

Volunteer Role Description:

Volunteer Role:	Volunteer Field Assistant (Namibian)
Department:	Institute of Zoology (IoZ)
Location:	Tsaobis Nature Park, Namibia
Supervisors:	Guy Cowlshaw and Project Directors
Purpose of role/ project:	This role supports the field research team on the IoZ/ZSL Tsaobis Baboon Project, whilst offering individuals the opportunity to gain vital work experience in this area.
Eligibility to apply to this role:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This role is available to Namibian citizens only. • You must be aged 18 years or older.
Commitment of role:	We are looking for four Namibian Field Assistants for 3 months from early July – Oct 2026. Some of these positions will be renewable for a further 3 months from early Oct - Dec 2026. Field Assistants undertake their volunteering on a 3-day cycle (2 days with the baboons, 1 day off).
Main tasks:	<p>Join the project team to undertake the following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-day follows of the baboon study troops on foot, and the collection of behavioural and ecological data from the baboons during those follows • Monthly plant phenology surveys, involving plant identification and the recording of plant phenology cycles (leaf, flower, fruit/pods) • Other miscellaneous research activities • Contribute to base camp management/logistics including communal cooking and cleaning duties.
Skills, attitudes and experience needed:	<p>This position is open to anyone with an interest in animal behaviour and ecology. We are particularly keen to hear from people who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are friendly, easy-going people, who are happy to live in a small team under basic conditions at a remote field site. • Are strongly motivated, reliable and committed. • Have good levels of physical fitness and stamina - you will be following the baboons on foot from dawn to dusk over mountainous terrain in extreme heat. • Show good initiative, with a willingness to learn and show attention to detail. • Have basic experience and skills in field research and data collection.

<p>Reasons to apply:</p>	<p>In this role you will gain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An amazing opportunity to share the lives of wild baboons in a beautiful desert landscape • An opportunity to learn new skills and gain experience, especially those relevant to research in behaviour, ecology, and conservation – see more information below • An opportunity to expand social and professional networks while working as part of a field team hosted by an international research institution and global conservation charity <p>Field Assistants gain extensive experience and skills in how to conduct research on the behaviour of wild animals and their use of the environment. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods of behavioural data collection (e.g., focal follows, group scans, ad lib data collection) • Methods of ecological data collection (e.g., plant identification and phenology surveys, climate monitoring) • Methods of biological sample collection (e.g., preparation of sample tubes, and collection of faecal samples for future analysis) • The use and maintenance of field research equipment (e.g., dataloggers, GPS units, radio handsets) • Data management (e.g., downloading data into the main project database, management of the samples spreadsheet) • How to run a long-term field study (various logistical activities and social skills ranging from baking bread and cooking for a large field team to interacting with neighbouring land owners and acting as ambassadors for the project) • Specialist experience/knowledge of baboon biology • Specialist experience/knowledge of Namib Desert ecology
<p>Relevant training:</p>	<p>Field Assistants receive a full induction on their arrival at the site, and then undergo a training period of approximately three weeks, during which time they receive training in all the points highlighted above, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural data collection • Ecological data collection • Biological sample collection • Use/maintenance of field research equipment • Data management • The operation of a long-term field study • Baboon behaviour and ecology • Namib Desert ecology <p>Field Assistants work closely with our field staff/students, and additional training is provided whenever necessary throughout the field season.</p>

<p>Support and resources provided:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from the Centralised ZSL Volunteer Management Team based in the UK. • Named ZSL contact/supervisors in the field and in the UK. • The costs of personal insurance are covered by ZSL. • All necessary scientific equipment to carry out research on the project and to ensure volunteer safety in the field, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dataloggers • GPS units • radio handsets • Food, accommodation, and other living costs are covered by ZSL for Namibian volunteers; we also loan personal equipment as needed, including binoculars, backpacks and tents. • To enable Namibian volunteers to access this opportunity, and in line with best practice in Namibia, the project provides a small stipend of N\$2000/month, equivalent to £80/month. • No clothing is provided by ZSL. Field Assistants wear their own clothes.
<p>Workplace conditions:</p>	<p>Field Assistants live alongside PhD students in a tourist rest camp in a private nature reserve. Project facilities include two bungalows with private shower/toilet blocks and a private camping area, where all team members camp.</p>
<p>Additional information:</p>	<p>The IoZ/ZSL Tsaobis Baboon Project has been hosting volunteers on its research team every year since 2002. Up to the end of 2019, we have hosted 108 volunteers from 23 countries. Many of these volunteers have gone on to MSc and PhD courses.</p>

Applying to this role:

- Send a copy of your CV and a 1-page cover letter to Volunteering@zsl.org by **11am on Thursday 30 April 2026**.
- Your cover letter should explain why you want to volunteer on this project.
- Your CV should include the names and email addresses of two referees.
- Please send your application as a single PDF document, with the cover letter on a separate page preceding your CV.
- Candidates who have been shortlisted will be contacted by WhatsApp on Thurs 7 May with details of an interview slot for the following week. The interviews will be held on Tues 12 and Weds 13 May by WhatsApp/Zoom. Please ensure you include your phone number with your application, and be ready to confirm your interview slot when you receive the invitation on Thurs 7 May.
- If you have questions about the role, please contact Punaete Kandjii, one of our 2026 field team leaders, on 081 487 5754.

