



Conservation Internship Information Pack

Gain creditable work experience
and specific job-knowledge,
living and working side-by-side
with stunning African Wildlife.

'Work directly
alongside
UmPhafa
management
staff'

UMPHAFa RESERVE

The UmPhafa Nature Reserve, situated in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, is a 6,000 hectare reserve comprising five farms previously managed for cattle and encompasses a wide range of habitats, from acacia savannah and bushveld, to mountainous terrain. Due to previous agricultural practices, many of the natural inhabiting species have been lost.

Owned by Colchester Zoo SA, and managed by the UmPhafa Conservation Trust, the aim is to rehabilitate UmPhafa as an example of the region's previous natural condition. Although some mammal populations have remained and have thrived since the Reserve was established, many more species have been released and UmPhafa is now home to a wide range of fauna, including giraffe, kudu, impala, common reedbuck, mountain reedbuck, zebra, blesbok, red hartebeest, blue wildebeest, waterbuck, nyala, warthog, aardvark and porcupine - to name only some. Leopard and spotted hyena have more recently returned to the area naturally and are regularly recorded through camera trapping, tracking, and now frequently by sightings. Small to medium sized carnivores, such as black-backed jackal, caracal, serval, genet, and several species of mongoose, are also common, and cheetah were released onto the Reserve in 2025 as part of the meta population management for this species in South Africa.



w: www.umphafa.com e: wendy@colchesterzoo.org

THE INTERNSHIP

As an intern to UmPhafa's management, you will have an interesting, exciting and – overall – valuable time by playing a crucial role in the operation of the Reserve by helping to collect vital data necessary to make key management decisions. You will have the satisfaction of developing the necessary skills required to make in-roads into the field of conservation, whilst working closely with large animals and knowing that your contribution is having a direct influence to the wellbeing of the fauna on UmPhafa Reserve.

This is an opportunity to gain creditable work experience in the field and shadow qualified staff members on a wide range of aspects involved in the running of a reserve. Project focus changes on a monthly basis and days will be varied with duties including behavioural observations on game species which often involves stalking species through the bush at close quarters. You will also aid with the other current research projects, such as small mammal trapping and camera trapping of elusive nocturnal species, providing an exceptional chance to learn crucial survey techniques, as well as gaining a greater appreciation of African animals and habitats. Depending on the time of the year there may even be the chance to see animals released onto the Reserve and even take part in game capture.

All internships begin with a full-orientation in which you will learn valuable identification, navigation and tracking skills as well as a few useful bush skills which will make the adjustment to life in the bush all the more comfortable. Vegetation surveys and assessments comprise an important element of the whole placement and over your period of stay you will learn the importance of particular plant species, their traditional/ medicinal uses, and vital nutritional information of the various herbivorous species. Some general maintenance of the reserve's roads, fences and structures is also often necessary and assistance will be required in the construction of hides, fixing fences, erosion control and alien plant removal.

During your time in South Africa it will be possible to experience local life and thereby develop an appreciation for the different views of conservation practices in Africa and a greater understanding of traditional Zulu culture. There are also several other reserves nearby, including a 'big 5' game park which there will be the opportunity to visit outside of working hours.

ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION

Internships are open to anybody with a genuine love of the natural world, particularly those who are looking to pursue a career in conservation. As competition is high for certain times of the year, internships will be offered following a successful application process with brief interviews being held either at Colchester Zoo or over the phone to discuss the placement in more depth. Prospective interns must be 18 years of age by the time of deployment to UmPhafa.

Placements are available year round and periods of stay are allocated in blocks of four weeks; i.e. 4, 8, 12 weeks, with pre-determined start and end dates. Dates of deployment will be allocated based on the applicant's preferred month of commencement following successful application.

For 2 WEEK PLACEMENTS, please contact us for availability.

ACCOMMODATION AND FACILITIES

Interns will be staying at Sully Farmhouse situated inside UmPhafa Reserve. Rooms are comfortable, single sex dorms with bunk-beds and lockable wardrobes for storing belongings, and will be shared with other interns and researchers on placements. A safe is also available for locking away valuables, such as cash, passports, phones, etc. however theft has never been a problem at the lodgings.

