



Introduced birds successfully eradicated from Assumption!

After three years of intensive eradication efforts and two more years of not seeing a red-whiskered bulbul or Madagascar fody on the island of Assumption, SIF is delighted to report that the eradication of these introduced species has been successful!



Assumption Island from the air © SIF

The two invasive alien bird species were introduced to Assumption in the 1970s from Mauritius. The presence of these introduced species on an island only 28 km from Aldabra was highlighted as early as the 1980s as a significant potential threat to Aldabra's native birds. Aldabra, at the time, was one of the largest tropical islands in the world on which only native bird species occurred. Funding to start an eradication programme for both species on Assumption was finally secured in 2010 from the European Union, co-financed by SIF. Preparation work and trials of methods started on the island in late 2011 and the eradication effort was launched in early 2012.

Three years of permanent presence on the island by an SIF team of between two and ten staff followed, with more than 30 different staff,

volunteers and students being involved in the eradication activities at some point. The dominant method of bird capture shifted from mist-netting at the beginning of the project to mainly shooting after the mid-point, as the density of the birds dropped and the remaining birds became ever more wary. The last year of the project was the most difficult, with dedicated staff relentlessly pursuing the last handful of highly sensitised birds. At this late stage the team could spend up to several weeks targeting each individual, so every single bird successfully eliminated was a cause for quiet celebration and relief.

More than 5000 red-whiskered bulbuls were targeted and the last of these was shot in December 2014. Over 3200 Madagascar fodies were eliminated, with the final bird shot in January 2015, but it was not known at the time that this was the last bird so three further months of intensive continuous observations were required to convince the team that there were unlikely to be more fodies on the island.

Three major follow-up trips to Assumption have been carried out since then, with no indication of either species. Multiple shorter visits by Aldabra staff transiting Assumption have also occurred during this time with all eyes trained for any signs of the introduced birds. After two years with no traces of red-whiskered bulbuls or Madagascar fodies on Assumption, we are at last confident that the eradication can be considered a success.

Early on in the Assumption eradication efforts, both introduced species were also found for the first time



The endemic Aldabra fody is one of the species that will benefit from the eradication © Fotonatura

on Aldabra, validating concerns about their presence on Assumption, and leaving SIF with no choice but to start another expensive eradication programme as soon as possible. Fortunately, UNESCO emergency funding was quickly secured to partially support these new efforts on Aldabra, and eradication work and research were conducted on both islands in parallel for 3 years. The single red-whiskered bulbul on Aldabra was eradicated very quickly. Dealing with the greater number of Madagascar fodies, however, was more complicated, especially after research confirmed our fears that they were hybridising with the endemic Aldabra fodies. Genetic research also showed that the Madagascar fodies on Aldabra originated from the Assumption population and that their presence on Aldabra pre-dated the eradication efforts on Assumption. After three years of eradication activities under challenging circumstances, our team has now eliminated all of the known Madagascar fodies on Aldabra and we are in the follow-up phase of monitoring to confirm their absence. Aldabra, along with Assumption, should once again be on its way to becoming free of introduced birds, and this time with minimal risk of new introductions.

our funders, the European Union, that we are able to announce the successful eradication of both red-whiskered bulbuls and Madagascar fodies from the island of Assumption. Although both species are common across the Western Indian Ocean islands and have been controlled elsewhere, we are not aware that either species has been successfully eliminated from any other island and believe that this eradication represents a world first for invasive species management.



The final large team of hunters and observers on Assumption © SIF

We would also like to thank everybody who has been involved in this huge eradication effort: consultants, team leaders, long-term staff, hunters, students, volunteers, Aldabra staff and all Head Office staff. You are too many to list here but every one of you was a needed part of the team and helped to secure this remarkable achievement.



A large catch in the early days of the eradication (left); firearms were used increasingly as the project progressed (top right); Eradication Team Leader with one of the last red-whiskered bulbuls (bottom right) © SIF

After this lengthy eradication mission and innumerable unexpected complications along the way, it is with enormous relief, and sincere gratitude to our partners, the Islands Development Company and Island Conservation Society, and

Vacancies at SIF

It's an excellent time to join the SIF team with several vacancies at Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai!

Two exciting conservation volunteer positions are available on Aldabra; these positions are open for Seychellois nationals and foreigners.

