

Marine Conservation Society, Seychelles (MCSS).

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. MCSS remains to this day the only Seychelles based Non-Governmental Organisation dedicated exclusively to the conservation and sustainable use of marine 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:

Conservation of turtle rookeries on the developed island of Mahe:

This small grant project is funded by the Mangroves For the Future initiative and is based on increasing turtle conservation through public awareness and community involvement. Aspects of this project include:

- Monitoring of important turtle nesting beaches in the south of Mahe
- Production and dissemination of educational material such as posters and presentations
- Public awareness surveys
- Data handling and analysis

Coastal Development and Ecosystem Modelling as a Tool to Enable Improved Local and National Policy Decision-making Processes:

The large grant project is also funded by the Mangroves For the Future initiative and is being run in conjunction with another local NGO. This project is designed to strengthen the technical and scientific basis of, and empower local community involvement in, coastal development and decision making processes. Aspects of this project include:

- Providing baseline information on the abundance and quality of coastal habitats and existing coastal development through habitat mapping using satellite technology and GIS software
- Surveys of local communities to attain socio-economic perspectives of coastal development in study areas
- Production of a simple tool that will enable fast assessment of potential ecological consequences of planned coastal development projects.

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Conservation of threatened marine biodiversity of N.W. Mahe through increased public awareness and community involvement in a multi-species acoustic tracking programme.

Funded by the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme. The overall aim of this project is to increase scientific understanding of local biodiversity and threats by improving knowledge of threatened and indicator species through local community involvement.

Aspects of this project include:

- Acoustic array design and deployment
- Capture and tagging of target species
- Creation of species distribution and habitat utilisation maps of critical areas
- Production of species-habitat threat analysis
- Local community project awareness programme

Management and conservation of protected marine vertebrates:

(Starting in March 2011)

This is a component of the large GEF funded Protected Areas project and is being conducted in conjunction with the National Parks Authority and the Seychelles Fisheries Authority. The overall aim of this project is to expand and strengthen existing marine Protected Areas in the inner Seychelles by creating temporary and movable PAs established to protect species in critical life-stage habitats.

Aspects of this project include:

- Creation of species-habitat distribution and abundance maps with location of seasonal critical areas and threat analysis
- Turtle distribution, abundance and habitat evaluation and mapping (this compliments our ongoing turtle monitoring programme)
- Whale shark distribution, abundance habitat evaluation mapping
- Threat and impact analysis and mapping
- Development of management plans for critical habitats for nesting turtles and aggregating whale sharks

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 and Natural Resources, the Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA), the Marine Parks Authority (MPA), other local NGOs and the Seychelles Centre for Marine Research and Technology (SCMRT) without compromising its role as an independent NGO.

The MCSS is active on national committees such as the Steering Committee for the Environmental Management 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

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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.

VOLUNTEERS' DUTIES

Volunteers assist the MCSS Project Coordinator and staff in all activities.

1. Monitoring & Research Programme (40-60% of volunteers' time)

Assisting the Project Coordinator with varying programmes such as:

- Monitoring the numbers of turtles nesting at specific beaches (SEP-MAY)
- Monitoring the change of beach slope at Anse Intendance nesting site (every 4 weeks)
- Monitoring nesting habitat and beach crest vegetation at specific beaches (yearly)
- Assisting with the Whale Shark Monitoring and Tagging Programme
- 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. Tourism (10-20%)

- Helping with whale shark interactions during public monitoring programmes (Aug-Oct)
- Assisting visitors during turtle activities at monitored beaches

3. Management / Administration (10-20%)

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

4. Volunteers own research project (10-20%)

There will be opportunity for volunteers to carry out their own research project. If you have a particular project already in mind please discuss your ideas with the Chairman of MCSS and the Project Coordinator 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.

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REQUIREMENTS FOR A VOLUNTEER

- A university degree in a biological subject, and/or good practical skills
- Some experience of working in wildlife conservation
- Ability to work without close supervision, although the Project Coordinator will provide guidance in all aspects of the work
- Good working discipline and motivation
- Preferably over 21 years of age
- 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
- A PADI Open Water Diving Certificate, or equivalent, preferable
- 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

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 in the volunteer flat is self-catering and dormitory style with four person, male and female bedrooms. Limited crockery, cutlery and cooking utensils are available in the kitchen provided. A washing machine is also provided but volunteers are expected to provide their own detergent which can be bought locally.
- Volunteers are expected to provide their own linen and towels.
- Due to the limited accommodation it is not practical to arrange visits for family or friends to stay in MCSS accommodation, we will however assist in organizing bookings at local guest-houses if needed.
- Volunteers will be responsible for keeping accommodation clean.