Background Information:

The Study Site

Weather

Tsaobis has a desert climate, with extreme heat and little rain. It is also very seasonal. Our fieldwork usually takes place over the dry austral winter, between May and October, so although the days are hot the nights are cool (temperatures can fall as low as 0°C in midwinter). From late winter, the days get noticeably longer and hotter, and sporadic thunderstorms become increasingly likely from October onwards.

Landscape

Tsaobis is a beautiful desert wilderness. The landscape is a mixture of alluvial and gravel plains, rocky hills, and nearby mountain peaks. Most vegetation comprises herbs, small shrubs, and dwarf trees, although the dry sandy bed of the ephemeral Swakop River that cuts through this landscape supports several woodland groves. Following summer rains, the desert springs into life and the baboons forage across the hills and plains. In the winter time, as the summer growth dies back, the baboons forage primarily in the Swakop River woodlands. Throughout the year, the baboons sleep on cliffs in the rocky hills.

Wildlife

Tsaobis is home to a variety of wildlife including mountain zebra, kudu, springbok, klipspringer and, of course, baboons! Predators include jackals and, occasionally, leopards. Birds and reptiles also abound.

Location

Tsaobis is centrally located in Namibia. It is only a 3.5 hour drive from Windhoek (the capital). The nearest town, Karibib, is a one-hour drive away and comprises a petrol station, bank, post office, and basic shops.

Working Conditions

Daily Schedule

Data collection requires full-day follows of the study troops. This ensures that the location of the sleeping cliff used by the baboons each night is known, which in turn facilitates their pick-up by observers early the next morning. If the day begins late, or ends early, the baboons can be lost and may take several days to relocate. Full-day follows require that the field team have already had breakfast, prepared their pack lunches, and are ready to leave camp in good time before dawn; it also means that they will not get back before nightfall. The most distant baboon sleeping cliffs are more than an hour away from camp, so a prompt start in the morning is essential (e.g. 4:30am). The baboons are then accompanied until they reach their sleeping cliff at dusk (e.g. 6pm, returning back to camp by 7pm). Although these are long days, the weekly schedule ensures that there are regular breaks for all the team (see below).

Working with baboons in the Tsaobis landscape

Observers spend the day on foot in the company of the baboons as they traverse the rocky, mountainous terrain around the Swakop riverbed. This landscape is beautiful but also physically demanding. Field team members travel (with backpacks) up to 10km a day, ascending and descending steep hills and slippery scree slopes as they follow the baboons. The baboons are habituated to the presence of human observers, allowing data to be collected from close proximity without causing disturbance, but observers must

always act carefully and responsibly when in the company of these wild animals. Data collection is largely conducted with handheld computers. Faecal and urine samples may also be collected on a routine basis. On-site supervision and detailed guidelines will be provided describing how to work with the baboons in this desert landscape.

Environmental surveys and monitoring

At monthly intervals throughout the field season, plant phenology surveys will be conducted. These are an important complement to the baboon behavioural data, since they describe the spatial and temporal availability of the baboons' food patches.

Weekly work schedule

Since data collection from the baboons requires consecutive full-day follows, these "field days" usually take place over two-day stints with an intervening one-day break. The latter are primarily "rest" days, but there will also be some office and general housekeeping duties (e.g. uploading data to the project databases, cooking supper). Trips will be made to Windhoek about once a month for supplies, and volunteers will also be expected to assist occasionally with these trips. Although the field-camp/rest day cycle of 2-1 days is the normal routine, this schedule necessarily retains flexibility throughout the field season.

Living Conditions

Accommodation

Accommodation is based around a small two-roomed bungalow. The bungalow has a kitchen, bathroom and office. Members of the field team sleep in their own tents which are pitched under trees close to the bungalow, but use the living area of the bungalow for rest and relaxation.

Food

Field team members prepare their own breakfasts and pack lunches, but for supper we cook communally, with all team members taking turns to prepare the evening meal. Due to limited refrigeration/freezer space, communal food is vegetarian.

