

RUNG'ABURE'S SERENGETI BIRD CAMP PROJECT

Eco-Tourism Plan

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Prepared for: John Mwita and the village of Rung'abure

Prepared by: Chris Hartzell

Summary of plan:

Create a "Birding" eco-tourist destination that is run and operated by village community members.

Current situation:

Rung'abure is a small village that lies in the heart of the Serengeti. The village is struggling to find economic independence and cannot compete against well established large scale eco-tourism businesses around them.

Background:

Rung'abure is a small village and there is almost no information readily available on it. It does have electricity and internet capabilities.

Demographics:

Population is estimated at 700 based on 2008 census. It is projected to currently be slightly less. Close to 100% of the population are resident natives. The education background is unknown.

Location:

Rung'abure is located in the Mara Region of Tanzania and lies just outside the North Gate of the Serengeti National Park. It is approximately 13km south of the town of Mugumu, which has its own commercial, non-international airport. Rung'abure is connected with graveled roads and easily accessible by vehicle from 3 directions. There are 2 international airports, Kilimanjaro and Nairobi that are found roughly equidistant from the village north and south. It is approximately 80km south of the Kenya border and the Maasai Mara.

Current Tourism:

Rung'abure has the nearby permanent tented camp, Ikoma Bush Camp, and 3 nearby lodges. Although Ikoma Bush Camp is a higher class, well-kept and attractive tented camp, it receives minimal tourist traffic, which based on initial research, is due to lack of marketing and surrounding competition. The other nearby lodges receive the same reviews.

Summary of problem and solution:

Eco-tourism for the purposes of wildlife safari is saturated in the area to the point of tourist companies and lodges closing. There is no way for Rung'abure, with its current situation, to compete effectively in the wildlife eco-tourism market. However, there are just over 500 species of birds in the Serengeti and Rung'abure sits in a location that has good potential for hosting over 2/3rds of them in a localized area. Bird-watchers have increased in numbers and increased in expenditures significantly and in some regions of the world have exceeded wildlife tourism. With "Birding" tourism growing almost 1000% in the last decade, being a multi-billion dollar industry, and only reached approximately 1/3rd to 1/2 of its tourist capacity, Rung'abure sits in a good position of tapping effectively into this market by becoming a tourist destination as a "Birding Hotspot".

Plan Application:

This plan applies to Rung'abure and would not necessarily be viable for other villages both regionally and continentally. Rung'abure has a unique situation in that it is a small village, centrally located between cities and airports, sits in

possibly prime bird habitat, has very limited local eco-tourism competition, and has a sense of strong community involvement.

Projected Result:

Create employment for roughly 10-500 and village gross income of \$100,000-\$1,000,000, depending on participation and involvement.

Phase Summary:

Create a series of phases that outline how to create and market Rung'abure as a birding destination. The phases start with low involvement and cost and increase systematically. Although each higher phase would be dependent on the success of the previous phase, each phase would provide for independent viable "stopping" points if the village decided not to proceed to the next phase.

Plan Constraints:

Success is not guaranteed. Viability of the plan is dependent on actual bird demographics of the surrounding area as well as the involvement of the community. Additionally, the better funded nearby camps/lodges could catch on to the same idea and provide competition. It is imperative that the project be kept quiet or made to look like another wildlife venture until completed. Additionally, plans for development such as airports or highways would fatally damage this plan. Birds would flee from nearby airports and high speed cars would not only kill birds, but kill off large amounts of insects and reptiles, a major food supply for local birds. Pollution could damage vegetation that are sources of food and nesting materials.

Projected Success:

60-90% chance of success with phases 1-5.

50-80% chance of success with phase 6(A).

20-60% chance of success with phases 6(B)1 & 2.

50-90% chance of success with phases 7-9.

Key to Success:

Good identification of the bird demographics, full community involvement and preparation, keeping the plan quiet from surrounding competition until phases were complete and marketed, and good marketing.

PLAN PHASES

Phase 1 - Education

This will involve anyone capable of being field guides to self-educate themselves on bird identification, migration, and behavior. People will need to start learning the birds, their names, and where to look for them. Field guides must have a thorough understanding of birds and their identification. "Birders" are picky about accurate identification and their "life lists" are the primary drive for them spending money to see specific birds.

