

# **WILDLIFE ACT RESPONSIBLE TOURISM POLICY**

## **CONSERVATION APPROACH**

We understand that true conservation is the protection and preservation of wildlife in the wild, with the aim of ensuring that animals can contribute to the growth or maintenance of wild populations. We take into consideration the current status of the environment and ensure that conservation efforts are directed towards threatened species, either locally or globally.

All too often projects are developed as a means of generating an additional funding stream for a reserve rather than as a means of getting specific work done. Addressing conservation needs is our primary focus, and the work done by our volunteers is used for meaningful conservation management purposes.

The essential data that our volunteers help gather and analyse has numerous management applications, including the planning of successful introduction and removal strategies of priority wildlife species, as well as supplying information to the local conservation authorities.

## **SMALL FOCUSED GROUPS**

We only accept a maximum of 5 volunteers at a time on each project we run. Keeping our teams small and efficient provides insights into real conservation work, allows one-on-one time with experts in the field, and keeps volunteers involved in all day-to-day aspects of wildlife conservation and monitoring.

However, we also understand that not all volunteers are equipped to efficiently and accurately participate in all aspects of our work, but we do ensure that the conservation work that volunteers are correctly allocated and allowed to participate in, is relevant and meaningful. We feel that not all organisations engaging with volunteers follow a similar code of conduct in this regard.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

We are painfully aware that our mere presence is a burden on biodiversity and therefore institute measures to limit our impact as much as we can. All of our accommodation is on the reserves within which we work and we constantly

change and convert the accommodation into a sustainable system. While doing so we are continually showing our volunteers the environmentally-friendly techniques we are developing and implementing along the way.

Getting here and back with minimal impact is important to us. We therefore encourage smart travelling, which includes taking direct flights, our one-day-a-week pickup policy (getting picked up as a group instead of individually), and providing discounts for the longer volunteer stays.

We take every step to be energy and resource efficient – making us of energy-efficient light bulbs, solar power, geyser covers, rechargeable batteries, natural-based cleaning products, captured rain water and venison products to name a few. We also educate our team members on how to live a more sustainable life once they leave to go back home.

We work in an incredibly fragile and complex ecosystem in Southern Africa. Our work is focused on saving biodiversity through the preservation of critically endangered species. These species act as umbrellas, meaning that the conservation of these high-profile species has a spin-off effect of the preservation of large tracts of land and hence the conservation of biodiversity in these systems.

## **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Conservation efforts often neglect to take the social impact of local communities into account. It is our belief that conservation is only sustainable if the local community benefits from conservation.

50% of our staff come from the local communities surrounding the reserves we work on. Along with this we are presently a Satisfactory Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Contributor as stipulated by the South African Department of Environment and Tourism. Structured within our workforce is a learnership programme, whereby we train aspirant local community members to enter the conservation field, and in doing so, build up valuable experience and skills needed to further their careers. After the programme is completed we employ them ourselves, or help them find work within the conservation sector.

100% of volunteers' money is put directly back into our organisation - providing sustainable employment for the staff. All food and supplies are

purchased locally and volunteers are encouraged to buy their souvenirs from small village craft outlets.

## **LOCAL JOB CREATION**

Our company policy is to only employ African Nationals, especially in the role of our wildlife monitors who interact with volunteers on a day-to-day basis, thereby providing local job creation. We are able to employ 2.5 South Africans for every one project and five volunteers.

Furthermore none of our volunteer work detracts from local employment in the wildlife or reserve sector. Instead we aim to engage government with their job programs - specifically the South African “Working for Wildlife, Water and Fire” programs which provides government funding to eradicate alien vegetation and provide teams to assist with relevant wildlife jobs.

## **PARTNERSHIPS & SUPPORT**

We are currently the only conservation volunteer organisation in South Africa supported by and working with high profile organisations such as the WWF and Wildlands Conservation Trust. We are also the only volunteer supported organisation to work on National Game Reserves rather than privately owned reserves.

Some of our activities include:

- Assisting Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife by monitoring a 1/3 of South Africa’s critically endangered Wild Dog population
- Annually assisting WWF with the release and monitoring of rhino on the Black Rhino Range Expansion Project
- Running one of the largest leopard survey’s in the world in partnership with the global big cat authority, Panthera and;
- Collaborating with Wildlands Conservation Trust to protect the rhino population within a community-owned reserve while simultaneously educating the children of the community.

Some of our credentials / achievements:

- We are participating members on the Wild Dog Advisory Group for South Africa (WAG-SA)

- We are founding and active members of Project Rhino KZN,
- One of three coordinating members of the KwaZulu-Natal Wild Dog Advisory Group and the Zululand Vulture Project, in partnership with the provincial conservation authority, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, and the Endangered Wildlife Trust.
- Part of the South African Lion Management Forum (LiMF)

We are further supported by reputable organisations including:

- Woolworths South Africa
- Rhino Africa Safaris
- African Parks
- Blood Lions
- Fair Trade Tourism
- iSimangaliso Wetland Park
- Project Rhino KZN
- The Global Nature Fund, and;
- The Sindisa Fund

## **REAL CONSERVATION**

There has unfortunately been widespread abuse of the voluntourism market to further the gain of projects claiming to provide conservation outputs. This is especially true of projects that breed wild animals (unnecessarily) in captivity, specifically lion, for the purpose of cub petting, hands-on care and the walking with lions entertainment industries. The scientific evidence shows that the captive breeding of lion and other predators plays no role in the conservation of these species in the wild whatsoever.

Many wildlife sanctuaries claim conservation status, yet by pure definition can have no conservation output – with conservation being the preservation of species for the future growth and maintenance of species in the wild, not in sanctuary. Sanctuaries are animal welfare projects, designed to allow captive wild animals the means of living the rest of their lives in peace. We strictly do not trade with animals or their parts, allow breeding in sanctuaries, or allow any form of direct human interaction.

All of the above is why Wildlife ACT exists, is how we continue to grow, and is how we contribute to wildlife conservation to the best of our ability.