



Marine Conservation Society Seychelles (MCSS)

Volunteer & Intern Information

The Marine Conservation Society Seychelles (MCSS) is a local Non-Governmental Organisation that was registered in 1997 and incorporates the Shark Research Institute, Seychelles (SRIS). The MCSS was formed by a group of local marine experts to meet the lack of capacity in Seychelles and to address matters of marine biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. Understanding that the land is intrinsically linked to the ocean, particularly on islands such as in Seychelles, MCSS has since expanded its remit to cover coastal ecosystems and remains dedicated to the conservation and sustainable use of both marine and terrestrial biodiversity.

In 2000, the MCSS successfully obtained funding from the Global Environment Facility for a three-year project focused primarily on the management of coral reefs, whale sharks and marine turtles, following the severe bleaching event of 1998.

The MCSS/SRIS has pioneered work in Seychelles in a number of highly successful projects including monitoring the whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*), management of the Crown-of-thorns-starfish (*Acanthaster planci*), the installation and maintenance of environmentally friendly moorings systems, a strategic approach to marine turtle management, the development of marine eco-tourism activities and the sustainable use of marine biodiversity in general. MCSS is currently running a number of grant-funded projects and community based programmes:

Seasonal Protected Areas Project:

This is a component of the large GOS-GEF-UNDP funded 'Ridge to Reef Project' that will see the nomination, designation and implementation of the Seasonal Protected Areas.

The overall aim of this project is to expand and strengthen existing Marine Protected Areas in the inner Seychelles by creating seasonal PAs established to protect turtle species in critical life-stage habitats.

The SPAs will be located in the south of Mahé, where there are several important Hawksbill turtle nesting beaches. This project will continue under funding to April 2025.





Aspects of this project include:

- Creation of species-habitat distribution and abundance maps with location of seasonal critical areas and threat analysis using drone captured ortho-mosaics
- Turtle distribution, abundance and habitat evaluation and mapping (this compliments our turtle monitoring programme)
- Threat and impact analysis and mapping
- Development of management plans for critical habitats for nesting turtles
- Monitoring of important turtle nesting beaches in the south of Mahé on foot and by drone
- Production and dissemination of educational material such as posters and presentations
- Public awareness surveys
- Data handling and analysis
- Supporting the maintenance of the MCSS native plant nursery

Logistics:

- Turtle volunteers will be based at the Beau Vallon volunteer accommodation and will be required to commute by bus to the beach sites situated in the South of Mahé (MCSS will contribute to the costs of the commute)



Fisherman's Cove Coral Programme & Story Resorts Conservation Stewardship Project

This programme started in February 2016 as a partnership project with Le Meridién Fishermans Cove Resort with the development of a snorkel trail for the hotel guests with guiding and interpretive materials.

After the coral bleaching event in August 2016 the programme was expanded to include a coral rehabilitation programme which supports both in-water and on-land coral nurseries and a coral transplantation programme to supplement reef recovery.

The Story Resort stewardship project started in March 2019 in partnership with the H Hotel at Beau Vallon, Mahé. This conservation project is a very broad one, which covers both a large freshwater wetland, extensive hotel grounds and the near-shore marine ecosystem.



There is a very active education programme aimed at hotel guests and children and the local community, as well as a comprehensive conservation programme.

Activities include:

- Wetland monitoring and rehabilitation
- Trapping & tracking studies on endemic terrapins
- Coral reef restoration & rehabilitation
- Educational activities for children at the resort & local schools
- Wetland discovery tours
- Guided snorkel tours



Volunteers and interns will have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of both projects and are accommodated at the MCSS self-catering apartments in Beau Vallon.

Regional Coral Reef Restoration Project

This project is funded by the GOS-GEF-UNDP '*Coral Reef Restoration Project*' in conjunction with other local partners and partners in Mauritius and aims to restore 2500m² of reef at Anse Forbans and 2500m² off Cerf Island. Large scale in-water coral nurseries are being developed off Cerf Island to provide the necessary coral colonies and several restoration methods will be used for the transplantation and restoration on the two sites. Subject to what phase the project is in, volunteers and interns will be accommodated either on Cerf Island or at the Beau Vallon self-catering apartments.

Volunteers for this project need to be certified divers with at least 20 dives.





Whale Shark Monitoring Project

The whale shark monitoring project is a seasonal project, which runs during the months of August, September & October.

