

Henderson resident's college studies include South African adventure

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Bailey Stauffer and her ostrich friend in South Africa (Photo: *Furnished*)

HENDERSON, Ky. - The world becomes a smaller place the more of it you see.

Henderson resident Bailey Stauffer, 20, recently returned from a two-week stint in South Africa where she and a team of Kentucky college students assisted residents there who work with wild game.

A place she once considered far away and with a lifestyle that was completely foreign is now one of her favorite spots on the globe and home to people she misses on a daily basis.

"When I was there, I'd always check to see what time it was back home. Now, I'm always checking to see what time it is there," she said.

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Did you know

Did you know that it takes eight grown men to move a water buffalo? Or that when you black light an African scorpion at night, it turns green?

Did you know that a giraffe will stick out its tongue as a warning that he's about to kick you? Or that possessing and eating meat is a status symbol to South African residents?

Stauffer said these were just a few of the things gleaned from the trip that she hopes to repeat again next year.

What about this misconception?

"Lions were designated king of the jungle because they are more aesthetically pleasing," Stauffer said. "But hyenas have more power. They are more the king of the jungle because they can actually run off lions."

On the job

Stauffer said the team stayed at a camp in the area of Janala, South Africa.

"The person in charge of the group was named Andre Pienar," she said.

The best way to describe Pienar is that he's a broker of wild animals.



Bailey Stauffer, 20, hugs Remi, a young giraffe that's been bottle-fed. (June 2019) (Photo: Furnished)

"Andre doesn't move animals just to move them. He moves them for conservation reasons, Stauffer said.

"He captures game and we helped him with the captures. Game is captured for different reasons," she said.

"Sometimes, it's that there is no more vegetation so animals were captured and moved to a better location. Some of the game, the farmers were moving them from breeding farms to hunting farms.



The team of Kentucky students who traveled to South Africa. Bailey Stauffer, 20, of Henderson, is in the middle row on the right (June 2019). (Photo: Furnished)

"The last one we did, a neighbor stole this guy's giraffe and zebra so we were returning them. There are so many different reasons Andre moves game," she said.

"The camp was beautiful. We had electricity and running water which we could drink out of the faucet because it was boiled before it came out. The water was safe to drink. But we had bottled water (if needed) and the amount of bottled water we went through was just crazy.

"It's winter there, so it was like 80 degrees during the day, 40s at night and there was no humidity. It wasn't hot. I didn't sweat that much."

Stauffer said there weren't large bugs to see either. "All the bugs were dead because it's winter (there). Even the birds migrated to Northern Africa."

As for some of the locals, "the guys we worked with were in full pants, big jackets, had toboggans and were freezing," she said. "I kept thinking, 'I know it probably gets really warm there (in the summer) ... but I didn't think it was cold (for winter).'"

Among the tasks laid out for the student team -- which was comprised of nine females and one male -- was to find a baby giraffe for relocation. That process took five days, she said.

"We were told that this piece of property was overpopulated with giraffes," Stauffer said.

"The gene pool needed more genes because too many of the giraffes on the property were inbred and you could tell it through height difference and other features between the inbred and non-inbred giraffes," she said. "So Andre's client, the property owner, was killing off the male giraffes and selling the meat to locals. We were taking baby giraffes that would grow up and be killed and relocating them to a zoo. There was one baby giraffe in particular we were going after."

The first day of the search, "We all thought we'd see a bazillion giraffes. No. It took us two hours to see any giraffes. We just drove around in trucks looking for giraffes.

"After about 45 minutes, I thought, 'Do I even know what a giraffe looks like? Because there aren't many trees ... there's not much of anything (to camouflage them) so do I even know what they look like?' Then Andre said something about them not being as tall as other giraffes (because of the inbreeding). So we found the giraffe we were looking for but had to wait for the vet to get there to dart it. The vet was working with some lions" which caused her to be delayed.

Stauffer said when the vet got to the area, the baby giraffe had to be relocated but they weren't able to get him that day.

It took several more attempts over many more days before the capture was successful.

The baby giraffe was located and transported back to camp where the team named him Melman in honor of the giraffe in the Madagascar movies.

"We got to bottle feed him," she said. "At first, we had to force feed him because he was scared. We loved him, but he hated us."

Not all fun and games

While Melman was captured safely, the group experienced one that didn't end well.

"Giraffes are not long distance runners," She said. "They aren't supposed to run for long distances for long periods of time. This giraffe, which wasn't the right one we were trying to get, was darted but just ran and ran and ran. And then we darted again and he kept running. He wasn't not showing any signs of slowing down."

Finally, "We catch up to the giraffe and Andre gets him down. He gives him the tranq reversal, but he ended up dying."

"Everybody was just quiet. I don't even know how to describe it. Everyone was just quiet and no one talked the rest of the night," she said. "That is something you have to deal with and it was a lesson and we learned from it. It's a life lesson too because most of the students who went are pre-vet students so most of us are going to have to mourn but know it's part of the circle of life. It was hard. That was rough. We tried everything to resuscitate."



Bailey Stauffer at Blyde River Canyon in South Africa (June 2019). (Photo: Furnished)

Other animal adventures

Stauffer's experiences weren't limited to giraffes.

The team helped Pienar move Nyala deer.

"We set up tarps like a tunnel and held up tarps to move the herd into a certain direction," she said. "A baby Nyala got away from us through the tarp and its mother jumped right over me as I'm holding up the tarp, to get to her baby."

Stauffer also gave shots to a water buffalo and wrangled with ostriches to move them.

She said while her favorite part of the trip were the lessons about cultural differences she received during talks with Pienar, her second favorite was "the hands on with wildlife that you don't see here. Like getting to bottle-feed a baby giraffe."

"I also went on a night safari, but I fell asleep," she said. "I did wake up long enough to see hyenas."

Trip of a lifetime

In our team, "There were nine girls and one guy. He was a trooper. He said he grew up with three sisters and he was the only boy so it worked out. But we didn't know each other before the trip, but by the end of it we were all like best friends and it feels like we've known each other forever," she said.

Even since being back in the states, the group texts every day and is in frequent communication with Pienar and his family, who continues to update the students on Melman's progress.

"Andre and his family are Christians. Every day we prayed. Every morning before we left, we prayed. We prayed at every meal. He told us if we wanted to be part of his devotional group, we could sign up separately for that as well. He told us if we sign up he will send us devotionals every morning for the rest of his life. And so far he has."

"There aren't enough words to describe this trip," Stauffer said. "The experiences and the people were just incredible."

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Bailey Stauffer, 20, leads a giraffe in South Africa which is being relocated. (June 2019) (Photo: Furnished)

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