



More than 20 teachers from Miami University's Earth Expeditions joined together at the Cheetah Conservation Fund to learn about Namibian environmental education and Namibian culture during a week-long learner-centered training course. Contributed photo

Students, professors travel to Namibia to save wildlife

Miami University partnership program offers real-world experience.

By Elizabeth Hagedorn
Contributing Writer

While most students and professors headed back to Oxford in August, those participating in the Miami University's Earth Expeditions program traveled to Namibia to work with the Cheetah Conservation Fund.

integrated conservation efforts working with relevant stakeholders and organizations."

Welpton's activities in Namibia include: coordinating and implementing research, conservation, and education programs; managing the volunteer program and ecotourism business, aiding in animal husbandry and training, and helping with daily operations.

Welpton has also been coordinating and implementing two-week and month-long international training courses on integrated livestock, wildlife, and predator management, and cheetah conservation biology.

Chris Myers, a professor in the Miami's Zoology Department and his wife Lynne Myers, co-director of Project Dragonfly, started Earth Expeditions with the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens in 2004 with field partnerships and courses in three countries.

In 2010, Earth Expeditions is offering 16 sections in 10 countries.

"Lynne and I saw an opportunity to create an exciting global program from Miami," Chris Myers said. "We believe there are better alternatives to the traditional practice of forcing students into classrooms year after year with too little opportunity to engage in real-world issues."

According to Myers, program participants join with leading field scientists, educators, and community leaders worldwide.

The participants can work with Laurie Markler on the cheetah conservation in Namibia, David Western and Maasai leaders in Kenya, and Phra Paison Visalo, a renowned "green monk," in Thailand.

Earth Expeditions also works hand in hand with the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens.

"We had contacts with conservation organizations in the country, and we offer a place that is very much connected to animal in those places," said Dan Marsh, Director of Education at the Cincinnati Zoo. "It is a site where informal and formal educators can meet to see examples of how we conserve those animals in the wild."

Marsh said the program is the only one like it in the country. One of the program's goals is to keep growing to reach a national audience by connecting with other zoos and aquariums across the country.

To learn more or to get involved with Earth Expeditions, visit EarthExpeditions.org.

The 2010 course sites include Amazon, Baja, Belize, Borneo, Costa Rica, Kenya, Mongolia, Namibia, Thailand and Trinidad.

To learn more about the Cheetah Conservation Fund, visit cheetah.org.

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Leigh Welpton, a 2005 Talawanda High School graduate, has been working with the Cheetah Conservation Fund in Namibia since graduating from UC Berkeley in December 2008. Welpton is the executive assistant to Dr. Laurie Marker on the conservation.

"Namibia is a beautiful country with some truly amazing people and wildlife," Welpton said. "Also, I'm able to be involved in

According to Cheetah Conservation Fund, this was the sixth year that this course has been conducted, with lessons revolving around learner-centered education training methods and community-based learning for the benefit of ecological communities.

During the course, the participants observed several of Cheetah Conservation Fund's orphan cheetahs and watched them in their daily exercise.

The Cheetah Conservation Fund is just one partnership option through Miami's Earth Expeditions program.