Hatters Explorer Scout Unit Kenya Expedition 2026 written by Luca Charalambous

After running expeditions across many continents, it was time to return to Africa in the summer of 2026. In particular, the vibrant and majestic land of Kenya. A land of towering mountains, endless savannahs and extraordinary wildlife. For 49 young people, this was more than simply another expedition; it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the pride, beauty and spirit of Africa.

Fundraising for this expedition began in October 2024, with the planning beginning long before that. However, it was 30th July, when the once-distant dream that we had spent years working towards was finally becoming a reality. Unfortunately, the flight timings were against us this time. We had to meet at the 14th Southgate Scout Hut at 11pm, ready to board a flight at 6:30am the following morning.

At this point, everyone was sleep deprived, but nevertheless, we climbed aboard a coach bound for Heathrow Airport Terminal 2. This whole process took a very long time unnecessarily, however at 06:30, we finally boarded our first Lufthansa flight, heading for Frankfurt. After what felt like the shortest sleep of our lives, we touched down on German soil. Then, at 11:25, it was time to board the flight to Nairobi – the flight we had been anticipating for almost two years. Eight hours later, our marathon journey had finally come to an end. After a lengthy hold-up at passport control, we finally emerged from the terminal and were greeted by Anne and Steve, the steady hands steering our expedition, and Alice, who had flown in earlier that day from Bangkok.

At around midnight local time, we finally arrived at Wildebeest Eco Camp, where we would spend no more than eight hours before beginning our epic adventure across Kenya. It was late, we were exhausted, and yet the excitement was impossible to suppress. Kenya was finally here.

The next morning, we awoke to the stunning surroundings that the eco camp had to offer before embarking on a four-hour journey to the Kaiyaba Scouts Centre, our home for the next few nights. We were welcomed with a mouth-watering lunch, before heading for a very special visit to the former home and museum of Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of worldwide Scouting. For many of us, this was a fascinating experience. We learnt about Baden-Powell's final years in Kenya and discovered that he had chosen to be buried facing Mount Kenya. Standing in the very place where so much of Scouting's history had unfolded made the visit feel particularly significant.

That evening, we learnt some of the expedition's all-important administration. Anne was no longer simply Anne; she was to be known as 'Mama Simba'. At the end of each day, we would celebrate an Explorer earning 'Star of the Day' and being awarded an elephant. Meanwhile, the leaders had something rather less desirable to look forward to: one of them would receive the infamous 'Crocodile of Shame'. We were also introduced to Prince and Heidi and their three children, part of RedRoad Tours, who would go on to become our heroes throughout the expedition.

The following day, it was time for our first mountain hike. Of course, there was no better place to begin than the mighty, majestic Mount Kenya. Reaching the summit would have been an expedition in itself, so instead, we spent the day hiking across its slopes. The views were nothing short of spectacular. Africa's second-highest mountain towered above us, giving us our first real

taste of the scenery that would dominate the days ahead. For four to five hours, we climbed, explored and admired the landscape before eventually descending towards our minibuses – one of which had faulty brakes that overheated at one point!

Then came an awe-inspiring moment, as we drove to the Equator and experienced what it was like to stand at 0° latitude. Cameras appeared almost instantly as everyone gathered around the iconic Equator signpost, eager to capture a memory at one of the world's most famous geographical landmarks. It was a fascinating experience for everyone, but those studying Physics and Geography perhaps appreciated it that little bit more.

On Monday 3rd August, it was time to leave behind the wonders of Kenya's Highlands and the Kaiyaba Scouts Centre and travel to our next destination: Elsamere, situated beside the breathtaking Lake Naivasha. For many of us, it was the most beautiful lake we had ever witnessed. We were incredibly fortunate to spend two nights beside this gem. Elsamere also provided us with a few luxuries: dormitories instead of tents, more Westernised food, and – perhaps most importantly to the young people – plug sockets! We spent the rest of the day learning about the work of Joy Adamson and how she established a conservation centre at Naivasha to support endangered species. We also discovered how Elsamere continues to support wildlife and the natural world today. Half of us visited the Birds of Prey rehabilitation centre, where we learnt about their efforts to protect life in the skies. A few lucky participants even had the opportunity to feed some of their most protected species – an experience that certainly left an impression.

