

Iganyana Bush Camp

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The Painted Dog Conservation (PDC) Project's purpose-built environmental education camp for school groups.

The location

Iganyana Bush Camp is surrounded by Sikumi National Forest, on the border of world-famous Hwange National Park. It was carefully built into a beautiful teak woodlands community with as little disturbance as possible, so it is totally immersed in the woods. The area is part of an intact African savanna ecosystem, where elephant, giraffe, lion, leopard, cheetah, painted dog, buffalo and over a dozen species of antelope roam free.

The facility

Iganyana is the name for the painted dog in the local Sindebele language. Iganyana Bush Camp consists of a circle of 18 student rondavels (a rondavel is a traditional African style house, usually round in shape). Each thatched-roof rondavel has 2-3 beds. Two special teacher rondavels have 1-2 beds. The camp can accommodate up to 45 students and 3 teachers. Over the dining room is a huge thatched activity deck which leads out to a platform and raised walkway into the adjacent 600 metre diameter painted dog enclosure, part of the nearby rehabilitation facility for injured and orphaned painted dogs. The bush camp office houses a 16 terminal computer lab and field guide library. An electric

Students studying the teak woodlands.



Painted dogs.



Photo © Aart Visser

fence surrounds the bush camp and the Environmental Education Exclosure, a 200 by 300 metre area that allows students to safely investigate African ecology. Separate ablutions blocks provide running water, cold showers and pit toilets. Each rondavel, the dining room and the ring trail are lit with electric lights.

The educational programme

PDC's Children's Bush Camp Programme is designed to allow students to directly experience the African bush. The philosophy behind the curriculum emphasizes exploration and discovery, with hands-on activities. Classes are divided into activity groups (or packs) of fifteen or less for all lessons. Although any environmental concepts can be covered to meet the needs of individual schools, the standard bush camp curriculum covers the following concepts:

- Species
- Adaptations
- Niche
- Habitat
- Natural Communities
- Ecological Relationships and Interdependence
- Extinction
- Endangered Species
- Conservation Strategies



Activities

Students are rotated through a series of specially designed activities in small groups. Each activity group is assigned to a specially trained professional guide for the length of the stay. Each student is provided with an activity logbook, in which they record their discoveries. Which activities are offered depends on length of stay and options chosen. Lessons and activities offered include:

- **Teak Woodlands Studies:** Through a series of scavenger hunts in the safety of the camp's Environmental Education Enclosure (EEE), students learn about ecological relationships and adaptations for survival in one of the ecosystem's most interesting natural communities.
- **Meet the Dogs:** Students use an interactive computer programme in the bush camp's computer lab to learn about the natural history and threats to survival of painted dogs. They then hike on a raised walkway through the 600-metre diameter Painted Dog Enclosure to search for painted dogs. In the Painted Dog Rehabilitation Facility, students meet orphaned painted dogs and learn about the techniques used to reintroduce painted dogs back into the wild.
- **Radio Tracking Activity:** Students learn how painted dog researchers use radio telemetry to find and monitor painted dog packs. They then use this equipment to play an advanced form of hide-and-seek in the bush camp grounds.
- **Game Drive:** Students are taught about wildlife adaptations for survival by the guide in the Hwange National Park.
- **Tree Search:** Botanical terms are learned through the use of an interactive computer programme. They then use these terms to find and identify native trees by their characteristics, viewed as adaptations to their habitat and niche.
- **Nature Art:** Watercolour techniques are practised to capture the beauty of nature in their own paintings at a nearby waterhole.

- **Solo Activity:** Students are spread out along a trail in the EEE, or along the walkway, to experience the solitude and sounds of the teak woodlands alone. Students use a "sound mapping" sensory awareness activity and poetry to attune to the beauty and complexity of the surrounding environment.
- **Campfire:** Singing and playing campfire games around the bonfire.
- **Video Night:** "Hunters in Twilight" is watched and discussed by students to learn about the research and intervention procedures used by Painted Dog Conservation project to try to save Hwange's painted dog population from extirpation.
- **Night Walk:** Having experienced the raised walkway by daylight, students now walk it in the dark to discover the nocturnal sounds of the teak woodlands.
- **Night Drive:** Students learn about behavioural adaptations to nocturnal niches on this exciting drive into adjacent Sikumi National Forest.
- **Research Techniques:** Students shadow a scientist conducting research in the area to learn about darting, radio telemetry, data collection and ethological techniques.
- **Game Walk:** Students are led into the bush by an armed and experienced guide to learn about animal behaviour and the ecology of different natural communities.

Eligible schools

Any school group wishing to participate in the environmental education programme may attend Iganyana Bush Camp. The facility is not available for tourists, conferences or types of groups other than school groups. Because one of the chief aims of the programme is to educate local communities about the factors threatening Hwange's painted dogs, some local primary schools are eligible to come to Iganyana Bush Camp free of charge. So far, nineteen schools bordering Hwange National Park attend the programme each year. Other Zimbabwean schools and international schools may attend the programme as "donor schools." Donor schools not only cover the cost of their camp experience, they also sponsor one local school's camp, thereby allowing the programme to expand to more local schools. ♦

Author Contact Details: To find out more about the camp and the programmes, including costs, contact references in other schools, the coordination of customized experiences or to reserve the bush camp for your class, contact Wilton Nsimango at wilton@painteddog.org

For photos and more information on the Painted Dog Conservation and the Iganyana Bush Camp, visit PDC's website: www.painteddog.org