**INFORMATION FOR ARIDE VOLUNTEERS**

**WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ARIDE VOLUNTEERS?**

It is no exaggeration to say that Aride is one of the finest tropical island nature reserves in the world. For the right volunteer candidate this is an exceptional opportunity, possibly the experience of a lifetime and tremendously rewarding. However, please be aware it is no picnic. Living conditions are basic, the work can be demanding and the climate can be a drain on those unaccustomed to the tropics. It is not for the faint hearted. However, for those with the right aptitude and interests working as an Aride volunteer is an exceptional opportunity. We welcome young graduates who wish to pursue a career in conservation, individuals with a conservation interest who are able to bring skills such as IT or practical work and also more experienced individuals seeking something different.

Volunteers assist with all aspects of the island’s work including scientific monitoring and research, maintenance of the paths, buildings and other infrastructure, launching and landing boats, patrolling the island and leading tours for visiting tourists. Further details are given below in the section ISLAND LIFE. Time will be made available for a personal research project and a report will be expected by the end of the stay.

Volunteers are required to produce:

1. A completed questionnaire form, to be emailed to the ICS CEO not less than 2 weeks prior to departure (available for download on the Aride website). Volunteers are encouraged to give as much feedback as possible about their experience.

2. A report recording any research work undertaken while on the island, using the island computer. This must be completed on the island before departure and sent to the ICS CEO.

ICS also encourages all volunteers who go on to pursue a career in conservation to remain in contact with ICS. Aride monthly reports are now available on the Aride website and you can also opt to receive these monthly by email.

If there are any errors in this document or any additional information you think it would be useful to include for the benefit of future volunteers, please email the ICS CEO: icsceo@seychelles.sc

**ABOUT ARIDE ISLAND**

Aride is the northernmost island of the granitic Seychelles, 72 hectares in area, roughly 1 mile long and 0.25 mile wide. It is leased and managed as a nature reserve by Island Conservation Society of Seychelles and owned by Royal Society for Nature Conservation (RSNC), a UK based charity. The only resident inhabitants are the reserve's staff, currently 4 Seychellois Rangers, Island Manager, Conservation Officer and 2 volunteers visiting for 3 months at a time. They live in a small group of houses close to the beautiful coral sand beach overhung by palms on the south side of the island. The bulk of the island is granitic, forming steep cliffs on the north side and rising to 140m at the highest point. To the south there is a small garden where a variety of fruits and vegetable are grown for the island's inhabitants.

Alongside Aldabra, Aride has one of the most important seabird populations in the Indian Ocean. About one million seabirds breed on the island, including what may be the world's largest colonies of Lesser Noddy and Tropical Shearwaters and an important regional colony of Sooty Tern. The island has up to 1,200 pairs of Roseate Terns, one of the last significant colonies in the region. There are also large numbers of breeding Brown Noddies, Fairy Terns and White-tailed Tropicbirds and a few pairs of Red-tailed Tropicbirds. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters are abundant and up to 5,000 Frigatebirds roost on Aride. Translocations of endangered or restricted-range endemic bird species have been made: the Seychelles Warbler was introduced from Cousin Island (until recently the world's only known location for this species) to Aride in 1988; a large breeding population is now well established; Seychelles Fodies were introduced from Cousin in 2002, and Seychelles Magpie-Robins on several occasions from Frégate Island, most recently in 2002; Seychelles Blue-Pigeons and Seychelles Sunbirds have re-colonised naturally.

The island is largely covered in native woodland, including one endemic species. Wright's Gardenia *Rothmannia annae* is a shrub with beautifully scented flowers that is found naturally nowhere else in the world. Also found on the island is a Peponium (cucumber family) which may be another Aride endemic. Coastal woodland, devastated on most other islands, is being encouraged on Aride. Mapou *Pisonia grandis* woodland is the best example of such habitat in Seychelles.

There is a particularly rich reptilian fauna that includes three species of skink (lizard), three species of gecko, three species of harmless snake and two species of marine turtle. The island is an increasingly important breeding site for the Hawksbill Turtle. The reserve boundary includes 200m of surrounding seas, thus protecting a beautiful coral reef and its associated marine life (slowly recovering from bleaching caused by the 1997/8 sea-warming event).

The temperature is generally between 25 and 34oC, and humidity can be high during the rains. From October to April, north-west winds bring most of the rain. This is the hottest season with the calmest seas, and the time when most tourists visit Aride. From May to September, the south-east monsoon blows. Rough seas can make landings difficult at this time and this is the main breeding season for most of the seabirds.

Aride has several boats powered by outboard engines. There are regular trips to Praslin for shopping and post and removal of rubbish. There is a clinic and bank in Grand Anse and also in Baie Ste. Anne. The crossing takes about 45 minutes. There are numerous flights and ferries daily between Mahe and Praslin, and also regular international flights to/from Mahe.