Telephone and messaging

Tsaobis has no mobile phone coverage, but the Project has access to the rest camp telephone and wi-fi which usually has a sufficient signal for WhatsApp (without pictures). The project covers the costs of the wi-fi service, but volunteers will need to pay for any phone calls they make at local rates.

Visitors

Members of the field team may receive visitors at Tsaobis, but volunteers should consult the Project prior to making arrangements as permission from relevant landowners needs to be sought. Care must be taken that visitors do not disrupt the field routine and all plans and arrangements for visitors must be confirmed with the Project Directors prior to the visit. Unfortunately, accommodation for visitors cannot be guaranteed at the field site and it will not be possible for visitors to accompany the volunteers when working with the baboons.

Personal Details

Preparation

There will be various tasks and pieces of paperwork that volunteers must complete before they begin at Tsaobis. These include vaccinations (see below). We will organise personal insurance. In addition, where possible, we encourage volunteers to do a little background

reading on baboons before coming to Tsaobis. In particular, Louise Barrett's "Baboons: Survivors of the African Continent" (BBC, 2000) is an excellent introduction to the world of baboons, while Robert Sapolsky's "A Primate Memoir" (recently republished: Vintage, 2019) is a wonderful account of fieldwork with baboons.

Health and safety, general

All volunteers will need to ensure that they are up-to-date with their vaccinations. This should be done as soon as the volunteer has been accepted onto the Project, since some vaccination courses can require several months between the first and last injection.

Health and safety at Tsaobis

Because fieldwork at Tsaobis is conducted on foot and takes place from dawn to dusk, often over difficult terrain, volunteers should be physically fit. Due to the dry desert climate, Tsaobis is a healthy place to work, but volunteers will need to take appropriate steps to avoid dehydration, sunstroke and excessive sun exposure. This includes carrying plenty of water, wearing wide-brimmed hats with appropriate clothing and sunglasses, and the regular application of sunblock.

Health and safety outside Tsaobis

Although the tar and gravel roads in Namibia are generally of a good standard, all volunteers should drive carefully and at reasonable speed, and never drive at night. Although Namibia is generally a safe country to visit, when in Windhoek (and other urban areas) it is a sensible precaution to stay alert and avoid walking the streets at night, especially alone. For further details on health and safety in Namibia, please refer to the UK Government's [travel advice](#).

What to Bring

Clothes

Due to the cold nights and hot days of the desert winter, field team members should bring sweatshirts and jumpers as well as light summer clothes. Woolly hat, gloves, and a warm fleece are recommended for cold winter mornings and evenings. Field clothes should include long-sleeved shirts and long trousers, in addition to t-shirts and shorts. Avoid wearing dark colours if possible; lighter colours are much cooler. A wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses are essential. A small lightweight waterproof windcheater is also recommended for windy winter mornings. In addition to field clothes, some smart clothes will also be useful (e.g. for visits to Windhoek). Footwear should include a robust pair of walking boots and a sturdy pair of sandals.

Equipment

Field team members are advised to bring the following equipment. If you are one of our Namibian volunteers we can loan you this personal equipment as needed, but encourage you to bring your own gear along if you have it:

- A tent. Ideally your tent should be three person, since it will also double as your private retreat. A mattress will be available, but your tent will need to be large enough to accommodate it. The mattress dimensions are 190cm x 88cm x 15cm.
- A 3-season sleeping bag
- A comfortable backpack for daily use in the field. Ideally bring a backpack with a waist strap as well as shoulder straps, so that the weight of the bag can be carried on the hips rather than the back. Backpacks that are moulded to allow air to pass

between the bag and your back (e.g. the Berghaus "freeflow" design) are cool to wear. Backpacks should be a minimum of 25-30 litres volume.

- A comfortable pair of hiking boots. Ideally these should be lightweight but robust (with ankle support).
- A good set of binoculars, ideally 8x40 or 10x40. Avoid poor binoculars: they will make your work difficult and frustrating.
- A spare pair of spectacles (if used)
- A torch (ideally a head torch)
- Ankle-length gaiters
- A simple compass and whistle
- A sewing kit
- A water bottle can also be helpful, although most of the time we simply re-use the bottles that come with bottled water and soft drinks.
- Many previous volunteers have found it useful to bring a laptop, camera, speakers (to play music), e-reader, and/or books to read, in addition to their smart phones. A weather-proof bag, or just a ziplock bag, can be useful to keep valuable electronic equipment safe from dust and sand. Compact/travel games are always welcome, as are DVDs.
- For personal expenses, volunteers can bring cash, and should also be able to make withdrawals from ATMs using a standard debit card. Credit cards are widely accepted and are recommended for emergencies.