

Namibia:

CHEETAH KINGDOM

- Hands-on participation in Africat's Annual Big Cat Health Examination weekend.
- Expert led by Africat, giving a fascinating insight into Namibian big cat conservation.
- Five nights at Okonjima, the home of Africat and where big cat sightings are unparalleled.
- Visit Kavita Lion Lodge, home of Africat North, to meet with local Herero communities



Summary

Working exclusively with Africat, Steppes Discovery offers a unique opportunity to work with Africat's vets on the Annual Big Cat Health Examination weekend that takes place at Okonjima. This is our second year of operating the trip which gives clients unparalleled access to cheetahs over two days of checkups. You will be on hand throughout this period, helping the vets to ensure all cheetahs are vaccinated, given a thorough health examination, weighed, blood samples are taken and contraceptive implants administered where required. This trip also includes an introduction to Africat's community projects in Namibia's northwest wilderness and an insight into Africat's carnivore conservation program at Okonjima.

Overview



While big cat conservation is the main focus of the trip, Namibia's wild and rugged wilderness never fails to inspire those with a love of Africa's open spaces.



After a night in Windhoek's elegant Olive Grove Hotel you head north to Okonjima, nestled among the Omboroko Mountains and home to the Africat Foundation. The first two days will be led by Okonjima's big cat experts, and spent tracking leopard, cheetah and wild dog on foot and by vehicle in Okonjima's rehabilitation reserves. The next two days are spent assisting Africat's vets and field operatives in the Annual Big Cat Health Examination. This is a unique opportunity to experience hands-on big cat conservation work, giving you the chance to contribute to the long term preservation of Namibia's most enigmatic predators.



After Okonjima you head further north to Kavita Lion Lodge, situated to the east of Damarland and headquarters of Africat North. From here you will be introduced to the work of Africat North, dedicated to the protection and conservation of wild lion populations in Namibia. Kavita has a sanctuary overlooked by a discrete hide which allows for close-up observations and superb photo opportunities of lions and leopard. While the focus of the trip is big cats your second day at Kavita is more about the local people (mainly Damara and Herero) as you meet with local community leaders to give an insight into what it really means to live side-by-side with lions and other predators.



The trip finishes with a stay at Erongo Wilderness Lodge, nestled in a secluded valley in the Erongo Mountains and renowned for the richness of its bird population.

Itinerary



Day 1 - Windhoek

Arrive at Windhoek airport to be collected and transferred to The Olive Grove Hotel, located in downtown Windhoek. The rest of the day and the evening is at leisure.

Day 2 - Okonjima

After an early breakfast you will meet your driver guide with the rest of the group and head north to Okonjima Lodge, headquarters of the highly regarded Africat Foundation. Nestled among the Omboroko Mountains lies Okonjima - a Herero name meaning Place of the Baboons. Staying at Main Camp on the old guest farm, Okonjima is the perfect base for witnessing Africat at work, in their mission to preserve big cats in Namibia.



After lunch in the beautiful grounds of the lodge which was the original Hanssen family farmhouse, there is time to relax and enjoy the surroundings. Take a swim in the secluded swimming pool or sit quietly near to one of the bird feeding areas. Over 250 bird species have been identified on Okonjima, including some Namibian endemics such as the Carp's Black Tit, Hartlaub's Francolin and the Damara Rock Runner. Following afternoon coffee, tea and cake you will be escorted by Africat's guides on a game drive, 'radio-tracking' leopards. The leopards roam freely and catch their own prey within the 4500 ha private Rehabilitation Area in Okonjima's grounds so while sightings are common they are by no means guaranteed. After dinner you will be invited to join Africat hosts at a nocturnal hide where there is the chance of seeing Namibia's nocturnal game such as porcupine, honey-badger and caracal.



Day 3 - Okonjima

This morning and this afternoon you will join the Africat experts in tracking carnivores, both on foot and possibly by vehicle (depending on which carnivores are known to be in the area.)



