

Siyafunda Wildlife and Conservation Project



📍 Limpopo, South Africa

🔍 Monitoring & tracking

🐾 Wildlife

🌿 Conservation





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I. Who is SIYAFUNDA?

Siyafunda Wildlife and Conservation Project is situated in the Greater Kruger Park Area in northeastern South Africa. Established in 2004, its initial focus was to aid the reserve in monitoring elephants as part of a contraception program. Over time, this mission expanded to include the observation of all Big 5 animals and other predators. In 2013, we made use of our gained knowledge and expertise to extend our efforts into the Makalali Reserve in Northern Limpopo, bordering the well known Kruger National Park.

This project plays a crucial role in providing essential information and support to nearby conservation areas, contributing to anti-poaching initiatives and animal monitoring efforts. By focusing on specific information and knowledge, we assist the surrounding reserves to make more informed decisions for the well-being of their wildlife. Operating in Big 5 territory, this project offers a unique and professional experience for individuals passionate about these captivating natural environments far beyond the experience of 'going on safari'.

Siyafunda Wildlife project offers you a unique experience of living in the African bush and gives you the opportunity to observe and be a part of the research and monitoring teams on the reserve.

The focus of the project is monitoring and tracking some key species such as; elephants, lions, hyenas and leopards. You will also be involved with monitoring and observing the breeding behaviour of Buffalo, Livingston Eland and Nyala.

The Greater Makalali Reserve is a vast Big 5 nature reserve covering an area of 25.000 hectares. Situated in the Lowveld area, the home of nature conservation in South Africa, your work as a volunteer is vital for accurate management of the animals within the reserve. The data collected is made available to students and researchers that we host, as well as a number of national conservation projects, including the [Endangered Wildlife Trust](#) (EWT).

Whether on a monitoring drive, tracking animals on foot, or observing the wildlife at a waterhole from one of our vehicles, all your work will be done under the guidance of a qualified and experienced wildlife ranger. As the various activities you will assist with have predetermined objectives, you do not just get to view the animals, but you get to live with them for a little while. There's nothing quite like sitting in the dark next to a sleeping lion waiting for it to start its nightly hunt or being surrounded by a herd of elephants and being able to spend time observing their individual personalities and family dynamics. There is no 5 star safari (that would costs you many times more) that can compare to this experience.

At the end of the day, you return to the camp to share your experiences over dinner around the open fire and then fall asleep to the sounds of the bush.



2. What do volunteers do?

Volunteers help with monitoring wildlife during morning and afternoons when animals are most active. Tracking is often done on foot to find the more elusive animals, which is an amazing way to experience the bush. During the drier winter months, observation hides are used at the waterholes which allow for close observation of animals and their interactions without the animals being aware of your presence.

Volunteers also spend time cleaning riverbeds after floods (washed down rubbish), fence line monitoring and anti-poaching activities to assist the habitat management on the greater reserve.

Elephant Monitoring

Elephants were introduced in 1994 and the project was the first reserve to have intact family groups relocated to it. The reserve was also the first to take part in the Elephant Contraception Program to regulate its total elephant population.

The program started in 2000 and is the longest running of its kind; it is the benchmark on which all other similar projects are based. This was a pioneering study and it is important to continue to monitor the elephant herds as the reserve has the most extensive and longest continuing database of elephants on contraception in the world.

Monitoring of the elephants involves recording their movements to determine daily and seasonal ranging patterns. The project also observes and records long term behavioural aspects, focusing primarily on herd/bull associations and sexual behaviours. Elephants are a key-stone species and require constant information collection for effective wildlife management decision making.





Lions Monitoring

The monitoring of lion population is done to assess their movements, behaviour and predator-prey interactions. Lions, like elephants, are key-stone species and, within restricted wild environments, require constant monitoring to assist with management interventions when required. Interventions are done to bring variety to genetic diversity within the population and to control population size. The reserve has participated in various population control methods and research. Contraception of lions has been used and studied within this reserve. Lions are prolific breeders and between 1995 and 2007, 89 lions were born at the reserve.

Breeding Animals Monitoring

A 400 hectare, enclosed area of the reserve is home to the project's current breeding initiatives; Buffalo, Livingstone Eland and Nyala.

The first 6 buffalos, 2 males and 4 females, were reintroduced to the Reserve in 2008 – the first to have returned to this land for 80 years or more. The buffalos are disease free and are a substantial financial investment. They will be released into the greater reserve once the herd size is big enough to sustain itself and to be exposed to hunting lions. The project monitors their progress within the enclosure, checking health, possible pregnancies, and any new births.

