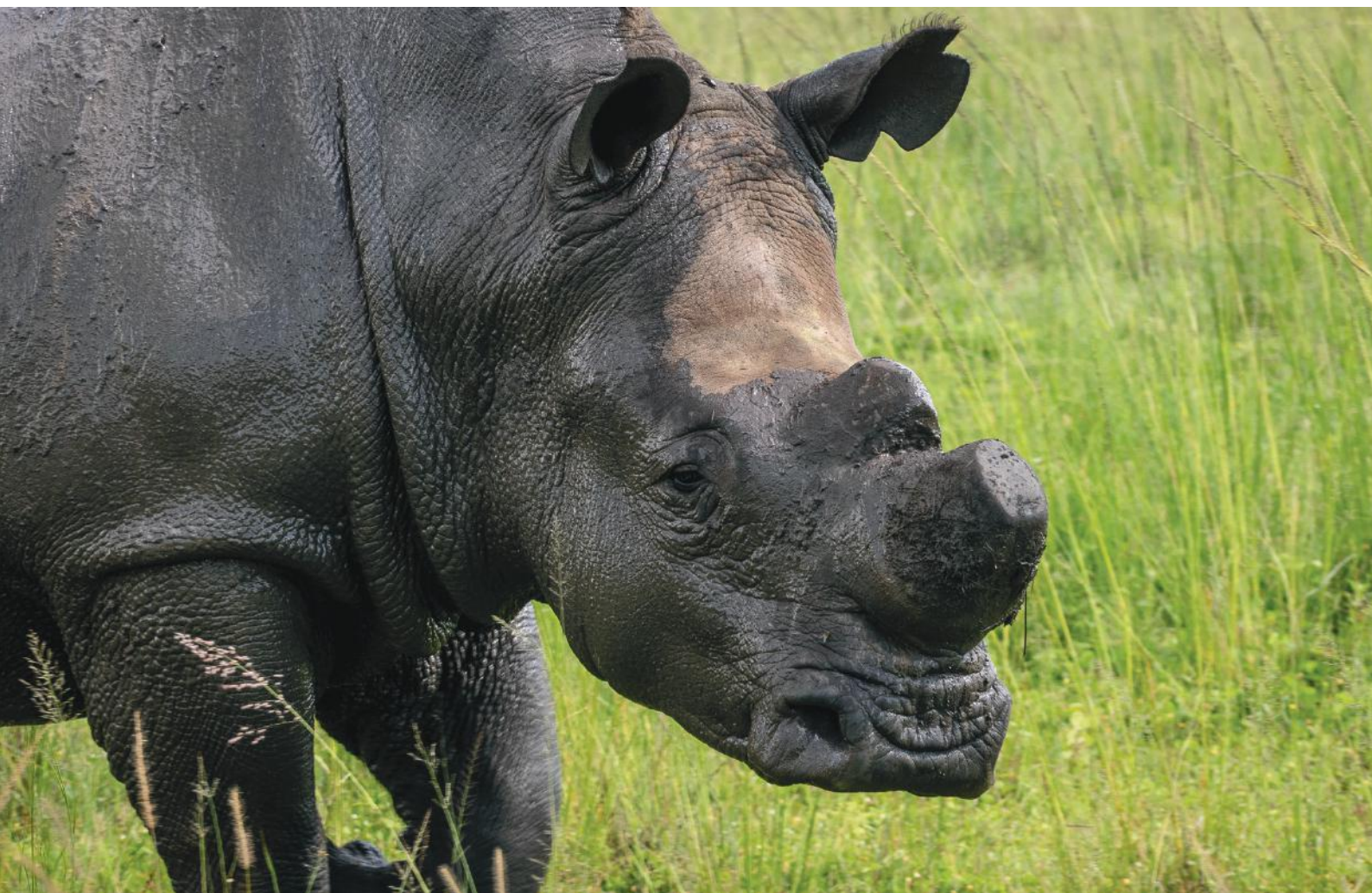




A guide to the:

Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project



The Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project

Focus: Elephants & Rhinos
Location: Zimbabwe

Start Date: Every Monday
Arrival & Starting Point: Harare

From the imposing Victoria Falls to the bright lights of its capital city, Zimbabwe is a destination known as much for its beauty as it is for its variety – and here in the Mashonaland East Province, both can be found in abundance.

The Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project is situated on a 10,000 acre reserve, an area which was acquired seven decades ago with the purpose of farming cattle. By the 1950s, the owner of the land, Norman Travers, had developed a keen interest in wildlife conservation and felt that the space would be better used as a conservancy. Impala, waterbuck, kudu and antelope were soon introduced to the reserve, though just a few decades later it would undergo an even greater transformation.

The 1980s brought with them one of the largest crises Zimbabwe had ever seen: the poaching epidemic. Throughout the decade, numerous wildlife species were severely impacted by wildlife crimes, with the black rhino being one of the most affected. Over the course of just a few years, Zimbabwe's black rhino population had plummeted from 10,000 to less than 1000, pushing the species ever-closer to extinction. Travers was alarmed by the impact that the poaching crisis had had on the country's animals, so managed to convince The Department of National Parks and Wildlife to move a small number of black rhinos onto his conservancy in the hopes of aiding the species' survival. Owing to their breeding and release programme, the project has succeeded in their efforts to improve black rhino populations in Zimbabwe, though they remain committed to maintaining these numbers – and this is something you will assist with whilst on this project.



As a volunteer, you will have the opportunity to support rhino conservation efforts through a range of important activities, such as tracking and observation. You will also help the project team to provide care for the rest of the animals on the reserve, including three wonderful elephants! These elephants arrived at the project as orphans and are therefore unable to be released, but this does not mean that they are a lost cause – in fact, the project team have provided them with an excellent quality of life for many years, and you will be invited to contribute to their daily care whilst learning about the importance of conservation as a whole. The Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project will prove not only to be an educational experience for yourself, though, as you will be invited to share your knowledge with the youngest members of the community when you visit the local primary school! This, combined with your work on the reserve, will certainly leave a positive impact on Zimbabwe and will contribute to a brighter future for both the community and the nation's beloved wildlife.

Norman Travers' own efforts have helped Zimbabwe's black rhino populations bounce back from an uncertain fate. With your help, the Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project can continue to provide a lasting legacy for more of the country's phenomenal wildlife species – so if you've ever dreamed of aiding African conservation efforts, this is an opportunity that should not be missed.

Rhino Tracking & Observation

Owing to the success of the project's rhino breeding programme, the rhinos on the reserve are free to roam 24/7. The reason for this is to improve on their natural behaviours (such as grazing, browsing and socialisation), something which cannot easily be achieved if the rhinos are kept captive. The project hopes to someday release suitable candidates into the wild, so providing them with a natural and uninterrupted quality of life is certainly important. Since the rhinos are free-roaming, however, they can be difficult to study, which is why you will assist the team in tracking the animals using telemetry.

Each of the rhinos are fitted with telemetry collars, which will help the team to identify their location. You will head out onto the reserve either by foot or by vehicle in search of the rhinos, where you will observe them and record information such as their feeding patterns. These observations may provide an indication of the animals' health and will also alert the project team of any issues which they can then solve. Other observations may be indicative of the behaviours of certain individuals, from their aggression and territory establishment to the development of a relationship between a mother rhino and her calf. The team have worked hard to create a huge body of knowledge which they have shared with other conservation organisations, meaning the work that is carried out here benefits rhinos across the world just as much as it helps those on the reserve to progress towards their eventual release.



Elephant Observation & Care

Rhinos are not the only animals you'll observe whilst on this project – you'll also get up close to the reserve's resident elephants! While the observation of both species remains important, their reasons are rather different to one another: this is because, unlike the rhinos, the elephants are all rescues and therefore cannot be released into the wild, meaning that the care they require will vary somewhat to a release candidate. The elephants on the reserve no longer have the stimulation of being part of a large, hierarchical herd, so you will assist the project's expert handlers in providing sensory enrichment to the animals in order to keep their bodies and minds occupied. You will observe the elephants during these enriching activities (such as walks across the reserve) as your knowledgeable guide explains their behaviours to you. This activity is necessary in ensuring that the elephants maintain a positive quality of life, though it is understandably a favourite part of the project for many of our volunteers!



Enclosure Maintenance

While the rhino breeding programme aims to release suitable candidates into the wild, the elephants on this project are sadly too habituated to live completely independently and therefore must remain under the watchful eye of the project team for the remainder of their days. This is quite the responsibility for the team, however, they are committed to providing the best quality of life possible to their animals, and therefore it is important that their enclosures are correctly maintained. You will help to ensure that the elephants' bomas stay comfortable by replacing any old hay with fresher bales, and you will also assist in safety checks in order to confirm that their enclosures are intact.



