

# PRINCETON IN AFRICA

## Final Report

This report focuses on your observations, reactions, realizations, and insights after completion of your fellowship. It will be shared with board members and future Fellows and used to improve the quality of fellowships. We hope it will help you to continue processing your time in Africa. We encourage you to make additions in the form of personal letters, a collection of anecdotes, photos, etc., and you are encouraged to draw conclusions or highlight observations with additional commentary as well as simply relating events.

### Your Personal Information

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

FELLOWSHIP END DATE: 6/20/11

ANTICIPATED RETURN DATE: 6/21/11

What do you plan to do next? Please be specific! (e.g., attend Harvard Med, be a barista at Starbucks, teach English in Cameroon, etc.)

I worked for a University of Wyoming PhD student in Yellowstone National Park for two months after returning to the US. He studies the effects of red squirrels on serotiny in lodgepole pine, a trait that can affect community and ecosystem structure during postfire recovery.

Sometime in mid to late Sept., I will be heading back to Mpala Research Centre in Kenya to work for a Princeton professor for 5 months, looking at wildlife scout data and doing some more with camera traps, and maybe even assisting with an undergrad class, etc.

At the end of February, it sounds like I will be moving to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda to work for a professor from the Max Plank Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology. She studies a troop of mountain gorillas there, so I'll be splitting my time between camping and living at a research center following and taking behavioral observations on the gorillas through the dense vegetation and on the steep hills in the park.

### Your Travel and Other Logistical Information

1. How will you travel when you depart your host country? Please be specific in terms of what airlines(s), what cities you will fly to/from, how much your ticket cost (was this travel part of a roundtrip you purchased earlier?) how did you find/purchase your tickets, etc.  
I flew with British Airways from Nairobi to Philadelphia via London- flights BA064 and BA067. The one-way ticket cost \$1210 purchased 2.5 months in advance. I found it online on kayak.com, but had to have my mom purchase the ticket since my debit card kept blocking the transaction.
2. Any travel tips to share with future Fellows?  
Round trip tickets are much cheaper sometimes. Consider getting one of them and then you'll have the flexibility of changing it (within one year depending on the airline). Cheapest travel is on the ground usually- find a good matatu driver and use him... they'll often give you price cuts that way.
3. Did you experience any health problems during your stay in Africa?

No.

4. Have you utilized the health insurance PiAf or your host organization provided you? Please describe any interactions or experiences—positive or negative—you have had with your health insurance company or policy. Please include the name of the provider in your response.

No.

5. Did you take anti-malarials during your fellowship? If so, what kind and how/where did you acquire them?

No.

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## Your Work

6. Please summarize all of the work you did this year as you would on your résumé or CV.

***Princeton in Africa Fellow:*** Mpala Research Centre, Kenya, June 2010- June 2011

- Worked directly with the executive director
- Monitored Mpala's elephant population through individual identification as well as implementation of a database compatible with other similar programs in Laikipia and Samburu.
- Assisted a researcher with a camera trap project across Laikipia to determine how different land management practices affect wildlife populations.
- Oversaw the Northern Kenya Conservation Clubs, afterschool programs in five local primary schools that try to give students a different prospective on the world around them.
- Managed Mpala's website, newsletter, mailing list, and fundraising websites.

7. How would you evaluate your work? What do you feel you were able to contribute? How might you have been more effective?

I worked primarily as the executive director's assistant. I picked up a lot of the work that would otherwise be overlooked and researched into things for her like Salesforce.com and Crowdrise.com. Sometimes I felt like I could have used a little more direction and a greater challenge, but the freedom of doing things for the benefit of Mpala that also interested me was great. I might have been more effective if I knew more about fundraising and how to keep effective donor databases, etc., but I'm pretty quick at picking those things up. I really could not have asked for a better boss last year. She helped me tremendously.

8. What accomplishments from your fellowship are you most proud of?

I really liked the job I did on the Mpala quarterly newsletter- I picked up the layout and style really quick. I was proud of the job I did collecting, organizing, and printing volumes of the Mpala publications. I also liked how I helped get started with the elephant monitoring project and how I kept the camera trapping data up to date and organized.

9. During PiAf's Pre-departure Orientation in May 2010, you listed three things you hoped to gain from your experience as a PiAf Fellow. What were they? (To refresh your memory, we have recently emailed these to you.) Did you achieve these goals? How has your fellowship affected other goals you have/will set for the future?

My goals were to make new friends, to have new adventures, and to learn more about myself for future plans. I did achieve all of these goals. Through my fellowship, I was able to line up my next two jobs (at Mpala and Bwindi) and so I now can prepare myself for my return to East Africa. Not only do I have work goals, but I'm personally going to try to finish a journal manuscript and to get better prepared for applying to graduate schools as early as next fall.

10. What kind of a person would do well in this fellowship or one like it? Do you have any specific advice for future Fellows who are interested in this position?

A person who has studied ecology, environmental science, or biology would do well in this position. The research center is full of similar people, so it is best if the person has a biology background (preferably field biology) to relate with the others. That being said, the job does entail a lot of office work, so the future fellow should be aware of that. And as much as I loved having the executive director as a boss, she travels quite often and at other times is bogged down with her own work. The future fellows should be comfortable setting their own schedules and priorities and be aware that they cannot depend on her to arrange their schedules for them.