Livingstone Eland is the largest antelope. Along with Nyala, numbers are in decline due to encroachment on habitat by humans, as well as poaching. Therefore observing behavior, learning about breeding patterns and protecting these antelopes in a secure wildlife area are very important to preserve these species for the future.

Hyena Monitoring

The reserve is host to both species of Hyena; Brown and Spotted. The Spotted hyenas are superior in numbers and are a particularly important species for the effective functioning of this ecosystem. They provide the cleaning up of carcasses, as well as being effective hunters. The project monitors den sites and activity and ID specific individuals to track interaction and behaviour.

Brown hyenas are very rare and occasional sightings of them are met with great excitement for all involved.

Leopard

The project closely monitors the locations of leopards to determine territory extent as well as creating and updating ID kits to monitor individuals and determine total population size. As with all predators, prey selection and reproductive behaviour to effectively assist the reserve management is also monitored.

The project works closely with [Panthera Leopard Research Project](#), who are monitoring and determining the leopard population in the area. This project is planned to continue for the next 10 years. Working in conjunction with Makalali Research, you will assist with the setting and monitoring of camera traps during the key months of February and March.



Small Mammal Survey

Sightings of the reserve's small mammal population are also monitored and recorded. This data allows us to determine species density, habitat, home range and territory utilisation of these animals. This includes animals such as Aardvarks, Jackals, Honey badgers, Caracals and, of course, the elusive Pangolin!

General Game

The project monitors and records locations, demographic composition and any significant behavioural displays of general game on the reserve such as impala, giraffe, and wildebeest. This is to see trends in habitat use and animal population sizes which are determined during helicopter game counts conducted every 2 years as well as game counting we do throughout the year from vehicles and on foot.

Birds and Raptors

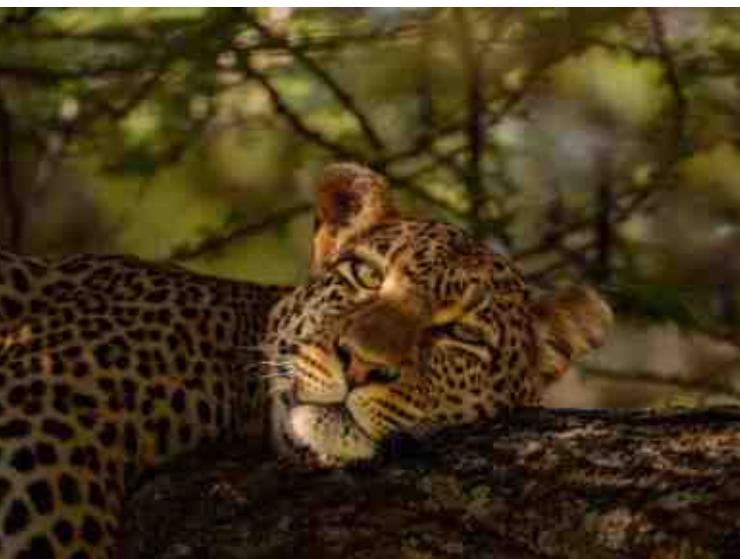
Each week the project monitors the different species of birds seen in the area. This is to determine any seasonal correlations and observe migratory patterns as part of a larger country wide initiative – Ndlovu birding project. Positions of birds of prey and vultures are recorded, and this information is recorded and sent to the Endangered Wildlife Trust who constantly monitor the vulnerability status of these birds. Many of these birds are threatened due to persecution by people who believe they threaten livestock and for traditional medicine and beliefs.

Habitat Conservation

Alien Vegetation Control: Under the guidance of [Working for Water \(WFW\)](#), volunteers will assist with identifying and monitoring stands of alien and invasive vegetation within the river and across the reserve. Volunteers will participate in the removal and chemical control of these species as well as the follow-up monitoring of problem areas. This is an important project as alien invasive plants can encroach on areas and prevent other indigenous plants from growing, as well as using up large amounts of moisture from the soil. This has a detrimental effect on your ecosystem and therefore requires constant monitoring and removal.

Reserve Management

The project is lucky enough to be situated on a large reserve, but this also means that it needs to be constantly managed. Volunteers will have the opportunity to take part in assisting with reserve duties such as road maintenance to prevent erosion problems, encroachment of vegetation over the roads and fence clearing when needed.





3. How can I help?

Volunteer your time and energy!

