



Marine Conservation Project

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Introduction

The Marine Conservation Project offers a unique learning experience for volunteers who are passionate about the marine environment. It will allow you to make valuable contributions to increased knowledge, awareness and conservation efforts while supporting applied marine research. As part of the comprehensive volunteer programme, you will regularly receive the opportunity to assist the research team and obtain hands-on participatory experience in boat-based and land-based fieldwork, as well as marine mammal stranding response and necropsy. You will participate in various long-term monitoring projects focusing on cetacean photo-ID, abundance estimates and habitat use; seal presence and behaviour in estuaries; and seal-shark interactions in Robberg Marine Protected Area.

Combining research, conservation and education into its comprehensive volunteer programme. The project strongly depends on the willingness of volunteers to contribute their time and dedication to help further their work, allowing you to make a valuable contribution to increased knowledge and awareness regarding local conservation efforts.

It's all hands-on! You will play a major role in all projects where you will be expected to perform a large portion of the work. Your participation in conservation and education projects will involve regular hikes and surveys on local beaches to perform marine debris clean-ups; alien plant eradication; river health assessments; assistance at the SANCCOB Seabird Rehabilitation Centre; assistance at the Knysna Animal Welfare Service (KAWS); and environmental education of children at the Siyakula Pre-School Crèche and Sterreweg Special Needs Pre-School



Accommodation

Accommodation at the ORCA House consists of a huge kitchen, male and female bathrooms as well as dormitory style same sex bedrooms. There is also a twin room available for long term volunteers to ensure a little more privacy during their stay. The house is equipped with free wireless internet and a laundry service provided by 'house mom', Tilly.

Whilst a full stocked kitchen is provided for volunteers to cater for themselves, Tilly cooks a delicious dinner for everyone during weekdays. Weekends are completely self-service; however many volunteers opt to go out on weekends. The ORCA house is located within easy walking distance to two shopping centres with a variety of shops, restaurants and fast-food outlets, both local and international.



Activities

The project is involved in a number of marine research projects which are perfect for individuals who are interested in marine mammal research. By assisting our biologists in the field, you will gain valuable experience in boat-based and land-based field research methods involving some of Plettenberg Bay's charismatic marine top predator species. You will assist with humpback dolphin photo-ID research and record sightings of other marine animals during dedicated boat-based surveys. In addition, you will join Ocean Blue Adventures commercial whale and dolphin watching boat trips when there are opportunities to record opportunistic data. You will also participate in other research projects including marine mammal stranding response and necropsy; seal population monitoring and seal-shark interaction research in the Robberg Marine Protected Area. Sample processing, data entry and error checking forms an important component of research, and you will be expected to perform a large portion of this work.

Due to the weather-dependent nature of our work, we plan each week's activities the weekend before, usually on a Friday. Once the schedule has been finalized the volunteer coordinator will write the programme on the activity board in the dining room. The standard volunteer working week at the ORCA Foundation is Monday to Friday, from 08h00 to 17h00, except on a Friday afternoon when we often finish at 13:00 (but not always). Some days can involve more work and longer hours, while others move at a more leisurely pace. You are expected to be ready at the time specified on the volunteer Whatsapp group the night before, when we collect you for the day's activities, which can range from general duties at Ocean Blue Adventures to assisting our biologists out in the field. Evenings and weekends are your leisure times. The relaxed atmosphere of

Plettenberg Bay and the ORCA Foundation house will help you to settle in quickly.

Opportunistic Boat-Based Surveys with Ocean Blue Adventures

You will join Ocean Blue Adventures on their commercial whale and dolphin watching boat trips when there are available seats to record opportunistic sightings of marine animals such as whales, dolphins, seals, sharks and seabirds. When whales and dolphins are encountered you will take dorsal fin photographs for photo-identification research. Sightings of injured, entangled or vagrant seals hauled out on Robberg Peninsula are also photographed and recorded. All data is intended for use in existing collaborative research and citizen science projects, and will provide us with information on aspects such as the spatial distribution of various species within the bay, individual movement patterns, changes in group sizes, population health, predator-prey interactions and human-wildlife interactions.

