



GAP
AFRICA
PROJECTS



**SOMKHANDA
CONSERVATION FIELD TRIP**

**UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER
PROJECT OVERVIEW**

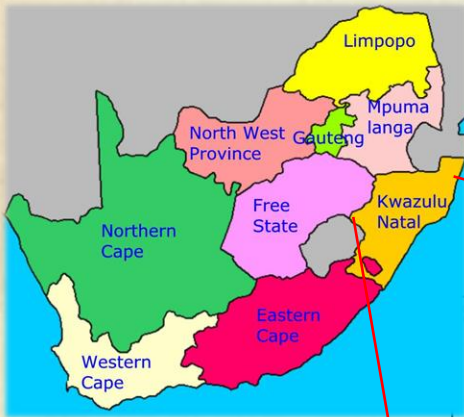


SOMKHANDA GAME RESERVE

Somkhanda is a 12000ha community-owned game reserve in the Zululand district of KwaZulu Natal and is home to the last of the 'big 5'. Somkhanda is home to breeding populations of two key endangered mammal species - Black Rhino and the African Wild Dog. The full complement of species that historically occurred in the area includes Lion, Elephant, Hyena, Giraffe, White Rhino, Wildebeest, Zebra, Impala, Nyala, Kudu, Bushbuck, Reedbuck and many more.

HISTORY OF THE RESERVE

The Gumbi Tribe lost their tribal land during the years of Apartheid and in 2006 successfully won an ancestral land claim over a large area of Zululand and on a section of this they established the 12000ha Somkhanda game reserve. The reserve supports the local community with job creation through ethical ecotourism and by providing schools and support to the local tribe.



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SOMKHANDA CONSERVATION FIELD TRIP

Field trips to the reserve have been running since 1999. The academic team at Somkhanda are able to offer a bespoke course to each institution dependent on their own personal objectives and learning needs. We set out a basis of the trip, comprising of a 9 day academic module at Somkhanda plus an additional 3 day module of the groups choice in whatever area is of most interest.

The students will be taught and work alongside the field guides and conservation team at Somkhanda game reserve. Activities students will be involved in:

- Leopard camera trap surveys
- Small mammal research
- Wild dog tracking
- Rhino monitoring
- Predator tracking (Lion)
- Elephant monitoring and observation
- Game counts
- Fence and road maintenance
- Water management for game
- Community cattle dipping
- Alien plant control
- Fire management
- Game capture

The working day: A full 9 hour day will be planned but will vary from day to day depending on the days task and what surprises come up.

A typical programme split would be as follows:

Days 1 - 6

Somkhanda Game Reserve – Conservation and Research Activities

Days 6 – 8

Somkhanda Scotia Camp – Wilderness Sleep out and Survival Experience

Days 8 – 9

Community Home Stay with Gumbi Tribe

Days 9 – 11

St Lucia Wetlands



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WILD DOG TRACKING:

One of the highlights of visiting Somkhanda Game Reserve, is the chance to see these magnificent endangered animals. Wild dogs are the most endangered carnivore in Africa requiring a vast area of land to sustain one pack. Somkhanda is surrounded on three sides by tribal communities, whose livelihoods are dependent on cattle and goat farming; prior to the introduction of wild dog to Somkhanda an agreement was made with the community that the reserve would monitor and track the pack of dogs twice daily. There is a permanent team dedicated to this; you will be able to join in with their work, watching the dog hunt and play!



LEOPARD MONITORING:

Due to the importance of cattle to the economy of the rural community outside of Somkhanda and the reserve's commitment to fostering good relations with the tribe, there is ongoing monitoring of the leopards on the reserve. You will learn how to set camera traps and identify individual leopards as well as recording their movements.



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BLACK RHINO PROJECT:

Black Rhino populations are under threat throughout Africa with the total number having plummeted from approximately 65000 to 2400. In recent years successful conservation efforts have resulted in numbers rising again to a current population of approximately 3000. South Africa is home to the largest number of black rhino and certain key populations have reached their optimum biological carrying capacity. Overpopulation can negatively impact on population growth and so breeding populations have to be carefully established and controlled in a suitable habitat. Whilst on Somkhanda you will have the chance to help restore the ideal habitat for the black rhino; by eradicating the plant species of chromoleana odorata. You will also take part in patrols looking for signs of poaching and learn to track the rhino as well as identify birds, plants and animal tracks. Rhino tracking is essential, the information must be recorded daily so the reserve can keep an eye on their movement patterns, their physical condition and their associations with other animals and other rhino; there is a permanent team dedicated to this on the reserve and you will be able to join them.



