earthwatch expeditions
by Nat Hab

Explore with Purpose



Walking with Wildlife in South Africa

On Foot with Rangers, Record Animal Sightings to Support Predator-Prey Research

Table of Contents

Trip Overview 3

Itinerary 5

Accommodations 8

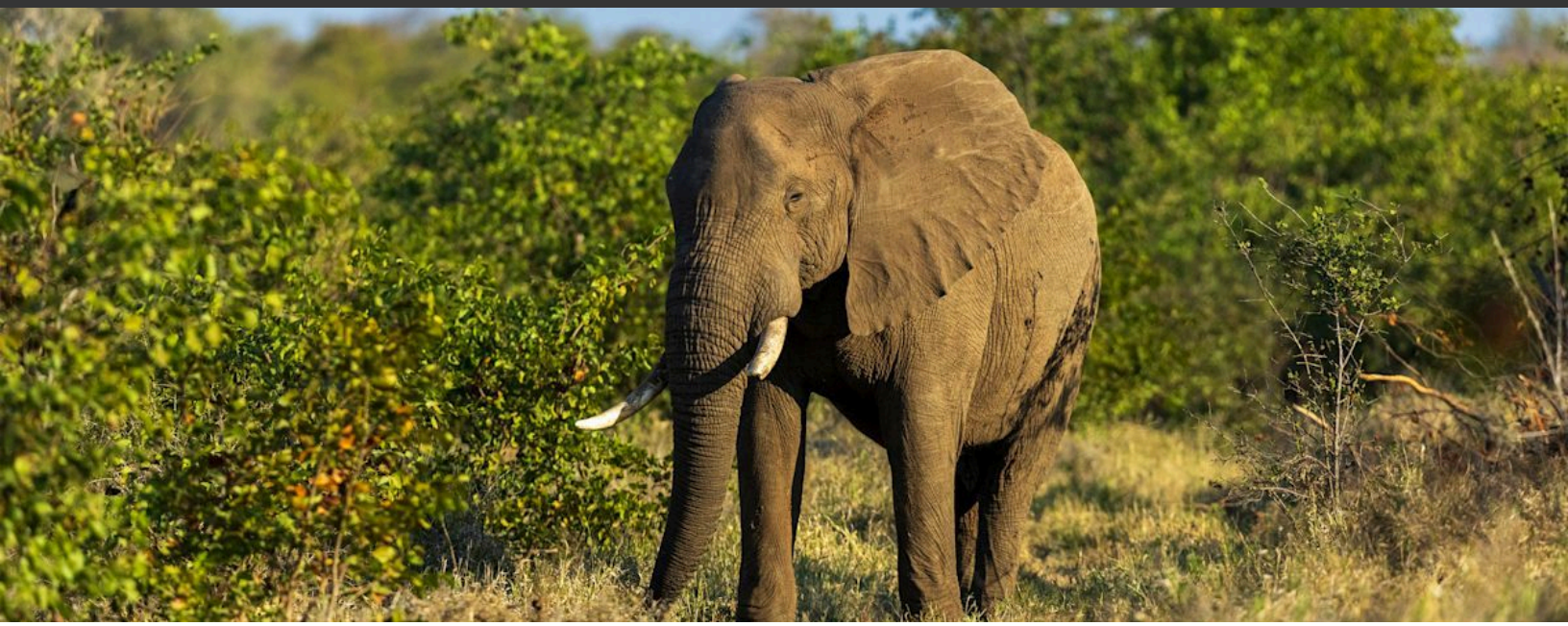
Meet the Scientists 10

Research & Impact 11

Discovery in the Field 13

Dates, Pricing & Info 14

Know Before You Go 17



Trip Details:

Days
13 Days / Jun–Aug

Price
From $17988 (+Air)

Walking with Wildlife in South Africa

On Foot with Rangers, Record Animal Sightings to Support Predator-Prey Research

Africa's oldest game reserve, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park is a landmark of rhino conservation, renowned for helping bring the southern white rhino back from the brink of extinction. Today, this storied South African wilderness remains an important stronghold for endangered black rhinos, sheltering both rhino species alongside elephants, buffalo and giraffes. Lions, leopards, cheetahs, spotted hyenas and endangered African wild dogs also roam the reserve, making it one of the continent's most compelling wildlife destinations.

