



# From Congo to Monduli: An eco-science centre with a 'Savannah' difference

By MARC NKWAME

DR Ben Beeckmans sat behind a grand piano and struck the ivory keys to entertain his guests.

The tune that came out of his efforts, according to Dr Beeckmans, was an own composition which he dubbed 'Savannah!'

Now Dr Beeckmans is not a musician, though judging from his collection of compact discs, he is certainly a fan of piano-based classic tunes and the one he had just played was in praise of an African topography.

"If you look around all you see is the Savannah landscape; very relaxing takes away the stress creating the perfect environment for unwinding," he explains and the quiet, sun heated wilderness seem to agree with him.

The area in question is the remote, sun-scorched, countryside of Monduli District hidden away from civilization at the centre of which stands the newly established Eco-Science Park.

The founder and Director, who is also an Environment Scientist and Physical Geographer, Dr Beeckmans explained that, what is likely going to be Africa's first research village, found its way to Arusha (Tanzania) after its initial location, somewhere in the Democratic Republic of Congo, suddenly became unfavourable.

Fascinated with volcanoes,

**"The centre is also preparing a mobile unit for field work and the conditions to collaborate with Ecoscience will be discussed between us and the participants and will depend largely on the nature of the project."**

the scientist found DRC to be a perfect setting for his 'Science Village,' except that political unrest at the heart of Africa forced him to look elsewhere and Tanzania's 'tranquility' was inviting.

Now it is not always that Monduli district gets mentioned in tourism despite owning part of Lake Manyara National Park and a section of Tarangire National Park.

But after finding Congo a 'hostile' spot, Monduli was soon to make history for launching what is now going to be the continent's first ever Natural Resources, Wildlife and Environment Research Park set to add another value to Tanzania's tourism industry.

"This is where Science is going to meet Tourism and we hope the Eco-science facility will form yet another tourism attraction in Tanzania, but this time it will be tourism with a purpose not just the usual leisure travels," stated Mr Erasto Mbwilo, the Manyara Regional Commissioner.

Mr Mbwilo officially

opened the Eco-Science property on behalf of the Arusha Regional Commissioner, Mr Magessa Mulongo whose name has been engraved in the foundation stone's placard.

"Since this is going to be Nature sciences' study and research centre, we hope it will help to discover and possibly help to find solutions for the diseases ailing many species of wildlife causing most of them to die," said the Manyara RC.

The Monduli District Commissioner, Mr Jowika Kasunga said he was impressed by the facility which not only adds potential investment and employment opportunities for the area, but the Eco-Science centre will also help to transform the Monduli's wild savannah for the better.

Eco-Science which is a hybrid facility comprising of the nature research centre, a luxury lodge situated on the North-Eastern border of Tarangire National Park, 20 kilometres south of the village of Makuyuni, the main junction at the road to both

the Ngorongoro Crater and Serengeti National park.

The Science Centre has been described as a satellite in Maasai land for scientists and students, for local and international universities in general, as well as research centres from all over the world.

"Small groups of scientists, researchers and students can stay at Eco-science for their investigations, studies or for conferences," said Dr Ben Beeckmans, the Eco-Science Director who is also an Environment Scientist and Physical Geographer.

He explained that the science centre, completely independent from the luxury lodge, consists of 10 very large tents. The two largest ones are a restaurant and conference rooms with a library.

"We invite universities or individual scientists with a keen scientific interest in Northern Tanzania to propose projects which could be important for the local population or beyond it," said Mr Beeckmans, adding that natural sciences like geography, biology and geology, environmental sciences and agriculture will be the main sectors of the centre even though Ecoscience is also open to other domains.

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*WHERE science meets nature, music is sometimes also present.*

depend largely on the nature of the project."

The Eco-science Director explained further that part of the collaboration was twofold. "Eco-science will ask some of the scientists to inform visitors of their work and for every project a report or publication-

depending on the importance under our own "Eco-science" label will be forwarded.

"Our aim is to have a mixture of long term projects and shorter, punctual ones. Scholarships will also be part of the future," he said.

But still fascinated with

eruptions, Arusha is not disappointing; the active 'Oldonyo L'engai is very much within reach and due to that, the 'Eco-Science' centre can rekindle what had driven its founders to DRC in the first place.

Apparently, in addition

to studying wildlife, the environment and natural species, the property will also conduct researches on seismic forces with the aim of predicting future volcanic activities along the main Rift Valley.