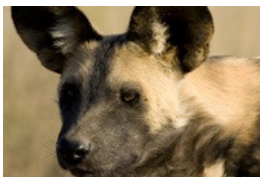
AfriCat's large carnivore rehabilitation programme was initiated in 2000 to give some of their captive cheetahs an opportunity to return to their natural environment. Two years on the fencing of the last section of Okonjima's 22 000ha Nature Reserve - had been completed! This protected 16,000 hectare wilderness, in the centre of commercial farmland, has enabled Africat to expand and accelerate its rehabilitation programme with the ultimate aim of returning more large carnivores to the wild.



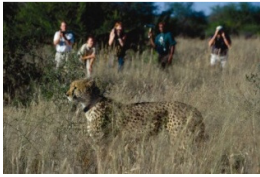
There is an extremely high specification fence; 82 km's in length, which is predator proof as well as monitor lizard, tortoise and pangolin friendly! Part of the 22 000ha property is now divided into a 16 000 ha park for cheetah rehabilitation and a 4 500 ha park for the more dominant predators such as leopard and hyena. However the 16,000 ha reserve is also home to brown Hyena and the resident leopard that were in this area before the fence was completed. The larger reserve will initially accommodate up to 12, 16 or 18 cheetahs providing a much greater variety of tracking opportunities. The cheetahs in this reserve have been fitted with radio-collars so that they can be tracked on a daily basis in order to monitor their welfare, condition and hunting successes.



The rehabilitation programme gives these cheetahs the opportunity to hone their hunting skills and become self-sustaining in a protected area. Orphaned at an early age, most of these cats have missed out on all that they should have learnt from their mother while growing up - not only hunting skills and techniques but the essential 'life-skills' needed to survive in the wild. These cheetahs can now only learn these "life skills" by way of experience; lessons often being hard and unfortunately, sometimes fatal.



In September of 2010, 4 Wild Dogs were released by Africat into the Reserve after 5 years of rehabilitation work by Africat's dedicated team. The release has been a success with the pack taking down a female kudu on their second day of being left to their own devices. The story of the Africat Wild Dog's is an uplifting one and while these painted wolves still have a long way to go before they can be considered truly



rehabilitated the work that has been done to date is a shining example of progressive conservation in action.

Between lunch and your afternoon's activity, a visit to the AfriCat clinic and Information Centre is planned for a short introduction on what you can expect during the Health Check over the next 2 days.

Day 4 & 5 - Big Cat Health Examination Weekend

For the next 2 days you will be helping Africat staff with the Big Cat Health Examination weekend. This is a unique opportunity to experience hands-on big cat conservation work, giving you the chance to contribute to the long term preservation of Namibia's most enigmatic predators. You will be on hand throughout this period, helping the vets and field operatives to ensure all cheetahs are vaccinated, given a thorough health examination, weighed, blood samples are taken and contraceptive implants administered where required. Africat also take this opportunity to groom the cats.



It is impossible to assign tasks to people in advance as each person's capabilities and strengths will need to be assessed once the examinations are under way however you will be expected to play an active role in assisting with this essential work.

Ongoing collaboration with scientists and the conservation authorities and working closely with the farming community allows for studies to be conducted that provide valuable information on large carnivores and their long-term conservation in Namibia.



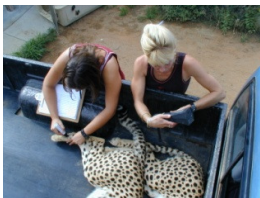
The annual health examinations of the cheetahs at AfriCat give invited specialist veterinarians the opportunity to conduct research on various aspects of animal health, particularly those relating to the health of large carnivores in captivity. As well as providing expert information on the health of AfriCat's animals, the examinations also allow for the comparison of results with similar studies being conducted on large carnivores in other captive facilities. Some of this information can also be used to gain insight into the health of large carnivores in the wild.

The data that is collected from each animal that moves through the AfriCat programme is recorded in a database that allows for easy access to information either on a particular cat or when providing statistics on these carnivores to researchers around the world. The data from the captured cheetahs and leopards, i.e. where each animal was captured, its characteristics, such as gender, age, etc., gives us some idea as to the geographical distribution and demographics of the wild cheetah and leopard populations living on Namibian farmland.



