

THE STORY OF



UMPHAFU
Private Nature Reserve

Since 2005, Colchester Zoo's Action for the Wild has been striving to develop the UmPhafa Private Nature Reserve in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Today, in the face of this immense challenge, the 6,000 hectare reserve is flourishing from the result of over a decade's hard work!

Looking through photos of UmPhafa at its first conception, it is barely recognisable from how it appears today. Lands littered with scrap steel and endless miles of barbed-wire fencing characterised the old cattle farms where the reserve now stands. Now, in the place of livestock, roam healthy populations of proud looking giraffe and majestic kudu. Impala nibble at the acacia trees and warthog graze carelessly on the lawns surrounding the old farmhouse. However, the immense task of rehabilitating the land to its natural condition, not to mention fencing the seemingly endless boundary, has seemed daunting at times. The process of re-balancing the natural order of species took a great deal of planning and a huge amount of time was spent monitoring every stage of the process.

The first animal releases took place in 2006 and continue to the present day, adding new bloodlines to resident populations. Each species has been carefully selected for the particular role that they play within the ecosystem in order to create conditions in which all animals live in a harmonious environment. Annual game counts have confirmed success in many species, such as zebra, ostrich and giraffe.

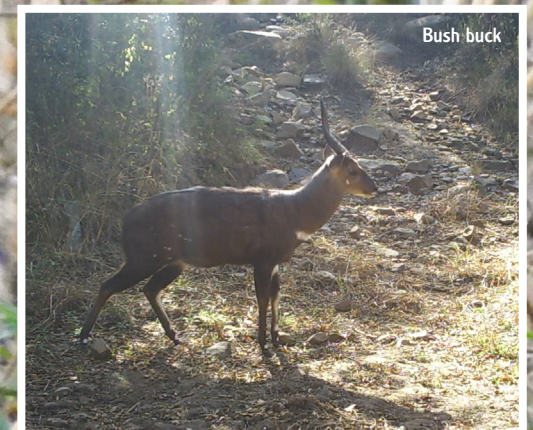
By June of 2013, many populations had swollen to capacity on the original release property and a specialist game capture team was brought in to assist with the translocation of some of these animals onto another portion of UmPhafa. Then finally in 2015, the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle fixed into place, when Sully Farm, a farm previously separating the reserve into two distinct areas, was purchased, and the reserve's fences could be dropped; enabling the wildlife species to naturally migrate across the whole 6,000ha reserve.



Research forms the underlying foundation for the operation of UmPhafa and regular surveys are undertaken by staff in order to monitor the habitat. Using funds raised by Action for the Wild, a number of camera traps have been purchased and surveys have been initiated in order to measure the population size of species and level of natural migration on to the reserve as conditions improve.

Camera traps allow close observation of even the most elusive of species and, over the years, the reappearance of bushbuck, steenbok, caracal and honey badger have all been recorded. Being particularly susceptible to habitat change, large carnivores are generally the first to be affected as conditions deteriorate, so the return of leopard to the area after years of absence was noted with a great amount of excitement and, by early 2013, staff were regularly recording signs of at least two individuals, with up to 12 individuals reported by 2019! Perhaps a lot more unexpected however was the arrival of spotted hyena. The characteristic whoop had been heard over a number of nights and eventually a camera trap photo confirmed its presence on the reserve.

Leopard



Collaboration with other conservation organisations is also a key conservation goal for UmPhafa, highlighted by the request to introduce African wild dogs into a managed boma on UmPhafa, an ongoing reserve project since 2013.

Our role to bond new packs for release onto larger reserves is a key part in the meta-population management practice for this endangered species.

Our first release in 2014



As the demand for more field data grew, the volunteer and research programme was established to assist with UmPhafa's projects.

Since UmPhafa initially opened its gates to this programme in 2010, over 300 enthusiastic individuals have visited the reserve, staying between 2 weeks to 3 months at a time. Each had the opportunity to experience the workings of the reserve first-hand and to contribute directly to conservation in South Africa.

This programme continues to grow in popularity, furthering the sustainability of UmPhafa's work in the future.

With all aspects of UmPhafa gaining serious momentum, the reserve has come a long way towards achieving its initial objectives, but the efforts continue in order to meet new challenges. Education goes hand in hand with any successful conservation project and plans to build on the current links with the local community are in the pipeline for the immediate future, with hopes to recruit the new generation of South Africans into the fight for conservation.

