earthwatch expeditions
by Nat Hab

Explore with Purpose



Sustaining Elephants in South Africa

Assist with Collaring Elephants & Help Scientists Monitor & Study the Herds

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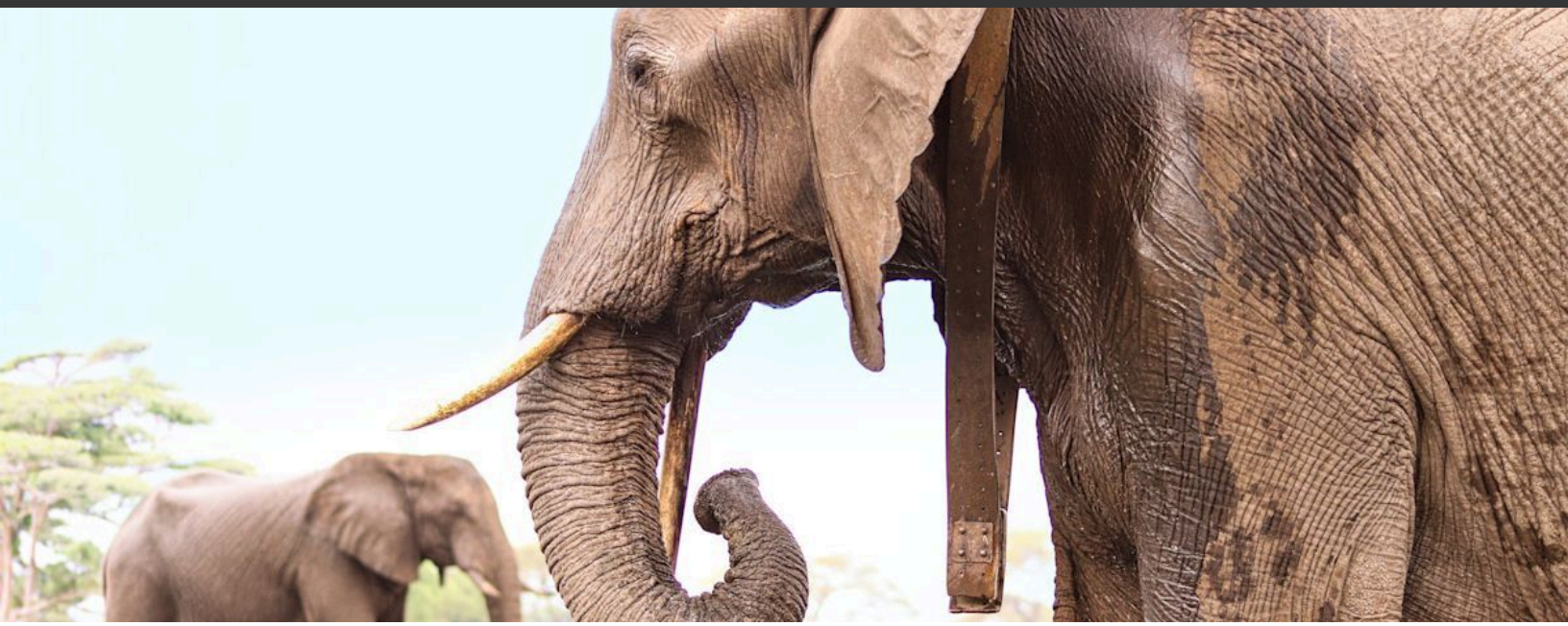
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Trip Details:

Days
11 Days / Apr–Oct

Price
From $22394 (+Air)

Sustaining Elephants in South Africa

Assist with Collaring Elephants & Help Scientists Monitor & Study the Herds

Spend hours with wild elephant herds in South Africa's legendary Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, watching calves trail their mothers, bulls roam the savanna and family groups gather. As you get to know these animals, subtle differences emerge: The shape of an ear, a scar or the curve of a tusk can reveal an elephant's identity. With wildlife researchers, photograph and track individual animals, use thermal cameras and rangefinders, and uncover the relationships that connect these extraordinary giants.

From Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's wooded savannas to the sweeping landscapes of the Greater Kruger Ecosystem, search for lions, leopards, rhinos, buffalo and other iconic wildlife on classic African safaris. There, you'll also have a rare opportunity to witness an elephant collaring and assist wildlife veterinarians, helping reserve managers track herd movements and reduce conflict between elephants and nearby communities.