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## Your Reflections

11. What did you find most inspiring about/during your fellowship experience?

I found being around a lot of people who are or were like me at some point to be the most inspiring part of my fellowship experience. My boss and her husband spent years doing the kind of work I want to do someday and lived abroad most of the last 20 years or so. Seeing accomplished people like them and the other senior researchers at Mpala made me more secure in keeping up with those goals and striving for higher ones.

12. What have you learned about your own values and worldview through living abroad this year?

I learned that as much as I value fieldwork and living abroad for long periods of time, I need to keep a better eye on my finances since eventually I will always be going back to the US to relax and see family. I realized how education is not a high priority for people who have trouble feeding themselves- a new scenario for me. I learned that giving is not always the answer when ultimately you want people to be able to do things for themselves. So I now have a greater appreciation for money and education (despite other priorities) and have a very different attitude with respect to aid organizations, especially in Africa.

13. Looking back, what does PiAf mean to you? How did this experience affect you? What did you learn or gain from your fellowship? (This is another chance for you to give us good fodder for our marketing materials!) ;)

Princeton in Africa does not mean the obvious: it is not a group of Princeton students or alumni studying or working in Africa. Instead, Princeton in Africa is a group of young, motivated, college graduates from across the United States who decide to devote a year of their lives to a variety of organizations and causes in Africa. Our work ranges from visiting refugee camps and distributing food and medicine, to setting up water collection tanks for orphanages, to monitoring wildlife populations, and empowering women's groups across the continent. My year in Kenya did not just help me gain skills I will continue to use throughout my lifetime, but it gave me direction for my years to come. Princeton in Africa gave me more than that, however. I now have an international community – composed of co-workers, senior researchers, friends, and, without a doubt, the other PiAf fellows and staff – who I know I can count on for just about anything whenever I need it.

14. What will you miss the most once your fellowship has ended?

Hmm, that's a hard question. I really miss the sounds, especially the hyena calls as I go to bed. I miss the sense of adventure that I live with everyday there. I even miss the slower pace of life (only sometimes though). I guess what I miss the most is a combination of the people there- both expat and Kenyan- and the possibilities for wildlife research there- I mean you can't study wild elephants in the US.

15. Are there a number of things in your life that once seemed unusual but now seem normal? Please share a few...

I think I experience more things in the opposite sense, but I can think of a few in this direction now that I'm back in the States. All the trees in semiarid Kenya are really short, but became the norm for me by the end of the year (the deciduous trees in NJ look HUGE). It was unusual to think I would spend an entire

year without seeing an ocean, but I did not really realize that until the end of my post and could see myself continuing to live that way now. It was unusual for me to be the only white person on some of the streets in Nairobi or the only white in a restaurant (I never noticed this in Latin America for some reason), but the staring and the talking (about me that is) grew to be normal. It was unusual for me to drive in another country, to plan my day according to African time, to not see my boss for weeks at a time, but all of those became normal. Most shocking was that it was unusual for me to not have a pretty solid plan for the next few years, but living moment to moment right now has become normal.

16. What perceptions of Americans/expats have you encountered while in Africa? Are there any common misconceptions?

Everyone thought I was rich being a white American in Kenya. While I had what is consider a significant amount of money to them in my bank account, I only got home by borrowing money from my parents. In Kenya, being white means you're a tourist or an aid person usually, so it was sometimes hard for me to explain what I was doing at Mpala. I do not carry candy around for the kids and I do not feel that I should be put in charge of teaching conservation clubs or similar things for that matter. Just because I'm white does not mean I expect to speak at or lead all the events. I'm just there to oversee most of the time and help everyone have some fun.

17. What misconceptions do Americans/foreigners generally have about the country in which you are living?

Many foreigners do not understand the population problems arising in Kenya nor how common you'll find people with diseases like HIV, malaria, polio, and tuberculosis. When people think of Kenya, they usually think of wildlife parks and safaris, but with the rapid rise in human populations, it might be time to consider addressing the problems that will arise on that end in the near future. Also they figure most people speak English or at least Swahili, but there are many people who know neither well and rely on their tribal language. I think most of the misconceptions have to do with people or with how best to use their money there when making donations. While things like the elephant orphanage make tons of money, there are other organizations that might have much better uses for the donations.

18. If you could go back to the start of your fellowship year and do anything differently, would you? If so, what? What do you know now that you wish you had known at the beginning of your PiAf fellowship?

I don't think I would go back to the start of my fellowship year, but I do wish I had known and taken advantage of my boss's interest in hornbills and got that project started before I left. I wish I had had a little more time in the field doing work with her, but I had a great time nonetheless.

19. Do you have any specific suggestions for improving your fellowship position or Princeton in Africa fellowships in general?

The only thing that was difficult for me was the money situation since the other volunteers make more than twice what I was making. I felt like I was left out because of that at times, watching my budget since Kenya is pretty expensive for that part of the world. I know that it's nearly impossible when you're trying to expand, but if PiAf could cover one roundtrip plane ticket I think it would reduce a lot of stress that incoming fellows might have.

20. How do you think Princeton in Africa board members and staff helped you over the year—or could have helped you more? Do you have any specific suggestions for improving interactions with the PiAf office or program representatives?

Well, one of the Princeton in Africa board members hired me for the fall, so that helped me tremendously. I did not have too much interaction with the other board members to be honest even when they were at Mpala. It would be great if a suggestion could be made to try to have a meal together while they are around (even though I know they're always busy with the Mpala board meetings then, but it would be great to hear their input too). As for the staff in the office, you guys were great.

21. Any other comments/suggestions to share?

None that I can currently think of- I'll email you if anything comes to mind.