

'Wildlife Volunteer': an Adventure for Students

This is an adventure for students 18 year and older. Your chance to experience the African bush in the raw. Time, space and silence have different dimensions. An experience that will give a different perspective to anything you do for the rest of your life. You will be placed in research projects in wildlife conservancy areas, contributing to wildlife and habitat conservation through a variety of activities. Main focus will be on monitoring and identification of elephant, lion, rhino and other mammals, birds, insects and reptiles as well as plant populations.

Additionally you will have many adventures in the bush including camp-outs, big game encounters and being taught all aspects of life in the bush. You will stay with a number of students in a camp or farmhouse on the reserve under the supervision of highly qualified researchers and rangers. A life changing experience given to few. Placement can cover anything from 2 weeks to 3 months.

Projects are in the hart of various large game reserves and conservation areas in South Africa. You assist researchers with the daily tasks that need to be fulfilled. Depending on the project these tasks include activities such as:

Monitoring and Identification:

- Elephant monitoring
- Predator tracking and monitoring
- Game counts, monitoring and transect analysis
- Animal habituation and monitoring, including leopard
- Identification of Animals, tracks, droppings, birds, insects, snakes and other reptiles, trees, shrubs & grass species
- Plant studies and identification
- Bird monitoring – bird counts, species list, raptors, etc
- Identi-kits set up and use for rhino and other large mammals

Conservation activities:

- Alien vegetation control and identification
- Working and experiencing a wilderness area
- General reserve management
- Environmental education programs with local schools

General activities:

- Camp outs in the bush
- Introduction to firearms
- Animal tracking techniques
- Radio telemetry techniques
- Navigation and GPS techniques for orientation and research applications
- Basic Geographical Information System (GIS) knowledge and application
- Data collection and input
- Basic data analysis

A sample day in the life of a Wildlife Volunteer:

Students will rise before the sun and head out in search of the pride with their trained staff member, while travelling in the 4x4 exploring this beautiful and diverse reserve. Some of you will be navigating the team along the rocky roads of the reserve using GPS maps and a GPS, while the others are mastering the art of Radio telemetry techniques to pick up the signal of the lion pride. While tracking the lions you will pass a multitude of animals including impala, zebra, Kudu and you may even be lucky enough to bump into the herd of elephants, or even a Rhino.

At last a signal is heard on the equipment and now the training has to be put into practice to actually locate the lions. We are all asking are they still in the thicket in the river or have they made a kill? The signal gets louder and one of the students spots a tail moving in the riverine vegetation. The huge male lion proudly saunters into an opening, along the river where he joins the females on a waterbuck kill. We all stay with the pride until the research data has been recorded while learning about the habits of lions. Data such as GPS location, behaviour, kill information, movements will be recorded.

The lions, now full, are sleeping, so we head out to get a location on the elephants while being taught about the fauna and flora of the area.

We are home for brunch, cooked by the daily duty team and have time to relax before having to input the day's data and have an informal lecture on Reserve management.

We head out early to visit the Sable breeding project before locating the pride again. One of the females has moved away from the group so we track her well into the evening monitoring her movements and behaviour. We return late in the evening and sit around the fire for the evening braai, chatting about the exciting encounters of the day. Early bed tonight as tomorrow we are sleeping out under the stars in the bush, so we will need our sleep.

Accommodation:

You will stay in basic but comfortable in dormitory style accommodation with hot running water, and solar electricity in e.g. a farmhouse situated in a secluded spot on the reserve

Elephants and other wildlife often frequent the house, and the roar of the lions can be heard in the distance in the evenings. When not out following lions, the evening will be spent cooking on an open fire, chatting with your friends and enjoying the calls of the night... a true African experience.

Volunteers are expected to do their own cooking and keep the camp clean and tidy. Volunteers will under all circumstances be supervised by researchers or accompanied by well trained, qualified and armed rangers and.