



A guide to the:

Wildlife Orphanage in South Africa



The Wildlife Orphanage in South Africa

Focus: Human/Animal Conflict Issues

Location: South Africa

Start Date: Every Saturday

Arrival & Starting Point: Hoedspruit

For many people in South Africa, family is everything. Close bonds are formed throughout society, from the local villages to schools and places of work. Here at the Wildlife Orphanage in South Africa, things are no different: for more than a decade, this wonderful project has opened its doors to a variety of in-need animals, each of them invited to receive rehabilitation and care from kind-hearted volunteers. Similarly, the orphanage has extended its reach to a number of surrounding schools, offering education to hundreds of underprivileged children throughout the years. Indeed, the Wildlife Orphanage in South Africa is a special kind of family – one which was forged after love blossomed between two like-minded individuals.

Ian and Michele Merrifield met many years ago whilst he worked as a game ranger and she volunteered at the same lodge. A shared passion for the animals they cared for resulted in the pair falling in love and, eventually, realising their mutual dream: to open a wildlife orphanage of their own. In the early years of the wildlife orphanage being open, Michele and Ian helped to raise a local boy, who they soon learned had limited knowledge or understanding of South African wildlife or even of his local environment. This turned out to be a 'lightbulb' moment for the pair as they realised that they could help to educate the boy – as well as other children like him – with the help of some animal ambassadors!

While South Africa is home to a wealth of phenomenal wildlife species, it is sadly a destination in which the poaching crisis is a real problem. Similarly, conflict between animals and members of the local

community exists as they may view a number of species as pests: marmosets, big cats and even small deer have been known to destroy crops or attack livestock, which in turn can result in the locals using lethal measures in order to protect their livelihoods. Since the wildlife orphanage has been running, however, the local area has seen a sharp decline in these issues, and it is thought that the compassion shown to the animals here has helped to change the locals' perspective. Additionally, younger generations are growing up with a sense of duty and care towards their native wildlife, and this can directly be linked to their education on such topics.

As a volunteer on this project, you will contribute to the education of some of the region's most underprivileged children. Your days will be spent alongside these inquisitive and joyful young minds, as you explore topics such as animal care, wildlife conservation, and environmental studies. While caring for the animals is certainly enjoyable, this activity is all the more special when you realise the positive impact that it is having on the children. Here, you will have the opportunity to make a profound difference in the lives of the animals and school children alike – so if you're looking for a meaningful, wholesome experience, there really is no better place to volunteer.



Teaching School Children

During the project, you will spend most of your time working with small groups of local children. These groups typically consist of around 8 children between the ages of 12-16, each possessing a keen interest in learning.

Generally speaking, the quality of education in rural South Africa can be rather poor, especially as classes tend to be overpopulated, making it difficult for each child to learn at their own pace. For instance, in a class of 130 or so, there may be children with greatly varying levels of ability, and some may be left behind while others progress. The project aims to combat this by running small weekly classes, where students will learn important life skills and explore topical issues surrounding their local environment.

When the daily classes draw to a close, the children often remain onsite and are eager to spend more time with you! You will be encouraged to play games with them and may even be invited to an evening of dancing around the bonfire.



Outreach Campaigning

Working with the community is a major part of this project, so if the school children are sitting exams instead of visiting the orphanage, you will instead spend up to 2 days per week visiting other schools in the area which may not have yet had the benefit of working with the wildlife orphanage. The children at these schools tend to be in Grade 9 (around 14-15 years old) just before they go on to further education. You will be provided with the material to educate them on topics such as wildlife crime, waste management and the environment through lessons and fun games!



Working With Animals

You will join the school children in helping to care for the orphaned and injured animals which reside at the project site. By leading by example and showing the children how to be compassionate towards the animals, you will help them to gain a greater respect for their local wildlife and will also teach them how to be responsible. With or without the assistance of the children, you will also feed the animals and help to monitor their health. The majority of the animals at the orphanage are likely to never be released due to injuries or humanisation, which means that constant care is required, both day and night.



Maintenance & Construction

Since the orphanage can take in animals at any time, the demand for upkeep remains rather high. Additionally, an increase of animals onsite means that they will require a space to call their own, so maintenance and construction may be a part of your time on this project. Some of the activities you could take part in include the maintenance of the camp itself; the creation of new enclosures for the animals; painting various areas of the orphanage; and assistance with general repairs and construction. This is an excellent team-building exercise, and is also one which will allow the orphanage to provide a safe and suitable home for all of their animals.



Free Time

At the end of each week, you will have two consecutive days off which you are able to spend as you please (though please note the animals need feeding every day, so you if you are at the sanctuary during your days off, you'll be encouraged to lend a helping-husbandry-hand!) The project team tend to head into Hoedspruit every Saturday, afternoon so if you would like to check out some of the local shops and restaurants, feel free to go along! If you'd rather visit Kruger National Park, a member of the team will be happy to help you arrange your own transportation. Similarly, thrill-seekers may wish to visit the Blyde River Canyon, where bungee-jumping, rafting and ziplining activities await!

