UmPhafa Reserve

The UmPhafa Private Nature Reserve, situated in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, is a 6,000 hectare reserve comprised of several farms previously managed for cattle and encompasses a wide range of habitats from acacia savannah and bushveld to mountainous terrain. Due to previous agricultural practices many of the natural inhabiting species had been lost and the aim of Action for the Wild is to rehabilitate UmPhafa as an example of the region’s previous natural condition. Although some mammal populations had remained and have thrived since the reserve was established, many more species have been released and UmPhafa is now home to a wide range of fauna including white rhino, giraffe, kudu, impala, common reedbuck, mountain reedbuck, zebra, blesbok, red hartebeest, blue wildebeest, waterbuck, nyala, warthog, aardvark and porcupine - to name only some. Leopard and spotted hyena have more recently returned to the area naturally and are regularly recorded through camera trapping, tracking, and - on rarer occasions - sightings!! Small to medium sized carnivores such as black-backed jackal, caracal, serval, genet, and several species of mongoose are also common.
The Placement

Your time on UmPhafa, will offer you an interesting, exciting and - overall - valuable experience. You will play a crucial role in the operation of the reserve by helping to collect vital data necessary to make key management decisions. You will also have the satisfaction of developing the necessary skills required to make in-roads into the field of conservation, whilst working closely with large animals and knowing that your contribution is having a direct influence to the wellbeing of the fauna on the UmPhafa Reserve.

This is an opportunity to gain creditable work experience in the field and shadow qualified staff members on a wide range of aspects involved in the running of a reserve. Activities will include behavioural observations on game species which often involves stalking species such as rhino and giraffe through the bush at close quarters. You will also aid with the other current research projects such as camera trapping of elusive nocturnal species and game counts, providing an exceptional chance to learn crucial survey techniques as well as gaining a greater appreciation of African animals and habitats.

The trip will begin with a full-orientation in which you will learn valuable identification, navigation and tracking skills as well as a few useful bush skills which will make the adjustment to life in the bush all the more comfortable. Vegetation surveys and assessments comprise an important element of the whole placement and over your period of stay you will learn the importance of particular plant species, their traditional/medicinal uses, and vital nutritional information of the various herbivorous species. Some general maintenance of the reserve’s roads, fences and structures is also often necessary and assistance will be required in relevant management tasks.

During your time in South Africa it will be possible to experience local life and thereby develop an appreciation for the different views of conservation practices in Africa and a greater understanding of traditional Zulu culture. There are also several other reserves nearby, including a ‘big 5’ game park which there will be the opportunity to visit.

Accommodation

Rooms are comfortable, single sex dorms with bunk-beds and lockable wardrobes for storing belongings. A safe is also available for locking away valuables, such as cash, passports, phones, etc. however theft has never been a problem at the lodgings. Under-sheets and pillows are provided, although a sleeping bag, liner and towel must be brought as part of the personal kit. The house is fully equipped with hot water showers, electricity, and laundry facilities. Unlimited Wi-Fi access for emails and Skype is available.

The kitchens are fully supplied with cooking facilities and three good meals a day are covered by the placement cost. A housekeeping and laundry service is provided although it is the responsibility of all residents to keep the kitchen clean and tidy after main meals and at weekends.

Money

Costs on many items in South Africa are comparably low in respect to the UK although average spending will vary from person to person. A recommended £30 per week is sufficient in order to cover any luxuries during your period of stay.

The local currency is Rand and money can be changed up before departure, at the airport on arrival, or withdrawn from ATM machines.
Visa

Most nationalities will automatically be granted a 90 day visitor permit by South African Immigration authorities. Details can be obtained from the following site: http://southafrica-houseuk.com/visas_vis_forcit.html

Interns will not be undertaking paid work of any kind and stating the reason of visit as work or business may lead to refusal of entry. Passports must have a minimum of six months validity from the date of departure. If you are travelling with a non UK passport, please check your visa requirements before travelling.

Insurance

Essex University are providing suitable insurance for your trip.
Deployment

You will be met at the arrivals section at Durban Airport by an UmPhafa representative and will be transferred immediately to UmPhafa Reserve. The trip will take approximately three hours and there will be an opportunity to withdraw or exchange money at the airport before leaving.

