

Alexander Owens – Blog 2

Originally, I was expecting that Kenya would be stereotypical Africa, meaning it would be a lot of Savanna and wildlife would be ever present. Kenya, though, has so far not been like that. The plant life is different as well as the climate. As soon as I take a sip of water, it left my body an hour later. I was expecting the animals to be larger, but they are still stunning. The diversity is much greater than that of California and the fauna is fascinating. At the Impala ranch, I saw giraffes, dik diks, elephants, impalas, and hyenas. Professor Nasa explained to me that if you head further down into east Africa, where most non-Africans get their image of Africa, the wild life get massive. They have the extra space to grow. The environment determines the size of the animals. In Kenya, there is bush, so the wildlife does not have as much room to grow. Smaller wildlife is favored over larger animals. Their smaller size allows them to more easily maneuver through the bush. They evolved that way.

Additionally, I was not expecting to be so close to the wild life (even though I knew I would be camping). At the Impala ranch, my heart jumped when I heard a lion growl at night. Once you hear it, the sound sticks in your mind. Instant adrenaline rushes through you to keep you awake and focused. If I was not awake before, I was certainly awake then. Then I realized that I was in Africa. No other animal screams Africa more than the lion. It was probably the least enjoyable thing for me because it frightened me so much. If had a diaper on, I would have used it. Further, one of the biggest surprises to me has been the care and thought that has to go into solving a problem. At the Impala ranch, Professor Rubenstein from Princeton gave a lecture on cattle grazing in Kenya. There are two types of cattle rearing, commercial and pastoralist. Commercial ranchers raise cattle for their meat and hides to make a profit. They usually have 1 cow per hectare. Pastoralists, though, see cows as their source of wealth, rarely, if ever, killing them. They are used for buying a wife (10 cows), social status, and economic benefits. As the world is changing, the question must be asked; can wildlife and livestock live together? Climate change, a major issue, makes it such that the intensity of rainfall increases and its frequency decreases. As such, this means more droughts, which means less water for cows to drink, and greater competition for resources, which means cows will now be competing for water with wildlife and commercial farmers. Pastoralists will now have fiercer competition amongst themselves. Because of problems like climate change, the pastoralist way of life is threatened. However, it is not an insurmountable challenge.

In the eyes of many cattle herders, wildlife is seen as competition, and killed. But in a series of experiments, Professor Rubenstein showed that it is possible for livestock and wildlife to coexist. In one instance, he had cows bunched together and another as business as usual. Bunched cattle resulted in higher cattle weight as opposed to un-bunched cattle. Even though it requires herders to be more proactive, the cattle more efficiently ate grass. In another, a zebra substitute, the donkey, was used to see if zebras can help cattle in any way. Cattle are picky. They prefer high-quality, rich grass to eat. Zebras and Donkeys, though, are much less picky. They will eat more, but they both need to graze for twice as long. Through NVDI, a technology that allows scanning of vegetation, it was shown that donkeys will eat down to the nub of vegetation. Thus, they allow better growth of plants for cows to eat. Unfortunately for the professor, he has to convince the pastoralists over other plans on how best to confront this issue. As such, he said that he has to build a rapport with them. It is very slow to build trust.

Consequently, this has many ramifications for solving issues at home in the US. We have to solve our problems at the local level, starting from the bottom upwards. People do not like things imposed upon them unless they are lead along every step of the way. We have to be very careful about unilaterally implementing policies. The Pyramids were not built from the top down, but the bottom up.