Volunteers & interns will take part whale shark eco-tourism activities, including taking bookings, participating in whale shark tours and collecting data on migratory whale sharks.

Volunteers and interns are welcome on this project and would stay at the MCSS selfcatering apartments at Beau Vallon.



MCSS General Approach

MCSS bases its work on a policy of open engagement of actors in the domain of marine conservation, sustainable use and development; and works closely with local partners such as the Ministry of Environment Energy & Climate Change, the Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA), the Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA) and other local NGOs, without compromising its role as an independent NGO.

The MCSS is active on national committees such as the Steering Committee for the Marine Spatial Plan and contributes to Seychelles' international undertakings in a number of ways including the fulfilment of reporting obligations and sending representatives on national delegations to international meetings.

MCSS welcomes motivated volunteers to assist with their work in the monitoring and conservation of Seychelles marine bio-diversity. While facilities and support are minimal, the programmes running are interesting and in some instances at the forefront of conservation research on the species concerned. The following pages give some useful information for prospective volunteers.



VOLUNTEER & INTERN DUTIES

Volunteers and Interns assist the MCSS Project Leaders and staff in all activities.

1. Monitoring & Research Programmes (40-50% of volunteers' time)

Assisting with varying programmes such as:

- Monitoring the numbers of turtles nesting at specific beaches (SEP-MAY)
- Monitoring the change of beach slope at turtle nesting sites (every 4 weeks)
- Monitoring nesting habitat and beach crest vegetation at specific beaches (yearly)
- Assisting in various aspects of the grant funded projects being run by MCSS

The amount and type of such work may vary considerably depending on the season.

2. Management / Administration (10%)

- Assisting with data entry and analysis
- Helping with cataloguing resources
- Maintaining house and office contents and immediate surroundings in a presentable condition

3. Volunteers & Interns own research project (30-40%)

There will be opportunity for volunteers and interns to carry out their own research project. If you have a particular project already in mind please discuss your ideas with the Scientific Coordinator of MCSS and the Project Leader first. Sources of reference on Seychelles are limited and, with the exceptions of reef fish, birds, marine shells and higher plants, keys or ID guides to many aspects of specifically Seychelles Natural History do not exist. If in doubt, bring the reference with you.

REQUIREMENTS FOR A VOLUNTEER

- A university degree in a biological subject (project dependant), and/or good practical skills
- Some experience of working in wildlife conservation
- Ability to work without close supervision, although the Project Leaders will provide guidance in all aspects of the work
- Good working discipline and motivation
- Preferably over 21 years of age

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- Good physical fitness
- Medically fit. **THIS IS ESSENTIAL.** It is not advisable for anyone with a history of medical problems to apply
- Able to swim and be confident in the water
- Independent but able to co-exist as part of a very small team with restricted facilities and to help out whenever necessary
- Ability to speak English with another European language (e.g. French) would be desirable, but not essential
- Be available for a minimum of four weeks to volunteer with MCSS

Volunteers are required to produce a typed report recording any research work undertaken while at MCSS. This **must** be completed **before** departure.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

Accommodation:

Accommodation at the main MCSS apartments is self-catering and dormitory style with sets of bunks. Crockery, cutlery and cooking utensils are available in the kitchen and a washing machine is also provided, but volunteers are expected to provide their own detergent, which can be bought locally.

- Due to the limited accommodation it is not practical to arrange visits for family or friends to stay in volunteer accommodation, we will however assist in organizing bookings at local guest-houses if needed.
- Volunteers are responsible for keeping accommodation clean and for any breakages or loss of apartment fittings, furniture etc.

Office:

- The computers are for MCSS business and a metered broadband internet connection is available at the office to access email and general websites, but Skype and video down-load sites may not be accessed through this system.

Dress:

- Volunteers must dress appropriately for both office and field work (e.g. MCSS t-shirts and shorts (of an appropriate length). You will be issued with two MCSS T shirts for your use and it is important that you wear them at all times during your MCSS activities; a lot of our activities take place on private property and it is important that you can be identified as being with MCSS to avoid embarrassing situations with security guards etc.



