



PROJECT REPORT
TANZANIA VOLUNTEER TRIP
October 21-31, 2025



Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) organized and led a volunteer trip to the Karatu and Moshi Districts in northern Tanzania in October 2025. Six volunteers traveling from the United States, including Trip Leader Kelly McCoy, met in Arusha, Tanzania to begin this two-week journey. Maggie Simbeye, our Guide and owner of Maggie's Tours, joined the group for the orientation meeting. Beginning on Day 2, she and Guide/Driver Nishel Kileo stayed with us throughout the first half of the trip. For the second half of the trip, we were met by the team from Joining Safaris, Guides and Drivers Benson Lucas who transferred the group from Karatu to Moshi, where we were met by Joining Safaris Owner, Erick Urassa. The Joining Safari team stayed with us throughout the second half of the trip.

Work focused on the two main districts in the Northern Circuit tourism areas of Tanzania: In Karatu the group volunteered on reforestation of the foothills around the African Rift Valley wall in Gekrum Village near Lake Manyara National Park. In Moshi,

the volunteers worked on reforestation and trail maintenance in the Rau Forest Reserve and the Njoro Juu Spring Conservation Area near Mount Kilimanjaro National Park.

The Tanzania projects were carried out under the auspices of Dare Women's Foundation at Gekrum Village, the Rau Forest Reserve District Manager and Forest Caretaker, and Kiviwama Indigenous Tree Nursery at Njoro Juu Spring Conservation Area.

Volunteers contributed a total of 363.3 hours towards the following projects:

Prepared the pre-dug holes and planted 467 Sisal plants and 55 fruit tree saplings around the hillsides at Gekrum village near the boundary of Lake Manyara National Park. Cleared brush from 5.0 kilometers of trails and .75 hectares of brush from a campsite in the Rau Forest Reserve. Planted 775 tree saplings in pre-dug holes in 1 location in the Rau Forest Reserve, and 50 tree saplings and 365 Ebony Tree seedlings at the Kiviwama tree nursery at the Njoro Juu Spring Conservation Area. Our goal was to plant 1008 trees on this trip. Combined, we achieved 877 trees and 365 seedlings **for a total of 1242 plantings** during this second reforestation project! In addition, the fees paid by the volunteers for the trip encompassed the costs for both the procurement of tree-planting supplies and the acquisition of the trees and seedlings that were planted during the trip.

DETAILED TRIP REPORT:

October 21st Arusha:

The group met at our hotel for an introductory meeting and orientation to the projects and the days ahead. Maggie's Tours Owner and Guide, Maggie Simbeye and team including Driver & Guide Nishel Kileo, Morgan and Geraldine, two young ladies that will be part of the community group, joined and shared their excitement for the project and the work at Gekrum Village, educated the group about the history and culture of Tanzania, as well as the community we will be working in. We also had a fun language lesson in Swahili and Iraqw (the Cushitic language spoken at Gekrum Village and surrounding Manyara region of Arusha).

October 22nd Karatu-Gekrum Village:

The following morning, our group was joined by Driver & Guide Nishel Kileo, who is also Maggie's husband. Together our group departed in 1 safari vehicle leaving the hectic busy city of Arusha behind as we headed west for a 3-hour drive toward the more rural, idyllic, and open plains of the Great Rift Valley and the town of Karatu. We made a lunch stop along the way in Mto Wa Mbutu for local lunch of traditional foods made by the Sunday Group, a local women's empowerment NGO at their farm under a grove of Banana plants. **Did you know** the Banana is a plant that is an herbaceous perennial, and NOT a tree, that grows between 10 and 20 feet tall?

Upon arriving in Karatu the group checked into our lodge and refreshed quickly, before heading to our volunteer project home for the next 4 days at Gekrum Village.

Upon arriving, the group received a lively, warm welcome from the community along with 5 other language groups from neighboring communities of Gekrum Village.

After the community immersion and cultural exchange festivities, the group received an orientation of the village including walking the planting sites with Maggie and Daniel Kalisti Mandoo, the Gekrum Village Advocate. Due to the nature of the hillside being at varying heights and on uneven ground we wanted the team to feel comfortable and decide where they would begin working the next day. During this time, the group also learned that Daniel led the community in pre-digging all the holes around the community hillsides.



Gekrum Village warm welcome, group engaging with the community and walking to the tree planting site.

After this full day of driving, orientation and community immersion, the group returned to the lovely garden setting of the lodge at 7pm, to settle into their rooms and enjoy dinner before retiring for the evening.

October 23rd:

We departed the lodge at 8:30 am and arrived at Gekrum Village around 9:00. Generally, the drive is about 30 minutes, give or take time based on weather and road conditions. This year the rains were very short, the normally uneven and unpaved dirt roads were dry.

