



## Big 5 and endangered species Project



Our wildlife project offers you a unique experience in the African bush and allows you to observe and be a part of the research/monitoring teams on the reserve. The focus of this project revolves around some of the key species; rhino, cheetahs, lions, elephants... Habitat work also plays an important part of the monitoring process. The reserve is a vast Big 5 nature reserve covering an area of 25.000 hectares and is situated in the Lowveld area, the home of nature conservation in South Africa. Here, your work is vital for accurate management of the animals within the reserve.

Whether on a monitoring drive, on foot, or observing the wildlife at a waterhole, all of your work will be done under the guidance of qualified rangers. As each activity has a pre-determined objective, you not only get to view the animals, but are also able to assist in the conservation of these species.

# THE PROJECT

## Monitoring Big 5

**Elephant** : Makalali introduced elephants in 1994 and 1996 and was the first reserve to have intact family groups relocated and to take part in the Elephant Contraception Program. This is a pioneering study and it is important that we continue to monitor the elephant herds as Makalali has the most extensive and longest continuing database of elephants on contraception in the world. Our monitoring of the elephants involves recording their movements to determine daily and seasonal ranging patterns.

**Lion** : Our lion population is done to assess their movements, behaviour and predator-prey interactions

**Hyena** : Makakali reserve is host to both species of Hyena; brown and spotted. The Spotted hyena are superior in numbers and are a very important species for the effective functioning of this eco-system. They provide the cleaning up of carcasses, as well as being effective hunters. The brown hyena are very rare and sightings of them are met with great excitement.

**Leopard** : We closely monitor the locations of leopards to determine territory extent as well as creating and updating ID kits to monitor individuals and determine total population size. As with all predators, we also monitor prey selection and reproductive behaviour to effectively assist the reserve management.

**Buffalo** : Makalali Game Reserve has not had free roaming buffalo on the land for over 100 years. In 2009 the reserve re-introduced 8 disease free buffalo into a 400 hectare breeding camp, 10 years later in 2019 the population had grown to 52 buffalo. They were released into the open system in June 2019. Siyafunda will be monitoring the buffalo very closely as they integrate into the larger reserve and will be interacting for the first time with predators. It is an exciting and nerve racking development. Greater Makalali now has a free-roaming big 5.



You will be taught basic bush survival skills and how to navigate your way through the African bush. During your stay, your days will be spent mostly on foot walking through the reserve, learning how to track the animals. You will be approaching endangered species on foot and recording their behaviour, location and condition. The collected information is then used by the reserve management and anti-poaching teams, as well as national conservation efforts to help save these endangered species. Furthermore, you will take part in vehicle-based monitoring to see the amazing Big 5, as well as habitat work to help with the monitoring process.

If you have a love of nature and want to participate in helping to save Africa's endangered species, this is the project for you. Once a month volunteers are taken to a local orphanage which provides a home for children affected by HIV. When visiting, some time is spent playing with the children. Aside from basic moral support, support is given for other provisions. The project will often buy them food and special treats when visiting, and volunteers are asked for a small donation to cover this. Volunteers are also welcomed to bring other donations with them or to buy them locally.

**Rhino :** With the ever present threat from poaching, close monitoring of these animals is crucial for the future of the species. The rhinos are monitored to ascertain their movement around the reserve and interaction with each other. This is done mostly on foot due to their secretive nature. This also forms part of the anti-poaching measures in place, working closely with the reserve management and anti-poaching teams on the reserve to ensure 100% sighting and safeguarding of our rhino.

**Cheetah :** As cheetahs are one of Africa's most endangered large predators, the entire population is monitored on the reserve. By tracking the cheetah on foot, we can observe their utilisation of the area, prey selection and reproductive behaviour.

**Southern Ground Hornbill :** With less than 1500 of these birds left in the wild, we are lucky to have a family of Southern ground hornbills on the reserve. The majority of our monitoring takes place during their breeding season from late October to February. The ground hornbills are very slow breeders , fledgling only one chick every 9 years. We observe their nests regularly in order to determine the dates that eggs are laid.

