



Annual Report 2007
Seychelles Islands Foundation







Seychelles Islands Foundation: Annual Report 2007

We are delighted to present the first annual report for the Seychelles Islands Foundation, which contains information about SIF activities and supported projects over the past year.

The year 2007 will be remembered for a number of things, but importantly among these was the celebration of 25 years of World Heritage Status for Aldabra in November.

A number of research studies were completed in 2007 which yielded important results and details of these projects and how the results are being disseminated are included in the report.

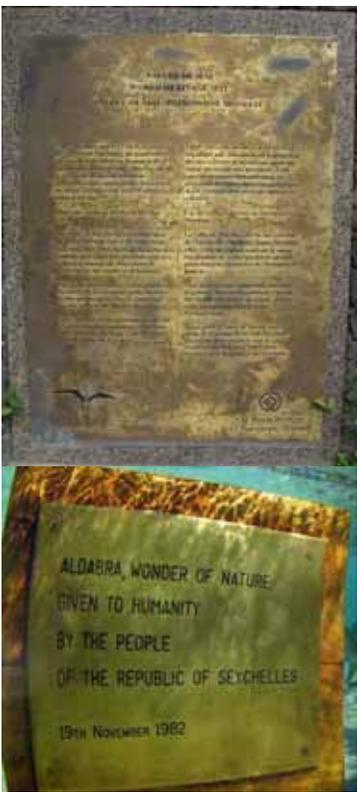
We hope you enjoy reading this report. If you have any comments on articles or suggestions for improvements, please let us know.

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Acknowledgements

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Note from the SIF Chairman

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the first annual report for SIF, which comes shortly after SIF celebrated its 25-year anniversary of Aldabra's designation as a World Heritage Site on 19th November, 1982. Much has been accomplished since but much more still needs to be done to make Aldabra one of the world's leading 'living laboratories' of the 21st century.

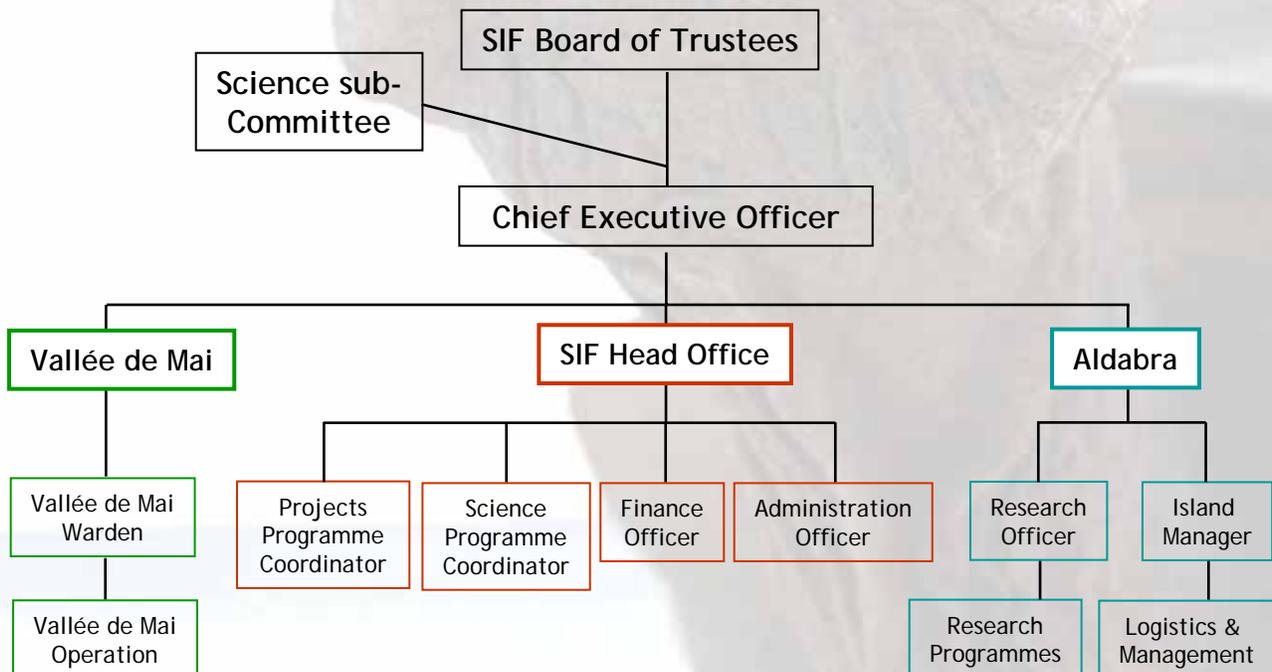
At this time, I would like to pay my deepest respects to the first SIF Chairman, Mr Guy Lionnet, who passed away this year and will always be remembered as a champion of the natural environment.

