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# Silhouette

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# Paradise in Peril

by Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF)



Ring-necked Parakeet

The Seychelles boasts some of the most magnificent beaches in the world, bordered by lush forest and towering granite peaks. This natural beauty attracts thousands of tourists every year who come to soak up the tropical sun and exquisite surroundings. But these paradise islands are under attack. Since the islands were first colonised in the 18th century people have been bringing alien species into the Seychelles. These alien species are now threatening the natural treasures of these islands: unique animals and plants that are only found here.

Alien or introduced species are plants, animals or organisms which are introduced by humans accidentally or intentionally to an area outside their native range, for example: dogs, pigs, goats, ornamental plants and many fruit trees. Invasive alien species spread extremely fast and can completely take over whole ecosystems. This is when the habitat of some of the very rare Seychelles species such as the Seychelles Black Parrot or the Coco de Mer palm tree is threatened. A local organisation, the Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF), has started a campaign to combat these invasive species in the Seychelles.

SIF manages and protects the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Sites of the Vallée de Mai on Praslin Island and Aldabra Atoll in the far reaches of the Seychelles archipelago. Invasive alien species pose a serious threat to both of these unique and internationally renowned areas. With generous funding from the European Union, SIF has embarked on a four-year project to eliminate or control some of the invasive alien species that are found in these sites, safeguarding their beauty and biological diversity for the future.

Since 2011, SIF has secured many successes in their fight against invasive alien species. After being present on Aldabra for over 130 years, goats had caused untold damage to the native vegetation and threatened the survival of the Aldabra Giant Tortoise. In August 2012, the last goat was successfully removed from the atoll by SIF, which was a huge achievement and crucial to protecting the native plants and animals of the island. Work is also ongoing on Assumption Island, which is the closest island to Aldabra. Large populations of introduced birds on Assumption pose a threat to the endemic birds of Aldabra.

In order to reduce this risk an eradication programme was initiated and over 75 per cent of the invasive bird population on Assumption has since been eradicated.

Closer to home on the main island of Mahé, activities have also begun in the ancient palm forest of the Vallée de Mai on Praslin. In 2012, an extensive plant survey of the Vallée de Mai was completed. This enabled researchers to identify the location and extent of invasive plant species, such as the well-known Cinnamon tree. Data collected in this survey will be used to make future management decisions on the removal of these plant species from the forest.

Some invasive alien species are so small that it is hard to imagine the damage they could cause; Yellow Crazy Ants are one such species. These yellow ants may be small but have had devastating effects around the world. They can easily overpower and threaten insects and animals such as snails, slugs and reptiles that are found only in Seychelles. Research so far has shown that although the ants are present in the Vallée de Mai, they are not spreading which should make it easier to control them.

Praslin is also home to the iconic Seychelles Black Parrot, one of the 12 endemic bird species of the Seychelles. The Seychelles Black Parrot is only found



on Praslin Island and is one of the rarest birds in the Seychelles archipelago. The parrot breeds mainly in the mature palm forest of the Vallée de Mai and, interestingly, each breeding female parrot has its own distinctive call. The parrot's small population size and limited range make it highly vulnerable to external pressures. One of the main threats to the parrots is the presence of the introduced Ring-necked parakeet or Kato ver, on Mahé.

The Ring-necked Parakeet is the most widely found and successful parrot in the world. It has a broad native range stretching across southern Asia and northern Africa and has been introduced to more than 35 countries across five continents. A large green bird with a long tail and an unmistakable high-pitched squawk, the parakeet has caused many problems in different countries. In Mauritius the parakeet transmitted a virus to endemic Echo Parakeets which resulted in the deaths of many birds. In Australia, the Ring-necked parakeet is now considered a major agricultural pest, raiding a wide range of cereal, nut and fruit crops, causing economic losses. In the UK, the Ring-necked Parakeet population has exploded and now competes with nesting native birds, posing a threat to already declining species.

The parakeet was accidentally introduced in the Seychelles in 1996, when four captive birds escaped. These birds quickly increased in number to the current population of around 300 birds. Although only currently found on Mahé there is a danger that the parakeets could populate other islands in Seychelles. The establishment of parakeets on Praslin would directly threaten the Black Parrots, as they would compete for food and nesting sites, and transfer disease. An effort to limit this population of destructive parakeets has been started by SIF to protect the national bird of the Seychelles, the Black Parrot.

With the collaboration of international agencies, such as the European Union, the Seychelles government, local organisations, international visitors and local people, it is both possible and achievable to maintain the natural splendour of these magical islands.

**How you can help prevent the spread of invasive species:**

- Ensure you declare all animal and plant products when entering the Seychelles
- Visit the Vallée de Mai on Praslin island to learn about invasive species and the work of SIF
- Support and promote the protection of native plants and animals both in the Seychelles and at home
- If you see the Ring-necked Parakeet whilst you are here, particularly if they are roosting or nesting, do not disturb the birds but report the sighting to the Greenline (+248 272 2111) or to SIF (+248 252 3623).

**Further information:**  
Please visit our website – [www.sif.sc](http://www.sif.sc), or email us on [info@sif.sc](mailto:info@sif.sc).