Resources - current bird books and internet access. Possible to get experienced local guides to come train?

Timeframe - dependent on individual time.

Cost - \$0-\$150 for books. Cost is dependent on internet access.

Phase 2 - Establish bird demographics

A check list of local birds must be established. Once educated, guides must go out into the field and establish a checklist of local birds and their locations. Identification of "rare" birds is essential. Behavior must be also noted so as to establish their feeding and migration habits.

Resources - binoculars, recorders, scopes, vehicle, and Serengeti checklist

(http://www.serengeti.org/download/Bird_Check-List.pdf)

Binoculars and spotting scopes should be adequate to establish accurate identification. These special “song recorders” have a playback and record feature and should be loaded with local bird songs and can be played back to bring birds in. The recording feature allows a bird song heard in the field to be recorded and played back to attract an unknown bird to its own song allowing positive identification.

Timeframe - 8 - 18 months to establish accurate migrating population.

Cost - binoculars \$75ea new, can possibly be acquired through donations. Spotting scopes with tripods \$100-\$500 new/used, can possibly be acquired through donations. Recorders \$50-\$100 each and would need to be purchased. Unknown cost for fuel.

Phase 3 - Create “hot spot”

Using the knowledge from phase 1 and 2, create a hot spot nearby in a prime location for bird viewing and eventually where a camp/lodge will be. Some birds will never come around people, some will. It is important to choose a location that sits on along the line of the two types of birds so as to get as many species centralized to the one site. Those that come around people must be centralized in viewing areas. Establish a bird watering hole, bird feeders, bird boxes, and plant vegetation and trees that will attract birds to feed and nest. If nesting can be established, it can significantly increase popularity of tourism to the location. If birds of prey and owls can be brought in, could triple popularity. One or more “blinds” should be built. Their design and location should be for both night and day birds and allow photography.

Resources - people power! Time to dig, build, plant. Look at acquiring desirable plants and trees.

Timeframe - unknown for build time, depends on how much is needed. 3-6 months for birds to move in.

Cost - unknown, dependent on materials.

NOTE: Noise and night light should be a large consideration for location.

Phase 4 - Village preparation

Clean up village for tourism. Address any needed items like; roadside trash, clean water, clean restroom facilities, food and drink vendors available nearby. Educate community on tourism such as; good manners, dealing with nasty tourists, how not to alienate tourists (don't overwhelm them with begging or sales pitches). Investigate insurance and liability needs.

Resources - people power! Time to clean and educate. People to call about insurance and liability.

Timeframe - unknown, dependent on village.

Cost - unknown for insurance, will need further investigation. Other items, unknown, but should be minimal as phase is dependent on people and time more than money.

Phase 5 - Guide preparation

Equip all guides with uniform shirt and equipment. Supply them with binoculars, spotting scope, recorder, and bird book.

Resources - Distribute resources acquired for phase 2. Uniform T-shirts with logo.

Timeframe - unknown, but projected days to weeks.

Cost - unknown for additional equipment needed. Dependent upon what resources were acquired for phase 2. \$200 for Uniform shirts.

NOTE: At this time it should be determined which phase the village is ready for financially. If able to do go straight to Phase 6(B), skip Phase 6(A). It should be also noted that Phase 6(B)2, although the best option for the village, would delay activation of Phase 9 and delay income until completed.

Phase 6(A) - Accommodations and guiding-unable to build own camp/lodge.

If a camp/lodge is not able to be built onsite immediately, then nearby camps should be contacted and informed of possible partnership for using their accommodations in conjunction with visiting Rung'abure bird site.

Pros: earlier tourism, no initial costs.

Cons: potential loss of income due to partnership with big business.

Resources - people with negotiating skill.

Timeframe - unknown, dependent on negotiations.

Cost - none, but probably a percentage of profits.

Phase 6(B)1 - Accommodations-able to build own camp but not lodge

Limited funding is available, a tented camp should be built. This would be similar to the temporary tented camps using the large military style tents, porta-potties, bucket showers, etc.

Pros: earlier tourism, lower initial costs.

Cons: potential loss of higher luxury oriented tourists.

Resources - materials to make a camp.

Timeframe - unknown, dependent on building.

Cost - unknown, dependent on construction costs.

