

Article

History of Daktari Wildlife Orphanage

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Some years ago, the TV series Daktari told the story of a family in Africa which looked after injured or orphaned animals. Like thousands of children throughout the world, Ian Merrifield was fascinated by this series, which led them to do the same, many years later. He was working as a game ranger in a reserve when he met his future wife Michele. She assisted in hand-raising a baby zebra which had been attacked by lions, an orphaned wildebeest, and two small warthogs. Since then, there have been many more!

A close friend of Ian, Ed, is quadriplegic. Their common passion for animals inspired their idea to 'Make a plan': they wanted to find a solution so that being underprivileged or handicapped do not necessarily mean a person cannot take care of animals. Their motto 'Make a plan' has helped them in accepting the following challenges:

"Make a plan": give underprivileged children and disabled people the opportunity to look after and nurture animals. One of the main goals in connection with underprivileged children is to teach them compassion for animals that will lead to a reduction in poaching, which is a great problem in this area.

"Make a plan": give the injured or orphaned animals a second chance, or, at least, the chance to be accompanied at the end of their life.

"Make a plan": To be accessible to international children, volunteers and tourists, and thereby provide them with the same unique wildlife experience.

"Make a plan": Daktari represents a huge challenge and lots of satisfactions. Our motto encourages the participants to give their best. This contributes to strengthen their personality, with positive impact on their circle of family and friends.

Their motto guides them every day when building their project. However, as a non-profit company, the means of action are limited. Land, reserve management, and catering for the children correspond to heavy expenses. Consequently, they rely on new financial contributions.

Several private donors have already joined their cause and they carry on appealing to private foundations to share our values. Their main resources come from the

rent of rooms at Daktari and the financial participation of volunteers.

A primary objective is to welcome young underprivileged children for free. If it is not possible to gather the amount of money necessary, their family to contribute to the bed & breakfast costs.

All donations made to Daktari are indexed in a list which is available for inspection. The donors can stay anonymous, whilst others are listed on Daktari's well visited web site. They have also implemented a system of sponsorship where a donor can choose a name for a particular animal and gets news about him/her regularly.

Daktari is the translation of 'doctor', in the Swahili language and this job is delegate to the local vets specialized in wildlife, while Daktari provides the following after-care and nursing. Where possible, animals are rehabilitated in their natural environment. Having worked in this sector for years, they have made precious contacts in other big game reserves, which are efficient and conscientious partners and adherent to the Daktari principles.

In connection with underprivileged children, Daktari runs a program called **"Sponsor a Child"**. Underprivileged children living in rural villages have no access to wildlife, which means that they are unlikely to have any insight into the areas of animal protection and conservation. The wildlife, which is their heritage, is contained either in national parks or private game reserves which are inaccessible to them. If wildlife and the environment are to be preserved, it is necessary that the children of today are educated in these areas.

The goal of Daktari is to invite sponsored underprivileged children to stay at the reserve. During this stay the children will receive education in the areas of animal care, nature conservation, environment protection, tracking, and flora and fauna. In this way, Daktari hopes to develop the children's compassion for animals and the environment as a whole, and thereby reduce poaching and environmental abuse. Daktari hopes to team these underprivileged children with international children, who also have no access to wildlife, but who can provide the funds for both themselves and the underprivileged children.

The children will help in all aspects of running a wildlife orphanage. Consequently, their social skills will be improved through joint effort, teamwork, and a sense of responsibility. This responsibility will also help develop the children psychologically, in that they will learn that everything is possible if you just "make a plan".

Lots of people believe in Daktari: private donors and local businesses broadcast information, volunteers build the infrastructures... Daktari is at its first stage and there is a strong hope that the people will keep supporting them in making the wish of so many children come true!

Goals and principles

The education of environment preservation is a real need, so that we can pass on the richness of our natural heritage to future generations. All over the world, a lot of children have a particular emotion towards the animals and can feel that instinct or privileged link between the human and the animal. Here at Daktari, we are convinced that it is essential to give everyone the possibility to experience these very special moments: giving time and attention to orphaned or injured animals.

A new concept in experience, conservation, and learning!

As a new initiative in conservation awareness, Daktari aims at educating underprivileged children to friendly-environment behaviour and to the care of orphaned and injured animals. Moreover, Daktari wants to provide the same opportunity for people with disabilities.

