



A guide to the:

Kariega 'Big 5' Conservation Project



The Kariega 'Big 5' Conservation Project

Focus: The 'Big 5'
Location: South Africa

Start Date: Every Monday
Arrival & Starting Point: Port Elizabeth

Situated on the edge of South Africa's famous Garden Route, the Kariega Game Reserve serves as a fantastic 'first taste' of classic Africa. The reserve covers a vast and impressive 11,000 hectares of land; an area rich in lush, green vegetation, and home to both the Bushman and Kariega rivers. It is the reserve's pristine landscape which sustains an impressive array of wildlife species, including the iconic 'Big 5', and as a volunteer you will get the opportunity to learn more about the management of some of Africa's most beloved species.

The Kariega 'Big 5' Conservation Project invites volunteers to take part in a safari experience with a difference, as during your stay you will act as an 'Assistant Conservation Manager', taking part in a number of game drives as you help the reserve team in their efforts to collect data on the resident animals. An understanding of South African wildlife is key to the project's desire to reintroduce species such as elephants, leopards and rhinos to their endemic homes; in fact, the project itself was founded in response to the historical hunting and extermination of 'problem' animals in the Eastern Cape. Miseducation throughout the 19th and 20th century saw the region's farmers push a number of indigenous animals to the brink of extinction with the aim of protecting their livestock. In some instances, certain ecological landscapes were changed forever as a result of this. Since the late 1980s, however, the Rushmere family (who have owned the land for generations) have successfully helped an array of animals to return to the area, but while their efforts have proven particularly successful in the case of lions, zebras, giraffes and hippos, other species (such as springbok) have failed to thrive, perhaps owing in part to other ecological changes on the Eastern Cape. It is for this reason that data collection remains a major part of the project, with reserve maintenance and community education also playing a key role in the preservation of South Africa's wildlife as a whole.



By volunteering on the Kariega 'Big 5' Conservation Project, you will not only have the opportunity to observe and appreciate the splendour of South Africa's vibrant Eastern Cape from within an award-winning reserve, but you will also earn a sense of reward by committing to a number of activities designed to support conservation efforts for years to come. Buffalo, big cats, wild dogs and more await you on this exciting safari experience as you are invited to learn more about South Africa's wildlife from an unparalleled perspective – so why not secure your place today?



Rhino Monitoring

South Africa has been gripped by the poaching crisis for many years now, with rhinos being amongst the biggest victims of this crime. The reserve is home to both white and black rhinos, and with the latter being critically endangered, it is important for the team to monitor and account for the rhinos on the reserve. As a volunteer, you'll help to gather information on the rhinos you encounter for the project to utilise as they continue to improve rhino conservation efforts.

