



A leopard with a distinctive spotted coat is perched on a thick, grey tree branch. The leopard is looking directly at the camera with a calm expression. The background shows green leaves and a clear blue sky.

# **Volunteer Information Pack**



# ORGANISATION OVERVIEW

## TRANSFRONTIER AFRICA



Situated in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, Transfrontier Africa is a non-profit environmental conservation organisation under contract with Olifants West Nature Reserve (OWNR). Transfrontier Africa's objectives are aligned with OOWNR's Management Plan to improve wildlife conservation and ecosystem sustainability in the reserve, supporting management in making informed decisions based on scientific evidence. Therefore, research is one of its core functions.

TA's focal area has recently been extended to include Blyde Olifants Confluence Conservation Area (BOCCA), and TA now provides ecological, security and educational services to both areas and surrounding communities.

OWNR (88 km<sup>2</sup>) is a Big-5 area, linked to the Kruger National Park and part of the Greater Kruger, while BOCCA (40 km<sup>2</sup>) is a recently created conservation area, which hosts plains game, as well as predators that cannot be held within fenced reserves (e.g., leopards, spotted hyenas, black-backed jackals, occasionally wild dogs).

TA's Research Department conducts several on-going projects, that take place every year, and undertakes temporary projects, too. Temporary projects are subject to changes and evolve with the needs of the organisation and reserves.



## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AND DATA COLLECTION



Volunteer work varies depending on what time of year you go, and day-to-day activities are dictated by the team's daily priorities, the change in seasons and the time of year. You will be assigned to research projects and tasks on a rotational basis to give everyone exposure to as many aspects of conservation and reserve management as possible.

Activities are planned in advance for the week and are allocated daily with no option to choose. Weather conditions, urgent matters arising and vehicle availability may necessitate short notice changes and it is not guaranteed that you will be able to get involved in all projects/work.

You'll assist in data collection, data entry and reserve maintenance which will provide support to staff, researchers and interns and will in turn improve your knowledge of conservation including animal management.

### PREDATOR DIET STUDY

Every winter, apex predators' scats (lions, spotted hyaenas, leopards and wild dogs) are collected. Samples of the scat, and hairs found in these samples are picked up and analysed under a microscope, to determine prey species. This data is entered in a database, and further projects will look at comparing this methodology with e-DNA analysis, and at apex predator diet, analysed parallelly to the prey species composition and abundance in the reserve (prey availability).



### BIOPRODUCT USAGE AS ELEPHANT DETERRENT

Human-elephant conflicts are common in Asia and Africa, and often have unfortunate consequences for both sides. Therefore, to prevent elephants from breaking fences, raiding crops, destroying human infrastructures such as water pipes and tanks, to name a few examples, effective and ethical methods are urgently needed.

One of the methods that was developed is the use of bees, which deter elephants. However, this solution is associated with several issues, therefore it was decided to investigate the potential of bees' alarm pheromones as a bio-deterrent. Transfrontier Africa carries out the study of the behavioural reaction of the elephants when confronted with the pheromones.





## TREE WRAPPING

Elephants feed on various parts of a tree, and their preferred tree species are marulas (*Sclerocarya birrea*) and knobthorns (*Senegalia nigrescens*), often causing the tree to die. While elephant-driven tree mortality is a natural process, the establishment of fenced nature reserves coupled with an increase in artificial water resources, can lead to an increase in this mortality rate due to an increase in elephant density. To reduce this rate, a solution has been implemented in Olifants West Nature Reserve since 2021: to wrap the trees in wired mesh. The efficiency of this solution is monitored by revisiting wrapped and control trees.



## ALIEN VEGETATION CONTROL



Invasive alien plants are plants introduced into South Africa from other countries, intentionally or unintentionally, that cause human, environmental and economic damage. In the absence of natural enemies, these plants reproduce and spread rapidly, taking valuable water and space from our native plants. Alien vegetation control and monitoring constitutes an on-going project and aims at protecting our native biodiversity. Transfrontier Africa uses various methods to remove these invader species: biocontrol agents (specific bugs), selective herbicides, and manual removal.