Snare Patrols & Anti Poaching

The poaching crisis has put many of Africa's wildlife species at risk, and the issue is something which has tragically impacted the project directly: in 2007, three of the rhinos on the reserve were shot and killed by poachers, with an unborn calf also losing its life alongside its mother. The project team are desperate to provide a safe home for all of their animals, which is why they employ an anti-poaching team who make it their daily mission to protect each of the large animals on the reserve. You will help to support their efforts by undertaking snare sweeps around the conservancy, looking for evidence of poaching and collecting any snares or traps which you may find. This activity will help to minimise the risk of death for smaller animals on the reserve, and will also enable the anti-poaching team to focus their efforts on priority species such as rhinos and elephants.



Monitoring by Horseback

One of the best ways to monitor the animals on the reserve is by horseback. The reason for this is that the animals are not easily spooked by the presence of a horse, whereas an approaching vehicle may cause them to move away with caution. The gentle manner in which you approach the reserve's animals will allow you to more accurately record the size and health of different herds, although this is ultimately a fantastic way in which to take in the beauty of your surroundings. Please note that this activity is only suitable for those with previous riding experience.



Breakfast With Elephants

A unique opportunity presents itself in the form of an early-morning meal alongside one of Africa's most beloved animals: the elephant! You and your group will head out on the reserve in search of the elephants' most recent location, whilst the project team bring along all of the equipment needed to make a delicious cooked breakfast on-the-go. Once you have reached your destination, you will sit and wait in anticipation of the elephants' arrival – though it's never usually long before they show up! Once you have finished eating and your dishes have been packed away, you will embark on a bush walk alongside these gentle giants, making this a phenomenal way to start the day.



Game Drives

No trip to Africa would be complete without a game drive – this is a classic part of any visit to the continent, and during your time on the project you will have the opportunity to embark on one or two of these exciting excursions. The Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project is home to a wealth of enticing wildlife, from the rhinos and elephants themselves to zebras, giraffes and even the rare sable antelope. You will head out into the vast savannah of the reserve, keeping your eyes peeled as you search for the project's impressive game animals. Since a number of the animals are free-roaming, you never know what you might spot – so be sure to bring your camera along for the ride!



Weapons Training

Both fun and educational in equal measure, the weapons training element of this project often proves to be a favourite for many of our volunteers! During this activity, you will take part in example drills that the anti-poaching team would conduct themselves in their efforts to counter the threat of poaching on the reserve. You will be given a paintballing gun and encouraged to test your accuracy by shooting at a target – be sure to bring your A-game, as things do tend to get a little competitive!



Carnivore Feeding

This is your opportunity to face off with some of Africa's most impressive (and hungry!) carnivores as you help to feed the reserve's lion and crocodile. You will witness the animals' innate behaviours as they tear into the chunks of meat thrown their way, proving that life on-reserve doesn't have to limit their natural capabilities.



Conservation Activities

As this is an active reserve, there are many activities which need completing to ensure that each day runs smoothly and that the reserve's animals receive the correct level of care. Daily activities on the project range anywhere from the distribution of food and hay bales, right through to 'cattle dipping' – this is where you may help to round up the cattle on horseback, leading them towards a vat filled with water and a pesticide solution designed to rid them of ticks and dirt. Whichever activities round out your day, you're sure to be kept busy!



Visiting A Local School

The project has partnered with a local school to form a 'conservation club', which aims to educate local children on topics such as the environment, animals and birds. The project believes that, by developing a conservation-conscious state of mind, the community will in turn learn to protect their native wildlife and the environment which surrounds them. You will support these efforts by helping to prepare lessons for the children at the school, and may also carry out some aspects of the lesson yourself!

While the 'conservation club' is a valuable part of the children's education, you may also be asked to assist in other elements of the curriculum. From offering your support in literacy programmes to taking part in sports or games with the younger children, your time at the local school will likely be a memorable and meaningful part of the volunteering experience. Please note that this activity only takes place during the school term time and is not a guaranteed part of the project.



Cultural Evenings

Occasionally, the project team will hold a 'cultural evening' at the volunteer house, and you will be joined by members of the local community for a night of entertainment. A typical local meal will be prepared for you and as the night progresses, you might even be invited to join in with a traditional dance! This is an excellent opportunity to learn about the Shona culture, with the youngest members of the community being particularly enthusiastic in their quest to share their favourite traditions and pastimes with you.



