

MAURITIAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

Volunteering on the Rare Plants Programme: Forest Conservation

Introduction

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation runs a Volunteering Programme designed to offer a range of training opportunities and work experience in Plant Conservation programmes. The volunteer will be given responsibilities and exposed to a wide variety of experiences which will enable the volunteer to acquire attractive skills for the employment market.

The volunteer position is for one year. During this time the volunteer will spend six months at Ile aux Aigrettes and six months at Pigeon Wood (Black River Gorges National Park). Opportunities to participate in other flora and fauna projects of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation will also be given to the volunteer. There are two placements available.

The Organisation

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF) is a dynamic and highly successful Mauritian Non-Governmental Organisation involved in the conservation of some of the world's most endangered wildlife. This very important work has advanced substantially by international co-operation including the input of volunteer research assistants.

MWF, which was formed in 1984, plays a pivotal role in the conservation of the fauna and flora of Mauritius and Rodrigues. MWF works in partnership the Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Production and Security, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, the North of England Zoological Society with support from organisations such as the World Parrot Trust, the Peregrine Fund, the British Museum of Natural History, the Philadelphia Zoo, Loro Parque, the New Zealand Department of Conservation, the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, and the International Zoo Veterinary Group.

The main objectives of the Foundation are:

- To conserve and manage the indigenous flora and fauna of Mauritius and its territories.
- To raise and supply funds necessary for the conservation projects undertaken by the MWF and its associate organizations.
- To inform, educate and involve the Mauritian people in this vital work.

More than 300 people from 35 countries have volunteered on MWF projects. We are proud of the career achievements of those that have worked with us. MWF now numbers some 80 Mauritian and 10 expatriate staff, with around 30 volunteers per year who are divided into teams each working on a particular project. Each project has an overall manager and a field coordinator to whom the field staff report.

The Rare Plant Team

The Plant Team currently consists of five scientific staff members:

Asha Poonyth, Flora Manager, manages the projects of the Plant Team

Jean Claude Sevathian: Plant Conservation Officer, is responsible for the rare plant surveys, propagation of rare plants, nursery operations and Field Gene Bank maintenance in Pigeon Wood and consultancies in six private forests. You'll directly report to Jean Claude while you're based at Pigeon Wood.

Ashok Khadun: Islet Plant Restoration Manager, manages the Plant work on Round Island & is a consultant on projects.

Poonam Gangaram: Flora Support Officer, who is responsible for the coordination of phenology project

Marine Goder: Horticulturist Coordinator, is in charge of Ile aux Aigrettes nursery, propagation of plants for the different project, planting on IAA, training of new staff in horticulture. You'll report to Martine while you are based on Ile aux Aigrettes.

Volunteering Experiences

You will play a part in the vital work to protect native and endemic plants. You can contribute to our work by bringing in a range of skills, interests, time, and enthusiasm. You could find yourself, propagating endemic species, and monitoring the plants, collecting seeds throughout the island, and working in the nurseries and field gene banks, and removing invasive plants. Living in a field station will give you the experience interacting with other persons from several countries who share your passion for conservation. Volunteering for MWF not only helps you enhance your professional skills but also contributes to your personal development through living in close quarters with others, and exposure to different cultures.

Our field stations where you'll work

We manage eight field stations at which staff members are based. You will be living at two field stations, that is Pigeon Wood and Ile aux Aigrettes, for the duration of your stay. The field stations are used by MWF staff as well as University students and NPCCS staff. Visiting scientists and conservationists and sponsors may stay at the field stations from time to time.

Pigeon Wood

This field station was completed in September 1996 by the NPCCS and is located at the top of the Pigeon Wood on the south-facing slope within the National Park. A rare plant nursery has been built, and a field gene bank for rare plant species has been set up. It receives the greatest amount of rainfall of all the field stations, making it a camp in the mist.

Ile aux Aigrettes

In 1984 the MWF initiated a habitat restoration project on the island with the aim of conserving native plant and animal species. In 1986 the MWF obtained the lease for the management of the

island and a programme to remove exotic weed species and eradicate introduced animals began soon afterwards. In 1997 a nursery was built for the production of endangered native plants for the plant restoration programme on the island. To date some 30 endangered endemic/native plant species have been reintroduced. The nursery also produces plants for the restoration project on Round Island.

