



GAP AFRICA PROJECTS



WATERBURG WILDLIFE & VETERINARY NURSING COURSE

KIRKLY HALL / ASKHAM-
BRYAN COLLEGE



WELGEVONDEN GAME RESERVE

Welgevonden Game Reserve, (Dutch for "well found"), is a 34,8500ha game reserve in the Waterberg District, of the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

A pleasant 2.5-hour drive or an easy 45-minute flight from Johannesburg into one of the airstrips, makes Welgevonden one of the most accessible premier **malaria free** wilderness reserves in the country. It forms part of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve which was officially declared by UNESCO in 2001 and currently covers an area in excess of 4000 km².

The reserve comprises of mountainous terrain that is dissected by deep valleys and kloofs while flat plateaus characterise most hilltops. Altitude varies from 1080 m in the north to ±1800 m in the southern section of the reserve.

The diversity of habitat leads to a wide range of wildlife with grassy plains abounding with antelope from the largest eland to the diminutive duiker; and cheetah, lion and leopard are regularly seen close by. There are also numerous rare and unusual species such as brown hyena, aardwolf, pangolin and armadillo – all best seen at night. Over 300 bird species can be seen on the reserve, including rare blue cranes which breed in the southern section early in the year.



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ABOUT THE RESERVE

Welgevonden is home to over 50 different mammals, including the Big Five. There are rare and unusual species too, such as brown hyena, pangolin, aardwolf and aardvark – all best seen at night. The grassy plains abound with antelope from the largest eland to the diminutive duiker, and cheetah, lion and leopard are always close by. It is the diversity of habitat on the reserve that encourages such a wide range of wildlife as well as over 300 bird species, including rare blue cranes.

At 34,850ha in size, Welgevonden Game Reserve lies in the Waterberg plateau, about 250km north of Johannesburg. Here guests enjoy unlimited traversing through the reserve and experience an environment where biodiversity conservation and game viewing are managed in harmony. Welgevonden protects a unique and special environment and the reserve's management is deeply committed to ongoing conservation research and development.



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COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course aims to provide veterinary nurses and/or those studying to be a veterinary nurse with hands on practical experience in the wildlife field. Students will be based at the Game Reserve's research camp working directly with the conservation and research team. This is the department that runs and manages the day to day decisions and monitoring of the wildlife and eco system of the reserve. The team and their work is crucial to the management and welfare of all wildlife on the reserve, involved in selecting which animals need to be removed from the reserve and which need to be added to maintain a balanced ecosystem.

The groups time will spent working with local wildlife vets and specialists with whom the research team work.

One of the main objectives we achieve with each vet nursing group is assisting in the darting, DNA sampling and ear tagging of 2-3 rhino on the reserve. This work is carried out by Dr Peter Caldwell, a world famous carnivore vet who has a strong passion for Rhino work; he has a wealth of knowledge in the wildlife industry and it is an amazing opportunity for the students to to learn from him.

There are other veterinary activities that students will be involved with enabling them to work hands on with wildlife which will vary depending on time of year plus the needs and requirements of the reserve.

The course is full of informative lectures from specialists in the conservation and wildlife field, as well as the veterinary surgeons. All students are provided with a course field manual, in which all lecture notes are given and personal study notes can be added!



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CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

With the Conservation Research team:

- ✓ Darting simulation and practice shooting exercise for students.
- ✓ Game transects- estimating numbers of different species on the reserve
- ✓ Land capacity exercise: How many animals has the reserve got VS how any can the land support?
- ✓ Visit to the breeding camp bomas - Buffalo breeding project
- ✓ Animal tracking
- ✓ Telemetry Monitoring; elephant, cheetah, lion
- ✓ Alien Plant species eradication
- ✓ Wildlife breeding management (sable, buffalo, rhino & big cats)
- ✓ Elephant Behaviour Study
- ✓ Collecting various faecal samples for the research team
- ✓ Laboratory work; identifying parasites from samples, microscope worm, blood smears, egg floats
- ✓ Insectavora- their role in the ecosystem and how we can monitor the growth of an ecosystem through study of insects present; practical - spider collection!
- ✓ Post Mortem of a wildlife species (not guaranteed)
- ✓ Attending local Game Auction
- ✓ Nocturnal Species ID and night game drive

There are many topics that will cause ethical discussion whilst students take part in this course and this is encouraged so that students return to the UK with a wider knowledge of the issues this part of the world are facing.

Group Debates:

- ✓ Hunting of wildlife - should it be allowed?
- ✓ Rhino Poaching - dehorning or not dehorning?
- ✓ Rhino Horn - To trade or not to trade?
- ✓ Farm or Game reserve - how big is a reserve?



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VETERINARY ACTIVITIES

Assisting the Wildlife Vet with:

- ✓ Preparing and loading darts: correct methods to minimize risks
- ✓ Wildlife immobilization on a Game Reserve: Darting Buffalo/ Sable/zebra/impala to remove or fit tracking collars
- ✓ Witness Helicopter darting of large Wildlife species: White Rhino
- ✓ Immobilisation of White Rhino for DNA Tagging, Ear Notching and Samples
- ✓ Immobilisation of Large Predator Species: Managing the Lion population; replacing collars or moving them to a different area
- ✓ Giraffe capture; specialized procedure when available.
- ✓ Parasite (internal and external) monitoring and control in wildlife.
- ✓ Elephant Contraception darting - helping prepare and load the vaccination darts
- ✓ Wildlife Capture and Relocation
- ✓ Replacing/Fitting of Tracking Collars on various antelope species

NB Some and not all of these veterinary opportunities will be carried out on the project. Working with wildlife cannot be predicted or manipulated for student experience.



