

VSA Assignment Description

Assignment Title	Conservation Breeding Adviser
Country	Solomon Islands
Location	Honiara
Partner Organisation	Tetere Species Recovery Centre / Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECDM)
Duration	12-24 months
Sustainable Development Goals	



41453

1. Partner organisation overview

The Tetere Species Recovery Centre was established as a multi-stakeholder effort aimed at averting the extinction of the Santa Cruz Ground Dove (*Alopecoenas sanctaecrucis*). This species once had a near-continuous distribution throughout the Eastern Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, but was heavily impacted by the arrival of invasive species such as black rats. The last confirmed wild birds are confined to Tinakula, an active volcano which lies offshore of the larger island of Nendö in Temotu Province, Solomon Islands. Tinakula erupted in November 2017, an event which resulted in the death of a significant percentage of the remaining bird population and led to fears that the species would be lost. News that a large number of birds had in fact been removed from the island in the weeks prior to the eruption, and were being held by commercial wildlife exporters in Honiara, prompted Birdlife International to initiate an emergency response. A Conservation Biologist of Toledo Zoo was dispatched to the Solomon Islands where he assisted MECDM in obtaining custody of 110 SCGD (76 males and 34 females) and established a temporary rehabilitation facility.

Since then, the scale of environmental threat to terrestrial ecosystems in the Solomon Islands has become apparent and there is dire need for a dedicated Species Recovery Centre with the capacity to respond to the imminent extinction of critically endangered species by establishing reserve populations in captivity.

To this end, an agreement has been reached with the Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Company (GPPOL) who have provided a compound adjacent to their head office in Tetere as a site for the Recovery Centre. GPPOL have also agreed to provide basic amenities free of charge, to include the facility in security patrols, and to add local staff to the company payroll. A block of aviaries to house a breeding population of SCGD has already been constructed (entirely funded by Toledo Zoo). The ultimate goal is to reintroduce the species into suitable habitat in the wild; discussions with local and international partners on how best to achieve this are ongoing.

There are plans to expand the remit of the Recovery Centre by working with other highly threatened endemic species in the future. Likely candidates include the Guadalcanal Monkey-faced Bat (*Pteralopex atrata*) and the various species of Solomon Islands giant rat (*Uromys and Solomys spp.*).

2. Assignment overview

Local Animal Keeping staff, whilst dedicated and enthusiastic, currently lack the skills relevant to the proper management of conservation breeding programmes – specifically



detailed record keeping, behavioural observation, restraint and handling of animals and administering medication.

The VSA volunteer's goal will be to address this by providing day to day mentoring and ongoing training and upskilling to the Animal Keepers.

It would also be desirable for the volunteer to collect data relating to the behaviour and of target species and other aspects of their biology. This will enable us to better understand their needs in captivity and collate information relevant to the management of wild populations, particularly with anticipated plans to upscale the breeding programme.

The Recovery Centre is located approximately 30km from Honiara. The workplace is largely open-air, consisting of animal enclosures and a food-preparation area with running water and electricity installed on site. Additional structures are planned and likely to be completed within the duration of the volunteer assignment. The volunteer will be required to work from both the centre site as well as from home.

3. Goal/outcomes/outputs

Goal

Tetere Species Recovery Centre animal keeping staff are competent in all aspects of animal husbandry, species care, and collect and compile behaviour information, enabling the centre to achieve management plan recommendations.

Outcome 1

Animal Keepers are able to adequately keep and care for animals held at the Species Recovery Centre.

Work with partner institutions, the Project Officer and Animal Keepers to:

- Prepare captive diets which meet the nutritional needs of target species. This will include devising captive diets for target species which are nutritionally complete, not prohibitively expensive and utilising locally available ingredients. Instruct Animal Keepers in the correct preparation and presentation of these diets, paying particular attention to good hygiene practices.
- Keep animal enclosures clean and well maintained. This will include formulating a cleaning schedule and maintenance check for animal enclosures and instruct Animal Keepers on its implementation.
- Catch, restrain and handle animals as required. This includes instructing Animal Keepers in the correct techniques for catching and handling target species, demonstrating this when animals have to be moved for management purposes or caught for medical treatment.
- Administer medication and basic veterinary treatment and fit specimen identification markers as required. This includes using incidents of animals receiving medication or veterinary treatment or being fitted with identification markers as an opportunity to instruct Animal Keepers regarding correct procedure.

Outcome 2

Animal Keepers are able to keep detailed and structured records relating to the animals in their care and collate data on species behaviour, biology and management in captivity.

Work with partner institutions, the Project Officer, species experts and animal keeper staff to:

- Design a system for recording target species behaviour, breeding activity, births, deaths, veterinary treatment and all other relevant information.



- Instruct Animal Keepers on the use of this system and provide supervision to ensure that data collection is consistent.
- Produce husbandry protocols for target species which include information also relevant to the management of wild populations.

Outcome 3

Target species are breeding well and in line with management plan recommendations.

- Ensure that animal keeper staff maintain animals in accordance with species management plans, so as to ensure maximum genetic diversity in captive populations.

4. Reporting and working relationships and capacity building

The volunteer will mentor and work closely with Animal Keeper staff and provide support to the Project Officer and partner institutions. The volunteer will report and be accountable to the Project Officer.

The volunteers and Tetere Species Recover Centre/MECDM will have an ongoing relationship with the VSA programme manager in terms of assignment monitoring, reporting, professional advice and personal support.

As needs on the ground may change over time, the volunteer is encouraged to review and update the Assignment Description on arrival in consultation with the partner organisation and VSA Programme Manager. By their very nature, development situations can involve significant change, so it is advisable that the volunteer periodically review and reflect on the Assignment Description throughout the Assignment to ensure the best development outcomes are being achieved.