**ISLAND LIFE**

Aride Island is a beautiful place to live, surrounded by birds, trees, and the Indian Ocean. But it’s also very isolated, especially during the southeast monsoon season, and there are luxuries we go without. The purpose of this section is to give potential volunteers and researchers an idea of the realities of life on Aride. It’s very important to come to Aride with a lot of enthusiasm, a willingness to learn, an appreciation for nature, and an ability to swim.

**Travel**

Air Seychelles, Kenya Airways (via Nairobi), Qatar (via Doha), Emirates (via Dubai) and Condor (via Frankfurt) fly to Mahe. Cost varies and is more expensive during European holiday periods. You should book at least 6-8 weeks beforehand. Please pay your own fare then send a receipt to the Chairman of ICS at pangaea@sky.comin order to receive the ICS contribution of £375. If you have a UK bank account please provide just sort code, account name and account number for an internet transfer to be arranged. If your account is in another country please also provide bank name, address, IBAN and SWIFTBIC.

Please notify the ICS Operations Manager on icsops@seychelles.sc as soon as you know your flight dates/times of arrival etc., so he can book internal flights, which ICS will pay.

On the flight you will be given a Disembarkation Card to complete. Under reason for your visit enter 'Volunteer work on Aride'. Please ensure you have with you a copy of the ICS letter to immigration informing them of your arrival. You should receive this letter before your departure for Seychelles. Please bear in mind that you will only be given a standard Visitor's Permit for 30 days- extensions will be obtained later via the island.

**Health:**

No inoculations are essential, although tetanus is advisable. There is no malaria in Seychelles. 'Swimmer's ear/Coral ear' an infection caused by salt water and high humidity can be a problem so it is advised that the necessary medication be sought from your doctor for general ear infections prior to leaving, plus any other relevant medication. Other essential health items include a dry antiseptic, as wounds may not heal easily. In addition, it is advisable to bring talcum powder to prevent fungal infection and sores and bring a supply of painkillers. It may be useful to bring antihistamine tablets and cortisone cream (in addition to paracetamol or equivalent) for use in the event of a centipede bite, though these are also available on the island.

**Insurance:**

Travel insurance for personal effects is the responsibility of the individual. Volunteers are advised not to bring anything of great value without insurance cover. Conditions are unkind to equipment, clothes, books etc and there has been some petty theft in past years.

**Weather**

There are two seasons on Aride: the NW monsoon (the rainy season) lasts from October to May and is wet and hot (temperatures range between 27-31°C). The SE monsoon (the dry season) lasts from May to September and is much drier, slightly cooler (temperatures range from 25-28°C), and much windier. The seas are usually calmer during the NW monsoon and this is when most tourists visit Aride.

**Accommodation**

The houses on Aride are currently under renovation until the end of 2012: the houses for the staff have been finished (June 2011), and next up the are the volunteers’ block and the wardens’ house. Staff accommodation consist of a small house with bed (usually single), bathroom including sink, shower, and flush toilet, as well as an attached kitchen with sink, gas stove, fridge, food storage containers and basic cooking utensils (pots, pans, knives, cutlery, plates, glasses, cups, etc.). The volunteers’ block will contain four single rooms, a shared kitchen, and a shared bathroom with sink, shower, and toilet.

**Water and electrical power**

Fresh water is a precious resource on Aride and should NEVER EVER be wasted. There are two kinds of fresh water: drinking water is collected rainwater and is found in the large blue bins. It should be filtered and boiled before drinking. Meanwhile, running water comes from the well and is used for everything else (washing dishes and clothes, showers, toilets, etc.). Both types of water are scarce, especially in the dry season (the SE monsoon, from May-September), and excessive use of water (long showers, letting the tap run, etc.) should be avoided at all times. Also note that there is no water heater on the island, although the water can get quite hot in the afternoon on sunny days.

Electricity is currently provided by a generator, which usually runs from 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm daily. There is a long-term plan to connect solar panels onto the electrical grid, but this is not yet the case. There is also a small portable generator available for small jobs that need to be done during the day. Electrical plugs on the island (and in most places in Seychelles) are of the UK variety (220V with square pins).

**Internet/Phones**

The current internet connection is dial-up, and quite slow compared to European standards. Generally, checking emails a few times a week is not a problem, but uploading/downloading large files, photos, and videos is impossible from the island. Since the phone connection runs on solar power so both internet and the landline are only available during the day and early evening. On cloudy days, the connection sometimes doesn’t work at all. However, there is a wireless phone available, and there are also plans to upgrade to a broadband connection very soon. Mobile phones do work quite well on Aride. Local SIM cards and long distance card are available at good prices from shops on Praslin. There are also several internet cafés in Grande-Anse which have good prices.