Expedition Highlights

Get to Know South Africa's Wild Elephants

Spend hours observing elephant families in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, learning to recognize individuals by their ears, tusks and scars. Photograph these distinctive features, record interactions between mothers and calves, and help researchers piece together the lives of elephants across generations.

Assist With an Elephant Collaring

Venture into the Greater Kruger Ecosystem for a rare behind-the-scenes wildlife encounter. Watch veterinarians fit an elephant with a tracking collar and help with essential tasks right alongside them, from monitoring vital signs to keeping the animal cool, as conditions allow.

Search for Africa's Big Five

Explore two of South Africa's celebrated wildlife regions on safari, from Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's wooded savannas to the Greater Kruger Ecosystem. Watch for lions, leopards, rhinos and buffalo alongside the elephants, with opportunities to encounter giraffes and other iconic African wildlife.

Research at a Glance



The Research Focus

Investigate how elephants use Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park by identifying individuals, documenting family relationships and tracking behavior and habitat use. Help researchers test new ways to recognize elephants using their unique physical features.



What You'll Do

Spend hours observing elephant herds from safari vehicles. Photograph distinctive ears, tusks and scars, record calf interactions and social behavior, and use thermal cameras, rangefinders and GPS to collect detailed field observations.



Why It Matters

Following individual elephants reveals how family groups interact, where they travel and which habitats they favor. These records help wildlife managers make targeted decisions about elephant populations and their protection.

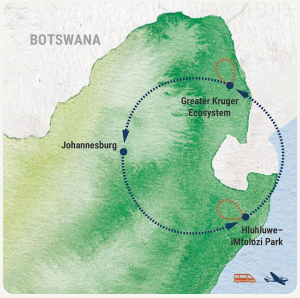


Sustaining Elephants in South Africa Itinerary

Assist with Collaring Elephants & Help Scientists Monitor & Study the Herds

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	JOHANNESBURG
Days 2–3	JOHANNESBURG / HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK
Days 4–7	HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK
Day 8	HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK / GREATER KRUGER
Days 9–10	GREATER KRUGER
Day 11	GREATER KRUGER / JOHANNESBURG



Day 1

JOHANNESBURG

Meet Your Fellow Explorers in Johannesburg

- Arrive in Johannesburg and transfer to your nearby hotel
- Meet your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers
- Gather for a welcome dinner and introduction to the expedition

Arrive at Johannesburg's international airport in South Africa's largest city, the gateway to your wildlife adventure, and transfer to your nearby hotel.

This evening you'll meet your Expedition Leader and the five fellow travelers joining you on this 11-day adventure. Over a welcome dinner, get acquainted and look ahead to the extraordinary experiences awaiting you: long hours with wild elephant families, wildlife research in one of Africa's oldest protected areas and a rare chance to assist with an elephant collaring.

Days
2–3

JOHANNESBURG / HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK

Enter the Wilds of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi

- Fly to Richards Bay and continue overland to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park
- Set out on your first game drive, then begin observing elephant families with researchers
- Learn to identify individual elephants through photographs and distinctive markings

Fly from Johannesburg to Richards Bay, then travel into the heart of KwaZulu-Natal's wildlife country. Your destination is Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, a vast sweep of grasslands, wooded valleys and rolling hills that shelters elephants, rhinos, lions, buffalo and a remarkable diversity of other wildlife.

After arriving at Hilltop Camp, head into the bush on your first game drive. Watch for giraffes browsing above the treetops, white rhinos grazing in the open and elephants appearing along the tracks. Tomorrow, you'll begin looking beyond the herd, learning to recognize the animals you encounter as individuals.

The next day, head out early with researchers to search for elephant families, sometimes using tracking information from GPS-collared elephants to help locate them. Once you find a herd, settle in for an extended observation. Rather than moving on after a few photographs, you may spend two or three hours watching the same elephants. Follow a calf as it stays close to its mother, notice how adults respond to one another and watch the group change as individuals feed, rest and travel.

Learn to distinguish one elephant from another by studying the curve of a tusk, a notch in an ear or a distinctive scar. Take standardized photographs of these features, building a visual record that may help scientists recognize the same elephant years later.