- The **data analysis volunteer** must have excellent experience analysing ecological data and will be set specific tasks relating to Aldabra data management, the role will also include field work at remote locations around the atoll. There

will be opportunities to contribute to or lead on scientific publications.

- The **monitoring and data processing volunteer** will work as part of the Aldabra research team, conducting routine monitoring on turtles, giant tortoises, birds and plant, as well as being set specific tasks assisting with research and organisational tasks. Field work will include spending time at remote field camps, and boat work.

Both positions are for a period of 6 – 8 months and include all living expenses, transport to and from the atoll and a small stipend. Hurry though, the **deadline has been extended to Tuesday 21st February** so prospective volunteers have a few more days to apply! Contact Nancy at nancy@sif.sc for details.



There are also several paid positions available for Seychellois nationals at Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai:

Aldabra

- Maintenance and Logistic Technician , urgently needed

Vallée de Mai

- Security Officer x 2
- Field Worker x 3
- Sales Clerk x 2
- Housekeeper x 2
- Visitor Centre Service Coordinator
- Property Maintenance Supervisor

Contact Bernadette at hr@sif.sc or +248 432 17 35 for details.

Aldabra fossils transported to Zurich



Fossilised lower jaw fragment of Adabra crocodile © SIF

As reported in our May 2016 newsletter, in December 2015 members of the Zurich-Aldabra Research Platform (ZARP) group visited Aldabra. Dr Dennis Hansen, one of the researchers, discovered several fossils in a dried out pool, including a large piece of the lower jaw of the extinct Aldabra Crocodile! Following photographic identification of some of the fossils it was agreed that the fossils would be sent to several researchers at the University of Zurich who are leading world experts in extinct crocodiles and chelonians.

The logistics of transporting biological specimens internationally can be challenging and very expensive and we were delighted when Hunt Deltel, after reading about our find, contacted us and offered to transport the fossils from Mahe to the researchers in Zurich. The fossils have safely arrived with no damage in Zurich and the research on them is able to begin. SIF would like to sincerely thank Hunt Deltel for sponsoring the shipment of fossils in January and we look forward to updating you on this exciting project in due course.



Critique of Giant Tortoise Human-Translation Hypothesis

Late last year an SIF-co-authored commentary was published in the Journal of Biogeography (Hansen *et al.*, 2016) critiquing a recently proposed human-translocation hypothesis on

the origins of endemic island tortoises in the western Indian Ocean. Dr Dennis Hansen of the Department of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies at the University of Zurich led a team of scientists in response to a paper published in the same journal by Wilmé *et al.* (2016). Wilmé *et al.* argued that the early human colonisers on Madagascar in the last few thousand years transported giant tortoises from island to island in the Western Indian Ocean, which then established wild populations and evolved into separate species.

Hansen *et al.* critique this theory for several reasons. Firstly, Wilmé *et al.* were not clear about when the proposed transport of tortoises actually occurred; the first evidence of people on Madagascar was 4000 years ago, but the paper provides unsubstantiated suggestions that people may have arrived there much earlier. Hansen *et al.* further argue that the island tortoises included in Wilmé *et al.*'s hypothesis are from at least eight species across two genera, and that these eight species have significant morphological and genetic differences. There is no evidence to support the evolution of eight separate species in the relatively tiny evolutionary time period of a few thousand years since humans first allegedly transported them.



Swimming Aldabra giant tortoise © Fotonatura

One of Wilmé *et al.*'s main arguments is that it is very unlikely that giant tortoises would float or swim to such small and 'young' islands, but this argument ignores the evidence that Aldabra was re-colonised by giant tortoises each time it

re-emerged as a result of sea level fluctuations. Hansen *et al.* also point out that when sea levels were lower, islands were larger and many areas that are now under water would have been above sea level. This would have reduced the distance between islands and made it more likely for tortoises to travel between them.



Aldabra giant tortoise in the waves © Fotonatura

Wilmé *et al.* state that giant tortoises are poor swimmers and that after drifting for such a long time at sea would be too stressed to reproduce. This argument ignores evidence of tortoises on Aldabra actively swimming to favoured browsing areas, sometimes against tidal currents. It also discounts Aldabra tortoises that have been found alive on the coast of Tanzania and Kenya, covered in barnacles from months at sea, some of which were later observed to join a breeding herd.

