



Seabirds Conservation Volunteering Programme in Sal Island, Cabo Verde 2021

Cabo Verde is an archipelago with rich biodiversity, home to 8 species of seabirds that breed along the year, as well as an important nesting area for loggerhead sea turtles. 5 out of these 8 seabird species can be found in Sal Island, three of them being endemic of the country. Our recent work has also identified that Sal is also home for one of the largest red-billed tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) colonies in West Africa.

The red-billed tropicbird nest in hard-to-reach areas, such as steep mountains and cliffs. The nesting season is throughout the whole year, with the high reproductive season during winter. Although decreasing in the last years, poaching is still a big threat for this species in Sal. Introduced species such as stray cats and dogs also impose an increasing problem, once these attack their nests. The osprey or fishing eagle (*Pandion haliaetus*) is a cosmopolitan species with a resident population in Cabo Verde. Many threats, such as poaching of the eggs and chicks by humans, reduced considerably the population in most islands of the country. In the last decade, thanks to many conservation projects and the increase of environmental awareness in the local community, the population started increasing and it is now stable. The breeding season for this species is from December to May in Sal Island.

Since 2017, Projeto Biodiversidade started a study to monitor the populations of red-billed tropicbirds and osprey, to better understand their conservation status, besides their main threats in the island. While conducting the monitoring of these two species, four other seabird species were found in Sal Island and three of them for the first time ever. Projeto Biodiversidade's Bird Programme is part of Alcyon Program, a project for the conservation of the seabirds of Cabo Verde led by Birdlife International.

Until now we have a recorded more than 500 seabirds' nests, ringed more than 1.200 birds, and monitored 6 different populations! But 2020 it was also a different year for us because, despite being a record season, the challenges of COVID-19 meant that we weren't able to welcome any international volunteers. As a result, our field team was not as lively and filled with people from all around the world as we wanted it to be. 2020 was a year of lessons – one of which being just how many great things international volunteers bring to our project. Volunteers play a key role in our team, not only they bring critical manpower for the patrols, but also important energy, enthusiasm and multiculturalism, essential elements for supporting motivation and refreshing team energy throughout the season.

We also understand 2020 was a difficult year for everyone around the world, with many having to change their routine and even cancelling their plans to adjust the new conditions. It was a year where we learned just how much we depend on a healthy planet to ensure our health in the future. Volunteering with conservation projects is just one way to support nature and help it thrive. When you volunteer with us, you can be certain of your contribution to

protect critical ecosystems and the important wildlife species that are a part of it. What better way to move forward from a challenging year than to reconnect with nature and join our project as a volunteer?

Our mission continues in 2021 – hopefully with you as a part of our team! If you are looking to kick-start your career in ornithology and develop new abilities, this opportunity is for you! This volunteer programme will allow you to gain hands-on field experience, with direct contact with key-species to the local biodiversity. We only take a limited number of volunteers each season and are looking for people who want to do something really worthwhile during their free time and who are prepared for some challenging, but very fulfilling work.

During the programme, volunteers will work with the different species of seabirds and the osprey, depending on the period of the year. Under the supervision of the coordinators, volunteers will take part in different activities:

- Monitoring and following the colonies;
- Ringing of adults and chicks;
- Monthly census;
- Deployment of GPS and geolocators devices in adults during different stages of the reproductive period to study feeding and migration areas;
- Help in the collection of blood, fat, faeces, feathers, and diet samples from adults and chicks;
- Deployment of camera traps to better understand the threats the different colonies face.

This is a unique experience where you will learn about seabird conservation techniques and work side by side with experienced conservationists, while enjoying an amazing landscape. You will also work with threatened species that can only be seen in very few places and will have the opportunity to make a real difference to their survival in Sal Island.