The following sunrise was nothing short of breathtaking. Golden light stretched across Lake Naivasha, preparing us for our next challenge: Mount Longonot. Here, we hiked towards the summit of this extinct volcano, eventually reaching Crater Point. On the lower slopes, we caught glimpses of the animals we might encounter over the following few days. As we climbed higher, the views of Naivasha and the surrounding savannah became increasingly spectacular. Fortunately, the altitude sickness barely worsened, although the trek itself became progressively more demanding as the terrain steepened.

After a short break for lunch, we finally reached Crater Point – the enormous volcanic crater marking the peak of the mountain. We were rewarded with jaw-dropping views, and naturally, the cameras came out once again. After around 45 minutes, it was time to descend and experience the landscape from a different perspective. Unfortunately, the paths were extremely dusty. So, while we had reached the crater relatively clean, we returned to the minibuses covered in dust!

That evening marked our final night at Elsamere. We were greeted by numerous baboons outside our dormitories and, for a fortunate few, even a hippo hiding amongst the bushes. We spent the evening planting trees and learning more about the vegetation at the conservation centre, while the other half of the group visited the Birds of Prey rehabilitation centre.

The following morning, we celebrated an Explorer's birthday – with perhaps the best birthday present imaginable: a six-hour drive. Some of us used the journey to learn a few Swahili expressions: such as Jambo, Mzuri sana and Hakuna Matata, and even learnt a song called Jambo! We stopped briefly at a local supermarket, giving our young people the opportunity to experience everyday

shopping in Kenya. Then the paved road disappeared. We ventured onto the dusty tracks on the outskirts of the Maasai Mara, and suddenly the landscape began to transform before our eyes. We started seeing some incredible pieces of wildlife: Hyenas, Zebras, Monkeys, Giraffes.

Kenya was beginning to reveal to us its wild side.

Eventually, we arrived at Olchorro Oirowua Conservancy, on the outskirts of the Maasai Mara, which would be our home for the next four nights. The campsite was extraordinary. From behind our tents, we could see wild animals roaming across the landscape. For many of us, it was the most incredible place we had ever camped. There was something surreal about waking up knowing that the wilderness was quite literally on our doorstep.

That afternoon, we met the fabulous Dr Caroline, our project leader for the next two days. After discussing safety in camp and out on the savannah, we began learning about her conservation efforts around the Maasai Mara. We familiarised ourselves with the equipment and processes we would use to collect data. Then, our plan for the following two days was formed.

The next day brought Conservation Day 1. The morning was spent observing carnivores and herbivores, collecting data and learning how to set up camera traps in carefully selected areas. We discovered how these traps are used to gather valuable information about wildlife without disturbing the animals themselves. We then experienced what it was like to conduct a foot patrol across the savannah – an experience many of us concluded was considerably more difficult when the sun was beating down overhead!

Throughout the afternoon, we spent time herding cattle and then took part in the most wacky, adventurous and highly anticipated activity of the expedition: painting eyes on their rears. Painting eyes on cattle was undoubtedly a once in a lifetime experience for many of our young people – and certainly one that none of us will forget. Despite its charm, we were all fascinated by the impact this conservation idea had on cattle. We learnt how these painted eyes can influence predator behaviour and why the project has become such a significant part of conservation efforts in Kenya.

The following day was Conservation Day 2. We spent the morning analysing grass height and animal faeces along a transect, even learning to identify which animal a particular piece of faeces had come from. We also analysed the relationship between vegetation and wildlife, discovering how different species inhabit different areas depending on the environment around them. During the afternoon, we visited a rhino sanctuary, where we volunteered to clean and maintain certain areas and learnt about the methods used to care for their rhinos. We then got to witness the Rhino's themselves, which was another unforgettable experience.

Afterwards, we thanked Dr Caroline for her support over the previous couple of days. The conservation work had changed more than just what we knew; it had evolved the way many of our young people viewed the natural world itself.

Then came our last day at Olchorro Oirowua conservancy, which meant one thing: Safari. We entered the Maasai Mara National Reserve and began our safari. What we saw was nothing short of jaw-dropping. These were: Zebras, giraffes, hyenas, otriches, and baboons. We drove towards the lakes, where we saw around 50 hippos, accompanied by a couple of crocodiles. Then came elephants, buffalo and, eventually, the predators we had been

hoping to find: lions and leopards. Combined with the rhinos we had seen the previous day, we had now witnessed the Big Five in under 24 hours. For many of us, this was a dream come true. We spent the entire day on safari, capturing countless photographs, appreciating the beauty of the Maasai Mara and witnessing the extraordinary spectacle of animals living freely in the wild. We then headed back to camp, only to witness the most colourful and wonderous sunset our eyes would ever capture. This beauty was a stunning end, to what had been the most amazing day. After this, animals in London Zoo would never feel quite the same again. We settled in for our final night at Olchorro, where each participant and leader was gifted a large animal picture from local tribes. It meant that everyone could take a small piece of the Maasai Mara home with them – assuming, of course, that they could somehow fit it into their luggage!