## BOREHOLES AND SUBTERRANIAN WATERS

Water is essential to all life and is a scarce resource. Monitoring the water table level is therefore essential to ensure sufficient water is available for the ecosystem through the sustainable water use by landowners and lodges present on the landscape. The trend in depth of the water table is monitored over time and is linked to annual rainfalls, to establish recharge and consumption rates and propose management measures.







## ECOLOGICAL CARRYING CAPACITY

The surveys take place to assess the ecological carrying capacity of the reserves, i.e., the largest population size of grazers the reserve can support without suffering from long term degradation, and to determine any fluctuations in the condition of the veld (e.g., post-drought recovery).

## FIXED POINT PHOTOGRAPHY

In any ecosystem, the vegetation forms one of the pillars on which the complex food-web rests. A healthy ecosystem is not sustainable without a healthy vegetation base and monitoring it is therefore essential. In light of that, pictures are taken monthly at fixed determined points and the evolution of the vegetation over time at these points will be analysed by TA's Research Department at a later stage.

## GAME COUNTS

Bi-weekly game counts are conducted in Blyde Olifants Confluence Conservation Area (BOCCA), in order to obtain the most accurate representation of the species composition. For the past few years, the same methodology has been employed allowing for consistency in the data and the ability to detect trends over time. These data can then be compared to primary vegetation production to help understand the changes in species composition over time.

## RHINO MONITORING

Black and white rhinoceros populations are both threatened by habitat loss and poaching (illegal trade of rhino horn), and are classified as Critically Endangered and Near Threatened, respectively, on the IUCN Red List. In this global context, local monitoring of their population and global collaborations are essential. All sightings and evidence of rhino presence, such as active middens and rhino tracks are reported, recorded, and shared with various local and global organisations to counter the drastic decline in rhino populations. Rhino monitoring camera traps are regularly serviced.



## WILDLIFE MONITORING

Threatened and iconic species, such as African wild dogs, Southern ground-hornbills, cheetahs and vultures, are closely monitored in OOWNR, and the data is shared to global or regional conservation programs.



Besides assisting with research projects and reserve maintenance duties, some camp duties, such as laying out breakfast, cleaning and assisting with cooking are also expected during your stay at Ndlovu Camp.

Volunteers and interns also aid the Bush Babies Environmental Education Program and The Black Mambas anti-poaching unit from time to time.

| Activities                     | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Alien veg. (cacti)             |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Alien veg. (drainage)          |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| borehole monitoring            |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Ecological Carrying Capacity   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Fence - vegetation clearing    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Fire Monitoring                |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Game Count                     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Hides - bee pheromones project |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Intern projects                |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Phytomass                      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Predator - prey survey         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Rhino monitoring               |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Study abroad programs          |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Tree wrapping                  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

An overview of our annual recurring projects, and the months in the year that these projects are carried out.



**DATA CAPTURE AT THE OLIFANTS WEST OFFICE**





## DAILY LIFE AT TRANSFRONTIER AFRICA

### NDLOVU BUSH CAMP

Situated in Limpopo Province, Olifants West Nature Reserve, Hoedspruit, Ndlovu Camp was newly built early in 2013 following a move from the project's former home, Paradise Camp. Ndlovu camp will be your home whilst joining Transfrontier Africa's Volunteer Program. There is an open air lapa, communal camp fire area, kitchen, 360 degree viewing deck, 2 open air bathrooms with flushing toilets and cold water shower protected by a modesty screen. Cold water showers are often a blessing returning from the field in the hot summer months.

The camp is not a lodge and there is no bar or swimming pool or air conditioning. It will, however, offer you an authentic bush experience!