**Money**

The currency in Seychelles is the Seychelles Rupee (Sr). In mid-2011 rates were: 12Sr = US$1, 17Sr =€1, 20Sr = £1. Money can be exchanged at currency exchanges (Bureau de change) or at some banks. The former usually offer a better rate of exchange. There are several places to change money in Grande-Anse, and currency in SR should always be carried since most shops there do not accept credit or debit cards. There are also a few ATMs available in Grande-Anse.

**Food/Shopping**

There are usually one or two shopping trips organised each week to Grande-Anse on Praslin (weather permitting of course!). In addition to food shopping, these trips are also the occasion to send and receive mail at the post office, buy souvenirs, exchange money, etc. It’s important to ensure that you have enough food to last for up to two weeks if the weather is very bad or there are mechanical problems with the boat, especially during the SE monsoon period. Food prices in Seychelles are comparable to those in Europe, although local products like fruits, vegetables, and fish are usually less expensive, while prepared and imported foods (like meat) tend to be more expensive. Some sample food and drink prices (in Seychelles rupees) from 2011:

 1 kg flour: 10 Sr

 1 kg sugar: 13 Sr

 1 kg white rice: 10 Sr

 500g bag of pasta: 8-12 Sr

 Loaf of sliced bread: 20-25 Sr

 Can of beans: 20 Sr

 Can of tuna: 16-18 Sr

 Packet of fresh fish (3-5 whole fish): 70 Sr

 1 kg onions: 13 Sr

 1 kg tomatoes: 15-20 Sr

 1 L fruit juice: 30 Sr

 1 L coca-cola: 25 Sr

 100 g Instant coffee: 50 Sr

 Bottle of local beer: 20-25 Sr

 Bottle of imported beer: 35-40 Sr

 Botte of local Takamaka rum: 220 Sr

 Takeaway meal (generous portion of rice, main dish, and salad): 35-45 Sr

 There is a limited amount of fruits and vegetables in the garden on Aride. The exact selection depends on the season and the year, but generally, the following crops are grown: aubergines, chilli peppers, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, lemongrass, oranges, limes, tomatoes, bananas, cocoyams, turmeric and bred lamar (a kind of spinach which has become a staple on Aride, as it is good in everything from pastas to soups to quiches), Around the island, wild pineapples can be found on the hill, coconuts near the beach, and arrowroot on the plateau. Fishing trips, followed by barbecues, are also occasionally arranged, especially in calm weather.

 It’s very important to put all food in airtight containers and cover all plates. Anything left uncovered or out will quickly be devoured by skinks, mice or fodies (and they’ll come back for more after!).

**Boat launching**

The main boat used on Aride is a 5-m long inflatable rib which is used for trips to Praslin (shopping trips, supply trips, transporting tourists, etc.). A trip to Praslin generally takes about 30 minutes, and can be quite rough, so this is not the place for those who suffer from seasickness or a fear of water! A small fibreglass boat is also occasionally launched for fishing trips in calm weather.

Since the island has no dock, the boat lands and launches from the beach. Everyone in the island needs to participate in launching and landing the boat, especially during rough seas, as this can quite a difficult and physical (and wet!) task. An ability to swim well is very important for launching the boat, and those who cannot swim should reconsider coming to Aride. In very rough weather, launching may be impossible and trips might have to be cancelled.

**Workdays**

The working day usually starts with a meeting at 7:00 am, during which the tasks and schedule for the day are discussed. A typical day might include monitoring activities, launching the boat, raking, removing invasive plants, data entry, tourists (especially in the NW monsoon), or maintenance activities. The working day ends at 5:00 pm, and includes a two hour lunch break from 12:00 to 2:00 pm. Usually there are snack/tea breaks in the morning and afternoon as well, but the exact schedule depends on tasks that need to be done.

**Weekends**

Usually, half the staff stays on the weekend, while the other half go off the other. Some monitoring activities need to be carried out on weekends by those staying on the island, such as weather, beach patrol (during turtle season), and feeding the magpie robins. These are done in the mornings, after which the day is free. Trips to Praslin (or Mahé) for the weekend can also be arranged for volunteers or visiting researchers.

**Tourists**

During the NW monsoon (October-May), the island is open to tourists up to five days a week. Tourists generally arrive in the morning and are taken on a tour including the conservation center, the plateau, and up to the western viewpoint. Sometimes groups have an organised barbecue (which is provided by their hotel or tour) and leave in the afternoon. In the SE monsoon season, tourists are rare, due to the rough seas, although groups sometimes arrive by helicopter.

