



Organization: University of Cape Town

Location: Kalahari Desert, South Africa

Duration: 3 months **or** 6 months

Seeking: Two volunteers for 3 months each **or** one for 6 months as a Research Assistant

Dates:

1st of October 2020 to the 27th of December 2020.

27th of December 2020 to the 30th March 2021.

(Three months each)

OR

1st of October 2020 to the 30th of March 2021.

(Full six-month field season)

Description:

I am a Ph. D. zoology student at the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, and I am looking for one field volunteer to come assist me with data collection for my research on the southern yellow-billed hornbill (*Tockus leucomelas*) in the Kalahari Desert, South Africa. Either for one of two three month stints (1 Oct 2020 – 27 Dec 2020; 27 Dec 2020 – 30 Mar 2021) **or** for the full six-month period (1 Oct 2020 – 30 Mar 2021).

The volunteer will need to get to Cape Town / Johannesburg by the start date, after which transport to and from the field site, as well as room and board, will be paid for.

A stipend of R3000 per month will be offered to South African volunteers. For international volunteers, return flights to and from Cape Town will be paid for or subsidised (within reason, subject to the availability of project funds).

We will be staying at a well-equipped research station at the field site. The volunteer will get their own room, alongside 5-10 other researchers. There are approximately 35 research personnel at the field site, including volunteers and researchers from all over the world working primarily on suricates (*Suricata suricatta*), Cape ground squirrels (*Xerus inauris*), and mole rats (*Heterocephalus glaber* and *Fukomys damarensis*). This is

the site of the long running, internationally acclaimed Kalahari Meerkat Project (<http://kalahari-meerkats.com/kmp/>).

Once at the field site we will not leave until the volunteer's time is complete. This means that the volunteer will have to survive approximately 3 months with limited cell phone reception and a relatively slow, expensive internet connection. The field site does have a small swimming pool for respite from the heat during time off, and given that there are usually 25 or so young volunteers present, there is opportunity for social interaction despite the remoteness of the field site.

The field site is called the Kuruman River Reserve, closest to the village of Van Zylsrus, in the Northern Cape of South Africa. The reserve has a diverse and abundant animal and bird life. I have recorded approximately 120 bird species, including many endemics. The mammals include the large study populations of suricates and ground squirrels, as well as aardvark, aardwolf, Cape fox, eland, blue wildebeest, steenbok, duiker, gemsbok (oryx), and springbok. For those interested in smaller creatures, there is an abundance of insects and arthropods, including several scorpion and solifuge species. The reserve is characterised by dunes interspersed with large camelthorn (*Vachellia erialoba*), and is truly a beautiful place. The mean daily maximum temperature is approximately 36 °C (97 Farenheit), but regularly exceeds 40 °C (104 Farenheit).

Volunteer duties:

My Ph. D. is looking into the reproductive ecology of the yellow-billed hornbill. These birds breed in nest boxes, and the females actually seal themselves inside, incapable of leaving for several weeks.

The volunteer will therefore need to perform nest checks with me starting at 04h30 in the morning. This will comprise assisting me at each nest with monitoring the status of breeding pairs, and taking feathers and morphometric measurements of the female and chicks (mass, tarsus length, wing and tail measurements etc.). I will also need assistance with capturing and handling the hornbills to implant body temperature loggers.

Other than the nest checks, the volunteer will help run a supplementary feeding regime, which will require travelling (driving or cycling) around the field site to feed selected pairs. Other research duties for the volunteer will include downloading data from a weather station, iButtons within the nests, PIT tag readers, and perch scales, as well as assisting catching and ringing (colour banding). The volunteer will also need to assist with behavioural observations (either 7 hours straight following a habituated hornbill every second day, or 1-hour observations 3 times a day depending on how the breeding season goes).

The volunteer will have afternoons and evenings off for 3 days a week. Besides the research duties, we will share cooking and cleaning duties as much as possible. Typically, we also share a drink with the other 5-10 people staying with us each evening as well.

Volunteer qualifications:

Having at least an undergraduate in zoology or related field is welcome. Experience handling or dealing with birds is highly preferable. Considering we will not leave the field site once there, the volunteer must be someone who will enjoy time away from civilization in a hot, quiet, beautiful semi-desert.

Given the long days and physical demand of what we will be doing, it would be best if applicants were in good shape mentally and physically.

Covid 19:

Because of the current uncertainty regarding international travel, this application is currently only open to **South African Citizens or people already living and working in South Africa.**

Application Instructions:

Please send your CV, short (250 word) letter of motivation, as well as anything else you consider relevant to nickpaddie@gmail.com, with the subject "yourlastname_hornbill project assistance".

Deadline: 15 August 2020

Sincerely,
Nicholas B. Pattinson

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nicholas_Pattinson

<https://hbresearchproject.wixsite.com/hbresearchproject/ph-d-students>

<http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/fitz/students/doctoral/pattinson>