We have a goal to raise \$20 million for the Aldabra Foundation in the next two years. With the creation of this foundation 3 years ago, the ground work is now in place to allow your generous donations to start flowing in. I thank you in advance for your interest in this report, in the work of SIF and any support you are able to provide to aid our management and protection of these two unique sites.

Maurice Loustau-Lalanne

SIF Staff Restructuring

With increasing demands on the SIF, the Board decided in 2007 that there was a pressing need for the organisation to improve its strategy and establish a Chief Executive Officer. We would like to introduce and warmly welcome Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, who was appointed as the new CEO in July 2007. Dr Dogley's previous research on the Coco de Mer has shed light on many aspects of this flagship species' ecology, and her long history with the Department of Environment and prior involvement with SIF make her an ideal person to take the helm. She also gained substantial experience in tourism development and international cooperation when employed with the former Ministry of Tourism and Transport. The new management structure of SIF is illustrated below:



ALDABRA CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE STATUS



On the 19th November, 1982, the Republic of Seychelles shared Aldabra, the world's largest coral atoll and one of the last remaining pristine areas globally, with the rest of humanity, when the site was awarded World Heritage Status by UNESCO. The Seychelles Islands Foundation was established in 1979 to manage and protect Aldabra after 30 years of management by the Royal Society of London. In November 2007, the 25-year anniversary was met with great excitement and marked with a variety of activities.

An art competition for schoolchildren was held to increase awareness of Aldabra and the importance of World Heritage Sites among young people, which proved very popular. The awards ceremony was held on the 14th November 2007 where the documentary film "Tides of Aldabra" was viewed.

The Annual General Meeting of the SIF Board was held on Aldabra from the 15th to the 21st November 2007 so the attendees could experience Aldabra and its remoteness first-hand. The visit was also intended to increase understanding of all board members of the difficulties of managing and protecting the atoll and to ensure that informed decisions are made regarding operational and management issues on Aldabra.

The official anniversary ceremony was held on Aldabra on the 19th November with Patrick Victor as Guest of Honour.

Other anniversary activities included

- Radio quiz on Paradise FM with prizes of T-shirts and books awarded, to increase awareness of Aldabra and the need for World Heritage Sites among the general public
- Christmas Lottery to raise funds to ensure the continuation of the annual schoolchildren visit to Aldabra
- Local exhibition at the Natural History Museum of the Seychelles
- 1st day cover stamp issue with pictures of Aldabra in honour of the anniversary

Future activities planned include a Science Workshop to increase and improve research activities on Aldabra and SIF is also considering launching a special initiative: "Friends of Aldabra".



Vallée de Mai Redevelopment and Research plans

Improvement of facilities through redevelopment

The Seychelles Islands Foundation occupies a unique position in its responsibility for management of the only two World Heritage sites of Seychelles. The exceptional natural beauty of the mysterious Vallée de Mai palm forest, and the fact that this is the only site in the world where the Coco de Mer and the black parrot can be seen in abundance in the wild, attracts tens of thousands of visitors every year. We aim to satisfy every one of these visitors and although expressions of satisfaction and encouragement are common, completion of the recent business exercise in collaboration with the Shell Foundation identified a need for SIF to raise the standards of our facilities for visitors. Thus, in 2007, plans to improve the visitor facilities at the Vallée de Mai were initiated and the redevelopment is underway. The improvements will include larger educational and information display areas and a more spacious shop area with a greater and more exclusive array of products, many of which will be available only at the Vallée de Mai.