Ile aux Aigrettes also harbours a field gene bank for critically endangered lowland plant species. The aim of a field gene bank is to safeguard the remaining genetic diversity of chosen critically endangered species by generating one or more safe replicates through various propagation techniques. These replicates are planted on IAA as a reserve.

Round Island

Round Island holds a very rich array of unique reptiles and plants and healthy populations of seabirds. However, the island has suffered heavy degradation and soil erosion due to introduced herbivores. Conservation work is aimed at controlling weed species, restoring the habitat, using the island as a sanctuary for rare plants and monitoring reptile and seabird populations. It is MWF's policy to give each of our overseas field staff the opportunity to volunteer on Round Island for two weeks during their stay with us.

What will you do?

The main areas in which you will acquire skills are Islet Restoration on Ile aux Aigrettes and Endangered Plant Management in Pigeon Wood Nursery management.

At both Ile aux Aigrettes and Pigeon Wood your main duties will involve:

- Participating in daily nursery activities such as watering, weeding, pest control and cleaning
- Collecting and bagging seeds
- Cleaning, counting and storing seeds
- Participating in propagation activities such as sowing and cuttings
- Potting
- Participating in planting and subsequent monitoring
- Helping with making tags and tagging of rare plants planted
- Weeding around rare plants planted in field gene bank, and their mother plants in the field.
- Day to day maintenance of nurseries
- Helping with monitoring of rare plants planted as well as the phenology of the mother plants of rare plants species
- Assisting in data entry and analysis
- Assist in writing reports
- Performing of other cognate duties as may be assigned.

On Ile aux Aigrettes you'll also help with quarantine of plants for Round Island.

Opportunities to learn about and even participate in other MWF project may also be given especially as you will be sharing a field station with conservation biologists on a variety of fauna projects.

Employment conditions

Staff members are normally required to work 07 00 – 18 00 hrs Monday to Friday and on Saturday 0700 to 12 00 hrs, but may be required to help out during the weekend with watering the nursery, fundraising or education and awareness activities. Time off in lieu can be organized.

Staff members are expected to stay for the mutually agreed duration or extension of their contracts. Exceptional circumstances are recognised.

Staff members are required to sign an employment contract with MWF and abide by its conditions. A copy of this contract “MWF’s Information, Requirements and Recommendations” will be sent to you if a post is offered.

You will be allocated a two-week break at the end six months, and a further one-week break after nine months.

Accommodation

Ile aux Aigrettes

The house on Ile aux Aigrettes has two bedrooms, a work room cum office, a well fitted kitchen, bathroom with shower and a verandah along the front of the house. Additional space is available in the bunk house. The house is solar-powered, but supplied with water. There can be up to 10 staff based at this field station with projects covering Flora, Passerines, Pink Pigeons and Reptiles.

Pigeon Wood

The house in Pigeon Wood can comfortably sleep four people, but two to three staff usually live here working on the Pink Pigeons, Passerines and Flora projects. It is supplied with electricity and mains water.

MWF House

The MWF house is situated in Black River, on the coast and is home to MWF staff that work at the aviaries and in the lowland gorges. It is available for expatriate field staff to stay at during their time off and at weekends. The house has a limited carrying capacity and in the busy season (September to February) there is a roster system for weekend use.

Cost

One return air fare to Mauritius, health insurance premium covering repatriation in case of severe accident, £200 per month for food, entertainment and others, £400 for reserve and medical expenses on arrival.

Volunteer’s profile

Volunteers should hold a degree or diploma in Horticulture or related field. Knowledge of Geographical Information System (GIS) applications will be an advantage. The minimum age to be eligible for MWF field work is 21 years. Given the highly demanding nature of MWF field work, only the most mature candidates will be considered.

Holding of a valid driving license for private car or motorcycle will be an advantage

Start date: negotiable

To know more about the organization please visit our site at <http://www.mauritian-wildlife.org>

For any queries about the position you may email to apoonyth@mauritian-wildlife.org