

WILDLIFE ACT'S SOUTHERN DRAKENSBERG CONSERVATION PROJECT



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OVERVIEW

The Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project is Wildlife ACT's most recent conservation project focusing on the monitoring of endangered and critically endangered vultures, and various other priority species and protected area boundary conservation work. The vulture conservation work involves nest monitoring and vulture-safe feeding site management and monitoring, management of a long-term camera trap survey and various protected area boundary support, such as alien plant control and emergency response for issues related to vultures and other priority species. A significant focus of the project is placed on implementing conservation efforts for the vulnerable Cape Vulture and the critically endangered Bearded Vulture.

The Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project takes place both in and around the Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site in South Africa, a crucial stronghold for several threatened and endangered species. During their time at the Project, volunteers live in an authentic farmhouse situated in the buffer-zone surrounding the World Heritage Site, surrounded by breathtaking scenery.



LOCATION

The Maloti-Drakensberg Park is a World Heritage Site in KwaZulu-Natal and is one of the five largest protected areas in South Africa – providing one of the last strongholds for several threatened and endangered species.

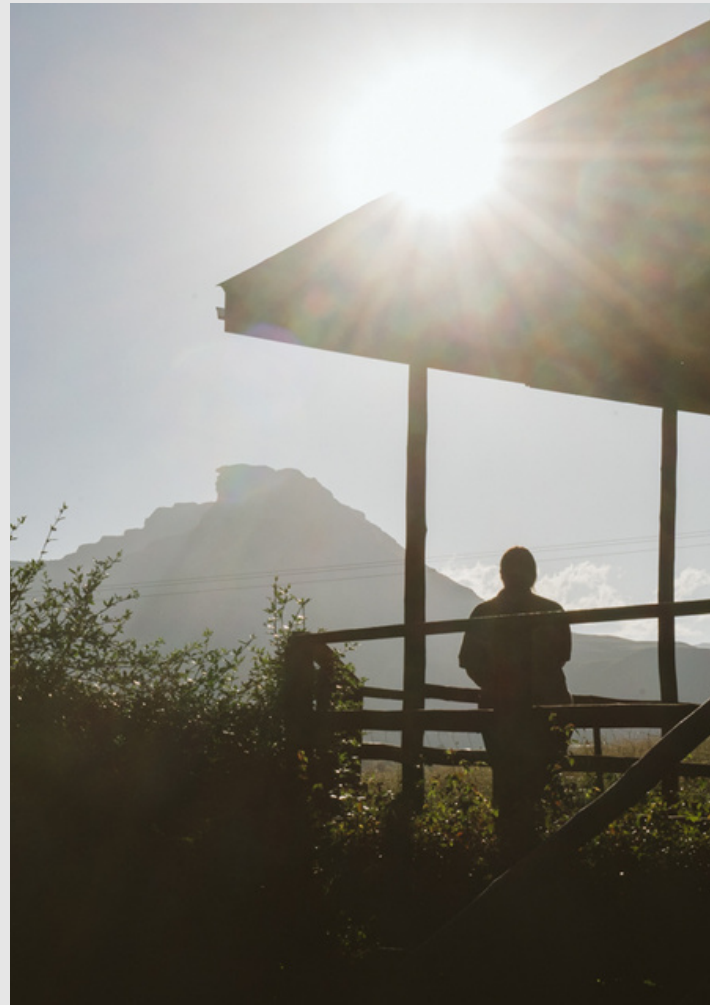
The Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project heavily focused on vulture conservation, helping to conserve South Africa's two cliff nesting species of vulture found in the area, namely the Bearded Vulture and Cape Vulture.

The Drakensberg region is a breeding stronghold for these endangered birds. The team monitors and manages vulture-safe feeding sites and nests through active surveys, camera traps and ground-based hide monitoring.

The Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site is renowned for its spectacular natural landscape, importance as a haven for many threatened and endemic species, and for its wealth of rock paintings made by the San people over a period of 4,000 years. The Heritage Site covers an area of 249,313 ha making it the largest Protected Area complex along the Great Escarpment of Southern Africa. Extending along most of KwaZulu-Natal's south-western border with Lesotho, the property provides a vital refuge for more than 250 endemic plant species and their associated fauna.

It also holds almost all of the remaining subalpine and alpine vegetation in the KwaZulu-Natal province, including extensive high altitude wetlands. The uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park has been identified as an Important Bird Area, and forms a critical part of the Lesotho Highlands Endemic Bird Area.

The Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project also includes focused conservation work in the buffer-zone surrounding the Heritage Site, calling on local communities' support. As a result, a number of the project's activities take place on local farms, offering exclusive access to Wildlife ACT.



PROJECT DETAIL



PROJECT COST: R18,200.00 FOR 2 WEEKS
(1 WEEK OPTION AVAILABLE)

The Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project is made possible through a collaboration between Wildlife ACT, the Drakensberg Conservation Initiative and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

This project is actively increasing wildlife conservation efforts in the Southern Drakensberg, with a large focus on vulture conservation, as well as priority species monitoring and protected area boundary conservation support.

The project's work involves the monitoring of nesting sites in the World Heritage Site and surrounds, managing and maintaining safe vulture feeding sites in the buffer zones surrounding the site, and conducting a long-term remote camera trapping survey in the Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site. Working closely with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project will provide useful information for use in management and policy making within the World Heritage Site and surrounding areas.

Other work done by the project involves alien plant control and emergency response for issues related to vultures and other priority species.

ACTIVITIES

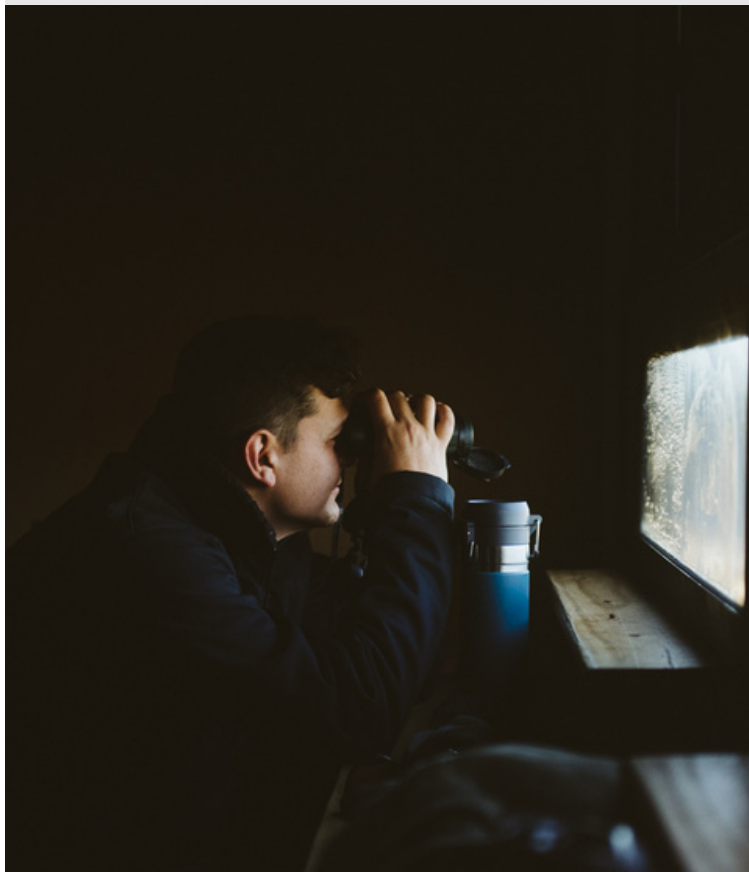
At the Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project, volunteers can expect to get involved with on-the-ground conservation work for endangered species in the area. Due to the nature of the project, activities can be quite physical with many hiking opportunities into beautiful and scenic mountainous areas. Primary responsibilities include:

Vulture Nest Monitoring

Volunteers will be required to monitor the various nest sites in the area, which often means hiking into mountainous areas, and often involves long hours identifying and monitoring activity at the nesting sites. This only takes place during the active breeding months, from May to November.

Vulture Safe Feeding Sites

Volunteers will be required to assist with the transport of carcasses to vulture safe feeding sites. This can happen at any time and volunteers must be prepared to move at a moment's notice. The site needs to be managed, and old carcasses then need to be moved off to the side when a new carcass is brought to the site. On occasion, vulture hide monitoring sessions will be required to monitor activity at the sites. The camera traps at the feeding sites also need to be maintained, which involves batteries and memory cards being changed. Once back at the house, the camera footage needs to be downloaded with photos of tagged vultures being catalogued for long-term species monitoring.



ACTIVITIES

Long-term Camera Trap Survey:

Volunteers will be required to assist with the management of the long-term camera trap survey we are conducting in the area. This survey involves long days hiking in the remote mountainous areas scouting for, setting up and maintaining camera trap stations. Management of this survey includes battery and memory card will then be changed, clearing of vegetation around the camera trap to provide a clear image of the animals passing by and prevent false triggers and, back at camp downloading and cataloguing of the camera trap footage.