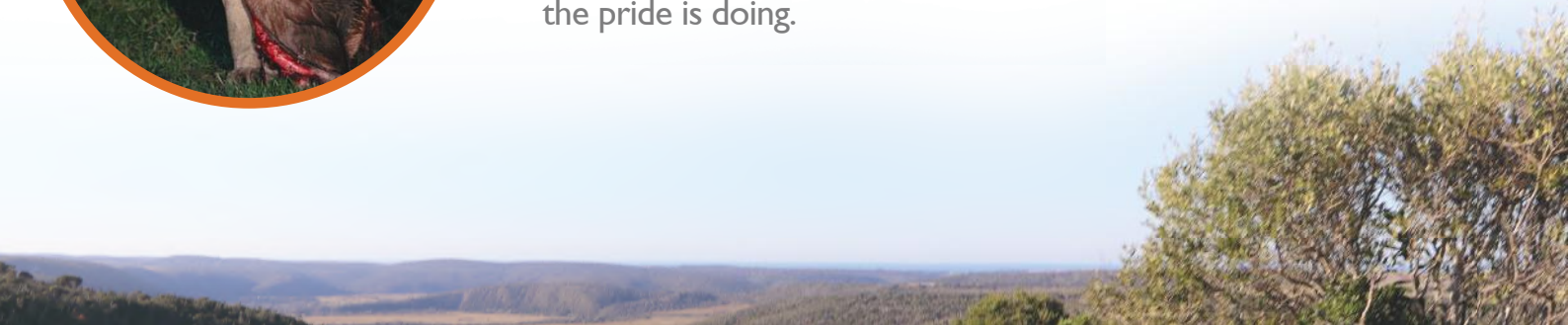
Elephant Impact Monitoring

Perhaps more famously than any other species in Africa, elephants are known to have faced substantial threats to their survival. Historically, farmers have tried to scare the animals away from their land in an attempt to protect their livestock, and the poaching epidemic has seen thousands of these gentle giants killed for their ivory tusks. Kariega introduced elephants to their reserve back in 2004 and, since then, their populations have increased (owing in part to an abundance of bushveld found on the reserve), though it is important that their numbers remain stable and that the grounds they live on can continue to sustain them. You will help to monitor the elephant's movement patterns, range utilisation and vegetation impact across the reserve, identifying the animals by their unique ear markings and recording them as you go. This information is beneficial in helping the reserve to remain as informed as possible about their animals as they continue to provide a suitable and sustainable environment for the elephants to live in.



Lion Prey Monitoring

To ensure that the ratios between predator and prey remain balanced, you will monitor the kills made by the reserve's lions. This will help to provide the conservation management team with valuable information about the number of animals killed by the lions, their preferred prey source, and an indication of how well the pride is doing.



Camera Trap Analysis

For decades, leopards have been deemed to be 'problem animals' due to their tendency to attack livestock, and as a result of culling by farmers, the species has suffered a sharp population decline. The team at Kariega have worked to introduce leopards onto the reserve, utilising camera traps to enable them to monitor their populations since their arrival. You will help the team check each of the camera traps, changing their memory cards, and recording information on all images taken. The cameras are moved around the reserve from time to time in order to increase the chances of leopard populations (as well as other species) being spotted, so you may assist with this activity too.



Game Drives

Game drives are a classic element of any African adventure, and are certainly a highlight of this volunteer project. You will head out in a safari vehicle, crossing grassy plains and African bushveld in search of the reserve's impressive wildlife species. During the drives, you may be asked to record the sex and age ratios of certain species, and if you're really lucky, you may even catch a glimpse of the reserve's carnivores in pursuit of their prey. This is an excellent opportunity to enjoy a close encounter with the 'Big 5', so be sure to bring your camera along for those picture-perfect moments!

Reserve Management

As a member of the project team, you will discover that life on the reserve isn't all about game drives: in order to provide an appropriate home for Kariega's many animals, hard work must be carried out! You will help out with a range of important reserve management activities, from alien plant removal to road maintenance. Invasive plants are a problem on the reserve, and without proper management they may kill off the vegetation that the herbivorous species eat to survive. Similarly, it is vital that the roads connecting different parts of the reserve to each other are maintained, as otherwise the project team would be unable to carry out their work. You may be asked to help carry out a number of reserve management activities not listed here, so a flexible, 'can-do' attitude is necessary!





Birds in Reserve Project

As part of a collaborative effort headed by the University of Cape Town's Avian Demography Unit, the project has set out to create a catalogue of information on the birds found in the reserve. You will help to contribute towards this by gathering information on the types of bird species found at Kariega, their breeding status and their population numbers. Birds are often a good indicator species for issues in the ecosystem, therefore it is important for the project to remain informed about their status.

Animal Capture

Occasionally, the opportunity may arise for volunteers to assist in the capture of one of the reserve's animals. This activity may be carried out if an animal needs veterinary treatment or if it needs to be relocated to another area of the reserve, and in this instance, you may have the chance to assist in the whole procedure. From sedation to transportation, this rare activity offers a unique glimpse into the efforts of a reserve management team, but do please note that this is not a guaranteed part of the project and will only occur when absolutely necessary.



Community Development

Wednesdays on the project are considered to be 'community days'. Volunteers will usually help out at a local under-funded school, helping to teach the children maths, English and science. Your time at the school is certainly worthwhile, as in South Africa, schools are usually under-staffed, meaning the children do not always get the education they deserve and so desire. Your help at the school will be greatly appreciated by the teachers and the headmistress, but the ultimate reward is found on the faces of the children who are often overjoyed to be able to continue with their studies! (Please note that while education is a key part of community development, you may instead be asked to help renovate buildings such as the school, or may find that this activity does not take place at all during the South African school holidays. You may head to the nearby town Kenton-on-Sea to help out with child welfare projects instead. Please also note that this activity is dependent on the availability of vehicles and is therefore not a guaranteed part of the project.)



