

Orientation Guide

ORCA FOUNDATION



WELCOME

Hi There!



This booklet serves as your comprehensive guide to the ORCA Foundation's volunteer program for the year 2023/2024. Created with the goal of raising awareness about marine conservation issues in Plettenberg Bay, the ORCA Foundation combines research, conservation, and education to make a positive impact. Our international volunteers, like yourself, play a crucial role in furthering our mission. We encourage you to read through this guide to ensure your stay is comfortable and enjoyable.

Our Mission

1. **Raise Awareness and Interest:** We aim to raise awareness and interest in marine conservation issues facing Plettenberg Bay.
2. **Support Applied Marine Research:** We support applied marine research that informs conservation management decisions with scientific advice.
3. **Community and Collaboration:** We foster a sense of community by collaborating with other conservation organizations and research institutes in the region.
4. **Educate and Inspire:** We expose international volunteers to local marine research, conservation, and education initiatives.
5. **Teach the Young:** We teach young children about the value of our oceans.

Let's do this!

Meet the Staff



Charlie Lilford
General Manager



Jared Harding
Manager



Melissa Nel
Researcher, & Coordinator



Dr Chantel Elston
Research Collaborator



Kade Howorth
Field Assistant



Julene Capazorio
Field Assistant



Program Overview

The ORCA Foundation, a conservation node of Ocean Blue Adventures, is dedicated to creating awareness about marine conservation issues in Plettenberg Bay. Our volunteer program integrates research, conservation, and education, relying on the dedication of international volunteers. Volunteers from diverse backgrounds come together to contribute to our projects, increasing knowledge and awareness of local conservation efforts.

How Will I Help?

Get ready for hands-on experiences! As a volunteer, you'll actively participate in conservation and education projects that involve hiking, responding to strandings, and visiting local schools. You'll also assist in marine research projects, gaining valuable experience in boat-based and land-based field research methods.

Things to be aware of

✓ **LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION**

Your participation level may vary depending on the length of your stay and your experience. Longer stays may lead to increased responsibilities and potential training or supervision of new volunteers.

✓ **CHALLENGING WORK CONDITIONS**

Be prepared for challenging conditions, such as boat-based fieldwork, hiking, and physically demanding tasks. Inform the volunteer coordinator of any limitations or conditions that may affect your participation.

✓ **WEATHER DEPENDANT NATURE**

Our projects are highly weather-dependent, and last-minute changes in the schedule are common. Marine mammal strandings take priority, and bad weather days may be used for data entry.



Orientation

NO PRIOR EXPERIENCE IS REQUIRED FOR OUR PROJECTS. HOWEVER, WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU POSSESS THE FOLLOWING QUALITIES TO MAKE A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION:

- GENERAL INTEREST IN MARINE BIOLOGY, RESEARCH, CONSERVATION, AND EDUCATION
- ENTHUSIASM, POSITIVITY, MATURITY, AND INDEPENDENCE
- WILLINGNESS TO LEARN AND WORK WELL WITHIN A TEAM
- ADAPTABILITY AND PATIENCE DUE TO WEATHER-DEPENDENT FIELDWORK
- MODERATE FITNESS FOR HIKING
- ATTENTION TO DETAIL
- FLUENT ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS (BOTH WRITTEN AND ORAL)

TRAINING
&

Work Schedule

Due to the weather-dependent nature of our work, we plan weekly activities in advance. The standard volunteer working week is Monday to Friday, from 08:00 to 17:00, with Fridays often ending at 13:00. Weekend & evenings are your leisure time.

