



Ring-necked parakeet culled at Morne Blanc!

We are thrilled to announce that the ring-necked parakeet spotted in July was successfully targeted by the eradication team. It was shot on Wednesday 23rd August and we are now one step closer to the completion of this momentous eradication. Prior to August's successful cull, the last bird shot was in May 2016.



*Jesse Friedlander and Verçange Marie with the parakeet
© Jeremy Waters*

Although many people have contributed to the project since it started in 2013, the current team consists of Jesse Friedlander, an experienced avian hunter who was part of the original eradication team from 2014 to 2015, Jeremy Waters, a volunteer with previous experience eradicating mynah birds from North Island, and Julio Agricole and Jessica Moumou, invasive alien species technicians who were also part of the original eradication team. The team was assisted by Verçange Marie of the Seychelles People's Defence Force. Corporal Marie

has been a dedicated and tireless member of the team and SIF is extremely grateful to him and to the Seychelles People's Defence Force, particularly Chief of Staff Colonel Rosette and Colonel Luther, for their support in the eradication. Without their willingness this eradication project would not be possible. SIF is also extremely grateful to the Ministry of Employment, Immigration and Civil Status for their assistance, and to the Environment Trust Fund who have provided the emergency funding to complete the eradication.



*Mr Damou awarded the bounty by Julio Agricole ©
Jeremy Waters*

A key part of the eradication has been the public information campaign and the information provided by the public has been of vital importance at every stage, especially for the last elusive birds to be targeted. The sixteen months between the bird shot in August and the one shot in May 2016 is an indication of the difficulty locating birds in the highly vegetated, mountainous and sparsely populated parts of Mahé. The existence of the bird that was culled in August is thought to be the one discovered as a result of several members of the public, including Wilna Accouche the former SIF

science programme officer, who spotted it near their homes and called the SIF hotline. Instrumental in the process were Mr and Mrs Damou, of Morne Blanc, who notified the team each time they saw the bird in the albizia tree on their property. Their continuous efforts allowed the eradication team to identify the most likely position in which to shoot it and following the successful cull last Wednesday Mr and Mrs Damou were awarded the SCR 2000 bounty. Following the successful cull Mrs Damou said that she is supporting SIF in this initiative in order to “keep our endemic black parrot safe, we have to protect the parrot!”

Although the last known bird in the wild has been culled, it is possible that there are more ring-necked parakeets remaining on Mahé. The bounty awards have now been increased to **SCR 500 for a parakeet sighting** which is confirmed by the eradication team, and **SCR 5000 for a confirmed sighting which then leads to a cull by the team.** If you have any information on recent sightings of these birds please contact the team as soon as possible on 2523623.

SIF and Friends of Vallée de Mai club participate in Seychelles sea turtle festival



SIF staff and visitors at the SIF stand © SIF

The Seychelles sea turtle festival is an event held every year in August to celebrate the sea turtles inhabiting Seychelles waters. Students from many schools and environment clubs, as well as NGO’s and other interested citizens and organisations join together to celebrate some of Seychelles most loved species. The festival is organised by the Seychelles Sea Turtle Festival Committee, and 2017 was a milestone for the event in that it was the 5th edition of the festival. The festival has previously taken place at Beau Vallon beach, but this year the organisers revamped the event, leading a march through the heart of Victoria on a busy Saturday morning, attracting a lot of attention from passers-by. The march ended at the old playground with an exhibition set-up for all to enjoy, including multiple sea turtle inspired educational activities.



SIF staff at the SIF stand © SIF

SIF staff took part in the march, and were joined by 12 children from the Friends of Vallée de Mai clubs, who travelled from Praslin for the event. SIF had a stall at the exhibition, with three main activities for children; ‘make your own turtle’ from recycled material, turtle conservation themed snakes and ladders, and a pledge board where participants could write their pledge to protect turtles. It was a fun day for us and all our friends and supporters.



The hugely popular snakes and ladders © SIF

The day ended with a prize giving for the school with the best creative idea, slogan and costumes, and all schools were presented with a save the turtle t-shirt. Thanks to the Seychelles Sea Turtle Festival Committee for a fantastic event once again!

SIF Instagram launched...