You'll also begin documenting herd composition, calf relationships and social behavior. Use rangefinders, thermal cameras and GPS to record observations alongside habitat and weather conditions. These details contribute to a growing database of individual elephants and support an emerging AI-assisted identification system.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-548-7555

Days 4–7

HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK

Get to Know the Elephants of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi

- Track and photograph elephant families in different sections of the park
- Document herd composition, calf relationships and social behavior using field equipment
- Explore varied savanna habitats in search of elephants, white rhinos, giraffes and other wildlife

Your elephant research continues with another morning in the field from Hilltop Camp. Return to the savanna to observe elephant families, photograph recognizable individuals and record their movements and interactions. With more time spent watching the same herds, you'll begin to notice details that might escape a passing safari vehicle: a calf's position within the group, the way adults respond to one another or how individuals separate and reunite while feeding.

That evening, transfer to Hlatikulu Bush Lodge, your base for the remainder of your time in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. From here, continue exploring another section of the reserve, searching grasslands and wooded valleys for elephant herds.

The research methods remain the same, but each encounter brings new animals and observations. Study tusk shapes, ear markings and scars to identify individual elephants, then photograph their distinctive features. Record group size, calf relationships and social interactions, using rangefinders, thermal cameras and GPS to document your observations.

Pay attention to where elephants travel, feed and gather, noting habitat and weather conditions as you go. Together, these records help researchers investigate the movements, relationships and habitat preferences of a large population they are still working to understand. Your photographs also contribute to the growing visual database that may allow scientists to recognize individual elephants across successive years.

Research outings bring opportunities to encounter Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's wider wildlife. Watch for white rhinos grazing in open areas, giraffes browsing among the trees and zebras or antelope crossing the grasslands. Each drive offers a different perspective on the park's varied habitats and the animals that share them.

Between field sessions, enjoy the atmosphere of Hlatikulu Bush Lodge, watch for wildlife from observation areas and compare sightings and discoveries with your small group over dinner. By the end of your time in the park, you'll have contributed detailed observations that can help researchers make more precise decisions about managing and protecting its elephants.

Day 8

HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK / GREATER KRUGER

Journey Deeper into South Africa's Wild Country

- Depart Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and travel to Richards Bay
- Fly to the Greater Kruger Ecosystem for the second phase of your expedition
- Arrive at your safari lodge near the elephant collaring operation

Depart Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and travel to Richards Bay, where you'll board a flight to the Greater Kruger Ecosystem for the next phase of your elephant research expedition.

Here, the focus shifts from identifying individual elephants and documenting their social lives to understanding where herds travel. You'll learn how wildlife veterinarians and reserve managers use GPS collars to follow elephant movements, particularly when animals approach the boundaries of protected areas.

Your lodge provides a comfortable base close to the collaring activities, with opportunities to watch for wildlife in the surrounding bush. Ahead lies one of the expedition's most unusual experiences: seeing a wildlife veterinary team at work with an elephant.

Days 9–10

GREATER KRUGER

Go Behind the Scenes of an Elephant Collaring

- Assist wildlife veterinarians with supportive tasks during an elephant collaring
- Discover how GPS tracking helps reserve managers monitor herds and reduce human-wildlife conflict
- Search for Africa's Big Five on safari drives through the Greater Kruger region

Join a wildlife veterinary team in the field for a rare, firsthand look at an elephant collaring operation. This is no ordinary safari encounter: You'll see the care, coordination and precision involved as the team fits one of Africa's largest land mammals with a GPS tracking collar.

Depending on conditions and the needs of the veterinary team, you may assist with essential tasks such as monitoring vital signs and oxygen levels, taking measurements or helping keep the elephant cool during the procedure. It's a chance to contribute directly to a specialized wildlife operation while gaining a new appreciation for the expertise involved.

The collar will allow reserve managers to follow the elephant's movements and better understand where its herd travels. That information can help them respond when elephants approach or leave protected areas, reducing the risk of conflict with nearby communities.

The rest of your time in the Greater Kruger region brings a different kind of excitement. Head out on traditional safari drives, scanning the bushveld for lions, leopards, rhinos and buffalo, as well as elephants and other wildlife. Back at the lodge, enjoy the comfort of your surroundings and the chance to reflect on a wildlife experience few travelers ever witness.

Day 11

GREATER KRUGER / JOHANNESBURG

Return Home with a New Perspective on Elephants

- Fly from the Greater Kruger region back to Johannesburg
- Say farewell to your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers
- Connect with your international flight home

Your South African adventure comes to a close today, but you'll leave with memories of watching elephant families roam the savanna, learning to recognize individual animals and witnessing a rare elephant collaring operation alongside wildlife veterinarians.