**African Wild-dogs :** In 2019 Makalali will be introducing a new pack onto the reserve and will be attempting to establish their home range within the reserves boundaries.

**Game Drives & Walking Trails :** Game drives are a great way of covering distance within the reserve in order to see the larger African wildlife, observing their behaviour, movements and habits along the way. After dark, they also enable the possibility of sighting the nocturnal animals such as African civet, black-backed jackal, large spotted genet, porcupine and aardvark to name but a few.

**Camera Trap Projects & Habitat Work :** Siyafunda deploys camera traps throughout the reserve to monitor leopards and the other more secretive animals that inhabit Makalali Nature Reserve.

Monitoring walks also allow you to walk, quite literally, in the footsteps of the animals

you are tracking. You will learn how to identify the tracks of the animals you are monitoring, as well as any others they may have been following, or following them! By determining age and direction of the tracks you will be able to help determine territory and, with any luck, current location.

**Habitat Conservation : Alien Vegetation Control:** Under the guidance of Working for Water (WFW), volunteers will assist with identifying and monitoring stands of alien and invasive vegetation within the river and across the reserve. Volunteers will participate in the mechanical removal and chemical control of these species as well as the follow-up monitoring of problem areas. This is an important project as alien invasive plants have the ability to encroach on areas and prevent other indigenous plants from growing, as well as using up large amounts of moisture from the soil. This has a detrimental effect on your ecosystem and therefore requires constant monitoring and removal.

## **Example Itinerary**

### **Monday**

Project start day. Town trip to pick up volunteers and restock on supplies.

### **Tuesday**

Early start on a set-route drive as part of the game counting program to determine populations of general game. In the afternoon, depart for a monitoring drive to locate one of the project's key species of interest; lion, elephant, leopard or hyena.

### **Wednesday**

Waterhole monitoring in the morning to determine species utilisation of the area. Set off for a drive in the afternoon to the breeding boma to monitor the buffalo, Livingstone eland and nyala.

### **Thursday**

Habitat work; you could be busy with exotic plant removal, erosion control or bush clearing. In the afternoon or evening, head out on hyena monitoring and night patrol.

### **Friday**

Early morning start, go out to locate elephants as part of the ongoing research into the elephant contraception program. The afternoon set out to monitor bird species on the way to a sleep out under the stars with the Endangered Species project.

### **Saturday**

Either an outing will be planned or it will be a free day for volunteers to relax or head out on their own tour. When you have free time, it's not recommended to stay at the camp because the rangers have their off duty.

### **Sunday**

Habitat work in the morning, followed by an afternoon monitoring drive focusing on the lion population. On return in the evening, you may head out to the local pub or have a typical South African braai (BBQ).

In between activities, volunteers will receive a series of presentations on the work of the project, or how to approach dangerous game on foot, or possibly even a presentation on Rhino Poaching lesson. This time will also be used to transfer all data collected onto the computers and compile the weekly research report, as well as helping out with vehicle checks and cleaning.

Please note that from time to time there can be unavoidable changes to projects. These can be caused by weather, conservation priorities, materials supply, or because ongoing projects have progressed more quickly or slowly than originally planned. We ask you to accept the changes – we are sure that you will enjoy the replacement projects just as much.. This routine is stuck to as best as possible; however, working with animals requires a flexible schedule. The above outline is subject to change



## **Meals**

All food for breakfast, lunch and dinner is provided, as well as fresh fruit. However, food is only re-stocked once a week so once it's gone it's gone! If you have any special dietary requirements please inform us before your arrival so that we can accommodate them if possible. Cordial fruit drink, tea and coffee are provided. Soft drinks, alcoholic beverages (beers and ciders) and snack foods are not available in camp but you can buy them on the weekly town trips.

## **Accommodation Big 5**

Your home during your stay will be the Siyafunda Main Camp, in the heart of the reserve with all the wildlife on your doorstep, quite literally! There are twin beds in the rooms with shared bathrooms and all meals are prepared by the group.

In the evenings, while sitting around the open fire, you can listen to the nightly calls of the lions and sounds of the bush while doing some star gazing and sharing stories of your day.