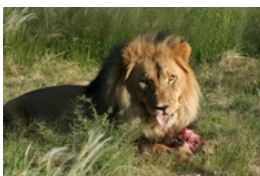
The biological samples (blood, serum and hair) can be used for various studies with analysis results potentially giving us insight into the health, as well as the genetic make-up of Namibia's wild cheetah and leopard populations.

During this time PAWS volunteers, Okonjima guests and local school children will at some point be present to witness the proceedings.



Day 6 - Okonjima

Today will be a good opportunity to relax a little following what will have been a very intense yet rewarding 2 days. You will have the option of joining a morning or afternoon activity in the reserve, perhaps to track one of the species you did not see on your first few days. You could also join the Bushman Trail which is an easy walking route on which your guide will explain the traditional San way of life and the skills they use to survive an unforgiving wilderness.



Day 7 - Okonjima to Kavita Lion Lodge

After breakfast this morning you will drive to Kavita Lion Lodge - a journey of approx 4 hours through the central farmlands of Namibia and into the beautiful Kunene region west of Etosha National Park. You can expect warm hospitality in a wilderness environment at this friendly game ranch, with spacious and well-appointed en-suite bedrooms and thatched chalets. There is a swimming pool for when you want to relax



and delicious meals served outdoors, with the sights and sound of Africa the perfect accompaniment.

Kavita Lion Lodge is Africat's northern headquarters in Namibia and is dedicated to the conservation and protection of the wild lion in Namibia. Once you have settled into the Lodge, met your hosts, Tammy & Uwe and have enjoyed a refreshing drink you will visit the Environmental Education Centre, where guests are introduced to Africat North's Human Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Project, working with local farmers along the boundary of Etosha National Park. A member of the Africat team will give an overview of the research and monitoring programmes being conducted at the Carnivore Care Centre, where rescued lions and leopards have a home. The sanctuary is overlooked by a discrete hide where you will be able to view Kavita's big cats from close proximity allowing for exceptional photographs. With memory cards full you will return to the Lodge shortly before dark and enjoy an evening meal with the group.



Day 8 - Kavita Lion Lodge - Community visit

The emphasis today is on meeting local communities to better understand what it means to live with the constant threat of human-wildlife conflict. You will visit a Livestock Protection Project in the Khoa di Hoas and Ehi-Rovipuka communal conservancies which lie on the western border of Etosha. Here, you will meet with community leaders and farming families and see first-hand the challenges faced by these people in protecting livestock from predators. Africat are helping these communities with building mobile kraals to better protect livestock from night time attacks. Instead of predator removal as a method of conflict mitigation, AfriCat now offers farmers a variety of effective farm-management techniques to better protect their livestock. In this way, farmers are encouraged to become predator tolerant and most of the resident predators remain in place. Currently, Africat is in the process of establishing the Communal Carnivore Conflict Project and so there maybe the opportunity to escort their Recovery Unit on a patrol. Time permitting there maybe the chance to visit the Carnivore Care Centre again. Lunch will be a bush picnic with dinner served back at Kavita Lion Lodge.



Day 9 - Erongo Wilderness Lodge

After bidding farewell to Kavita you are taken to Erongo Wilderness Lodge, approximately 5 hours from Kavita in the heart of Namibia. Nestled amid granite formations on the outskirts of an ancient volcano, the lodge is a founder member of the Erongo Mountain Nature Conservancy, joining 30 private landowners in a collective effort to conserve and protect this natural treasure of over 200,000 hectares. The conservancy's mission includes the preservation of the rich cultural heritage found in Namibia's heartland, in the form of rock paintings and engravings. Erongo is also particularly good for birding and seeing mountain adapted wildlife like agile klipspringers, dassies and baboons. You will explore this area on foot, accompanied by a guide from the lodge who will join you in bringing your final day in Namibia to a fitting end with a chilled sundowner overlooking the spectacular Erongo Mountains.