Hansen *et al.* provide sufficient evidence to rule out Wilmé *et al.*'s theory but they are concerned about the impact of the paper on conservation and education. The Indian Ocean islands have high numbers of unique native species which are threatened by non-native species, and confusion among politicians and the general public about which species are native could impede conservation in the region.

References:

Wilmé, L., Waeber, P.O. & Ganzhorn, J.U. (2016) Human translocation as an alternative hypothesis to explain the presence of giant tortoises on remote islands in the south-western Indian Ocean. *Journal of Biogeography*.

Hansen, D.M., Austin, J.J., Baxter, R.H., de Boer, E.J., Falcón, W., Norder, S.J., Rijdsdijk, K.F., Thébaud, C., Bunbury, N.J. and Warren, B.H. (2016) Origins of endemic island tortoises in the western Indian Ocean: a critique of the human-translocation hypothesis. *Journal of Biogeography*.

SIF Celebrates National Protected Area Day with Activities on Mahé and Praslin

National Protected Area Day is celebrated each year on 31st January, to help raise awareness of the importance of conserving the protected areas in Seychelles. A variety of activities were organised around the country to commemorate Protected Area Day this year. The protected areas in Seychelles include national parks, reserves and marine parks. Seychelles UNESCO World Heritage Site's, Aldabra Atoll and the Vallée de Mai, are both protected areas.



One of the participants in the Protected Area Day march on Mahé © SIF

On Mahé, the Government of Seychelles, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) Programme Coordination Unit organised a march in which school children from the central area of Mahé and staff from different environmental organisations participated. The group walked from the National

Botanical Gardens, around Victoria and ended at the Gallery of Arts. During the march participants chanted and sang messages to emphasize the importance of the protected areas in Seychelles. SIF staff also participated in the march. At demarcated points during the march the schools entertained participants with special performances about environmental issues. On arrival at the Gallery of Arts there was a short ceremony to officially launch the Protected Area Finance Plan, Seychelles National Parks Strategic plan and Seychelles Wildlife Club Magazine on Outer Islands



Vallée de Mai staff ready to paint the Old People's home © SIF

SIF also organised activities on Praslin to commemorate Protected Area Day. Vallée de Mai staff repainted the Old People's home on Praslin on Monday 30th January. SIF staff were delighted to see the joy on the faces of the residents while they watched the painting work. The bolder residents made jokes from time to time while others excitedly watched from a distance.

For the past three years SIF has endeavoured to help the centre for disabled children on Praslin by providing them with educational resources each year. It was with pleasure that SIF donated educational resources to the disabled children at the school again this year. The educational resources were presented in a short ceremony which was held at Baie Ste Anne Primary School on Monday 6th February. The presentation of educational resources to the centre for disabled children was followed by a donation of reference

books for the total value of almost SCR 30 000 to Praslin's schools and public libraries. Present at the ceremony were representatives of libraries from all four schools on Praslin and the two public libraries, teachers and pupils from the centre for disabled children Praslin, the management team of Baie Ste Anne Primary School and some Vallée de Mai staff. On behalf of the schools, Ms Monique Lesperance, head teacher of Baie Ste Anne Primary School expressed her appreciation to SIF for the donations. The children showed their appreciation by performing a song.



Children from the centre for disabled children receiving their educational materials © SIF

SIF is continuing in its commitment to engage with the community on Praslin. We aim for these activities help to increase the willingness for other organisations to participate in activities organised by SIF and nurture a greater sense of connection between local residents and the Vallée de Mai. We hope that our activities with the Praslinois community will help all residents to appreciate the importance of the Vallée de Mai.



Black Parrot Chicks Begin Fledging!

January was an exciting month for the black parrot team in the Vallée de Mai, with the ringing of Seychelles black parrot chicks beginning, and the first six believed to have fledged! When black parrot chicks have grown large enough, usually at around 25 days old, the team fits coloured rings to them to allow identification and monitoring after they have left the nest. Each chick gets its own unique colour combination and number. The rings are made of aluminium and are fitted using pliers which are specifically designed for the job. The rings fit loosely so that they can move freely on the leg and they do not cause the parrot any discomfort. During January, many of the black parrot chicks being monitored grew large enough to have their coloured rings fitted.



