Mpala, Kenya
COURSE GUIDE 2020

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1. Your course

Congratulations on getting a place on a TBA field course! Your course co-ordinators are [Greg Maina and Dr Kevin Wallace](#). You will also be joined by core tutors from leading international universities and a variety of local experts.

These courses are specifically designed so that we spend as much time in the field as possible, with the following aims:

- To increase your understanding of the conservation and ecological issues specific to tropical regions.
- To provide you with skills essential to conducting field research in the tropics.
- To encourage networking amongst participants, tutors and the wider TBA network.
- To inspire and support you in conducting your own independent research, and an ongoing career in conservation.

In order to maximise our time in the field our timetables are flexible, but typically you should expect to spend most daylight hours out in the field, with lectures and seminars in the evening. The courses are intensive, and we work a seven day week so that we can get the most out of the experiences on offer to us. The more you put into a course the more you will get out of it, so come along with an open mind and plenty of enthusiasm!

2. Course costs & logistics

**African participants**

A limited number of full or partial scholarships are available to successful African applicants. Scholarships contribute to course costs which include course fees or tuition, national travel, accommodation and subsistence costs as well as the costs of international travel to and from the rendezvous location.

Priority for places will be given to outstanding applicants but we will also take into consideration those who can raise all or part of their participation costs (i.e. course fees and travel costs).

We would strongly encourage you to look for funding from grants, foundations or your organisation, and we will be willing to provide letter of support towards your applications.

**All other participants**

You pay a heavily subsidised course fee of £1200, or £900 for participants from member institutions (click [here](#) for a list of current members). Participants from European institutions may apply for a BES scholarship of approximately £200 towards their costs. If you are successful, the award will be subtracted from your final balance of the TBA course fees.

You are responsible for booking and payment of your travel to and from the course and travel insurance which MUST COVER REPATRIATION COSTS TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY in the (extremely unlikely!) event of a medical emergency. When booking flights please ensure that you land with time to get to the rendezvous, and that your return flight is the day after the course ends or later.
3. Arriving for your course

Flights & connections

Please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that you arrive in plenty of time for your flights and connections. Please check your flight times carefully, ensuring that you are reading the times correctly (e.g., is it a 24 hour clock?). If you are unsure, please contact the Nairobi office or Cambridge office for help. Connections and boarding are often not announced, and can be confusing. Please be waiting at your gate at least an hour before departure even if the flight is showing as delayed or not boarding yet.

If your flight changes or is delayed, please let us know on +44 (0) 797 0405 978 (Kevin Wallace) and/or on +254 721 315 833 (Greg Maina) immediately (you can also use WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger). We will reply to let you know that we have received the message.

Your luggage

Inevitably, on occasion, items of luggage are delayed in transit. It can take several days for the luggage to reach us, so please ensure that you pack any essentials (spare clothes, small toiletries, medicines) that you will need for the first three days of the course in your hand luggage. Please also place a small padlock on all luggage items to reduce the risk of interference. If your luggage does not arrive at the airport, please take the following steps:

- Report it missing to the luggage office/airline at the airport.
- Get a receipt from the luggage office/airline with a reference number and their contact phone number.
- At all sites, IF the luggage office/airline estimate that the luggage will arrive before the course start date, arrange for it to be sent to the rendezvous.
- At all sites, IF the luggage office/airline estimate that the luggage will arrive after the course start date, arrange for it to be sent to the Field station.

Visas & immigration

It is essential that ALL PARTICIPANTS check the visa requirements for their country and apply if necessary for a visa with the relevant embassy in your own country at least two months before the course.

On all visa applications and entry cards please state that you are a “TOURIST”, and use the field station address and contact person details from the rendezvous section of this document.

Please do not mention Business, Study or Research as these will require different types of visa and will bring complications — so please do not mention these words!!!

To mitigate visa complications are courses are 28 days long. You can arrive the day before and depart the day after. Most countries can be issued with at least a 30-day visa.

Please note that you will need to make the length of your stay very clear to immigration officials upon arrival. Your visa and immigration stamp must cover the whole period that you will remain in the country.

The Kenya High Commission website has lots of information and there is an option to use their eVisa system to pre-order your visa to avoid any possible complications upon arrival.
Travelling to the rendezvous

We endeavour to have a TBA representative meet all the flights, assuming you are not arriving significantly in advance of the course. **Please look for the TBA sign.**

If you are entering the country by road or train, or arriving significantly in advance of the course, then you will need to take a bus or taxi to the rendezvous point. Please only use recognised means of public transport, and do not accept assistance from private individuals.