Planned Research in the Vallée de Mai

SIF research and scientific activities at the Vallée de Mai have been a low priority for many years compared to Aldabra, where the daily routine frequently revolves around the research programmes. The SIF plans to redress this balance by initiating a new programme of scientific research aiming to improve knowledge and conservation of the Vallée de Mai ecosystem. Starting in 2008, SIF will investigate the role and abundance of the Seychelles black parrot in different habitats on Praslin. There are also plans to initiate further research into the Coco de Mer, particularly reproductive biology and population genetics.





Vallée de Mai: a major Seychelles tourist attraction

Visitors

2007 saw a record number of visitors to the Vallée de Mai so far this decade (Fig. 1). Including tourists and resident visitors, there were 68,820 adults and 3681 children. Compared with the total number of tourists to the Seychelles for 2007, approximately 43% of these tourists visited the Vallée de Mai, which is in line with previous years and illustrates the continued importance of the Vallée de Mai as the major tourist attraction in the Seychelles.

Coco de Mer sales

Coco de Mer sales are a key source of revenue for the Seychelles Islands Foundation and represent an important tourist souvenir for the Seychelles. The number of Coco de Mer nuts collected annually from the Vallée de Mai and Fond Peper are shown below. Fewer nuts were collected in 2007 from the Vallée de Mai than in the previous 6 years but the number of nuts collected from Fond Peper has increased annually since nut collection began at this site in 2004. The total number of nuts collected annually was over 1000 for 2005 and 2006 and this has dropped to just over 800 in 2007. Of these, 794 Coco de Mer nuts were sold by the SIF during 2007.

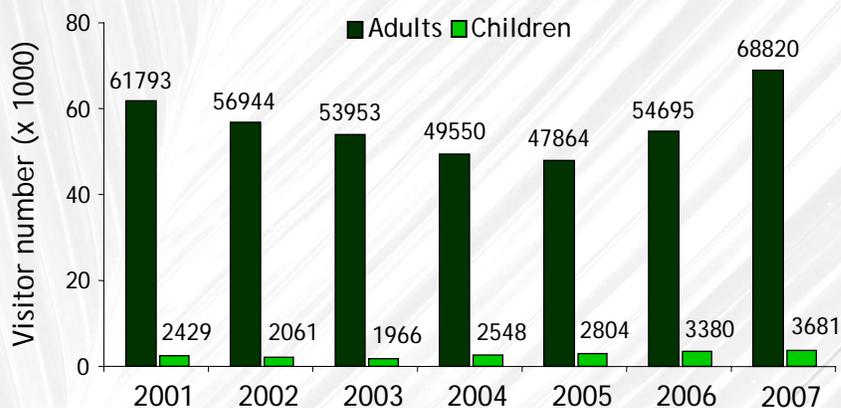


Fig. 1. Annual number of visitors to the Vallée de Mai: 2001-2007

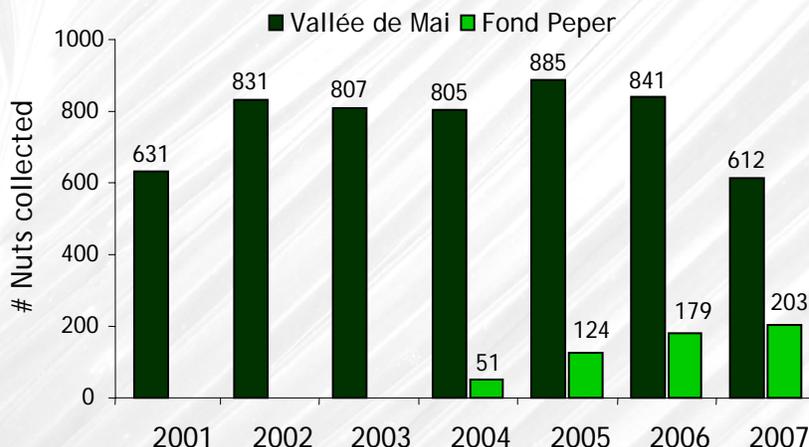


Fig. 2 Number of Coco de Mer Nuts collected annually at Vallée de Mai and Fond Peper



ALDABRA

SCIENCE PROGRAMME 2007

The long-term monitoring programmes for a range of species on Aldabra are of increasing importance in the context of global climate change. The true value of these programmes is emphasised when data from a multi-year period is combined and analysed to show long-term trends and relationships. However, it is also important and revealing to examine and assess these data on an annual basis as the results below and on the following pages show.