### The Siyafunda Main Camp has:

- electricity and hot running water (solar panels: on overcast days it can sometimes run out)
- Internet / WIFI at the base: R100 per week is charged to connect using your own computer, smartphone or tablet
- Reasonable cell reception at camp. You can easily buy a south-African SIM card (MTN is best) at the airport or in Hoedspruit.
- Comfortable lounge area: library with books and magazines, TV, DVD players, - Swimming Pool, volleyball,
- Braai / BBQ area

## **Accommodation Endangered species**

Your home during your stay will be in an eco-friendly tented camp set amongst the trees which overlooks a water course. There are large, comfortable twin share tents set on raised platforms, ensuring each has its own unique view of the African bush!

Each tent has 2 comfortable single beds, with duvets, blankets and hot water bottles for the colder winter nights. There are shared ablution facilities with flushing toilets and bush showers. Your evenings will be spent hearing tales from your experienced ranger, listening to the sounds of the bush, before you fall asleep under the African sky.

## **Extra information**

### **Laundry**

There is laundry facilities on-site

Please note: The project is not responsible for any damage to clothes during washing or ironing.

### **Internet**

Wi-Fi is available at the main house volunteer accommodation for R100 per stay.

## **Location**

The reserve is nestled between the Drakensburg Mountains and the Kruger National Park in the heart of the Lowveld. It is crossed by two rivers; the Selati River in the North and the Makhutswi River in the South adding to the reserve's unique topography. It is 65km North-West from Hoedspruit and 75km South-East from Tzaneen.

- Shops/Grocery Stores: You will receive weekly transport into town so that you can purchase essentials and food items
- ATMS: There are plenty of ATMS in Johannesburg where you will have your orientation. Once on the project you will have the opportunity to withdraw money on your weekly shopping trip. The nearest ATM is at a garage 20 km away.

## **Supervision/Coordination**

As the nature of the work varies, volunteers are placed under the supervision of various staff members. One member of the team is assigned as "Team leader" to ensure all volunteers have a great stay.

## **Transport**

Volunteers will be met at Johannesburg International Airport and taken to the project by shuttle. The vehicles used are roadworthy and have all relevant licences and liability insurance.

- All transport is safe and reliable
- All licences and insurances are up to date
- All insurances and liabilities for passengers are up to date and fully paid

## **Winter in South Africa**

Please note that May through to September are winter months and it can get quite chilly with an average temperature ranging from 5 degrees Celsius at night to 15 degrees Celsius during the day. Please make sure to pack enough warm clothes if you plan your trip in that period.

## **Free time**

In between the morning and afternoon activities' you have free time. This time should be dedicated to food preparation and making sure all the data collected that day is inputted onto the computer and checked by a second person. Once these tasks are done you could... - See if there is any camp work that could be done; maintenance, cleaning etc.

- Watch a documentary or movie in the lounge.

- Read a book. Field guides are available to read but they must be returned once finished. - Soak in the swimming pool.

- Take a nap!

## **Arrival**

It is recommended to fly to and from Hoedspruit Airport. A transfer from the airport to the project and back will be arranged in this instance. Choosing this option will save you a six hour bus shuttle from Johannesburg to Hoedspruit and back.

PLEASE NOTE THAT BECAUSE OF COVID-19 AND SUDDEN CHANGES IN REGULATIONS YOUR ITINERARY MAY NEED TO BE ADJUSTED OR CHANGED UNEXPECTEDLY AND WITHOUT NOTICE.

## **Packing List**

- Casual working clothes for hot and cold days
- Semi formal clothes for functions and for trips to town
- Jackets
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Hat or Cap
- Binoculars and Camera with charger or batteries
- Working gloves
- Backpack for walks
- Raincoat (if you're coming during summer: Nov-March)
- Scarf and gloves (if you're coming during winter: June-Aug)
- Converter/Adapter
- Swimsuit and towel
- Personal toiletries and bath towels
- Raincoat and boots (gumboots)
- Insect repellent
- Laptop with own dvd's if desired
- Pocket money (drinks and souvenirs)
- Flashlight and batteries
- Notebook and pen
- Proof of all inoculations
- First aid kit and personal medication
- Water bottle (1 litre minimum)
- Reading material