Experience the park from every angle, venturing out on foot with your own dedicated armed field ranger and heading deeper into Big Five country on safari drives. Follow routes closed to regular visitors, read tracks and watch for wildlife among rolling grasslands, wooded hills and river valleys. When animals appear, observe their behavior and record sightings for the park's long-running wildlife census. Here, you're not just watching wildlife from a distance—you're helping researchers understand the animals you've come to see.

Expedition Highlights

Explore Big Five Country on Foot

Enter the bush with expert field rangers, following tracks, listening for animal calls and watching for wildlife ahead. Traveling at ground level heightens your awareness of every sign and sound as you learn to read the same clues your rangers use in the field.

Search for Rhinos, Elephants & Predators

Discover Hluhluwe-iMfolozi on foot and by safari vehicle, looking for white and black rhinos, elephants, giraffes, buffalo and zebra. Keep watch for lions, leopards, cheetahs, spotted hyenas and endangered African wild dogs as you travel through one of South Africa's richest wildlife areas.

Venture Beyond the Usual Safari Routes

Follow research routes into sections of the park closed to regular visitors, exploring grasslands, thornveld, forest patches and river valleys far from the usual safari circuit. Traveling these routes on foot gives you access to parts of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi few visitors experience.

Research at a Glance



The Research Focus

Track wildlife across Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, from rhinos and antelope to lions and other predators, helping researchers understand population trends and how animals use the landscape.



