Hands-on Rhino & Elephant Conservation Programme
Family Volunteering

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF IMIRE

Imire was founded in the 1950s by Norman Travers, initially as a cattle, maize and tobacco farm. He longed for the presence of game and in the late 1970s branched out into game farming. He pioneered the integration of cattle ranching, farming and long term sustainable wildlife management. Like Noah, the animals came in two by two and within 10 years Imire had become a 10,000 acre game park stocked with impala, waterbuck, kudu, eland and the rare sable antelope.

BLACK RHINO BREEDING AND RELEASE

Imire is internationally renowned for its black rhino breeding and release programme. In the 1980s, during a period of Zimbabwe’s worst poaching, rhino numbers crashed from 10,000 to less than 1,000 in just a few years. The Department of National Parks & Wildlife moved the remaining wild rhino into the custodianship of private conservancies, called Intensive Protection Zones. Norman believed that Imire could successfully care for rhino, but was derided as a dreamer - how could rhino from the dry heat of the Zambezi Valley survive the bitter Wedza winters? However, he convinced sceptics by showing them proof of the rhinos depicted in the 700 year old bushman paintings on the conservancy. Imire’s adopted rhino and their offspring have since thrived.

THE IMIRE RHINO

Imire were given seven orphaned baby black rhino in 1985. Noddy, Sprinter, Fumbi, Cuckoo, DJ, Amber and Mvu were aged between four and six months. Their parents had been poached in the Matusadona National Park in Northern Zimbabwe. Each of the seven calves were hand-reared on formula milk for eight years and raised as a semi-domesticated herd. Several in-depth studies were carried out by ecologists to ensure the rhino suffered no ill-effects from the new vegetation, climate and herding, since black rhinos are naturally solitary animals.

The seven original rhino bred very successfully at Imire, with 15 births in less than 20 years - a record given the rhino’s notoriously slow speed of reproduction. Over the next 15 years, 11 rhino were successfully returned to the Matusadona National Park where they were monitored by National Parks and a team of volunteer student vets. The Matusadona release programme was stopped in 2000 due to a lack of funds and today this ancient animal once again faces extinction in the wild.
IMIRE’S TRAGEDY

On November 7th 2007 Imire suffered the worst poaching incident in its history when three rhino were shot and killed. Two females, DJ and Amber and a male, Sprinter were killed, along with Amber’s almost full term unborn calf. The incident left DJ’s 6 week old calf, Tatenda, a confused and terrified orphan. On that night, Imire lost a generation of rhino.

Tatenda became an international star in the Animal Planet documentary, “There’s a Rhino in My House” which tells the chaotic story of his first year, hand-raised by Judy Travers in her home with a warthog named Pog and a hyena named Tsotsi. He was released into the game park to be a partner for Shanu, our youngest female rhino, in 2008. In November 2016 Imire was struck by another tragedy when Tatenda suddenly fell ill and passed away at the age of just 9 years old. He taught us all so much about hope and survival, and so many people world-wide joined us in mourning our loss. Our work to protect the rhino and secure its future in Zimbabwe continues.

On 27th November 2014 Shanu gave birth to a female calf, the first born at Imire since the poaching incident in 2007. Tafika is the most beloved of rhino and we are grateful and proud that our breeding and release programme can begin again. We are now home to four black and two white rhino.

HELP CREATE A POSITIVE FUTURE

Volunteers get very involved with our rhino at Imire, learning about their behaviour and monitoring their activities, feeding and socialisation. You will play a role in their continued protection and security as you enjoy getting to know their eccentricities!
THE IMIRE ELEPHANTS

Imire is home to four elephants. Mac, Toto and Mandebyu and form our small family herd, and then there is Nzou, who happily lives with a herd of buffalo! The elephants living at Imire were orphaned in the wild at a very young age. Imire rescued them and has since provided them with an environment that is as close to their natural habitat as possible, whilst maintaining both animal and human safety. Had the elephants not been saved and given a forever home at Imire, they would certainly have perished in the wild.

Ivory and rhino horn poaching is rife throughout Africa and to protect our elephants and rhinos they sleep in secure bomas at night. In this way we can ensure that there are armed guards, proper lighting and communication systems in place in the event of any incident threatening their safety.

Elephants are extremely intelligent and sensitive creatures. They need constant stimulation in order to remain content. This stimulation occurs in the wild by being part of a large, hierarchical herd, and through the constant challenge of finding food and water, while avoiding predators. Our elephants do not face these challenges which can lead to boredom, stagnation and seeking excitement in other, often very destructive, ways. In order to prevent this from occurring, we set them challenges of our own, developed by elephant behaviour experts. Our training keeps their minds and bodies occupied and helps keep them stimulated. All the training and handling done at Imire is on a reward basis and we do not condone cruelty of physical punishment of any description.

CARNIVORES AT IMIRE

Imire is home to Mambo the lion and two hyenas. We are lucky enough to be able to provide these carnivores with comfortable, spacious enclosures. Imire is a retirement home for these animals, who have faced difficulties elsewhere, been abandoned or abused. We are happy to rescue these animals from any unfortunate circumstances and create a better quality of life for them in their golden years. None of the carnivores are bred from or handled.

OTHER WILDLIFE AT IMIRE

In addition to our six rhino, four elephants and lion, we are also home to a herd of buffalo (with Nzou the elephant matriarch!) and a wide variety of antelopes: sable, eland, kudu, nyala, waterbuck and blesbok, as well as zebra, giraffe, wildebeest, warthog and crocodile. With over 48 bird species and numerous snakes and lizards, Imire is an animal lovers paradise.
HANDS-ON RHINO & ELEPHANT CONSERVATION

Our volunteer programme is a unique opportunity to live in the heart of Zimbabwe and share the experiences of a 10,000 acre family-run African game reserve. You will live in close proximity to black and white rhino, elephants, buffalo, giraffe and many other animals and birds. You will hear incredible stories, learn our history, witness amazing animal relationships and help with research projects to further our knowledge of the wildlife which surrounds you.