Office:

- Should be dressed appropriately for office (e.g. t-shirts and shorts)
- A telephone has been installed for MCSS business purposes; personal use must be kept to an absolute minimum and bills paid promptly.
- The computers are for MCSS business and a broadband internet connection is available at the Project Coordinator's discretion. Access for email and general websites is allowed but Skype and social networking sites may not be accessed through this system. The technology is fragile and phone costs are expensive; in the event of malfunction repairs could take weeks - Seychelles is NOT the place to be if you can't manage without regular communications with friends and family etc. Alternately you can go to the internet café at Beau Vallon (up to Sr40 per hour depending on where you go).

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What to bring:

Clothes: Lightweight, cotton clothes, T-shirts, shorts, a pair of light coloured long trousers and long sleeved shirt (for mosquitos in the evenings), swim wear etc. Evening wear if you plan on going somewhere fancy. 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 it's 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.

Miscellaneous: Please bring your own linen and towels.

Optional extras: any luxuries e.g. spirits (a bottle of Smirnoff will cost over £30), cigarettes, personal stereo, earplugs (noisy birds), snorkel and mask, wet suit.

You may be asked by the Chairman or Project Coordinator to carry out small items of equipment or goods not available in the Seychelles. Obviously this saves the MCSS money but please do not feel obliged to take things at the expense of your own luggage. Also, if you are asked by friends or relatives on other islands to take things out this is NOT a priority for you - do not feel obliged to take things.

Finances:

Volunteers are expected to pay their own air fares to Mahe, Seychelles (about £500-£800 depending on time of year). Emirates and Qatar airways are usually the cheapest options if you are coming from Europe but also check Air France and Air Seychelles.

About £25-30 per week is required for food etc. This will cover a very basic life-style (Seychelles is an expensive place). More money should be allowed for the odd luxury (beer!) and travelling/accommodation on other islands.

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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 have to contribute to the cost of accommodation at **EU 400** per person per month which includes the cost of utilities and limited internet access.

Health:

Some doctors recommend typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis injections. None is essential, but tetanus is advisable. There is no malaria in Seychelles, but 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 medication is not 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 and centipedes, the sting of the latter being the most unpleasant of all. It may be 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 and there has been some petty theft from the property / office in past years. 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.

Travel:

Air Seychelles, Air France, Kenya Airways (via Nairobi) and Condor (via Frankfurt), all fly to Mahe. Air Seychelles fly from Heathrow. Cost varies - up to £800 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 Chairman or Project Coordinator as soon as you know your flight dates/times

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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 only be given a standard Visitor's Permit for 30 days – this is not a problem and extensions are easily obtained for up to 3 months. 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 / flat.

The working week for MCSS is a 6 days – volunteers work 5 days but may be asked to work weekends if necessary as some of our monitoring activities are sometimes over the weekend. 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 discothèques around the island (the closest to MCSS being Tequila Boom at Bel Ombre).

Deepam cinema in Victoria shows one film (sometimes 2, if one is over 18 – usually horror or a Bollywood movie) a week at 17:45 and 21:00 from Mondays to Fridays. On weekends the film is also shown at 15:15. The films are changed on Wednesday. Tickets cost SR30-35 depending on which seats you choose.

There are 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, (main 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 90 return and a connecting 30 min ferry to La Digue for EU 19 return. Alternately you can take the 3hr ferry directly to La Digue at EU 15 return. (Please check prices as they are subject to change!)

There is a library in town but it is recommended that you bring a supply of books.

Sight seeing around Mahe can be done by bus with a trip costing SR 5 in standard buses or SR 10 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 not go alone.

Recommended reading:

Spectrum Guide to Seychelles, Eds. A. & J. Skerrett, Camerapix (1996). ISBN 1-874041-93-8. (Available at Antigone Trading's Shops at Seychelles airport and at Temooljee's Arcade in Victoria, Seychelles). Very comprehensive, but slightly out of date.

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Odyssey Illustrated Guide to Seychelles, S. Carpin, The Guidebook Company Ltd, Hong Kong, (1997). ISBN 962-217-508-2. (Also available in Seychelles as above).

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.

Birds of Seychelles, A. Skerrett, I. Bullock & T. Disley, Helm Field Guides (2001). ISBN 0-7136-3973-3. Currently the best bird guide available.

Diving and Snorkeling Guide to the Seychelles, L. Wood, Gulf Publishing Company (1997). ISBN 1-55992-097-1. The section in the Lonely Plant Seychelles guide will probably suffice though.

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

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