



PO Box 2146 Swakopmund, Namibia
Tel: +264 64 402501 / Cell: +264 812332148
Fax: +264 64 403574
elephant@iway.na
www.desertelephant.org

ELEPHANT HUMAN RELATIONS AID CONFLICT PREVENTION VOLUNTEER PROJECT

Briefing notes for Agents

Why did EHRA begin?

EHRA is a Namibian registered not for gain organisation (reg no. 21/2003/630) which has been in operation for the past 9 years. The aim of the organisation is to conserve the desert elephant population in Southern Damaraland, through anti conflict measures. During the 70's poaching in the region soared and the elephant population was totally diminished. Through conservation efforts a small population of elephants returned to the area in the mid 1990's which although fantastic for conservation, created many problems for the subsistence communities and farmers in the region. Elephants, in their search for water damaged many community water points leaving people with out access to fresh water. In addition local communities had lost knowledge on elephant behaviour and therefore the ability to live with out fear and in safety with their large neighbours. During this time, due to so many complaints, it was motioned that all elephants in the region should be irradiated. EHRA was formed during this time and helped to over turn this decision.

What does EHRA do?

One solution to the conflict problem is to construct large protection walls around the water points, which still allow elephants access to drink, but stops them from pulling pipes and breaking the infrastructures. The idea from the formation of the organisation was to launch a volunteer project that would conduct this work.

This method has been incredibly successful in preventing conflict situations and thanks to the help of over 1150 volunteers, EHRA has constructed over 147 protection walls and alternative drinking points for elephants. In order to assess which farms elephants visit it, was also deemed important to know where elephants move and therefore a twice monthly elephant patrol was devised. Identification and movement data has been gathered on all elephants in the area which is an invaluable tool in elephant management. Volunteers also assist each year on the government game counts throughout the region, which is a 2 week long project.

Through the volunteer scheme and a school partnership programme, EHRA has totally renovated a local school, A.Gariseb Primary which is on the Ugab River. All 290 children attending the school are from farms affected by elephant movements and indeed the elephants are often with in metres of the school! In addition to upgrading classroom, office and dormitory blocks, EHRA has provided a computer room, library, huge vegetable garden and playground!

EHRA has expanded its work to include education in The PEACE Project, which is a practical, elephant training programme for local communities and schools, which aims to empower people with information which enables them to live in a peaceful way with out fear and conflict with the local herds of elephants. In addition local game guards are taught how to approach elephants safely during their patrols and how to identify the elephants in their area.

Conflict incidents result in pressure on the government to shoot 'problem elephants' and EHRA therefore strives to protect the elephants by reducing the opportunities for damage to water points, collating accurate data on elephant numbers and movements and providing education on elephant behaviour.

EHRA is a small grass roots organisation with 8 dedicated and passionate staff. We are 100% committed to conserving the desert elephants, assisting communities and providing a safe, rewarding and once in a lifetime experience to our fabulous groups of volunteers.

Being an EHRA Volunteer

How it works

The project works in two week blocks and volunteers can stay for a minimum of 2 or a maximum of 12 weeks.

The first week is a building week. Volunteers build walls around farmers and communities water pumps, water tanks and windmills which pump the water, so that the elephants are able to access the water but can not damage the infrastructure. Elephants often pull up pipes or put their tusks through water tanks to get to the water which they are able to smell.

The building week is quite hard work and physically challenging, but the aim is to work together as a team and do as much as you are capable of. This week is very satisfying and groups tend to bond and adapt to bush life very quickly, taking it in turns to cook over the fire and deliver the first cup of coffee to everyone in bed!

The second week is a patrol week. The aim of this week is to track the various resident herds in the area to record movement patterns and information such as new births, deaths and other important events such as mating. The elephant's movements are recorded through their GPS positions which are then plotted onto on line maps on our database. This information then shows which farms the elephants visit to drink water and therefore where EHRA needs to build protection walls. Data on elephant numbers is incredibly important as EHRA is the only organization providing accurate figures to the government on the elephants in this area.

Getting there

Volunteers meet at the coastal town of Swakopmund. EHRA office will arrange all transfers and accommodation, although this is paid for by the volunteer.

Volunteers can fly into Walvis Bay or Windhoek International Airport. Walvis Bay is just 30 mins from Swakopmund whereas Windhoek is a 4 hour drive in a safe and reliable modern mini bus. Transfers from Windhoek airport to Swakopmund are N\$480 and from Walvis Bay N\$220.

Volunteers should arrive on the Sunday prior to the project as we have a short briefing in the evening at the guesthouse Villa Wiese, where all the volunteers stay. EHRA has a dedicated dormitory room costing N\$130 Namibian dollars and there are also single N\$350 and double rooms N\$385 available.

A full information pack with all details of kit required, information on visas, currency, weather, reading will be provided.

Structure of the 2 week project

On the Monday morning the group depart to EHRA base camp +- 4 hour drive in EHRA's Toyota Quantum. In the evening there is a full safety briefing and explanation of the project to be undertaken. Tuesday AM the group pack and leave to the build site +- 1 hour drive, set up camp for the week and begin work. On the Saturday AM the group returns to base camp and the rest of the weekend is for relaxing. The area around camp is beautiful and wonderful to explore. On the Sunday the group have the opportunity to join our staff on the food run to a local town called Uis, where there is a small supermarket, a lodge that provides internet connection, a swimming pool and a small restaurant. On Sunday evening there is a briefing specific to the week's patrol, what is the aim of the week, which elephants we need to track, and specific safety information on behaviour around elephants.

On the next day, Monday the group leave for elephant patrol and spend the week tracking the local herds of elephants. They return to the base camp on Thursday PM then leave for Swakopmund on Friday AM.

