



World Oceans Day: focus on young people's role in ocean conservation

The James Michel Foundation commemorates World Ocean Day annually on 8 June with a conference focusing on the marine life we all depend on. More than 100 secondary school students and young professionals attended the event this year, which aims to educate young people about sustainable ocean management and preservation. The conference theme was "Together we can protect and restore our oceans".



Conference attendees outside the James Michel Foundation © SIF

Launched by former President of the Republic and Patron of SIF, James Michel, the conference included presentations by the Seychelles Fishing Authority, the National Institute of Science Technology and Innovation, the Department of the Blue Economy, the Agency for National Human Resource Development, the Department of Conservation of the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, and SIF.

The various speakers informed students about threats to our oceans and opportunities to become active members in the fight against those threats. We gave a presentation about the problem of plastic pollution on Aldabra and the Aldabra Clean-Up Project expedition which took place earlier this year in March 2019. The various institutions briefed the students about career opportunities in those sectors and education and training. The conference concluded with a high level discussion about the Marine Spatial Planning mechanism in Seychelles which was recorded for later broadcasting.

It was a fruitful and enjoyable experience for everyone involved and we are looking forward to continuing our support for this initiative in the coming years.

Environment Day celebrates local conservation efforts

To celebrate Environment Day on 5 June, conservationists from different organisations were invited to the State House by the President of the Republic of Seychelles. Three of our research staff from the Vallée de Mai, Terance Payet, Emmanuel Morel and Shanone Hibonne represented SIF at this event. In his speech of thanks for their hard work, President Faure expressed his deepest gratitude to the organisations for managing Seychelles' natural habitats including national parks both land and sea, UNESCO World Heritage sites and also for raising awareness about the importance of Seychelles' ecosystem.



Environment Day celebrations at the State House © SIF

During the ceremony two staff from the Ministry of Environment, Helene Rose and Maxime Jeremie, were presented with a certificate and other prizes for their long-term service. Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Wallace Cosgrow, gave a speech to express his appreciation to conservation organisations for helping communities by educating people in environmental protection. A short film was screened by Nathalie Dufresne from the Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA) to show the everyday work of conservationists from SNPA and Cousin Island.



Terance Payet, Shanone Hibonne and Emmanuel Morel at the State House © SIF

After the ceremony a group photo was taken in front of State House with President Faure, Minister Cosgrow, PS Alain de Comarmond, and all invited guests. The event was also a good opportunity to socialise and discuss different monitoring methods with different organisations.

SIF Vacancies

We have several vacancies on Aldabra which need to be filled urgently. We are actively seeking Seychellois applicants for all the positions. Details can be found on our website at <http://www.sif.sc/jobs> or contact HR on 432 17 35 if you are interested in any of the following positions:

- Electrical technician
- Marine mechanic
- Shopkeeper
- Logisitcs assistant with plumbing skills
- Relief skipper 60 NM
- Ranger/Boatman (with valid skipper license of 10 NM)
- Ranger
- Marine volunteer



Vallée de Mai celebrated Seychelles' National Day with a visit from a very special guest

The Vallée de Mai celebrated Seychelles' National Day on Saturday 29th June with a visit from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Saint Vincent and The Grenadines, The Honourable Dr Ralph E. Gonsalves. National Day is an annual celebration to mark the anniversary of Seychelles' independence from the United Kingdom in 1976.



Dr Ralph Gonsalves with the Vallée de Mai staff © SIF

The Prime Minister was invited by President Danny Faure to be the guest of honour for Seychelles' 43rd National Day ceremony. During his visit, he was accompanied by the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change (MEECC) Mr Wallace Cosgrow, Principal Secretary of MEECC Mr Alain Decomarmond, the Praslin Environment Coordinator Ms Shirley Joubert and Foreign Affairs officials.