Example:

ORCA WEEKLY SCHEDULE

18th September – 24th September 2023

	Monday 18 th	Tuesday 19 th	Wednesday 20 th	Thursday 21 th	Friday 22 th	Saturday	Sunday
AM Activity	08:30- 12:30 Beach Survey	08:00- 11:00 Dolphin/Whale watching	08:30 – 12:00 Dolphin/Whale watching	08:00-12:00 River Survey	07:00 – 12:00 Robberg Observations	Off	Off
Lunch/Break	Farm Stall	11:00 – 12:00	Wednesday market lunch	12:00 – 13:00	12:00 -13:00		
PM Activity	14:00 – 15:30 Data Count	12:00 – 16:00 Robberg Observations	13:00 – 16:00 Beach Survey	12:00 – 15:30 Snorkel Excursion	13:00 – 15:00 DATA ENTRY COMPLETION.		
High Tide	5:29pm	5:59pm	6:21am	7:02am	8:00am		
Low Tide	11:05am	11:33am	12:05pm	12:46pm	1:48pm		

The Three Pillars



Our mission revolves around three core pillars: Research, Conservation, and Education. These pillars are the foundation of our efforts to protect and preserve the marine environment in Plettenberg Bay and beyond.

1

RESEARCH: UNVEILING OCEAN MYSTERIES

Research lies at the heart of our work. Our team of marine biologists and researchers explore the ocean's secrets, from tracking majestic whales to monitoring elusive sharks. Through rigorous scientific inquiry, we expand our knowledge to make informed conservation decisions.

2

CONSERVATION: GUARDIANS OF THE OCEAN

We are dedicated ocean guardians, committed to preserving the natural beauty of Plettenberg Bay. From beach cleanups to responding to marine mammal strandings, our conservation initiatives aim to ensure a healthy marine ecosystem for generations to come.

3

EDUCATION: INSPIRING FUTURE OCEAN STEWARDS

Education is our tool for change. We inspire young minds in local schools, teaching water safety, shark awareness, and the importance of ocean preservation. We empower students to become advocates for a healthier planet.

SEE WHAT PROJECTS WE HAVE IN THE NEXT PAGES



Opportunistic Boat-Based Surveys

Joining Ocean Blue Adventures on their commercial whale and dolphin watching boat trips is an exciting part of your volunteer experience. When available seats allow, you'll embark on these trips to actively contribute to our conservation efforts.

Your Role

1. **Recording Sightings:** During these boat trips, you'll be responsible for recording sightings of various marine animals, including whales, dolphins, seals, sharks, and seabirds.
2. **Photography:** Capture the essence of the marine world by taking photos of dolphin and whale dorsal fins, as well as other interesting sightings.

Project Purpose

- a. **Continuing Baseline Data for the Bay:** Your observations and data collection are essential for maintaining and enhancing our baseline data for Plettenberg Bay. This long-term dataset is invaluable for understanding the bay's marine ecosystem.
- b. **Humpback Dolphin Data:** Plettenberg Bay boasts the longest-running dataset for Humpback dolphins, a Critically Endangered species. Your contributions play a pivotal role in monitoring and conserving this vulnerable population.

By participating in this project, you'll help us determine the distribution and movement of marine animals, monitor their population health, study human-wildlife interactions, and gather other critical ecological information. Your efforts contribute to the protection of these magnificent creatures and their habitat.



Robberg Observations

Prepare for breathtaking hikes and dedicated observation sessions as you head to the Robberg Peninsula. This project involves monitoring marine wildlife from designated cliff-top sites, providing a unique perspective on the marine ecosystem.

