

'Blood moon' eclipse delights young Kenyans

July 27 2018, by Gregory Walton



A man looks through a telescope set up to let the local community at Lake Magadi in Kenya watch the lunar eclipse on Friday

"Mars, Pluto, Saturn, Jupiter, Venus—Mercury, that's the one I really wanted to see," said Chu Owen as he used an app on his mobile phone to locate planets above.

"It's the planets I'm really excited to see."

Owen, 39, and his wife Susan Murabana set up their high-powered [telescope](#) at Lake Magadi, 100 kilometres (62 miles) southwest of the Kenyan capital Nairobi on Friday to let the local community to watch the lunar eclipse.

East Africa, along with the Middle East and parts of Europe, was forecast to have some of the best views of the lunar eclipse—the longest one this century.

"We've done this before for the [solar eclipse](#) in 2016," said Murabana, 39.

For that eclipse, some 300 members of the [local community](#) who are mostly Maasai turned out to experience looking through the telescope.

"It's good to give people who wouldn't otherwise get to use a telescope like this an opportunity," added Murabana as Owen manuevered the mechanical telescope into position.

The couple, who co-founded the Travelling Telescope Africa organisation, chose Lake Magadi as it is an isolated area far from the light pollution of towns and cities.

'Really have to see it'

Murabana pointed to planets with a laser pen as a young local boy wearing shorts and a dark jumper climbed a small step-ladder to be the first to look through the telescope.



The "blood moon"—the longest this century—viewed in Kenya on Friday

"I saw moons of Jupiter, and some stars. Yes I liked it," smiled Memusi, seven.

Around him, young people—some wearing traditional Maasai outfits and armed with alem daggers—laughed and pointed as the moon turned dark red and became obscured by Earth's shadow.

"This is my first time to see a red moon—it's very exciting," Murabana told a crowd of local people on a loudspeaker.

"The moon is going into the shadow, the shadow that the earth is always

casting," added Owen as a shooting star crossed the sky.

Purity Sailepo, 16, said that she had been inspired by the visiting telescope to become an astronomer.

"Until today I thought Mars, Jupiter and the other planets were in the imagination of scientists," she told AFP.

"But now I've seen it I can believe it and I want to be an astronomer to tell other people."



The line to get a chance to look through the telescope at the eclipse

Nearby, sky-gazers of all ages queued excitedly for a chance to take the eyepiece and see the cosmic display for themselves.

Across the largely clear sky, distant stars and the Milky Way became starkly visible as the light reflected by Earth's satellite was temporarily extinguished.

"You don't anticipate how pronounced the change is," said Mudit Sharma, 40, who travelled from Nairobi to witness the eclipse.

"You know it makes sense, but you really have to see it," he added as the [moon](#) became a faint amber silhouette.

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