Boat-Based Humpback Dolphin Surveys

The Indian Ocean humpback dolphin was recently listed as endangered in South African waters and faces a number of anthropogenic threats due to its preference for shallow coastal waters. With an estimated population size of less than 500 individuals, it is considered to be South Africa's most endangered resident marine mammal. You will assist our cetacean biologist during dedicated boat-based surveys (4 per month) to collect sighting and photo-identification data. Data will contribute towards an existing collaborative research project of the Nelson Mandela University, which aims to increase our knowledge of this species, assess trends in population numbers and inform conservation management decisions with scientific advice.

Boat-Based Monitoring of Cape fur seals in the Keurbooms River Estuary

You will assist our biologists during dedicated boat-based surveys to record the presence, individual identity and behaviour of Cape Fur seals that frequent the Keurbooms river estuary. Using photo-ID techniques you will identify individuals with unique flipper scars. Prey species will also be identified from photos taken during predation events. With this, biologists aim to determine whether individual seals specialize in feeding on estuarine fish species, and whether their behaviour is seasonal, tidal, sex or age specific. The study further aims to place the impact of river seals into context with current recreational fishing pressure, which you will also record.

Cliff-Top Monitoring of Seals, Sharks, Whales and Dolphins in the Robberg Peninsula MPA

You will regularly hike out on Robberg Peninsula to perform dedicated observation sessions from designated cliff-top monitoring sites. From here you will record environmental conditions and the presence and behaviour of seals, sharks, whales, dolphins, tourism vessels and shore anglers within the Robberg Marine Protected Area. Your information will be used to monitor seal-shark interactions and the importance of the marine protected area to marine mammals and the tourism industry. The hike can be strenuous to some, and certain sections are not suitable for those who have a serious fear of heights.

Snorkelling

Snorkelling is the underwater observation and study of animals in flowing waters. We use this time underwater as an opportunity to observe, assess and clean the water and environment that provides us with the chance to do research and conserve. While snorkelling in our estuaries and inshore reefs along Plettenberg Bay we look at fish abundance, distribution and habitat use. We also remove any pollution seen during the swim, specifically keeping an eye out for fishing gear such as fishing line, hooks and sinkers.

Marine Mammal Stranding Response and Necropsy

You will occasionally attend to dead whales, dolphins and seals ashore to assist biologists with scientific dissections and the collection of samples for research. Samples are transported to the Port Elizabeth Museum on a monthly basis where it is used in various ongoing studies on marine mammal morphology, taxonomy, population structure, diet, health, fisheries interactions and predator-prey interactions. You may also get an opportunity to assist with rare events involving live seals ashore to capture, tag, move and/or release them. Stranding events involving live dolphins or whales are extremely rare.

Bird Ringing with Natures Valley Trust

Natures Valley Trust sometimes invites us to assist them at one of their bird ringing sites where they capture birds in order to ring them with a uniquely numbered metal band and to record any recaptures of previously ringed birds. This work is done as part of a long-term study assessing aspects such as survival, residency and body condition of the birds in this area. Volunteers get the opportunity to observe the birds up close and are able to learn about the different species which we find here in South Africa, particularly the 'Fynbos' species.

River Health Evaluation

As part of a citizen science project we perform mini-SASS river health assessments at various sites along the Bitou River. In order to complete an evaluation, the river needs to be sampled for micro-invertebrates. These species are then identified and scored on a matrix according to their sensitivity to disturbance. Results will allow management authorities to identify early warning signs of decreasing river health due to various potential sources of pollution. The results which are obtained from the evaluation are fed into the online MiniSASS database, where the history of the river's health can be accessed by the public.