Days:

Times of work vary depending on the season. You must expect early starts in the morning and sometimes late nights. The animals dictate when work is done, when they are out and about so are the volunteers.

Summer: Leave at 5:30am and out for 4 to 5 hours. In the afternoon we leave at 16:00 for another 3 to 4 hours

Winter: Leave at 6:30am and out for 4 to 5 hours. In the afternoon we leave at 15:00 for another 3 to 4 hours

You will also be given lectures and presentations 2 or 3 times during the week over the lunch period. For the remainder of the time between monitoring, volunteers are required to enter all the data they have collected onto our databases.

4. How to become a volunteer

Step 1

Submit your application [here](#).

Step 2

Our booking office will help you to confirm your stay.

Step 3

Check out our special discounts and offers & book your flights and/or travel arrangements.

Step 4

Finalise your payments.

Step 5

Wait in anticipation for your departure date!





5. Location

The project is situated between the Drakensberg Mountains and the Kruger National Park in the heart of the Lowveld. The reserve in which it is located is dedicated to the protection of animal species at the risk of extinction.

Hoedspruit, the closest town, is fundamentally an agricultural town situated just a short distance from Kruger National Park, surrounded by wildlife-rich landscapes that make it a popular stopover for tourism. What started as a few shops, a bank, and a small rondavel serving as a station has transformed into a premier eco-tourism destination, renowned for some of the best 'Big 5' wildlife viewing in South Africa.

Despite the influx of scheduled airlines operating from the nearby airport, Hoedspruit has managed to preserve much of its rural charm.





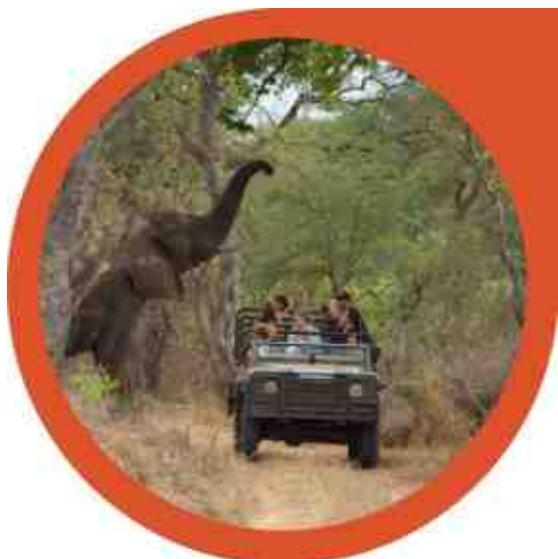
6. Is South Africa safe?

Despite general ideas of South Africa being very unsafe, it is important to know that South Africa is known to many as very friendly and welcoming. But please remember that you must realise that you will be far away from the big cities where you must stick to a certain behaviour to avoid complicated situations. As 70% of people in South Africa live in poverty and only few are extremely rich, the differences in life and hope for a better future creates a situation that fuels crime, lack of education, substance abuse, domestic violence and many more problems.

Your safety is very important, and your host will look after you to the best of their ability. We do expect you to do your bit and keep to our safety guidelines. Common sense is your best friend when it comes to safety, but here are a few guidelines:

- Do not walk alone in the bush or wander off without explicit permission
- Stay with the group where possible
- Do not walk around with your valuables
- Do not carry a backpack on your stomach; it shows you have valuables and are an easy target as a tourist
- Have a phone on you but do not walk around while calling.

There is no concern about safety, except from animals, at the project. The game reserves are guarded and fenced, and the town is also safe during our town trips. But, like everywhere in the world, security is everybody's personal responsibility, so use your head and be aware of your surroundings.





7. How much does it cost?

Included in fees:

- Transfers for arrivals and departures on Mondays to/from Hoedspruit
- All food (except snacks, soft drinks and alcohol)
- Accommodation on the reserve
- All linen (except towels)
- Monday to Friday housekeeping service
- All training for assistance with our research
- All travel within the reserve
- Assistance to organise travel in the local area
- An outing every two weeks to interesting local attractions outside of the reserve (entrance fees to be paid by volunteers)

Excluded from your fees:

- Flights to South Africa
- Transfers on Tuesday to Sunday if required
- Personal travel and healthcare insurance
- Internet (small fee payable for access at camp)
- Towels
- Entrance fee to local attractions
- Other personal items such as alcoholic drinks, soft drinks or snacks.