The chalets are brick built and have a thatched roof, which keep them nice and cool in summer. They are lockable but care should still be taken with any valuables you bring to camp. The chalets have been arranged in a semi-circular formation around the Lapa/Communal area and are close together for safety purposes, but their door is facing the bush to maintain privacy.

They have recently been upgraded with new thatching, solar panels and individual power outlets for charging laptops, phones, power banks, cameras, and so on. There is a ceiling solar light and a stand-alone fan for those hot African nights.



### POWER SUPPLY

The camp runs on solar power only. Power is occasionally interrupted on days where there is insufficient sun to charge the solar panels but these days are very rare in South Africa. Please be mindful that the project runs on a very limited budget and resources are finite. Please use firewood, water, solar power, fuel and LPG (gas) conservatively.



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## MEALS

Drinking water is available and is not rationed. It also comes from the borehole but is perfectly safe to drink, although it may taste a little different from what you are used to. You can alternatively buy bottled water from town at your own expense.

3 meals per day will be provided i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Breakfast - cereals, bread, jam, fruits, tea and coffee

Lunch - to be taken in the field - bread, cheese, cold meats, leftovers, snacks, fruits

Dinner - cooked on the campfire - simple but varied diet of meat, vegetables, rice, pasta, salads.

All cooked meals are prepared on the open fire. Vegetarians and vegans can be accommodated.

Please declare any dietary requirements and food allergies at the time of booking. Shopping is only done once a week on a Monday and failure to do so may result in a very limited menu until the next trip to town.

On a Saturday evening, it is usual for staff and volunteers to visit a local restaurant. This will be at your own expense so please budget for this.



## PHONE SIGNAL AND WI-FI

Generally, the signal from the Vodacom network for phone use is sufficient to good. Wi-Fi is generally of good quality. Please remember Olifants West is a wilderness location, so use mobile phones considerately so as not to disturb other guests or the wildlife.

## LAUNDRY

A laundry service is not provided. You can wash by hand (washing powder not provided) or take it to the laundry in town on a Monday at your own expense. It is normally returned in the same week.



## ACTIVITIES

Monday to Friday, and Saturday mornings are dedicated to field work, which consists of reserve maintenance duties and research projects. Volunteers may be assigned to students or interns to assist them in their project in the field. During this time, interns and staff will educate volunteers in their area of study. There may also be opportunities to get involved with the work of the Black Mambas and the Bush Babies.



**DURING YOUR TIME IN THE FIELD THERE WILL BE GOOD OPPORTUNITIES TO ENCOUNTER SOME OF SOUTH AFRICA'S DIVERSE AND ABUNDANT WILDLIFE, SO DO BRING YOUR CAMERA ALONG!**

Mondays: Town trips to Hoedspruit, to save resources such as fuel, are limited to one day a week, unless in the case of an emergency. All volunteers, students, interns, and staff alike are to purchase anything needed for the week or drop off or pick up laundry on this day. Due to work requirements and limitations of space in vehicles, not everyone might be able to go to town every week but will be able to ask those going to buy items on their behalf. It is suggested to plan an extra R500 – R1000 per week, depending on your personal requirements.

Sundays involve the cleaning of camp and vehicles by interns and volunteers as allocated by the cleaning rota. The kitchen, bathrooms and other communal areas will be cleaned daily, as allocated by the rota. All chalets will be kept clean and tidy, by the current resident. The rest of Sundays is generally a day to relax and have fun, with visits to the endangered species centre, the reptile park, hiking in Blyde River Canyon, a daytrip to the Kruger National Park, etc. Sunday Adventures! These visits are decided on by the group and at the volunteers' own expense (e.g., entrance fees, fuel)

## YOUR STAY INCLUDES:

- Accommodation, linen
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner, coffee, tea and drinking water
- Wi-Fi
- Participation in daily research activities and reserve management duties
- Please note: Towels, mosquito nets, and washing powder are not provided.