Upon arrival at the Vallée De Mai, Dr Gonsalves and his delegation received a warm welcome by the Site Manager and staff, followed by a guided tour from Senior Visitors' Attendant Missia Dubignon. The Prime Minister and his delegation were given a detailed explanation about the conservation work being carried out in the forest. They learned about the iconic black parrot and the famous coco de mer which has the largest seed in the plant kingdom. At the end of the tour, the Prime Minister and his delegation were challenged to estimate the weight of a coco de mer and witness the de-husking of a coco de mer by our Security Officer, Andrea Radegonde. The Prime Minister was sat only a few metres away from this impressive sight!



Coco de mer de-husking © SIF

After the demonstration, the Prime Minister and his delegation visited the souvenir shop where they had a chance to purchase locally made crafts, before the group had a photo session with Vallée de Mai staff. This was followed by an

offering of a coco de mer book as a token of our appreciation. They then headed to the café for refreshments and signed the visitor book. The Prime Minister described the Vallée de Mai as “Simply majestic – a veritable Garden of Eden”.

Yellow Crazy Ant Activity and Exhibition for World Environment Day

The Vallée de Mai celebrated World Environment Day on 5th June around the theme of yellow crazy ants (YCA). This invasive species has spread across the entire reserve and is threatening to the Vallée de Mai ecosystem. As a major concern for SIF and its partners, we felt it was appropriate to plan the Environment Day activities around this theme.



Site Manager, Julio Agricole, opening the exhibition
© Spark

Earlier in May, SIF Science and Projects Coordinator, Jennifer Appoo, gave a presentation to all partners on the threats posed by YCA to the

Vallée de Mai. Once the partners understood the issue, they wanted to get directly involved in reducing YCA numbers in and around the Vallée de Mai using environmentally friendly methods. We decided to channel this enthusiasm into a competition! Seven organisations took part in the challenge which was held on 6th and 7th June. Most of the teams used sugary baits to attract the ants, and some collected ants directly from their nests. This was a simple and very effective method used by Acajou which awarded them 3rd place in the competition.



Prizes to be awarded to activity winners © Spark

After this activity we held an exhibition on the 28th June for each organisation to showcase the methods they used to kill the YCA. Vallée de Mai Site Manager, Julio Agricole, officially opened the exhibition with a ceremony which featured songs, poems, speeches and drama performances by schoolchildren. We also presented certificates and prizes to the teams who took part in the activity. The exhibition was open for the whole day and was an important opportunity for visitors of the Vallée de Mai to learn more about the yellow crazy ants and the threats they pose to the forest.



Schoolchildren admiring the exhibition © Spark

Send your black parrot photos to help us learn more about these birds!

This month we launched a new outreach programme to help us learn more about the black parrots. We have fitted coloured metal rings on the legs of over 250 black parrots in the last 10 years. Each parrot has a unique combination of coloured rings which allows us to identify every ringed parrot if we know the colour of both of the rings. Identifying parrots means we can learn more about their movements and life-span.



Black parrots tagged with leg rings. You can clearly see the rings of the top parrot - perfect for identifying! © SIF

We are asking people to send photos they have taken of black parrots showing the rings to blackparrot@sif.sc, along with the time and date the photo was taken, as well as the location. Any additional information photographers can provide (for example: it was in a group with three other parrots, eating starfruit) then this would also be helpful. Even if you see the same parrot on different days, we would like to know as all of this information helps to expand our knowledge of the black parrots' habits and build up a picture of their movements, survival and population dynamics.




Can you help us find our Black Parrots?
Have you spotted a black parrot wearing leg rings?




Take a photo - you could win a chance to name a parrot!

Some parrots are wearing coloured rings, every set of rings is a different colour so we know which bird it is. Please take a photo of the rings and send it to blackparrot@sif.sc or our Facebook page along with the date, time and location you took the photo.

Remember, it's the rings that are important, so make sure we can see them clearly in the photo!
A big thank you from the Vallée de Mai team! 😊

Poster advertising the black parrot campaign © SIF

Asking members of the public to send us their photos of black parrots will allow the team to gather information about parrots all over Praslin instead of only at the Vallée de Mai where the team is based and most of our efforts are concentrated. So please consider

sending us a photo whenever you see a ringed parrot, and contribute to improving our knowledge of this unique species.

