searching
FOR SPOTS

Horse Riding Safari & Community Outreach

Volunteer Programme

Experience Africa on horseback & contribute to conservation in Zimbabwe

About Searching for Spots

Our ethos at Searching For Spots is to provide an immersive experience for people, where they have an active role in conservation and develop more of an understanding of the complexities that come with this endeavour. The goal is to evoke and nurture a passion for wild spaces and community. In doing so we will ensure the longevity of these spaces and those who rely on them. For me, at the core of this diverse and novel conservation offering is a drive to gather more information and understanding on leopards and to protect them.

To properly explain what our venture with Cawston looks like, it is important to provide some background on the property. The reserve is an enclosed system, situated 60 km's north of the city of Bulawayo, where leopards are the property's apex predator. Enclosed systems require careful management of game numbers, as the animals no longer have the freedom to migrate naturally and therefore an overpopulation of animals within an enclosed environment will be ecologically detrimental. The property was purchased in 1987, since its inception, Cawston has primarily been a working game farm and utilised responsible and ethical hunting to sustain the land. However the relentless hikes in the cost of living in Zimbabwe makes constant adaptation a necessity. Simply put, hunting can no longer cover the costs and hunting more animals than necessary in this closed system is not a viable long term plan. The land owner is a firm believer in the precautionary principle and this founded their agreement with Searching For Spots.

Heeding the necessity to diversify and having seen the passion that Owen has for leopards and the preservation of their species, Cawston have ***stopped all leopard hunting*** and with your help we aim to make our volunteer and research programme successful and popular enough to generate the required economic benefit to compensate. ***We cannot achieve this without your support and effort***. As this journey evolves we aim for volunteer and eco-tourism to have a major role in the conservation of this land.

How do horse riding volunteers contribute?

Cawston is home to 16 horses and offers volunteers the unique opportunity to traverse the property on horseback while enjoying the diverse landscape and all of its inhabitants. Horseback safaris provide a different perspective and feel to the naturally immersive experience, placing you closer to African wildlife while working on projects that actively protect and benefit the property and its wildlife.

Enjoy the fresh air on a morning canter through the African bush, accompanied by a dawn chorus and the warm ambience of the morning sun. Or an afternoon wind down followed by a sun-downer or two. Game viewing on horseback is a wellness exercise and we highly recommend this activity.

Horseback patrols along the property's perimeter and snare sweeps, further inland, will be conducted with Cawston’s experienced scouts in an effort to continually show a presence and note any suspicious activity or breaches in the fence line. Participating in anti-poaching patrols is an important task to reserve security. (There will be no direct involvement with poachers during these activities.)

Why volunteer with Searching for Spots?

Work is highly varied on the Estate and no one day is the same. Your work day starts at 6 am and finishes at 5 pm and there is a two-hour lunch break. The kind of work you are involved in depends on what projects are currently underway as well as on your skills and level of desire to be involved. Keeping horses in the African bush is very different to a first world country, especially as there is no vet around the corner, so be ready for a challenging but deeply rewarding experience.

What is included?

It's pretty much everything!

- Induction and training on the project
- Comfortable tented accommodation with ensuite bathrooms
- 3 x meals a day
- Most equipment required for the project, but riders must bring helmet, riding pants & boots
- Transfer to and from Bulawayo airport / bus stop
- Transport relating to the project
- 24 hour project coordinator available

What you pay

- Flights to and from project
- Visas
- Travel & medical insurance - please also budget for medical up-front payments (e.g. a visit to the doctor is US$30)
- Personal travel costs, alcohol & snacks during your stay
- Any excursions not related to the project including trips to town

Arrival

You need to arrive at Bulawayo Airport or bus station, on the day your project starts. A driver will meet you and transport you to the project. Upon arrival you will be shown your room where you can freshen up from your journey. That afternoon you will be given an induction and meet the team members who will be running your chosen project.

What does volunteering involve...

While volunteering your key activities can be broken down as follows:

Horse Riding

- General Horse Maintenance
- Working with our rescue horses & donkeys
- Snare sweeps & boundary fence patrol
- Activities:
  - Morning / Afternoon Outrides
  - Schooling horses
  - Basic veterinary treatment
  - Cross country course
  - Jumping / dressage arena
  - Lunging Ring
  - Holistic healing
  - Natural horsemanship

Community Outreach

Volunteers will engage with schools and communities in the surrounding areas and through the use of activities such as sports, game drives, animal interaction and storytelling we will strengthen relations with community members, young and old, while working together to conserve the people's natural heritage.