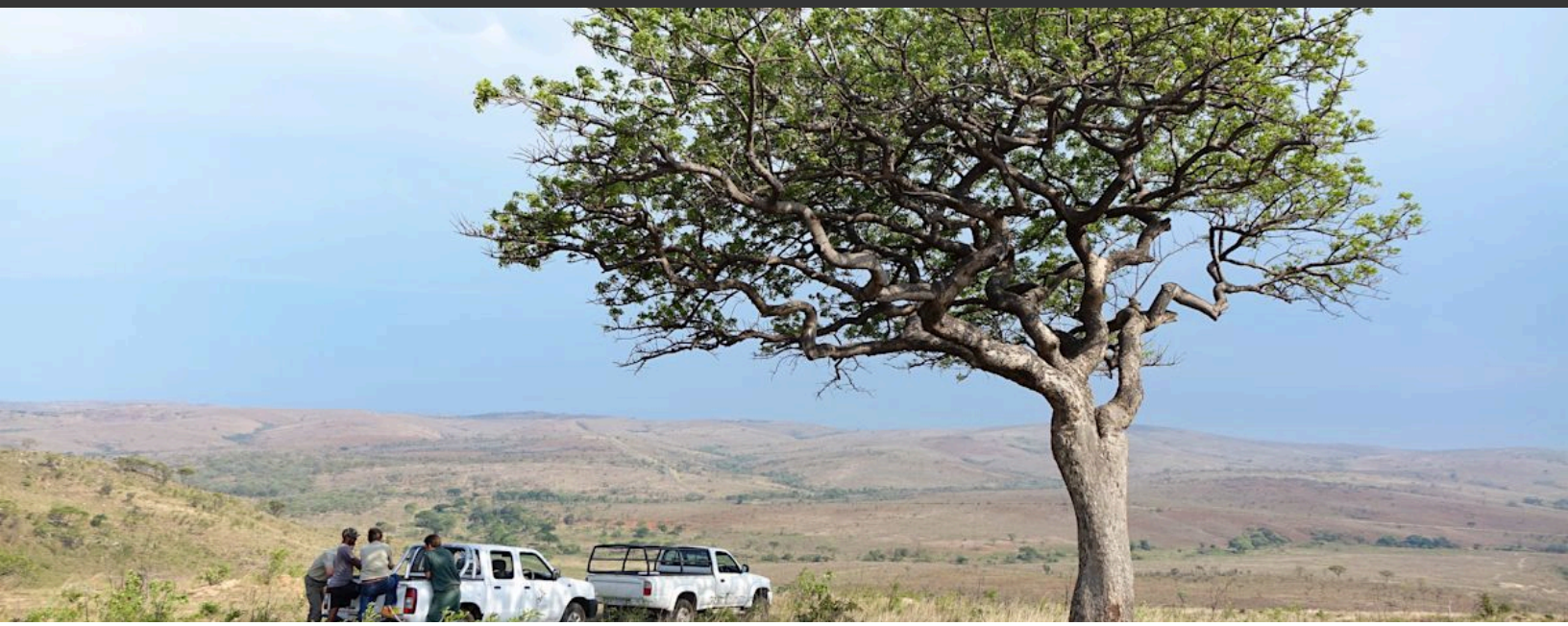
What You'll Do

Travel remote survey routes on foot, identifying wildlife and recording species, herd size, behavior and location, along with vegetation and weather conditions at each sighting.



Why It Matters

Your observations contribute to the park's wildlife census, helping ecologists monitor endangered black rhinos and other mega herbivores, understand predator-prey relationships and make wildlife management decisions.

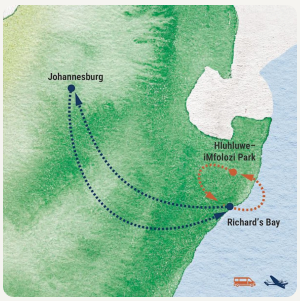


Walking with Wildlife in South Africa Itinerary

On Foot with Rangers, Record Animal Sightings to Support Predator-Prey Research

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Johannesburg
Day 2	JOHANNESBURG / RICHARDS BAY / HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK
Days 3–4	HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK
Days 5–12	HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK
Day 13	Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Parek / Johannesburg



Day 1

Johannesburg

Gather in Johannesburg before your wildlife research expedition

- Meet your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers over a welcome dinner
- Learn about Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's rhino conservation history and the wildlife surveys you'll join in the days ahead

Arrive in Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city, set on the high-altitude plateau known as the Highveld.

Once the center of the country's gold rush, Johannesburg is now a bustling metropolis and a gateway to some of southern Africa's most celebrated wildlife destinations. Your journey begins here before heading east to KwaZulu-Natal, home to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. There, Africa's oldest game reserve played a pivotal role in bringing the southern white rhino back from the brink of extinction. Today, its grasslands, wooded hills and river valleys shelter both white and black rhinos, elephants, buffalo, giraffes and predators including lions, leopards and endangered African wild dogs. In the days ahead, you'll explore wildlife research routes closed to regular visitors, searching for animals, interpreting tracks and contributing observations to the park's official wildlife census.

Tonight, meet your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers over a welcome dinner, with a briefing on the journey ahead.

Day 2

JOHANNESBURG / RICHARDS BAY / HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK

Journey into Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's rhino country

- Fly from Johannesburg to Richards Bay, then travel into Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park
- Discover the reserve's pioneering rhino conservation history at the game capture museum and visit wildlife holding enclosures known as bomas.
- Meet the research team and enjoy dinner at Hilltop Restaurant overlooking the wilderness

This morning, fly from Johannesburg to Richards Bay on South Africa's eastern coast, then continue by road into Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. The journey takes us into KwaZulu-Natal's rolling hills and savanna.

Established in 1895, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi became a center for pioneering rhino conservation efforts that helped restore southern white rhino populations. Today, the reserve remains an important stronghold for endangered black rhinos, alongside elephants, buffalo, giraffes and an array of predators.

Visit the game capture museum to learn about the park's pioneering wildlife relocation efforts, then see the bomas, enclosed areas used to temporarily hold animals during capture and relocation operations. You'll also meet the research team and discover how the observations you'll gather on foot contribute to the park's long-running wildlife census.

Dinner tonight is at Hilltop Restaurant, overlooking the reserve's wooded hills and valleys. Tomorrow, you'll begin learning the skills needed to explore this wildlife-rich landscape on foot.