Please note that all weekend activities are of your own expense, so if you plan to spend any time away from the project site you will need to bring some additional cash with you. However, if you would prefer just to unwind at the orphanage, you are welcome to make use of its facilities, such as the swimming pool.



Itinerary

Day 1

Upon your arrival into Hoedspruit on Saturday, you will be met by a project representative and transferred to the project site. Here, you will have the opportunity to familiarise yourself with your surroundings and meet your fellow volunteers before eventually settling into your accommodation for the night.

Day 2

Today you will receive a tour of the wildlife orphanage. This will be your first opportunity to meet the animals, such as monkeys, a caracal and an adorable group of meerkats! The rest of the day will be spent learning more about your responsibilities and experiences as a volunteer and what you can expect from the weeks ahead.

Day 3-14

Monday - Friday are your project days, during which you will take part in a variety of activities between the hours of 7am and 8:30pm. A major part of this project is your involvement with the local children, you will take part in lessons covering topics such as human-animal conflict, careers in conservation, and even social subjects including safe sex and disease.

Day 15

After saying goodbye to the children and animals at the orphanage, you will begin your journey to Hoedspruit Airport for your return flight home or to continue with your own travel plans.

A Typical Daily Breakdown

7:00am	Wake up bright and early to meet your group for a morning coffee!
7:10am	Take a morning stroll in the bush with the children and sanctuary dogs.
7:30am	Sit down with your group for breakfast as you prepare for your day ahead!
8:00am	It's time to feed the animals and clean their enclosures!
9:00am	School's in session! With a wide range of topics to cover, the morning sessions may include wildlife tracking, environmental issues, or lessons on politeness.
12:30pm	Lunchtime!
2:00pm	Afternoon lessons will begin and may include lessons on animal knowledge, career development or fun activities such as swimming.
4:30pm	After lessons, you and the children will feed the animals their second meal.
5:30pm	In a more casual setting, you'll gather the children for a social talk which may include respect, sex education or substance abuse.
6:30pm	Everyone will sit down to enjoy dinner together.
7:30pm	Unwind by playing games, watching a film or spending the evening around a bonfire with the children.
8:30pm	The children are off to bed, leaving you with the rest of the evening to relax, play cards or stargaze whilst listening to the sounds of Africa at night.

Accommodation

Your time on the project will be spent sharing a rondavel (round chalet) with your fellow volunteers, with up to 4 people sharing per room. Whilst rustic, the chalets are certainly comfortable and have a charm about them, with their thatched roofs and quaint design. You will have access to hot-water showers, as well as western toilets, which in most cases are attached to the chalet (in other cases, you will have to walk no further than 10 seconds away to a bathroom outside of your room). If you are a family, couple, or group of friends, the project staff will be happy to allocate you your own room, subject to availability.

There is a small living area onsite for volunteers who want to unwind and chat, as well as a swimming pool and outdoor living area. There is also a small bar where you can watch movies on a projector.

There is no mains electricity onsite, but lighting and power are provided by solar energy and a generator, making this quite an eco-friendly project in terms of how it's run! Finally, laundry will be done for you each day (except on Sundays), as the team are keen to do all they can to make your stay happy and comfortable.



Food & Drink

You will be provided with three meals per day whilst on the project, with all meals being served in a buffet style. Options may vary between local cuisine and international favourites, such as burgers and fries, spaghetti or pizza, and most dietary requirements (with the exception of gluten-free diets) can be catered for – all that we ask is that you let us know of your needs in advance of your time on the project! (If you do require gluten-free items with your meals, please note that you will have to bring your own.)

Tea, coffee, juice and water are all included in the price of the project, though alcohol is not. If you would like to enjoy a beer or a glass of wine during your free time, you can purchase this onsite at the cash-only bar. Additionally, you may wish to bring some of your own snacks along with you or buy them in Hoedspruit during the Saturday excursion.



What's Included

- Accommodation
- Three meals per day (plus refreshments)
- Airport transfers
- English-speaking project leader
- A donation to the project
- Laundry service
- Wi-Fi

Not Included

- Flights
- Vaccinations
- Visas
- Travel insurance

Volunteer Reviews

Catherine

"Preparing an enrichment activity for the meerkats at the centre and carrying it out with them is something I'll always remember."



Sophie

"I had such a fantastic time on the project - my only regret is that I didn't stay longer! It's clear this project has on the children, animals, local communities, and the volunteers who visit."



Jennifer

"I'll never forget the children at the centre - their beautiful souls and interest in learning to create a better life for themselves, their community and the world."





What Next?

Becoming a volunteer at the Wildlife Orphanage in South Africa 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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