

## Nature Journal Safari with the Amani Children's Home

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By Anne Chadwick

In February 2023, I was fortunate to join John Muir Laws and a group of volunteers in sharing the joy of nature journaling with a group of 42 children from the Amani Children's Home in Baraka Village, Tanzania. Our group of about 20 adults from the U.S., Canada, and Israel spent two wonder-filled days with the children — one at the home and another venturing into Tarangire National Park for a fun day on safari.

We had just come from a jaw-dropping 12-day adventure through six safari parks, getting close to everything from Little Bee Eaters to Elephants. During our adventure, our four brilliant Tanzanian guides took up nature journaling and began filling their own journals with words, pictures, and numbers in celebration of nature.

At the Amani Children's Home, we asked our guides to speak with the children about their educational backgrounds, their love of nature and the environment, and their new-found practice of nature journaling. The children seemed intrigued and inspired from the very start, thanks to this introduction from local guides who spoke their language — literally and figuratively. Jack Laws worked his magic as well, with an inspirational overview of nature journaling, curiosity, and environmental protection.

Next, we gave each child a nature journaling kit with a journal, watercolor pencils, a water brush, and goniometers. Wide eyes and big smiles filled the children's faces when they realized they could put their names on their kits and keep them for themselves.

Once each child had a kit, they rotated among seven learning stations where our volunteers taught skills including animal tracking, tapping into curiosity, drawing mammals, visual story-telling, and more. Fortunately, we visitors had many educators among us, and we teamed up with local guides to co-teach the sessions.

On day two, we took the children on safari in Tarangire National Park. Equipped with their new nature journaling kits, they quickly started drawing

wildebeests, zebras, warthogs, giraffes, elephants, eagles, and baobab trees. Some asked “I wonder” questions and explored possible answers. Others counted babies or compared males to females. All seemed fully engaged, regardless of ability and age (five to seventeen).

Once inside the park, we mixed up the seating among buses and safari vehicles so that each child could take a turn riding in a jeep. One student, age 17, took a front seat and peppered the guide with questions about the animals, biodiversity, environmental protection, wildlife guiding, and even how to drive a jeep. It was clear he hoped to become a guide, and he was thrilled to learn more about what it takes to succeed in this esteemed career. According to Amani administrators, “The students came home not only with a new skill, but a newfound connection to Tanzania’s rich biodiversity.”

The Amani visit was a highlight of our Tanzania experience. Several volunteers noted that the kids were very responsive and engaged. “Kids are kids everywhere,” one educator noted. We wondered about the best way to follow up on this inspirational visit. Ethical Volunteerism includes meaningful follow-up in the long term, and it was clear that the Amani administrators are interested in a genuine, authentic, and lasting connection.

What form might this take? Our tour company, Face of Africa Adventures, expressed interest in helping us maintain a program. Maybe one of their guides could take Amani children and an educator on mini-safaris on a regular basis and continue the practice of nature journaling. The kids who participate may then mentor others who are interested. What if we reserved seats on future safaris for students and teachers to join us? More ideas are circulating. Meanwhile, a couple of teachers in our group have already started pen-pal relationships between their U.S. students and the Amani kids. Through this ongoing outreach, we hope to help inspire these children to be caretakers of their natural resources.

“Today, over fifty children and teens call Amani home, and more attend its on-site nursery program. The children are from diverse ethnic and religious affiliations. Amani works with our regional Social Welfare Office to keep children connected to their cultural backgrounds and natal communities. We believe in equal access to education, empowerment of marginalized

communities, the decolonization of charity, and a brighter tomorrow where these children are the heroes of their own story.” — Amani website