Days 3–4

HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK

Discover the skills of a wildlife tracker

- Learn essential bush safety protocols from experienced field rangers before heading out on wildlife surveys
- Sharpen your wildlife identification skills, recognizing animals by their tracks, signs and behavior
- Practice using GPS units and rangefinders to document wildlife sightings for the park's census

Spend two days preparing to explore Big Five habitat on foot. Experienced field rangers introduce essential bush safety protocols, including how to respond to encounters with elephants, rhinos, buffalo and large predators.

Develop your wildlife identification skills, recognizing animals by their appearance, tracks and behavior. Practice scanning the vegetation for movement and interpreting signs that reveal which animals have passed through.

You'll also train with GPS units, rangefinders that measure the distance to wildlife and other research equipment, learning how to document sightings for the park's official census. By the end of your training, you'll be ready to put these skills to work on the research transects ahead.

Days
5–12

HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK

Walk restricted research routes through big five country

- Explore research transects closed to regular visitors, accompanied one-on-one by an experienced field ranger
- Search for rhinos, elephants, buffalo and elusive predators on foot, recording sightings for the park's official wildlife census
- Enjoy afternoon and evening game drives, sundowners and time to take in the reserve's wildlife-rich landscapes

Over the next eight days, venture into the bush one-on-one with an experienced field ranger, following research transects—designated wildlife survey routes—inaccessible to regular visitors. Travel through Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's grasslands, thornveld and river valleys, scanning for movement, listening for animal calls and reading tracks along the way. Look for white and black rhinos, elephants, buffalo, giraffes, zebras and antelope, keeping watch for lions, leopards, cheetahs, spotted hyenas and endangered African wild dogs.

When wildlife appears, identify the species, count individuals and observe their behavior. Use GPS equipment and a rangefinder to record each sighting's location and distance, along with vegetation and weather conditions. Your observations contribute to the park's official wildlife census, helping ecologists monitor populations and understand how animals use different habitats.

Mornings are devoted to wildlife surveys on foot, while afternoons and evenings bring guided game drives and sundowners. Depending on the day's plans, you may also explore additional hiking routes or visit scenic viewpoints. During the dry winter season, thinner vegetation improves visibility, while animals gathering near permanent water sources offer excellent opportunities to watch and photograph them.

Your two camps offer very different perspectives on life inside the reserve. At Hilltop Camp, take in sweeping views over the Black Umfolozi River valley, where nyala, warthogs and bushbuck are often seen nearby. At secluded, unfenced Gqoyeni Bush Lodge, reserved for your group, elephants, buffalo and other wildlife may wander close to camp.

Between surveys, discuss your observations with the research team and enter field data. On your final evening in the park, enjoy a farewell dinner with your fellow travelers.

A Note About Your Itinerary
To maintain small groups and an intimate research experience, departures follow one of two routes through Hluhluwe-iMfolozi. Both include stays at Hilltop Camp and Gqoyeni Bush Lodge, along with the same research activities and wildlife experiences. The only difference is the order in which the camps are visited.

Day
13

Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Parek / Johannesburg

Depart Hluhluwe-iMfolozi and return to Johannesburg

- Enjoy a final breakfast in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park before departing the reserve
- Travel to Richards Bay for your return flight to Johannesburg and onward connections home

After breakfast, bid farewell to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and the rangers and researchers who have guided your time in the field. Travel by road to Richards Bay for your flight to Johannesburg, where you'll connect with your flights home.



Walking with Wildlife in South Africa Accommodations

On Foot with Rangers, Record Animal Sightings to Support Predator-Prey Research



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.



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.



Gqoyeni Bush Lodge

This remote, unfenced bush lodge features reed-and-thatch rooms linked by elevated boardwalks, overlooking the Black Mfolozi River where elephants, rhinos and other wildlife come to drink.

