

AFRICAN INSIGHT

EXPERIENCES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



AFRICAN INSIGHT ACADEMY: INTERNSHIP ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH



INTERNSHIP: ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH

This 3 – 12 month internship, offered on Somkhanda Game Reserve in South Africa, is available to individuals that have at least an Honours BSc degree in a relevant field and can show adequate research skills, or are in the process of acquiring a BSc with backing from a supervisor.

The Gumbi Tribe lost their tribal land during the years of Apartheid and in 2006 successfully won an ancestral land claim over a large area of Zululand and on a section of this they established the 12,000ha Somkhanda Game Reserve.

Somkhanda is home to populations of both black and white rhino and is preparing for the reintroduction of Cape buffalo and elephant. It has a comprehensive range of all the large mammals that historically occurred in this region, including some top predators such as elusive leopards, hyena and wild dog. This unique situation affords the opportunity for volunteers to get involved in the reserve's wildlife and environmental management, ecological research and monitoring programs.

African Insight, responsible for the development and management of tourism on the reserve, has developed a Science on Safari model with the objective of developing a range of wildlife experiences that add to financial sustainability of the reserve as well as providing vital scientific data of the fauna and flora essential for the ongoing biological management of the reserve.

This project is not for those who are looking for a holiday experience where they will be entertained but it is for those who are considering a career in conservation and need work experience or have research skills and are looking for an opportunity to make a contribution to this important community conservation initiative.

Applicants are encouraged to propose a suitable project during the application process that can ideally be completed (at least the data collection part) within their time on Somkhanda or of a nature that ongoing data collection will be suitable for future interns without a project and will contribute to the ecological research needs of the reserve. Individuals who propose projects that make use of existing data or collection methods that are easily accessible (e.g.: rhino movement pattern research where data can be easily obtained by rhino monitors) will be given priority. Submission of private research project proposals must be evaluated and approved before arrival. This will be based on relevance to management objectives of the game reserve. Depending on the requirements of the project there may be additional costs that need to be borne by the intern and agreed on in advance.

Applicants that do not have their own pre-approved project must still clearly motivate why they want to get involved in research. They will be trained and thereafter assist in the ongoing field data collection for scientific studies currently underway (i.e.: camera traps and tick-borne disease transmissions) as well as assist other researchers with field data collection.

The ecology research interns could also get involved in reserve activities such as vegetation assessments or game counts providing a greater understanding of game reserve management. Interns have the potential to participate in management activities such as game capture, game introductions and priority species monitoring.

In line with the objective of contributing to the sustainability of the game reserve all interns will be trained to facilitate academic field trips, Science on Safari and volunteer programs.

Interns are mentored and managed by a dedicated and highly experienced management team. They are regarded as team members and not as tourists and are expected to also respond as such – taking seriously their tasks and duties at all times.

For Interns that do not have their own preapproved project the specific daily activities depend on the time of the year and involves a variety of research, management and monitoring projects associated with a wide range of activities on the reserve. The techniques used are professionally sound and scientifically recognized. Current projects include:

Example Projects:

Rhino monitoring techniques- Due to the significance of the species rhino monitoring is an ongoing project on the reserve with many of the animals having been fitted with radio tracking devices. Interns provide valuable independent field data on specific rhino which assists field rangers allowing them to focus on others. Information gathered from rhinos includes: general health, associations with other animals and off spring, movement, home range plotting, feeding preferences etc.

Camera Trap Surveying - Interns under experienced supervision manage this programme entirely; checking camera traps, changing batteries, downloading data and sorting through photographs. The objective of the camera trap survey method is to monitor a variety of species and known individual animals to assess their physical condition, the presence of calves and associations between individuals, with a focus on the more elusive black rhino and leopard.

Game Population Monitoring - Estimating animal numbers can prove challenging – the roads are very rough and difficult to traverse, the vegetation is dense in many places and the topography is very hilly. Interns will work in pairs stationed in a hide at a waterhole for a predetermined period to count game species as they arrive to drink. Details to be recorded will include the species, age class and sex.

All research / monitoring data collected will contribute to the ongoing management decision making of the reserve's wildlife populations.

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Some other activities you might be involved in are:

- Wildlife Monitoring Techniques
- Game capture (seasonal)
- Community cattle dipping
- Alien plant control

Working Days And Hours:

A full 9 hour day is expected from interns which can vary from day to day depending on the day's task and what surprises come up. Interns get 2 days off per week and depending on what might be planned these days can be used to join our monthly group outings. Days off can be accumulated and taken together.

Optional Weekend Excursions:

At least once a month volunteers and interns in camp have the opportunity to participate in a 2 or 3 night excursion off the reserve to other tourist attractions in the region. The cost for these is for own account and can be arranged on arrival.

Conditions:

It is important that interns of this project understand the importance of the following:

- To be enthusiastic and independent
- To show respect towards the people and culture of the local community.
- To show flexibility towards responsibilities, tasks and activities.
- This is not a relaxing holiday but an experience where hard work is expected.

Other Interns and Volunteers:

You will most likely be working with both local and international interns and volunteers.

Accommodation:

During your stay you will be living in safari tents right in the bush. Single accommodation is provided. The camp supplied with running water, communal showers and toilets. Bedding and towels are provided and laundry facilities are available.

Meals:

Catering is not provided and interns have a fully equipped bush kitchen in which to prepare their own meals. Opportunity will be provided once a week to restock on supplies from the nearest town which is 45 minutes away.

Connectivity:

There is only one service provider that offers coverage on the reserve, however it generally has excellent connectivity. We keep a stock of a local SIM card for mobiles. We have a number of internet dongles for use of volunteers and interns into which you can insert your sim card to connect to internet.

Costs (per 3 months):

- Euro 1,855.00
- USD 2,075.00
- GBP 1,560.00
- ZAR 24,300.00

Included in the fees are:

- Pick up upon arrival at Durban International airport
- Accommodation in our bush camp. Ablutions & outdoor showers
- Professional mentors to supervise you
- Use of laundry facilities

Excluded from the fees are:

- Meals (Self catering- Group participation)
- Other personal expenses
- Insurances
- Flights

Starting Dates

The reserve is remote and therefore interns arrivals and departures are coordinated to save on transport costs. Arrival is at Durban International airport and the transfer to Somkhanda Game Reserve leaves at 10h00. Transport is provided to departing interns (free only on the scheduled dates) back to Durban International Airport and will drop interns off at 15h00.

2016

11 January - 01 April
08 February - 29 April
07 March - 27 May
04 April - 24 June
02 May - 22 July
30 May - 19 August
27 June - 16 September
25 July - 14 October
22 August - 11 November
19 September - 09 December
17 October - 06 January 2017
14 November - 03 February 2017
12 December - 03 March 2017

2017

09 January - 31 March
06 February - 28 April
06 March - 26 May
03 April - 23 June
01 May - 21 July
29 May - 18 August
26 June - 15 September
24 July - 13 October
21 August - 10 November
18 September - 08 December
16 October - 05 January 2018
13 November - 02 February 2018
11 December - 02 March 2018