Under-sheets and pillows are provided, although a sleeping bag, liner and towel must be brought as part of the personal kit. The house is fully equipped with hot water showers, electricity, and laundry facilities. Unlimited Wi-Fi access for emails and WhatsApp is available.

'All meals are included whilst on placement at UmPhafa'

The kitchen is fully supplied with cooking facilities and residents are encouraged to plan and cook main meals together. Three good meals a day are covered by the placement cost and all interns and researchers compile a weekly shopping list themselves. A housekeeping and laundry service is provided although it is the responsibility of all residents at Sully to keep the kitchen clean and tidy after main meals and at weekends.

There is an ATM in Ladysmith and on occasion there may be the opportunity to accompany staff members into Ladysmith on the main supply run.

'Comfortable working and living conditions located in the centre of the Reserve'

'Orientation programme includes tracking, identification and navigation skills'



SPENDING MONEY

Costs on many items in South Africa are comparably low in respect to the UK although average spending will vary from person to person.

A recommended £100 per week is sufficient for most interns in order to cover any luxuries and excursions, with associated fuel costs, during their period of stay. The local currency is Rand and money can be changed up before departure, at the airport on arrival, or withdrawn from ATM machines.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

Colchester Zoological Society / UmPhafa Conservation Trust is a non-profit organisation and therefore it is necessary for internships to be self-supported.

Two-week placement: Contribution of £800.

Four-week or more placement: Contribution of £1,320 for stays of four weeks will be required, with an additional contribution of £680 per four weeks thereafter.

Contributions will cover accommodation and housekeeping, food, airport transfers, all costs associated with planning and running placements, preparation for interns for their field experience with professional support and dedicated staff to answer questions, field training and orientation, and unlimited Internet access. Airfares, personal travel insurance and excursions made outside of UmPhafa are not covered by this contribution.

An initial deposit of £300 is required to secure the placement within two weeks of acceptance of a placement offer. The remaining balance is to be paid four weeks prior to departure. In the event of placements being offered less than four weeks in advance, full payment will be required at time of booking.

Please note that placement fees are reviewed each year to match inflation and cover any increasing costs for the operation of placements. Any increase will be announced in January to come into effect on 1st June. Placement costs will be honoured at the rate at which they were initially booked unless placements are postponed beyond the date of cost increase.



'Make sure to check your visa requirements well in advance of your placement'

FLIGHTS

Arrival and departure dates will be allocated by Colchester Zoological Society upon successful application, in order to coordinate with pick-ups for all interns and researchers. It is the sole responsibility of the prospective intern to arrange flights for these dates. Flights should be booked to Durban Airport (King Shaka International) and details forwarded to Colchester Zoological Society. These must be received at least four weeks in advance and must include:

- Flight number
- Carrier
- Departure location
- Arrival date and time
- Departure details (unless interns intend to travel onwards)

Please be aware that our staff meet all interns at Durban Airport (King Shaka International) at 2pm; this ensures that you can travel back to the reserve in the safety of daylight. Therefore when booking your flight, please ensure you book to arrive at the airport well before collection time. **Please be aware there are no direct flights to Durban Airport. When booking connecting flights to Durban, it's crucial to allow a minimum of 4 hours between flights to account for potential delays and missed connections.**

Transfer back to Durban Airport at the end of the placement is included in the contribution, however there will only be one trip for one day. Interns that have later flights may be expected to travel to the airport at the same time as those that have earlier flights.

VISAS

Visa applications are the responsibility of the individual applicant. Some nationalities, including UK passport holders, will automatically be granted a 90 day visitor permit by South African Immigration Authorities once arriving in South Africa. This visa covers those interns staying on UmPhafa for anything up to 12 weeks.

For non-UK passport holders, please check your visa requirements with your relevant embassy and ensure you apply for your visa in sufficient time for your placement. Some embassies may require a letter from us on headed paper confirming the duration of your stay for visa applications, which we can supply on request. We require a photocopy of this visa at least four weeks prior to your arrival on UmPhafa.