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

Meet the Scientists

Walking with Wildlife in South Africa

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

Research & Impact

Walking with Wildlife in South Africa

In South Africa's Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, leave the safari vehicle behind and enter Big Five habitat on foot, with a dedicated field ranger by your side. Follow research transects closed to regular visitors as you search grasslands, wooded hills and thornveld for rhinos, elephants, buffalo, antelope and elusive predators. Every sighting is a chance to look closer, record what you see and contribute to the park's official wildlife census. Here, in a reserve that helped save the southern white rhino from near-extinction, your observations become part of a continuing conservation story and inform species and landscape management within the park.

Research Focus

Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park helped bring the southern white rhino back from the brink of extinction. Today, it remains an important stronghold for endangered black rhinos, while its ongoing wildlife research helps ecologists understand and manage the many species that call the reserve home.

The park's long-running wildlife census tracks the numbers and distribution of rhinos, elephants, buffalo, antelope and other species. Repeated surveys help ecologists identify population trends, investigate predator-prey relationships and assess how many animals the reserve can support. The findings inform wildlife management decisions, including potential animal translocations.

Conservation Impact

Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's biennial wildlife census provides a long-term record of the reserve's animal populations. By comparing surveys across years, park ecologists can detect changes, assess factors that might be influencing those changes, monitor endangered species and assess options for managing wildlife.

- **Long-term population data** on rhinos, elephants, buffalo, antelope and other large mammals
- **Closer monitoring of endangered black rhinos**, including where they're sighted throughout the reserve
- Evidence to inform wildlife management, including **decisions about potential animal translocations**
- Insight into predator-prey relationships through **observations of carnivores, herbivores and their behavior**
- **A clearer picture of wildlife distribution** across grasslands, wooded hills and river valleys

Each new survey adds to a record that helps ecologists understand how wildlife populations are faring and what management actions may be needed.

Your Role in the Research

With your own experienced armed field ranger, walk quietly through the bush, alert to movement, animal calls and tracks in the vegetation. Unlike a conventional safari, you're here to observe wildlife systematically, gathering information that becomes part of a long-running scientific record.

When you spot wildlife, identify the species, count individuals and note their behavior. Measure the distance with a rangefinder, record the GPS location and document the surrounding habitat and weather. Back at camp, review your observations and enter the day's findings into the park's wildlife census database.

Life in the Field

Head into the field early, when temperatures are cooler and wildlife is often most active. Some mornings may bring a distant rhino or a herd of antelope. Others require hours of patient searching, listening and watching for movement as you follow a roughly cut route through the bush.

After returning to camp, compare observations, enter field data and discuss the day's discoveries. On selected afternoons, set out on guided game drives for another perspective on the reserve's wildlife, with opportunities for photography and sundowners. Each day brings a different combination of hard work, anticipation and unexpected encounters.

Field Conditions

This is an active expedition through Big Five habitat, with eight research days that may involve hiking up to 9 miles over roughly cut transects. Expect rocky ground, steep slopes, deep ravines, thorny vegetation and occasional river crossings. Good hiking fitness, balance and the ability to remain alert over long distances are essential.

Experienced armed field rangers lead the surveys, and guests must follow safety instructions immediately. July through September generally brings mild, dry conditions, with cool mornings and evenings. Wildlife activity, weather and research priorities may alter daily plans, so come prepared for both demanding terrain and the unexpected.

Discovery in the Field

Walking with Wildlife in South Africa

1 **Walk Where Rhinos, Elephants & Lions Roam**

Explore Big Five habitat on foot with your own dedicated armed field ranger, alert to tracks, animal calls and movement in the bush. With just six travelers, there's ample opportunity to ask questions, learn to interpret wildlife behavior and discover what makes this landscape extraordinary.

2 **Turn Wildlife Encounters Into Vital Data**

Spot a rhino on a distant hillside or come upon a herd of buffalo, giraffes or antelope, then take a closer look. Record species, herd size, location and behavior, adding each sighting to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi's official wildlife census.

3 **Search for Africa's Elusive Predators**

Scan the bush for lions, leopards, cheetahs, spotted hyenas and endangered African wild dogs, watching for tracks and other signs when the animals themselves stay hidden. Each clue adds to the anticipation—and your observations help researchers study predator-prey relationships within the park.

