

# GAP YEAR DIARY



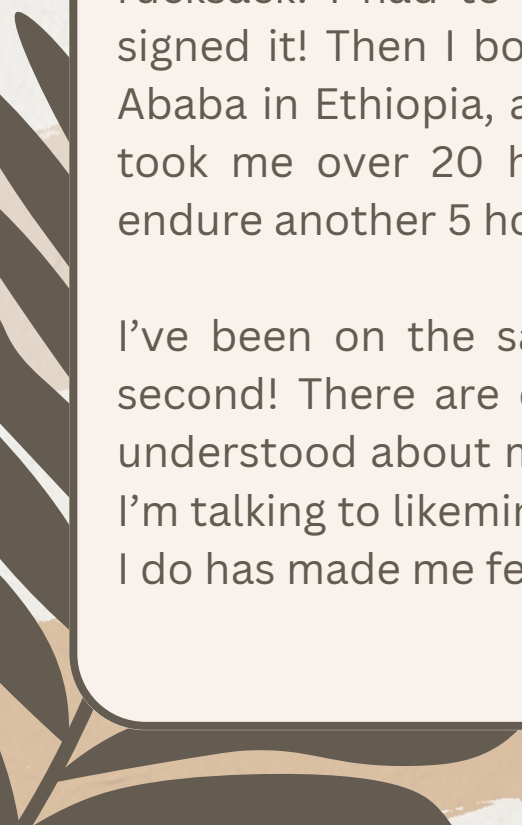
Grace finished Montsaye Sixth Form in the summer of 2022. She gained an A grade in Geography, and B's in both Biology and English Language. Rather than going straight into university like many of her peers, Grace decided to take a gap year to travel and undertake some volunteering work. She still keeps in touch with us, letting us know what she is up to and where she is. Below is a copy of her latest email – it's a good one!

I'm writing this from the safari base located at the southern edge of Liwonde National Park in Malawi. I wanted to update you on my trip and all I can say is that being here is a dream come true.

It's crazy how quickly this trip came around. I booked it a year ago and now I'm in a Jeep driving through the bush spotting elephants and hippos!

In preparation for the trip, I had a lot of vaccinations, including rabies, hepatitis A and typhoid, and I purchased a very large rucksack! I had to fill out lots of forms - you name it I probably signed it! Then I booked my flights; I flew from Heathrow to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, and from there to Lilongwe in Malawi. In total, it took me over 20 hours to arrive at the sanctuary, only to then endure another 5 hour bus journey to the safari base.

I've been on the safari now for a few days and I'm loving every second! There are other volunteers here and I've never felt more understood about my passion for animals as I do now, knowing that I'm talking to likeminded individuals who share the same interests as I do has made me feel so at home.



The facilities here are basic but we do have flushing toilets and running water, as well as fans in our rooms for when the temperature peaks. My only struggle is having to walk across the base at night to use the toilets, my fear of spiders and snakes does not help at all!!

Our day typically involves waking up at 5am to go on our morning drive, using telemetry to track animals as we go. We get back to the base around 10am to relax and take shelter from the sun, before heading back out from 3-6pm for the afternoon drive, where we continue tracking and record any sightings of the monitored species. So far, I've watched elephants bathe themselves in the river, crocs and hippos swim and dive under the water and gibbons groom each other. We received a rescued pangolin, one that has been saved from the illegal wildlife trade. After its assessment, we have taken turns babysitting it and tomorrow we release it back into the wild.

I'm staying here for another week, and in this time I hope to see a cheetah or a lion. Then I'll travel back to the sanctuary, located on the outskirts of Lilongwe City, where I'll be involved in the daily maintenance and husbandry of the rescued animals in their care.

Experiencing the local culture of the communities, their way of life and passion towards wildlife is inspiring, yet so humbling. When visiting the nearby towns, I'm in awe of the people's strength and their capabilities, watching them build homes and basic infrastructure from such simple materials; witnessing first hand how happy they are, despite living in severe poverty, and how different their attitudes are. It is so rewarding. I'm only three days in, and I already know I won't want to go home.



# PHOTO ALBUM