Ecological Management

These are some of the things you could get involved with:

- Anti-poaching - join the game scouts in their morning routine training
- Participate in snare sweeps or perimeter walks / rides
- Assist with any project that the property may be conducting from water hole cleaning / rebuilding to veld management, bush clearing and removal of invasive plant species.
- Animal husbandry - as the property is a working game farm there is also the opportunity to work with dairy cows, goats, sheep etc
- Participate in waterhole based game counts
- Participate in live game capture (happens once a year)
- Assist in water and power sustainability projects

Other available activities:

Leopard Research

- Trail camera setting up
- Data capture from Trail cameras
- Compile Identity kits for individual cats
- Utilise conservation technology for data capture eg Trap Tagger, SMART, Earth Ranger
- Create maps for territories of dominant leopards identified
- Bush walks & leopard tracking
- When a leopard is located effort is made to spend time with it to advance the habituation of identified individuals

Conservation & Wildlife Photography

If you have an interest in photography Owen is more than happy to help with setting advice and photographic opportunities.

Orphaned Elephant Enrichment

Cawston has three orphaned elephants that have been hand raised. Volunteers may have the opportunity to spend time in the presence of these majestic creatures while they traverse the landscape freely during the day to forage.

Other Research Projects

- Sable breeding program
- Vulture safe zones and other large raptor research
- Giraffe research
- African Bees Project

What does a typical day look like?

At Cawston there are two full time grooms and you will be assisting them in their work. Enoch has worked in a variety of stables from racing, polo-cross to general horse management and Omeka became a groom in early 2023 and is passionate about the animals in his care. During your out-rides with Enoch and Omeka, we like you to be always on the look out for snares or other evidence of poaching.

Below is a typical daily program. The type and extent of schooling and outrides you do will depend on your ability & skills.

- 06.00 Wake up! Coffee time!
- 06.30 Start at the stables, feeding, grooming and checking over the horses. Sometimes this is a bit delayed if you have to go find the horses in the bush as horses are released into the bush every evening to graze as well as after their breakfast or morning ride.
- 8.00 / 8:30 Breakfast
- 09.00 Schooling / outride / general stable work or other estate project taking place
- 12:00 Lunch
- 14.30 Afternoon outride / schooling / stable work or other estate project taking place
- 16.30 Evening feed and general check over of each horse

As part of our herd we have several rescue horses and donkeys. They also need time, love and attention as they have a myriad collection of problems.

Accommodation

Volunteers experience a comfortable glamping safari feel with a stay at Cawston Tented Camp in their fully tented rooms with private ensuite- bathrooms. Glamping is all the rage here, where proper safari tents meet modern day amenities. Tents are fitted with 220v electricity and adaptors are provided to fit USA and EU plugs that do not need voltage converters. A private veranda to the front of the tent allows you to relax while watching birds flit amongst the trees and wildlife come down to the waterhole and graze the lawns around camp.

The tents are supplied with fans in summer, and in winter, when it's really cold; enjoy slipping into a bed warmed with an electric blanket.

The swimming pool, the deck and the lounge / dining area all overlook the busy waterhole so during your down time you can enjoy a refreshing swim and watch the game that comes down to drink.

Location

The Searching for Spots volunteer programme is located on Cawston Wildlife Estate (CWE) which is located 60km from Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe. Bulawayo has a population of approx. 1 million people. It's a sleepy city that loves the arts. It's also fondly known as the 'City of Kings' or 'Skies'. The native language is Ndebele. The Ndebele are descendants of the Zulu, having split nearly 200 years ago, so the two languages are very similar. The Ndebele people, ancestrally a warring tribe, are gentle, friendly and very welcoming.

General Information

Visas

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct visa for the entire length of your stay. Please ensure you request a **business visa** on your application form when you arrive in Zimbabwe. The business visa is valid for one month. Please be sure to give the correct departure dates and that this is correctly dated on the visa that authorities put in your passport. Should you wish to volunteer for longer than one month you will have to chat to us directly about this.