4 **Learn to Read the African Bush**

Train with field rangers to identify wildlife by appearance, tracks, signs and behavior, then put those skills to use each morning. Learn how to scan the terrain, spot subtle signs of wildlife and travel safely through habitat shared with large mammals and predators.

5 **Map Wildlife as You Find It**

When animals appear, pinpoint their location with GPS, measure their distance with a rangefinder and record details about the surrounding habitat. Combined with sightings gathered throughout the park, your observations help researchers track where wildlife is found and how populations change over time.

6 **Safari Through Rhino Country**

Set out by safari vehicle to cover more of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi, photographing wildlife among wooded hills, open grasslands and water sources. The dry winter season brings thinner vegetation and animals gathering near permanent water, creating prime conditions for searching out the park's rhinos, elephants, predators and herds.

7 **See Rhino Conservation Where History Was Made**

Search for white and black rhinos in a reserve renowned for helping save the southern white rhino from near-extinction. See how wildlife monitoring continues that legacy today, helping managers protect black rhinos and make decisions about the park's wildlife populations.

8 **Stay Deep Inside the Reserve**

Make Hluhluwe-iMfolozi your home, sleeping within the protected wilderness you explore each day. Take in sweeping views of the Black Umfolozi River valley from Hilltop Camp, then stay at secluded, unfenced Gqoyeni Bush Lodge, reserved for your group, with elephants, buffalo and other wildlife sometimes roaming nearby.



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $17988 (+Air)

Group Size
Limited to 6 Travelers

Walking with Wildlife in South Africa Dates, Pricing & Info

On Foot with Rangers, Record Animal Sightings to Support Predator-Prey Research

2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices not confirmed for 2028		
Jun 11 - Jun 23, 2028	**From $17988** +internal air	Natural Habitat Explorers Pricing Available
Jun 11 - Jun 23, 2028	**From $17988** +internal air	
Jun 27 - Jul 9, 2028	**From $17988** +internal air	
Jul 13 - Jul 25, 2028	**From $17988** +internal air	
Jul 29 - Aug 10, 2028	**From $17988** +internal air	
Aug 14 - Aug 26, 2028	**From $17988** +internal air	
Aug 30 - Sep 11, 2028	**From $17988** +internal air	

2030 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2030		
Jun 9 - Jun 21, 2030	**From $19682** +internal air	
Jun 25 - Jul 7, 2030	**From $19682** +internal air	
Jul 11 - Jul 23, 2030	**From $19682** +internal air	
Jul 27 - Aug 8, 2030	**From $19682** +internal air	
Aug 12 - Aug 24, 2030	**From $19682** +internal air	
Aug 28 - Sep 9, 2030	**From $19682** +internal air	

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

Included

Accommodations, services of Earthwatch Expeditions' professional Expedition Leaders, local guides and camp staff, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch 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.

Internal flight from Johannesburg to Richard’s Bay is 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 at least $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 Adventures Nat Hab Air Team 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 800-548-7555. 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.

Know Before You Go

Walking with Wildlife in South Africa

Whether you're preparing for your upcoming expedition or simply want to learn more about South Africa's wildlife and conservation efforts, these resources offer a closer look at the animals, habitats and research that make this journey unique. Discover the rhinos of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, learn how researchers track wildlife populations and explore what it takes to survey Africa's Big Five on foot.

Why Is Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park One of the Best Places in the World to Study African Wildlife?

In the rolling grasslands and wooded hills of South Africa's Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, white and black rhinos roam alongside elephants, buffalo and giraffes, while lions, leopards and other predators hunt among the thornveld and river valleys. Established in 1895, this is Africa's oldest game reserve and one of the continent's most important rhino conservation landscapes.

The park played a pivotal role in bringing the southern white rhino back from near-extinction and remains a stronghold for endangered black rhinos. Today, its long-running wildlife census helps ecologists monitor animal populations, investigate predator-prey relationships and understand how wildlife uses different habitats.