DURATION:	EURO	USD	GBP
1 Week	€ 880	\$1 035	£ 770
2 Weeks	€ 1 665	\$1 955	£1 455
3 Weeks	€ 2 435	\$2 860	£2 130
4 Weeks	€ 3 190	\$3 745	£2 790
Extra Weeks	€ 785	\$ 920	£ 685

Accommodation

You will be staying at the Twines Camp which has no fence around it so you will see free roaming animals and birdlife during the day or hear them at night. They visit us in the garden and we regularly see the elephant herds coming to drink at the waterhole. The main building with the office has a large comfortable lounge with a book and movie library where volunteers can spend their free time reading field guides and other books or watching documentaries in the evening. We also have a volleyball court at the camp, or you can jump into the pool for a cool off!



The volunteer house accommodates a maximum of 10 volunteers in five cozy rooms which have shared sleeping arrangements for 2 people. Each room has a washbasin and an en-suite bathroom, which is shared with the adjoining room, consisting of a shower with hot running water provided by eco-friendly solar heaters and flushing toilets.

Next door is the kitchen with an outside eating area. The kitchen offers cooking facilities for volunteers to prepare their breakfast, lunch and dinner. The fridge is always filled up with fresh veggies and fruit, cheese and a variety of meat. Volunteers help themselves with tea, coffee, cereal and toast in the morning. For a late brunch you can do sandwiches or salads or have a tasty fry up. In the evening, after the game drive, the volunteers cook a delicious meal together or just braai (South African BBQ) in our Boma, where we light up the fire after sunset.

In the evenings we spend most of the time under the South African stars and light up the fire in the boma. We sit around enjoying a well-earned drink and an amazing dinner, telling stories of the day's adventures.

Meals

Cordial fruit drinks, tea and coffee are provided. Soft drinks, alcoholic beverages (beers and ciders) and snacks like chocolate are not available in camp but you can buy them on the weekly town trips. All food for breakfast, lunch and dinner is provided, as well as fresh fruit. However, food is only re-stocked once a week so once it has gone it is gone! If you have any special dietary requirements, please inform us before your arrival so that we can accommodate them if possible.

Laundry

There are washing machines available for use at the camps, washing powder is supplied. Clothes are line-dried, no dryers available.

Shopping and Supplies

There are various mini markets where you can purchase things you need. The game ranger will transport you to these local shops or spar once a week.





8. When can I start?

All collections and drop offs of volunteers are done on Mondays throughout the year so please arrange your travel to coincide with this. If you are unable to do so, please advise us promptly and alternative transport can be arranged for you at your own expense.

Participation is from 2 weeks minimum and you can only book per full week. Your maximum stay is 12 weeks.





9. Things to consider

Visa

As visa requirements vary per country, please look up if you can get a free 3-month visa upon arrival. Please note that visas are the responsibility of the volunteer, and that Go with Khaya will not be held responsible for clients being denied entry, should they not be in the possession of the relevant visas.

In general, the rule applies that any stay of longer than 90 days in South Africa will require you to apply for a visa before departure. If you plan to stay shorter than 90 days most nationalities receive a free visa upon arrival in Johannesburg or Cape Town airport.

All travellers must be in possession of a valid onward/return air ticket.

Passport

South Africa insists on people having 2-free pages available when you enter. Keep this in mind if you are going to fly home from South Africa after completing a tour to multiple African countries. Please ensure that your passport is valid for at least six months after your date of departure from Africa. You are personally responsible for ensuring that passports, visas, vaccination certificates and other travel documents are in order and for all costs relating thereto.

Vaccines

For vaccines we recommend that you contact your local physician or travel clinic for information and advice but Yellow Fever is advised and Rabies recommended.

Weather

The weather in this part of Africa can be diverse and summers can get very warm, while winters can get quite cold. The Kruger Park area has a temperate climate



Rainy Season (October to March). The subtropical climate has hot rainy summers starting in October and ending around March. The summer rains transform the arid reserve into a lush flowering paradise, but the increased foliage does make animals harder to see.



Dry Season (April to September). The winter months from April to September are extremely pleasant with warm dry days and cold nights. Traditionally, the best game viewing is in the winter as the vegetation becomes sparse and water is restricted to rivers and water holes.

Insurance

Accidents can happen to anyone. Make sure to get comprehensive travel and medical insurance.



Alcohol

We allow alcohol to be enjoyed at the accommodation but only for those of 18 years. Volunteers under the age of 18 are not allowed to drink alcohol as per South African Law.

