

# Marine Conservation Society, Seychelles (MCSS).

## Volunteer Information 2016

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 and community based programmes:

### **MCSS-Banyan Tree Turtle & Terrapin Project and the Wildlife Conservation & Rehabilitation Centre**

This six-month demonstration project was a component of the large project funded by the Global Environment Facility '*Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Production Sector Activities*'. The primary objectives of this project were to set up an environmental officer and a turtle and wildlife rescue facility at Banyan Tree Resort at Anse Intendance, utilising the resort's infrastructure.

The Banyan Tree Resort is in a remarkable location with Critically Endangered Hawksbill turtles nesting on the beach and with two species of Critically Endangered freshwater turtle (terrapins) inhabiting the wetland that rests at the centre of the property.

Work on the project has moved on at a great pace with the Wildlife Conservation and Rehabilitation Centre opening on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2015. A veterinary training course was run for the Centre staff and local vets by WVI and slowly the necessary veterinary equipment is being procured with the help of several sponsors.

The Centre has raised funds to bring in a digital x-ray machine for use in the Centre and by the Veterinary Services Department which was installed in August 2015. Activities under this project include:

- Wildlife care & rehabilitation (specialising in terrapins & turtles)
- Trapping & tracking studies on endemic terrapins
- Wetland monitoring and rehabilitation
- Educational activities for schools
- Education talks and tours for resort guests
- Aerial surveys and mapping via UAVs (drones)

The Wildlife Conservation and Rehabilitation Centre is moving from strength to strength and we are taking volunteers on this project so if you are interested please contact us.

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## **Cerf Island (St. Anne's Marine Park) Stewardship Programme**

This started as a one-year demonstration project also the '*Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Production Sector Activities*' project. The primary objective of this project was to develop a participatory partnership between one of the resorts based in the Marine Park, Cerf Island Resort, and the Seychelles National Parks Authority, who administer the MPA, to foster a stewardship approach to conserving fragile marine biodiversity.

The stewardship project has been so successful that the project is carrying on with the opening of an **MCSS volunteer base** on Cerf Island to support the community based **Cerf Island Conservation Program**. This will allow the maintenance of the snorkel and kayak trails already implemented as well as allow for the expansion of activities:

- Snorkel trails
- Kayak & snorkel safari trails
- Visitors information kiosk
- Educational presentation to Cerf Island / Marine Park guests
- Guided snorkel tours
- Mountain / jungle wildlife trail construction
- Endemic species monitoring (plants and terrapins)
- Coral nursery and 'galvanic' artificial reef
- Underwater erosion barriers

## **Management of Temporal Protected Areas:**

This is a component of the large GEF funded Protected Areas Sustainable Financing project and builds on the four years of work developing this concept and legislation under the 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. This project will continued through under continuation funding from April 2016 to April 2020.

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)
- 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 Mahe
- Production and dissemination of educational material such as posters and presentations
- Public awareness surveys
- Data handling and analysis

## **Anse Forbans Stewardship Programme**

This programme started in July 2016 at the request of the Anse Forbans community, having seen the impact of the Banyan Tree and Cerf Island programmes. Local hotels, guest houses and private individuals are partnering with MCSS in a cooperative stewardship approach to conserving fragile biodiversity of Anse Forbans.

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This community based initiative is called **Anse Forbans Community Conservation Programme** and is working with its partners and community members to develop a range of facilities that will benefit biodiversity conservation, the appreciation of residents and visitors of local biodiversity and will open sustainable usage of the area's natural resources. The activities identified so far are:

- Development of three hikes:
  - Collines du Sud Summits (250m asl., Key Biodiversity Area, stunning views to South, East & West, already walked and mapped)
  - Anse Capucin (Secluded off-road beach 2.25km South of Chalets Anse Forbans, already walked and mapped)
  - Mount Parnel summit (350m asl., stunning views of East, South and West Mahe)
- Hike trail and biodiversity guides
- Wetland monitoring and rehabilitation with endemic species monitoring
- Coral reef mapping and rehabilitation
- Snorkel trails
- Kayak & snorkel safari trails
- Family and visitors' facility development

Volunteers are welcome on this project and we would arrange accommodation locally.

### **Cooperative Coastal Stewardship projects:**

We have two smaller coastal stewardship projects in the Beau Vallon area working with Le Meridién Fisherman's Cove Hotel and the H Resort. These projects include wetland monitoring and the development of a coral reef snorkel trail similar to the facilities and activities developed on Cerf Island. Volunteers are welcome on this project and would stay at the MCSS facilities at Beau Vallon.

### **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Foundation Project at Grand Police:**

Since May 2016 we have been implementing a detailed wetland monitoring project in the Grand Police wetland, a key Biodiversity Area on South Mahe. The area is earmarked for development and the project aims to provide an accurate inventory of the biodiversity and develop guidelines to minimise and mitigate any adverse impacts of development in this area. Volunteers will be needed to assist with the monitoring and mapping and biodiversity assessment phases of this project.

