Carnivore Conservation Research at Kanaan

Unrivalled Scenery with Wildlife – Namibia at its Best

Background
The successful management of any wildlife area is a complex and difficult task with many facets and different interests. The scale of operations can be daunting and requires many eyes and hands to get the necessary work done. Kanaan is the newest addition to the N/a’an ku sê project network and a true desert gemstone. Previously utilised as a film, photography and holiday destination we aim to establish an unfenced wildlife reserve which provides refuge for a suite of endangered species and is based on scientific and sustainable management practices. Moreover, Kanaan is part of the Namib Sand Sea and holds ample photographic opportunities including Namibia’s iconic red sand dunes, vast open grass plains dotted with camel thorn trees as well as abundant antelope, towering mountain ranges and many other scenic features. Kanaan welcomes guests who want to be actively involved in almost any of the duties which sound management requires, and those that want to experience the desert first-hand. During your visit, help the local team record wildlife information that contributes to the long-term management of the area. The main flagship species are cheetah, brown hyaena, spotted hyaena, leopard and a range of desert-adapted wildlife species. We’re starting from scratch, so visitors can really make an impact.
Environment
Kanaan (and part of neighbouring farm Vergenoeg) provides 352km² of stunning desert scenery. The farm features all the iconic vistas that Namibia is world-famous for and hence has been used for professional film and photo shoots. Throw in some of the country’s most spectacular wildlife and you’ve got the perfect combination for photographic and research adventures. Kanaan’s environment entails a spectacular mix of red sand dunes, imposing mountain ranges, vast grass plains and old camel thorn trees. In addition, Kanaan directly borders the Namib Naukluft Park and therefore provides an important link for landscape scale wildlife conservation. But that’s not all – Kanaan also has been home to the San Bushman and sometime in the future will again be home to a traditional San settlement which volunteers may have the opportunity to visit in order to learn more about Namibia’s rich cultural history.

Mapping
The simple basis for any professional management of a wildlife area is a good, accurate map. Maps, for example, are necessary to evaluate plant and animal population data and guide future decisions. The volunteers will join the researchers and use a GPS unit to map anything from important wildlife observations to habitat features as well as infrastructures such as roads, water holes, fences etc. Once collected, the positional information will continually be processed into up-to-date reserve maps which are used by management and for publication of scientific results. Mapping means quality time in this fantastic environment whilst collecting information on a variety of features and resources. A lot of the mapping will be undertaken on foot to understand the relevance of data at the landscape scale. Encounters with different species of wildlife are guaranteed.

Ancient San Skills
Nobody knows and understands the vast and dry southern African landscape better than the San people. Their expert knowledge of spoors, plants and animals is world-renowned. N/a’an ku sê’s researchers have made use of and immensely
profited from these skills in many scenarios in the last several years. Kanaan will in the future be home to a traditional San settlement and volunteers will have the chance to experience the unique culture and ancient field skills of the San directly. In the future, once the settlement is fully developed, volunteers may also choose to visit the village for an introduction to original San folklore and culture.

Capture Mark Release

To understand how wildlife utilise the reserve and how they interact in a challenging and demanding environment requires indirect monitoring techniques such as GPS satellite tracking. Especially for very secretive species like the leopard and brown hyaena, GPS collars are a good way of gathering important information. The volunteers will help researchers identify areas of regular carnivore activity (dens, riverbeds or marking trees for example), place cage traps there and then check cages. When species of interest are captured, the animals will be immobilised on-site and fitted with suitable GPS or VHF trackers for continued monitoring. After release, the work continues at the computer following the satellite information from study animals and putting them in a scientific context.

Radio Telemetry Tracking

Collaring animals with GPS trackers to follow their day-to-day movements is only one piece of the puzzle though. Remote satellite tracking does not tell us much about the breeding success, prey selection, health status or other important ecological parameters of a study animal. Direct observations are necessary to evaluate these suitably and therefore the team will go into the field regularly to track collared individuals of any species and make direct assessments. The animals are found by way of radio telemetry which means locating the radio transmitter in each collar with an antenna and receiver. Days in the field can be long and warm, and a certain amount of walking is often required following the radio signal of transmitters – but the rewards of finding wildlife...
in the desert and collecting meaningful information at the same time are unrivalled.

**Game Count**

Herbivores of all sizes are an integral part of African ecosystems. In the vast Namib Desert it will be critical to understand local ungulate population dynamics and migrations to ensure sufficient water supply. At the same time, ungulate populations need to be assessed against the available vegetation to avoid damage to the ecosystem, for example from overgrazing. The volunteers will participate in regular game counts to assist these monitoring efforts. Kanaan has historically been home to large herds of migratory and desert-adapted oryx (gemsbok) and springbok, but also contains less known species such as the greater kudu or klipspringer. Ostrich populations will also be counted. During the initial resource assessment phase, a large number of game counts will be conducted to establish the baseline estimate for each species in the area. Later on, game counts will continue to assess population trends against this baseline. Questions to answer include, for example, how do wildlife utilise this semi-arid landscape on a seasonal basis and how does this correlate with predator populations?