SANCCOB Seabird Rehabilitation Centre

We visit the centre occasionally to assist with general maintenance of the facility and the rehabilitation of various seabirds, such as the endangered African penguin. Due to the fact that the centre is in Port Elizabeth, this requires an early start to the day, often leaving the ORCA house at 05h30 in the morning. Therefore, please be prepared for a long day if you are lucky enough to partake in this activity during your stay with us. The activity is often combined with a seal or dolphin necropsy at the Port Elizabeth Museum, which is hosted by the museum's marine mammal curator in return for samples

that we routinely collect from marine mammal stranding's in Plettenberg Bay.

Alien plant eradication

One of the ORCA Foundation's goals is to remove as many alien plant species as possible from the Plettenberg Bay area. These species are not compatible with our natural vegetation and are

known to use a lot more water resources than our indigenous plants. South Africa is short of rainfall and this inevitably leads to drying out of rivers and a decline in local biodiversity. In conjunction with other organizations we often head out into the surrounding areas to help remove problem species – sometimes removing as many as 300 trees in one day. We are currently removing the alien species *Acacia saligna* (Port Jackson) which is a native of Australia and was introduced into South Africa for dune stabilization. This can be a tiring and physically demanding task especially when done in the heat. Please be prepared for this by wearing a hat and sunblock. Also note that this activity will not be done for longer than two hours a day.

Beach Clean-Ups

We regularly hike along Plettenberg Bay's beaches to clean up marine debris. Unfortunately, we live in a world where people still dispose of their rubbish from vessels, in rivers or on beaches. This often causes deadly entanglement of marine animals. Tiny plastic particles (micro-plastics) are also known to end up in the ocean food-chain. This project not only keeps our beaches clean and healthy, but also sets a good example for the community. We also use the opportunity to record our findings, which gives us indications of where the garbage is coming from and where it appears most frequently.

Eco-bricks

At the beginning of 2019, we started our Eco-brick project, a method we are using to help us in reducing the amount of non-recyclable materials we are introducing into the environment. These non-recyclable materials include polystyrene trays, silver packets such as chip and chocolate wrappers, just to name a few. An eco-brick is a plastic bottle which is stuffed full of waste which is not biodegradable, a completed eco-brick can weigh between five hundred and six hundred grams. They can then be used as a brick to help with the building of structures and furniture. All the eco-bricks which the ORCA Foundation produces will be donated to community projects in Plettenberg Bay who require them. A box is kept in the kitchen whereby we collect all the materials needed to make the eco-bricks.



Outreach Projects

The Marine Conservation Project has various local outreach programs that they support with funding and hands on assistance. Volunteers will assist at a variety of these programs during their stay, but which programs you take part in will depend on the time and duration of your visit.

Siyakula Pre-School Education

Once a week, volunteers visit young children at the local crèche to give a lesson on basic English words based on the theme of the week. All teaching is done in English (translated by the teachers into their mother tongue of isixhosa) so that kids can learn a second language. It has been proven that by getting the information to people at an early age you are helping to enhance their cognitive function of their brain. This is important as this is the learning phase when children are able to start identifying things, and thus we can help make a difference in their lives. Volunteers also train children through reading stories and playing games. They further assist the crèche by serving children lunchtime meals and washing up. The children at the creche absolutely love it when volunteers visit them and they literally shower you with lots of hugs and affection.

Sterreweg Special Needs Pre-School

Volunteers occasionally spend time assisting carers at a local crèche during daily activities involving children with moderate to severe cognitive and physical disabilities. Volunteers may also participate in an Early Intervention Programme for children between 1 and 3 years old or shadow Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists

who work at the centre. Volunteers are more than welcome to help out at the school whenever they prefer, but this must please be pre-arranged with the programme manager.

Knysna Animal Welfare Services

Once every two weeks volunteers may visit the Knysna Animal Welfare Services centre (KAWS) to assist with general maintenance of the facility and interact with cats and dogs. As a volunteer you will assist in getting the dogs more acquainted with people by taking them for a walk on a lead as well as playing with and grooming them. This activity has proven to be a firm favourite among our volunteers.