Itinerary

Day 1

After arriving into Harare International Airport, you will be met by a project representative and transferred to the project site. You will then have a chance to settle in and spend some time getting to know your fellow volunteers, before getting an early night ready for your volunteering adventure!

Day 2 -14

These are your project days which will see you taking part in many exciting activities all in the name of rhino and elephant conservation! An example of a daily itinerary can be seen below, though please note this is subject to change depending on the needs of the project.

Day 15

Sadly, your adventure has come to an end. After bidding farewell to your fellow volunteers, the project team, and of course the animals, it is time to head back to the airport for your return flight home or to commence your onward travel plans. If you're lucky enough to stay longer than two weeks, your itinerary will repeat.

Example Daily Breakdown

6:00am

It's a bright and early start with time to grab a tea or coffee before being briefed about the day's activities ahead!

6:30am

Time for your first task of the day! You may find yourself delivering hay bales and supplementary feed to the animals or possibly using telemetry to track the reserve's black Rhinos.

9:00am

After working up an appetite, you'll have time to enjoy breakfast and get yourself ready for the next activity. Your favourite breakfast on this project will definitely be the one in the company of elephants!

10:00am

The second activity of the day may see you sweeping the reserve for snares with the anti-poaching unit, tackling alien plant species or lending a hand at the local school.

12:30pm

Lunchtime! Enjoy a long lunch break with time to relax before heading back out into the field.

2:00pm

After lunch you could be feeding the resident carnivores or perhaps joining the anti-poaching unit in target practice using paint-ball guns! On this project, you're sure to end the working day with a fun-filled activity.

5:00pm

Before heading back to clean up for dinner, you'll walk the resident elephants back to their bomas for the night.

7:00pm

Time for dinner! After a great meal with your fellow volunteers the evening is at your leisure, though on some nights you'll be invited to join sundowners, night drives or even a cultural evening at the volunteer house!

Accommodation

During your time on the project, you will stay in a beautiful thatched house located on the reserve. Up to 12 volunteers can be accommodated here at any one time, with your group being split across five large bedrooms. These rooms are a mixture of twin-share and dormitory style, though regardless of which room type you are allocated, you are sure to be comfortable. Rooms are typically shared on a same-sex basis, though families or couples may possibly be accommodated together depending on availability.

There are two main bathrooms in the house, each with western toilets and hot showers, whilst outside you will have access to a solar-powered shower block. Also outdoors, you will find a large swimming pool and grass area – both ideal places in which to unwind and relax outside of your volunteering hours. Finally, a large dam situated next door to the house has formed a lake, and occasionally volunteers have taken a small boat out onto it! This is a beautiful location in which to enjoy your volunteering experience, as well as a welcoming home to return to at the end of each day.



Food & Drink

You will receive three meals per day whilst on the project, with all dishes prepared by the project's resident cooks and available on a self-serve, buffet-style basis. Vegetarian and vegan options are available upon request, but please let us know well in advance of your time on the project. If you have any specific dietary requirements (such as gluten, wheat or dairy intolerance), you will be required to bring your own specialist foods along with you, though the cooks will be happy to prepare your meals.



Please note that on some days, your meals (often lunches) will be packed up and taken out into the field, allowing you to make the most of your conservation experience. Additionally, the project's cooks do not work on Sundays, therefore it is up to you and your fellow volunteers to prepare your own meals.

Drinking water is pumped from a borehole and is safe and clean for drinking, though if you would prefer a soft drink (or even an alcoholic option outside of volunteering hours!), there is a small onsite bar offering options at an additional fee. Snacks are also available for purchase at the bar.

What's Included

- Accommodation
- Three meals per day
- Transfers to and from the airport
- A laundry service
- English-speaking project coordinator
- A donation to the project

Not Included

- Flights
- Visas
- Travel insurance
- Alcoholic beverages and personal snacks

Volunteer Reviews

Hannah

"I will never forget the first time I stood in front of the magnificent Makavhuzi, a bull elephant. His sheer size was overwhelming but he was so gentle!"



James

"There were so many great moments, such as the morning enrichment walks with the elephants. I loved getting to know their personalities!"



Isabel

"The whole experience was incredible! Being so close to the elephants and rhinos and learning so much about them is something indescribable."





What Next?

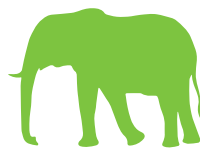
Becoming a volunteer on the Rhino and Elephant Conservation Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to wildlife conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



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 Zimbabwe!



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

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