Volunteers are based in a shared apartment in Santa Maria with other volunteers and project staff. You will be sharing a bedroom with one or two more volunteers. Volunteers work five days each week and will have 2 day off to explore the island, enjoy diving, surfing and other water sports, or just lay on the beach and relax! The project has agreements with different businesses that do a very good discount for our volunteers.

Participating in this programme will require long days in the field and waking up very early to avoid the heat of the day. Some of the colonies are located in steep cliffs that we carefully access and in an offshore islet that demands good swimming skills. A very good level of fitness and physical and mental energy is required.

Requirements:

- Desire to make a difference in conservation;
- At least 18 and under 45 years old;
- Must understand spoken English and/or Portuguese;
- **Very good level of physical fitness;**
- High level of energy and flexibility;

- Able to cope with physically challenging conditions (long walks, early mornings, hot weather, insects);
- Must be **very comfortable** around steep cliffs and mountains;
- Must be comfortable handling blood and diet samples as part of the fieldwork;
- Ability to work and live with people of different backgrounds and nationalities.

Desired:

- Good swimming skills (preferably in the ocean);
- User knowledge of working with databases in Excel.

Volunteer Contribution: Volunteer contributions cover accommodation and utilities such as water and electricity. **Meals are not provided.** Food is not cheap here, but you will be able to save some money by doing communal cooking. Volunteer contributions also provide critical funds needed to support basic but essential needs of the project, allowing us to monitor all the colonies with higher regularity, and ultimately, protect more seabirds.

One week: 320 €

Two weeks: 420 €

Three weeks: 520 €

50 € for each additional week

At your arrival you will be required to pay a €100 refundable security deposit against loss or damage of project equipment, and you should bring sufficient funds for any other activities that you would like to do. Once a volunteering period has been agreed, you will be asked to pay via bank transfer 100€ of your fees in advance. This payment will ensure that your place is booked as we have limited spaces and the demand is big. The payment will not be refunded if you cancel your volunteering – unless the cancellation is due to travel bans and/or flight restrictions, as a result of the pandemic (see the Updates on COVID-19 document for more information on the conditions of the programmes). The remaining amount of the fees should be paid upon arrival. If once you arrive at the project you decide to leave before the agreed date, your total contribution will not be refunded (this does not apply for the refundable security deposit, which will be refunded).

Benefits: Volunteers will be provided with accommodation during their stay in an apartment in Santa Maria. You will also be able to enjoy discounts in dive clubs, surfing schools and nature excursions! In addition to accommodation, volunteers will be part of a very small team of experienced bird conservationists. This means that you will have the opportunity to learn and improve your skills working hands-on in spectacular landscapes, while also being exposed to a wide range of cultures and backgrounds during your time with us.

Timing: We strongly recommend a stay of at least 3 weeks, but the minimum stay is of 1 week. Some airlines only fly to Sal Island on specific days of the week, depending where they fly from. Please, confirm the best routes to Sal Island with our team before purchasing your flights, we will be happy to assist you. Volunteers are welcomed from the **11th of January until the 15th of December**. Volunteers can apply at any point throughout the season. Check the table below to see which species we work with during the whole year.

For more information, please feel free to contact us at volunteerinsal@gmail.com
 You can check our FAQs website at www.projectbiodiversity.org/faqs

	Jan.	Feb	Mar	Apr	Ma y	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Osprey												X
Red-billed tropicbird												X
Cape Verde Shearwater (Endemic)												X
Cape Verde little Shearwater (Endemic)												X
Cape Verde Storm-petrel (Endemic)												X
Bulwer's petrel												X
X - We only welcome volunteers from mid-January until 15th of December												

COVID-19

Health and safety have been our priority during this pandemic and as a multicultural organization, we are committed to ensuring the health and safety of our staff, volunteers, collaborators and communities we are part of, while continuing with our conservation efforts on Sal Island.

For that reason, all volunteers must have comprehensive travel insurance before joining us. Please, read more detailed and up-to-date information on our COVID-19 response and policy clicking [here](#).