Some nationalities are required to arrange your visa in advance so check with the Zimbabwe embassy in your country of residence to establish your visa requirements well in advance. Passport holders of the UK, Ireland, USA, Australia, New Zealand and most EU countries can obtain their tourist visa upon arrival into Zimbabwe. **Please check this before you travel.**

*These are simply a **guideline** and may be subject to change without notice:

Visa required countries
Single Entry - US$ 30
Double Entry - US$ 45

British and Irish
Single Entry - US$ 55
Double Entry - US$ 70

Canada
Single Entry - US$ 75

Finance

Local Currency: US Dollar

Volunteers typically spend around $75 -$100 per week for personal items such as snacks, drinks and souvenirs. We recommend that you bring your cash with you as your main source of funds as there is sometimes intermittent access to ATMS and many smaller shops do not accept debit or credit cards. Change is also an issue so smaller denomination notes are best!

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory and must include cover for emergency evacuation and repatriation as well as lost or delayed luggage. Please ensure you are covered for the entire duration of your trip, from the day you leave your country until the day you return. Ensure that you are covered for all activities you plan on participating in within your programme and travelling elsewhere (e.g. horse riding, bungee jumping / rafting in Victoria Falls).

If possible we recommend your insurance covers you for having to leave the programme early. No refunds will be issued in all but exceptional circumstances should you have to leave prior to your scheduled departure date.

Food

We have two wonderful onsite cooks who make delicious home-cooked, organic and locally sourced meals 3 times a day, from their famous sweet corn fritters to a wholesome casserole. We tailor to your dietary needs as much as possible – from vegetarian to gluten free, just let us know what you like and what you can't eat however do we encourage you to bring any specialised ingredients with you should you require them as procuring these kinds of products in Zimbabwe is difficult at times.

As a working game farm meals may include venison/game meat. Animals on the reserve are harvested responsibly and ethically for food for volunteers, staff and the community.

Electricity

Tents are fitted with 220v electricity and adaptors are provided to fit USA and EU plugs that do not need voltage converters. We recommend bringing solar chargers for your devices and a head torch will come in handy, in the summer months it can be extremely hot at night usb powered fans are always a bonus to have in your bag for the nights.

Laundry & clothing

There is a housekeeper at camp and laundry is provided during the week. Washing powder is provided and volunteers can do their own laundry on weekends if required. We do recommend not taking many 'good' clothes and only using items you do not mind getting ruined while working on a farm or with animals.

In our winter we suggest you bring layered clothing as early morning in June – August can be very cold, often 32F, although it warms up into the 50'sF later in the day.

We ask that you be respectful when it comes to wearing the correct clothing. Our staff come from strong traditional beliefs and find revealing clothing offensive. Courtesy to their religions and beliefs is essential.

A suggested packing list will be sent once you are confirmed on the project.

Keeping in touch / Wifi

With the remote location of Cawston Camp there is no available Wi-Fi. We advise on arrival buying a local SIM card and topping it up with a "private Wi-Fi" bundle which is more cost effective and has great coverage in the area.

Security

Zimbabwe is a beautiful country full of wonderful, kind and generous people but as with travelling elsewhere in the world you should be aware of the risk of opportunistic crime and take precautions to minimise the chance of becoming a victim. Please be aware of your surroundings. The vast majority of visitors to Zimbabwe suffer no problems but if you have any specific questions about the current situation in the country please contact us directly.

Going to town

We are an hour's drive from Bulawayo and there is no official public transport to town. There may be a vehicle going into town once a week and with some advanced notice, we can arrange to have you join the vehicle for a day in town if needed. If a personal trip to town for shopping etc is requested this will be at a cost of $30. Please note that if you are unwell or need to go into town for medical treatment this will be accommodated and at no cost.

Weather

January to April - days & nights are hot with regular, short lived thunderstorms which cools the summer air.

May to September - long sunny days with a chance of rain. Nights are cooler & can be very cold at times.

October to December - high summer temperatures often accompanied by heavy rain fall.

Health and safety

A change in environment, climate, food and lifestyle can result in minor illness. Please inform staff if you feel unwell at any time. We recommend you obtain professional advice on immunisations before you travel.

Vaccinations

It is essential you ensure your tetanus shots are up to date, a rabies vaccination is recommended but not required. Zimbabwe has an excellent childhood program of vaccinations and children are administered with the following vaccines – MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), polio, chicken pox, TDaP (diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus), BCG and HPV. It would be advisable to ensure you have had these as well.

Malaria

The project is not in a high risk Malaria region, but we would advise that anti-malaria medication is taken as directed by your doctor, especially if you plan to visit the Victoria Falls area.

