

15F Trip Report for the Paulson Family Foundation:
Exploring International Wildlife Conservation Research and Policy

This past fall, I spent two and a half months interning with the Indlovu West Conservation Research LLC in South Africa. I lived and worked in a small bush camp in the Balule Nature Reserve (BNR); BNR is approximately 40,000 hectares and is a part of the Greater Kruger National Park (GKNP). Each day, I woke to an unbelievable, rusty-colored sunrise over the Drakensberg Mountains, laced up my hiking boots, buttoned-up my camo-collared shirt, and packed up my notebooks for a typical day working in the South African bush: monitoring the remaining Black and White Rhino populations.

Over the last decade, BNR has collared and/or utilized VHF horn transmitters to monitor rhino behavior and movements to both further study and protect the two species to the best of their ability. Working alongside brilliant ecologists, biologists, veterinarians, etc. I assisted the acquisition of transmitter signals via hand-held antenna, triangulated the location of the transmitter, and then collect each rhinos' location via GPS. Additionally, we documented any tracks, scrapings, or rhino middens via GPS and utilized and sorted camera trap capture footage in order to effectively populate our anti-poaching map.

Each night, we analyzed our data and compiled our reports for the day. Using ArchGIS, we created and distributed a daily rhino population heat map to our anti-poaching team who would then spend each night monitoring the rhinos within our reserve—protecting both species from local and international poachers. After long days in the field, we cooked our dinner around an open fire, shared our sightings of the day, and contributed our thoughts and ideas on how to improve our work for the next day, and everyday after.

I have learned more about this particular biome and the incredible wildlife that inhabit it than I ever could have imagined. In addition to my work with BNR's rhino project, I assisted elephant population identification and behavioral dynamics research, classified various tree species and scores of damage in a project designed and headed by the University of Arizona, participated in various invasive species projects, responded to poaching incidents and fence alarms with members of the Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit and/or TransfrontierAfrica, and conducting a personal research project on the need for artificial waterhole provision within BNR. My former boss, Craig Spencer, is one of the most important and influential conservationists in the world. He is a brilliant lunatic who has put his own life on the line in the name of conservation more times than most people in this field combined:

"[Conservation] is like a poison in your veins... it burns you to your soul, your core. The question is not if you need conservation, but if conservation needs you." -Craig Spencer

In a few short months, I learned how altruistic and all-consuming wildlife conservation truly is; all of my colleagues had left their lives and loved ones behind them in order to dedicate all of their time and energy into saving this world from a few ruthless members of our very own species. It is difficult and exhausting, but it is truly where I see myself in a few short years. I am so grateful to have this time on my own — it is so rare that people have the opportunity to explore the soul and one's true passions and I am so thankful to both the Environmental Studies Department and the Paulson Family Foundation for making this dream a reality.