Participants join this research on foot, following restricted survey routes with experienced field rangers. By documenting animal sightings, herd sizes, behavior and habitat conditions, they contribute observations that help park managers make informed conservation decisions.

Quick Facts	
Location	Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Primary species	White and black rhinos, elephants, buffalo, antelope and large predators
Key activity	Walking wildlife surveys, GPS mapping and behavioral observations
Conservation focus	Wildlife population monitoring, endangered rhino conservation and predator-prey relationships

What Wildlife Will I See in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park?

Hluhluwe-iMfolozi is home to the Big Five—rhinos, elephants, buffalo, lions and leopards—along with numerous antelope species, other predators and birdlife. July through mid-September is an especially favorable time for wildlife viewing, when thinner vegetation and animals gathering near permanent water sources can make sightings easier.

Depending on habitat, weather and wildlife movements, you may encounter:

- **White and black rhinos**, with the park particularly renowned for its role in southern white rhino conservation
- **African elephants**, often seen near waterholes during the dry season
- **African buffalo**, sometimes gathering in large herds

- **Lions, leopards and spotted hyenas**, among the park's resident predators
- **African wild dogs**, endangered carnivores that are occasionally encountered
- **Giraffes, plains zebras and blue wildebeest**, grazing and browsing throughout the reserve
- **Nyala, greater kudu, impala, waterbuck and bushbuck**, among the park's many antelope species
- **Hippopotamuses and Nile crocodiles**, found in rivers and permanent water sources
- **Chacma baboons and vervet monkeys**, inhabiting woodland and savanna habitats
- **Martial eagles, bateleurs and African fish eagles**, among the reserve's birds of prey
- **Southern ground hornbills, lilac-breasted rollers and white-fronted bee-eaters**, among the region's distinctive birds

Cheetahs, servals and other elusive species also inhabit the park, though sightings are less predictable.

What Is the Climate Like During This Expedition?

Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park experiences mild, generally dry winter conditions in July and August, transitioning to warmer spring weather in September. Days are often comfortable for hiking, but early mornings and evenings can be chilly.

Period	What to Expect
July	Around **72°F during the day / 52°F at night**. Mild, dry winter weather with cool mornings and evenings. Average monthly rainfall is approximately **1.2 inches**.
August	Around **73°F during the day / 54°F at night**. Mostly dry conditions with gradually warming afternoons. Average monthly rainfall is approximately **1.8 inches**.
September	Around **75°F during the day / 57°F at night**. Warmer spring conditions with occasional showers or thunderstorms possible. Average monthly rainfall increases to approximately **2.6 inches**.
Overall Conditions	Generally dry winter weather, cool mornings and evenings and comfortable daytime temperatures. Rain becomes more likely as spring approaches.

Weather patterns vary from year to year, and temperatures can differ across the park's elevations. Participants should bring layers for cool mornings and evenings, lightweight clothing for active days and rain protection, particularly for September departures.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need previous research or wildlife tracking experience?

No previous scientific research or wildlife tracking experience is required. During the first two field days, experienced rangers introduce bush safety, wildlife identification and research techniques. You'll learn to recognize animal tracks and signs, use GPS units and rangefinders and document sightings accurately before beginning the main research surveys.

What type of research will I assist with?

You'll contribute to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park's official wildlife census by walking designated research transects and systematically recording animal sightings.

Research activities include identifying species, counting individuals and herd sizes, observing behavior, measuring distances with rangefinders and recording GPS locations. You'll also document vegetation and weather conditions to help ecologists understand how different animals use the reserve's habitats.

What is the conservation impact of this research?

The park's biennial wildlife census provides long-term data on wildlife populations and distribution. By comparing observations across survey periods, ecologists can monitor endangered black rhinos, identify population changes, investigate predator-prey relationships and assess how wildlife populations are responding to conditions within the reserve.

These findings help inform conservation management, including decisions about wildlife populations and potential animal translocations.

How physically demanding is the expedition?

