

NYAYO

Following the footprints of safari guides in Africa

Volume 3: Zambia



"If you want to go fast,
travel alone. If you want
to go far, travel together."

- African proverb



THE ZAMBIAN ART OF TOGETHERNESS

WRITTEN BY ALICE PÉRETIE

"I've always felt at home on the African continent, and Zambia in particular holds a special place in my heart. As a photographer, writer and philosophy teacher, with a background in community conservation, I love exploring ways in which the arts can draw us back to our humanity, and in doing so, (re)connect us with our environment. I'm passionate about using that which makes us human - appreciation for beauty, creativity, storytelling - to slowly bridge the nature-culture divide. There are so many incredible projects out there that deserve some light, and I try to do this as best I can."

Two beaming faces smile at me through the screen. Lary and Kellie, founders of the not-for-profit organisation By Life Connected, have embarked on a truly ambitious mission. We officially met many moons ago in a village on the side of the main road leading to the Nalunanga Gate, gateway to the wildy rare Kafue National Park. Touched by the beauty and challenges in the area, the passionate pair left everything behind in the early pre-Covid days of 2020 to set up their organisation (and lives) on the eastern border of the Greater Kafue Ecosystem (GKE). For half a year, the couple humbly observed, listened, and learnt from the communities and park stakeholders (lodges, NGOs and park authorities) living and operating in this area.

Their vision? To enhance and empower local projects and livelihoods, to connect people to wildlife. **How?** With local projects that create traditional skills and structures, but also designed to bring people together at a community level. A fitting project in a country that relies on the idea of togetherness.

Our encounter in Nalunanga is a story into the open from all over, much to connect stakeholders, and so that down lives to ch

So tell me, what have you been up to in and around the Kafue area?

K: We noticed that villagers surrounding the park didn't have enough alternative resources to satisfy various needs, turning to ones within the GKE to either poach or log for charcoal burning. Kids need to be fed and sent to school you see. But we also realised that park organisations, like lodge owners, get their supplies from Lusaka, a long and tedious 4-5 hour drive away. Yet we're based within a community that traditionally relies on agriculture. Straight away we recognised the potential here - to connect farmers to conservation and wildlife, as suppliers.

L: We understood there were two main sectors that needed attention: supplying GKE organisations, and general waste management. How could we respond to these issues at community level? Our first initiative, 'Farm to Table', addresses the logistics and supply issue by integrating local village farming cooperatives around Nalunanga. We're currently in our trial phase, supplying organisations like Panthera, Musckem and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Change headquarters. We are delighted to report that this has been a huge success. Our next phase is to expand the programme to include more partners. If lodges need labour, like a plumber, we'll refer a local guy for the job - we have a system with from people who are willing and available to work. They always return with stories of lion and elephants and seem... different. Happier. Nature is things to people. We're too disconnected from it - hence the interest. People in Zambia are afraid of lions and harmless animals, and there is a need to connect and re-discover old traditions that are disappearing fast.

K: Supplying park stakeholders with local products is one thing - wait till lodges serve their own Kafue produce, made fresh that morning! We've also developed a circular system to help with waste management, our 'Waste to Wealth' initiative. Rather than have it dumped or burnt, local businesses work within the system to reuse and recycle. Green Safaris (who own Ila Safari Lodge) is our main partner for the majority of the projects, including this and their Green Safaris Conservation Foundation* - they've been incredible. We will shred the plastic into eco-bricks, turn glass into chandeliers - sometimes all it takes is guidance, business training or resources, and so we invite people from across Zambia who have these skills to share them with us.

But connection also relies on transmission - and guides and rangers often have many stories to tell, and pass on. Do you work with them to create an interest in nature conservation?

K: We've started working on a Conservation Education Programme (CEP), organising weekends at a lodge (currently Ila Lodge), taking children on game drives, and having lunch there - they find this utterly thrilling and fascinating! Amazingly, 95% of children in Nalunanga have never seen an elephant in their life. Instead, they hear negative stories of raided crops, and people killed by "ellies" - these misunderstandings and disconnections happen at an early age. Ila Safari Lodge sends guides to Lukanga primary school to teach conservation, the importance of reconnecting with our environment and how we, as humans, are part of this process. The Zambia Carnivore Programme also helps us with content for the lessons, and we have access to similar initiatives through Chipembele Wildlife Education Trust - it's quite an effortless process because we're all collaborating and have the same overall objective.

*Conservation Foundation is Green Safaris' initiative designed to support livelihoods and conservation locally in areas where Green Safaris owns or operates lodges.



It's still early days though. We aim to grow the CEP this year, increasing the number of schools under the programme, as well as participating lodges. It can't just be Ilala Safari Lodge all the time, and some, like Musese Camp, are now ready and willing to use their own safari vehicles to enable more and more children to visit and experience Kafue. These children deserve to see the park and all its animals - it is still their land, their heritage and their ancestry.

You mentioned your vision was to connect everyone to increase impact. How do you plan on achieving this at landscape level, taking into account how huge the Greater Kafue area is?

L: When we first arrived, we had a 'small big plan' in mind - to connect all actors around the park and to enhance every stakeholder's impact. It's incredible to see so many people trying to find solutions as best they can, so we thought, how can we combine these efforts?

K: We are creating a website centralising knowledge about every stakeholder, impactor, and community in the region, and which informs everyone about ongoing projects - a comprehensive database, accompanied by a monthly newsletter that recaps all there is to know about various local missions. For instance, we will send out newsletters saying Musese are gathering ecological insight on lions in their area, and Game Rangers International (GRI) are working to facilitate discussions between local chiefs and the government to address encroachment issues, and so on...we want to trigger a 'wait, we have expertise here, we can collaborate' reaction to enhance everyone's incredible work.

L: We want to go on a journey with the Kafue stakeholders and create a sustainable future together. The website and newsletter are just examples of where we step in as facilitators. People know and trust us now, they know our intentions. And it really all comes down to trust for collaboration and problem-solving. The struggle lies in how to build that bond between people, to get them to talk and avoid local politics. Organising meetings...

K (laughing): No, not meetings, they are boring and everyone hates them. Well, to be fair, they are necessary but, if people only ever meet up formally and disagree, then we go nowhere. We need fun gatherings. Musese Safari Lodge did an amazing job hosting a volleyball tournament at the lodge where everyone got to know and enjoy each other's company before the serious stuff began. People love them! The park is too big to achieve things alone, and it's very often the case that someone is doing something but no one knows about it, and someone else might be needing support on a similar project.

And so ends our interview. I am truly honoured and grateful for the time this wonderful pair has granted me, and can only hope my words do justice to their achievements thus far and to come. An encounter like this fills me with hope, and I so look forward to following their work and adventures around the Kafue. But this is only the beginning - By Life Connected has a promising life ahead, with plans to expand the model across all of Zambia, and even across the world. Collaboration, community, and conservation. We're all in this together.

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📍 www.bylifeconnected.com

Dear Alice,
Thank you for your
order of Haggis Macgrouse
as you enjoy all of the
and they bring a little
of Nova to your home.
Gemma
- founder

Thank you for
the gift of
the Haggis
Macgrouse