**We leave the rendezvous hostel/hotel early the next morning of the course to travel to the field site. Please note that if you miss the rendezvous you will have to make your own way to the field site, and as there is no public transport to the field site this is rather tricky, so we strongly advise that you make sure that you arrive in plenty of time!**

Money

As a general rule we advise that you carry the money that you will require in cash. (Bring Euros, US dollars or Pounds sterling and change it to local currency upon arrival). There are no facilities to change travellers’ cheques during the course, and it is unwise to rely on debit/credit cards as few places accept them. Where there are ATM machines there are often large queues. The TBA course site is a long way from any ATMs or banks. Always exchange money at recognised exchange bureaus, not on the black market. If you arrive by airplane, it is easiest to exchange your currency at the airport. It is easy to change currency back in the same way before leaving.

You will need money for the following purposes: (1) Any meals bought before the course rendezvous or after the course ends. (2) Any souvenirs that you wish to purchase. (3) Drinks, such as sodas or beers, from the field station bar or during excursions. (4) The local field station staff work very hard to look after us during our stay, and participants often wish to leave a small tip to thank them for their efforts. (5) Any minor medical expenses incurred.

It is advisable you change to smaller denomination (KeS 100, 200 and 500. Highest KeS denomination is 1000) if you intend to make purchases in small shops or travel using public means.

Banking

Banks in Nairobi and other large Kenyan towns open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday, and 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Saturday’s. Twenty-four hour access to your account can be facilitated through ATMs countrywide at various banks. Some banks at the International Airport open round the clock everyday, as do the foreign exchange bureaus.

Most international credit cards are accepted in Kenya. Barclaycash ATMs accept any International VISA and MASTERCARD credit cards. Standard Chartered Bank’s computer network allow access to over 60 moneylink ATMs situated at all its branches, major shopping malls, gas stations and other strategic locations countrywide.

Safety

Whilst travelling, as you would anywhere else, please take care of your possessions. Avoid carrying valuables when in the cities, avoid travel after dark (or use taxis - do not walk), and watch out for pickpockets. The TBA cannot take responsibility for the loss of any possessions during the course, and you should consider taking out insurance on any valuable items.
**Etiquette**

We promote equality, celebrate diversity and embrace the culture of the country we will be travelling to. Because of this please come with an open mind free of any gender, race, class prejudice or any type of bias or preconception.

- Taking photographs of official buildings, including Embassies is prohibited. Photography is also prohibited at airports. When taking photos of buildings or people, please ask for ask for consent. Also, people often take offence if photographed without their consent.
- Plastic bags have been banned for environmental reasons.
- Mpala is located within a reserved/conservative pastoralist community and although there are no strict dress codes we would like you to be sensible and considerate, for example females should avoid excessively short skirts or shorts and for males (and females) tops are to be worn at all times – no bare chests 😊.

**4. Accommodation**

If you book accommodation at the rendezvous location, please mention that you are a TBA participant. We have a good relationship with these hotels and they will give you priority over other 'normal' reservations.

Accommodation at Mpala will be in shared twin tents and there is a nearby showers and toilet facility. Bedding is provided and laundry facilities are available.

All meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) during the course are provided and eaten communally.

Free filtered/treated drinking water is available throughout the day. It is also possible to buy sodas and beer at the field station bar.

**Power supply**

Power supply can be unreliable and power surges are common.

**Kenya** uses 240V, 50Hz power supply, with 3 pin type G plugs (UK style).

**Communications**

Mobile phone and internet communications can be very variable and unreliable in the locations we visit and we do not have internet facilities at the field stations. There is no Wifi and only weak phone signal at the River Camp we will be staying in, although there is better phone signal and WiFi at the main Research Camp. In order to avoid worrying friends and relatives back home we suggest that you do not promise to contact anyone whilst you are away. However – local SIM cards can be purchased, and we will advise you nearer the time as to the best way that this can be accomplished.

**5. Transport**

You should be aware that road and vehicle conditions may not be of a standard that you are used to. Seat belts are often absent or do not work, breakdowns are common, and journeys can take a long time. Try to see it all as part of the experience and a good opportunity to bond with your course mates!
6. Health information

Malaria

The risk of getting malaria is high throughout East Africa. Even if you live in an area where malaria is endemic and believe that you are resistant, the malaria at the field site is likely to be of a different strain. Malaria is a serious disease and must be avoided. There is chloroquine-resistant malaria in many regions. Seek medical advice prior to travel regarding prophylaxis.

If mosquito nets are provided, please use them. In the evenings wear long sleeves, long trousers, socks and insect repellent to reduce the risk of being bitten.

Food and water hygiene

Stick to bottled water or the filtered/treated water provided to you on the course.