What to Bring

With an average temperature of 29°C the Seychelles climate is tropical and beach-perfect. It is hot and humid for most of the year but the heat is usually moderated by cooler sea breezes. During August through to October the average temperature is 26°C and humidity is around the 80% mark so you will need to bring clothing and items suited to these conditions. Below is a list of suggested items you might want to consider when you're packing; however, it is not exhaustive. **The most important thing to mention in this section is that it can be difficult to buy some things in the Seychelles and imported goods are generally expensive, you will need to bring enough cosmetics, insect repellent, rechargeable batteries, medicines and clothes for your time out here.**

Contact us if you need any further advice:

Clothes: Lightweight, cotton clothes, T-shirts, shorts, quick-dry / board shorts, a pair of light coloured long trousers and long sleeved shirt (for most restaurants in the evenings – also good to limit mosquito availability!), swim wear etc. A good, strong pair of trainers, sandals, sun hat, good quality sun glasses and a pair of dive boots/aqua shoes to use when doing shore line work. A waterproof jacket/raincoat.

N.B. A high proportion of your time will be spent wearing swimwear- bring plenty!

Equipment: a small day rucksack, pens/pencils and notepads. Batteries (bring plenty as they are difficult to get hold of and expensive in Seychelles), torch, penknife, alarm clock, water proof watch, camera equipment, binoculars. Cameras and binoculars can suffer from mildew because of high humidity so bring airtight boxes containing silica gel sachets (available from some chemists, shoe shops and camera shops) to keep them in are useful. Cosmetics/Medicine: general medication, elastoplast, lots of sun cream, after sun (if you burn easily), mosquito repellent, plenty of toiletries, etc.

Food/Drink: coffee and tea are available in the local shops, the local vanilla tea is really nice. Food can be bought in the local small shops though fresh fruit and vegetables are more likely to be found at roadside stalls or in Victoria at the market.

Essentials: Please bring your own bed sheets and towels.

Optional extras: any luxuries e.g. personal stereo, earplugs (noisy birds / dogs), snorkel and mask, wet suit.

Costs & Finances:

Volunteers have to pay their own airfares to Mahé, Seychelles (about 700€-1000€ depending on time of year). Emirates, Etihad and Qatar airways are usually the cheapest



options if you are coming from Europe but also check Air France, Air Seychelles, and Ethiopian Airways.

About 50€-70€ per week is required for food etc. This will cover a very basic life-style (Seychelles can be an expensive place). More money should be allowed for the odd luxury (beer!) and travelling/accommodation on other islands. Seychelles Rupees are only available in Seychelles, there is an exchange desk at the airport and exchange places in Beau Vallon and Victoria. Cash machines are available in Beau Vallon and Victoria, Visa is accepted by most of them, MasterCard is also accepted at some.

Volunteers must contribute to the cost of their visit at EU 850 per person per month; this helps towards the cost of airport transfers, accommodation & utilities, administration and support & infrastructure. A breakdown of these three main categories is provided below.



- 1. Accommodation and utilities** – covers the cost of rent, electricity, cooking gas and water, and wifi connection at the office.
- 2. Administration** – includes pre-departure support, marketing, website and social media management, permits, insurance, compliance certificates and legal fees.
- 3. Support & Infrastructure** – is provided in the form of dedicated project staff providing in-country support, airport pickups, tailored volunteer training, vehicles and fuel, project equipment and materials, MCSS t-shirts, office facilities.

Health:

Some doctors recommend typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis injections. None is essential, but tetanus is advisable. There is no malaria in Seychelles, but the possibility of contracting dengue fever is present, so it is recommended that you bring a mosquito net and/ or repellent. 'Swimmer's ear', an infection caused by bacteria in salt water and high humidity, can be quite a problem so it is advised that you bring acid-alcohol type ear drops and an



ear infection medication be sought (from your doctor) for general ear infections, plus any other relevant medication. A good broad-spectrum antibiotic is useful. Other essential health items include a dry antiseptic, as wounds don't heal easily. In addition, it is advisable to bring talcum powder to prevent fungal infection and sores (N.B. prevention being better than cure- always rinse in fresh water after coming out of the sea and change into dry clothing). Finally, bear in mind that common European medications may not be easy to get in Seychelles, specifically if you are allergic to penicillin etc. Waterproof hydrocolloid dressings suitable for blisters (available at pharmacies, but not in Seychelles) are advisable if you react badly to insect bites. Seawater retards healing and wounds need covering to prevent infection.

