



Life-changing Volunteering Trips for 2014

HOW DO YOU FANCY SPENDING YOUR ANNUAL LEAVE PROTECTING THE WORLD'S ENDANGERED WILDLIFE? HERE ARE 10 LIFE-CHANGING WILDLIFE VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS YOU COULD CONSIDER JOINING IN 2014

If you thought spending time working with endangered wild animals and getting to know their intimate secrets was only the preserve of professionals or gap year students, think again.

All over the world wildlife organisations rely on help from ordinary people using their holidays to help with conservation work. You can be occupied in the scientific survey of behaviour and population numbers, monitoring health and welfare, or animal husbandry. The common factor to all volunteering holidays is that you do not need any prior experience or specialist skills to take part. Necessary training is given and most activities also offer the opportunity to see more of the other wildlife, as well as meet the people, of the country in which they are based.

All that most wildlife sanctuaries and organisations ask is that volunteers be willing to tackle anything, and they're reasonably fit for those jobs that are a little more active and strenuous. Background and age are immaterial for the most part, as is the time you commit – from two weeks to three months. You shouldn't expect top luxury, though. The fees you pay are mostly spent for the benefit of the wildlife you are helping to support.

What: Protecting snow leopards

Where: Tien Shan mountains, Kyrgyzstan

When: 9 June – 23 August (two week slots)

Who: Biosphere Expeditions

How much? £1,780 plus flights per-person

Rare, beautiful, and bloody difficult to find are just a few of the adjectives that could be used to describe the elusive snow leopard. And yet, ironically, it is the scarcity of these endangered big cats that makes the possibility of catching a glimpse of one so seductive. Add to this the opportunity to make a genuine difference to the efforts to protect them in some of the world's most uncharted mountain ranges and you have the recipe for an unforgettable working holiday.

'Mountain Ghosts' is the latest addition to Biosphere Expeditions' 2014 programme of conservation working holidays. Volunteers venture to the Tien Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan to survey snow leopards and their prey – predominantly mountain sheep and the Central Asian ibex – along with other animals, including marmots and birds.

Once there, you will be working for two weeks as part of a small international team, comprised of up to 12 volunteers, a scientist and an expedition leader, from a mobile tented base camp at altitudes of around 2,000m. Working in open steppe and high mountain country, you will spend your days looking for tracks, kills, scats and the animals themselves, as well as setting camera traps.

Offering true expedition-style base camp conditions, testing but satisfying mountain surveying, off road driving, and variable mountain weather, this is a particularly challenging expedition, but one on which the potential rewards more than justify the hardships.

www.biosphere-expeditions.org