



SPOTLIGHT

Eco-Tourism





DIANI BEACH: CAN “RESPONSIBLE” TOURISM SAVE IT?

Diani Beach has one of the last remaining coastal rag forests in the world, identified by IUCN as an East African biodiversity hotspot and recognised by Bird Life International as an Important Bird Area. Apart from the famous beach, the forest's flora and fauna are a reason for tourists, biologists and nature lovers to come visit all over the world.

But more than 75% of the forest, one of Kenya's endemic habitats, has been cut down during the past 25 years, according to Wildlife Extra, and species affected by this destruction include at least five types of primates, dwarf antelopes, bush cats, several types of lizards and snakes, tortoises and birds such as the Silver-cheeked Hornbill. Large-scale development of private land is in fact restricted under the EMCA Act of 1999 (Environmental Management Coordination Act), which sets out guidelines and requires an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment), which must be undertaken before it starts, but somehow the development goes on.

“But overnight we see huge patches of forest disappearing to make room for 20-30 new beach complexes. There are laws, but nobody seems to pay attention to them”, says Eirik Jarl Trondsen, manager of The Colobus Trust, a wildlife conservation group which has protected the Colobus monkey and other primates in the area for more than 12 years. As the primates are under threat from illegal deforestation, the Trust has taken on conservation of the South Coast forest as a key activity.

“Tourism is expanding and there is surely an expectation of an increase for Diani, judging by the number of new commercial constructions in the area, such as banks. We think that Diani will see a growth spurt in the next five years”, says the owner of one of the leading cottages in Diani.

But outside the tourist complexes, local residents struggle with a low standard of everyday life and very urgent issues concerning basic needs. “No consideration is made on essential services such as water, which is non-existent, electricity, which comes and goes, or the handling of garbage and the sewage”, says a Colobus Trust Trustee.

Hardly anyone has access to running water, sewage trenches are open and diseases are common. CWSB (Coast Water Services Board), responsible for the supply and delivery of mains water and sewerage to the area, told a local newsletter in June 2008 that “services are very inadequate” and that every day there is a great lack of water due to, among other things, deficient infrastructure. In 2006, the CDA (Coast Development Authority) profiled the following coastal issues, among other things: inadequate infrastructure, inadequate public services, degraded water quality, on-water and land use conflicts, lack of a holistic approach towards management of the coastal and marine resources. CDA was established in 1990 by an act of parliament with the vision of a 'sustainable utilisation of the unique coastal resources'. An hotelier in Diani says that not all his colleagues observe the rules and regulations for waste water management, which means that the water tables may be contaminated and leakage into the sea is probable.

