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## **Elephant Expedition Calf Mortality Research, Elephant Behaviour and Tracking**



EHRA is a Namibian registered not for gain organisation and has been in operation since 2003. The organisation has made a substantial difference to the conservation of the desert elephants of Namibia, through practical and realistic solutions to elephant-human conflict. Over the years EHRA's team of trackers and elephant behaviourists has grown and is today still the only elephant specific NGO in Namibia. EHRA's Director of Field Operations, Chris Pitot who has worked with EHRA for the past 15 years, is also FGASA qualified and will be leading the expedition.

EHRA conducts week long elephant patrols every other week of the year and have done so for the past 22 years. These patrols are hardcore 4x4 patrols into wild and uninhabited areas of Damaraland. EHRA has run a volunteer project every 2 weeks of the year since its conception and over 3000 people have been safely guided through an extreme wilderness experience. In addition, EHRA runs an educational project aimed at empowering people living

with elephants with the knowledge they require to live safely and without fear of the resident herds. This project also trains conservancy game guards, lodge employees and tour guides and EHRA has formalised this training with this intense 7-day elephant course.

Participants signing up this training course can be sure to gain a multitude of experience in elephant research, tracking and behaviour, to actively contributing to research into calf mortality.

## Itinerary

### **Day 1: 13 September**

Arrival to the Skeleton Coast town of Swakopmund. Before dinner you will be met by Chris Pitot. This will involve a short briefing about the arrangements for the following day's departure. Evening at leisure.

### **Day 2: 14 September**

Depart to EHRA base camp +-4 hours. On arrival to camp we will get settled, then head to the information centre for a briefing on EHRA, the itinerary for the week and the research project we will undertake. A further briefing will be given on health and safety and the schedule for the course.



### **Day 3: 15 September**

Each morning the group will start the day with a 10km trek. During the trek the art and skill of animal tracking will be explained, alongside the identification of tracks, flora and fauna. We will hike until the lunch stop which will be waiting for us.

After a healthy lunch and rest we will jump on the vehicles and head out to track the elephants. Today elephant behaviour will be concentrated on. Topics to be covered include:

- Introduction to desert elephant anatomy, physiology, behaviour, social structure, ecology.
- Introduction to identifying and aging elephants.
- Introduction to tracking elephants and viewing them in the safest way possible without causing any damage to the environment.
- Introduction to human-wildlife conflict in the area and how to solve it.
- Satellite Collaring and Earthranger – Technology providing an early warning alert system.

For those photographers in the group, we would also train in taking elephant ID photos that we always need to update the ID books.

Tonight's camp is our first wild camp and students will also be taught the importance of a desert camp set up. This will include how to ensure your camp is safe from wild animals and other important elements to consider such as placement of the fire, toilet etc. Students will also be given training in fire cooking skills every evening. EHRA runs a strict policy of leaving 'only footprints' where ever we camp.



#### **Day 4: 16 September**

The day starts with the morning hike and during the hike we will cover:

- Introduction to the area
- Identification of common trees and bushes of the area, their adaptation to the dry conditions and explanation of their medicinal value.

Lunch will be in the field and this afternoon we will concentrate on our research project of dung and water collection. The dung collection requires patience and during our time spent observing the elephants we will cover the following topics:

- Elephant Behaviour
- Understanding gestures
- Elephant Communication – seismic, tactile, chemical, visual and acoustic communication
- Feeding patterns
- Elephant Identification and aging

Participants will be responsible for the choice of camp and its set up. This evening, depending on the phase of the moon, will be a briefing on the night's sky.



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### **Day 5: Start of elephant tracking – 17 September**

This morning's walk is going to focus on tracking skills and how EHRA tracks the elephants.

- Practical work on tracking elephants including aging dung and analysing elephant footprints
- Other sources of information – such as local sightings
- How to create successful scenarios – how to anticipate elephant movements
- Safe and sensitive elephant approach by car and on foot
- Further experience on how to read elephant physical language and understanding gestures and communication
- Use of the earthranger app

This afternoon we will continue with the dung and water collection project. Students will be responsible for the choice of camp and its set up.



**Day 6: 18 September**

In this morning's walk we will collect water samples. After lunch it is the students chance to put their knowledge into practice. Students will lead the day's elephant tracking.

Students will be tested on elephant track identification and analysis. Elephant behaviour and safety will be included. Students will also be tested on their elephant knowledge, safety, camp set up.

Camp for this evening will be our last wild camp.

**Day 7: 19 September**

Our last morning will concentrate on the research project. We will aim to be back in base camp by lunch. After lunch we will organise our samples and ensure our Earthranger patrol information is complete.

We will do a last hike to the sun down spot above the Ugab River.

This evening there will be a quiz for the group on the things we have learnt, and prizes and certificates will be handed out.



### **Day 8: 20 September**

Drive back to Swakopmund.

## **Costs**

2000GBP. This includes transfers from Swakopmund to EHRA Base Camp and return, all your food and camping equipment.

## **Dates 2027**

- **14–21 February**
- **8–15 May**
- **8–15 August**
- **14–21 November**