



searching
FOR SPOTS

*Conservation & Wildlife
Photography*

Volunteer Programme

Photography is an empowering
conservation tool!





*Under our watch, leopards
will be protected.*

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.

About our founder - Owen Gröbler



Owen is a conservation & wildlife photographer who has an infectious passion for photography and the natural world. He is especially fond of leopards and understanding animal behaviour. Owen has an extensive background in teaching and has spent the last 6 years honing his photographic skills in the African bush.

Owen's accolades include a successful 5 year leopard identification project on the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate where he conducted research & monitoring of Leopards in a peri-urban environment. His research and experience enabled him to compile a wonderful coffee table book called 'Searching For Spots - Leopards of the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate' to promote coexistence with leopards in that environment.

One of the dominant females he followed and photographed over that period became an icon in the conservation sphere where her image has been published in the Remembering Leopards - Remembering Wildlife series of books by Margot Raggett. This image, showcasing the incredible adaptability of leopards was also selected for the Highly-commended category in the final 17 images for the 2022 Africa Geographic Photographer Of The Year competition.

His wildlife photographs speak for themselves and it isn't only his images that tell a great story, so be sure to ask about his most cherished moments among nature.



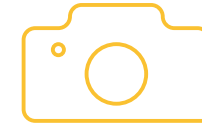
Photography is an empowering conservation tool!

Owen Gröbler is an award winning and published wildlife photographer, his expertise will assist you in taking your photography to the next level. Owen will help you to better understand your camera and when to use certain settings, then he will cover different aspects of wildlife / conservation photography such as composition, taking advantage of different light conditions and creativity. Owen offers comprehensive post processing Lightroom tutorials and volunteers will have ample time to edit and share their images with the group.

Cawston is a vast property and offers a host of photographic opportunities. From the nighttime star filled skies, wild animals in their natural environment (either on game drive or from the comfort of hides situated at a number of waterholes, including one sunken hide for that low angle perspective), to creating photography that will assist in promoting the conservation efforts of the property. This includes photographing the anti-poaching teams as they carry out their training or patrols, the goat herder and their furry counterparts, the horses, the scouts and the community during outreach days. The property has three elephants and photographing these impressive giants is always a treat. The programme includes an excursion to Matopos to do Rhino Trekking and have the chance photograph these marvellous animals on foot.

With this programme, not only will you be enhancing your portfolio and skills as a wildlife photographer with a mix of theoretical and practical classes, you will also be making a difference by bringing awareness to wildlife and conservation projects / topics in Zimbabwe.

Why choose this programme?



This project is guaranteed to enable you to grow as a photographer and leave Zimbabwe with an incredible conservation and wildlife portfolio as well as a sense of purpose having contributed to important conservation work being done on the property. Cawston also boasts a one of a kind underground hide where you will be able to spend time and photograph any birds or wildlife that come to drink during hide sessions. This is an amazing opportunity to photograph wildlife at eye level and practice both patience and different camera settings as well as your creativity. Your photography instructor, Owen, believes in an applied learning approach to your tuition so your days will be a mix of theoretical tuition with practical opportunities to put into action the skills you have been taught.

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
- Transfer to and from Bulawayo airport / bus stop
- Transport relating to the project
- 24 hour project coordinator available
- Half day excursion to Matopas National Park

What you need to bring:

You will need to bring your own equipment:

- DSLR / mirrorless camera
- Lenses - ideally a zoom lens and a wide angle
- Computer - for editing lessons and ideally your own license of Lightroom / photoshop

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 during your stay
- Any excursions not related to the project including trips to town

Arrival

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 tent 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 your days will look like...

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

Wildlife & Conservation Photography

- Game drives and / or bush walks
- Daily tuition from Owen
 - Camera settings
 - Light, composition, creativity
 - Lightroom & photoshop editing sessions
- Underground photographic hide sits
- Giraffe manor - spending time with & photograph from unique angles
- Time spent with elephants, photographing them drinking from a hide at a waterhole

Ecological Management

- 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

Horse Riding

- Horse Maintenance
- Snare sweeps & boundary fence patrol
- Morning & Afternoon Outrides

Other Research Projects

- Sable breeding program
- Vulture safe zones and other large raptor research
- Giraffe research - helping establish individuals, density and movement patterns.
- Bees - Project run in partnership with African Bee Products

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.

The outreach programme will primarily focus on the children in schools, aiming to nurture their love for nature and highlight how humankind and nature are interlinked.





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

Canada

Single Entry - US\$ 75

British and Irish

Single Entry - US\$ 55
Double Entry - US\$ 70



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.

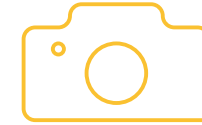
Weather

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

During your time on the project you will have every weekend off from volunteering and this is the perfect time to explore everything this beautiful country has to offer. You are more than welcome to simply relax around the accommodation but most volunteers will use this time to travel and see the country.

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

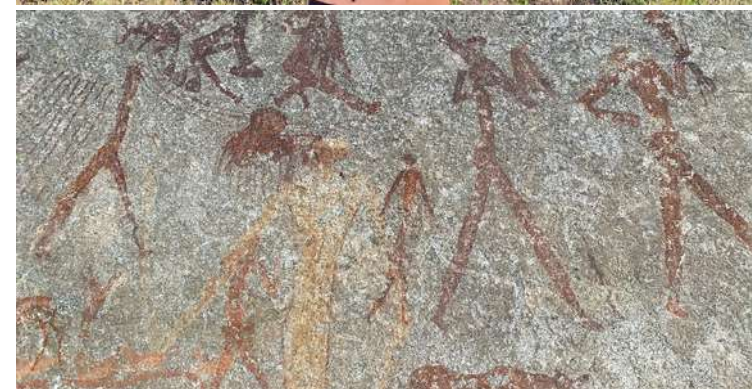
Visit one of the most stunning national parks in Africa to see towering rock formations, ancient cave paintings and go for bush walks for a 90% chance of getting close to Rhino.

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:

Leopard Research

To enhance our leopard research programme we require the following equipment / facilities:

- AA batteries
- Trail cameras
- SD memory cards
- GPS collars
- Tracking equipment
- Educational programmes to showcase wildlife to children in the area

Medical Outreach

Funds raised will go towards:

- Building upgrades to the existing Maternity Waiting home
- New beds & bedding
- Upgrade to kitchen facilities
- Communal relaxation area
- A fund for the mandatory Medical Caesarean kits that all women need to purchase incase required.
- A fund for medication and consumables required as shortages are often experienced.

Community School Outreach

Volunteers wishing to bring something for the kids are encouraged to bring:

- Pens,
- pencils,
- crayons,
- chalk,
- writing books,
- learning aids such as flash cards, wall charts and maps
- Sport equipment - soccer / footballs are always welcomed

**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			
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	14 October - 21 October	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	11 November - 18 November	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	9 December - 20 December	1 week	US\$ 1 350
2025			
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	27 January - 3 February	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	24 February - 3 March	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	24 March - 31 March	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	7 April - 14 April	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Leopard Research & Wildlife Photography	16 June - 30 June	2 weeks	US\$ 2 400
Leopard Research & Wildlife Photography	25 August - 8 September	2 weeks	US\$ 2 400
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	29 September - 13 October	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	10 November - 17 November	1 week	US\$ 1 350
Wildlife & Conservation Photography	1 December - 8 December	1 week	US\$ 1 350

Sign up to be a volunteer today!

Thank you for taking an interest in our wildlife & conservation 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!



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