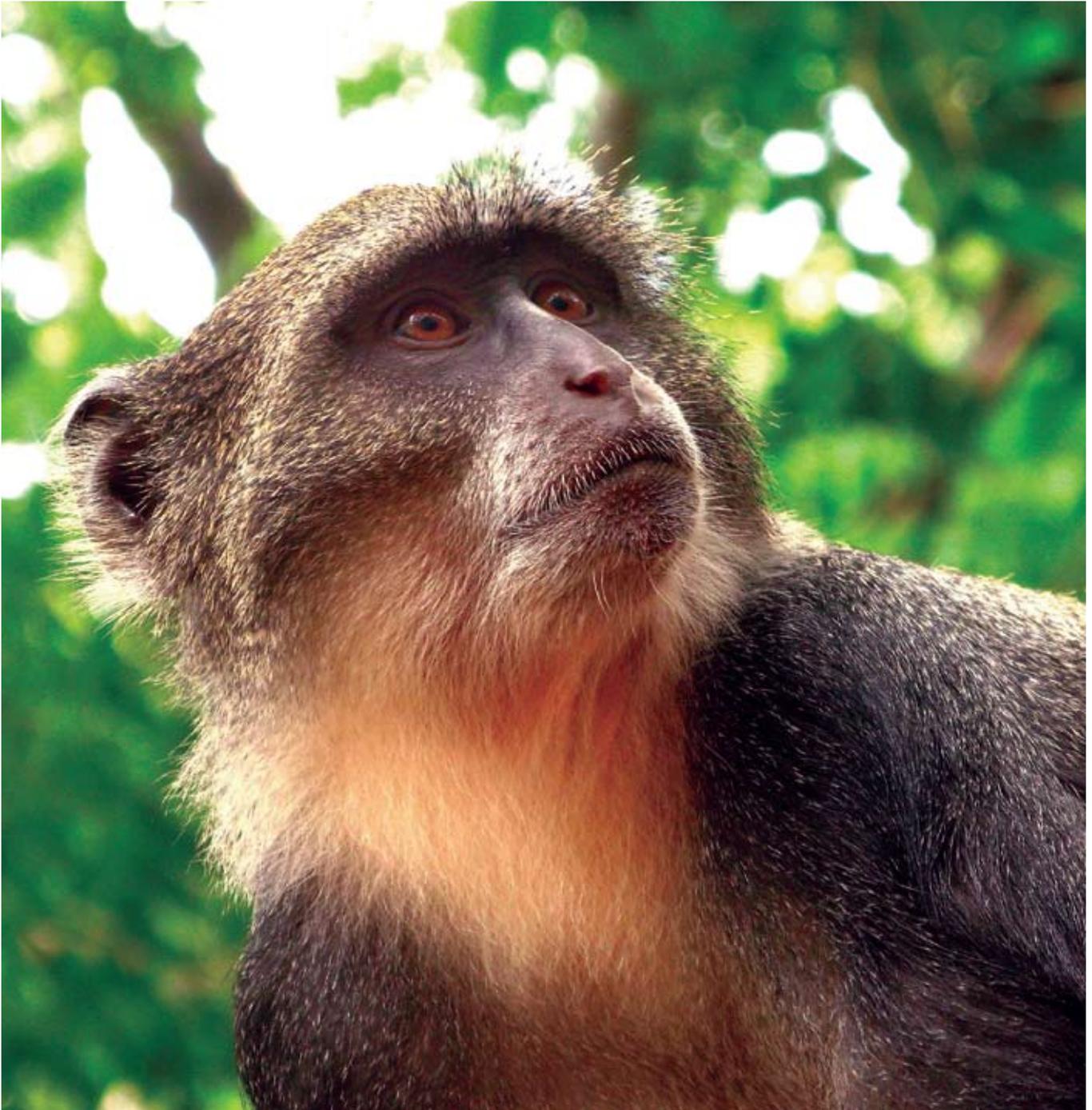
New development has also put pressure on the coral reef that extends outside Diani Beach. One of the greatest attractions of Diani is its stunning environment for

Main picture:
Diani Beach

Pictures by:
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snorkeling and diving. However, the reef is not what it used to be. Huge coral areas lie dead and colourless. A demand for coral souvenirs, shells and rare seafood has resulted in a widespread illegal shell trade, where tourists are often unaware of the status and impact this business has on the reef. Local fishermen are illegally combing the shallow reefs daily to collect living shells that are put in freshwater, which kills them and turns them into souvenirs. The shells represent an important part of the reef life and are part of its fragile ecosystem that takes years to develop. Coral is often being torn or destroyed by snorkelers or divers who are simply not aware of the importance of avoiding touching it. This issue can only be solved with awareness-raising campaigns, education, workshops and information for both parties; tourists and fishermen. Yet for many fishermen, this is the only way to earn a living.

In response to the need for sustainable use of marine and coastal resources, local workshops have been organised and have resolved to implement the Jakarta Mandate and the CBD (Convention of Biological Diversity) programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity. The Jakarta Mandate is a global consensus on the importance of marine and coastal biological diversity. There is also the 30-metre riparian zone, which is protected as part of the Diani-Chale Marine Reserve. It is illegal to disturb it. Above the high water mark within this zone, turtles lay their eggs. The zone provides protection from erosion for the land and hosts a variety of flora and forage for several animals. This law is imperative for the integrity of the MPA (Marine Protected Area). Late in 2008, the East African Wildlife Society hosted a workshop aimed at enhancing conservation, sustainable management and monitoring of the marine ornamental fishery in Kenya and drew participants from various stakeholders including the



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government and the private sector. Efforts are currently being put in place to address the issues raised by the participants.