**Monitoring activities**

Monitoring makes up the core of the work on Aride. New monitoring activities can be added, but these are the current monitoring project taking place on the island:

Weather (daily), beach patrol (5x daily during turtle season), magpie-robin feeding and sightings (daily), beach access (weekly), fairy tern breeding success (weekly), white-tailed tropicbird breeding success (weekly), mortality due to Pisonia (weekly), bridled tern count (weekly), frigatebird count (monthly), beach profiling (every three months). There is also a yearly seabird census taking place over 4-5 days during the breeding season (usually in June or early July). In addition, volunteers and researchers work on their own projects.

**Invasive species**

Like many islands, Aride has suffered from the importation of invasive plants and animals. Most invasive species on the island are plants, which are removed regularly. Mice are found around most of the old houses. Traps are available, but luckily these mice seem to be more interested in eating human crumbs than birds. There are several barn owls around the island which kill and eat seabirds, but their numbers are controlled. Indian mynas have been sighted a few times around the island, but have never managed to become established, probably due to a lack of food.

Luckily, Aride has never been invaded by rats, which has enabled it to remain the bird sanctuary that it is. There is a strict rat protocol in place, which prohibits any boats other than the island’s to land on Aride. As well, any supplies and boxes arriving on Aride are checked. If rat activity is suspected, it is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT to notify the Island Manager or Conservation Officer as soon as possible.

**Snorkelling and swimming**

Aride is surrounded by a coral reef, around 3-6 meters deep, which means it can be enjoyed with just a mask and snorkel, without the need for scuba diving equipment. There is only one safe place to enter and exit the water, which is directly in front of the boat shed, and currents can be quite strong, so caution is advised. Snorkelling and swimming is safer in pairs or groups, and someone on the island should always be advised. There is a very limited supply of snorkelling gear available on the island.

Although a lot of the coral is dead from a past bleaching event, the reef is slowly regenerating and the biodiversity is quite high. There are many species of fish, including parrotfish, triggerfish, angelfish, needlefish, and many others. Barracuda, eagle rays, and reef sharks can also be spotted (there are no dangerous sharks near the island). Hawksbill turtles are also often seen quite close to shore and they are very good at posing for the camera! On the bottom, urchins, cone shells, corals, nudibranchs, and sea cucumbers can be seen amongst the coral. For those who prefer the beach, Aride has a very nice sandy beach, although at high tide, there might not be any beach to lie down on.

**Recreation/Free time**

Without internet or television, free time on Aride can include nature walks, photography, snorkelling and swimming. Rainy days can sometimes be quite tedious, so books or playing cards can help pass the time. There is a selection of books (mostly left by previous staff and volunteers, and mostly in English) in the warden’s office, but new additions are always welcome!

**Electronics**

Even in the dry season, Aride can be quite humid and the salt spray is always present. This kind of environment can be quite hard on electronic equipment so any computers, cameras, music players, etc. so be stored unless being used in a good bag or container, preferably with a few packets of silica gel to prevent damage. It’s a good idea to avoid using any computers outside.

**What to bring to Aride:**

Bed sheets and pillowcase (pillows are provided)

Mosquito net

Clothes for fieldwork (expect these to become very dirty, very quickly!)

Light raincoat

Hat for protection against the sun (and also against bird droppings!)

Sunglasses with cord

Lots of swimwear!

Good walking shoes

Sandals

Beach shoes (useful for launching the boat when there are rocks)

Mosquito repellant

Sunscreen

Antibiotic/Antiseptic cream or spray

Bandages and plasters

Any other medications (a broad-spectrum antibiotic, eye/ear drops, allergy medication, anti-itch cream, etc.)

Any other personal items

Any food items that might be hard to find (good coffee, chocolate, etc.)

Water bottle

Binoculars (indispensable since there are hundreds of thousands of birds!)

Camera

Rechargeable batteries and charger (good batteries are hard to find)

Headlamp or torch

Silica gel

Electrical adaptor if necessary

Small day backpack

Waterproof watch

Snorkelling gear

A dry bag for carrying items to and from Praslin

Notepad and pens/pencils

Books

Any other equipment needed for your specific project

Dry bag(s) For a selection visit this site:

<http://www.over-board.co.uk/?gclid=CJb3hvTzl60CFcMMtAodp3YHmA>

**Recommended reading:**

Berlitz Seychelles pocket Guide. Berlitz

Insight Guide to Mauritius, Reunion and Seychelles. APA Publications

Mauritius, Reunion & Seychelles, Lonely Planet Publications,

Birds of Seychelles, A. Skerrett, I. Bullock & T. Disley, Helm Field Guides (2011). Helm.

The Beautiful Plants of the Seychelles, J. & A. Skerrett, Camerapix (2007). ISBN 1-874041-05-9

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

**Useful websites**

Please refer to the Links pages of the Aride website & ICS website: www.islandconservationseychelles.com