From the Frontline

Title

Kiragu Mwangi Programme Officer, Conservation Leadership Programme "I was led to a career in conservation by a genuine and keen interest to understand how things work. My earliest memories are at ten years old, when I came across a 30 cm male Jackson?s Chameleon in the hedges of my small rural village Ithekahuno in Nyeri, Kenya, and marvelled at the complexity of the animal. From then on, I acquired a hunger to learn what was in the natural world, and why it looked and behaved the way it did. In my work at BirdLife, I help to equip young conservationists with the skills to be leaders in biodiversity matters. The Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP) is a biodiversity capacity development programme, implemented as a partnership of four global conservation organisations; BirdLife International, Fauna and Flora International, Conservation International and Wildlife Conservation Society. This year the CLP is 25 years old, and has helped more than 2,500 young conservationists to become the next generation of conservation leaders. I currently manage the CLP grants portfolio of over 85 projects in 33 countries. I coordinate the grants application process, and the design and implementation of climate change and ecosystem services agenda for the CLP, among other engagements. My biggest challenge is balancing the work priorities, since the CLP is a very ambitious programme that is constantly adapting to new and emerging issues. What I enjoy most is the feeling of contributing to the improvement of peoples? lives, and empowering them to become better conservation biologists. The CLP offers young conservationists huge support mechanisms through grants for projects and travel to conferences, training and opportunities for networking. All these are opportunities I did not have when I was their age, which is a very formative stage in one?s career path. I truly believe we are helping them walk the right path, where they can achieve great things and leave a positive mark in the annals of conservation biology. My biggest successes have included enhancing the reviewing grant application process for the CLP to include members of the IUCN Species Specialist Groups, enhancing the project implementation mechanisms and encouraging award winners to share their work with the greater body of science by publishing their results in peer-reviewed papers, as well as spreading the word to many partners and potential collaborators about the CLP. My biggest disappointment has been not being able to expand the CLP message to parts of the world like the Middle East and small island nations, where the programme has not had much representation. The BirdLife International Partnership model has been a tremendous success in facilitating a strong movement of people committed to conservation of nature and improvement of human wellbeing. Learning from each other and sharing ideas and innovations are some of those great and wonderful benefits that BirdLife Partners have. I am always amazed at how quickly good ideas can spread, like bushfire, to cause positive change in species and habitat conservation. Having worked for NatureKenya before the BirdLife International Secretariat, I can appreciate the skills picked up through interaction with conservation professionals across the BirdLife Partnership. My academic and professional growth would not have been possible without the

support I received through the Partnership. My current position working at a global level allows me to be a conduit for information and skills for others who are facing frontline conservation problems. There is strength in numbers, and the Partnership is where one can feel they are part of a true global movement of people who genuinely care and work hard for nature." *From the Frontline* is a regular feature in BirdLife's quarterly magazine *World Birdwatch*