COMMUNITY CATTLE DIPPING:

As a free service to the community the reserve, with the backing of the state veterinary department, undertakes community cattle dipping to eradicate ticks. The programme takes place every week throughout summer and every second week throughout winter. The aim is to control tick population and reduce the incidence of tick-borne diseases. This improves the health of the animals which increases milk production and decreasing calf-interval. It is also a great opportunity to experience traditional Zulu life.



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BESPOKE - RESEARCH PROJECTS

There is also scope to include time where the students are able to work on their own research programmes; either during the 9 day module or in place of the other add on modules. Students can use this as their individual research component and are able to create group projects.

All research projects are aligned with the game reserve management objective and can be broad and dynamic. The research will benefit both the student and the game reserve. Many research programmes allow for hands-on experience where life skills, not available in their present environment, are encouraged and taught. Once a project subject is chosen, a project proposal should be developed and materials and methods can be discussed. These projects must be carefully prepared in advance of the trip so that the reserve can put all the necessary requirements in place so the research can run as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

- **Alien Plant Management**- Invasive plants play havoc with natural habitats; infestation need to be investigated, mapped out and recommendation made for their removal.
- **Aquatic Systems - river, springs and dams** - The Mkuzi river forms the southern boundary of the reserve and there are several streams, ponds, dams and water holes that need monitoring and measuring for rainfall.
- **Geology and Soils** - Current land use practices need their impacts monitored and recorded.
- **Small and Medium herbivore management** - Grazing and browsing impacts, especially near to artificial water points. Impacts of hunting and sale of game.
- **Mega Herbivore Management** - Cape Buffalo, a protected species, need to be monitored and tracked daily. Feeding habits and their impact need to be reported on.



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- **Small Predator Management** - All species need to be identified, mainly via camera trapping. A catalogue of animals is being made so we can identify as many individuals as possible on the reserve. More information is desperately required by the reserve, especially in relation to prey species.
- **Large Predator Management** - Lion, Leopard, Wild Dog, Spotted Hyena, Brown Hyena and Caracal have an impact that needs to be identified and recorded. Mapping their home ranges and activity.
- **Conservation Management** - Aspects of the physical management of the environment and other supporting infrastructure needed to manage a game reserve. Fencing, road and tracks, erosion, planning and mapping.
- **Amphibians** - Many of which are threatened or endangered, the reserve has a check list of the species but little is known about their status and distribution
- **Insectavora - including spiders** - Only 21 are recorded on the reserve when thousands of species occur. Insects are important environmental indicators so they need to be identified and monitored.
- **Environmental education** - For children both in local schools and abroad, an adult education course is needed.
- **Biodiversity heritage** - How do we manage the ecosystem beyond the fence line of the game reserve.

Once you have chosen your specific area of interest, we can provide examples of project titles within that area of research.



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WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE X 2 DAYS

SCOTIA CAMP

As part of your conservation experience, groups will have the opportunity to sleep out on the reserve at Scotia Wilderness Camp. Activities during this time will include traditional cooking over an open fire (potjie), wildlife tracking, signs/spoor and survival skills

The evenings are spent around the fire learning about Zulu culture.



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CULTURAL COMMUNITY VISIT

Students are given the option to spend a night staying in a family home in the local community; eating traditional African food and sleeping in traditional village huts. Students will stay in small groups with individual families, they will have to join in with chores and help prepare dinner. This is an eye opening and incredibly rewarding experience for students.



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ACCOMMODATION AT SOMKHANDA

In keeping with the safari adventure theme, groups are accommodated on the reserve in comfortable safari tents, with communal hot and cold showers and regular flushing toilets. All meals are provided in a communal dining room. If students opt to sleep out there are basic camps around the reserve that can be used for sleep outs; sleep out under the stars and learn how to make a fire and cook on it! There is also a lodge available for students and lecturers at an additional cost.



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