Whilst Seychelles is free from deadly species, there are a few nasties. These include wasps, sea urchins, blister bugs and centipedes, the sting of the latter being the most unpleasant of all. A recent introduction to the islands is the hairy caterpillar, which although usually less than 1 cm long, has hairs, which have an irritant effect leading to itching and a rash. If you are particularly sensitive to such things, it is advisable to bring antihistamine tablets and hydrocortisone cream (in addition to paracetamol or equivalent) though these are also available locally. To avoid being bitten, it is advisable to keep the area immediately surrounding the house clear of leaf litter (MCSS responsibility but volunteer assistance appreciated).

Insurance:

Volunteers are advised to take out a good travel / medical insurance with coverage for personal effects. Do not bring anything of great value without insurance cover, high humidity conditions are unkind to equipment, clothes, books etc. Please note that MCSS takes no responsibility for volunteers personal belongings, it is their responsibility to place them in safe locations and keep doors locked, etc.

Background Check:

All volunteers and interns are required to provide a criminal background check prior to arrival. MCSS staff and volunteers often conduct activities involving children, both at partner hotels and through outreach activities. Recognising that anyone has the potential offend, MCSS aims to promote the welfare of all children with whom we come into contact, by ensuring safeguards are in place.

Travel:

You must book a return or onwards flight with a stay in Seychelles of less than 12 weeks to qualify for a Visitor's Visa. If your planned visit is for longer than 10 weeks there are significantly different procedures that we have to follow which involve a special volunteer's work permit with some direct cost implications. This can take 12 weeks or more to organise and must be done prior to your arrival, so you do need to let us know well in advance if you plan a longer term visit.



British Airways (from London), Emirates (via Dubai), Etihad / Air Seychelles (via Abu Dhabi), Qatar (via Abu Dhabi), Kenya Airways (via Nairobi), Condor (via Frankfurt) and Ethiopian (via Addis Ababa) all fly to Mahé. Cost varies - up to £900 at peak times e.g. Christmas and Easter. You should have a good look for competitive fares, as there are savings to be made. Please notify the Chief Executive Officer as soon as you know your flight dates/times of arrival etc., so they can organize logistics at this end.

On arrival:

On the flight you will be required to fill in a Disembarkation Card with the reason for your visit. You should write 'HOLIDAY' and DO NOT mention 'work'. Please bear in mind that you will usually be given a standard Visitor's Visa for only 30 days on arrival—this is not a problem and extensions are easily obtained for up to 10 weeks which we will take care of. After clearing Customs and Immigration, go through to the arrivals area where an MCSS representative will be waiting to assist you and bring you down to the office/apartment.

Working week:

The working week for MCSS is 5 days with weekends off; however, for some projects we have to provide 6 days a week cover so when necessary we will schedule days off on a rotational basis as needed. We tend to be flexible as to days off and will accommodate requests for special days for visits (e.g. to Praslin and La Digue) as much as is possible.

Things to do in Seychelles:

- There are a few bars and clubs around the island.
- Deepam cinema in Victoria shows one film a week from Mondays to Fridays.
- There is a wide range of beaches to sunbath on. These are relatively safe but avoid bringing valuables as they may be stolen if you leave them unattended.
- Snorkelling or swimming – there are a number of nice spots to go snorkelling and / or swimming but you need to take care with currents at certain beaches.
- Diving - Underwater Centre Seychelles / Dive Seychelles, (long-term sponsor of MCSS) has a special rate for MCSS volunteers plus you can also upgrade to the next dive qualification level at resident rates.
- Island Hopping is recommended. You can take the 1 hour ferry to Praslin (Cat Coco) for EU 100 return and a connecting 15mins ferry to La Digue for EU 30 return. (Please check prices as they are subject to change!)
- There is a library in Victoria, but so it is recommended that you bring a supply of books or a Kindle.
- Sight- seeing around Mahé can be done by bus with a trip costing SR 10 in standard buses or SR 15 in the new air-con bus.
- Mountain walks are possible. The tourist information Centre in Victoria sells trail guides. These are safe but it is recommended that you do not go alone.