For those completing 2 or more rotations, the programme follows the same routine with a different focus on elephant patrol each week, meaning that volunteers would experience different elephants, scenery and areas of Damaraland.

Accommodation:

Volunteers are provided with bed rolls, which includes a mattress but volunteers need to bring their own sleeping bags and pillows. During the rainy and colder season we provide 2 man tents on build week and space allowing on patrol. Otherwise volunteers sleep under the stars under a tarpaulin. At base camp volunteers are accommodated in a tree! This is a very large platform within a huge Ana Tree and is wonderful! There are two elephant drinking dams in the camp and the elephants often wonder through!

During build week there is a long drop toilet provided. There are no washing facilities this week, so volunteers are advised to bring wet wipes. At base camp we have toilets and showers which have hot water. During patrol our camps are very basic, we camp wild every night depending on the elephants locations and always find a stunning spot to camp for the night.

Duration

Volunteers can book for 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 or 12 weeks.

Dates

The project runs throughout the entire year with a 4 week break between mid December and beginning of February.

Who are EHRA volunteers?

EHRA takes a maximum of 14 volunteers per project from 17 + years of age. All volunteers are required to complete a medical form and if over 65 a Dr must sign the form. On EVERY trip we have a mixture of young and old, male and female, although there is a strong female, 22 years plus trend.

Prices to agents

Price for 2015 is 600 pounds sterling per 2 week project. There is a sliding scale we can offer for multiple trips.

What is included/excluded

Included: all equipment, food, transfers and accommodation whilst on the project.

Not included is insurance, flights, accommodation whilst in Swakopmund, transfers and personal equipment.

Why choose EHRA?

Each EHRA volunteer physically contributes to the conservation of the desert elephants. Volunteers can immediately see the difference that their hard work and funding provides. The volunteer project is the heart of the organisation, it is REAL conservation work at ground level. In addition EHRA is one of the most well established volunteer projects with over 850 volunteers helping to construct over 115 walls.

Link to EHRA flicker page

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/55176702@N02/>

Links to videos and films

Life as an EHRA volunteer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuF6oD840Zc>

The Travel Channel 'The Ethical Traveller' EHRA Feature Feb 2012:

<http://vimeo.com/35355238>

Interviews with EHRA staff and further explanation of the organisations aim:
<http://vimeo.com/15996534>

Testimonials

Aled Morris - 28th Feb - 11th March 2011



My time with EHRA was more than I could have ever expected. I made some great friends and have taken away some even better memories from my time with you guys. Namibia's beauty is difficult to translate into words. There is such a difference between the lush green areas surrounding Windhoek, compared with the arid desert we pass along the way to Uis and then the bushland which surrounds base camp. It is as if there is a postcard-photograph view everywhere you look. Once we arrived at the build site the experience really began. Cooking over an open fire for fellow volunteers and staff next to the Ugab river bed was a great challenge and one I looked forward to every time I was on 'duty'. The building itself was hot, physical and great fun with everyone pulling together and chipping in to help each other out when needed. The staff are always on hand to give their expert advice on rock selection to mixing cement and general information about the area we were in. I feel that I learned a great deal about the environment, the culture of the locals and the challenges that Namibia faces - this again was down to the in depth knowledge and passion for conservation that the staff possess. I will never forget one night whilst on tracking week when we set up camp at the foot of a koppie and watched a herd called G6 walk off into the distance, later there was a stunning lightning storm on the horizon whilst fireflies flew around us and we stared up at the Milky Way. That was unbelievably beautiful.

Claudia Ruecknagel 21st November - 17th December 2011



When I tried finding the right volunteer project for myself last year I wanted to do something useful for humans as well as working with animals in the wild. I found EHRA and thought: this is it. But I never expected it to become such a wonderful experience. We definitely all got so much more out of this whole project than we all thought before. Living in the bush 24/7, physically working from 8 till 5 with a little siesta during the day, being surrounded by strangers all the time in the beginning and no shower for 5 days was really pushing the limits but getting close within hand reach to the elephants was all worth it. And I made friends who will stay with me for a long time since EHRA. Volunteering is the way to go - and everybody involved in EHRA is putting so much effort and love in the project that nobody will walk out of this experience without saying they absolutely loved it. I cant wait to go back.

Emily Webber - 10th - 21st October 2011



Everyone should experience EHRA! We all had our own reasons for doing a trip like this, some wanting to escape the city life, some to find themselves, some just there for their friend, but whatever the reasons the end result was same for everyone, totally inspired. For me, two weeks wasn't enough and having to come home was a real shock to the system, there simply wasn't a moment that I didn't love! I will never forget sleeping under the stars rolling over and watching a bull elephant eating out of the tree less than 10 foot away, or laughing and singing with new friends, seeing black rhino in the wild, making 4 whole roast chickens for dinner, taking a shovel and matches to the toilet, new found love of peanut butter and jam sarnies, the stars – brighter and clearer than I have ever seen, the sound of trumpeting elephants in the dark, or the joyous feeling of a shower after building week! (If you like home comforts, this probably isn't the trip for you, if you can handle Glastonbury festival then you'll be just fine!) I feel very privileged to have been able to be a part of something that I feel is so special and does such great work. I will be back, hopefully for longer this time! Thank you EHRA for memories and an experience I will never forget!

Other EHRA Projects

Families

We will be organising a family specific volunteering project, further information will be provided.

Schools

We are always looking for other schools to join our partnership scheme. This is a once yearly renovation project at a local Namibian school combined with a week long trek where students are taught to navigate. Please contact Rachel for further information.

For further information please refer to our web site www.desertelephant.org or contact Rachel elephant@iway.na +264 64 402501