This is a wonderful experience for volunteers of all ages. Come and experience Africa in a safe environment, work hard and become part of a very special family. Our volunteer programme is a life-changing experience both for volunteers and for our staff and local community. It is a wonderful way to get involved and give something back.

WHAT MAKES OUR PROJECT UNIQUE?

It’s all about intimacy and connections. We take just 12 volunteers so you will have plenty of time and space to form bonds with other people, animals and the spell-binding African bush. You will be part of our family in no time, with three generations of the Travers family living at Imire - from granny to babies! We also pride ourselves on our programme’s diversity; you will work with animals, help with community projects and in the local school, carry out work around the game park and undertake research projects. Learn about the animals, birds and trees which surround you and take a moment to savour the peace and serenity which is so unique to Africa. Every activity our volunteers get involved with, no matter how small it seems, makes a difference. You will see first-hand the impact that your volunteer experience has to the game park and the community.
No two days on Imire are ever the same and there is always something unexpected around the corner! We have adapted our popular volunteer programme and included activities which we know from our bushcamps, kids of all ages absolutely love!

WILDLIFE & CONSERVATION

This project will increase your knowledge of rhinos and elephants and allow you to get up close to these endangered animals. Learn about the animals, birds, trees and the environment around you, as you immerse yourself and your family in game park life.

- Walk with the rhino and elephants and learn from their experienced handlers
- Learn about rhino conservation and the challenges this amazing animal faces to survive
- Help put the rhino to bed and make sure they have adequate food and water
- Track the white rhino using telemetry and GPS
- Learn to recognise different animal tracks and signs as you hike through the bush
- Go on nature walks and game drives and identify different animal and bird species
- Enter the kingdom of the nocturnal creatures as you take night walks through the bush

GAME PARK ACTIVITIES

- Get involved with every aspect of game park life and get a behind-the-scenes peek into how Imire really operates!
- Go on patrol to check for evidence of snares, traps and damage to the boundary fence
- Deliver feed and nutritional supplements to sable, zebra and other plains game. Help feed the lion and hyenas
- Join the Anti-Poaching Unit as they undergo training exercises
- Assist with fence building and repair
- Help with game park projects such as building fireguards and repairing roads
- Remove invasive plant species and help with tree planting
BUSHCRAFT & SURVIVAL SKILLS

Learn how to survive in the bush, how to find water and how to navigate without a compass - great for developing leadership skills. Take part in practical conservation lessons and learn how to work together as a team.

- Learn basic bush survival skills - how to find water, how to navigate and make a fire, and how to find food
- Use the trees and grasses around to you make rope and even a toothbrush!
- Do physical training with the Anti-Poaching Unit on the obstacle course and abseil from the top of Castle Kopje
- Learn about the night skies and the constellations - so different from the ones at home
- Learn to navigate at night using the stars
CULTURE & COMMUNITY

The heart of Imire is our community. We share the importance of protecting wildlife with rural communities and school children, to secure the future of Africa’s animals, in particular the black rhino.

- Play sports and games - challenge yourself in soccer or volleyball matches
- Immerse yourself in the Shona culture; learn to cook sadza and nyama, sing songs and move your feet in traditional dances. Meet members of the local community and exchange ideas and experiences
- Visit Markwe Caves and learn about the ancient Bushman paintings
- Brave the ladder; climb to the top of Castle Kopje and learn about Imire’s rich history

LEISURE TIME

In your free time you can go fishing and canoeing, enjoy camp-outs in the bush or relax by the pool at the volunteer house with a cold drink after a hard day’s work! You may also have the opportunity to go horse riding in the bush (extra cost). If you enjoy hiking we can arrange trips to Wedza Mountain and trips to see the Bushman paintings at Markwe Caves (about 5km outside the reserve).

If you would like to arrange a driver to take you into Harare to visit the markets and shops, we can arrange a private taxi for $100 per car each way (costs shared between volunteers). Speak to Rob or Morgan to organise this. There is no reliable public transport from the reserve to Harare.
**PROJECT PRICING 2019**

Places on this project are limited to 12, so please book early to avoid disappointment!

Price: $901.25 per person/week

A 50% deposit is required to secure your family’s place; once this is received we’ll send you a booking form to send us your flight and insurance details and food requirements. Full payment is due 60 days before the programme start date.

**ACCOMODATION**

Your home is a thatched two-storey house with a family atmosphere. Situated in the heart of the game park on our largest dam, Numwa House is in an idyllic spot with a pool, bar, braai area and plenty of opportunities for fishing. There are three bathrooms inside the house with bath and shower and three outside solar showers with amazing views over the dam! There is hot and cold running water for showers, baths and cooking.

Rooms are shared, but a twin or double room can be requested. The house has three twin or double rooms and two same-sex dormitories. Private rooms can be requested but are not guaranteed.

We are lucky enough to have a borehole at Imire with fresh spring water for drinking. You will receive three home-cooked meals a day during your stay, made by our expert cooks, Stocks and Tafadzwa, served buffet style. Dietary requirements can be catered for; please let us know before you arrive!

On a Sunday our staff are off so volunteers are responsible for preparing food for themselves or the group. Food is provided. Alternatively you may book to have a delicious 3-course meal at Imire Lodge. The cost of this is $25 per person.