

STUDY ABROAD SOUTH AFRICA: JUNE 6-AUGUST 3

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Overview of My Experience

- Since I could remember, I wanted to be a wildlife veterinarian in Africa. Before this summer, however, I had never even traveled to Africa and I had no idea what it would be like to be a veterinarian on this very unique continent. So this summer I took the opportunity to work with wildlife experts and veterinarians, and it was an experience of a lifetime! I started off my trip doing a three week program with the University of Pretoria, called Vets in the Wild. We traveled all around the northern part of South Africa, observing and learning about wildlife and working with wildlife veterinarians. After the three week program, I interned at a wildlife center called the Cradle of Life in Mpumalanga, South Africa. There, I looked after wild animals, both captive bred and free roaming.

Lion Park



- On the first day of my trip, I visited a lion park. The park contained over 100 lions, in addition to a few cheetahs and tigers. Although all the animals here were captive bred, I was taught about the behavior of these creatures in the wild.

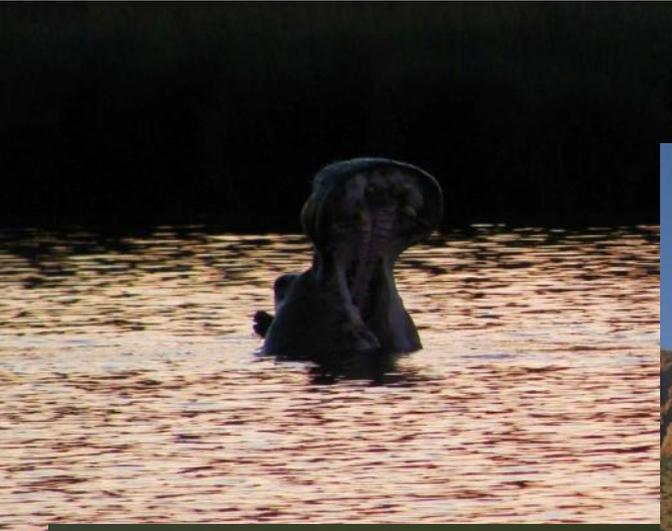


CLAW: Community Led Animal Welfare

- For a few days, the other students and I went out into the poor townships in order to provide free medical care to the people's pets. We vaccinated and treated over 100 cats and dogs, and also taught the people about the proper care of animals.



Imbambala



- I continued my journey onto a private game reserve called Imbambala. This place was so desolate that I had to ride a boat across a lake in order to get there. Here, I worked with wildlife experts who taught us about wildlife management. I not only attended lectures, but went out in the wild in order to learn about the African bush. I was surrounded by leopards, rhinos, hippos, deadly snakes and hundreds of other species, but I was taught how to live with these creatures and to track them by foot. Never did I consider that such a big part of becoming a wildlife veterinarian is being able to understand and track these animals.

Shooting a Rifle

□ I was surprised to learn how important it is for wildlife veterinarians to be able to shoot a rifle. I soon realized that they are responsible for shooting dart guns to sedate animals, using a rifle as defense against dangerous creatures (including poachers) and possibly hunting animals as a part of wildlife management. After a few rifle lessons, I got the opportunity to go up into a helicopter and shoot a dart at a target like wildlife veterinarians do when they must capture large animals, such as elephants or giraffes. This experience was both exhilarating and frightening, considering I felt very unqualified. Fortunately, I shot my target, and once I had finished darting from a helicopter, I got to dart eland antelope on the ground as part of a translocation project.



Kruger National Park



- I spent the next several days visiting Kruger National Park. This national park is about the size of Israel and contains hundreds of different animal species. I drove around the park, observing animals and learning about their behavior. I had the opportunity to spot the “big five”: rhino, elephant, buffalo, lion and leopard. I also learned about the different issues surrounding African wildlife. I attended lectures on poaching, elephant overpopulation and wildlife diseases.

Game Capture



- Over the next couple days, I worked with a wildlife veterinarian. He taught me about the different drugs he uses to sedate and treat animals. He also taught me about the methods he uses to capture animals. I had the opportunity to help treat a wildebeest with a cut leg and to relocate six eland antelope.

Reptile Park and Rehab Center



- On my last couple days with Vets in the Wild, I visited a reptile center and a rehabilitation center. The reptile center contained dozens of different snake species, as well as many other species. I learned about their behavior, and even performed a necropsy on a snake. The rehab center contained over 100 animals, all of which were sick or injured or were being raised for educational purposes. Here we also learned about animal behavior and veterinary care of wild species.

Cradle of Life Safari Park

- After training with veterinarians and wildlife experts, I interned at a wildlife center called the Cradle of Life. The center contained a safari park, where zebras, black wildebeests, giraffes, sable antelope, porcupines, and dozens of other species roamed. Here, I was responsible for driving through the park every day, ensuring that the animals were safe and healthy. In one instance I discovered a dead sable antelope and was responsible for performing an informal autopsy. After discovering a heavy lung infection, I sent samples to a veterinarian for a formal analysis.



Animal Sanctuary



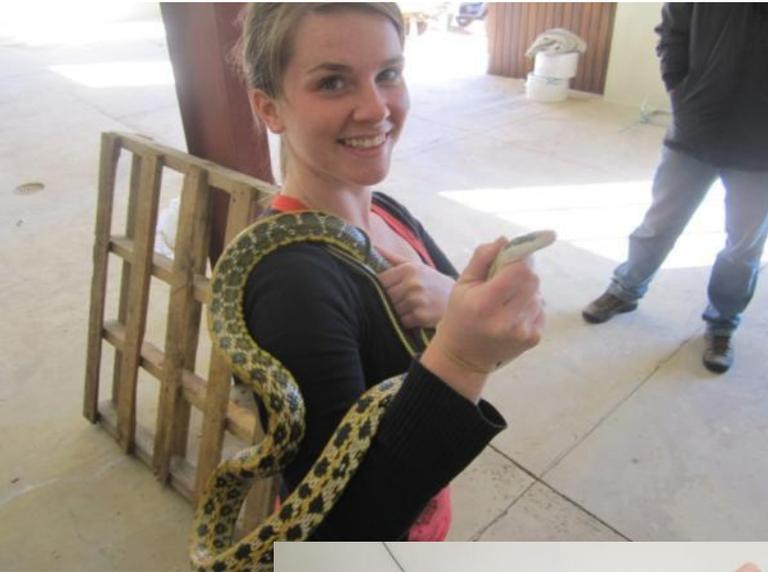
- The center also contained an animal sanctuary, where captive bred lions, tigers, cheetahs, jaguars, leopards, hyenas, jackals and birds of prey lived. I was responsible for feeding and looking after these animals.

Rehabilitation Center



- The Cradle of Life contained a rehabilitation center. The animals here are all injured or captive bred animals. I helped to raise a nine month old hyena named Duma, and two young mountain lions (Nittany's cousins). I also looked after meerkats, a bushbaby and wild cats.

Reptile Park



- The reptile park housed over 80 venomous snakes. My duties included medicating all of them orally. I was taught how to correctly handle these snakes and how to care for them properly.

What I've gained from my experience

- My trip to Africa will probably be one of the most valuable experiences of my lifetime. It provided me a glimpse of what to expect in my future career and has led me on a track to fulfilling my goals. What I expected from my experience is completely different from what I encountered; but I now know what obstacles are in the way of my career goals, and so I am prepared to overcome those obstacles. Through this internship, I have not only gained valuable experience in my field of study, but I have also gained confidence that I have chosen the right career path for me. Many thanks to College of Agriculture and Mr. George Settlemyer for providing me the funds to have such a fantastic experience!