### **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 and Natural Resources, 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 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 facilities and support are minimal the programmes running are interesting and in some instances at the forefront of conservation

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research on the species concerned. The following pages give some useful information for prospective volunteers.

## **VOLUNTEERS' DUTIES**

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

### **1. Monitoring & Research Programme (40-60% 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 Anse Intendance nesting site (every 4 weeks)
- Monitoring nesting habitat and beach crest vegetation at specific beaches (yearly)
- Assisting with the Whale Shark Monitoring 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.

### **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 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, 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
- 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

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- 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 office is self-catering and dormitory style with two 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.
- Accommodation on the Cerf Island and Banyan Tree projects is in the resorts' staff accommodation and in both cases consists of a single shared bedroom with two single beds.
- Volunteers must 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 volunteer accommodation, we will however assist in organizing bookings at local guest-houses if needed.
- Volunteers will be responsible for keeping accommodation clean.

#### Office:

- Volunteers should dress appropriately for office work (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 costs paid promptly.
- The computers are for MCSS business and a metered broadband internet connection is available to access email and general websites but Skype and video down-load sites may not be accessed through this system.

#### 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 is difficult to buy many things in the Seychelles and imported goods are generally expensive, you will need to bring enough cosmetics, personal toiletries, sunscreen, insect repellent, rechargeable batteries, medicines, first aid 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

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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.

Miscellaneous: Please bring your own linen and towels.

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

### **Finances:**

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

About £25-30 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 have to contribute to the cost of accommodation at **EU 200** 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

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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. 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. 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:**

Emirates (via Dubai), Etihad / Air Seychelles (via Abu Dhabi), Kenya Airways (via Nairobi) Condor (via Frankfurt) and Ethiopian (via Addis Ababa) all fly to Mahe. 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 Chairman 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 Permit 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 / flat.

If your planned visit is for longer than 10 weeks there are significantly different procedures that we have to follow which involve a special volunteers work permit with some direct cost implications. This can take up to 10 weeks to organise which 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.

### **Working week:**

The working week for MCSS is 6 days with Sundays off; however, for some projects we have to provide 7 days a week cover so 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 discothèques around the island (the closest to MCSS being Tequila Boom at Bel Ombre).

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- Deepam cinema in Victoria shows one film a week (sometimes 2, if one is over 18 – usually horror or a Bollywood movie) 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 / 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 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 or a Kindle.
- 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.

Useful websites for planning your visit here include:

- [www.seychelles.travel](http://www.seychelles.travel) the home page of the Seychelles Tourist Board
- [www.virtualeseychelles.sc](http://www.virtualeseychelles.sc) is the government web site with lots of info and live web-cams

### Restaurants

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

- Sam's, Victoria – good pizza and pastas
- Pirate's Arms, Victoria – Serves a wide variety of dishes. Awesome milkshakes!
- Pizzeria, Docklands, Victoria – good pizza and pasta
- Baobab, Beau Vallon – great pizzas, lasagna and smoked fish specials

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. 300Rs, but check first)
- Berjaya Hotel, Beau Vallon – Chinese restaurant, Indian Restaurant and Japanese
- Teppanyaki (From 300rs for a meal)
- The Mahek at the Coral Stand Hotel, Beau Vallon-Indian food but prices can be steep (300+rs per person)
- Rendezvous, Victoria – Great Salads and Steaks, Amazing desserts (200-300rs for a meal).
- The Wharf, East Coast – Great quality steaks, salads, Indian menu and plenty of other options (250-500rs)
- Bravo, Eden Island – Good S.A. style restaurant with good burgers, salads, and plenty of other options (250-450rs)

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- 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 35-50Rs.

### **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-5 Star Hotel well worth a visit at some point during the season to check out cocktail menu
- Level 3 – Located at Docklands is a good place to have a drink in a Sport's Bar atmosphere
- Boardwalk Eden Island – Up-market bar at the Eden Island Marina
- Pirates Arms-Central Victoria-pub like atmosphere
- Love Nut-Nightclub in Victoria
- Tequila Boom-Nightclub in Bel Ombre near Beau Vallon.
- Le Faya-Bar in Bel Ombre near Tequila Boom, Beau Vallon

### **Venturing beyond Mahe...**

- Praslin – The 2nd largest Island of the Seychelles is a 45min ferry ride (costs approx 30 euros one way on Cat Cocos but check prices first) or 15min flight from the main island of Mahe. Main highlight of Praslin is the Vallee 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).
- There is a library in town but it is recommended that you bring a supply of books or a Kindle.

### **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

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Temooljee's Arcade in Victoria, Seychelles). Very comprehensive, but slightly out of date.

- 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.
- 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](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

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