Upon arriving we gathered for an orientation on how to plant the tree saplings, from Maggie and Daniel “Dani” Kalisti Mandoo, the Gekrum Village Advocate. The planting process has essentially 7 steps that we all learned in Swahili which was fun! Core to the process is mixing the soil and the “mbolea” (fertilizer), centering the sapling in the hole, adding the “matamahuluku” (mulch), then slowly adding “magi” (water). This was followed by a tool safety briefing from Kelly and Dani.

The group paired up with a community member, and there were 3 translators assigned to the volunteer pairs from the community representing the Dare Women’s Foundation. Our translators were Asha (guiding expert who has gone up Kilimanjaro 3 times on Mountain Bike) and originally joined us in 2023, Jocelyn also a guide, and Winnie, a local entrepreneur. Beyond the pairs, other youth and young adults also joined in on the planting.

As the saying goes **“it takes a village”** coming together to protect nature! The pairs of volunteers dispersed to all sides of the planting area, while Maggie, Dani, and Kelly constantly rotated the hill to check in with the groups. We wrapped up the day at about 3:30 pm, having planted 405 trees (15 more on the first day compared to our 2023 trip).



Group receiving tool orientation, and then off to planting at Gekrum Village !

October 24th:

Rest day! The entire group participated in a day of exploring Lake Manyara National Park on Safari and picnic lunch. This year we began at the southern gate which really showed off the communities that live around Lake Manyara and the various biodiversity and ecosystems that make up this national park.

This experience gave our group more context on climate change, the desertification of higher areas in the region, lake flooding caused by runoff from human activities along the Great Rift Valley Wall, and the impacts on Lake Manyara. Over time Lake Manyara's accumulation of sediment from run off reduces the already shallow lake's capacity to hold water, which combined with high rainfall causes the lake to overflow surrounding areas. Our group was able to see areas that once were dry land and park roads that no longer exist due to flooding, lake expansion, and dying trees due to lack of oxygen at their roots due to prolonged saturation of the soil, which prevents them from absorbing water and nutrients.

We had a nice sunny day exploring the various ecosystems of the park and viewed many birds, Baboons, Blue Monkey, Vervet Monkeys and various flora and tree species. We stopped for a great picnic lunch with an exceptional overlook of the lake, then hopped back into the safari vehicles for more wildlife viewing. After lunch as the light began changing, the larger mammals all began to come out! The group enjoyed watching the daily activities of many bird species along the lake and in the woodlands, along with Elephants, Impala, Buffalo, Hippos, Zebra, Bushbucks, Baboons, Warthogs and finally Giraffe. We ended the day on the way out of the park, with an amazing view of Elephants in a riverbed as dusk began setting in, before returning to our lodge for dinner and retiring.



Sights from our rest day safari in Lake Manyara National Park!

October 25th:

For our last project day, we focused on soil and vegetation retention. Before lunch we aerated, fertilized, mulched, and watered 62 trees from our previous group trip. When completed, we were able to plant and perform maintenance on a total of 467 trees. We celebrated over lunch and an afternoon with the whole community. Celebrating the work were community members, our group, along with Maggie and the Dare Women's Foundation. The afternoon finished with music, dancing, and a cultural exchange that celebrated nature. We said "farewell" to the community and returned to the hotel for rest, relaxation, and dinner.



Last day with the Gekrum Village and surrounding communities, celebrating nature and goodbye for now!

The 405 Sisal plants and 55 Pomegranate fruit trees planted at Gekrum Village include 8 species:



Left: Gekrum Village Tree planting site 2018. Center: Gekrum Village tree planting site today. Right: goal is to have tree and bush canopy like the hill of Lake Manyara National Park.

At dinner, the team at the lodge surprised our group with a cake and a song of farewell. It is generally important in African cultural traditions to have ceremonies especially when arriving and leaving, because it is about transition and we are learning that there is much joy in these heartfelt “hellos” and “goodbyes” in Tanzania!

October 26th - Transfer Day:

Our group enjoyed breakfast and checked out of their rooms and said final goodbyes to Maggie and Nishel of Maggie's Tours. After breakfast, we were met by Joining Safaris Guides and Driver Benson Lucas who gave us an orientation on the next week of activities in the Moshi region. Then we hopped into the safari vehicle and began the 4-hour drive from Karatu to Moshi.

We stopped for lunch midway at the Arusha Cultural Heritage Center. This is a national museum that reflects the history and culture of Tanzania's diverse people, along with art in one of the largest museums on the continent. This was also an opportunity for folks to shop, use an ATM etc. Upon arriving at our hotel in Moshi we were welcomed by Erick Urassa, owner of Joining Safaris. The group settled in and then met later for dinner.

October 27th:

After breakfast, the group gathered to depart and was met by Benson. The group enjoyed an orientation tour of Moshi Town followed by a welcome meeting and signed in at the offices of the Kilimanjaro Regional Forest Authority and Rau Forest Reserve offices. We were met there by Erick, Rosie, the Rau Forest Caretaker and Kilimanjaro Regional Forest Authority representative, and Mr. Kipule of the Kiviwama Tree Nursery, our local NGO partner. Mr. Kipule began his conservation work “Keep Kili Green” around Moshi Town at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in 1995.



