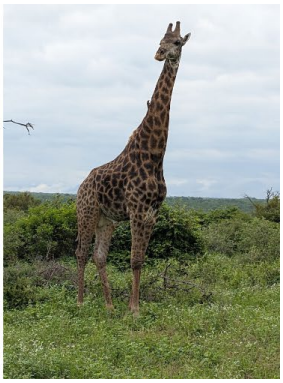
UW Wildlife Conservation in South Africa – Summer 2026
Program Handbook





UW Wildlife Conservation in South Africa is offered by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This Program Handbook supplements handbook(s) or materials you receive from your program leader as well as the Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information and advice available at the time of printing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

Questions about your program abroad (housing options, facilities abroad, etc.) as well as questions relating to academics (e.g. course credit and equivalents, registration deadlines, etc.) should be directed to CALS Study Abroad at UW-Madison.

This program handbook contains the following information:

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Contact Information

On-Site Program Leader Information

- Program Leader: Dr. Jim Berkelman | jberkelman@wisc.edu |608-265-9757 |217 Russell Labs
- Program Leader: Rebecca Johnson | rhjohnson@wisc.edu | 116 Agricultural Hall

UW-Madison Information

College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Study Abroad
116 Agricultural Hall, 1450 Linden Drive
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Tel: 608-265-0673
Web: studyabroad.wisc.edu

For Program Advising & Grades: **Rebecca Johnson** Study Abroad Advisor E-mail: rebecca.h.johnson@wisc.edu	*For Financial Matters:* **Judy Humphrey** IAP Accountant E-mail: judy.humphrey@wisc.edu

Emergency Contact Information

In case of an emergency, call the main UW Study Abroad number **(608) 265-6329** between 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the UW Study Abroad staff on call at **(608) 516-9440.**

Embassy Registration

All program participants who are U.S. citizens must register with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) before departure as this will sign you up for automatic travel and safety alerts as well as help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. You can register on-line at https://travelregistration.state.gov. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country's embassy or consulate.

U.S. Consulate in Johannesburg

1 Sandton Drive
Sandhurst
Phone: +27 (11) 290-3000
Fax: +27 (11) 884-0396
https://za.usembassy.gov/

Program Dates

8/14/2026 through 8/27/2026

Preparation Before Leaving

Immigration

Passport
Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website (travel.state.gov/passport). If you already have your passport, *make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad.* You may have to apply for a renewal.

It is good practice to carry a couple paper photocopies of your passport. Also, save a photo of it on your phone as well as somewhere online where you can access it in case you lose your physical passport.

Visa
A visa is not required for U.S. citizens for this program. U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport valid for at least six months beyond the end of the program. Non U.S. Passport holders may have different visa requirements. Ask your Study Abroad Advisor, if you have any questions.

Handling Money Abroad

Currency and Exchange Rate
The official currency of South Africa is the South African Rand (ZAR). It is around 17 Rand for 1 Dollar. You can withdraw cash from ATMs in the airport or exchange dollars for Rand at a currency exchange at the airport. Using an ATM has lower transaction fees than a currency exchange. If you are going to use an ATM, make sure you have a PIN code. Current exchange rates can be found online at https://www1.oanda.com/currency/converter/ or https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/.

Cash and ATM/Debit Cards
For this program, we recommend bringing $50-100 in cash in US Dollars and the equivalent of $100-200 in South African Rand. Nearly all required expenses are covered by the program fee (see the program cost sheet for details), but it is good to have some cash to purchase snacks and/or souvenirs. We recommend bringing at least two bank cards and notifying your financial institutions of your dates/locations of travel in advance of the program so they do not automatically block your card when it is used internationally. Make sure to check with your bank about getting an international 4-digit PIN and details on how to access your account in South Africa if necessary. Check whether your bank is part of the CIRRUS system. If it is, you will be able to withdraw cash at South African ATMs (automated teller machines) bearing the CIRRUS signs. Remember to note the contact information of your bank or credit card company to use in case of a lost or stolen card.

Safety with Money
While most of the program takes place on wildlife reserves where you can safely store money and belongings in your housing, be sure to use precautions with money while en route between

program locations and particularly when passing through busier urban areas. Be aware of pickpockets in crowded areas, especially those frequented by tourists. Carry your money, debit/credit cards, and other important documents in a money pouch or pocket inside your clothing. You may want to purchase a money belt that can be easily worn underneath your clothing. Do not carry all your cash and cards in a single place in your bags or on your person – it is wise to spread these out among several locations on your person to avoid losing it all at once if anything should happen.

It is unlikely that you will need to withdraw cash during the program, but if you do, use precautions when using an ATM. Do not reveal your pin number for your ATM/debit card, use machines inside banks or other buildings, and avoid withdrawing cash alone.

Maintain a copy of all credit card numbers and any PIN numbers in a safe place, either on paper or in a virtual location in the Cloud, and do not carry these with you at any time. Leave a copy of these documents with your Financial Representative in the United States.