Useful websites for planning your visit here include:

- www.seychelles.travel the home page of the Seychelles Tourism Board

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- www.virtualseychelles.sc is the government web site with lots of info and live webcams

Restaurants

There are a number of places to eat without blowing the budget (good meals under 250Rs) these include:

- Taste of Italy – Pasta, coffee, ice cream, pizza
- Dolce Vita - Cafe
- Baobab, Beau Vallon – great pizzas, lasagna and smoked fish specials
- Several Takeaways serving good local food under 100scr

If you have a little more in your budget you might want to try:

- Boathouse, Beau Vallon – All you can eat Creole buffet, good for large groups and large appetites, casual dining (approx. 500Rs, but check first)
- Berjaya Hotel, Beau Vallon – Chinese restaurant, Indian Restaurant and Japanese
- The Mahek at the Coral Stand Hotel, Beau Vallon-Indian food but prices can be steep (300+rs per person)
- The Beach Shack – Casual Cocktail beach bar& restaurant, Beau Vallon
- Bravo, Eden Island – Good S.A. style restaurant with good burgers, salads, and plenty of other options (250-450rs)
- Chilli's, La Misere – A new Mex / Chinese fusion restaurant with a range from burgers, to Creole to Tex Mex, also 'theme nights' at weekends (250-450rs)
- Le Perle Noir, Beau Vallon – One of the better local restaurants with good meat and sea-food.... Not cheap!
- La Scala, Bel Ombre -Probably the # 1 restaurant in Seychelles-Expensive but well worth it for a special occasion!

Not to mention all the smaller places that are open during the days in Victoria and Beau Vallon where a take-away Creole lunch will only cost about 55-80Rs.

Nightlife

Nightlife isn't what Seychelles is most famous for although there are certainly a few places to party once in a while (if you're not working the next day!). Many of the venues suggested here are hotels and therefore their prices reflect that:

- The Sunset Beach Hotel-4 Star Hotel well worth a visit at some point during the season to check out cocktail menu
- Boardwalk Eden Island – A bar at the Eden Island Marina
- The Boat House Bar – Casual beach bar, Beau Vallon
- The Beach Shack – Casual Cocktail beach bar, Beau Vallon



Venturing beyond Mahé...

- Praslin – The 2nd largest Island of the Seychelles is a 1hr ferry ride (costs approx. 100 euros return on Cat Cocos but check prices first) or 15min flight from the main island of Mahé. Main highlight of Praslin is the Vallée De Mai, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1984. Day trip options from here include Cousine & Cousin Islands or Curieuse Island where you can get close up to a Giant Tortoise in the wild. There are numerous hotels you can stay in or else with a little investigation you should be able to find a much cheaper bed and breakfast option.
- La Digue -The 4th largest island of the Seychelles group, La Digue is the place where you'll get all your picture postcard shots of the Seychelles, as it is one of the most beautiful islands with palm-fringed beaches, towering granite boulders and turquoise waters. Best way to explore the island is by bicycle, which you can hire for about 6 euro a day. This is a must see place as traditional life still holds sway with only a limited numbers of cars on the island, bicycles and the odd ox-cart ruling the roads. Once again there are plenty of hotels available but your best option is probably one of the many small guesthouses or Bed and Breakfasts that usually won't cost you more than 50 Euros a night between 2 people. ***Please note that ferry tickets to La Digue are bought at the Praslin ferry port through Inter Island Ferry and no longer partnered with Cat Coco – about 15 euro).

Recommended reading:

- Spectrum Guide to Seychelles, Eds. A. & J. Skerrett, Camerapix (1996). ISBN 1874041-93-8. (Available at Antigone Trading's Shops at Seychelles airport and at Temooljee's Arcade in Victoria, Seychelles). Very comprehensive, but out of date.
- Mauritius, Reunion & Seychelles, Lonely Planet Publications, Colourcraft Limited, Hong Kong (2001). ISBN 0-86442-748-4. Has a very limited section on the Seychelles, worth photocopying.
- Underwater Guide to Seychelles, 2nd Edition, C. Mason-Parker & R. Walton. John Beaufoy (20202). ISBN 978-1-912081-27-1
- Birds of Seychelles, A. Skerrett, I. Bullock & T. Disley, Helm Field Guides (2001). ISBN 0-7136-3973-3. Currently the best bird guide available.
- Whale Sharks, David Rowat. The Marine Conservation Society Seychelles (2010) ISBN 978-99931-17-00-1 (Available cheaper directly from us at MCSS)

Most available from a public library, good bookshop or www.amazon.co.uk

Queries

Please address all queries to the MCSS Team at volunteermcss@gmail.com

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