Interns will not be undertaking paid work of any kind. On arrival in South Africa when granted your visitor permit, or when applying for your visa, state the reason of visit as tourist/holiday. Stating the reason of visit as work or business may lead to refusal of entry.

Passports must have a minimum of six months validity from the date of departure.

INSURANCE AND MEDICAL DEPOSIT

Interns must have sufficient insurance coverage valid for their entire period of stay. This is the responsibility of the intern to organise and all policy details must be emailed (or can be photocopied and posted/faxed) to Colchester Zoo four weeks prior to departure. The policy must cover a minimum of £3,000,000 towards medical evacuation/repatriation.

As well as insurance cover, a cash medical deposit of £200 in GBP Sterling must be lodged with a project coordinator on arrival to cover medical emergencies should it be necessary (the full balance of the medical deposit will be returned at the end of the period of stay providing it was not required). Alternatively, the project coordinator will cover the cost of any medical treatments, with the cost to be repaid via bank transfer prior to departure from the reserve. Travel insurance is not accepted upfront at the hospitals but the patient can claim any payments back afterwards.

w: www.umphafa.com e: wendy@colchesterzoo.org

'You will be met at Durban Airport, and transferred to the UmPhafa Reserve'

DEPLOYMENT

Interns will be met at the arrivals section at Durban Airport by an UmPhafa representative and will be transferred immediately to UmPhafa Reserve. The trip will take approximately three hours and there will be an opportunity to withdraw or exchange money at the airport before leaving. Pick-up times will be confirmed at least one week prior to project commencement.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

The work that interns undertake will be very strenuous in nature and frequently over extended periods. Survey sites will often be in locations only reachable by foot over steep and rocky terrain. A good level of fitness will be required in order to carry out these activities and an intern's involvement in certain aspects of project work will be dependent on his/her capacity to fulfil this requirement.

WEATHER CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to plan for the weather in KwaZulu-Natal. Although winters are warm and dry during the day, nights can be very cold. Summers are very hot and sunny for much of the time although heavy rain and storms are frequent. It is advisable to check the internet for a more accurate picture of the weather over the period of stay and to bring suitable clothing and kit accordingly. Please also note that being in the southern hemisphere, the seasons are reversed to those in the UK.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

As an ambassador for UmPhafa in Colenso, offensive behaviour, either verbally or physically, towards inhabitants, UmPhafa staff or fellow team members by anybody will not be tolerated. As a visitor to the Republic of South Africa researchers and interns are bound by the laws of the country and must behave accordingly. On UmPhafa Reserve, researchers and interns are under the direct responsibility of the project coordinators and should follow the instructions of the supervising staff member and never leave the group without permission from the duty supervisor. Failure to abide by these principles may lead to repatriation at the discretion of UmPhafa staff.

Colchester Zoological Society reserves the right to refuse research applications and placements where necessary.

All participants of UmPhafa placements will be expected to complete an indemnity form on arrival on the Reserve before any field work can be undertaken.

'It is important to plan for the weather in KwaZulu-Natal, so check the internet'



ESSENTIAL KIT

Clothes for the Field – These must be robust, bush appropriate and subdued in colour, i.e. beige, khaki, brown, dark green

- A good quality, sturdy pair of walking boots
- Trousers
- A warm fleece/top/jacket
- Long sleeve shirts
- Short sleeve shirts/t-shirts
- Shorts
- Wide brimmed hat or cap
- Sunglasses
- A spare pair of glasses (if you wear them, as well as a copy of your prescription)
- Rain jacket
- Work Gloves

Additional essential clothing – May to September

- Windproof, cold weather jacket
- Warm hat, gloves, scarf
- Base-layer
- Clothes to sleep in
- Thermals