Packing

Suggested Packing List (not comprehensive)
A packing list will be provided in Canvas in the coming months.

We will be travelling to South Africa during their winter, which is similar to October in Wisconsin. You can except mild, mostly sunny days with high temperatures in the 60s and 70s F and cool nights with lows in the 40s and occasionally 30s F. Rain is infrequent, but we may be far from shelter when it happens. We will be riding in open vehicles in the early morning most days, so make sure to pack multiple light warm layers (e.g. sweatshirt, sweater, fleece, windproof jacket) that can be shed as it gets warmer. You should plan on bringing a couple of reusable masks (in the event they are needed to minimize transmission of colds/covid-19/other illness), comfortable clothing suitable for field work in a wide range of temperatures and for relaxing/travel in between, warm layers for cool nights and early morning field work, a wool hat, extra socks (long), rain jacket, a pair of tennis shoes/sneakers and a pair of good hiking boots, a sun hat with visor or wide brim, sunglasses, sunscreen, insect repellent, binoculars (if you have them), general toiletries, dry shampoo/leave-in conditioner, a light day bag/fanny pack, a bag for used clothing. Having two pairs of shoes is a good idea: a pair of tennis shoes or sneakers to keep dry and for comfort and hiking boots that are water resistant for field work. Valuable items, expensive jewelry, and items that cannot be replaced should be left at home.

Electronics
You do not need to bring a laptop or tablet for this program, but you may want to bring your own device.

South Africa uses 220/240V 15 amp power. The main power outlet type is 'M' type but 'C' type plugs work with an adaptor. We recommend buying one similar to this in advance of the program.

Check with your cell phone / mobile provider about whether your phone will work in South Africa, and what the charges are for international roaming. We recommend using WhatsApp for tollfree messaging and international calling where wifi is available.

If you are in South Africa for some time, you should consider buying a South African sim card for easy access to the local mobile phone networks, including toll-free numbers. Sim cards are available at the airport or local retail outlets including supermarkets

Important Documents
Important documents (passport, emergency contact information, insurance card, ATM card, money, etc.) should be carried on your person or in your carry-on luggage. Also, make sure that you make a copy of important documents and leave them with a friend or family member back home to access in the case of an emergency.

Prescription Medication
Take enough prescription medication to last the duration of the program. It is very important to keep prescription medication in their original packaging and carry a formal letter/prescription from your doctor explaining your condition and use of medication in case it is asked of you in customs. Prescriptions should be packed in your carry-on luggage. Research whether your medications are restricted in South Africa – CISI/AXA (our insurance provider) can provide advising on this if you have trouble finding the information on your own.

Travel and Arrival Information

Flights
You are responsible for making your own flight arrangements to arrive and depart from your program. Specific flight guidelines will be shared with you by your Program Leaders later this semester. Feel free to monitor flights, but do not purchase them until you review that guidance from your Program Leaders. We will set a time for meeting up in the Johannesburg airport late in the day on Friday, August 14, and students should schedule their flights to arrive there by that time. Students who choose to travel to South Africa before the start of the course should plan to return to Johannesburg on August 14 to meet up with the group at the airport to begin the program.

The Academic Program

Course Information
Students will receive 2 credits of Forest & Wildlife Ecology 375: African Wildlife Conservation upon successful completion of the two-week program in South Africa. Assignments include an African wildlife species presentation, daily journal entries, lecture reflections, and participation in course activities.

This course can count as a major elective in the "Conservation" category for the Wildlife Ecology major. See your academic advisor about using the course to meet requirements for other majors.

Getting Credit
Study Abroad will automatically register all students for the study abroad placeholder course (ZZZ 100: Study Abroad Placeholder) for the Summer. After the program ends and your grade is awarded, the placeholder course will be replaced with 2 credits of Forest & Wildlife Ecology 375. To ensure that you receive course credit, you must submit a Course Equivalent Request (CER) by following these instructions:

1. Log into your MyStudyAbroad portal.
2. Select the "Academics" tile.
3. Select "Option 1: Pre-Approved CER".
4. Select the appropriate course by clicking the blue "ADD" button.
5. Hit "Submit Request."

Field Study
Be aware that a field study can be stressful for many reasons. Students are away from the comfort and familiarity of home/campus and this might be uncomfortable. Students will meet local individuals and will face language barriers and cultural differences. As a field study participant, students will be expected to be a team member. Students will be with the same travel mates for days, evenings, and even nights as they share bus rides, meals in restaurants, and overnights in hotels or local homestays. It is a 24 hour job to be a field study participant. Please anticipate these challenges and be ready to address them with respect and grace. On-site staff and leaders are there to help students with difficult situations, to encourage open conversations, and to build greater understanding.