This is a challenging expedition requiring strong hiking fitness and good balance. Participants may hike 6–9 miles per day over steep, rocky and uneven terrain, including dense thorny vegetation, deep ravines and occasional river crossings. Fieldwork typically lasts 5–7 hours, and participants must be able to follow ranger instructions immediately and move quickly if necessary during wildlife encounters.

Is it safe to conduct wildlife research on foot in Big Five habitat?

All walking surveys are accompanied by experienced armed field rangers trained in wildlife safety. Participants receive safety instruction before entering the field and must remain alert, stay close to their ranger and follow directions immediately. Wildlife encounters carry inherent risks, and participants must be physically capable of taking evasive action if necessary.

Can weather or wildlife activity affect research plans?

Yes. Wildlife movements, weather, terrain conditions and research priorities can influence daily activities. Survey routes or schedules may be adjusted by the research team and field rangers to maintain safety and support the project's research objectives.

What happens in case of an emergency?

Experienced field rangers and project staff oversee safety during research activities and respond to emergencies. Because the expedition takes place in a remote wildlife reserve with limited access to medical facilities, participants must follow emergency instructions immediately and carry the required medical evacuation insurance.

Do I need travel insurance?

Yes, medical evacuation insurance is mandatory for all participants. Comprehensive travel insurance is also strongly recommended to help protect against medical expenses, trip cancellations, travel delays and lost luggage.

What immunizations and travel vaccinations do I need?

Consult a travel medicine specialist or healthcare provider well before departure for current recommendations for South Africa. Requirements and recommendations may depend on your vaccination history, itinerary and individual health circumstances.

What Should I Pack for Walking with Wildlife in South Africa?

Pack for active days on foot in Big Five habitat, with warm afternoons, cool mornings and evenings and rough, sometimes thorny terrain. Comfortable, well-broken-in hiking footwear and clothing suitable for moving through dense vegetation are especially important.

Recommended items include:

- **Sturdy, broken-in hiking boots** with good traction and ankle support for uneven terrain
- **Lightweight, durable long pants and long-sleeved shirts** for protection from thorny vegetation and sun exposure
- **Warm layers**, including a fleece or jacket for chilly mornings and evenings
- **Sun protection**, including a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and sunscreen
- **A comfortable daypack** capable of carrying 2–3 liters of water and research equipment
- **Reusable water bottles or a hydration system** with sufficient capacity for fieldwork
- **Binoculars** for identifying wildlife at a distance
- **Personal medications and basic personal supplies**
- **Rain protection** for occasional showers, particularly during September departures

Participants receive a detailed packing list before departure, including any additional field equipment and clothing requirements.

What Will I Experience on Walking with Wildlife in South Africa?

Explore South Africa's Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park on foot, venturing into Big Five habitat with an experienced armed field ranger. Follow restricted research routes through grasslands, wooded hills and river valleys, searching for rhinos, elephants, buffalo, antelope and elusive predators.

Learn to identify wildlife by its tracks, signs and behavior, then put your skills to work conducting surveys for the park's long-running wildlife census. Record animal sightings, herd sizes and habitat conditions to help researchers monitor populations and understand predator-prey relationships.

Beyond fieldwork, enjoy guided safari drives and opportunities to photograph wildlife while learning about the park's pioneering rhino conservation efforts. Throughout the expedition, gain firsthand insight into how wildlife research informs conservation decisions in one of Africa's oldest game reserves.

What Does Daily Fieldwork Look Like?

Research days typically begin early, when temperatures are cooler and wildlife is often more active. After preparing your equipment, head into the bush with your assigned armed field ranger to follow designated wildlife survey transects.

Spend several hours walking through grasslands, wooded hills, thornveld and river valleys, scanning for animals and interpreting tracks and other signs of wildlife. When animals are encountered, identify the species, count individuals, observe behavior and record locations, distances, vegetation and weather conditions.

Back at camp, review observations, enter field data and discuss findings with the research team. Selected afternoons and evenings may include guided game drives, photography opportunities or time to relax before dinner. Daily activities remain flexible according to wildlife movements, weather, safety considerations and the research team's priorities.



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