Promotional film being produced for SIF

This month, a film crew from media agency Com & Click came to shoot footage in the Vallée de Mai. This footage will be used in a short promotional video about SIF, the Vallée de Mai and Aldabra which SIF can use on their website, social media sites and other channels. The content is designed to explain the work we do, showcase our achievements and inform and educate the public about these two UNESCO World Heritage sites. Com & Click are producing this film for free alongside a series of films from other conservation organisations as part of the Protected Area Finance Project.



Film crew in the Vallée de Mai © SIF

The film crew arrived at the Vallée de Mai on 20 June and our staff helped them to find the fascinating species that live in the forest. The crew saw seven giant bronze geckos, two of which were on a coco de mer tree. They also filmed the other two species of bronze gecko and both species of day gecko that occur in the forest, thus capturing all five endemic geckos of the Vallée de Mai. They were lucky enough to film several other endemics, including a juvenile Seychelles bulbul taking a bath in a stream, a coco de mer snail, and a Seychelles freshwater crab in a stream.



Film crew shooting footage in the Vallée de Mai © SIF



The mystery of coastal skinks

Similar coastal skinks are found on beach habitats across a significant portion of the tropics, and many island groups, including Australia, Polynesia, and the Western Indian Ocean, in an astonishing range which extends over 10,000 km! These animals have posed a mystery to researchers who are eager to understand long-distance dispersal and how certain groups of animals have evolved and dispersed so widely, across huge bodies of water.



Coastal skink © Sara Rocha

New research, including samples from Aldabra, which was carried out across the Western Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, has shed some light on the subject. The researchers carried out genetic analysis on skink samples and found that at some point in the past, the ancestors of modern coastal

skinks adapted to be able to exploit coastal habitats. This important new advantage also allowed the skinks to disperse widely, and they spread from Australia, west to the Western Indian Ocean islands and the East African coastline, and north and east to Hawaii and the Polynesian islands.



Researchers searching for skinks © Sara Rocha

But how did they spread so far?

The skinks were on these islands long before humans colonised, so they must have travelled there without the assistance of people. It seems that the traits that evolved which allowed them to specialise in coastal existence also enabled their journeys across such vast distances and oceans and facilitated their dispersal to many island archipelagos. This makes sense, given that traits which allow animals to thrive at the coast, such as saltwater tolerance, ability to float, etc, are also likely to make dispersal across sea water feasible. Researchers are still trying to identify exactly what the traits are that enabled the remarkable geographic spread of these fascinating creatures.

SIF is glad to have participated in this international research. You can read the [full research paper here](#).

Biosecurity steps up a level

When you consider animals that can have a big impact on environments and ecosystems, what do you think of? If you're on Aldabra, giant tortoises are the first to come to mind – they are built-in lawn mowers. But think much smaller. What about ants? Ants play a huge role in the environment, at times acting as ecosystem engineers. How can such tiny insects play such an important role?



Tapinoma malnocephalum, a widespread, sugar-loving ant found in the cup © SIF

Ants are impressive. Although different species have different tactics and colony sizes, they are an animal designed for team work. Native ants help to shape an environment, however, an introduced ant (non-native) can cause imbalance and unwanted change, thereby becoming invasive. Invasive ants are introduced unintentionally and can be hard to detect until they have fully taken over. One very well-known invasive ant, the yellow crazy ant, is a good example. It has caused massive amounts of ecological damage, making its way close to the top of the one hundred world's most invasive species list by IUCN. It is so effective that it kills and displaces native wildlife much larger than itself and has changed the vegetation structure in some of the areas it has invaded. The yellow crazy ant invaded the Seychelles several decades ago and is now found across the Vallée de Mai, where control tactics are underway (see article in Vallée de Mai section of this newsletter). To make things worse, the yellow crazy ant isn't the only species that can cause this amount of destruction – there are other high impact invasive ant species to be

concerned about.