## YOUR STAY EXCLUDES

- Flights
- Domestic travel between Johannesburg International Airport and our camps
- Insurance, Visas
- International banking or transfer fees
- Alcohol, soft drinks, snacks
- Restaurant visit, excursions/sight-seeing activities that are not part of the programme
- Any other personal items

## REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

- No specific knowledge or experience is needed to participate.
- Minimum age is 18 years.
- Physical fitness level moderate to good.
- Good command of the English language.
- Be prepared to be flexible, and have an open mind to different cultures.
- Able to live in basic conditions.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Africa is one of the most amazing places on the planet and during your stay at Ndlovu Camp we aim to help you to experience the “real Africa”. If you are keen to improve your knowledge and contribute to conservation whilst experiencing the sights and sounds of animals roaming freely in their natural habitat you will not be disappointed! This is more a back stage pass to conservation. Sitting under the stars around the campfire listening to the sounds of the bush is hard to beat! Nevertheless, living in the bush does not come without challenges - there can be water shortages, power failures, occasional issues with vehicles due to harsh driving conditions and sometimes the animals just remind us who is boss!

You must be prepared to be flexible and able to adapt to short notice changes in daily plans. Everything happens in “African time“ which can at times be a little frustrating for those of us used to a more structured lifestyle, but that is all part of the fun.





Transfrontier Africa has a dedicated team of experienced trained staff who will be on hand to ensure your safety, provide guidance in the field and offer support in daily activities. Their bush knowledge is second to none and during your stay you will learn a great deal about animal behaviour, conservation, ecology both practically and theoretically through supervised fieldwork and occasional lectures.

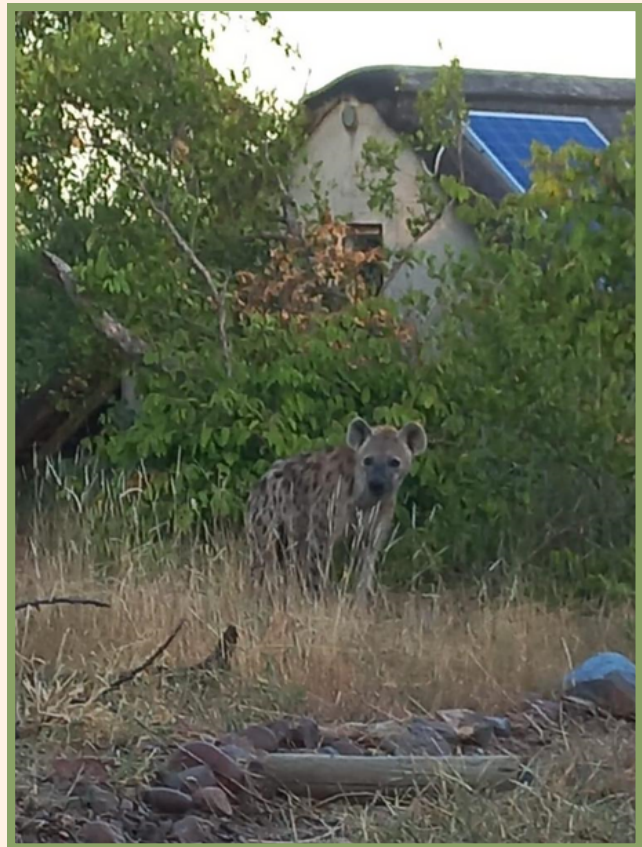
As our camp and research centre are open and located in a Big-5 area, and most of the fieldwork is conducted in a Big-5 environment, strict safety rules exist, and volunteers must always comply with them. No deviation will be tolerated. Respect wildlife and the natural environment.

All interns/volunteers must be appropriately dressed to comply with industry norms and standards i.e. khaki/green/bush colours. Closed shoes/boots, ankle gaiters, hat, water bottles and daypack are recommended. Volunteers and interns are required to wear a khaki T-shirt with the TA logo during working hours (See pack list further on for more information).