Phase 6(B)2 - Accommodations-able to build own lodge

If funding can be acquired, a permanent lodge with accommodations should be built. Marketing to different organizations could acquire enough financial donations to allow for this to happen.

Pros: well established tourist destination, elimination of partnerships and lodging competition.

Cons: more money and delayed start of tourism, delaying income.

Resources - materials to make a camp.

Timeframe - unknown, dependent on building.

Cost - unknown, dependent on construction costs.

Phase 7 - Business establishment

A "business" should be formed. Rules and pay for participating people should be established. This will help regulate people going off to tour on their own, ensure that profit is going back into the project and not solely to the individual, and keep everyone in line with operations, behavior, and expectations. The business should be named and Trademarked. Suggest *Rung'apure's Serengeti Bird Camp*. A logo and slogan created. Website created but not publicized. Tourist resources and souvenirs acquired.

Resources - website builder. Purchase of books, Rung'apure checklists, and materials for sale to tourists. Establishment of souvenirs; Trademarked T-shirts, photo vests, magnets, etc.

Timeframe - unknown, projected to be weeks.

Cost - unknown, depends on website building tools and builder. Approximately \$100-\$300 for Trademarking. \$200-\$1000 for tourist resources.

Phase 8 - Marketing

When ready to start tourism, prepare a list of organizations, tour companies, flyers, etc. to inform the international birding community of the *Rung'apure's Serengeti Bird Camp*. Marketing should be directed to tourist companies emphasizing the birding at this location in addition to surrounding wildlife. This should not be done in a trickle marketing campaign, but a quick-launch flood campaign. A flood campaign will eliminate competition from surrounding camps/lodges.

Resources - basic printing and mailing supplies.

Timeframe - unknown, projected to be weeks to couple months.

Cost - unknown, depends on number of mailings, but estimated at less than \$100.

Phase 9 - Tourism

Begin receiving tourists. Promote tourist “checklists” and individualize their visit to their individual checklist.

Research

One avenue for acquiring funding and resources is a prime location for research. Establishing of “bird banding” and population statistics at the site could triple the recognition of Rung’apure and bring in more funding.

Transportation

The above phases are based on tourists using tour companies as means of transportation and just visiting the village as a “stop”. Birding guides would be sub-contracted out by the tour companies and fees established for visiting the site. Eventually, the village could expand to provide transportation both locally, but eventually in surrounding areas incorporating both the bird site and surrounding safaris. By doing this, it will keep initial costs down until more money is brought back from tourism. Money could then be put into: 1) around village transportation only, 2) village to nearby lodging only, then eventually 3) full transportation and safaris into surrounding areas in search of both birds and wildlife.

NOTE: Insurance and maintenance costs should be investigated thoroughly with transportation and the comparison between owning and renting vehicles should be fully explored.

Phase 10 - Expansion

Once thriving, the focus should be on preserving the local bird population and not encroaching on the site with development. Development should be made opposite of the bird camp in the village. The immediate vicinity surrounding the bird camp should focus on original and local arts and craft souvenir stands. Pre-made and commercially manufactured souvenirs should be kept to a minimum. The emphasis should be on not only can you go and bird here, but find great native souvenirs. Because foreign tourists are wary of local food and drink, restaurants, café’s, or stands should be found outside the arts and crafts perimeter.

Phase 11 - Dedication

If it works, you can dedicate the waterhole or a street to me 😊

References:

Story of a poor Ecuador logging family who turned bird tourism into their primary income...

<http://www.refugiopazdelasaves.com/>

Story of a local tribe trying to find a way to keep their village alive in the Amazon and created the Amazon’s top eco-tour destination... <http://napowildlifecenter.com/>

Story of an Ecuador farmer who found rare birds on his land and now makes as much as his farmlands...

http://avesecuador.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34%3Athe-oilbird-cave-near-chontal&catid=25%3Anews&Itemid=29&lang=en

Article on economics of birding (pay attention to page 3)...

<http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/Economicsofbirding.pdf>

Australian article on birding tourism... http://www.4hoteliers.com/4hots_fshw.php?mwi=4991

Africa's top Bird Club... <http://www.africanbirdclub.org/index.html>

One of the best of the 120 bird tour companies worldwide... <http://www.tropicalbirding.com/>

One of the best of the 120 bird tour companies worldwide... <http://wingsbirds.com/>