

# The Evolution of Environmental Education at Munda Wanga Environmental Park, Zambia

*Emma Stone, Education Manager*

In 1950, a gentleman named Ralph Sander founded a botanical garden that was destined to become the showpiece of Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. At the time, he was a colonial civil servant working for the Department of Game and Tsetse Control and he called his garden *Munda Wanga*, which means “My Garden” in Nyanja (one of the many national dialects). He gained an enviable reputation as a botanist and was responsible for the establishment of many of the parks, gardens, and tree-lined avenues in Lusaka. An article written about him entitled ‘The Gardener of Chilanga’ was published in a 1966 edition of Readers Digest. Sadly, after 28 years of work, he died in 1978 having sold the estate to the government.



*The new Education Centre takes shape  
at Munda Wanga*

At the time the economy of Zambia was booming, and with the assistance of government grants, the Munda Wanga Gardens prospered and was eventually enlarged to contain a zoo (now referred to as the Wildlife Park and Sanctuary), displaying both indigenous and exotic species. A number of exotics brought to Zambia via the Chipperfield Circus were donated to the President, who passed them on to Munda Wanga. These included tigers, American black bear and Axis deer, many of which still reside at the park today.

Regrettably, the government grants could not be sustained and the estate passed through many

governmental and parastatal hands. Without proper management and capital, the facilities declined. Munda Wanga sadly became a horror story, with many of the animals starving in their cages; those that survived did so only through kind donations and support of local interested parties.

After many years of neglect a new organisation was formed, the Munda Wanga Trust. The Trust took over the management of the Park, and in 1998 Munda Wanga became known as Munda Wanga Environmental Park, encompassing a Wildlife Park, Sanctuary and Botanical Gardens. Today the park is undergoing a complete rehabilitation programme, with new enclosures being built and endangered species breeding and release programmes well under way.

After two years of rehabilitation it was obvious that, with over 55 percent of visitors comprising children in school groups, there was a need for some form of educational activities at Munda Wanga. In 2000 I was tasked with developing a park-based Environmental Education (EE) programme and Interpretation Centre. I have to say I was somewhat daunted by the bus and (literally) truck loads of children arriving at Munda Wanga on a daily basis. So the first task was deciding with what and how I was to do this.

I decided to focus on networking as the starting point. Perhaps naively, I assumed at first there would be a paucity of EE practitioners within Zambia. However, to my surprise, I was happy to find a number of educators working on private and government funded projects throughout the country. Here I could tap in to a wealth of experience of developing educational programmes within the Zambian context.

I started with a workshop, for which I managed to find funding from local companies. The workshop was aimed firstly at introducing EE practitioners to the EE programme at Munda Wanga and, secondly, as a brainstorming session for its development. This was a good start, and I gained a lot of valuable

contacts and ideas to work with. This was followed up with visits to local schools around the city, gaining support for and interest in the programmes.

As the next priority was funding, I developed a project proposal that was sent to as many potential local and international sponsors as possible. Internationally, I approached a large number of zoos and wildlife parks, gaining opportunities for assistance with both the development of materials and funding for the programme. A number were very helpful, especially Chester Zoo (UK), Bronx Zoo (USA) and Columbus Zoo (USA).

With the assistance of volunteers we also held a number of fund raising events, collecting a healthy sum of cash. Having no classroom or educational facility within the park, I decided to start developing the education centre. It is hoped that the centre will provide holistic environmental information, for all ages, bringing the botanical, wildlife and cultural factors together. A number of topics that were highlighted during the first workshop were chosen to be covered within the interpretation centre. These included habitats of Zambia, endangered species and cultural aspects of the changing environment.

As is the theme throughout Munda Wanga, we decided to use what we already have - an old concrete lion cage. It was agreed that this concrete building would be a fantastic location for the Education Centre, giving the public a feel of what it would have been like living behind bars. Using the old holding cages around the main room, we decided to create habitat zones that would reflect those found within Zambia. In addition, the building will house the education office, classrooms and a resource library.

Having gained sponsorship from a sign printer, I started developing interpretative displays and hired a crew to commence the structural renovations of the building. Work was finally underway.

During this time hundreds of visitors continued to spill through our gates, and with only one educational staff member (me!) it was difficult to cope with the school groups, never mind develop activities to conduct with them. It was clear that the next priority was to hire a full time Zambian educator, as well as

developing the educational capacity of our existing staff.

Again making use of whatever resources we already had, I commenced a training programme for our security guards and a number of gardeners who could be free to assist with some interpretative guiding during the busy periods. This worked well, with members of staff really rising to the challenge.

Through our links with Chester Zoo (UK) we were also able to gain their support. Members of the educational staff at Chester conducted some training at Munda Wanga and provided guidance and assistance with the developing interpretation programme. As a follow up to the in house training, I was also able to send Besa Kaoma, one of the gardeners who showed great EE potential, on a three-month Tour Guide Training Certificate run by the Ministry of Tourism. We have also secured a scholarship, from the Southern Africa Development



*Guide training at the American Black Bears*

Community Regional Environmental Education Programme (SADC REEP), for Diana Ngula, our full time Interpretative Guide, allowing her to attend a two-week EE certificate course in South Africa. Slowly our educational capacity is building.

During this time I was able to attend the second African Zoo and Reserve Educators Network (AZOREN) conference in Kenya, again thanks to support from Chester Zoo (UK). This proved to be a great blessing. The conference was attended by delegates from all over Africa, many of which were in the same situation as myself, facing the same

challenges. I was able to share my experiences and thrash out ideas with others about the challenges.

It was obvious that for people like myself, working in developing countries with little access to resources, books or the Internet, networking was perhaps the most important source of training and learning.

The benefits of networking also come in the form of training support and funding, as illustrated in my meeting with Tom Naiman from the Bronx Zoo (USA), through which I was able to gain their support for Munda Wanga. With funding sourced from the American Zoo and Aquaria Association (AZA), the Bronx are planning to conduct training workshops based at Munda Wanga, develop educational materials and, jointly with Chester Zoo (UK), fund the salary of a full time Zambian educator. This was the real push that the programme needed - with training and an educator we can finally start to achieve our goals as an educational institution.

As we are slowly progressing, Munda Wanga is getting more and more involved in developing national EE activities. We have commenced an outreach programme sponsored by Toyota Zambia, through which we are able to bring underprivileged groups from far and wide to Munda Wanga.

Since 2001 I have also been working on a steering committee alongside seven other educators from various projects, including the Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) and WWF. In the last year we have successfully created the first and only EE networking organisation within Zambia, the Zambia Network of Environmental Educators and Practitioners (ZANEEP). On December 14, 2002, Munda Wanga proudly hosted the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) and official launch of the network, which will be opened by the Director of the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) and the Minister of the Environment.

This day will be a great step in the evolution of EE at Munda Wanga, demonstrating that we have made much headway in turning a horror story into an educational resource for the benefit of the Zambian community. I would like to thank all those people and organisations who have contributed to the

development of Munda Wanga's EE programme: Bronx Zoo (USA), Columbus Zoo (USA), the British High Commission in Zambia, Paignton Zoo (UK), Toyota Zambia, Quentin Allen, Jersey Zoo (UK), Cheyenne Mountain Zoo (USA), Robin McLaughlin of San Diego Zoo (USA), Darcy King and especially Steve McKeown from Chester Zoo (UK).



*Phoenix, orphaned at a few days old by ivory poachers, is used to help the conservation message to visitors*

As always, if anyone wishes to get involved, assist us in our endeavours or simply network and share ideas, I can be contacted through the address below.

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