



Nesting season volunteering with sea turtles in Sal Island, Cabo Verde 2024

The islands of Cabo Verde constitute the world's second most important nesting site for the Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), one of seven sea turtle species found worldwide. This incredible species is a critical link in marine ecosystems, helping to maintain the health of seagrass beds and coral reef systems that provide food and shelter for a vast array of other marine life. Unfortunately, human exploitation of this species has brought them to the brink of extinction. The illegal hunt and trade of turtle meat along with the quick tourist and urban development are the main threats to the species in Sal Island.

For the last 12 years, both international volunteers and members of the local community have worked tirelessly to ensure the protection of nesting turtles – with beach patrols, community engagement activities, and community education programmes. We have also been working closely with the government to improve regulations. While the number of turtles killed has drastically reduced, illegal poaching and trafficking persist.

2023 was a busy season in Sal Island: we registered over 25.000 nests, and we relocated thousands of these nests to our hatcheries, from where we released over 100.000 of baby turtles! We were lucky to welcome on our team over 50 volunteers from 10 different countries. Our international volunteers play a key role in our team, not only do they bring critical power for the patrols, but also important energy, enthusiasm, and multiculturalism, essential elements for supporting motivation and refreshing team energy throughout the season.

Our mission continues in 2024 – hopefully with you as a part of our team! We aim to further empower the community to act against the slaughter of nesting females, through direct beach protection, as well as grassroots education and engagement. As a critical part of our team, you will have the opportunity to directly contribute to the conservation of this endangered species and ultimately help build a more sustainable Cabo Verde.

The project encompasses patrolling beaches (night and morning) to monitor nesting and deter poaching, data collection, research, working with tourists and local businesses, operation of hatcheries, and outreach activities and beach clean-ups. The work is undertaken by local and international field assistants and volunteers. Although there is a wide scope of activities within the project, protection of nesting turtles continues to be the main focus and this can be stressful and tiring, but ultimately highly rewarding.

The usual nesting season is from June until October with hatchlings being born from mid-August until mid-December. The project is based in Santa Maria, a popular tourist destination known for its beaches and water sports. Participants are based in field camps with self-catering accommodation in Santa Maria provided on rest days. This volunteering opportunity will not

only provide you with good experience in turtle conservation techniques but also allow you to make a real difference in the survival of sea turtles. Your participation will allow for opportunities to be directly responsible for saving numerous nesting turtles and hatchlings.

If you are looking for your first experience working in conservation, are taking a career break, or just wish to spend your holidays doing something meaningful, this is the opportunity for you! We only take a limited number of volunteers each season and we 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. Volunteers are a critical part of our turtle protection team with their enthusiasm and energy helping us to save many turtles.

As a volunteer your primary role will be to patrol the beaches at night with other assistants to deter poachers and ensure the turtles can nest safely. During patrols, you will also assist with important fieldwork activities, including tagging and measuring turtles, and relocation and excavation of nests. You may also get involved with other aspects of the outreach activities and assist other local community-focused charities with small projects. With this experience, you will learn about turtle conservation techniques and will have the opportunity to make a real difference in the survival of sea turtles.

Volunteers are based in a field camp (living in a shared tent with other volunteers), with rest periods in apartments in Santa Maria. Volunteers work six days each week and will have 1 day/night 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 offer a very good discount for our volunteers.

Living under these conditions can be challenging, extremely tiring, and stressful, and will include work both at night and during the day. A good level of fitness and physical and mental energy is required as patrols are at night-time and long (possibly all night), conducted on foot, and may be as long as 15km. Shift patterns vary but you will have 1 day of rest per week.

Requirements:

- Desire to participate in conservation;
- At least 18 years old and maximum 45 years old;
- Must understand written and spoken English;
- Good level of physical fitness;
- High level of energy and flexibility;
- Able to cope with physically challenging conditions (camping, long walks, sleeping on the beach, working late nights, hot weather, insects);
- Ability to work and live with people of different backgrounds and nationalities.

Volunteer Contribution: Volunteer contributions cover accommodation, utilities such as water and electricity, and meals during your working period. Meals are not provided on rest days. Please note that water and basic meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) are provided in the camp.

We can accommodate vegetarians and vegans. Volunteer contributions also provide critical funds needed to support the basic but essential needs of the project, allowing us to patrol the beaches more effectively, and ultimately protect more turtles.

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 – 6 nights per week in camp, with a rest night off in a shared apartment in Santa Maria. Meals will be provided to volunteers during their time in camp. In addition to meals and accommodation, spending time with the project will give you an incredible opportunity to work closely with sea turtles and directly contribute to their conservation. You will gain valuable fieldwork experience and be 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 on 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. The period when volunteers are welcome runs from the **23rd of June until the 20th of October**. Volunteers can apply at any point throughout the season.

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 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](#).

For more information, please feel free to contact us at volunteer@projectbiodiversity.org

You can check our FAQs website at www.projectbiodiversity.org/faqs