

Environmental science (MSc.) -Wildlife and biodiversity tract (4. Semester)

Host country: Zimbabwe

Host institution: Gonarezhou Conservation Trust

Master thesis abroad (7.7.2022-5.8.2022)

Identification code: Zim-2022-SWM22-f

Part 2: Experience report

The Gonarezhou National Park in the south east of Zimbabwe is home to the so called 'big five' among a plethora of other southern African wildlife. The subject species of my research is the south central black rhino (*Diceros bicornis minor*) of which a few individuals have been reintroduced to the park in the last year. The aim of my thesis is to expand existing knowledge on the behaviour of reintroduced mammals, specifically reintroduced black rhino. I was able to gain first hand experience on how the rhinos are managed on the ground thanks to the DAAD-PROMOS scholarship program for master theses abroad.



Figure 1: The iconic Chilojo cliffs of Gonarezhou national park

I got this interesting topic for my thesis because of a newly founded cooperation between the Gonarezhou National Park and the wildlife ecology and conservation biology department at my university. I booked my flight prior to receiving my funding as prices increase, closer to the dates of departure. Prior to my departure from Germany, I estimated the costs for accommodation and transport and changed the

appropriate amount of euros into US dollars (widely used in Zimbabwe) so that I had enough cash for my entire stay there. With some money for additional expenses and emergencies as well. Visa card is also accepted in most cities in Zimbabwe.

I arrived at the Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport and stayed the first night at a hostel in Harare that I had booked prior to my departure from Germany. I also booked an airport pick up and it all worked out well. As money transfers to Zimbabwe from Germany were not easy to organize, I paid the hostel in cash when I arrived. I would recommend organizing airport pick up in advance as it isn't easy to organize a taxi at the airport itself (from what I saw). There was also no wifi available at the airport when I arrived, so without a Zimbabwean sim card or roaming it would have been difficult to arrange anything by myself.

My supervisor in Zimbabwe organized my transport to Gonarezhou from Harare. In Gonarezhou I stayed in a camp located within the park. This accommodation and meals were arranged for me by my supervisor as well. Within the park I was not allowed to walk outside of my campsite which was fenced in, because of the wild elephants around so I either hitched a ride with members of staff driving to and from the main office or was picked up by a member of the research team.

I would highly recommend taking either a good flash light or headlamp when visiting Zimbabwe. The hostel I stayed at ran on a generator which broke down while I was there and most of Gonarezhou runs on solar energy so we did not have electricity early in the morning or later in the evening.



Figure 2: Gonarezhou is famous for the high density of African elephant within the park.

I had the opportunity to observe and participate in the daily work of the research team here and gain a glimpse into the vast amount of field knowledge they have through years of being out in the bush. In the region where Gonarezhou is located two languages are spoken namely Shona and Shangan. All the locals I encountered here spoke at least one of the two and English.

Every single person I met here was incredibly welcoming and friendly. I never felt unsafe or at risk in any situation either in Harare or at Gonarezhou. I am very grateful for this opportunity and recommend anyone interested in wildlife ecology or conservation who has a similar opportunity to me to take it!

Table 1: Breakdown of costs

	Cost
Flight (Frankfurt- Harare)	Euro 1011.00
Visa (1 month tourist visa)	USD 30.00
Airport pick up (to hostel)	USD 30.00
Hostel in Harare (1 night)	USD 25.00
Accommodation and food at National Park (26 nights)	USD 390.00
Miscellaneous	USD 150