



Seabirds Conservation Volunteering Programme in Sal Island, Cape Verde

Cape 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. Each pair lays one egg per season, eventually two in case the first one doesn't hatch. The nesting season is throughout the whole year, with the high reproductive season during winter. The incubation period is around 45 days, and during this time both male and female birds take care of the egg. Once the chick hatches, it will be on the nest for around 80 days, until it is strong enough to leave the nest.

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. Coastal development, which intensifies yearly in Sal Island, has led to an increase to the raven population, which are natural predators of the eggs and chicks of this species.

The Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) is a cosmopolitan species with a resident population in Cape 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. There are 11 pairs spread across the rocky outcrops of Sal Island. The breeding season for this species is from December to May in Sal Island.

Since 2017, Project Biodiversity 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. Project Biodiversity's Bird Programme is part of Alcyon Program, a project for the conservation of the seabirds of Cabo Verde led by Birdlife International.

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 volunteering 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'll learn about seabird conservation techniques and you will 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 watersports, or just lay on the beach and relax! The project has agreements with different businesses that do a very good discount for our volunteers. Have a look at this video of Santa Maria beach, near where you will be based (<https://youtu.be/LN1o9ELz0aQ>).

Participating in this programme will require long days in the field under the sun 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 good level of fitness and physical and mental energy is required.

Requirements:

- Desire to make a difference in conservation;
- At least 18 and under 50 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 with field work such as blood, and diet samples
- 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, electricity and cooking gas. **Meals are not provided.** 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. Note that buying food is not cheap in Sal Island, however there are very cheap options and will be able to save some money by doing communal cooking. You can check our FAQs website at www.projectbiodiversity.org/faqs.

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. If you decide to leave the project before the agreed date, your total contribution will not be refunded (this does not apply for the security deposit, which will be refunded).

Benefits: Volunteers are 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.

- Shared accommodation in an apartment in Santa Maria;
- Pick-up at the airport;
- On-line and on-site support from the Volunteers Coordinator;
- Discounts in dive clubs, surfing schools and nature excursions.

Timing:

Volunteers are welcomed from the **1st of February 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 (approximate).

For more info, contact volunteerinsal@gmail.com.

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