5. Selection criteria/position requirements

Education and Experience

- Significant experience of the captive husbandry of non-domesticated animal species (preferably birds and/or small mammals)
- Knowledge of the principles of Ethology (Animal Behaviour)
- Experience and understanding of analysing and recording data
- Qualifications in veterinary medicine are desirable but not essential
- An interest in Horticulture would be advantageous

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

- Ability to supervise and mentor a small team of staff with limited external support
- A driver's licence
- Ability to work independently and show initiative
- Confidence and the capacity for leadership
- Attention to detail
- Patience and determination
- Willingness to learn and speak Pijin
- A sense of humour



6. VSA Essential Attributes

- Commitment to volunteering, to VSA and to the partner organisation
- Cross cultural awareness
- Adaptability and a willingness to approach change or newness positively
- Able to form good relationships, both personally and professionally, with work colleagues and in the community
- Resilience and an ability to manage setbacks
- Initiative and resourcefulness
- An ability to facilitate learning through skills exchange

7. Living Situation

Honiara is the business centre of Solomon Islands and as such is a melting pot for people from all the island groups that make up the diverse nation. A hot and dusty place, Honiara offers most facilities albeit in a fairly rudimentary form. You are strongly encouraged to build relationships in the local community and socialise with Solomon Islanders at every opportunity, as this will enrich your experience of living in Solomon Islands. However, entertainment options are few and far between so the ability to make your own entertainment or willingness to get involved in community activities are important. There are various clubs and social groups in Honiara, which you will get to know with time.

VSA will provide basic, furnished accommodation with gas facilities for cooking. In Honiara, you will have access to power (although power outages can occur), piped water, phone, mobile data internet, restaurants, a variety of shops and an expatriate population. Public transport is very cheap within Honiara. The local bus service is provided by a plethora of vans, and some larger buses. A single fare of SBD3 applies, regardless of the length of the trip. Taxis charge a moderate fare (currently SBD10 per kilometre) but it is wise to establish a fare before commencing a journey.

Most volunteers feel safe in Solomon Islands, but it is important to know the risks and take personal responsibility for your safety. As in many countries, foreigners tend to be the target of petty crime, so always be alert and take precautions. In general, there are no problems moving around the majority of Honiara during the day but it is not safe to walk or catch public transport alone in Honiara after dark.

The Tetere Species Recovery Centre is located approximately 30km from Honiara. While the centre location is accessible by bus, it is anticipated that the volunteer will live in Honiara and use a project vehicle to commute daily to the centre. As with all travel outside Honiara, security can be an issue and the volunteer will need to take their personal safety and security seriously.

For more information, see <https://vsa.org.nz/what-we-do/countryregion/solomon-islands/>.



Additional information

Residency status

VSA volunteers must be New Zealand citizens or have New Zealand permanent residency status, and currently living in NZ.

Pre-departure briefing

As part of the volunteer's contract, successful candidates will be required to take part in a pre-departure briefing course run by VSA in Wellington and complete all required pre-reading.

Final appointment

Final appointment will be subject to satisfactory medical and immigration clearances (costs covered by VSA), partner organisation acceptance, and successful completion of the pre-departure briefing course.

Family status

VSA supports partners to accompany volunteers on assignments of six months or longer. However, volunteers with accompanying dependents will not be considered for this assignment.

Fundraising

Volunteers are encouraged to fundraise at least \$1000 with the support of VSA's fundraising team. Accompanying partners are encouraged to raise the same amount. All funds raised will help VSA keep its programmes in action and support future volunteers.

Vaccination requirements

Potential volunteers are advised that VSA's insurers require volunteers to be inoculated, prior to departure, in accordance with the instructions of VSA's medical adviser. VSA covers the cost of any required vaccinations.

Children's Act

While on assignment, VSA volunteers may be required to work with children and/or may choose to participate in informal activities in their own time that involve interactions with children (such as coaching teams or teaching English). VSA is committed to the protection of vulnerable children and adults, which also includes meeting our commitment under the Children's Act 2014.

The information requested during the application process is necessary to assist VSA to determine applicant suitability to work and/or interact regularly with children, and is part of a series of pre-selection checks undertaken on all applicants for VSA assignments.

Volunteer package

The volunteer's package includes the following:

Reimbursements and grants

1. Volunteers will receive an establishment grant of NZ\$750 to help them set up in their country of assignment. For volunteers with an accompanying partner (whether or not that partner is also a VSA volunteer), VSA will pay an establishment grant of NZ\$1,100 per couple.
2. For two-year assignments, the volunteer will receive a rest and respite grant of NZ\$1000 on completion of the first year.
3. A resettlement grant of NZ\$200 will be paid for each month the volunteer is on assignment. This is payable on completion of the assignment.
4. The volunteer will receive a monthly living allowance of SBD6500.

Accommodation

Basic, comfortable furnished accommodation will be sourced by VSA. In some circumstances, volunteers may be asked to share accommodation.



Airfares and baggage allowance

VSA will provide the volunteer with economy airfares to and from New Zealand for their assignment plus a baggage allowance.

Insurance

VSA will provide travel insurance to cover baggage and personal property, and non-routine medical expenses for the duration of the assignment. Further details of the insurance cover will be provided during the volunteer pre-departure briefing.

Utilities

VSA will reimburse volunteers reasonable expenses for household utilities while on assignment.

Final terms and conditions relating to the specific volunteer assignment will be confirmed in a personalised volunteer contract prior to departure.

