



Island Conservation Programme

Sal Island, Cabo Verde 2024 Season

Biodiversity and Threats

The islands of Cabo Verde, in the west coast of Africa, are home to a rich biodiversity, both terrestrial and marine. Their beaches welcome second largest population of the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) in the world, and their cliffs and islets are breeding ground for up to 9 species of seabirds, 5 of them endemic. When it comes to its flora, Cabo Verde has many endemic species of trees and shrubs.

With five Nature Reserves and ten other Protected Areas, Sal Island is no different: it has the largest colony of the red-billed tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) of the whole west coast of Africa, four other breeding species of seabirds, and a resident population of ospreys that nest during winter; we can find 20 endemic different plant species, some of them critically endangered; many migratory birds use Sal as a wintering area or as a stopover on their migration; and two different species of terrestrial reptiles that are exclusive of Sal Island. The waters of Sal are also home to a rich marine megafauna, with a bay which is home to many lemon sharks year-round. All of these in a variety of ecosystems and beautiful landscapes: white sand beaches and sand dune systems, seasonal wetlands and salt mines, an offshore islet, and steep coastal cliffs.

The iconic, 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 from December until February. 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, since they can prey on the birds and their eggs.

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 in Sal goes from December to May.

Unfortunately, over the last decade, unregulated activities within the protected areas have put the island's ecosystems at risk. The growing of uncontrolled coastal development poses several

threats, with activities such as illegal sand removal, destruction of the dunes due to touristic excursions, poaching of protected species and pollution.

Our Work

Project Biodiversity has been working since 2015 to increase the protection of these key biodiversity areas (KBAs), implementing a monitoring programme for the seabird, plants, marine megafauna, and reptile's species, organizing beach clean-ups and, more recently, developing a participative programme of the Natural Reserve of Costa da Fragata alongside with the authorities and local stakeholders.

You can check some videos of our work on our [YouTube channel](#) and on our social media ([Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#)). Our work on sea turtles has recently been documented by BBC One on the [second season](#) of [Animals with Cameras](#). And in the past, we have talked to BBC Earth as well about the different threats [sea turtles face on Sal Island](#). BBC Earth has also followed our seabird team working on a colony of [red-billed tropicbirds in 2017](#).

Volunteer for a brighter future

Volunteering with conservation projects is just one way to support nature and help it thrive. By volunteering with us, you can be certain that you are directly contributing to protect critical ecosystems and the important wildlife species that are a part of it.

If you are looking to kick-start your career in conservation 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 worthwhile during their free time and who are prepared for some challenging, but very fulfilling work.

What to expect

During their stay, volunteers will conduct different activities in Protected Area, and working with a variety of plant and bird species, many of them endemic to Cabo Verde or even the island of Sal. Volunteers will also work directly in the monitoring of lemons harks and other shark species. Under the supervision of a coordinator or field technician, volunteers will take part in diverse tasks, which are vital to the recovery of the ecosystem:

- Monthly census of both fauna and flora;
- Replanting of endemic species;
- Delimitation and signalization of paths and sensitives areas within natural reserves;
- Signs Maintenance within the natural reserves;
- Beach and dunes clean-ups;
- Monitoring and following the colonies of seabirds and osprey;
- Ringing of seabirds and osprey chicks;

- Deployment of GPS, geolocators and camera traps on different bird and seabird colonies;
- Help in the collection of samples (blood, fat, diet) from different bird species;
- Help in the collection of samples and biometric data from sharks;
Help in the collection of images (video and photo) of marine megafauna, on boat surveys;
- Inform local and international visitors about biodiversity and how they can help to protect it.

This is a unique experience where you will learn about ecosystem recovery 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.

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 work with the seabirds is done in colonies which are 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 years old and maximum 40 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 walking and hiking** around steep cliffs and mountains;
- Must have **good swimming skills** in the ocean;
- 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:

- User knowledge of working with databases in Excel.

Volunteer Contribution: volunteer contributions cover accommodation and utilities such as water, electricity, and gas. **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 more of the fauna and flora, and ultimately, protect more of our biodiversity.

One week: 275 €
Two weeks: 340 €
Three weeks: 400 €
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. This €100 *security deposit is not part of the volunteering fees*, as it is refundable by the end of your stay if it is not used. You should also bring sufficient funds for any other activities that you would like to do. Once a volunteering period has been agreed upon, you will be asked to pay via bank transfer €100 of the volunteering fees in advance. This payment will ensure that your place is booked. The payment will not be refunded if you cancel your volunteering. The remaining amount of the fees (total amount *minus* €100 that has been transferred to book the participation) should be paid at least one month before your 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 wildlife 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. You should join the volunteering programme on a Wednesday or on a Sunday, so check flights accordingly. 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 **15th of January until the 13th of December**. Volunteers can apply at any point throughout the year.

For more information, please feel free to contact us at volunteer@projectbiodiversity.org
You can check our FAQs website at www.projectbiodiversity.org/faqs
For more info about our conservation projects visit our site [habitat conservation](#) and [here](#).