



# UMPHAFA

## NATURE RESERVE

### Research Placement Information Pack

Study stunning African wildlife and natural habitats on a unique reserve, open only to researchers and interns.



'Full support provided throughout every stage of the project'

#### 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.



## THE PLACEMENT

Please refer to the research priority list and contact us for more information.

Research forms the underlying foundation of the ongoing creation and management of UmPhafa and the gathering of data for the conservation of fauna and flora remains the primary goal of the reserve. The research placement programme was formed to assist in this objective through providing opportunities to graduates or undergraduates to collect important data from a comprehensive range of areas for independent projects and dissertations. Project titles are often formulated from a priority list of focus areas, which is available on request, although proposals for any feasible study may be considered.

With an incredible diversity of habitats and fauna species the reserve offers excellent potential for legitimate and interesting research projects that not only fulfill the student's individual course requirements, but also actively contribute to the further management of the reserve. Experienced staff are on-hand to facilitate and supervise projects at every step to ensure research runs smoothly – from formulation of project titles to assisting with in-field logistics. Every researcher will also receive a study-site information booklet, which will include all the maps and background information needed for the final write-up.

This is a unique opportunity to become fully immersed in the African bush whilst studying majestic free-roaming wildlife and natural habitats in a stunning backdrop. As well as gaining the chance to develop advanced field-survey techniques, all researchers will participate in a full-orientation in which they will learn valuable identification, navigation and tracking skills in order to ensure that projects can be carried out effectively and safely, and that credible data is collected.

## ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION

This programme is open to under- and postgraduates with project or dissertation requirements to fulfill.

Periods of stay are allocated in blocks of four weeks; i.e. 4, 8, 12 weeks, with pre-determined start and end dates, which will be provided with the application form.

As competition is high, placements will be offered only after submitted proposals have been approved by the UmPhafa conservation coordinator and the applicant's course supervisor. It is recommended that applicants contact the conservation coordinator prior to sending proposals in order to discuss initial project ideas for feasibility and gain support in the planning stages. Although any suitable proposal will be considered, preference will be given to those that fall within the current priority research areas.

Following approval of proposals a short interview will be held, either at Colchester Zoo or over the phone, to discuss life on the reserve, working conditions and any other specific logistical points involved in the undertaking of the project. Finally, a research agreement will need to be signed by the researcher. Only after this full procedure has been followed will a formal offer of placement be made.

## 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 or 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 Skype is available.

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.

'All meals are included whilst on placement at UmPhafa'

'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

Action for the Wild is a non-profit organisation and therefore it is necessary for research placements to be self-supported. Four-week or more placement: Contribution of £1320 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 £200 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.

## CANCELLATION AND POSTPONEMENT

Notice must be given of cancellation of placements six weeks prior to the departure date in order to be eligible for the return of the full deposit. In the event of cancellations being made between six and four weeks prior to the date of departure, 50% of the deposit sum will be returned, with the full balance being forfeited if cancellation is made less than four weeks before departure. This will be considered as a charitable donation to Action for the Wild's UmPhafa project and will be put towards future animal releases.

Notice of postponement must be given at least four weeks before departure except in exceptional circumstances. The deposit will not be returnable in the case of the placement being cancelled once it has already been postponed. If placements are postponed beyond June 1st then they will be subject to any new rate increase as announced in January.



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

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

## FLIGHTS

Arrival and departure dates will be allocated by Action for the Wild 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 International airport (King Shaka) and details forwarded to Action for the Wild. These must be received at least four weeks in advance and must include:

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

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.

**PLEASE NOTE:** A £100 surcharge for airport transfers will be applied if no other bookings are taken during your preferred deployment date.

## 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.

## 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.

Action for the Wild 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
- Comfy shoes to wear around house e.g. flipflops or slippers
- 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)
- Gaiters
- 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
- 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
- Rehydration sachets
- Antiseptic spray (dry sprays rather than creams)

## OPTIONAL KIT

- Clothes other than for the field
- Laptop/tablet with wireless capability for internet
- Mobile Phone
- DVDs for evenings and weekends
- Reading books
- Download a Roberts bird app to help you ID 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](mailto: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.