Daktari is an international organisation of people who care, not only for animals and nature, but also for each other.

Our organisation is aimed at the following groups of people:

- Underprivileged children
- Visitors
 - Guests
 - Local schools
- The Nation
 - Increased collective awareness
 - Natural heritage
- International
 - Children
 - Guests
 - Volunteers

Our various goals:

- Offer to the underprivileged children:

- A high-quality education
- A life changing experience in the bush
- The care of orphaned or injured animals
- A partnership with international volunteers strongly involved in the project

- Give every interested person the possibility to participate in the project, as a volunteer or a guest. It is anticipated that under-privileged school students will be allowed free guided tours of the centre.
- Arouse collective awareness: education can only be a benefit to the Nation and hopefully an example to other nations, showing that no matter what colour, creed or disability, conservation is our responsibility. No prejudice will be tolerated.

Principle

Learning

Daktari is an educational centre for all: participants will learn basic animal care and simple actions to respect the environment. We consider including a specific awareness and prevention program about HIV/AIDS for the children from the local community, insofar as they are the first exposed to this burden. To a further extent, all the participants will learn a lot about themselves and their ability to live and work together.

Healing

Injured and orphaned animals are first examined by a vet. During their recovery, Daktari participants look after them everyday.

Sharing

Through common goals, all participants can form teams and share a unique life-time experience.

"Make a plan"

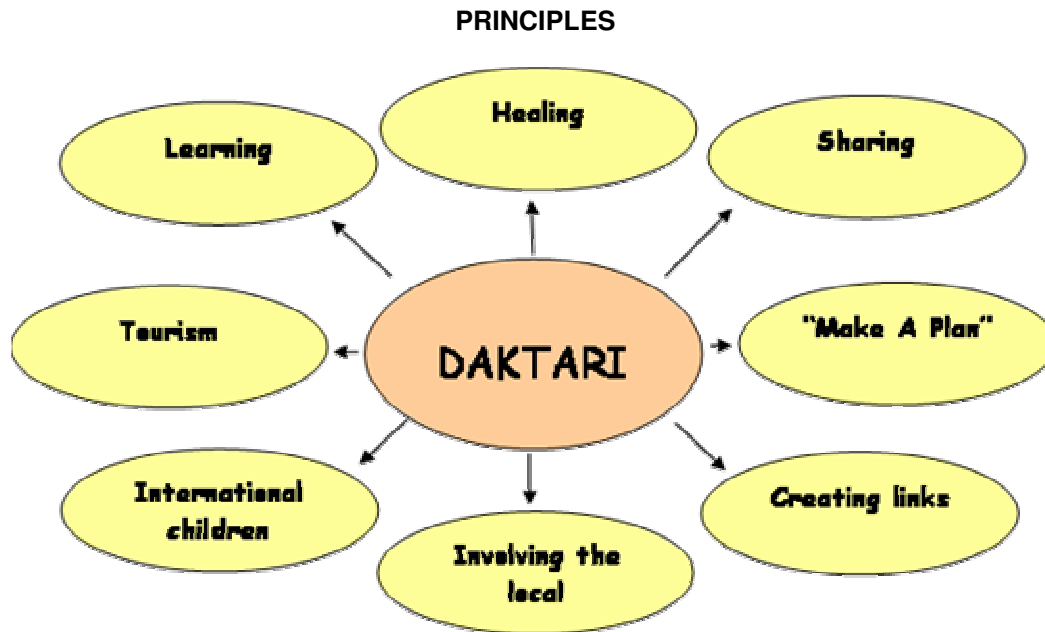
When organised by experienced people, teamwork can compensate for cultural, religious, and physical differences, so that everybody commits oneself actively in the project.

Creating links

Daktari's activities, failures and successes will provide the basis for reports, which may be consulted by similar projects, NGOs, the government, and every interested person. This will be achieved thanks to the personal implication of the participants and their contacts.

Involving the local community

It is indispensable that the locals take part in the project in the following way:



- Some of them work in the reserves. They are able to take in the needy animals and bring them to Daktari to be taken care of.
- School children will come and visit Daktari. Indeed, no educative structure currently exists about the necessity to live and work in harmony with nature. Daktari will teach them to act respectfully towards their environment and we will make them aware of animals' welfare in order to eradicate poaching.
- National centres for nature and wildlife conservation will benefit from Daktari's achievements.
- As Daktari develops, the need for employees will increase, and this will create employment opportunities for people from the surrounding rural areas.

boma and a community kitchen where people can prepare and enjoy their dinner. There is also a large braai area where people can sit and enjoy their food and the fire.