It is advised to not bring or wear jewellery of high or sentimental value. Revealing clothes are not acceptable either in the field or in camp.

Transfrontier Africa volunteers carry the image of the organisation during their time with us and are therefore expected to always be professional and respectful.

Finally, given that our camp and research centre both involve living in a small community, volunteers are expected to be respectful of each other, interns, and staff, to get involved and work hard, and to keep the premises clean and tidy and to participate in household chores according to the rota.



**A SPOTTED HYENA VISITING CAMP**

# ALL PART OF TRANSFRONTIER AFRICA

## NONWANE RESEARCH CENTRE

Nonwane Research Centre consists of basic but functional accommodation in the form of a shared house, shared indoor communal area, shared kitchens, and bathrooms, and an outdoor protected braai area. The Centre is powered by main electricity, generally, cell phone reception is good, and Wi-Fi is available.



This is the home of some of TA's interns and you may visit Nonwane from time to time to attend the intern presentations, or to have dinner if the weather is not conducive to open fire cooking.

Nonwane, too, is purposely unfenced, and unexpected visitors in the form of elephants, lions, and rhino to name a few are not uncommon.



## THE BLACK MAMBAS ANTI-POACHING UNIT

The Black Mambas APU is the first all-women anti-poaching unit in the world, founded in 2013 specifically to counter the increase in rhino poaching. Their work consists of being the eyes and ears of the bush, patrolling the reserve, and reporting any irregularities, all to protect our wildlife.

## THE BUSH BABIES ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Bush Babies Environmental Education Program was brought to life to educate children on fundamental life skills, particularly on the significance of environmental care and conservation. The passionate educators teach at rural schools, organise camps, assist in food security, and much more!





## TRANSFRONTIER AFRICA SHOP

To spread awareness for our causes and generate funds, TA has a shop which is situated at the Olifants West office. We sell branded merchandise as well as related items: Caps, T-shirts, bracelets, necklaces, buffs, water bottles, some books, beanies, hoodies and jackets, and recently started developing our own organic skin care range.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Check in with us on your preferred social media platform for the latest news, photos and videos.



@blackmambasapu  
@BushBabiesEnvironmentalEducation  
@TransfrontierAfricaNPC



@blackmambasapu  
@the\_bushbabies  
@tfafrica



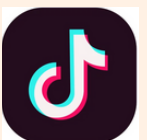
@blackmambasapu  
@bushbabiesedu  
@TFAafrica



The Black Mambas Anti-Poaching Unit



@theblackmambasapu7374  
@transfrontierafrica8956



@transfrontier\_africa





## TRAVELLING TO SOUTH AFRICA

It is your responsibility to ensure that you meet the passport and visa requirements for entry to South Africa. Please check with the relevant South African Diplomatic post/website in the country in which you reside. Any documentation that must be provided by our organisation can be supplied upon request.

The main international airport, O.R. Tambo International Airport, is in Johannesburg, and transport to OWRN therefore needs to be organised. Two options can be considered: taking a national flight from Johannesburg to Hoedspruit or taking a shuttle from the airport directly to the reserve (approximate distance: 450 km). Arrivals at and departures from TA should preferably be on Mondays and Thursdays.

The nearest airport to our project is Hoedspruit Eastgate Airport. There are two flights to/from Johannesburg and one to/from Cape Town daily by SA Airlink (<http://www.flyairlink.com>).

An alternative, environmentally friendlier and generally cheaper option is Swift or Safari Link's shuttle which departs O.R. Tambo daily at approx 07h00. This shuttle has a drop off point at the Olifants West Gate where a member of our team will meet you. Transfrontier Africa can help with the booking of the shuttle and can also book a night in a lodge next to the airport if an overnight is needed, depending on arrival times. As the shuttles leave at 07h00, any volunteer arriving past that time will have to book a night first. Free shuttles are available between the lodge and the airport.