Lunchbox Theatre

The Marine Research & Conservation Project are proud sponsors of the Lunchbox Theatre, a group of actors who perform for schools teaching them about various environmental issues. They have shows such as "the tree show" which teaches kids about why trees are important and "waste shows" which teach kids to recycle and to not litter. When the group performs at some of the schools in the area volunteers are invited to watch the show, it's amazing to see how the school kids react to this form of educating.

Fieldband Foundation

This is a great foundation and programme to help improve the quality of living for students at different schools in the disadvantaged areas around Plettenberg Bay. The foundation gives these students an opportunity and helps them to improve their futures. By learning music, the student members are a part of a team, being in a positive and joyful environment. Volunteers occasionally attend the Field band practises where they can listen to how the band plays. The tutors also teach our volunteers some beats which they can play on the instruments.



Additional Excursions

Volunteers may also choose from a variety of optional extra excursions which you can do during your own leisure time on weekends. Here are a couple, to name a few:

- Monkeyland - Marine Research & Conservation volunteers get in for free!
- Birds Of Eden - Marine Research & Conservation volunteers receive free admission here as well.
- Face Adrenaline Bungy Jump
- Seal diving
- Skydiving
- Quad biking
- Jet skiing
- Wolf sanctuary
- Snake park
- Zip lining
- Paragliding
- Surfing
- Scuba diving
- Shark cage diving
- Kayaking
- Horseback riding and much more right at your fingertips!

Please note: that any and all excursions are at your own risk and extra cost payable directly to the project.



Project Dates & Costs

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

This project is suitable for persons over the age of 18, who have an interest in the field of marine conservation, marine wildlife or just a sense of adventure. Volunteers need to be in good health with a moderate level of fitness. It is a great opportunity for those wishing to explore the wonders of the ocean!

While assisting the biologists during boat-based fieldwork you may be required to move around the vessel whilst underway, sometimes in choppy conditions. Seasickness is a possibility, and we suggest you take the necessary precautions if you think you may be prone to this condition. Hiking out to work sites, clearing alien plants or performing tedious behavioural observations from cliff-top vantage points can be physically demanding and mentally challenging. It is important to notify us if you have any disability, injury or condition (especially fear of heights) that may affect your participation in some of the more challenging fieldwork activities. This will not mean that you can not join the project, it is merely so that the staff may take this into consideration when allocating the daily activities.

It is important to remember that planned activities can change on a moment's notice, especially if the weather turns or something exciting like a marine mammal stranding comes along. Be patient and prepared to go with the flow...Unpredictable and chaotic days are common!

PROGRAM DATES

The Marine Research & Conservation project is open all year round. Arrivals and departures to the project are flexible. Contact us with your preferred dates and we will do our best to forefill them (availability pending).

Whilst admission onto the projects requires a minimum 1 week stay, you can stay as long as you like or can afford. We would like to recommend a 2-4 week stay wherever possible, as to allow enough time for you to get a full experience to all activities that are on offer, but it is not essential.

PROJECT FEES

| <u>Duration</u> | <u>Price</u> |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Week (7 days) | R 11,400 |
| 2 weeks (14 days) | R 20,650 |
| 3 weeks (21 days) | R 29,890 |
| 4 weeks (28 days) | R 39,150 |
| 5 weeks (35 days) | R 48,370 |
| 6 weeks (42 days) | R 57,600 |
| 7 weeks (49 days) | R 66,850 |
| 8 weeks (56 days) | R 76,100 |

For stays over 8 weeks please contact us for a quotation as additional discounts will be given.

Prices are shown in South African Rand. For your local currency conversion rates check out www.xe.com

*Prices correct at time of printing 31/01/2022

*Please note that any bank charges for payments will be for your account.