Marine Turtles

Aldabra is often described as a mecca for breeding turtles and 2007 was no exception, particularly for green turtle monitoring. The team carried out nearly 500 track counts across the atoll throughout the year and found an average of 9-10 fresh tracks per count on the main beach. These numbers are similar to 2006, providing more evidence of a long-term increase in nesting turtle emergence at Aldabra.

A large number (223) adult green turtles were tagged by the team as well as juvenile green, and adult and juvenile hawksbills. Tissue samples from all of these individuals were collected for genetic analysis, as part

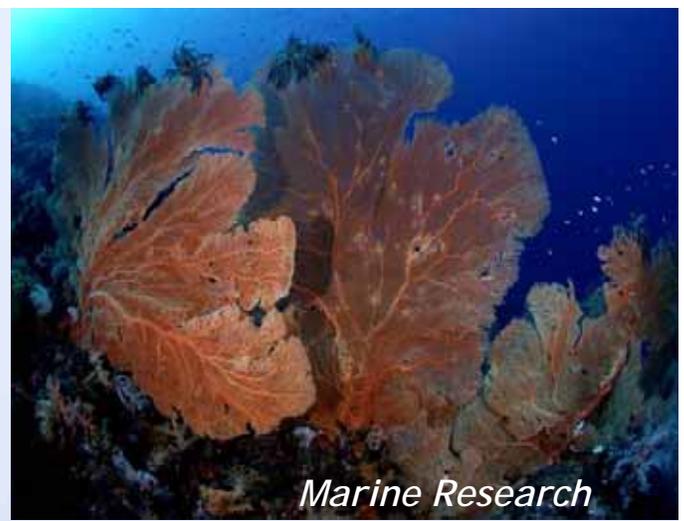
of an exciting long-term collaborative research effort across the region investigating marine turtle population structure.

A vast amount of data has been accrued over nearly 30 years on turtle breeding, tagging and encounters from Aldabra. SIF intends to utilise this data in the near future through analysis and writing up to (1) look more closely into why this breeding population is successful; (2) use the Aldabra programme and lessons learnt as an example to others and; (3) improve and streamline the turtle monitoring programme further.



Giant tortoises

The results from surveys across Aldabra in 2007 suggest that the tortoise population has declined by 15% in the last year to less than 100,000 individuals. However, compared to data collected over the last 10 years, there is considerable inter-annual variation in these estimates and the sampling method covers a proportionally tiny area of Aldabra, so this figure is not a cause for concern at the moment. Work is underway on Aldabra to identify and minimise the cause of this variation which should improve the accuracy of future tortoise monitoring.



Marine Research

Jerker Tamelander, of the IUCN, visited Aldabra in November to conduct a marine survey of alien invasive species. His follow-up report notes preliminary findings that no signs of bioinvasions or major shifts in reef species assemblages were observed. Recovery from the mass coral mortality due to the bleaching event in 1998 appears to be patchy - progressing well in some places but more slowly in other sites. Overall, however, the community structure has yet to return to pre-bleaching composition, illustrating the long-term effect of such events. Importantly, no impact of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 was observed, despite predictions that the waves may have caused structural damage to the reef system.

Publications and dissemination of results

The Aldabra research work has led to the submission of four scientific papers by SIF staff in 2007, including studies on crab plovers and grey heron predation on the Aldabra rail. Research on the declining catch rate of reef fish in the marine protected area and the effect of coral bleaching on carnivorous reef fish has also been submitted and was presented by the Aldabra Research Officer, Dr Pierre Pistorius, at two international symposia: the WIOMSA symposium in Durban and a workshop in Rodrigues, respectively, in 2007.