7. What you will be doing

The courses take place almost entirely atMpala Reserve and the immediate area – mostly within walking distance. The only time we will be away from the Mpala Reserve is for the short mid-course excursion – further information about this will be sent nearer the time.

Workshops

These sessions are based on you learning some of the fauna and flora in the local area.

Field exercises

These are structured sessions that challenge you to answer a question by collecting data, analysing it and presenting this back to your group. Each exercise will be led by the core teaching staff.

Excursion

A mid-course break offers a chance to relax and a change of scenery. Depending on the location, there is normally an outing based around a local conservation organisation. There is also normally some time to shop for souvenirs and replenish your store of snacks and drinks.

Projects

The latter part of the course is devoted to project work. In groups, you will devise a research question, collect data and analyse it. This will be written up in the form of a scientific paper. You will also present this as a PowerPoint on the morning of the final course day.

Lectures

Each core teacher will give at least two lectures (or maybe a discussion topic) based around their research and tropical conservation.
Guest speakers

We will be joined throughout the course by academics and professionals from national institutions. They will give lectures on their research and might also run a workshop or exercise.

Conservation in my country

We would like you to prepare a 10 minute, informal oral presentation. This can take any form you chose, you can use PowerPoint, bring handouts or other resources if you like. We will also have a flip chart available if needed. We can do this either digitally projected or we have a gorgeous outside circular Boma were we can sit and simply listen to your amazing story 😊.

During your 10 minute session we would like you to highlight some of the conservation issues in your home country AND give an example of a conservation SUCCESS story. Feel free to approach this in a creative way – you only have 10 minutes so you cannot cover everything! You could highlight a BIG conservation issue that you are interested in or maybe a smaller local project or something related to your research. This will be followed by 10 minutes of friendly questions and discussion from your fellow course participants and staff.

It’s a great way to start learning about the differences and quite often similarities of conservation across the globe. These sessions will be dotted throughout the course where YOU will be telling us about conservation in YOUR country. Thanks, and looking forward to learning a lot from you guys!

Laptops

To bring or not to bring…? …that is the question

This is completely up to you. Training as a field biologist - it will become an indispensable piece of kit for you especially if you want to stay on top of that data entry! Most of our field exercises during the course will require data entry, statistical analysis, writing-up and PowerPoint presentation. I don't know any researcher that goes out into the field without a laptop? So - I would encourage it.... Your laptop, you can use it when you want and you are used to it. Neither TBA nor the research centre will have any desktop or laptops available for you to use.

Having said that, bringing your own laptop it is completely at your own risk and it will be your responsibility to look after it. If you are unable to bring one, don’t panic, you will be working in groups most of the time, and we will ensure that each group has access to a laptop.

R & RStudio

One of the best and most widely used freely accessible stats software right now is ‘CRAN R’ and personally I use RStudio to make it a bit more user friendly. During the course we will be considering methodologies, collecting data and then …yes …analysing it to create some awesome results.

WiFi access is available at the Main Research Centre but can be intermittent and slow. Ideally you will need to pre-load any software you wish to use. If you are bringing your own laptop – I would advise you download and install R and RStudio. I shall share a list closer to the time detailing software packages to pre-install that have been suggested to me from the teaching staff.

Packed lunches

Bring a plastic/Tupperware box for take-away lunch – feel free to put your name on it as well as any specific dietary requirements. Maybe we won't need it but if we have an all-day activity the field station will pack a lunch for you. They normally pack it in styrofoam throw-away (unrecyclable) boxes.
8. Course checklist

Please print off this checklist and use it to make sure that keep on track with preparation for your course!

By 13th March:
- Click [here](#) to submit your course application

By end of April:
You will have heard from us about whether you have received a place on a TBA course.

Before end of April:
- Ensure you have approval from your employer/institutions to attend your TBA course.
- Click [here](#) to accept or decline your place on the TBA course
- Please email the course co-ordinator [Africa](#) or outside of Africa with a scan/photo of all relevant pages of your passport (photo page, passport information page - i.e., passport number, validity dates, place of issue). Please also attach a recent photo (head shot) of you that will enable us to recognise you when meeting you at the airport.

All participants from outside of Africa

- Send a deposit of £200 (plus a £6 bank admin fee), via cheque to the TBA Cambridge office payable to “Tropical Biology Association”, or via bank transfer to:
  - Account name: Tropical Biology Association Limited
  - Account number: 65317165
  - Sort code: 089299
  - Swift/BIC: CPBKGB22
  - IBAN: GB34 CPBK 0892 9965 3171 65
  - Bank address: Co-op Bank, PO Box 250, Delf House, Southway, Skelmersdale, WN8 6WT, UK

When making a payment to TBA please use the following reference format: “Surname Forename Course”, e.g. “Wallace Kevin Kenya”.

