



Conserving biological diversity for a sustainable future: the African challenge



African Student Conference on Conservation Science

Organised by the

**Tropical Biology Association African Alumni Group
(TAAG)**

9-12 June 2015
Ghana

TAAG promotes the conservation of Africa's threatened biodiversity by sharing knowledge and building the capacity of the next generation

Overview

‘ *This is one of the best conferences I have ever attended. The key highlight for me has been the workshops...Kiros Welegerima, Ethiopia*

This is the only conference organised for African students by young conservation scientists in the region. The gathering brought together 106 participants from 13 countries, representing over 50 institutions.

Providing a dynamic platform for discussion, the TAAG conference aimed to identify the challenges facing conservation in Africa, to share research impact and to develop recommendations for policy. It also gave emerging African ecologists an opportunity to meet with senior conservation science professionals, facilitating mentorship, collaboration and networking.



‘ *The past three days have been both uplifting and thought-provoking. I am glad I got to experience the 2015 TAAG conference. This is THE conference to attend...Tiwonge Gawa, Malawi*

Through keynote talks by specialists, expert-led workshops, student presentations and a panel discussion on climate change, the conference addressed the theme, "*Conserving biological diversity for a sustainable future: The African challenge.*"

Presentations were focussed on the following issues:

- Africa's terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity: Status and threats**
- Efforts at conserving Africa's biodiversity: successes, challenges and lessons**
- Climate change and biodiversity conservation in Africa**
- Biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and services**
- Biodiversity and livelihoods in Africa's rural and urban communities**

Sharing knowledge and building networks



‘ We organised this panel discussion to encourage future climate change research in the African region by forming strategic alliances and partnerships, as well as to showcase our commitment as young conservationists in finding sustainable solutions in response to the climate challenge... **Ishmael Dodoo, TAAG President**

Keynote talks

Providing a great opportunity for young conservationists to have direct contact with specialists and their work, the four keynote speakers presented and discussed latest research findings, policy development and practical experience:

- ❑ **Dr. Benjamin Gyampoh of the African Academy of Sciences captured the essence of the conference when he spoke about the status and threats to Africa’s terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity**
- ❑ **Dr. Mwangi Githiru of Wildlife Works gave insights on Biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and services**
- ❑ **Dr. Rosie Trevelyan of the Tropical Biology Association (TBA) spoke about capacity building as a tool for conservation and asked how do we know we are winning?**
- ❑ **Isaac Abban-Mensah of Proforest introduced the participants to the High Conservation Value (HCV) approach and how it can be applied across ecosystems, commodity production schemes and geographies in Africa**

Expert-led Workshops

Particularly popular were two workshop sessions which gave practical advice and new perspectives on issues that are a challenge to conservationists:

- ❑ **Fundraising for scientific work by Dr. Rosie Trevelyan of the TBA**
- ❑ **Communicating findings of biodiversity research in Africa: where to publish and what to consider by a team from Elsevier (an international academic publishing company)**

Panel discussion on climate change

Experts from academia, local government and the United Nations Development Programme engaged the participants in a discussion on the challenges and opportunities relating to climate change that are influencing the sustainability of African ecosystems.

The panelists emphasised the need to focus on more coordinated efforts between local and regional institutions to network and share knowledge in climate change research.

The discussion concluded with calls for a unified platform to share data and improve communication between scientists and policy makers from both government and non government organisations.

‘ The best thing about the conference was the opportunity to make new connections and learn new things. I am glad that I have not only gained information and conservation material, but also gained a mentor...**Odewale Ayobami, Nigeria**

Student presentations

A key feature of the TAAG conference is the opportunity it gives students to communicate the results of their research; a great way to learn from each other and develop effective presentation skills.

In Ghana, there were 34 oral and 19 poster presentations covering a variety of topics linked to the conference theme. These included bat diversity in Ghanaian agro-ecosystems and the conservation implications; the impact of the Ebola scare on consumer taste and trade in bush meat; the use of renewable energy to improve livelihoods and protect biodiversity, and the application of the Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Assessments (TESSA).

The best presentations were recognised and awarded. Judging criteria included academic rigour, novelty of the research, potential impact the research may have on conservation research, and the clarity in presentation.