SIF is active on Facebook and Twitter, and as of August also has an Instagram profile to add to our social media offering. Launched in 2010, and bought by facebook in 2012, Instagram is the fastest growing social media site. With over 700 million monthly active users, Instagram is still much smaller than its parent site Facebook, but it is more than twice the size of Twitter. Importantly, Instagram users have a slightly different demographic than the

other social media platforms, with significantly younger users, it will become increasingly important as a tool to reach young people.

Instagram is predominantly visual and is designed to share photos and videos, but text is also added to the photos, Instagram users expect aesthetically pleasing photos, in contrast to Facebook which is more content based. The focus of the SIF Instagram account will therefore be to showcase Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai as the spectacular sites they are, while the focus of Facebook and Twitter will continue to be keeping our supporters up to date with everything happening at SIF and at both sites, with a healthy mix of ‘the spectacular’ thrown in! While there will by occasional overlap, the content on Facebook and Instagram will be designed to complement each other, so if you’re only following us on one of the platforms be sure to check us out on the other as well! Follow us at: https://www.instagram.com/sif_seychelles/



SIF Instagram profile © SIF



August holiday camp, bigger than ever!

Twice a year the SIF team at the Vallée de Mai host a holiday camp during the August and December school holidays. The August Holiday camp this year was held from the 14th to the 25th August. This was the 11th edition and was special, as in addition to the usual one week holiday camp funded by SIF, the Ministry of Family Affairs provided funding for an extra week of the camp. The Ministry of Family Affairs supported the SIF programme as part of efforts to provide children who may otherwise have been left unattended with a safe and educational occupation during the holidays.



Holiday camp participants © SIF



Arts and crafts © SIF

During the programme, children have the opportunity to learn about many different topics; birds, invasive species, forest ecosystems, rivers, the Vallée de Mai reserve and Aldabra Atoll. Activities include crafts, nature trails, environmental games and this year also included a visit to the Natural History Museum and National Botanical Garden on Mahé. The holiday camp was attended by 58 enthusiastic students.



Beautiful artwork created during bird themed activities © SIF

A short ceremony was held on the last day of the holiday camp where representatives from the Ministry of Family Affairs, Vallée de Mai staff

and parents of the participants were present. Thanks to the Ministry of Family Affairs for the support. We can't wait for the December holiday camp!

Rat control around black parrot nests; determining the impacts of an introduced mammal on an endemic bird species



Seychelles black parrot chicks and eggs are vulnerable to rats © SIF

Monitoring of the breeding success of the Seychelles black parrot has been carried out by SIF annually for the past eight years and has resulted in an excellent baseline dataset on many aspects of nesting in this endemic species. During this time, rats have been implicated in the failure of many nests and are thought to be the main constraint to breeding success and possibly population growth of the black parrot. In spite of this, we do not know for certain that nests with rat control are more successful (i.e. more likely to fledge young) than nests without rat control.



Rat inside a black parrot nesting cavity © SIF

This uncertainty will be addressed under SIF's Inva'Ziles project in the Vallée de Mai. For the first time in Seychelles, a study of rat control around black parrot nests will be applied to measure critical information needed for decision-making, particularly during seasons with low nesting success, concerning impacts of an introduced mammal on an endemic species. This component of the project has important management implications, if rats are confirmed to have a significant impact on black parrot breeding success, long-term measures to control them around nest sites will be considered and implemented on a permanent basis.

Vallée de Mai science coordinator attends Systematic Adaptive Management Training

The Vallée de Mai science coordinator recently attended the Systematic Adaptive Management (SAM) training for the Western Indian Ocean marine protected areas. The course was organised by the Seychelles National Park Authority (SNPA) and held on Curieuse Island for

four days in July. The participating organisations were SNPA, Island Conservation Society, the Ministry of Environment, and SIF. This course was a follow-up course from the one held in August 2016, and was facilitated by Dr Jennifer O’Leary, the SAM Leader, who was also one of the facilitators for the 2016 edition.