Land birds

2007 counts suggest that the Aldabra rail population is lower than in 2006, but similar to 2004-2005 and higher than 2002-2003. Most other land bird counts in 2007 were lower than in 2006, when the counts were unusually high. The variation is probably due to low rainfall in 2007 following a year of high rainfall in 2006.



Enhancing our Heritage: Final Assessment completed

A six year project entitled “Monitoring and managing for success in natural World Heritage Areas” between UNESCO and IUCN and partly funded by the United Nation Foundation started in 2001. The aims of this project were to work with managers of World Heritage sites to: (1) develop an assessment, monitoring and reporting system for management effectiveness; (2) develop a consistent approach that can be applied to World Heritage sites on an ongoing basis; and (3) apply the results to adapt or enhance management. The project worked with nine pilot sites across Africa, Asia, and Central and South America, and included Aldabra.

On Aldabra, two management effectiveness assessments were undertaken in 2002 and 2007, enabling implementation of the Aldabra Management plan to be compared across a 5-year period. A rating system was applied to management actions ranging from 1 (meaning that the action was completed or the policy is in place) to 7 (meaning that action has not been commenced) and an average of these results in different areas of management (*e.g.*, administration, research, tourism) obtained. The results showed that, compared to 2002, when the average status of actions was 4.4, indicating that the majority of actions were at the policy and planning stage, the overall management in 2007 was more advanced (average = 2.5), indicating that substantial progress had been made in all areas and actions were mostly completed or work on them was well underway.

As well as indicating an improvement in management over time, several important lessons were learnt from this exercise. Firstly, the evaluation process provided an objective way to identify SIF’s strengths and weaknesses, which is transferable to other sites. Secondly, it was shown that addressing gaps and building capacity does not necessarily require large sums of money. The process also necessitates the development of a built-in mechanism which ensures follow-up and requires documentation, which ensures institutional memory. The project results will also facilitate the necessary management plan updates for both Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai.

Future plans include undertaking a similar process to assess and improve the management of the Vallée de Mai, reviewing the Aldabra management plan and adopting Park Plan software for both Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai, and developing and establishing a sustainable finance mechanism for Aldabra.

The EoH project has been extremely beneficial for SIF, not only for Aldabra, but also for addressing major issues related to the management of the whole organisation, including the Vallée de Mai.



Goat eradication progress

Goats cause untold damage to endemic wildlife in regions where they have been introduced outside their native range. Aldabra, where goats are one of the few introduced mammalian species, is no exception.

Goats were introduced to Aldabra for food before 1878 and quickly multiplied. By the 1920s, thousands were reported to inhabit the atoll and they occurred on all four large islands. An SIF/UNESCO control programme in the late 1980s found that goats were altering plant species composition, slowing natural regeneration of vegetation and reducing shelter and forage for giant tortoises. Efforts were made to start controlling the population and, by 1995, goats had been eradicated from all islands of the atoll except on Grande Terre, where they have been regularly culled since.



Wild goats on Aldabra

2007 saw the planning and execution of a final goat eradication programme on Aldabra by Rainer von Brandis (a former Research Officer on Aldabra) for the SIF. The programme methodology made use of recent advances in the field of mammal eradications using 'Judas' individuals. Judas goats are those which are captured, sterilised, fitted with a radio-transmitter and released. Being highly social animals, goats will always seek out other goats (associates), which can then be tracked and removed. Judas goats greatly improve efficiency of eradications by reducing search times and locating remnant herds.

A team of four, including three hunters and a vet, began Phase 1 (Judas goat establishment) of the eradication in August 2007 and the intense second phase (hunting) was completed by