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PROJECT LECTURES

There will be a range of lectures given to add the theoretical component to the practical activities and put into context all the work that the staff on the reserve have to complete in order to keep the reserve running and the animals managed properly.

These lecture topics will include:

- ✓ Managing game reserves and Land Capacity Model
- ✓ Species control- Predator pits
- ✓ State Veterinary disease control in practice. Notifiable disease sampling and control hands-on : Tuberculosis , Foot and Mouth, Brucellosis, Corridor Disease. Documentation required : Red cross permits.
- ✓ Drugs used in wildlife medicine
- ✓ Calculating doses in wildlife
- ✓ Logistics of wildlife transportation: Customised vehicles, crates and equipment.
- ✓ The Game Trade-Auction and value of livestock
- ✓ Game Capture systems
- ✓ Darting Wildlife
- ✓ Boma Management and rehabilitation



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PROJECT FOCUS-WHITE RHINO

Welgevonden works to minimize the potential of poaching, with just 1 incident in 9 years on the property. Students and volunteers will contribute to this by actively searching for rhino and getting to know them individually, to assist with updating individual identification guides. Behavioural observations, photos and GPS locations are recorded to document where the animals are occurring, keeping tabs on the localities and activities of White Rhino on the reserve.

Understand Anti-Poaching

Welgevonden takes pride in it's large investment in security of the reserve. Anti-poaching protocols are of vital importance and volunteers are invited to attend a talk for an insight to what anti-poaching, coordinating ambushes, gaining intelligence, and for all the latest statistics on the poaching tragedy...

DNA tagging and ear notching

Welgevonden now acts as a safe haven for many rhino as their anti poaching efforts are so strong. The reserve would like to have all their rhino ear notched (for identification) and also DNA sampled (in the event of a poaching, the horn can be traced). Our Veterinary Nursing course provide fundamental support to this project.



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MANAGING OTHER SPECIES

Elephant Identification and Behavioural Monitoring

As a megaherbivore elephants have the ability to alter habitats and have other effects on the Ecosystems on the reserve. Research is conducted into the effect that elephants have not only on the vegetative component of the reserve but also on the other animals that are affected by these changes.

With elephants living in close proximity to humans on Welgevonden and regularly coming into contact with humans as a result of tourism based activities, there is the potential for conflict. Research will determine the best way to reduce and avoid this potential conflict.

Individual elephants and herds will be identified to gain a better understanding of herd structure and behaviour to ensure the correct implementation of management intervention.

Monitoring Cheetah

Welgevonden is home to the largest, most successful wild Cheetah population in the Waterberg cluster; a huge hope for this Vulnerable species.

Students and volunteers will be actively involved in the conservation of this species by updating their identikits. This activity takes place when Cheetah are sighted but will occur year round and will invite many pleasant surprises!



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EXAMPLE ITINERARY

Day	AM	PM
1	Arrival; Lunch and Orientation	Lecture. Game drive and species identification
2	Lecture: Game reserves and Conservation	Game count transects- species ID, male female identification, body condition scoring, cyber tracker etc
3	Lecture: Wildlife Vet	Practical work with Vet- Collaring/moving animals in reserve
4	Telemetry Pracitcal (Lunchtime Debate-Hunting)	Dartgun theory and practice; Range finding, filling darts and target practice!
5	Anti poaching lecture and Debate	Faecal Sampling and Laboratory work. Evening Lecture- Game trade and value of stock
6	GameAuction	Nocturnal species lecture, early dinner, Night Game Drive
7	Day Off- Rest day- (opportunity to go Pony Trekking)	
8	Lecture and visit Breeding Bomas	Post Mortem of Wildlife Species
9	Excercise- Land Capacity Model	Rhino ID Afternoon- find rhino before notching
10	Dr Peter Caldwell- Rhino DNA tagging	Dr Peter Caldwell- Lectures or practical work.
11	Insectavora Day- The little things matter! - Spider Collection and Identification!	
12	Behaviour Study- Elephants	Drug Calculation Exercise. Evening- Potijke Competition Night!
13	Choice Game Drive and activity	



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ACCOMMODATION

The student center and camp is based on the reserve and boasts ten purpose built tents that sleep two people per tent in single beds, each tent also has lighting and electricity supply. There are communal hot and cold showers and regular flushing toilets. All meals are provided in a communal inside or outside dining room. There is also a number of communal facilities including a lecture room, canteen, storage fridge, lounge and entertainment area. The center also has access to Wi-Fi. The camp is fenced off inside the boundaries of the reserve, check out the aerial shot of camp below! You can wake up and find an elephant 10meters from your doorstep!

Three meals are provided on a daily on a semi-participation basis which are prepared communally. Students will take part in communal cooking and keeping the kitchen tidy. Meals will either be served at the facility itself or taken as a pre-packed serving, depending on planned or as result of unscheduled activities.

Weekends & Evenings:

Most evenings are spent at leisure in the camp enjoying the sights and sounds of Wild Africa.

Sunday is an off day and there are several local activities to do which include horse riding and ziplining. Most students choose to relax in camp after a busy week.



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WHAT DID 2017 STUDENTS AND TUTORS SAY?

What were your favourite parts of the trip?

'Rhino and Zebra capture were the highlight of the trip and being able to work with animals up close.'

'Anything that involved working hands on with wildlife! Also the Camp and the Staff were amazing.'

'A lot of students fed back that they have a new boost to learn more and feel more confident.'

What skills did the nurses get to practice?

- General life skills
- Communication
- Patience
- Tracking and identifying exotic species/body scoring/anatomy and physiology (bone identification/dissections)
- Darting
- TPR on wildlife
- Handling and restraint
- Species Identification and Body conditioning
- Medicating
- Monitoring sedation/anaesthesia



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