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Wildlife Research at Kanaan Desert, Namibia



As part of your stay in Namibia, we recommend you combine time at the sanctuary itself with a week or more at a remote research project, a great opportunity to view animals in the wild, to learn and be part of wildlife reserve management and to experience the spectacular wide open spaces that Namibia is famous for. This is a fantastic way to complete your African wildlife experience. The current focus project is at the breath-taking Kanaan Desert in the south of the country.

Undertaken in small groups and escorted by members of the sanctuary team, all transport, accommodation, meals and training are provided. Hiking and trekking the mountainous terrain make up a large part of the daily activities, so a good level of fitness is recommended. That said, activities can be tailored to suit the fitness needs and levels of most people.

The research project operates Saturday to Saturday. It is feasible, though perhaps a little rushed, to incorporate a research week during a 2 weeks itinerary, however we recommend a total stay in Namibia of 3 weeks or more to ensure the best overall experience.

Book now with a low \$400 deposit, balance due 3 months before trip. Payment plans available

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"The research week at Kanaan was the best thing I have ever done. It was hot, we were dehydrated, but it was absolutely amazing. The accommodation there was stellar."
Meaghan

6-7 hours drive south from the Sanctuary, Kanaan is a photographer's paradise, with spectacular scenery and night skies to take your breath away. Its contrasting landscapes include endless red sand dunes, towering mountain ranges and vast open plains. The main flagship species here are cheetah, brown hyena, spotted hyena and leopard.

Research at Kanaan is currently focussed on the spotted hyena of the Namib Desert. The study aims are to identify population dynamics, prey preferences and spatial ecology. These findings are used to refine conflict mitigation methods between carnivores and local farmers. Research volunteers at Kanaan may be involved with mapping the terrain, assisting with capture and releases, tracking, game counts, horse back game counts, camera trap placement and analysis, maintenance and security on the reserve, cheetah feeds and landscape conservation. Night drives and sleep-outs are an irreplaceable experience. During free-time, sundowners amidst the beauty of the Namib Desert and sandboarding are definite highlights.

Game Count Herbivores of all sizes are an integral part of African ecosystems and it is critical to understand local ungulate population dynamics and migrations to ensure sufficient water supply and to avoid ecosystem damage from overgrazing. Kanaan is home to large herds of migratory and desert-adapted oryx (gemsbok) and springbok and also lesser known species such as the greater kudu or klipspringer. Here in the vast Namib Desert, volunteers will participate in regular game counts on either horseback or by vehicle.



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Mapping - Mapping means quality time in this fantastic environment whilst collecting information on a variety of features and resources. We'll use a GPS unit to map anything from important wildlife observations to habitat features. A lot of the mapping will be undertaken on foot and encounters with different species of wildlife are guaranteed.

Capture Mark Release To understand how wildlife utilise the reserve and how they interact in a challenging and demanding environment requires indirect monitoring techniques such as GPS satellite tracking. For particularly secretive species like cheetah and hyena, GPS collars are a good way of gathering important information. We will identify areas of regular activity (dens, riverbeds or marking trees for example) and place "trap cages". When a species of interest is captured, the animal will be immobilised on-site and fitted with a suitable GPS for continued monitoring. After release, the work continues at the computer, following the satellite information from study animals.

Radio Telemetry Tracking Collaring animals with GPS trackers to follow their day-to-day movements is only one piece of the puzzle though. Remote satellite tracking does not tell us much about the breeding success, prey selection, health status or other important ecological parameters of a study animal. Direct observations are necessary to evaluate these suitably and therefore the team go into the field to track collared individuals and make direct assessments. The animals are found by way of radio telemetry which means locating the radio transmitter in each collar with an antenna and receiver. Days in the field can be long and warm, and plenty of walking is often required, but the rewards of finding wildlife in the desert and collecting meaningful information at the same time are unrivalled.

Camera Traps We also rely on additional "eyes" to properly monitor wildlife populations and these come in the form of motion-triggered camera traps. These cameras are non-invasive, record 24/7 and often give us access to interesting behavioural data that we would otherwise not be aware of. The cameras capture information on all wildlife that pass in front of them, be they carnivores, herbivores, birds or other species. This helps researchers make a range of assessments and is especially valuable for shy or nocturnal animals. Volunteers will help set and maintain cameras in the field and will also go through the abundance of images collected, helping assess and structure the recorded data.

Maintenance Work on a wildlife reserve does not end with science and research, though. For the ecosystem to function adequately several maintenance activities are compulsory, especially in very dry areas like Kanaan. As part of environmental rehabilitation volunteers will also be involved in projects such as fence removal. Volunteers will participate in the operational aspects of the reserve and should be prepared to get their hands dirty and contribute to maintenance as their capabilities allow.

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Other Activities One of the must-do activities in the Namib Desert is the sundowner. Enjoy the tranquillity and breath-taking scenery of the Namib when the sun sets and paints the desert in unimaginable colours. We may undertake night drives or sleep-outs as part of our security protocol, but also to observe some of the nocturnal desert wildlife. While you are here, make sure you sit back and let your mind wander away from the buzz of civilization – Kanaan is the ideal place for relaxation. The Namib night sky with its ever-prominent Milky Way is a highlight not to be missed.

Cheetah Feed Kanaan is home to two rescued cheetah who are now semi-habituated and the lucky residents of a 7 hectare enclosure on the red dunes of Kanaan. Volunteers may be involved in the food preparation, feeding and care taking of these cheetah, as well as enclosure cleanings. Caring for the cheetah is a vital aspect of the Kanaan program as we are dedicated to providing the best possible life for these former victims of human-wildlife conflict. Seeing the cheetah up close with Kanaan's stunning desert scenery as a backdrop is a truly inspiring experience !



Accommodation You will be staying in the beautifully renovated 5-bedroom farmhouse - rooms are shared and each has an en-suite bathroom. All meals are included and there is a lovely pool for regular cool-off swims.

A 7-night upgrade to one of our luxury chalets is available here for +\$280 per person twin-share or +\$350 single.

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