**Camera Trapping**

During the early resource identification stage as well as during the continuous monitoring of wildlife populations we also rely on “additional eyes” in the form of motion-triggered camera traps. Because the cameras record data 24/7 and every day of the year, they often “observe” wildlife that humans overlook. Moreover, the cameras are non-selective and therefore capture information on all wildlife that pass in front of them, be they carnivores, herbivores, birds or others. This helps the researchers assess which species are present, and where they are most active, especially for animals that are usually very cryptic or entirely nocturnal. The cameras are non-invasive and sometimes record interesting behavioural data that we would otherwise have no access to. Volunteers will help set cameras in the field (for example at water
points, cheetah marking trees, caves etc.), maintain them (refresh batteries and memory cards) but also go through the abundance of images to assess and structure example, the cameras will be used to identify coat patterns of large carnivores to individuals, breeding success and also space use. See examples already recorded in the nearby Namib Desert...

Cheetah Feed
Kanaan Desert Retreat is home to five rescued cheetahs from the N/a’an ku sê Sanctuary who are now the lucky residents of a 7 hectare enclosure on the red dunes of Kanaan. Volunteers will be involved in the food preparation, feeding and caretaking of these cheetahs as well as frequent enclosure cleanings on a regular basis during their stay at Kanaan. Caring for these five cheetahs has become a vital aspect of the program at Kanaan, as N/a’an ku sê is dedicated to providing the best possible life for these former victims of human-wildlife conflict. Seeing these cheetahs up close with Kanaan’s stunning desert scenery as a backdrop is a truly inspiring opportunity that is not to be missed!

Maintenance and Security
Work on a wildlife farm does not end with science and research though. For the ecosystem to function adequately several maintenance activities are compulsory, especially in very dry areas like Kanaan. Dealing with endangered species, it will be important to conduct regular anti-poaching patrols and other security efforts. In addition, water holes need regular maintenance and have to be controlled for damage. The volunteers will be exposed to and participate in the operational aspects of the farm, and they should be prepared to get their hands dirty from time to time and contribute to maintenance as their capabilities allow.

Other Activities
One of the must-do activities in the Namib Desert is the sun-downer drive. Enjoy the tranquillity and breathtaking scenery of the Namib when the sun sets and paints the desert in unimaginable colours. We will also be conducting night drives or sleep-outs as part of our
security protocol, but also to observe some of the nocturnal desert wildlife. Similarly, volunteers may be involved in waterhole observations because wildlife in the Namib are forced to drink regularly and therefore can be seen at permanent water sources. On your rest day, make sure you sit back and let your mind wander away from the buzz of civilization—Kanaan is the ideal place for relaxation. The Namib night sky with its ever-prominent Milky Way is another highlight not to be missed.

**Accommodation**

You will be staying in the beautifully renovated Kanaan farm house with shared rooms and bathroom. Depending upon the season, tented accommodations may also become available. The guesthouse has electricity, but volunteers need to bring their own South African socket adapters to charge electric appliances. However, there’s no cell phone reception in the area. We can accommodate groups of up to 6 participants at any one time, which means you are therefore guaranteed an intimate small group experience with lots of hands on opportunities. Most meals will be provided at the house. Beverages, alcoholic drinks and snacks need to be purchased before arriving at Kanaan. The house provides a homely family atmosphere in the Namib Desert.

**Food**

Volunteers on Kanaan will receive 3 balanced meals per day. Meals include a standard breakfast with cereals and toast. Coffee and tea are available. Lunches will be provided at the guest farm or in packed form for groups active in the field. Dinners typically are warm meals with meat (chicken, red meat or fish), different vegetables and pasta, rice, potato or salad. Once per week, dinner will be in the form of a traditional Namibian braai (barbeque). Please note that due to the remote location of Kanaan, some fresh produce may only be available seasonally. Own snacks and drinks should be purchased before arriving at Kanaan. **Vegetarian options can be catered for upon request. Please inform us of any special dietary requirements prior to your arrival at the project site.**
Important Information for Everyone

Volunteers should be equipped to work under any weather conditions, including cold winters and long hours in the sun (please check prevailing weather conditions at your time of travel). The local tap water is safe to drink. Although Kanaan is not located in a Malaria zone, people must consider prophylaxis if they intend to travel to other areas in Africa and suitable insect repellents should also be brought. All volunteers should ensure adequate health insurance cover for visiting Namibia and that relevant immunisations are up-to-date. Except for emergencies, volunteers have no access to the internet on Kanaan. Local currency can be obtained at the international airport upon arrival. Laundry services will be available on selected days.

Kanaan Volunteer Checklist:

- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping mat (optional)
- Torch/flashlight
- Warm clothing (including long pants)
- Raincoats (January to end of March)
- Binoculars (recommended)
- Guide books (optional)
- Hiking shoes
- Water-bottles
- Sun protection (hat, sun-screen SPF30+)
- South African electricity socket adapter

Kanaan Donations Wish-List:

- AA batteries
- Monetary Donations for camera trap/radio collars fund
- Sleeping bags
- Sleeping mats
- Binoculars
- Guide books
- Work gloves
- Pliers for fence-cutting
- GPS Units (such as a Garmin Extrex 10 or 20)
- Hand-held radios for field communications (walk-talky with decent range)

The volunteer programme runs for 7 nights starting every Saturday. Multiple week bookings are encouraged to ensure a lasting impact on the project and due to the diversity of activities.

Pre-bookings for the Research Project at Kanaan can be made through e-mail at: bookings@naankuse.com

Or

Add Kanaan to your project itinerary in the office upon your arrival at the Sanctuary

We look forward to welcoming volunteers to Kanaan!