**A 50% non-refundable deposit is payable to confirm your booking and full payment is due no later than 90 days prior to your arrival. You are welcome to make one full payment should you wish to do so.

***Any payments made via PayPal will incur an additional 1.5% Service fee.

PRICE INCLUDES

- Transport from George Airport to the Project (Return)
- All Accommodation whilst on the project (Shared)
- Wi-Fi
- Fully stocked Kitchen
- Laundry
- All Transport within the program.
- All Project activities as described.
- All project services as described.
- All equipment for activities described.

PRICE EXCLUDES

- All Flights and/or transfers other than those described above.
- All drinks such as Alcohol and soft drinks (Safe drinking water is provided)
- All personal snacks and any other luxury items you can't live without.
- Social events.

- Eating out (any meals at restaurants is at your own cost)
- Any Excursions offered by the project
- Extra activities on excursions
- Medical Expenses
- Travel & Medical Insurance
- Any visa related expenses
- Any vaccinations

For an additional fee of R700/night, Scales Volunteers can provide overnight accommodation in Johannesburg between flights on your arrival or return from your including a return airport shuttle to transport you between the airport and your accommodation.

To cover any additional expenses, such as personal/luxury items, cost of excursions or for meals when eating out, we would suggest that you consider having access to approximately R700-R1000 per week of your stay. ATMs are readily available and accept all major credit cards. Please consult your bank regarding charges and it is also advised that you notify them that you will be travelling abroad.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Marine guiding course

Project staff can happily assist you with your registration on the South African Boat-Based Whale-Watching Association (SABWWA) course, which will provide you with a local marine guide qualification.

SCUBA diving course

PADI accredited courses can be organised for volunteers at an additional fee through the local dive school.

Luxury Safari Break

If at the end of your Volunteer Program, you would like to treat yourself to a little bit of luxury at an affordable price contact us for more information about the Luxury Lodge options close to your project.



Weather & Climate

The project is based in an area with a subtropical climate and abundant sunshine. On average January is the warmest month with highs of 26c, whilst July is the coolest averaging temperatures between 8c-21c.

Between September and June you are most likely to experience good weather with pleasant average temperatures falling between 20c -25c. August is also the wettest month. This month should be avoided if you are not a big fan of rain.

If you would like to research more about the weather you can expect during the specific time of your trip, then we recommend that you check out wunderground.com as they give access to extensive historical weather data for almost all chosen locations.

As with any natural events, we are unable to guarantee that the weather you encounter will be as described, this is merely an indication to help advise you on what to expect and what weather to pack for.



Travel Information

HOW TO GET THERE

You will need to fly to George Airport, South Africa as this is the closest airport to the project. All domestic flights to George depart via OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. Therefore, it would be best for international travellers to fly directly to Johannesburg's OR Tambo Airport and take the connecting flight to George. There are regular international flights into Johannesburg's OR Tambo Airport and if you require assistance with selecting a flight, please do not hesitate to ask and we might be able to assist you, however Scales Volunteers do not offer flights as part of our packages.

Should you require over-night accommodation in Johannesburg whilst waiting for your connecting flight, this can also be arranged for you, however it is not included as part of our package.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

It is your responsibility to ensure that you meet the passport and visa requirements for entry into South Africa. Ensure that your Passport is Valid for your trip and for a minimum of 6 months after your return.

Please check with your nearest South African High Commission or the relevant South African Diplomatic website for the country in which you reside for more information regarding your specific visa requirements.

It is also your responsibility to ensure that you meet the COVID-19 requirements for entry into South Africa and any other country you might be passing through.

MEDICAL & PERSONAL SECURITY INFORMATION

Prior to travelling, you should visit your Doctor/Healthcare Professional to obtain advice on immunization and general health requirements. The Greater Kruger National Park is generally a low to medium risk malaria area, but you should consult your Doctor/Healthcare Professional about the appropriate prophylactics. Ensure that you declare any medical information we should be aware of on your booking form including any allergies and/or dietary requirements.

