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Summer 2012:
Imire Safari Ranch; Wedza, Zimbabwe

This past summer I spent six weeks interning at the Imire Wildlife and Safari Ranch in Zimbabwe, Africa. Imire Safari Ranch is an absolutely beautiful 10,000-acre plot of land filled with woodlands, savannah grasslands, thorns, plants, and forests. In addition it is the home to a colossal number of different animals and also many local community members. The Reserve is most known for protecting a number of different animals, including elephants, buffalo, crocodile, giraffes, zebra, over 150 different bird species, and most significant, five black rhino and two white rhino that life on the ranch. Imire's main goal is to:

At Imire we are serious about conservation and education. We aim to educate and help many different groups of people including the local communities, foreign and local visitors, researchers and special interest groups experience the wildlife and environment to better understand the phenomenal way of nature.

(Safari Ranch, <http://www.imire.org/rhino-programme/#.UD4SjEIfOFI>).

In 1987, the Ranch was first established as the owners of Imire became the proud parents of seven orphaned black rhinos, and ever since that point have worked to breed the species in order to keep them out of extinction and also to protect them from the large number of poachers who come after their horns. The Reserve must also stay in close and good relations with the Zimbabwean government in order to remain in control and owners of the land. For they are the only farm in the extended surrounding area that has not been taken

up for resettlement and this can be almost completely attributed directly back to their conservation work.

During my time at Imire I was kept extremely busy through the list of responsibilities that I was given and expected to take part in. My jobs as an intern included learning to train and then helping to handle the rhinos, elephants, and different species of antelope; undertaking in anti-poaching patrols; participating in close-up animal monitoring; studying and creating medicines and food out of local shrubbery; helping out with all duties including cleaning and maintenance of bom; actively taking part in game counts and general wildlife and game park observation; working to maintain game fences, roads, pens, etc.; participating in a number of fireguards; helping with tree planting and bush clearance; performing ranch patrols on foot and horseback; and traveling to Numwa School to help with the general teaching of students, particularly in the subjects of the environmental world and vegetation.

My two overall goals of my internship were to first of all be an active and helpful participant in all of these given tasks in hopes of learning more about the living creations, plants, and animals that exist in Africa, in addition to the people. I was also able to independently study the legal system by observing and learning about the laws the ranch had to abide by in relation to their conservation work. These goals and the work that I was required to do was rather intensive and took a lot of digging for information but in the end I was pleasantly surprised with the amount I had learned. It was through these goals that I had set and the jobs that I was given that I left Zimbabwe feeling as if I had truly experienced an African culture, helped the ranch in a way that was actually beneficial to them, and also gained knowledge that I know will be everlasting and helpful in my hopeful future career paths.

One of the things that I felt was a high point of the trip was the fact that a number of the jobs that I was asked to complete were very hands-on and the workers were not hesitant in the slightest to include me in the completion of the tasks. Exhausted and not really sure what time zone I actually was in, I arrived to Zimbabwe around 2PM, after 3 full days of travel. By 2:30PM on the same day, I had already been given my first task. There, not more than ten feet away from three giraffe, I was left with a few others and was told I needed to cut down about six large trees. However, I was not about to be handed a chainsaw like I was thinking, but instead was given a little machete knife and my instructions were “Famba!(go, in Shona), Tema!(cut, in Shona)”. After a lot of struggling and many blisters I managed to cut down all of the trees, and thought I never would feel more accomplished ever again than I did in that moment. Although I could not have been more wrong about that statement as the days went on and more and more extremely challenging hands-on jobs presented themselves to me. However, it was moments like this, participating in these activities that proved to be a critical part of my internship. They left me feeling not only accomplished but also were useful as the work I had completed was verified as actually being helpful. For example, I later saw those trees being used to repair a fence that blocked the crocodile from reaching the main road.

I have taken away a lot from my internship at Imire Safari Ranch. For example, I saw the importance of maintaining the reserve full of animals and wildlife and realized that preserving nature and the environment whether I was in Africa or anywhere else was a true passion of mine. I was taught how to identify when some animals were sick by observing and distinguishing which trees or plants and what part of those plants the animal was eating. I became very familiar with spotting the spores, especially of rhinos and of hyenas in sand

and dirt, in order to find or in some cases get away from the animals. I learned that rhino horns are like fingernails, in that when you cut them off they grow back. Therefore, the ranch cuts the horns and gives them to the government about every two years to limit the number of poachers. The government is supposed to keep them locked away in a safe, however it quickly became clear that no one was actually positive what they did with those horns worth enormous amounts of money. I participated in catching three fish poachers in a dam on the reserve and came to the understanding that it is acceptable for the police to beat the guys up very badly before they go to court for doing wrong. These two things, although very interesting, bring about what may be the low point of the trip. Attempting to research and learn about the legal laws put on the reserve --and about the government in general-- was rather tricky and at times impossible. For example, I found it was often slightly dangerous to openly be discussing the laws or also slightly inappropriate for me to talk about such things, therefore, the amount of information I actually could find out was quite limited.

The opportunity to intern at Imire Safari Ranch in Zimbabwe, that Sewanee and the Environmental Studies Internship Fund provided me with, is one that I am so thankful for. I had an unbelievable experience filled with moments that I know I will never forget. My internship has made me certain of my future career goals as my passion for nature has grown, and the lack of information and the amount of secrecy in the government just increased my interest in legal systems even more. I believe that my time abroad working has provided me with valuable experience and lasting knowledge, and because of all of this I could not possibly be happier that I took the time to apply for a scholarship because receiving one helped make my summer the most memorable one I have ever had.