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Drew Conroy Professor, TSAS, travels to Sub-Saharan Africa

Andrew B. Conroy

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus, drew.conroy@unh.edu

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Drew Conroy

Professor, TSAS ~ Sub-Saharan Africa

In June and July, I spent 3 weeks in five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. These included Kenya, Rwanda, The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Tanzania and Namibia. This incredible journey included attending an agricultural forum, visiting an agricultural development project, for which I have been an advisor for some years, checking out sabbatical possibilities in Tanzania and Rwanda, and finally visiting UNH undergraduate student, Alicia Walsh at the Cheetah Conservation Fund in Otjiwarongo, Namibia, with the financial help of the UNH Center for International Education.



Mulago Agriculture Forum, Mt. Kenya (clockwise from Drew wearing hat.): Drew Conroy, Andrew Youn, Michael Hudson (both of One Acre Fund), and Alexander Petroff (WVI)

I left Boston to travel to Kenya, with [Ted Fellow](#), [Alexander Petroff](#), the president of [Working Villages International](#). I advised Alex on his senior thesis some years ago, when he was a student at Hampshire College. The last 4 years I have served on the board of directors for Working Villages International.

It was through Alex, that I was invited to attend an agricultural forum put on by the [Mulago Foundation](#). The forum was put together in order to bring together NGO leaders, who have been supported by Mulago. The hope was to share ideas about what works and what does not in privately funded projects related to agricultural development in Africa. The forum was held at the stunning [Castle Forest Lodge](#), on Mt. Kenya. Attendees were working in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Senegal, Rwanda, Malawi, Zambia, Mali, Nigeria and other countries. From the [One Acre Fund](#) to [Comaco](#), [My Agro](#), [Root Capital](#) and many other unique organizations, I was able to interact for three days with some of the most energetic and amazing people I have ever met. Unlike many other conferences or workshops, where papers are presented, this forum was designed to develop relationships and share ideas informally, in a secluded and intimate setting. It was a truly one of a kind opportunity.

From Kenya, I traveled with Alexander Petroff to Rwanda and then the DRC. In the last 8 years Alex has been working in the South Kivu district in the DRC, where he has been helping resurrect and improve agricultural production in the war torn, but incredibly fertile Ruzizi Valley ([see video](#)). We flew from Kigali to the small town of Cyangugu, Rwanda on the edge of Lake Kivu, where we were met by Fiston Marc Malago, the WVI project manager ([see video of interview](#)) Marc escorted us through the border at Bugarama, Rwanda, into the Congo.

I had great reservations going into the Congo. Crossing the border my apprehension was confirmed as we were told by Marc to not even get out of the car, as the police and officials would likely shake us down if we even went into the customs building. Passing through various small villages on the way to the Ruzizi Valley, the poverty and desperation was evident. The presence of United Nations soldiers (from Pakistan), Congolese Army and Police, and people standing outside empty shops and tiny wattle and daub homes, watching us drive by was unnerving. I was warned by Marc to not even think about taking photos. About ten miles into the Congo, we turned off the main road, which was dirt onto a smaller road to the WVI headquarters. To my relief, it was an impressive place, and with Marc's influence and leadership, it seemed to be a safe haven in a war zone.



Drew Conroy and Fiston Marc Malago examining rice at WVI's Maliba Farm - DRC



Rwanda is one of the most intensively farmed areas in Sub-Saharan Africa

We spent three days visiting the fields, meeting people working on the farms, and exploring the possibilities for expanding WVI's work in the region. The accomplishments and levels of production were impressive, compared to the extreme poverty not more than 5 km away. I was particularly interested in how they had reintroduced oxen in order to allow the small farmers to expand their crop fields and transportation potential.

Leaving the Congo, we hired a taxi to drive 6 hours across Rwanda to Kigali. We had considered flying, but wanted to see the Rwandan countryside. In contrast to the Congo, businesses were booming, homes were attractive and well built, and the infrastructure including roads, phones, electricity, safety and transportation were impressive. Rwanda also has a much higher population density than other African countries I have visited. The farms stretched from the top of every mountain to the lowlands, where livestock, fish, and crops of every sort were grown and cultivated. There were issues with soil erosion, deforestation, and water pollution. I found Kigali to be a well organized and a rather cosmopolitan city, more like what would be found in South Africa

or Namibia.

