiting to explore with my visitors. I'm hoping to see more of the country before I leave.

9. After 6 months in the field, what have you learned about Africa, development, and living abroad? What issues do you want to learn more about during the remainder of your fellowship experience?

Something I was aware of when I was in South Africa, but *really* experienced here was how slowly or difficult it can be to make things happen in Africa. *Everything* takes longer than you'd expect here, whether it's because a car breaks down, the person you need to talk to is away, or it's the bureaucracy of the Kenyan immigration office. The Kenyans I work with think of westerners as impatient since we tend to lose our patience when things don't work within the time frame we were expecting. Researchers here refer to "Kenyan Time" when things take a particularly long time here.

While I've been immersed in the conservation world here at Mpala, I've come to see how much it is linked to development. Mpala strives to be a place that promotes conservation alongside people's livelihoods. Laikipia is an interesting place to be for conservation because there's very little national protected land. The conservancies in the area are all privately owned. There are also large cattle ranches and communally owned lands. Trying to make conservation work in a place where there are so many different landholders, stakeholders, etc. is extremely difficult. Conservation still seems to me to be something strongly pushed by the white, westerners who come to the region either as researchers, landowners, or tourists. I wonder if there would be wildlife in Laikipia if it weren't for the efforts of some westerners.

Having witnessed and learned about some of the challenges facing conservation here in Laikipia, I have become increasingly interested in how wildlife, people, livestock, etc. can all co-exist.

10. How have the first 6 months of your fellowship shaped your plans for the future?

Coming into this fellowship I knew I was interested in a career in conservation/wildlife biology, however, I didn't know whether grad school or vet school was a better route, particularly since my interests are still quite broad. Having interacting with many researchers at all points in their careers, and a couple wildlife vets, I believe I've now decided on vet school, and am considering dual degree (DVM/PhD) programs that some vet schools offer. My plan is apply to vet school next year, and I'm currently looking for opportunities to gain more experience in animal husbandy/working with vets that will make me a better candidate for vet school.

11. It is often helpful for us to draw from PiAf Fellows' words when we disseminate information about PiAf. However, we hate to hassle you whenever we need a blurb! So, please tell us a bit here about what PiAf means to you. Your insights and anecdotes give interested supporters a glimpse into the scope of your projects and potential to make a difference in one year. Please write a few paragraphs as if you were being asked to comment on PiAf for a promotional brochure. What would you say to a potential supporter? An interested applicant? An employer? A friend? What does PiAf mean to you? What have you gained or learned from this experience?

My year, thus far, as a PiAf fellow has been everything I could have hoped for. I fell in love with the African continent when I studied abroad in South Africa, and PiAf has given me the chance to follow that passion as well as my passion for wildlife and conservation. By being in Kenya for a year I've witnessed the challenges of conserving wildlife and ecosystems in a 3rd World country where health, education, food, and infrastructure are even bigger issues.

My study abroad experience in South Africa was spectacular. Every moment was so much fun; A year with PiAf goes beyond just being fun. I have a much better understanding of the issues, challenges, and problems here in Kenya. This year has gone beyond an introduction to the continent and its amazing wildlife. Here at Mpala I feel I am part of an international group of people trying hard to make the coexistence of conservation, researcher, and people's livelihoods a reality

I could not ask for a better post-college experience. I've gotten to return to a continent and wildlife I love, get involved with issues that I'm truly passionate about, and in the process I've started figuring out what direction I want to take my future career.