General kit

- 30L backpack
- Lunch box and large water bottle
- Portable charger
- Watch
- Sleeping bag and sleeping bag liner
- Comfy shoes to wear around house e.g. flipflops or slippers
- Binoculars
- Head torch
- Notebook & pen
- Takeaway coffee cup if you like hot drinks during the day
- Sunscreen (at least one bottle of high factor)
- Insect and tick repellent
- Towels
- Travel plug for South Africa

First Aid kit – All interns must supply their own first aid kit for personal use whilst working in the field

Additional Medication – UmPhafa staff cannot legally distribute medication. It is advised you take a good supply of over the counter medications:

- Paracetamol
- Ibuprofen
- Antihistamines (useful even if you do not suffer with allergies)
- Anti-diarrhea tablets
- Re-hydration sachets
- Antiseptic spray (dry sprays rather than creams)

OPTIONAL KIT

- Clothes other than for the field
- Gaiters
- Laptop/tablet with wireless capability for internet
- Mobile phone
- DVDs for evenings and weekends
- Reading books
- Download the 'Roberts Birds' app to help you identify the bird species on UmPhafa
- Field-guides (Although there is a large range available on-site)
- Camera
- Instruments if you play
- Wellington Boots (October – March)

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

- 'Cry of the Kalahari' – Mark and Delia Owens
- 'Born Wild' – Tony Fitzjohn
- 'The Elephant Whisperer' – Lawrence Anthony

CHECKLIST

- Medical form – 4 weeks prior to departure
- Payment of contribution fee – 4 weeks prior to departure
- Flight details – 4 weeks prior to departure
- Photocopy of Insurance policy details – 4 weeks prior to departure
- Photocopy of photo page of passport – 4 weeks prior to departure
- Photocopy of Visa (if required) – 4 weeks prior to departure



INTERN EQUIPMENT TO BUY OR RENT

We are aware that bringing sleeping bags, towels and lunch boxes can take up a lot of room in your luggage, therefore we offer you the opportunity to rent or buy these items from us.

If you buy any items you can choose to donate them to our Field Rangers for their use on your departure or you can take them home.

Item	To Buy (New)	To Rent (second-hand)
Sleeping Bag	R700 (approx. £35)	R100 (approx. £5) per week
Bath Towel (100% cotton)	R200 (approx. £10)	R30 (approx. £1.50) per week
Hand Towel (100% cotton)	R100 (approx. £5)	R15 (approx. £0.75p) per week
Wellies/Gumboots	R150 (approx. £7.50)	R20 (approx. £1.00) per week
Lunch Boxes	From £5 upwards depending on size required.	

Note: After use all our items are thoroughly cleaned and washed and replaced on a regular basis when required.

If you are interested in purchasing any of these items, please email amanda@umphafa.org with your requirements. The total cost will be confirmed back to you with the payment due upon arrival.

All prices and information is correct at time of publishing (January 2026) and may be subject to change.



TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- £300 deposit will be payable upon confirmation of your booking.
- Full payment for the placement is due at least four weeks prior to your departure date.
- A £100 surcharge for airport transfers will be applied if no other bookings are taken during your preferred deployment date. You will be notified of any additional charges four weeks prior to your departure date, along with any outstanding balance.

CANCELLATION AND POSTPONEMENT

- Notice **MUST** be given of cancellation of placements at least eight weeks prior to the departure date to be eligible for refunds.
- Cancellations made up to eight weeks prior to departure will be eligible to a full deposit refund less 25% admin fee (total refund £225).
- Cancellations made between eight and four weeks prior to departure will be eligible for 50% deposit refund less 25% admin fee (total refund £112.50).
- Cancellations made less than four weeks prior to departure will not be eligible for a refund with the full balance being forfeited. This will be considered as a charitable donation to Colchester Zoological Society's UmPhafa project.
- Notice of postponement must be given at least eight weeks before departure except in exceptional circumstances.
- The placement can only be rescheduled once.
- The deposit is non-refundable in the case of the placement being cancelled once it has already been postponed.
- If placements are postponed beyond 1st June then they will be subject to any new rate increase as announced in January.
- UmPhafa Nature Reserve reserves the right to reschedule or cancel a placement at any time if necessary.