

Special Project Update December 2013: Kids Cameras Conservation



Kids Cameras Conservation (KCC) is an innovative new programme that teaches children about the impact of conservation photography. The programme was created by Sherry Paul, a long-time PDC supporter and marketing consultant. Sherry proposed KCC to PDC last year, and we

launched it as part of the curriculum at our Special Bush Camp program this November.

Why did we introduce photography as an activity to the Special Bush Camp? We explained to the children that the animals, the plants, the trees that we want to conserve have no voice. But pictures are a universal language. Not everyone in the world speaks Ndebele or English, but everyone understands the message of a powerful image. The delivery of that message transcends distance, and boundaries, and time.

Photography is also a deeper way for the children to connect with nature. The act of taking the photograph creates an instant connection between the photographer and the subject at a level that no words can match. It's like planting a seed that can then grow with careful nurturing into the tallest tree. We believe that the emotional connection between photographer and subject creates a purpose that can bring about change. That same emotion can inspire viewers to support a cause, in this case, conservation. While accompanying the students at one of the photography sessions, Milusi, one of the bush camp teachers, told us that



in previous bush camps, the game drive was “just a game drive.” But photography gives the children an opportunity to make the wildlife a part of them forever, ignite their creativity and see nature through new eyes.



The final version of the KCC pilot programme for PDC was agreed upon by PDC’s Education Programmes Manager, Wilton Nsimango, Sherry, and myself. We thought the program would best be introduced at the Special Bush Camp. This is the end-of-year camp where the two best performing children from each

camp during the course of the year are asked to come back in November. You can imagine that we don’t have to ask them twice. On November 18, thirty-six excited children arrived with huge smiles on their faces. Visiting our Bush Camp for these rural children is like a once-in-a-lifetime trip to a magical theme park. And these children get to go twice.

Wilton greeted the children, made the introductions and explained the rules for the coming week. The children were then divided up into three “packs” of 12, named the Abangane, Itembe and Sethule, and then the activities began.

Sherry first taught the children the basic principles of photography, from how to hold the camera to simple lighting and composition technique.

Then the children set out to a nearby water hole to start taking photographs. The children’s excitement was infectious and it’s hard to know who enjoyed the sessions more: the children or the teachers. It was the first time the children had the opportunity not only to view the wildlife, but to take pictures of it. This was the moment we had been waiting for, to see what would unfold. Certainly we got a few crooked horizons and a few chopped off heads, but overall, the results were miraculous. The



Hwange Elephants at a waterhole. Taken by one of the children

children were naturals. It was no surprise that, on the last day of camp, when Wilton asked them what their favourite subject was, the children voted unanimously for KCC.



Ideally we would have given each child a camera. Unfortunately we did not have 36 cameras; in fact we had only six old ones that had been used for camera trapping, so two children in each pack of 12 shared one camera. The lack of cameras also meant that Wilton had to re-shuffle the programme schedule with the other course offerings so that each pack first took the KCC lessons, then went on their game drive with the cameras, then we had to re-charge the batteries, download their images, clear the memory cards, and give the cameras to

the next pack while Sherry reviewed and critiqued each team's work, every day, for all 36 children. It was a quite a logistical challenge for Wilton and Sherry, but of course they made it work. Our hope is that next year we'll be able to secure cameras for each of the children.

The KCC program helped us achieve our aim of connecting the children at an even deeper level with nature and conservation. It's our belief that the more engaged the children are with nature, the brighter the future is for wildlife and, of course, for the painted dogs. This was illustrated just a few days later when one of the young photography students, Sandra Ndlovu, approached Wilton and asked to borrow a camera so that she could take photographs of an upcoming Conservation Club competition. Wilton

agreed, and so through Sandra, and hopefully others, we are now seeing the practical application of our efforts take root.

As Sherry was leaving Zimbabwe, she told Wilton that her dream is that in ten years one of our Bush Camp photography students will be teaching the KCC course. We are committed to the students to do whatever we can to make that happen.

We have achieved so much over the years with your support and I will never get tired of thanking you for your wonderful generosity. I know that many of you are enthusiastic photographers and that all of you understand the impact a single image can have. We have researched the cameras we would like to purchase in time for the next KCC, they cost approximately \$155 each and if any of you would like to help us please feel free to contact me.



KCC: First Graduates!!!