River Cruise

If the weather and water levels permit, you may have the opportunity to embark on a cruise along one of the local rivers! This is a relaxing activity, offering the opportunity to unwind with your group whilst taking in the stunning scenery of the reserve from a new perspective.



Night Drives

Embark on a game drive beneath an incomparable night sky as you head out in search of the reserve's nocturnal animals! You and your fellow volunteers will venture out onto the reserve from the comfort of an open-air vehicle, listening to your knowledgeable coordinator as he talks to you about the wildlife activity that goes on even after the sun goes down. Your coordinator will also talk to you about the Southern Hemisphere's stunning constellations, offering an informative element to an already enjoyable experience.

Camp-Outs

'Get back to nature' by exchanging a night in your accommodation for one beneath the stars. A camp-out is an excellent way to appreciate a different side to Africa, so keep your ears open for the distant sound of the reserve's nocturnal animals as the night comes alive. Be sure to bring a warm jumper for this activity: your group may be gathered around a campfire, but African evenings can be chilly!



Itinerary

Below is an example of a 2-week itinerary, but it is possible to join for up to 12 weeks. Staying for 2 weeks will allow you to take part in as many of the activities as possible and a longer stay will provide a more in-depth experience.

Day 1

After arriving into Port Elizabeth Airport, you will be transferred to the project site. Upon arrival, you will have a welcome briefing and orientation and will then have the rest of the day to settle in and meet the other volunteers. If you arrive earlier in the day, you may have the opportunity to go out and join the afternoon activity.

Days 2 - 14

These are your project days, and you will take part in a combination of the activities listed in this guide. Each day will begin after breakfast at 8am, with lunch taking place at 1pm and the day ending at 5pm. Weekends are free for you to spend at leisure, so if you would like to take part in an activity (such as skydiving, sandboarding or a trip into town), just speak to a member of the project team. Please note, all weekend activities are at your own cost.

Day 15

Unfortunately, today is your final day. Once you have said goodbye to your fellow volunteers and the project team, it's time to pack up and transfer back to the airport for your return flight home or to continue with your own travel plans.



Accommodation

During your time on the project, you will stay in the volunteer house which is situated in the middle of the reserve and has views of the ocean. The house consists of five twin-share bedrooms, each with an en-suite bathroom. Rooms are shared on a same-sex basis, unless you are volunteering as a couple. Elsewhere in the house, there is a fully-equipped communal kitchen, large dining and living rooms, and an entertainment/lecture room with a pool table for you to enjoy. Outside, you can make use of a plunge pool and dedicated braai area, a perfect place in which to relax after a day out in the field! Wi-Fi is accessible at the house, however, the connection is only strong enough for sending messages via WhatsApp or checking in on social media.



Food & Drink

Whilst food is provided for you on this project, volunteers prepare their own meals. Usually the group will cook together, so this could be your chance to show off your culinary skills or learn a new dish from your fellow volunteers! Once every two weeks, you will also get to enjoy an evening braai (a traditional African BBQ), which is a great opportunity to socialise and unwind. Please note that while the project can cater to vegetarians, those with other dietary requirements (such as vegans or those with gluten intolerance) will need to purchase their own food from the local shop.



What's Included

- Accommodation
- Food for all meals
- Tea and coffee
- English-speaking project coordinator
- Laundry service
- A donation to the project

Not Included

- All flights
- Any vaccinations
- Travel insurance
- Airport transfers
(we can arrange these for an additional fee)

Volunteer Reviews

Michaela

"I will never forget the day we were watching a bull elephant cool off in a pool. Once he had finished, he came directly up to the side of the jeep!"



David

"My favourite moment was spotting a black rhino. It was a fantastic trip! Would definitely recommend!"



Charlotte

"Being only a few metres away from rhinos, elephants, lions, etc, are memories that I will take away with me forever! I'm already planning where my next trip will be!"





What Next?

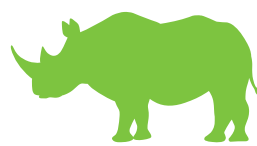
Becoming a volunteer on the Kariega 'Big 5' Conservation Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to wildlife conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.



Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to South Africa!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

#thegreatprojects



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