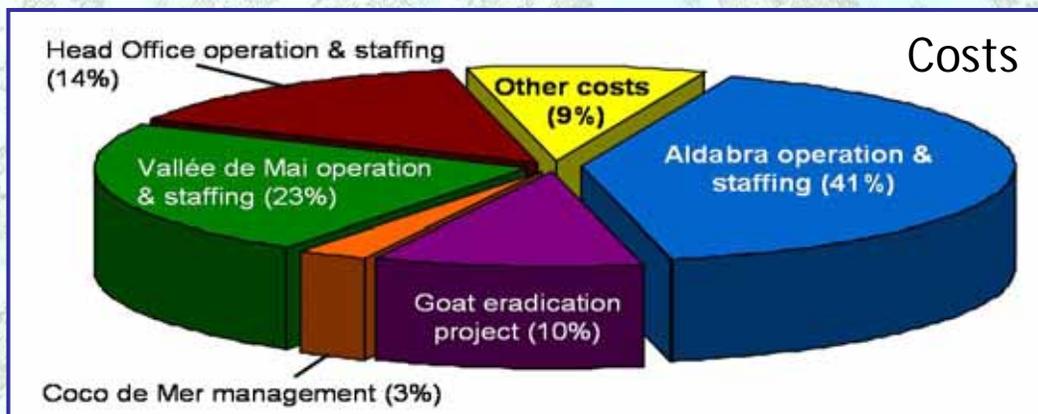
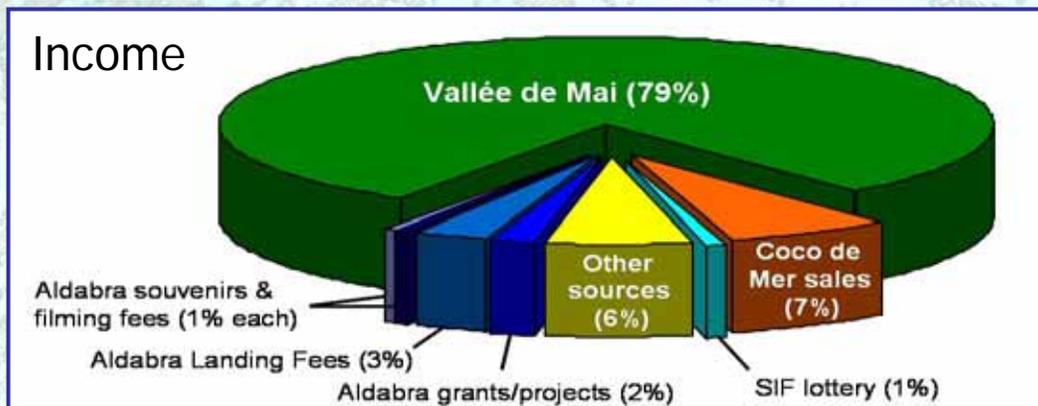


December 2007. 202 goats were killed in this period during a total of 853 hours of hunting. The third and final phase of the programme (monitoring and removing remnant individuals) is still underway and it will be some time before this phase is complete. The goat population is now so low that the remaining animals are becoming extremely difficult to locate and increasingly wary and we need to be certain of complete eradication before the programme can be declared a success.



Financial Analysis

All revenue generated by the Seychelles Islands Foundation goes directly towards managing, protecting and monitoring the vulnerable ecosystems of the Vallée de Mai and Aldabra. The breakdown of revenue (income) and expenditure (costs) is shown below. Although the Vallée de Mai generates the vast majority of SIF income, most of the expenditure is towards operations on Aldabra. The SIF is currently investigating ways to diversify sources of income to improve sustainability of finances.



CONTACTS

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Island Manager, Aldabra

Uzice Samedi
Acting Island Manager, Aldabra

Marc Jean-Baptiste
Current Island Manager, Aldabra

Dr Pierre Pistorius
Research Officer, Aldabra

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More about SIF and how you can help

The Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF) is a not-for-profit charitable organisation which was established as a public trust in 1979 to manage and protect the Seychelles World Heritage Sites of Aldabra Atoll and the Vallée de Mai.

To continue to run and protect these two sites, the SIF relies on funding generated largely by visitor entry fees to the Vallée de Mai and Aldabra, and supplemented by grants, donations and merchandise sales. Our work and progress will always be dependent on these sources and the generosity of our supporters.