Fitness Requirements

The work that you undertake will be very strenuous in nature and frequently over extended periods. Survey sites will often be in locations only reachable by foot over steep and rocky terrain. A good level of fitness will be required in order to carry out these activities and your involvement in certain aspects of project work will be dependent on your capacity to fulfil this requirement.

Weather Considerations

It is important to plan for the weather in KwaZulu Natal, as the seasons are in reverse to the northern hemisphere. Although winters are warm and dry during the day, nights can be very cold, so please come prepared with both warm and cold weather gear. It is advisable to check the internet for a more accurate picture of the weather over the period of stay and to bring suitable clothing and kit accordingly.

Additional Requirements

As an ambassador for UmPhafa in Colenso, offensive behaviour, either verbally or physically, towards inhabitants, UmPhafa staff or fellow team members by anybody will not be tolerated. As a visitor to the Republic of South Africa researchers and interns are bound by the laws of the country and must behave accordingly. On UmPhafa Reserve, researchers and interns are under the direct responsibility of the project coordinators and should follow the instructions of the supervising staff member and never leave the group without permission from the duty supervisor. Failure to abide by these principles may lead to repatriation at the discretion of UmPhafa staff.

All participants of UmPhafa placements will be expected to complete an indemnity form on arrival on the reserve before any field work can be undertaken.
Essential Kit

Clothes for the Field – These must be robust, bush appropriate and subdued in colour, i.e. beige, khaki, brown, dark green
- A good quality, sturdy pair of walking boots
- A good rain jacket
- Two pairs of trousers
- A warm fleecy/ top/jacket
- Two long sleeve shirts
- Two short sleeve shirts/t-shirts
- One pair of shorts
- Wide brimmed hat
- Sunglasses
- A spare pair of glasses
(if you wear them, as well as a copy of your prescription)

Additional essential clothing – May to September
- Windproof, cold weather jacket
- Warm hat, gloves, scarf
- Base-layer
- Clothes to sleep in

General kit
- 30L backpack
- Strong leather work gloves
- Lunch box and large water bottle
- Watch
- Sleeping bag and sleeping bag liner
- Good quality camera (video function a bonus)
- Binoculars
- Head torch
- Sunscreen (at least one bottle of high factor, 30+)
- Insect and tick repellant
- 1 or 2 towels
- Gaiters

First Aid kit – All interns must supply their own first aid kit for personal use and it must contain at least:
- 1 x Tweezers
- 1 x Scissors (5.5cm Blade)
- 6 x Safety Pins
- 1 x White Open Woven bandage 7.5cm x 5m
- 1 x Crepe Bandage 5cm x 4.5m
- 5 x 4-Ply Gauze Swabs 5 x 5cm
- 1 x Micropore Tape 1.25cm x 5m
- 4 x Hygienic Cleansing Wipes
- 2 Pairs sterile Gloves
- 1 x Low Adherent Dressing 5 x 5cm
- 1 x Pack of Assorted Plasters

NB: Lifesystems Adventurer or Explorer first aid kits provide all the above and are easily available online or in most outdoors retailers.

Optional kit

- Clothes other than for the field
- Laptop with wireless capability for internet
- Mobile Phone
- DVDs for evenings and weekends
- Short, sturdy lock-knife for heavier work in the field
- Reading books
- Field-guides. Some available on-site, but it is advisable to at least have your own bird book
- If you have an SLR camera, a 200mm lens. 300mm even better

Paperwork required in advance

- Completed medical form
- Photocopy of photo page of passport
- Photocopy of Visa (if required)

Recommended reading list

- ‘Elephant Whisperer’ – Lawrence Anthony
- ‘Cry of the Kalahari’ – Mark and Delia Owens
- ‘Born Wild’ – Tony Fitzjohn
- ‘A Primates Memoir’ – Robert M. Sapolsky

Vaccinations:

Before travelling, please make sure you are up to date with all the following vaccinations. Please note that UmPhafa is situated in a Malaria-free zone.
- Hepatitis A
- Polio
- Diphtheria
- Tetanus
- Rabies/Hepatitis B/Typhoid (if recommended by your doctor)