SIF staff working on biosecurity © SIF

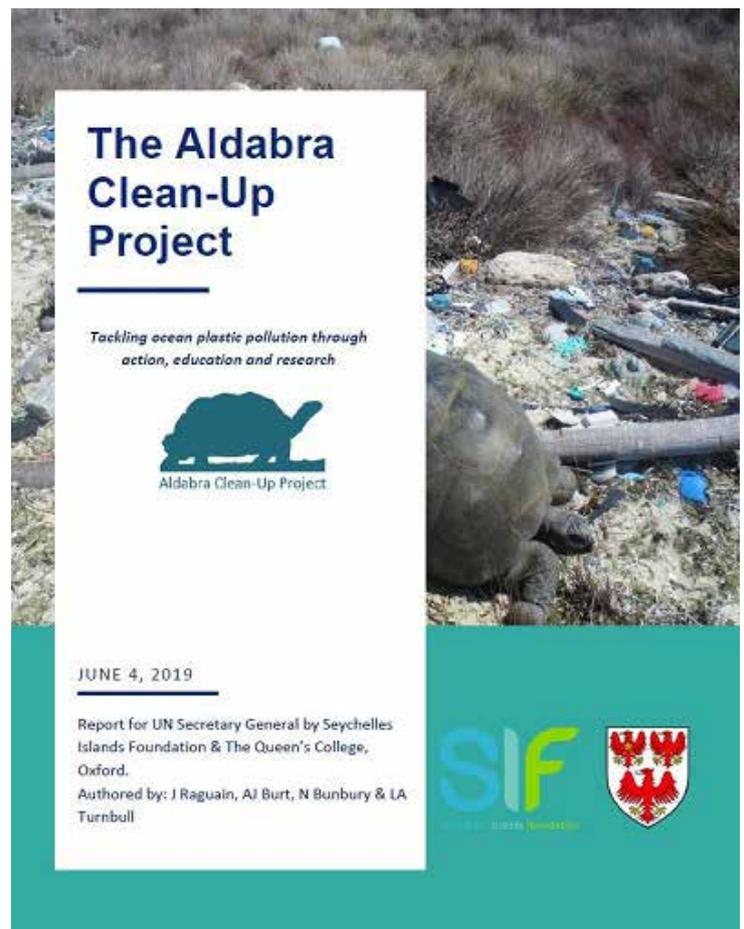
Invasive ants would be devastating for Aldabra, and control tactics would be a huge challenge if not impossible. Biosecurity measures (procedures put in place to minimize or prevent the introduction of non-native species) have been increased to impressive levels on Aldabra and by SIF staff on Mahé in the last several years. Tourists, staff, and incoming supplies are checked thoroughly before being brought onto land. A recent addition to biosecurity monitoring was to trial an ant monitoring programme on Aldabra in June. This entailed setting containers with protein and sugar baits in specific areas that have high traffic, collecting ants that visit these pots, and cataloguing what species are seen. This will give us an insight into what species are already on Aldabra. Once a system is fully developed, monitoring will be done after supplies and people are brought ashore, to act as an early detection method, in case any invasive ants were able to sneak ashore. Prevention is key, but early detection is the next most important step in ensuring these and other invasive species do not reach and establish on Aldabra. Such monitoring will play an important role in Aldabra's strengthened biosecurity programme – a whole new level of protection.



Ants attracted to a protein bait © SIF

Aldabra Clean-Up Project

June was a special month for the Aldabra Clean-Up Project. World Environment Day on the 5th June marked the first anniversary of the Aldabra Clean-Up Project's official launch in Seychelles. SIF and Queens College of Oxford University prepared a project report and video for President Danny Faure to present to the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, on 13th June at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Following this meeting President Faure, who is also a patron of SIF, met with the World Bank's Chief Executive, Kristalina Georgieva, and raised the problem of how Seychelles should dispose of all the marine waste collected from its beaches. In response the World Bank has committed to finding ways to tackle plastic consumption and disposal and identify new technologies which will help Seychelles and other states to manage the waste washing up on their shores.



