



STORIES FROM THE FIELD: OTS AFRICAN ECOLOGY & CONSERVATION SPRING COURSE

OTS Students Experience

The Rundown!

Hello from the OTS Spring 2019 students! We are currently back in Skukuza SSLI camp after our visit to Northern Kruger and outside the park in HaMakuya, where we had a three-day homestay with families of the Venda people. But I'll get to that in a minute, we should follow the chronological order of our travels. Upon arrival in Johannesburg and all the wonderfully awkward first introductions, we had a field trip to The Cradle of Humankind where some of the best preserved skeletons of early hominid species were found and displayed, and went on a cave tour of the excavation sites. We first stayed at the Nylsvley Nature Reserve in the Limpopo Province after leaving Johannesburg. At Nylsvley we saw some of our first zebra, giraffe, and antelope, as well as all sorts of cool frogs and tons of birds! It wasn't all wildlife watching however, we began practicing our field observation skills and gathered data for our very first assignment. We then travelled on to Kruger National Park and settled into the SSLI campus in the Skukuza, the largest rest camp in Kruger. Here we began work on our LRP's (Long-term Research Projects) where we went out into the field to gather data with a faculty member, while safely watched over by our very capable game guides. We learnt a bit more about history and culture in South Africa, as well as doing some statistics work in everyone's favorite software, R (We are actually all afraid of R, plz send help).



Sprinkled into all of this studying and field work are 6 am game drives where we see some COOL COOL COOL animals, as well as some afternoon visits to the tourist shop and restaurant, and practicing some language with the members of the catering staff (Better learn some Venda ASAP!!). All fourteen of us students have seen the Big 5; Lions, Elephants, Buffalo, Rhino, and Leopards. The Big 5 club is missing some quintessential African fauna, as we have also seen hippos, crocodiles, African wild dogs, monitor lizards, and some lucky few have seen a cheetah and a honey badger.

There are some hyenas that like to come along the fence of camp after dinner, and the vervet monkeys are practically everywhere. On February 15th we travelled to the northern part of KNP to the Shingwedzi research camp before making our way out of the park to HaMakuya. While still in Shingwedzi we worked on some LRP (Long-term Research Project) write-up, and a group started work on their FFP (Faculty Field Project) with a SANparks hero, Freek Venter. We took a few trips to the pool, and had an amazing sighting of a leopard and lots of hippos! After 6 days in Shingwedzi, we left KNP to HaMakuya. We were split into groups with a Venda interpreter and then met our families, staying in a round house called a Rondavel, which is commonly used as a guest house. Everyone had similar experiences with a few exceptions, some groups had to fight off sun spiders (they won), some rode in donkey carts, but EVERYBODY played a heck of a lot of soccer. Now we are back at Skukuza, after our worlds being turned upside down for a few days. We've hunkered down with some work to finish before spring break next week in Cape Town, we're looking forward to the beach! Stay tuned for more adventures abroad.