



KING EDWARD'S SCHOOL, BIRMINGHAM

MADAGASCAR EXPEDITION 2016

Dear pupils and parents,

We are writing to invite students currently in the 4th and 5th years on the school's next major overseas expedition, which in the summer of 2016 will venture to Madagascar. This renowned island, isolated from the mainland of Africa, is almost a continent in itself with a beautiful and unique landscape and biodiversity. We will not only be living among and learning about that landscape and wildlife, but working on research projects with scientists from *Operation Wallacea* (Opwall) to help conserve it: Opwall is an organisation of scientists and researchers with considerable expertise in biodiversity research and conservation, and our recent expeditions (Guyana 2012, Ecuador 2014) have been undertaken with them.

Structure of the Expedition

The expedition will start at the beginning of the summer holiday and will last for approximately two weeks. The two weeks have a different focus, as we outline below.

The expedition itself will start in Madagascar on **Sun 10th July**, and we will depart a couple of days prior to this. Week one is spent at a field camp in the dry Mahamavo forest in north-west Madagascar, where pupils will work alongside Opwall's scientists in survey teams. As well as having lectures on the biodiversity and conservation of Madagascar's wildlife, they will learn survey methods such as conducting transects for local herpetofauna (amphibians and reptiles) including geckos and chameleons, undertaking lemur surveys, conducting bird point-counts, mist-netting for bats and birds, observing wetland birds and setting traps to assess small mammals.

In week two we leave Opwall's forest camp for a wildlife tour of several other national nature reserves in central and eastern Madagascar, giving us a chance to encounter more of the island's charismatic wildlife. The reserves at Ankarafantsika and Andasibe will form the core of this tour, though we aim also to take in the private reserve at Berenty in southern Madagascar if travel plans allow. Lemur, gecko and chameleon species abound in these reserves, and the chance to observe wildlife close-up is very good. Accommodation in this week will be in a combination of lodges and camps in the various reserves. As travel plans for this week are still being finalised, our return home may be around the middle of the following week.

What will I gain from the expedition?

Aside from the obvious exposure to a great diversity of wildlife, hands-on instruction in field research skills and conservation, and the chance to work alongside experienced scientists which will appeal to those with interests or ambitions in biology and related degrees, the expedition brings even more immediate benefits to students:

J Porter & D H Corns, Expedition Leaders

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- The opportunity to collect data and ideas towards the 'Extended Essay' component of the International Baccalaureate. First-hand scientific data and observations on such a topic make for a very distinctive 4,000 word essay (our most recent of which won a declamation prize at Speech Day).
- Conservation is manifestly an activity which, again in the IB, can count towards the 'service' element at the diploma's core.
- Students who complete the expedition will (through Opwall) be awarded the ASDAN 'Universities' Award', which gives them 70 points towards their future university applications through UCAS.

The sheer enjoyment of travel and adventure is a huge attraction to an expedition like this; but the conservation and science element offers a real sense of purpose to such travel, and a way of 'giving back' to the ecosystems we will be visiting.

Instruction, Support and Guidance

Two members of staff will lead the expedition, both of whom have led similar expeditions with Opwall in recent years and are trained in 'far from help' emergency medicine suitable for such expeditions. In the field, students are led by research scientists from Opwall, and have the constant medical presence of a doctor trained in tropical and expedition medicine.

Cost

We anticipate a cost of **between £2,500 and 3,000**, which will include all flights, transport, food, accommodation, insurance, park fees, training, the services of experienced and qualified leaders, Opwall support staff, medical staff and scientists. We are aware of the significant cost of the expedition, and hope that you will find that some of the benefits listed above highlight its value. Furthermore, we will be discussing money-making ideas with the group soon after it is formed, and will organise a suitable meeting in the near future: we want the group to find a suitable way of raising money to go some way towards paying for this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

How will we prepare for the expedition?

Fund-raising will be our first task. Our second is 'expedition training', for which we will run a training weekend later in the year to equip participants with some basic forest survival skills, strengthen the team identity and introduce some of the biodiversity research techniques we will be using in Madagascar. This will take place at Andrews Coppice, the school camp site.

By way of finding out more about Opwall, Madagascar and the activities in which we will be engaged, we have gathered several resources together on the school's 'KES Wildlife' site: simply go to keswildlife.weebly.com (or Google 'KES Wildlife') and *click on the lemur on the home page*. Resources on the resulting 'Madagascar 2016' page include:

- An introductory slideshow presentation shown to pupils.
- Detailed information at Opwall's Madagascar page.
- A photo book (.pdf) on Opwall's Madagascar expeditions.

- Two videos from Opwall showcasing the Madagascar expedition.
- A link to the 'KES Madagascar 2016' Facebook group where pupils can receive updates on our planning for the expedition and talk with one another about it.

Next Steps

We hope you will wish to find out much more about our expedition, and we invite both pupils and parents to attend an **information evening** on Madagascar 2016, presented by Opwall's country manager for Madagascar and attended by Mr. Porter and Mr. Corns as expedition leaders. The meeting will take place at **6:00 pm on Monday 23rd March**: though you would be welcome simply to turn up on the night, it would help greatly us in organising the event if you would email us at dhc@kes.org.uk to let us know that you plan to attend. The meeting in no way commits you to taking the expedition further, and we will be glad to meet you and discuss our plans more fully.

If, in the mean-time, you wish to contact either of us regarding the expedition, please feel very free to do so. We look forward to hearing from you!

With all best wishes,

J Porter & D H Corns
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9th March 2015