Protected Area Boundary Support:

On occasion, we are required to respond to emergencies, these include vulture and other priority species concerns such as injuries, poisonings and human wildlife conflict. These situations vary but we provide support by responding rapidly and ultimately helping both the species of concern, and in the case of human wildlife conflict support by providing solutions to the problem. In some areas alien plants are encroaching into the World Heritage Site and our team works at controlling this problem in specific pre-identified vulnerable spaces.



ACCOMMODATION

The Southern Drakensberg Conservation Project team is based in a charming farm farmhouse affectionately known as the 'Gate House'. The house is situated in the buffer-zone surrounding the Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site. This location is perfectly appointed to allow for easy access to the World Heritage Site, vulture-safe feeding sites and allows for swift response to emergency call-outs.

The house is fairly rustic, but homely and equipped with a fireplace for cold weather. It offers twin rooms, an indoor bathroom, a cozy lounge and stocked kitchen, and a lovely outdoors verandah. The volunteers are responsible for preparing their own meals, as well as cleaning and maintaining the research house during their stay.



MEALS & FOOD

Meal preparation and food is all on a help-yourself basis. There is basic food supplied, however, if you require any “luxury” items, these will be at your own expense. There is a designated trip into town one day per week, thus food needs to last the full week.

Wildlife ACT endeavors to conform with any previously-disclosed dietary requirements, however, please note only dietary requirements for medical reasons will be catered for. We unfortunately cannot cater for specific weight loss or fitness diets unless medically important.



WHAT DO I NEED?

Essential Equipment and Clothing

- **Walking boots** essential for everyday use.
- **Water Bottle** (essential). Ideally 1.5 – 2 litre capacity.
- **Long trousers** and **long-sleeve shirts** as in all subtropical areas, insects can be a nuisance, especially in the evening.
- **Fleece** and/or warm **jumpers**.
- **Warm clothing**. The Southern Drakensberg region can be cold and may even experience snow during winter months. Please be sure to bring a **thick weather-proof jacket**, warm clothes for layering, **thick socks, gloves**, a **beanie** and a **scarf**.
- **Waterproof/windproof** Poncho or waterproof top and trousers recommended.

Continued

- **Sun Cream.** You will be spending a fair amount of time in the sun so please bring adequate sun protection. It is recommended that you apply a higher block than usual (30-45 SPF). The African sun is very strong and you could burn easily if you are not used to it.
- **Sun Glasses.** A good quality pair of sunglasses is recommended. Make sure they offer 100% UV protection. If you do not wear sunglasses it may be advisable to bring a pair of plastic safety glasses as these help to keep dust/insects/branches out of eyes.
- **Sun Hat.** A wide-brimmed hat is essential.
- **Medical Kit.** It is always useful to carry a small personal medical kit. This should include: Plasters, wound dressings and bandages, personal medication to last the duration of your stay, anti-histamine cream/ tablets, fungicidal foot powder/cream, antiseptic cream/solution, Imodium tablets (x30) and rehydration (e.g. Dioralyte) sachets (x 20), mild pain killers (eg. Paracetamol), tweezers, scissors, anti-nausea and anti-diarrheal tablets etc. Emergency travel kits can be purchased at most pharmacies.
- A good pair of **binoculars** will really add to your experience. A magnification of 8x, 10x or 12x is recommended.
- **Torch/Flashlight.** A head torch is required for night research and is recommended over a normal hand-held torch (LED lamps will make your batteries last far longer).
- Please bring **pens, pencils**, pocket-sized **notepads** and A4 **notebook**, which are essential for taking notes during class and on practicals. All other learning materials will be supplied.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

**Please note that Wildlife ACT staff are not qualified to give medical advice.*

PHYSICAL FITNESS

The physical aspects of this project can be challenging and a moderate fitness level is required for full participation. Activities include long days hiking in various terrains, much of which is at an incline.

FIELD BASE SAFETY

All members will be informed of the risks, health and safety procedures for the field base on arrival. It is imperative that everyone both understands and respects them.

PERSONAL SAFETY

Look after your important documents and take a separate photocopy with you. Do not wear excessive jewelry or walk around areas outside camp with valuable items on display e.g. cameras. Do not carry large amounts of cash.

INTERNET & COMMUNICATION

Please be aware that mobile reception in and around the project may be limited. The area generally receives decent cell service but there will be times when you will be out of range.



WILDLIFE ACT LOOKS FORWARD TO WELCOMING YOU!



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