



The Kasese Wildlife Conservation Awareness Organization (KWCAO) is a conservation education outreach program founded in 2002 by Asaba Mukobi, then a zookeeper at the Columbus Zoo in Columbus, Ohio. Asaba, who is now a keeper at the Oregon Zoo in Portland, Oregon, grew up in Uganda, and like the students served by KWCAO was never exposed to local wildlife. The program's mission is to create wildlife and conservation awareness in schoolchildren and their communities in the Kasese District of Uganda. The Kasese district is 12000 mi<sup>2</sup> (31200 km<sup>2</sup>) and completely contains two of Uganda's ten national parks. Both Queen Elizabeth National Park and Rwenzori Mountains National Park are noted for their high levels of biodiversity; QENP for its diversity in birds and mammals, RMNP for plants.

KWCAO's programs are primarily targeted at schools in the Kasese district, though educators also involve teachers and the students' families. The school program's stated goals are to give schools and communities fundamental knowledge about wildlife conservation through presentations and educational materials, develop and implement wildlife clubs in the region, and train a coordinator to carry out conservation programs in the field. The program's overall mission is to help schools and communities discover new ways to look at wildlife, specifically as sources of sustainable income rather than potential targets for poaching.



The school program is presentation-based, where educators come to local schools to educate the students and teachers about the wildlife in their area. These presentations include trading cards featuring facts and photos of Kasese District wildlife, which are distributed to each student at the presentation. These cards are printed in the US, processed by volunteers at the Oregon Zoo, and shipped to Uganda to be distributed by staff there (left: founder Asaba Mukobi distributes cards). The trading cards have been distributed at every presentation since KWCAO began operations. Many students arrived at presentations in 2009 with cards from friends and family dating back to the first presentations in 2002.

Major themes in the student presentations include living with wildlife, ways to make a living with wildlife without poaching, and the natural history of local wildlife. The curriculum is designed to combat the traditional view of animals as sources of meat or destroyers of crops and to promote a positive image of wildlife. Former poachers attend presentations to teach about the harm poaching inflicts on animals and to introduce alternative ways to make a living from wildlife. Parents and community members are involved in the presentations, particularly those on resolving wildlife-farmer conflicts.

KWCAO presentations have reached over 300,000 students at 245 of the 300 Kasese District schools. Recently some students walked up to 8km (5mi) to reach a presentation because the KWCAO educators were not visiting their school. Students and teachers have offered an overwhelming positive response to the program, requesting that the educators visit again or that they travel to schools they did not visit.



All of the schools participating in KWCAO's outreach education programs were eligible to send five students and one teacher to Queen Elizabeth National Park, in a program offered as a supplement to the presentations. These students were given a day-long tour of the park, allowing them to see some of the famous animals in their area, including elephants, hippopotamuses, baboons, wart hogs, chimpanzees, Colobus monkeys, and many bird species. The tour included a boat trip on a river through the park, which was the first time many students had ever been on a boat (right: a student watches elephants from the boat). The tour was meant to reinforce the positive image of wildlife that the presentations established.



In addition to its school outreach programs, KWCAO maintains a community outreach office in the Kasese District which distributed educational materials year-round while outreach programs are not running. In order to continue the positive trend in conservation, student wildlife clubs and community

tree-planting groups have been established that have gained much respect and participation (left: students plant seedlings provided by KWCAO). KWCAO also supports local businesses. For their education programs, educators locally purchase or rent generators, fuel, office supplies, food, and vehicles, bringing much-needed economic activity to a region where the average income is \$380 US.

Future goals for the education programs include having educators travel to more schools such that the entire student population at each school receives a presentation rather than hearing about it from a delegation who attended at another school, and expanding the national park tour program. The success of the trading card program has been unprecedented, encouraging students to continue learning about the animals briefly outlined on the cards.

For further information, visit [www.kasesewildlife.org](http://www.kasesewildlife.org) or contact Asaba Mukobi at P.O Box 10664, Portland, Oregon or at [info@kasesewildlife.org](mailto:info@kasesewildlife.org).