At the meeting EAWLS and Eco-Tourism Kenya said they needed to build a closer working relationship, particularly in regard to the current community-based projects the Society is undertaking in Lamu, Kuruwitu and Wasini, as well as other planned initiatives in the South Coast which have eco-tourism options built in them. The two agreed to initiate efforts to

jointly develop a concept to be used as a template to guide their working relationship. By encouraging a positive working relationship between the two organisations, EAWLS can gain considerable benefits by ensuring that current and planned community based ecotourism initiatives are eco-rated using the ESK internationally recognised rating system. This would ensure such initiatives are nationally and internationally recognised for their contribution towards sustainable tourism. In



addition, the EAWLS has been invited to sit in the Mombasa and Coastal Tourism Association (MCTA) Sub-committee on conservation and regulation.

“We are not against development in this area, but it should be controlled and sustainable” says Jarl Trondsen.

An important part of making the local development sustainable is the evaluation of whether a business is developed 'responsible' or not. The term 'responsible' corresponds to how a tourism business is run environmentally and socially within the following areas: energy, waste, water, conservation and community activities, and initiatives, programmes and monitoring. It is a question of understanding the impact of tourism and the value of sustainability.

An example: “When we purchased our hotel plot in Diani Beach it was full of trees, and we made sure that the entire property was built around them, so that we could save the canopy for the rare Colobus monkeys. We have also planted trees and bushes specifically to encourage birds and insects. We are working to develop a number of environmentally sound procedures and we built our hotel to maximise the use of solar energy for water heating and rain water collection”, two commercial cottage owners said. They add that, in order to operate responsibly, supporting local organisations and events have to be taken into account. A fixed percentage of the profit can be donated to community support or environmental investments such as tree-planting, wildlife centres, child care organisations, women’s groups, maintenance of kayas (sacred forests) etc. Safarilink, which flies daily to Ukunda on Diani strip, gives a percentage of its profits to the Colobus Trust, for example.

Camps International has its East Africa Headquarters in Diani and has been operating as a

responsible travel company for five years along the south coast and in Tsavo. Every year, hundreds of young travellers book through Camp Kenya for a minimum of one month where they engage daily with various community, environmental and wildlife projects that the company finances and implements. With five permanent camps based in rural settings, Camp Kenya has planted close to 200,000 trees in protected areas and schools, builds classrooms for several different schools and financially supports community-based conservation by paying for clients to visit areas like the Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary and Kaya Muhaka (a sacred protected forest). “There is a growing population of young people that are not only interested in travelling to destinations that are branded as eco-friendly but they also want to spend their time doing something useful.” says, Africa Programme Manager, Dipesh Pabari, “For me it’s not about massaging someone’s conscience and making them feel good about ‘saving Africa.’ This is not what we sell. It’s about taking part in existing projects that are run by a local company and have tangible results. We don’t bounce orphans on our knees, we build the orphanage, create some form of sustainable income generation and food security and move on.”

Camp Kenya and EcoTraining have just completed the first 28-day Field Guide Level 1 Course at Camp Kenya’s Rukinga Wildlife Sanctuary. The curriculum is the FGASA (Field Guides Association of Southern Africa) Level 1. The first seven participants had an



Top: **Snail in the coral rag forest**

Facing page left: **Sykes monkey in Diani**

Pictures by: **Anna Sandahl**

intensive introduction to geology, astronomy, zoology, anthropology and mammalogy.

EcoTraining Kenya hopes to establish formal guide training in Kenya in association with established academic and government institutions, to service the needs of the industry. To do this they will create a professional guide training school based on the proven EcoTraining South African model.

“We really see a great demand for responsible accommodation, and it is increasing”, say the owners of Asha Cottage, a small family-run boutique hotel in Diani with a responsible approach that supports local conservation initiatives. “As the hotels are the portal for foreigners to come and visit Kenya and appreciate its nature, it is extremely important that the hotels ensure that the same nature is protected. We hope that in the future, more hotels will be run in a responsible way.” ●

Anna Sandahl, SWARA.
Anna Sandahl was a volunteer at the Colobus Trust

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