Report presented to UN Secretary General © SIF

June also saw the Aldabra Clean-Up Project take part in the Commonwealth's Innovation Summit which took place from 24 to 26 June in Seychelles. The event saw participants from across Africa tackle various challenges, including the Aldabra Clean-Up Project's waste processing problem. Project Officer Jeremy facilitated the challenge with a presentation about the project and a visit to the marine debris. After seeing first-hand the scale of the task, the group assigned to this challenge came up with several short and long-term solutions and presented these to the rest of the summit. These solutions included creating value-added products such as model Aldabra species made from marine debris to sell to tourists, and turning the waste into construction materials that would be used in blocks, roofing and roads. The problem with these solutions was that the initial costs to purchase machinery are high. Any solution will need to raise enough funds to maintain such machinery and employ highly skilled labour.



Commonwealth Innovation Summit © SIF

SIF awarded the winners of the Aldabra Clean-Up Art and Essay Competition on International Biodiversity Day on 22nd May. The competition had a high turnout with 15 schools from Mahé and Praslin taking part. The prizes included a scenic helicopter flight, PADI open water diving training, a hand-painted tortoise sculpture, a day trip to Silhouette Island, ziplining, kayaking, glass bottom boat experiences and vouchers for books and art supplies.



ACUP Art and Essay Competition Prizегiving © SIF

Visiting Aldabra – a dream come true

This season Aldabra welcomed 1,017 visitors to the atoll, a dream come true for these lucky guests. Twelve vessels visited Aldabra from October 2018 to May 2019, ranging from small sailing yachts to larger expedition cruise ships. Tourists pay an impact fee which supports the running of the research station and its monitoring programmes. Activities are regulated within designated zones to reduce human disturbance, and anyone coming ashore must undergo biosecurity checks to prevent the introduction of potentially invasive alien species. Visitors are given an introductory presentation and are guided by SIF rangers throughout their stay where they learn about the research and conservation work on Aldabra. Thirty-seven diving and snorkelling activities were guided by SIF rangers and approximately 45 land tours and 22 lagoon cruises were undertaken by visitors.



SIF staff on Aldabra © SIF

Each land tour shows a different aspect of Aldabra's habitats together with current and past human activities. Guests visit a beach at La Gigi, an area where Picard is separated from Grande Terre by channels of water flowing into and out of the lagoon. Guests can relax and take photos of the UNESCO World Heritage Site plaque and

view Aldabra's lagoon and coral islets where a variety of shorebirds and seabirds can be observed. A historical tour takes guests to the Old Settlement where they can glimpse the past way of life on Aldabra. Guests walk along settlement beach where the nesting tracks of green turtles are visible in the sand and, upon reaching their destination, guests are greeted by the remnants of buildings that served a different purpose than that of today's research station. Another tour provides guests with a feeling for what it is like to explore the most remote areas of Aldabra, detouring away from the research station and into the field amongst the vegetation, following a transect where birds, tortoises and plants are monitored by the research team.



Boat trip with tourists on Aldabra © SIF

Lagoon cruises allow guests to get close to mangrove trees and coral islets where seabirds roost. The cruise floats over seagrass beds and corals that cover the lagoon floor and channels where guests can spot schools of fish, sharks and rays and green turtles. Snorkelling and diving activities give guests the extra opportunity to be immersed in Aldabra's marine environment. Guests experience the true nature of what reefs are like when marine life is given full protection from human exploitation. The team are looking forward to welcoming the next wave of explorers later this year whose dreams include setting foot

on Aldabra. If you are interested in visiting Aldabra, you can contact a tour operator such as Silhouette Cruises which includes Aldabra on their itinerary.

You can download or subscribe to the newsletter at www.sif.sc

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