Bid farewell to the Greater Kruger Ecosystem and fly to Johannesburg for your connecting flights home.



Sustaining Elephants in South Africa Accommodations

Assist with Collaring Elephants & Help Scientists Monitor & Study the Herds



Hilltop Camp

This safari camp sits on a forested ridge overlooking Zululand hills and river valleys, with abundant wildlife, sweeping park views and a nature trail winding through nearby bush.



Hlatikulu Bush Lodge

Perched above the Black Mfolozi River, this remote thatched-roof lodge features unfenced wilderness, river boardwalk, and immersion in the habitats of rhinos, giraffes, lions, cheetahs, elephants, and waterfowl.



Mjejane River Lodge

Overlooking the Crocodile River and Kruger National Park's bushveld, this relaxed safari lodge offers riverside wildlife viewing, an infinity pool and open-air dining beneath the stars.



Fairlawns Boutique Hotel

This tranquil sanctuary in the Johannesburg suburb of Sandton is near the international airport, yet a world apart, with luxury suites set among lush gardens that evoke traditional European ambience.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/south-africa-elephant-conservation-research-travel/accommodations.

Meet the Scientists

Sustaining Elephants in South Africa

Meet Your Lead Scientists



Elizabeth le Roux, Ph.D.

Park Ecologist, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, South Africa

Large Mammal Ecology, South Africa



Siphesihle "Sphe" Mbongwa, MSc, PGDPM

Control Technician and Acting Park Ecologist, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, South Africa

Wildlife Monitoring, South Africa

Discovery in the Field

Sustaining Elephants in South Africa

1. **Spend Hours with Wild Elephant Herds**
   Follow elephant families through Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, watching calves, mothers and bulls as their daily routines unfold across the savanna

2. **Learn to Recognize Individual Elephants**
   Look beyond the herd to identify elephants by the shape of their ears, the curve of their tusks and distinctive scars, building a deeper connection to the animals you encounter

3. **Capture Clues with Field Research Tools**
   Use cameras, rangefinders and GPS to document elephant behavior, locations and family relationships, contributing observations to a growing database of individual animals

4. **Experience the Rhythm of an African Safari**
   Set out on early morning drives, scan wooded hillsides for movement and watch the savanna come alive with wildlife beyond the elephant herds you're studying

5. **Explore Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's Wild Landscapes**
   Discover wooded savannas, open grasslands and rolling hills in Africa's oldest formally protected area, where elephant research unfolds amid a diversity of wildlife

6. **Discover the Science Behind Elephant Families**
   Observe how mothers, calves and other herd members interact, helping researchers build individual life histories and understand the bonds that connect elephant families

7. **Witness Wildlife Tracking Technology in Action**
   Observe an elephant collaring with wildlife veterinarians, assist with supportive tasks as conditions allow and discover how GPS collars and emerging AI identification methods help researchers follow individual elephants