The penultimate day of the expedition meant driving back to where this epic adventure had begun: Nairobi's Wildebeest Eco Camp. Along the way, we made several stops. The first was at a tourist market, where the prices were so high that we all boarded the minibuses empty-handed. Fortunately, we found another souvenir shop later in the journey, where the prices were far more reasonable and our young people had the opportunity to learn the art of haggling! We then stopped to admire the breathtaking views of the Great Rift Valley, a vast geological feature shaped by the movement of the Somali and African tectonic plates. It was yet another unbelievable sight, providing a fitting backdrop to an expedition that had been filled with extraordinary landscapes. After the photographs had been taken, it was time to return to Wildebeest Eco Camp for our final night.

At first, the campsite had seemed simply pleasant. Yet, after spending more time there at the end of our expedition, we had

grown to appreciate its beauty. That evening, we shared one final dinner and said our thank you's to members of RedRoad Tours, our patrol leaders, and Alice, who was leaving for Bangkok that night.

Then after 10 days, we had reached Day 11 – the final day. In the morning, we visited the Nairobi Giraffe Centre – something that one particular leader had been especially excited about! We had the opportunity to feed the giraffes and, for some of us, even kiss them, adding yet another unforgettable memory to an already extraordinary expedition. We also learnt about different species of giraffe and the conservation work being carried out to protect them across Africa. There was just enough time for one final bout of souvenir shopping, ensuring that everyone could take home the treasures from Kenya that they had been searching for. Lastly, we visited the Karen Blixen Museum in Nairobi, famous for her 1937 memoir 'Out of Africa'. We explored her former home and learnt about the life she had lived there, including the struggles surrounding her coffee farm. Then, it was time to return to the eco camp for one final meal before heading home.

We said farewell to Prince, Heidi and their three children. Yet, before leaving, we marked the occasion by investing their three children into the Hatters Explorer Scout Unit – something that we hope they will remember and cherish for years to come. Then came our final journey to Nairobi Jomo Kenyatta International Airport Terminal 1B. It was time to say goodbye to Anne (Mama Simba) and Steve, the people who had helped make this entire adventure possible. The expedition that had begun with 49 young people, countless hours of planning and years of anticipation was slowly coming to an end. We were reunited with the group we had started with 11 days earlier and boarded our 22:20 flight to Brussels. Eventually, we took our seats aboard Brussels Airlines,

with three lucky Explorers and one fortunate leader receiving a completely random upgrade to Premium Economy! For everyone else, economy it was.

Eight hours and thirty minutes later, we landed in Belgium. After a couple of additional security checks, we boarded our final flight of the expedition back to London Heathrow Terminal 2 – a flight which somehow felt as though it lasted no longer than a minute. After collecting our bags, it was time for a classic Hatters expedition tradition: taking the Piccadilly line to Oakwood from Heathrow, filling an entire carriage with our luggage. As always, nobody wanted to share a carriage with us! At around 13:15 on 11th August, we arrived back at the Scout Hut – a place that somehow felt as though we had only left yesterday. After thanking our social media hero for the trip, the Hatters Explorer Scout Unit Kenya Expedition 2026 officially came to an end. After years of planning, 18 months of fundraising and 11 life-changing days, it all ended here.

But an expedition like this doesn't truly end when the plane lands. It lives on in the photographs, the stories, the friendships and the memories. It lives on in the lessons we learnt about conservation, culture and the natural world. Most importantly, it lives on in the 49 young people who travelled across Kenya and returned home seeing the world a little differently.

From the slopes of Mount Kenya to the shores of Lake Naivasha; from the heights of Mount Longonot to the endless plains of the Maasai Mara, Kenya gave us far more than we could ever have expected.

Thank you so much to everyone who supported us on this expedition. You helped turn a once-distant dream into a reality –

and in doing so, created memories that 49 young people, plus 11 incredible leaders will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Blog written by:

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