There are a number of ways in which you can help us with this work:

- Visit the Vallée de Mai and experience the magic of this incredible location for yourself
- Purchase SIF products and souvenirs directly from the Vallée de Mai or the SIF Head Office in Victoria
- Donate to or fund-raise for SIF - all donations receive a 200% tax allowance

If you would like to contribute, or are interested in receiving further news about SIF please email: sif@seychelles.sc or check our website: www.sif.sc

SIF supporters 2007

The Seychelles Islands Foundation would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their generous support:

United Nations Foundation

Royal Society of London

Aldabra Foundation

FotoNatura, Nikon

Ernst Pilder

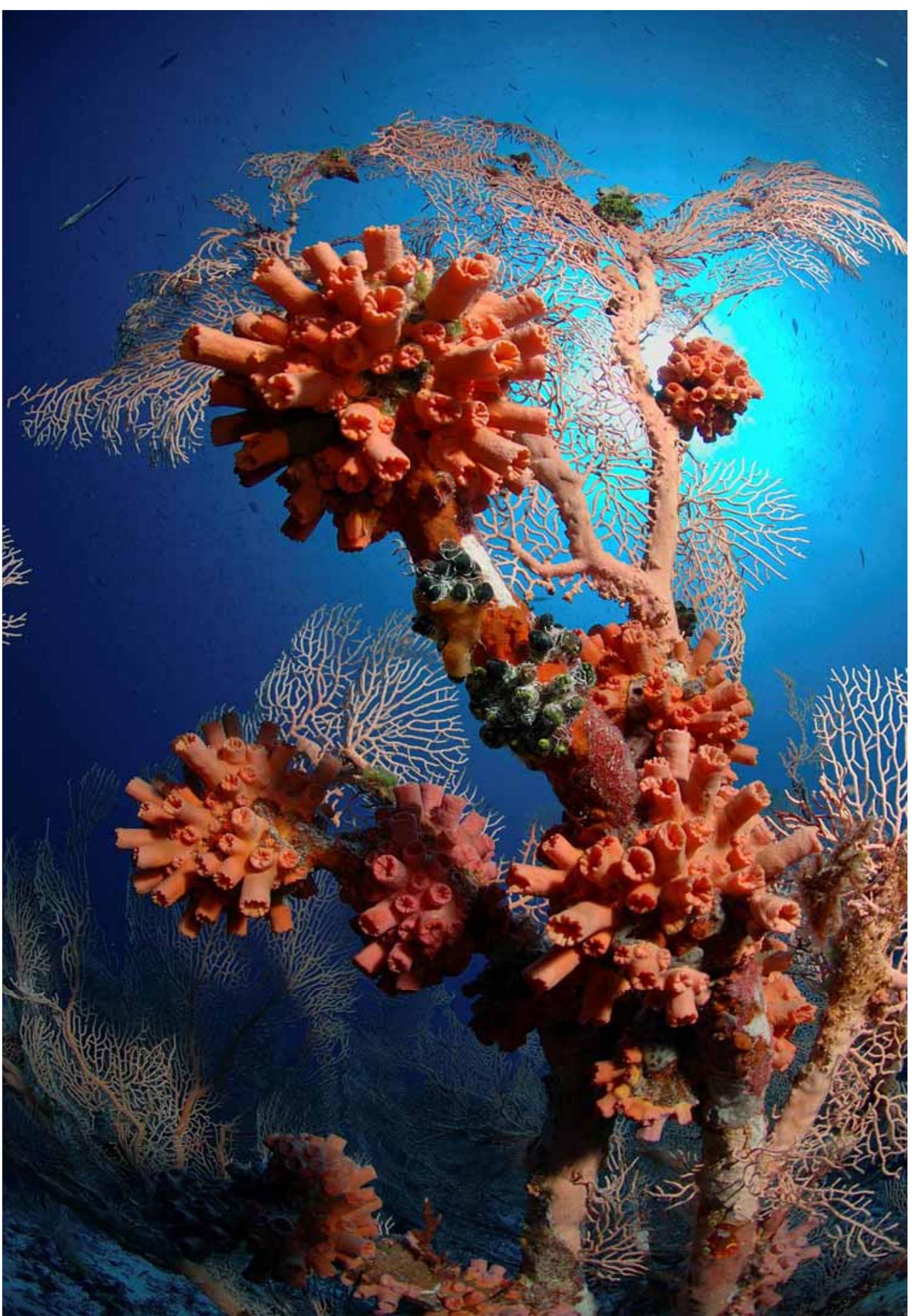
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