Then our group drove to Rau Forest to begin our tree planting project. This year we worked at the southeastern border that abuts the local community rice paddy. We had a small walk through the paddy which engaged all our muscles and challenged our balance to stay upright and out of the muddy water!



The group planted 150 Trees of 8 indigenous species. The objective for planting here is to improve the organic border between the community and the Rau Forest, build up biodiversity to grow and protect the forest environment. We followed a similar planting process that was used in the previous week: plant in the pre-dug holes, center the sapling in the hole, then layer in the soil, then add the “mbolea” (fertilizer), then adding the “matamahuluku” (mulch), and watering came from seasonal rain.

October 28th:

The group engaged in trail maintenance and vegetation clearing. We worked on clearing brush from 5 kilometers of 4 different Rau Forest trails, and just under 1 hectare of the main campsite with vegetation slashers. Along the forest canopied trails, we had views of all kinds of butterflies and a troop of Colobus Monkeys!

During this visit to the forest our group also visited the tallest tree in Tanzania, the Big Mvule Tree, measuring 167.3 feet tall and just under 10 feet in circumference and is 225 years old. The Mvule tree is also known as African Teakwood (*Milicia Excelsa*). This particular tree has a UN designation for its natural and cultural heritage. The uses for this tree include ritual and worship, traditional herbs, scientific research, and tourism. We came across a local singer filming a video close by to this tree.



Above: Before and After brush clearing along forest trails with slashers. And the Big Mvule Tree

October 29th :

The group returned to our planting area on the southeastern border next to the rice paddy and planted another 200 trees of 8 indigenous species! Each day at this location, the group looked forward to watching the sky change around Mount Kili hoping the clouds would make way for the peak to show. We had incredible views from the rice

paddy of Kilimanjaro and watched the various fauna that enjoyed this forest and wetland area, the various aviary species, butterflies, insects and a few frogs that surrounded us!

And each day in the forest we enjoyed a delicious lunch in this beautiful natural setting, made by Chef Hardson!



Above: Group tree planting in the southeastern sector of the Rau Forest Reserve. And Chef Hardson prepping lunch!

October 30th

Today we went to the Kiviwama Indigenous Tree Nursery at Njoro Juu Spring Conservation Area. Here we met Mr. Kipule who shared more about the history of Kiviwama in the community and his work in reforesting areas in and around Moshi since 1995. The Njoro Juu Spring also serves as Moshi towns municipal water source. This nursery is 4 hectares (10 acres) and is specific to small trees saplings. There is an additional nursery in Moshi Town that is home to larger trees. During this visit Mr. Kipule led the group in planting seeds for 375 Ebony trees, and then closer to the small slope above the natural water spring, the group planted 50 assorted trees.



The 775 trees planted in the Rau Forest Reserve included 11 species:

- o East African Newtonia Tree (*Newtonia Buchananii*)
- o Sycamore Fig Tree (*Ficus Sycomorus*)
- o Nile Tulip/Siala Tree (*Markhamia Lutea*)
- o Red Mahogany/East African Mahogany Tree (*Khaya Nyasica*)
- o African Blackwood/African Ebony Tree (*Dalbergia Melanoxylon*)
- o Mvule/African Teakwood Tree (*Milicia Excelsa*)
- o Mzambarau/ Waterberry Tree (*Syzgium Guineense*)
- o Zambarau/Java Plum Tree (*Syzgium Cumini*)
- o Mkfui/Quinine Tree (*Rauvolifa Cartia*)
- o Mfuruanje/Long Podded Albizia (*Albizia Schimpeyiana*)
- o Msenefu/Croton Tree (*Croton Megalocarpus*)

After this work the group returned to the hotel to clean up and refresh before our celebration and goodbye lunch. We were hosted at Erick Urassa's home along with the Joining Safari's team, the Rau Forest Reserve team, and Mr. Kipule. We were welcomed by local acrobats with song and dance and enjoyed celebrating the work, community members, and our group!





Final Reflections

The primary goal for the Tanzania Volunteer Trip is to plant trees to help mitigate the effects of climate change and desertification in the communities of Gekrum Village in Karatu and Rau Forest Reserve in Moshi. Volunteers also helped to restore and clean up trails in the Rau Forest Reserve in Moshi. During this second trip, our group was patient as we worked through some logistics kinks, a flat tire or two from navigating jeeps through bumpy dusty roads that are typical in Tanzania. All in all, this group donated 363.3 hours of demanding work, in the dry dust, the mud and water near rice paddies, humid and hot environment while being able to experience some of the most incredible landscapes, nature, new cultures and communities of people, and wildlife sightings in Tanzania. Our goal was to plant 1008 trees on this trip. Combined we achieved 1244 trees and seeds and cleared over 5 kilometers of trail and .75 hectares of a campsite during this reforestation project!