



Island Conservation Programme

Sal Island, Cabo Verde
2022 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 the 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. 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, 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 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, 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.

Up to date we have a recorded more than 500 nests, ringed more than 1.200 birds, and monitored 6 different populations of seabirds in the island. We have also collected tons of trash from beaches, dunes, and underwater clean-ups. Alongside with the local authorities, we have delimited several kilometres of paths within the Natural Reserve of Costa da Fragata for the safe use of touristic excursions. We have also conducted 12 flora and fauna census, where we have recorded over 80 species of plants, birds, and reptiles.

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

We understand that the last two years were difficult for everyone around the world, with many having to change their routine and even cancelling their plans to adjust the new conditions. During this period, we've learned how much we depend on a healthy planet to ensure our own health in the 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. What better way to move forward from a challenging period than to reconnect with nature joining our work as a volunteer?

Our mission continues in 2022 – hopefully with you as a part of our team! 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. 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 sensitive 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;
- 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.

Volunteers are based in a shared apartment in Santa Maria with other volunteers and project staff. You will be sharing a bedroom with other volunteers. Volunteers work five days and have 2 days off per week. During their time here, volunteers have plenty of time to explore the island and experience the Cape Verdean culture. You can go diving on different sites, such as shipwrecks and caves, you can get your diving certificate, or take kitesurf, windsurf and surfing lessons. You can also experiment local dishes such as the catchupa, and take dance lessons to learn how to dance funana and kizomba. You can also enjoy some local live music while experiencing this vibrant culture. Or you can just enjoy the beautiful, white-sand beaches around Sal. Project Biodiversity 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 work with the seabirds is done in colonies which 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 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, 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 all the colonies with higher regularity, and ultimately, protect more seabirds.

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, 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 at least upon your arrival in Santa Maria. 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. 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 **25th of January until the 15th 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](#).