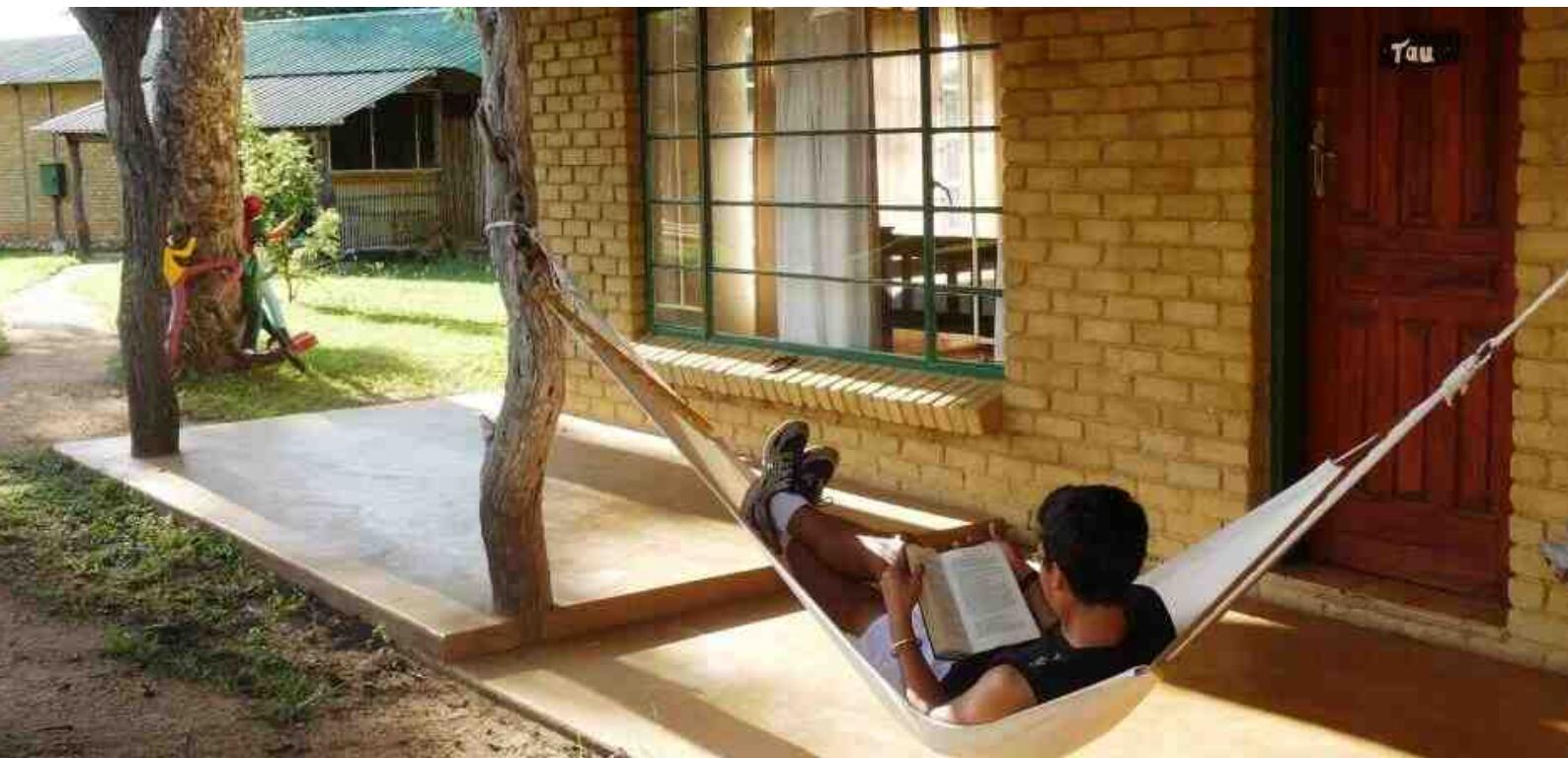
Drugs

Using or possessing drugs is illegal in South Africa as are the obvious hard drugs such as ecstasy etc.

We have a zero-tolerance policy for such usage.

Disclaimer

Go with Khaya commits itself to always offer accurate and correct information, but please keep in mind that information can change, and all projects can be subject to change regarding their programs and/or accommodation arrangements. Go with Khaya is a facilitating organization and does not run its own projects. Therefore, Go with Khaya cannot take responsibility whatsoever, for any changes concerning any program we offer. You will participate solely at your own risk.





10. Let's stay connected

We'd love to stay connected! Please follow & subscribe to our social media platforms below.



[Instagram](#)



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[Facebook](#)



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