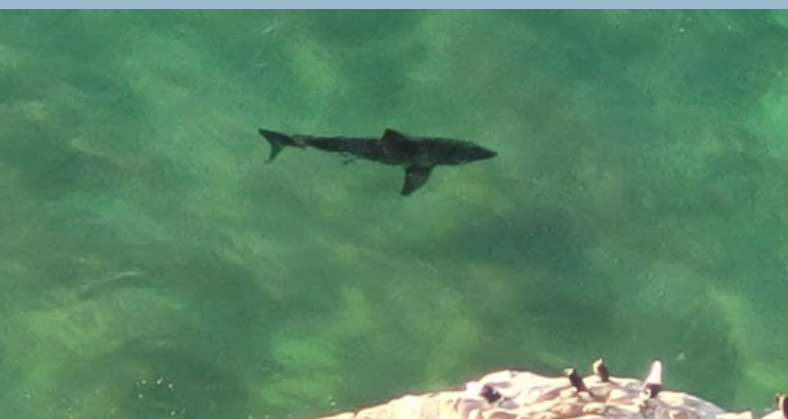
Your Role

- 1. Observation Sessions:** You will hike to designated cliff-top monitoring sites (labeled 1-8 on the map) on Robberg Peninsula, dedicating 3-4 hours to observe and record various aspects of the marine environment.
- 2. Data Collection:** During your sessions, record environmental conditions, and observe the presence and behavior of marine life, including seals, sharks, whales, dolphins, tourism vessels, and shore anglers within the Robberg Marine Protected Area.

Project Purpose

- a. Unique and Non-Invasive Observation:** This project offers a unique and non-invasive way to observe wildlife, particularly sharks, and their natural behavior within a Marine Protected Area (MPA).
- b. Long-Term Dataset:** Since 2019, the ORCA Foundation has been conducting dedicated observations, contributing to a valuable long-term dataset.
- c. Baseline Data:** The observations have not yet been influenced by controversial activities such as cage diving operations or invasive research techniques, making them essential for establishing baseline data.

By participating in this project, you'll play a vital role in monitoring seal-shark interactions, assessing the importance of the marine protected area to marine mammals and the tourism industry, and gathering crucial data to support marine conservation efforts in the region. Please note that the hike can be strenuous, and certain sections may not be suitable for those with a serious fear of heights.



River Surveys

Prepare for unique and adventurous river surveys as you explore the waters for distinctive aquatic life. This project involves boat-based observations and monitoring of water quality, alongside the deployment of camera systems for underwater species recording.

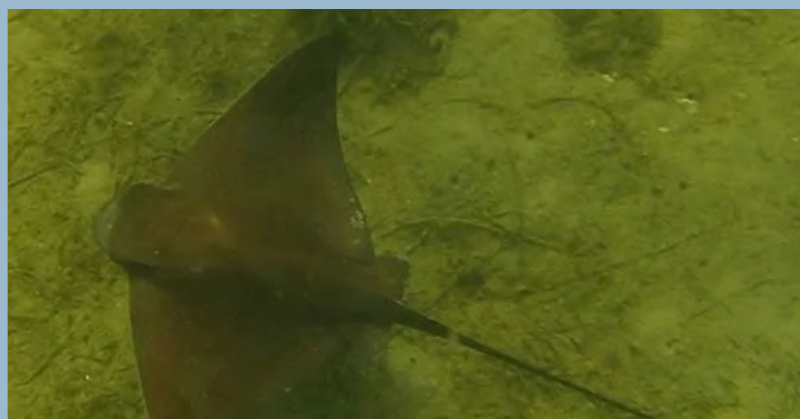
Your Role

- 1. Boat-Based Observations:** You will conduct observations from a boat, actively searching for specific animals that stand out, including shoals of fish, stingrays, sharks, turtles, and seals.
- 2. Water Quality Monitoring:** Monitor essential water quality parameters such as salinity and water temperature to gain insights into the river ecosystem.
- 3. Camera System Deployment (BRUVs):** Occasionally, you'll assist in deploying a camera system known as Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVs). These systems record all underwater species that pass in front of the camera field-of-view.
- 4. Video Footage Screening:** After collecting video footage, you'll participate in screening to identify the presence of sharks and rays.

Project Purpose

- a. Stingray Population Discovery:** Your river surveys aim to provide the first recorded evidence of a stingray population in the Keurbooms River, contributing to our understanding of local aquatic life.
- b. Breeding Ground and Juvenile 'Safe Space':** Ongoing research suggests the possibility of the river serving as a breeding ground and juvenile "safe space" for certain species. Your contributions help validate these hypotheses and support conservation efforts

By actively participating in this project, you play a crucial role in uncovering the secrets of the river ecosystem, identifying potential breeding grounds, and contributing to the protection of vulnerable aquatic species. Your efforts contribute to expanding our knowledge of these unique environments.



