RESEARCH PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Volunteer work varies depending on when you go and day-to-day activities are dictated by the team’s daily priorities, the change in seasons and the time of year. Having the Warden for the reserve in charge of the project can make for some interesting experiences! However, some staff may be required to take part in urgent reserve activities, which may not be suitable for volunteers to take part in. Please remember that during your time on camp, the staff have a responsibility to ensure your health and safety and this may mean that you cannot always accompany them in some of their duties, please do not take this personally.

We have continuous and on-going projects that are conducted on a day to day basis as well as annual research projects that are conducted at specific times of the year. Volunteers will be assigned research projects on a rotational basis to provide and ensure exposure to all current projects. There is no option to choose. During this time, interns and staff will educate volunteers in their area of study. Volunteers will assist their mentor, with all data collection, data entry, research and reports. This is essential for consistency in the research regime.

CONTINUOUS AND ON-GOING PROJECTS

Assisting Interns, Students, Professors etc
Transfrontier Africa hosts several University students, Professors and Doctor’s throughout the year to conduct a variety of research projects within Balule Nature Reserve. Volunteers will assist with preparations as well as data collection in the field. For more information on any additional projects please contact us.

Elephant Identification and Population Dynamics
Transfrontier Africa assists Elephants Alive, formally known as Save the Elephants – South Africa in its Elephant Identification study. Whilst in the field, using such features as external ear patterns, tusks and wrinkle-patterns above the trunk is collected by photographic identification. We also record information such as herd dynamics, age, and so forth. Upon return to Camp this information is logged into the Elephant Identification database which is then sub-mitted to Elephants Alive.

Camera trap monitoring & photo collection
Camera traps have been positioned throughout the reserve. All cameras must be checked and downloaded at least once a week. One back at camp the images are sorted, recorded and filed into various databases. All sightings of rhinos are logged daily to assist in our anti-poaching efforts. Sightings and body conditions are recorded and entered into the security database. A map is then produced containing their locations and sent to anti-poaching rangers daily.
Alien vegetation
Search and destroy! One of the most problematic invasive alien plant species in South Africa is Prickly Pears and Balule is no exception. We are using both biological (Cochineal beetle) and chemical (MSMA) treatments to eradicate this species as well as Queen of the Night (another alien cactus found in Balule) for the reserve. Our Cochineal nursery must also be maintained, ensuring our biological ‘weapons’ have plenty of food and space to breed to ensure a continuous supply to use in the field.

Reserve Maintenance
Transfrontier Africa is also responsible for the maintenance of the reserve, this includes all aspects of road and fence maintenance, management of the Waste site and emergency response. Having the warden of the reserve in charge of the project can make for some very interesting and exciting experiences.

Bush Babies Environmental Education Project
Environmental education lessons are conducted at 10 local schools surrounding the reserve from Monday to Friday, excluding school holidays. Lessons involve teaching about nature and conservation as part of our anti-poaching initiative. Volunteers will be required to teach the children about their home country, its wildlife and conservation struggles. Outside of the school term, 5-day holiday programs are held within Balule for all children of staff working within the reserve. Volunteers will be required to assist with lessons preparation, teaching and supervision of the children.

Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit
Founded by Transfrontier Africa, the Black Mambas are a majority female anti-poaching unit that focuses on visual policing and community upliftment. Snares are wire traps set by poachers in the hopes of catching antelope for their meat, however this is a very non-selective way of poaching and all wildlife, including the big 5 can become injured by these traps. The Black Mambas conduct regular sweeps to find and destroy these traps. When possible, volunteers will join the ladies on these sweeps.

ANNUAL PROJECTS
The above mentioned daily activities are on a set routine that continue throughout the year between the following annual projects:

January / February / March
➢ Ecological Carrying Capacity Survey

August / September
➢ Body Condition Scoring

October / November
➢ Phytomass Surveys
➢ Cocklebur - Search and Destroy