We will contact you by email if your deposit/full payment is not received on time. Otherwise please assume that all is well.

At least two months before your course:
- Ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months after the date you arrive in the course country.
- Check vaccination requirements (including yellow fever if required) and malaria prophylactics with your own personal doctor.
- Apply for visa and make sure it is valid for entire time you are in the country. If you have problems obtaining your visa please contact the TBA office immediately.
African participants only

The Tropical Biology Association will arrange travel for those receiving scholarships which include travel, and will be in contact with those participants.

Those making their own travel arrangements, including those travelling from, or returning to, countries other than their home country, must make appropriate visa arrangements and cover any associated costs. TBA will liaise with those participants who may receive partial scholarships.

All other participants

- Book flights and insurance (see rendezvous for dates and times).
- You will need to arrange your own health and travel insurance cover. You will be required to enter the policy details when you click here to tell us about your flights and insurance details.

At least three weeks before your course:

- Arrange foreign currency in $US dollars, pounds sterling, or euros as appropriate.
- Pay your final fee balance, if any, to TBA (plus a £6 bank admin fee), via cheque to the TBA Cambridge office payable to “Tropical Biology Association”, or via bank transfer as per the deposit above.
- Check your flight times carefully (is it a 24 clock?). Contact us if you are unsure.
- Accommodation is booked by the TBA for you from the rendezvous night to the last night of the course inclusive. If you will be arriving earlier or leaving later, you should book your own accommodation, and we suggest that you use the rendezvous hotel for this.

What to bring with you

Travel documents

- Passport
- Visa (if applicable)
- Yellow fever certificate (if applicable)
- Currency/money
- Tickets

Clothes

Please consider the following points when packing:

Mpala lies in the heart of central Kenya’s Laikipia County, these highlands can be a bit cooler than the lowlands and receive higher rainfall. July is approaching the middle of the dry season. The local weather conditions will range approximately between 24°C and 10°C for daytime highs and night-time lows and we expect some rain showers.

Long sleeves and trousers are essential for fieldwork. Full camouflage wear is NOT considered acceptable – just be sensible, we do not mind the odd item, but we don’t want to give the appearance of a TBA guerrilla warfare group! Walking boots, waterproof coats and trousers, and a warm sweater for cold evenings/mornings are essential.
Other items - essential

- Malaria prophylactics
- Personal medications
- A basic first aid kit (e.g., antihistamines, plasters, antibacterial cream, painkillers, antidiarrheal medications, rehydrate)
- Small hiking backpack for use in the field and overnight stays during excursions. This should be either waterproof or have a waterproof cover
- A GOOD RELIABLE torch or head torch plus spare bulbs and spare batteries/battery charger
- Binoculars – it really is a good investment if you do not have any😊😊
- Water bottle or bottles capable of carrying at least 1 litre
- Note books, pen and pencil – waterproof is better
- Clipboard – makes taking notes in the field easier
- Sun hat, sunglasses and sun cream
- Insect repellent
- Toiletries: Toothbrush (always use bottled/potable water for brushing teeth), soap, shampoo, deodorant, towel, etc.
- Hand washing soap/detergent for clothes – biodegradable if possible

Other items - recommended

- 2 x paper photocopies of your passport – You may be required to give one if you purchase a local sim card and useful if you lose your passport!
- Laptop with appropriate plug-adaptor if required – useful for data entry and the write-up phase. We do not have laptops available for you to use, it is highly recommend bringing your own laptop (with all the recommended R packages downloaded and tested) as this makes project work much more efficient
- Camera, memory card(s) and charger with appropriate plug-adaptor if required
- Penknife
- Packed lunch box – labelled with name and dietary requirements
- Swimwear – not sure there is anywhere we can swim, but you never know
- Waterproof clothing – jacket and trousers
- A GPS app on your phone is useful
- Mosquito net – if you want, but we have assured that there really are not many mosquitos in the area we will be.

Bring a travel journal/notebook within which you can keep a daily record of your experiences/thoughts/things you've learnt/species you've seen and people you've met; you'll want to remember as much as you can about this inspiring experience.

NB: All equipment and items that you bring are at your own risk. Security is good at the locations we stay and visit but please be aware and vigilant.
9. Rendezvous & field site

Rendezvous: 18h00 on Tuesday 28th July (and we return here for the night of 24th August)
Address: Nairobi, details to be confirmed

Field station: Mpala Reserve, Nanyuki, Laikipia County, Kenya
Dates: 28th July to the 24th August
Contact Person: Mr. Cosmas Nzomo, Administrator Mpala Research Centre
Phone: +254 2025 97401
Mobile: +254 772 481 217

Flights home: 25th August or later