International children

International children that come to Daktari will get a life-changing experience with wildlife in the bush. At the same time, they will get the opportunity to meet children with a different culture and background.

Tourism

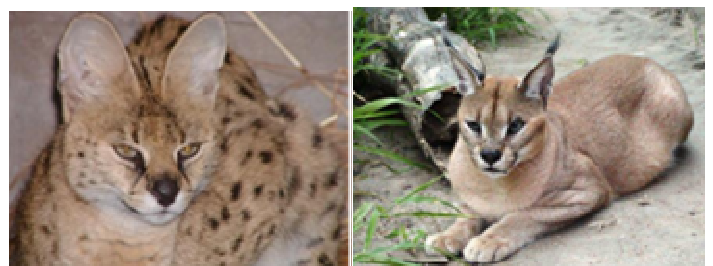
Besides national and international children and volunteers, Daktari also receives tourists at the reserve. These tourists are also offered a unique wildlife experience and the opportunity to be involved in nurturing the animals at Daktari.

Daktari Today

Daktari today consists of 4 small chalets which are being rented out to tourists in order to generate funds to cover the over all running cost of the project. There is a large

The Animal Camp

Jessica the serval and Felix the caracal



The animal camp is situated just next to the chalet camp. Some of the animals that can be found in the animal camp is the serval, Jessica and the caracal, Felix (Figure 2). Because of old injuries and their age these animals are not able to be released back into the wild.

Tawny the tawny eagle and Snaky the brown snake eagle



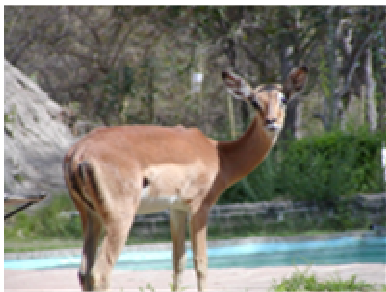
Besides the serval and the caracal, you can also find eagles at Daktari. A tawny eagle named Tawny and a brown snake eagle named Snaky. Both of these eagles were injured when they flew into power lines. Snaky has a broken wing that has not healed correctly, while one of Tawny's wings has been amputated.

Porky the porcupine



The 5th animal at Daktari is the porcupine Porky. Porky was caught in a snare at a nearby farm and injured badly. Porky was quickly taken to the vet and operated and he is now recovering very well. Because of an eye injury it is still uncertain whether or not Porky can be released properly into the bush.

Pala the impala



There is also an impala at Daktari, her name is Pala. Pala was born blind and because of oxygen starvation during birth the impala suffers from mental deficiency. She will never be able to be rehabilitated and survive on her own in the bush.

All of these animals are used to educate people about animal care and nature conservation. As mentioned

above, one of the main focus areas of Daktari is to educate underprivileged children from the local rural community.

Children At Daktari

Local underprivileged children are invited to stay at the reserve where they are education in nature conservation and animalcare. The director Ian Merrifield is an ex head game ranger and he gives lectures to the children about these areas. After the lectures the children are taken out in the bush, where they are given the opportunity to use their newly achieved skills in e.g. tracking.

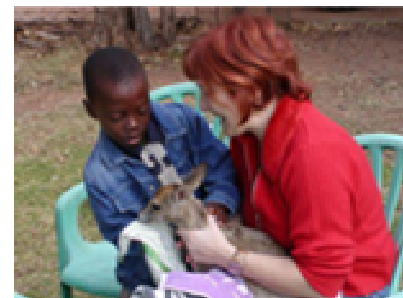


Ian doing a lecture



Tracking in the bush

The children helps in all aspects of caring for the animals and the hope is that they this will experience compassion for animals and the nature as a whole.



Animal care

At the end of their week stay, the children are given a test in the areas they have been taught to see what they have achieved. Besides developing more concern about wild-life and the environment, Daktari also aims at providing these children with more opportunities in life, as the education they receive at Daktari may help them enhance their chances of getting a job in the eco-tourism industry in the future.



In the class room