The award winners for best talks and posters are listed below:

- ❑ Exceptional talks: Vuyisile Thabethe (South Africa), Tiwonge Gawa (Malawi) and Evans Nkrumah (Ghana)
- ❑ Exceptional posters: Gwaldys Daghela (Cameroon), Adeiza Zainab (Nigeria) and Arabomen Joy (Nigeria)

TAAG goes from strength to strength

Two new alumni groups - in Burundi and Zimbabwe - have been set up since the first TAAG conference was held in 2013, bringing the total number of TAAG country groups to 15. Not only has TAAG grown in size, its reputation has also increased.



This was evident by the presence of former president of Ghana and current UN envoy on Climate Change, His Excellency John Kufuor, who opened the conference.

In his address, Kufuor recognised the important role the TBA plays in building the capacity of African conservation biologists, and mentoring them to become conservation leaders influencing global conservation policy and practice. He encouraged participants to get involved in evaluating policies and making tangible recommendations to conserve the environment for future generations.

‘ TBA alumni are a critical part of Africa’s future and I have high expectations of you and the role you can play to safeguard Africa’s biodiversity and sustain its climate for future generations ...**H.E John Kufuor**

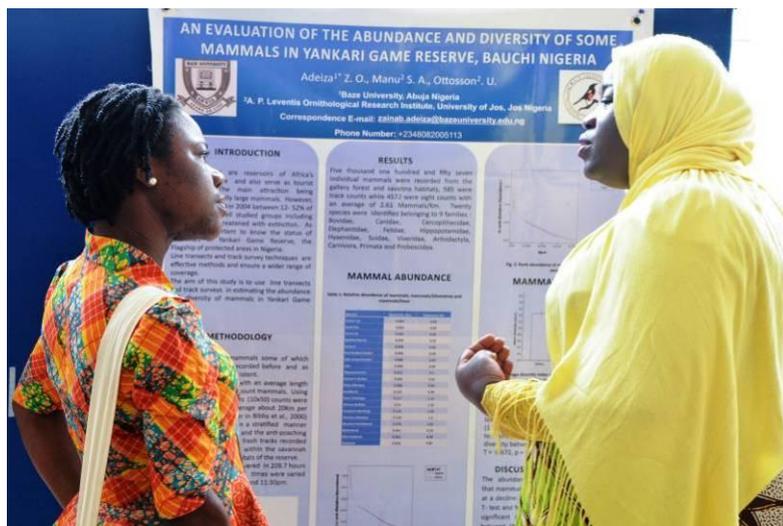
Media coverage

“The future of Africa is dependent on the contributions of the youth. TAAG is playing a key role in contributing to the voice of sustainable biodiversity conservation...Dr. John Abraham, TAAG LOC chair

Online and print media coverage of the conference included an article (published 11 June 2015) in the Ghanaian Times, a leading English newspaper in Ghana. The article was based on interviews with the TAAG President and the TBA director, and cited speeches made by Kufour and other speakers during the opening session.

TV Africa and Radio Univers (local television and radio stations) recorded the panel discussion on climate change. They also conducted interviews with conference participants and the TAAG local organising committee (LOC) chair who discussed the expected conference outcomes and the relevance of the conference being hosted in Ghana.

Real time conference updates were also shared via the TBA [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Google+](#)



Statistics of interest

100%
of participants said they
would attend a similar
TAAG conference

54
conservation and
research institutions
represented

700 km
distance travelled by
road from Lagos to
Accra by 33 Nigerian
alumni

The conference feedback was extremely positive and participants said that it was relevant and applicable to their work.



‘I organised for a bus full of Nigerians to travel across the border to Ghana to attend the conference. I am pleased that it was not in vain, as we have gained a broader perspective on scientific work, conservation practice and publishing. Thank you TAAG and TBA for organising this event...**Dr. Babalola Fola, Nigeria**

About TAAG

To serve as a voice for young conservationists across Africa, the Tropical Biology Association African Alumni Group (TAAG) was set up — and is run — by scientists who are all recipients of TBA training and support. The TAAG promotes the conservation of Africa’s threatened biodiversity by sharing knowledge and building the capacity of the next generation.

It achieves this by organising a unique event, the **African Student Conference on Conservation Science**, which gives students from across the continent the opportunity to present their work, share ideas and learn new approaches to conservation. The first conference was held in Kenya in 2013.

Sponsors



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