



CUSTODIAN PROGRAMME



VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME TO SUPPORT A HERD OF ELEPHANT ORPHANS

Have you ever wondered what goes into caring for elephant orphans? Join us for an in-depth and exciting initiative at HERD. We invite you to participate in critical operations on the ground and become a HERD Custodian by volunteering your time to make a difference for elephants.

Our HERD Custodians Programme runs over seven nights and eight days and gives insight into the elephants and the surrounding environment. We welcome you to play a role in ensuring the survival of the elephants and their natural surroundings. By creating a home and habitat for displaced elephants at HERD in our private reserve in South Africa, we contribute to the land, wildlife, and local communities.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

CONSERVATION: Custodians will assist us as we tend to the land, which the elephants regularly traverse en route to further areas on the reserve. This is done by removing encroaching indigenous tree species and reusing plant matter through brush packing. You will also assist us in removing alien/invasive species from affected areas and planting indigenous grass seeds to speed up rehabilitation. The long-term impact will ensure the regeneration of essential elements to make the environment thrive, manage and combat soil erosion, and ensure a diversity of healthier plants and trees.

Discover the importance of our keystone species and how we work to protect them, for example, through protecting their home. We are focused on preventing ring barking of trees, as this causes the trees to die since there is no longer a flow of food and vital nutrients to the necessary parts of the trees. This project involves packing rocks around the main trunk to ensure elephants cannot access the bark. Aged and mature trees are wrapped in chicken mesh to prevent elephants from using their tusks to pry bark off the trees.

EROSION PREVENTION: Due to a history of farming in the reserve, there are areas where erosion has grown into huge gullies. We use elephant dung and leftover foliage from elephant feed to combat this. Join us in assisting the team by cleaning the elephant homestead and using the leftover vegetation fed to the herd to pack into erosion areas, promoting regrowth and stability in the soil and preventing further erosion and damage.

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HERD ELEPHANT ORPHANAGE AND HOMESTEAD: Although volunteers will not be able to interact directly with the elephants, their time will be spent participating in daily tasks that must be done around the homestead and in the bush to support the herd. These include cleaning the homestead, combating erosion, cutting branches, cleaning water troughs, and repairing roads.

CREATING COMPOST: Our elephant dung is used in extraordinary ways, including composting, which you will have a hand in helping with.

GAME DRIVE AND WILD ELEPHANTS: Volunteers will have the opportunity to experience the elephants in other ways and spend the day with the wild herd in Kapama. Assist in building an ID for each wild elephant by taking images of their ear patterns or tusks. Each elephant will have a different defining factor, which makes it easier for the reserve to recognise the individuals.

Hard work brings amazing experiences and the opportunity to see many mammals and birds around HERD. Conservation is all around us; from the time you arrive until the time you leave, you will be submerged into the life in which animals and humans live and interact with each other daily. Each has its role to play. Enjoy time in the bush while helping make a mark on conservation.

ELEPHANT MOMENTS: Elephant Moments is a respectful and memorable early morning experience where you can meet and learn more about some of the Jabulani herd elephants and their passionate carers. In this 90-minute experience, you will delve into the biology and physiology of these gentle giants while learning about each elephant's unique personalities and remarkable stories.

HESC (Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre): You will have an opportunity to help with carnivore food preparation, feed the cheetah and rhino, and assist in cleaning enclosures. After lunch at the HESC deli, you can experience a tour of the facility and view the animals at the centre.

SIGHTSEEING: Join us for a trip to the world-renowned Kruger National Park. We will head into Kruger Park for a day of incredible natural sights and wildlife. There are many other places of interest around HERD, including Jabulani lodge, Blyde River and Panorama Route. Please speak to the trip organiser should you wish to extend your stay and visit some of these destinations. Our programme includes a trip to the vibrant town of Hoedspruit.

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COMMUNITY: Without our local community, it would be impossible for us to operate successfully. HERD commits to being active in our local community through education and awareness. Your HERD Custodian experience will include visiting the local Xilaveko Day Care, a creche housing over 120 children between age 0 and 6. Projects will depend on what is needed for the school but can include the installation of guttering, fixing of fences, installation of working toilets, painting of buildings, and fixing of playgrounds. Custodians are welcome to bring donations for the school's wishlist of needs.