Beach Surveys

Beach surveys encompass three vital components, each contributing to marine conservation and community upliftment. These components involve recording and reporting marine animal strandings, tracking shark egg cases, and conducting marine debris cleanup and site monitoring.

Your Role

- 1. Marine Animal Stranding Recording & Reporting:** You will collaborate with the local stranding network to record and report marine animal strandings. This can include a wide range of species, from seabirds and turtles to seals, dolphins, and whales.
- 2. Shark Egg Case Hunt with ELMO Africa:** In partnership with ELMO Africa, you will track shark egg cases along the coastline, contributing to research on these vital marine structures.
- 3. Marine Debris Cleanup and Site Monitoring:** Participate in cleaning up marine debris on the beaches, ensuring they remain pristine. Additionally, monitor the condition of these sites and report any instances of abuse to the municipality.

Project Purpose

- a. Assist Local Management Authorities:** Your involvement in recording and reporting marine mammal strandings helps local management authorities respond effectively to these events, contributing to the protection of marine life.
- b. Shark Egg Case Research with ELMO:** By collaborating with ELMO Africa on shark egg case research, you contribute to understanding the distribution and health of shark populations, aiding in their conservation.
- c. Community Upliftment:** Your participation in marine debris cleanup and site monitoring not only keeps beaches clean but also uplifts the community. Reporting abused sites to the municipality ensures that these natural resources are protected for future generations.

Through these beach surveys, you play a significant role in preserving marine ecosystems, supporting research efforts, and fostering community engagement in marine conservation. Your contributions help protect the marine life and natural beauty of the coastal areas you serve.



Youth Marine Education Program

In collaboration with Plett Shark Spotters, our volunteers actively engage in an ongoing youth marine education program conducted at local schools. This program focuses on educating young students about the marine environment in Plettenberg Bay, with specific emphasis on water safety, sharks, and marine mammals.

Your Role

As a volunteer, you'll play a vital role in supporting the existing education program. Your responsibilities include:

- Assisting in communicating with young students.
- Utilizing our informative posters and engaging educational games to convey valuable information about the marine environment.

Project Purpose

The primary purpose of this project is community upliftment. By participating in the Youth Marine Education Program, you contribute to the empowerment and education of local youth, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for Plettenberg Bay's marine ecosystem. Your engagement helps instill knowledge and awareness, ultimately strengthening the bond between the community and the environment they call home.



House Facilities and Meals

At the ORCA Foundation, we strive to provide a comfortable and sustainable living environment for our volunteers. Here's what you can expect:

DOMESTIC SERVICES:

A dedicated domestic worker ensures the cleanliness of the house five times a week, promoting a clean and pleasant living space. Communal clothes washing is also arranged to conserve water resources, aligning with our commitment to sustainability.

SHARED COOKING DUTIES:

Evening meals are a shared responsibility within the household. We operate on a roster system, ensuring that each member takes a turn preparing dinner. It's an excellent opportunity for team bonding and culinary exploration.

DINNER TOGETHER, THE ORCA WAY:

We believe that breaking bread together fosters a sense of community. On weekdays (Monday to Friday), evening meals are prepared for you. We accommodate various dietary preferences, including vegetarian options. However, you are also welcome to explore the nearby convenience store, pharmacy, or local restaurants if you prefer dining out. Our house's central location makes it convenient to access a variety of dining options.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY:

Our house is equipped with solar panels, reducing our reliance on conventional power sources. This means that even during load shedding, you can expect uninterrupted access to electricity, enhancing your overall experience.

SELF-SERVICE BREAKFAST AND LUNCH

For breakfast and lunch, you'll find a well-stocked kitchen at your disposal. You are responsible for preparing your own breakfast and lunch from the available ingredients. It's a chance to customize your meals according to your preferences and dietary requirements.

At the ORCA Foundation, we aim to provide a harmonious living experience that aligns with our values of sustainability, community, and shared responsibility. We look forward to sharing meals, stories, and memorable moments as we work together toward marine conservation and education.



Plettenberg Bay



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