Day 10 - Erongo to Windhoek

After a late breakfast at Erongo Wilderness Lodge you will travel south to Windhoek (approx 3 hours) and transfer to Windhoek Hosea Kutako International airport for your flight home - alternatively consider an extension to Etosha, Sossusvlei or the Skeleton Coast.

Dates

2012

Tuesday 1st May - Thursday 10th May

Main tour cost

From

£2, 895 per person based on twin share.

Please note this price is subject to change according to currency fluctuations and is based on ten people travelling. If less than ten people travel, there will be a minor supplement to pay.

Includes

Your tour leader and local Africat guides, transport, some meals (excluding evening dinner on Day 1 in Windhoek), all park fees, transfers, game drives, walks and hands-on involvement in Africat's Big Cat Health Examination.

Excludes

International flights, travel insurance, visas, vaccinations, meals as above, gratuities and items of a personal nature.

Single Supplements

If you are happy to share accommodation with a fellow traveller of the same sex then you will not be charged a single supplement for your holiday. This is of course dependent on there being another same sex traveller on the trip who is also wanting to share. If we cannot find a partner with whom you can share then unfortunately we will be left with no choice but to pass on the single supplement, imposed by the properties we are using. We will endeavour to keep this supplement to a minimum.

Naturally should you wish to have a single room then this is possible by simply opting to pay the single supplement of £625 (to be confirmed.)

International Flights

We are aware that when it comes to booking international flights there are a number of different options available to you which may be cheaper than the fares Steppes Discovery are able to offer. Please bear in mind however that when booking international flights with Steppes in conjunction with your holiday you are afforded a much greater level of financial protection than if you book your flights separately through a different source. This is down to EU Package Regulations which state that if a tour operator is booking international flights combined with ground arrangements on your behalf and the holiday has to be cancelled by the tour operator before departure because, for example, the flight from the UK is unable to take off, then the tour operator is obliged to refund the full cost of your holiday. Recently, this has become most pertinent on the occasions when flights were grounded in April 2010 due to volcanic ash and in December 2010 due to snow and frozen runways. Those travellers who had booked hotels and ground arrangements through a tour operator but had booked flights independently were still liable for the cost of their holiday, despite not being able to fly from the UK. Those travellers who had booked a 'package' through a tour operator including flights and ground arrangements were fully refunded the total cost of their holiday or, as in most cases with our clients, were found alternative arrangements at a later date at no additional expense.

This additional insurance against unforeseen circumstances can offer not only peace of mind but valuable cover should the unexpected occur.

Important information

Coming From The USA

If you are travelling from USA, you may find it easier to go via the UK, from where we can help organise flights.

Weather And Best Time To Travel

We expect this time of year to be warm and sunny for the majority of the time. However, be prepared for temperatures to get cool and take a fleece for evenings and morning game drives. April is the beginning of the dry season so the skies should be cloudless and the vegetation lush and green.

Vaccinations And Visa's

At present, British, Irish and American citizens can enter Namibia without a visa for 90 days or less for a holiday or private visit (ie not business). A full passport is required and it is recommended that this is valid for six months from return date of travel.

Health And Fitness

We recommend the following inoculations: Typhoid, Tetanus and Hepatitis A. If you are a regular traveller abroad we would recommend that you are up to date on all childhood inoculations and vaccinations including Polio. Given the hands on nature of the trip and the close proximity in which you will be handling the animals it is advisable that you speak to a medical practitioner about receiving the rabies vaccine. Malaria is present in the northern third of Namibia (Kavita) so it is important that you consult a medical practitioner for specialist advice on what malarial prophylaxis are best for you. A reasonable level of health and fitness will allow you to fully appreciate the walking options available on this trip and also participate fully in the Big Cat Health Examination.