The course was organised in order to increase capacity for participants to practice adaptive management in their respective marine protected area. Participants were taught about SMART goals – that is Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic and Time bound – and how these can help the management of marine protected areas. Participants were also advised on how to better assess their managements action through a model; setting objectives, assessing whether objectives were met or not, and resetting the objectives if not met. There were also practical



Field work practical session © SIF

sessions, participants practiced sea grass monitoring and coral monitoring in the Curieuse marine park. By the end of the training each participant was awarded a certificate for the completion of the course. Thank you to SNPA for hosting the training!



aldabra atoll

New giant tortoise monitoring programme

The new Aldabra giant tortoise monitoring programme protocol was finalised in August, and marks a milestone for Aldabra research. The new protocol has been in development for at least a year, in collaboration with external researchers and the Zurich Aldabra Research Platform team. The tortoises will now be monitored using two new methods; distance transects and sweep surveys. The new survey methods were presented to the research team and then an infield training session was conducted.



Aldabra giant tortoise © Foto Natura

Aldabra Atoll hosts the largest wild Aldabra giant tortoise population in the world, amounting to about 100,000. The species has been monitored by SIF every month since 1998. However a review of the data collected over the years identified some shortcomings of the previous study and recommended new methodologies to be set up. Distance transects and sweep surveys have been identified as appropriate methods to survey the large herbivores. Distance transects will allow management to accurately determine the total population of tortoises on the atoll and follow its trend. On the other hand, the sweep surveys will provide vital information on tortoise biology such as size, sex and age, with an increased understanding on other factors like their distribution, mortality and recruitment on the atoll. Other components of the sweep survey involve identifying and monitoring key tortoises nesting areas, as well as mark and recapture.



Tortoises at Aldabra © Jake Letori

Technology use will be improved for better data collection, the distance transects will be conducted using distance pointers and the sweep surveys will be recorded directly on a hand held device called the Trimble, enabling a standardized and more efficient data collection process. The surveys will be conducted twice a year, at several locations on the atoll, encompassing different vegetation types.

The science coordinator presented these new methods to both the research and logistics staff. Infield training was also given to the research team to ensure all the surveyors are properly trained for the new monitoring programme. The first actual set of surveys will be conducted in



Staff receiving training © SIF

September and all research staff are looking forward to these new exciting surveys, and the results they will yield! Everyone is eager to know the new population estimate since the present one of 100 000 is quite dated.

August maintenance on the atoll

The month of August is the peak of the south-east monsoon on Aldabra with very rough sea around the atoll. With no visitors landing on Aldabra and fewer activities at sea, the logistics team always uses this time to focus on general maintenance of the infrastructure, engines and



The old gym during and after renovations © SIF

other equipment on Picard Island in preparation for the start of the busy north-west season. In addition to the routine maintenance this year the team has been repairing an old building that was used as a gym. The complete renovation included plastering the walls, replacing the roof, building a small veranda and turning part of the building into a kitchen. The new facilities have been made available for staff recreation time, to socialise on the weekends or simply to chill out after a long day of work, enjoying the sunset and playing dominos.



Celebrating the completed renovation © SIF

The team also had some unplanned work in August with the collapse of the old water tower! The Aldabra water tower, which uses the natural pull of gravity to provide water to the Aldabra station, has been in existence for over 12 years. For this system, two fibre glass tanks with a capacity of 3000 litres are placed on top of the tower; one tank holds sea water that is used in the toilets and one is for fresh water for general consumption. The tower itself was made of mild steel and, despite regular maintenance, due to the high salinity on Aldabra over time the metal has oxidized.

Construction of a new tower started in November last year, with galvanized steel frames received from the Seychelles National Park Authority. At the time, with the visiting supply boat and the

Indian navy crew, the Aldabra team was able to build the base and erect two pillars. Afterwards the team continued to build the remaining two bases, but due to manpower limitations on the atoll it was not possible to erect the remaining pillars. However, recently the old tower collapsed and a determined team was able to build a temporary solution with a wooden tower to be used until the project can be completed. Finishing the water tower is a priority on the work plan now!



Collapsed water tower and the temporary wooden solution © SIF

Articles contributed by: Jennifer Appoo, Samia Auguste, Jude Brice, Nancy Bunbury, Annabelle Constance, Nathanielle Julie, and Lynsey Rimbault and Vicky Stravens; **Editing by** Annabelle Constance and Lynsey Rimbault