INSURANCE

It is very important that you take out adequate travel insurance for your trip to cover such events as cancellation due to illness, accident or injury, personal accident and personal liability, loss of or damage to baggage. Scales Volunteers or Scales Conservation Fund will not be responsible or liable if you fail to take adequate or no insurance cover at all. You will be required to submit a copy of your insurance policy / certificate with your travel information prior to departure.

CURRENCY

South African Rand. As the project is situated in the middle of the bush it is very hard to change currency, so we recommend that you exchange any cash prior to arrival. We also recommend the use of bank/travel cards over cash for security purposes. All shops accept Visa and Mastercard, as well as other well-known providers. However please ensure to contact your bank to notify them of your travel plans before you leave your country of origin to avoid your card being flagged as fraudulently used and subsequently blocked. We highly recommend travel cards as you can lock in your currency and do not charge withdrawals. Again, these should be arranged prior to departure.

SAFETY

The project is based in a safe community, and you won't have to worry whilst you are at your project, however we do want to give you some basic guidelines in order to ensure you have the best experience during your stay.

- Don't accept lifts from strangers
- Don't leave valuable things on display
- Don't "flash"/display any large sums of cash
- You will be in a wildlife area so beware of snakes, scorpions, and centipedes.
- Don't approach any animals that are in the wild as they are unpredictable.
- Follow project rules at all times. Always follow direction and requests from the Project Staff, they are looking out for your safety.
- Don't be shy to ask questions!



What to Pack

The suggested packing list below should help you with deciding what to pack. If you are unsure about any items or have any questions, then please ask. We are here to help!

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Original and certified copy of your passport
- All tickets and receipts for travel.
- Certified copy of any prescription medicines (Original only if necessary for re-fill)
- Original and certified copy of any Medical or Insurance Cards
- Original and certified copy of your Drivers Licence (If necessary)
- Copy of your Travel Insurance
- Copy of your Travel Itinerary

CLOTHING

- Hat / Cap
- Sunglasses
- Warm Jacket / Fleece
- Waterproof Jacket
- Durable and neutral-coloured shirts / t-shirts / Vests
- Durable and neutral coloured long sleeve shirts (seasonal, but also useful for covering yourself from the sun)
- Durable and neutral-coloured shorts
- Durable and neutral-coloured trousers
- Socks & Underwear
- Comfortable Walking Boots
- Sandals / flip flips

- Trainers
- Gloves & Beanie (Seasonal)
- Swimwear
- Appropriate Sleeping Clothes (Accommodation is shared)
- A couple of smart outfits for town trips or trips out to the local restaurants.

TOILETRIES

- Shampoo / Conditioner
- Soap
- Toothbrush & Toothpaste
- Hairbrush / comb
- Bath Towel
- Personal Toiletries – Razor, deodorant, sanitary products etc

GENERAL

- Water Bottle (Minimum 2 litre)
- Torch / Head Torch
- Day Pack
- Camera (Including batteries/charger and spare memory cards)
- Personal First aid kit (Plasters, Antiseptic, Prescription Medicine etc)
- Sunscreen (Factor 50)
- Laptop or iPad
- Insect repellent
- Travel adaptor Plug

RECOMMENDED

- Binoculars
- Reading material
- Power bank
- Positive attitude
- Mosquito Net

We recommend acquiring a local mobile SIM Card from one of SA's "pre-paid" options (Vodacom, MTN, Cell C, Telkom and Virgin), which are inexpensive and can be used to keep in contact with project staff, our office, friends and family or anyone else you might need to contact during your stay.

If you still have space left in your bag, please contact us to find out if there is anything that you can bring out for your project, such as supplies or donations that are waiting for transport.

WE ARE LOOKING
FORWARD TO HELPING
YOU PLAN YOUR NEW
ADVENTURE!



SCALES
VOLUNTEERS