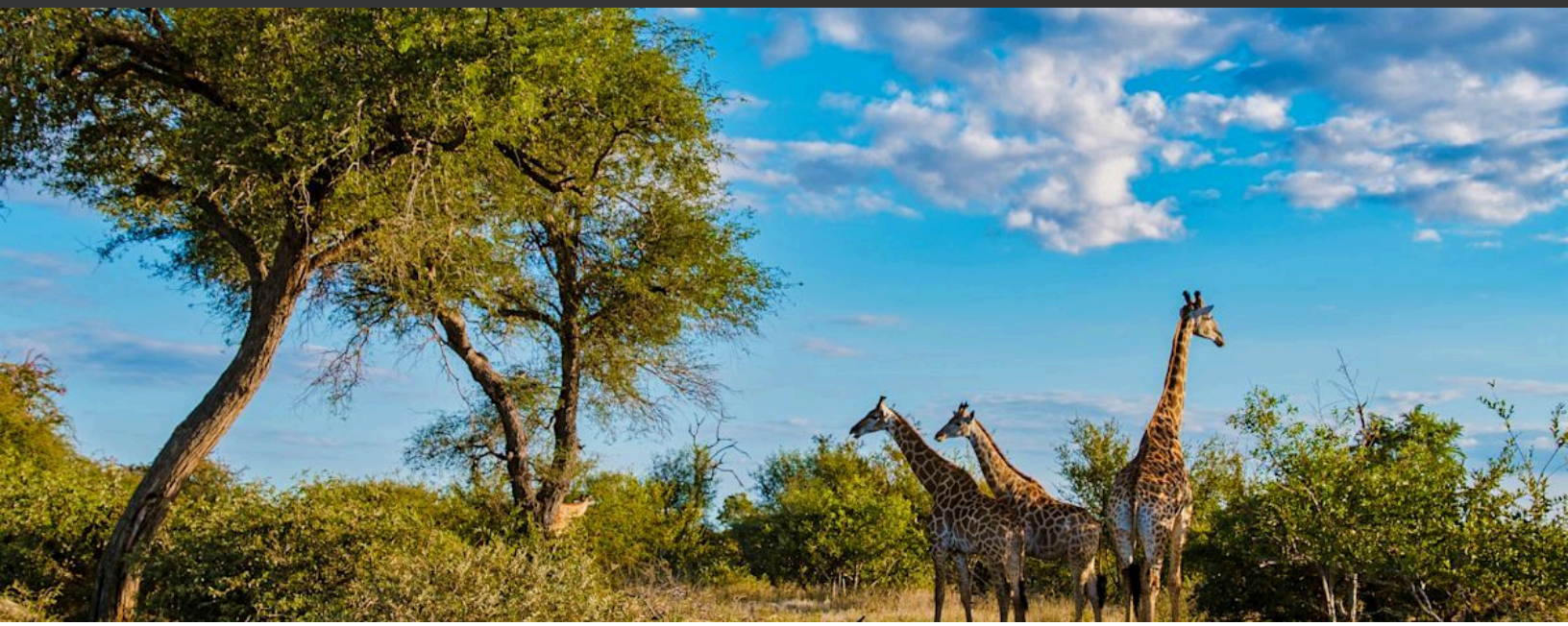
8. **Wake Up in the Heart of Elephant Country**
   Stay at safari lodges within Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, where observation decks offer opportunities to watch passing wildlife, then continue to a comfortable lodge in the Greater Kruger Ecosystem with private bush stands and easy access to the collaring operation

9. **Travel with an Experienced Expedition Leader**
   Benefit from the guidance of an Expedition Leader who helps connect the wildlife encounters, research activities and daily discoveries throughout your journey

10

Join a Group of Just Six Guests

Travel with no more than six like-minded guests, allowing more time and flexibility for field observations, questions and conversations while building connections with fellow travelers and researchers through shared discoveries



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $22394 (+Air)

Group Size
Limited to 6 Travelers

Sustaining Elephants in South Africa Dates, Pricing & Info

Assist with Collaring Elephants & Help Scientists Monitor & Study the Herds

2027 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2027		
Aug 15 - Aug 25, 2027	**From $22394** +internal air	
Sep 5 - Sep 15, 2027	**From $22394** +internal air	

2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028		
Apr 30 - May 10, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	
May 21 - May 31, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	
Jun 11 - Jun 21, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	

Departure – Return Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028	Pricing	Notes
Jul 2 - Jul 12, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	
Jul 23 - Aug 2, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	
Aug 13 - Aug 23, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	
Sep 3 - Sep 13, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	
Sep 24 - Oct 4, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	
Oct 15 - Oct 25, 2028	**From $22394** +internal air	

See https://www.nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/south-africa-elephant-conservation-research-travel/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Accommodations, services of Earthwatch Expeditions' professional Expedition Leaders, research staff, equipment and permitting, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on final day, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and final day, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Flight from Johannesburg to Richard’s Bay will be included.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests. We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes a **minimum of $250,000** in medical evacuation coverage.

To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel insurance policies we offer by calling 800-548-7555.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins and ends in Johannesburg, South Africa. Because this is a long international journey, **we recommend that you arrive at least one night prior to Day 1** to rest from your travels and begin the trip refreshed. For guests who come in early, recommended hotels will be included in your pre-departure materials. You must arrive in Johannesburg by 5 pm on Day 1 in order to attend the 6:30 pm welcome dinner.

You may depart Johannesburg anytime after 6 pm on the final day.

Our Earthwatch Expeditions Travel Desk can best assist with your travel reservations, as our staff is familiar with the specific requirements of this program and can help arrange the most efficient itinerary. Please call us at 800-543-8917. While we offer the best available rates to us on airfare and additional nights' accommodations, you may occasionally find special web rates or lower fares online.



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