Essential items

You should take sunblock, strong sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat. When walking wear colours that blend with the scenery. Long trousers or track-suit (not jeans) give protection against thorns and do not leave you cold when wet. Good footwear and a light coat or fleece for the cold mornings is advisable, as is a good pair of binoculars and a camera. Charging batteries is no problem for digital cameras and videos at all of the accommodation used on this trip.

Africat Big Cat Health Examination Weekend

Every effort will be made to ensure your enjoyment of this aspect of the trip however a degree of flexibility maybe required to ensure both your safety and the safety of the big cat's. While a pro-active and hands-on approach will enhance your enjoyment it is essential that you cooperate with Africat's staff's wishes and follow their instructions at all times.

Africat also allows PAWS volunteers access to the Big Cat Health Weekend as well as local school children and other Okonjima guests. This access will be on a spectator level only and will not allow hands-on involvement which is the exclusive privilege of Steppes Discovery clients.



Our commitment



Since 1997 we have raised significant contributions in support of the world's leading wildlife and conservation agencies, researchers and experts, and have increased awareness of travel and conservation through newsletters, lectures and consistent media coverage. Furthermore, we have voluntarily spearheaded collective action campaigns such as Travel Operators for Tigers in South Asia.

THE AFRICAT FOUNDATION IS COMMITTED TO THE LONG-TERM CONSERVATION OF NAMIBIA'S LARGE CARNIVORES.

RESCUE & RELEASE

AfriCat works closely with communal and commercial livestock farmers, assisting in alleviating losses from predator intrusion by providing a rescue-and-release and relocation programme. Since 1993 AfriCat has rescued over 1000 cheetahs and leopards on Namibian farmland. Over 85% of these animals have been returned to the wild.

REHABILITATION

AfriCat provides an environment for previously non-releasable large carnivores to hone their hunting skills in a 4500 ha reserve and a new 16 000-hectare reserve, on Okonjima. Carnivores learn to become self-sustaining which gives them the opportunity to return to their natural environment. This programme also supports constructive research.

HUMAN - WILDLIFE CONFLICT MITIGATION & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

AfriCat supports commercial (free-hold) and the communal farming communities of northern Namibia, specifically those bordering the Etosha National Park, in dealing with human/wildlife conflict issues and predator intrusion. In general, instead of predator removal as a method of conflict mitigation, AfriCat now offers farmers a variety of effective farm-management techniques to better protect their livestock. In this way, farmers are encouraged to become predator tolerant and most of the resident predators remain in place.



EDUCATION & RESEARCH

AfriCat provides environmental education programmes for the youth of Namibia by guiding them towards a greater understanding of the natural world and the importance of wildlife conservation. The programme has already reached over 20 000 children and young adults at the two education centres and through the Outreach Programmes. (AfriCat on Okonjima & AfriCat north, on Kavita).

AfriCat supports an ongoing collaboration with researchers, scientists and the conservation authorities by working closely with farming communities, allowing for constructive research to take place in support of the long-term conservation of Namibia's predators.

WELFARE

AfriCat provides a home, food and care for young, orphaned or injured animals until they can be rehabilitated and released back into the wild. Only 10% of all the carnivores AfriCat has rescued are with us on Okonjima and are cared for by the AFRICAT WELFARE programme.



Our travel partners, accommodation, service providers and ground agents are all carefully chosen to ensure their commitment to the environment, most being quality, family-owned businesses which reflect the unique character of the places, the abiding hospitality of the people and the remarkable spirit of the wilderness.

Now come along and see for yourself. With us it won't cost the earth!

Want to discuss this trip?



Please call Jarrod Kyte on 01285 643333 for more details or to make a booking

A love of wildlife and wild places has long been my main motivation for travelling. I am at my happiest when photographing big cats in Africa or when trekking in the shadows of mighty Himalayan peaks. Before joining Steppes Discovery I consummated my love affair with Africa by upping sticks and moving to Kenya for 2 years to manage a luxury tented camp in the Masai Mara. While Kenya takes some beating I have also been known to flirt with Namibia, India, Nepal, High Arctic, Antarctica, Galapagos and Peru in search of remote places and inspirational wildlife.