From Kigali, I flew to Tanzania's Kilimanjaro International Airport, near Moshi and Arusha. The flight took me over Lake Victoria, the Great Rift

Wall, the Ngorongoro highlands and I also had a stunning view of the Oldonyo Lengai mountain, which the Maasai consider the mountain of God.

I spent about a week in Tanzania, where I met with my former research assistant, Lobulu Sakita, a Maasai, near Arusha. Lobulu had assisted UNH-IROP students Heather Tucker ([about Heather's research](#)) and Ivy Carlson ([IROP Q & A](#)) with their research. He has been a good friend, who I have tried to visit every time I am in Tanzania.



Drew Conroy and Lobulu Sakita in Monduli, Tanzania



Dr. Joe Lugalla (UNH anthropology professor) and Dr. Hussein Sosovele – Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

From Arusha, I flew to Dar es Salaam, where I met with Dr. Joe Lugalla, from the UNH Anthropology Department and Dr. Hussein Sosovele of the University of Dar es Salaam. Joe and I get together frequently at UNH, but I had not visited his home in Tanzania in 15 years. After a whirlwind tour of Dar es Salaam, Joe took the two days to escort me to [Sokoine University of Agriculture](#) in Morogoro.

Note the new UNH Logo...

The Sokoine University campus is set in the stunning Uluguru Mountains of Central Tanzania.

We visited Joe Lugalla's uncle, Professor J.A.

Matovelo, who just happened to be the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Administration and Finance at the University. Through Professor Matovelo, I was introduced to the head of the Animal Science Department, Dr. Berno Mnembuka and numerous faculty, to discuss the possibilities of a sabbatical in 2015-2016. My Swahili skills were helpful in Tanzania, but also in the Eastern DRC, Rwanda, and Kenya, as Swahili is a common trading language of all four countries.

Finally, I flew from Tanzania to Namibia, to visit one of my IROP students, and former CREAM student Alicia Walsh at the [Cheetah Conservation Fund \(CCF\)](#) in Otjiwarongo, Namibia. Having been a Fulbright Scholar in Namibia in 2008, this was almost like coming home. I met with friends and former students. I spent 4 days with Alicia. At CCF, her research site, she showed me all that she had done with identifying the diets of carnivores on Namibian farmlands, via scat analysis using both DNA and bone fragment identification. See [Introduction to Cheetah Conservation Fund 2013](#).



Alicia Walsh (r.) in Kunene, Namibia for a 4th of July Weekend away from the lab at CCF



Alicia Walsh, Biomedical Science-Pre-Vet major and Prof. Conroy at Halali Waterhole, Etosha National Park, Namibia

Alicia had three days off, for a long 4th of July weekend. It was the first time she had gone to town or interacted with anyone outside the facility in 6 weeks. I met up with one of my former students, Uapii Kazahé and we traveled with Alicia to the Etosha National Park and to his family's farm in the Kunene Region of Namibia. The time spent with Uapii's family allowed Alicia to drive a donkey cart (the local transport of rural Namibians), slaughter a sheep, BBQ it Herero style, and herd and milk the cows.

For Alicia, it seemed the highlights in Etosha were seeing 3 black rhinos from the road, many elephants, giraffes, as well as a lion, a leopard, and hyenas. Here is a brief [overview of the park](#).

We took many scenic roads across central Namibia to make our way back to CCF. I left feeling Alicia had greatly benefitted from being taken away from her research lab and CCF for a few days, to see other parts of the country.

I would like to thank CIE for providing the funding to make this last part of my journey in Africa possible, and enhancing the African experience for a UNH IROP student Alicia Walsh.



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Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-2398 • Fax 603-862-0169
Thompson Hall • 105 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-1288 • Fax 603-862-0844

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