Tick bite fever

Mild winters and wet summers result in a proliferation of ticks. If you start to feel headachy, feverish and have swollen lymph glands or have jaundice looking eyes, it is likely you have contracted tick bite fever. This usually comes up 10 days after you have been bitten by an infected tick which leaves an angry red bite on you the size of a pound sterling coin. This is very easily and simply dealt with by a visit to the doctor to verify and to obtain a prescription for the appropriate antibiotic (doxycycline). We advise you to take precautions against ticks with the use of sprays and sensible clothing.

HIV & sexual relations

Zimbabwe has one of the highest HIV/AIDS rates in the world and we kindly request that no sexual activities are carried out while on the property and participating in our programme. Intimate relations with members of staff is strictly forbidden and will result in immediate termination of contract for that staff member. We do not recommend promiscuous behaviour and will not be held responsible should you choose to disobey our requests.

What else to do in Zimbabwe

Visiting Zimbabwe is a once in a lifetime opportunity, therefore, we urge you to go on as many excursions during your free time as possible. We have listed below some ideas which are relatively nearby and a must see if you have the opportunity! **Please let us know in advance or once you arrive and we can help organise a trip for you with our preferential rates.**

Matopos National Park

Visit one of the most stunning national parks in Africa to see towering rock formations, ancient cave paintings and go for bush walks for a 90% chance of getting close to Rhino.

Victoria Falls

One of the 7 Wonders of the World. Visit this huge thundering waterfall, go rafting, bungee jumping, sip cocktails in world renowned bars or take a Safari to Hwange to see the Big 5.

Hwange National Park

The largest national park in Zimbabwe, and only 2 hours drive from Cawston Camp. There are a wide variety of beautiful lodges to stay at, where you can start the day with a morning game drive, have a delicious lunch in the park, rest and unwind in the afternoon, watch the sunset whilst a herd of elephants joins you at the swimming pool, and finish the day with a night drive to search for Zimbabwe's nocturnal species.

Fundraising opportunities / our wishlist...

We will run different fundraising campaigns from time to time to facilitate either the research or for the benefit of the communities we work with. The campaigns could include the following:

Horse Outreach

In the last year CWE has been collecting donated items for the Mounted Police and Prison Units. These units in our part of the country are historically under-funded and under issued with general supplies and tack. The horses are always found to be in good condition despite the tough circumstances, beautifully schooled and well loved.

So far, we have repaired half a dozen saddles and replaced their stirrups, and donated a large number of numnahs, bridles and several saddles. If you have items you no longer want at home, and space in your luggage, the Units are always grateful for:

- Grooming kit items
- Secondhand tack (any colours / sizes)
- Head collars
- Bandages
- Second hand riding pants/shirts/boots for grooms
- Cash donations for dip, medical supplies and feed.

Please visit our Project Outreach page for more information on current campaigns and how you can support various projects further should you wish to do so.

CLICK HERE

Pricing & Project Dates

All projects start on a Monday. If you would like to stay for longer, you may combine any of the conservation programmes together, for a maximum stay of 12 weeks. Please contact us directly to discuss these options.

PROJECT	DATES	DURATION	PRICING
2024			
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	21 October - 28 October	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	18 November - 25 November	1 week	US$ 1 200
2025			
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	6 January - 13 January	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	3 February - 10 February	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	3 March - 10 March	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	31 March - 7 April	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	12 May - 19 May	1 week	US$1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	8 September - 15 September	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	13 October - 20 October	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	3 November - 10 November	1 week	US$ 1 200
Horse Safari & Community Outreach	8 December - 19 December	12 nights	US$ 1 900

Sign up to be a volunteer today!

Thank you for taking an interest in our horse riding and community outreach volunteer programme. We hope this information has sparked your interest in joining our work in Zimbabwe.

To become a volunteer:

1. Visit the project you are interested in attending on our website and choose your start date and duration
2. Complete the enquiry form with your desired project and start date
3. We will confirm availability with you and answer any questions you may have
4. Once confirmed on the project we will send you a link to our booking form to supply the information we require from you
5. We will provide you with an invoice with our bank details. We ask for a $200 non-refundable deposit to confirm your place
6. A month before you start your project our team will send you a pre-departure document with all the information you need to prepare for your trip
7. The remainder of the fee is also due at least 1 month before you depart
8. Get on the plane & come make your African conservation dream happen!

Feel free to contact us on **volunteer@searchingforspots.com** for further information and be sure to follow us too!

+263 78 093 3395 / +263 78 462 0467

/searchingforspots