Assist the HERD Jabuladies in making elephant dung paper, beaded bracelets, bookmarks, and other projects. The Jabuladies project empowers local women, increasing their household income and promoting gender equality through equal opportunities.

ACCOMMODATION: Accommodation consists of four twin rooms, each with access to their own bathroom, in a communal staff housing area, close to the elephant homestead, within Kapama Private Game Reserve. Accommodation is simple, clean and comfortable. Each room is fitted with adequate power points. There is a communal lounge, kitchen, and swimming pool. Basic laundry facilities are available for use. Bedding and towels are provided. Free WIFI is available; however, this can be intermittent due to signal. Three meals per day are prepared by the Custodians and HERD team and this makes for a valuable team-building experience. The closest town is Hoedspruit, approximately 25 km away, and the nearest private hospital is in Tzaneen (175 km).

ABOUT HERD

HERD (Hoedspruit Elephant Rehabilitation and Development) was established in 2019, following a 24-year journey in caring for elephants displaced or orphaned due to human-elephant conflict. The orphanage was built in response to a growing number of young orphaned elephant calves who needed a place of rehabilitation and an existing herd to accept them. HERD is South Africa's first dedicated elephant orphanage. The Jabulani elephant herd are a unique and close-knit family that started with Jabulani, an orphaned elephant who was rescued in 1997, and a herd of elephants that were rescued from Zimbabwe in 2002. In 2021, HERD Trust was established as a registered Public Benefit Organisation and Non-Profit Organisation.

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2025 RATES & CONDITIONS

Package includes:

Accommodation for up to eight people sharing
Return transfers to and from Hoedspruit airport
Three meals and snacks daily, water, tea and coffee, and cool drinks.
Please specify dietary requirements in advance during the time of booking so that we can determine if we can cater for you.
Planned activities as per programme provided on booking, depending on weather and availability.
Town trip for shopping in Hoedspruit
Activities include: a day at a wildlife rehabilitation centre, an educational elephant experience, a visit to a local community school, educational talks, and a day at the Kruger National Park, including transport and entry fees.
Custodians will receive a certificate after completing their programme with HERD, as well as a HERD Custodian T-Shirt.

Package excludes:

Additional food, snacks and drinks
Items of a personal nature
Additional/ optional activities, such as a night at Jabulani lodge, hot air ballooning, and ziplining, must be booked three days in advance and arranged with the project leader, who will assist in making the bookings.
Transfer fees for additional activities are for your own account.

Programme is subject to change based on availability and weather.

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SET DATES

16 - 23 February 2025
8 - 15 June 2025
7 - 14 September 2025

Rate per person sharing

R25 000

Single rate

R40 000

A minimum of four individuals is required for the programme to commence.

Please enquire for 2026.

Contact us to enquire or book: info@herd.org.za
Tel: +27 78 532 3645



WHAT TO PACK:

- When packing, it is recommended to opt for neutral and light-coloured clothing, so that you blend in better with the surrounding environment. Khaki, beige, brown, and green draw the least amount of attention and distraction when out in the bush. Darker and brighter colours can attract unwanted mosquitoes and insects.
- Sunblock and hat
- Insect repellent
- Malaria tablets – Although we are in a low-risk malaria area, you might wish to consult your doctor about malaria prophylaxis
- Torch
- Walking boots
- Camera
- Books to read; journal and pens to take notes
- Laptop or any device you wish to use to keep busy after hours
- Optional Pack for a Purpose donations for the school, or elephant orphanage

Please note: For the safety and welfare of all, we wholly prohibit the use of alcohol by Custodians on our property and request that you limit alcohol consumption to activities after hours in your free time off-site.

WEATHER:

Our dry winter season is from May to October. The weather is generally cooler, with sunny days and limited rainfall. The wet summer season (November to April) experiences more rainfall and daytime temperatures average +/- 30 degrees. Summers can reach the high 30's.

LOCATION:

We are located in Kapama Private Game Reserve in the Greater Kruger Area of South Africa. The nearest commercial airport is Hoedspruit Airport, which is about a 30-minute drive through the reserve to HERD.

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T: +27 78 532 3645
E: INFO@HERD.ORG.ZA
VISIT WWW.HERD.ORG.ZA