If you require assistance or have any questions regarding any practical or travel arrangements, please contact us at [volunteer@transfrontierafrica.org](mailto:volunteer@transfrontierafrica.org).

## HEALTH AND SECURITY

Prior to travelling to the project, you should visit your Doctor/Healthcare Profession to obtain advice on vaccination and general health requirement. The Greater Kruger Park is generally a low-risk malaria area, but you should consult your Doctor/Healthcare Professional about appropriate anti-malaria medication. Ensure that you declare any medical information we should be aware of on your booking form including allergies and dietary requirements (e.g., allergies, veganism). Ensure that you take out adequate travel insurance for you trip.

Our camp staff is trained in first-aid, and medical facilities are available in Hoedspruit (approx 20 km away) or in Tzaneen, the nearest bigger city.



## MONEY AND CURRENCY

It is crucial to ensure that your bank is made aware of your trip beforehand, and that your card can be used in South Africa. The national currency is the Rand (ZAR), with an exchange rate close to 1€ = R20.04 (updated in July 2023). Credit and debit cards are accepted almost everywhere, and ATMs are available for money withdrawal at O.R. Tambo Int. Airport and in Hoedspruit.

In South Africa, a 10% tip is usually expected when a service is provided (e.g., restaurants, bar).



## POWER SUPPLY

The standard electricity supply is 220/230 volts. We use a 3 pin plug, but adaptors for European 2 pin plugs are widely available. Have a look at the pictures.

## NETWORKS

The biggest networks in South Africa are Vodacom and MTN. Please note that the quality of signal can vary greatly in various locations. When purchasing a South African SIM card, we recommend Vodacom as it provides the best signal at TA locations, such as Ndlovu Bush Camp and Nonwane.

## LOADSHEDDING

South Africa has an on-going issue with the supply of sufficient power. The government implemented 'loadshedding' nationally, which means that at certain times the power is switched off for 2 hours, sometimes 4 hours at a time, to reduce demand. Most individuals, businesses and organisations therefore have a back-up system in place to continue productivity and services. The free 'Eskom Se Push' app is widely used to stay updated on planned loadshedding stages and schedules per region, to plan accordingly.

Ndlovu camp is not affected by loadshedding as it works on solar power, but Nonwane and several of TA's offices are at times affected.



## WHAT TO BRING

The suggested packing list below should help with deciding what to bring for your time at TA. During work hours, especially when out in the field, all clothing should conform to game management / industry standard (khaki and / or green). OWNRR expects all TA volunteers, interns, and students to wear a standardized uniform: a khaki shirt with the TA logo, available at our TA shop in sizes S-3XL (these can be ordered during the booking process). No bright colours to be worn during fieldwork in the bush.

### REQUIRED

- Water bottle
- Powerful torch (spare batteries/charger) and/or head light
- Day backpack
- Laptop and charger to work (interns only)

### CLOTHING

- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Warm Jacket / Fleece (seasonal)
- Waterproof Jacket (seasonal)
- 4 x Shirts (durable and of neutral coloration. Green or khaki)
- 2 x T-shirts TA
- 4 x Pairs shorts (green or khaki)
- 2 x Pair trousers (green or khaki - seasonal)
- 4 x Pairs socks
- Comfortable Walking Boots
- Sandals/flip flops (for in camp)
- Gloves and Beanie (seasonal)
- Watch
- Underwear
- Sleeping clothes to suit

### TOILETRIES

- Sunscreen
- shampoo & soap
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Hairbrush
- Mosquito repellent
- Towel
- personal toiletries (e.g., razors, deodorant)

### RECOMMENDED

- Small personal first-aid kit (e.g., plasters, tweezers, tablets)
- Binoculars
- Camera (with spare batteries and memory card)
- Reading book
- Plug-adaptor (South African 3-point 'round' plugs are used)
- Phone charger
- Mosquito net (available at our TA shop – arrangements can be made during the booking process)
- Swim wear (Sunday Adventures)



## CONTACT US

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