During a field study, students visit many sites, oftentimes multiple in one day. At many of these sites, the people students interact with have typically volunteered their time to teach about their business / culture / country. It is essential to remain respectful and considerate with everyone you meet throughout the program. Keep in mind that each site offers firsthand experiences and opportunities to learn about the local people, culture, and programs.

Most importantly, though, a field study provides opportunities to build connections between both participants and locals. Students are challenged to think outside the box and oftentimes quickly make decisions. Being proactive and deliberate during site visits can help students feel more connected to their program and local culture, especially considering the short duration. The rewards of a field study are only limited by what the student can achieve, so we encourage every participant to embrace their unique experience.

Living Abroad

Housing and Meals
All housing is provided. The first and possibly the last night of the program will be spent in a hotel in Johannesburg.

For the majority of the program, students will stay in shared dorm rooms with bathrooms down the hall at Siyafunda research station in the Makakali Game Reserve. There is a lounge area where lectures are delivered and a small library with reference material. All meals are prepared on site.

Dietary requirements like vegetarian, vegan, or other allergies can be accommodated. Laundry and limited wifi is available at central locations at the research station.

In Kruger National Park, you will stay in shared huts. The bathrooms are in a nearby building with hot running water and flushing toilets. The area is fenced and lit at night.

Wifi
Access to wifi is limited to the central area of the Siyafunda research station and will vary during the program depending on location. You should not count on always having access to it.

Insurance
You will be enrolled in the UW System required health insurance through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) and the cost of the insurance coverage is included in program fees.

Review the Policy Details Brochure & Claim Form (Policy # GLM N19012232), particularly the first several pages. This is the main document outlining the specific coverage details related to CISI insurance for most study abroad programs. We recommend reviewing this policy in advance of departure to familiarize yourself with the plan and know how it can best support you.

You will receive an email from CISI in the weeks preceding your program, asking you to create a CISI login to access your account and print your CISI insurance card.

Health and Safety
Program specifics will be discussed during the pre-departure orientation, but be sure to fully review the required general Health and Safety Orientation in your MyStudyAbroad portal for general health and safety guidelines. If you have specific questions or concerns, please contact your Program Leader and/or Study Abroad Advisor.

We recommend that students meet with a travel health specialist at least a month before departure to discuss any health concerns. There are no required immunizations for visitors traveling from the US, but we strongly recommend following CDC guidelines for Vaccines and Medicines in South Africa. You should make sure that you are up to date on routine vaccinations like MMR, DTP, and polio. Vaccines for Hepatitis A and B and typhoid are also recommended. Limpopo Province, where we will be staying for the majority of our trip, is considered a malaria risk area although the risk is minimal in winter. Students should consult with their health provider about malaria prophylaxis.

Motion Sickness
This program involves driving between program locations in addition to flights. If you are prone to motion sickness, bring medication or other items (e.g. anti-nausea pressure point wrist bands, ginger or mint candy) to help manage its effects.

Animal Encounters
The Siyafunda research station is not fenced, and large, potentially dangerous animals like elephants, buffalo, and lions routinely wander through the area. For safety, students must not leave the vicinity of the research station unless accompanied by a field ranger nor leave their

dorm rooms in the middle of the night. The Siyafunda staff will alert us when there are wild animals in the area, and may advise us to retreat to a building or vehicle. While riding in open safari vehicles or stopped to view animals, students should avoid leaning or extending their arms out of the vehicle or standing up suddenly.

Physical Demands
As part of this program, you will be expected to participate in ”bush walks” of varying length, sometimes over steep and potentially challenging terrain. There will also be other instances when you will be expected to do some more substantial walking in order to reach certain sites. You may encounter mosquitoes or biting insects and should dress appropriately and apply repellent as necessary. The bush walks will be led by armed rangers, and you will beadvised to stay directly on trails and avoid approaching potentially dangerous animals

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT INFORMATION/WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Siyafunda
https://www.siyafundaconservation.com/

UW-Madison International Academic Programs
studyabroad.wisc.edu

U.S. State Department:
travel.state.gov

Center for Disease Control
cdc.gov/travel/

Tourist Information
lonelyplanet.com

Student Testimonials

The 2026 program is the first iteration of the UW Wildlife Conservation in South Africa program, but we would like to share some quotes from non-UW students who have participated in programming at Siyafunda:

“This trip was one of the greatest experiences of my entire life, and I am thrilled with what I got out of it. I feel more confident in my ability to solve real-world problems. It is as though I’ve stepped into the life of the people I grew up admiring. I’ve been instilled with a newfound love and appreciation for how diverse and beautiful the world is, as well as how nature can connect people together from anywhere.”

“No amount of money could ever pay for the experience and newfound perspective I gained, nor the confidence I found in myself and my career path. If you are like me and want to know if zoology is truly the field for you, [this] is a perfect way to figure that out.”

“When I arrived, the scenery was absolutely beautiful. I learned about animals and their importance to the local environment, as well as the impact of plants and trees. This impacted me greatly as it was a new learning experience for me, and the people involved were amazing.”