Black parrot chick with rings fitted © SIF

A total of eight chicks were ringed in January and six of those are believed to have fledged successfully as they are no longer in their nests. Two others are yet to fledge but are expected to do so at the start

of February. Although none of the rings from fledged chicks have been confirmed from re-sightings, there have been several observations of adult parrots feeding smaller parrots, which are likely to be the fledglings.



Black parrot chicks in a nest © SIF

In addition to the successful nests this year in the Vallée de Mai and the Praslin National Park, at least one nest is known to have been successful in the monitored area of Fond Ferdinand. An unringed fledgling was spotted in Fond Ferdinand. This is great news as the success rate of nests in Fond Ferdinand was low this season, with only one chick from the known nests surviving to fledging stage. The sighting suggests that the parrots have been more successful than we are aware of in this area and that next season more extensive searches may be required to find more suitable nesting cavities.



Feeding time © SIF

Exciting Research on Vallée de Mai Herpetofauna Begins



Seychelles tree frog © SIF

New exciting research is being set up in the Vallée de Mai to monitor the unique and diverse herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) found in the forest. This upcoming research should start filling in the gaps in herpetofauna knowledge in the palm forest, because at present several species and their role in the forest, are understudied. Given the crucial role herpetofauna play in ecosystems, and the Vallée de Mai's status as a 'herp-hotspot', more information on these species will provide more insight into the Vallée de Mai ecosystem in general. The research will include surveys of several species, including the bronze and day geckos, the two species of chameleon, snakes, skinks and frogs. Research

on these species can be difficult because they are active at different times of the day or night, they can be extremely cryptic and because of the wide variety of habitats in which they live. Some are arboreal, living in trees, whilst others are terrestrial, living on the ground. The project is just beginning, with numerous monitoring strategies being investigated to identify the most appropriate methods for use in the palm forest. Stay posted for more news on this as it progresses.

In the meantime, the giant bronze geckos (*Ailuronyx trachygaster*) that were fitted with radio transmitters as part of MSc research investigating population status and territory size are now being re-caught to remove these. Several animals have



Giant bronze gecko © SIF

already been caught and had their transmitters and backpack harnesses removed, with some even having gained weight while wearing the harnesses! This is a positive sign that the harnesses have not impeded survival of the tracked geckos. Several others have been spotted during night searches and efforts are continuing to recapture these. Patience and a bit of luck will be required to get the final few!

Vallée de Mai Science Coordinator Accepted for Course at Durrell Conservation Academy

Vallée de Mai Science Coordinator Vicky Stravens is delighted to have been offered a place on the 2017 prestigious Durrell Endangered Species Management (DESMAN) graduate certificate course based at Jersey Zoo in the UK. Vicky is the latest of several SIF staff members to benefit from this international conservation course, with



Seychelles chameleon © SIF

Vallée de Mai Site Manager Marc Jean-Baptiste completing the course in 2012 and black parrot team leader Terance Payet doing it in 2016. Marc said of the course: “as a conservation manager it was eye-opening, I learnt a lot about management plans and facilitation as well as other skills a conservation manager needs”.



Vicky Stravens, Vallée de Mai Science Coordinator © SIF

The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (Durrell) was established in 1963 by Gerald Durrell, a naturalist and author. Durrell’s main aim is to prevent extinctions and since its creation it has contributed to the recovery of critically endangered mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians in the wild. In 1984 Durrell expanded to establish the Durrell Conservation Academy at Jersey Zoo as a form of “mini university” designed to equip conservation practitioners and students with the animal management and critical thinking skills required to help species recover from the risk of extinction. Since this time the academy has taught over 5500 people from 137 countries.

Since the creation of the ‘summer school’ training course, a full suite of courses have been designed for conservation biologists working worldwide. Vicky will be taking part in the course from February 27th to May 19th 2017. Vicky is very happy to have been accepted on the course and is excited to continue her own development and self-achievement, and to gain skills that

will help with her work at SIF. Vicky said of the DESMAN course that: “this training will allow me to be better equipped with the necessary conservation management techniques and skills to lead the research team in Vallée de Mai to ensure the survival of threatened species”.

SIF attend official launch of the SNYC values programme 2017

On Tuesday 17th January 2017, a group of Vallée de Mai staff were invited by the Seychelles National Youth Council (SNYC) to attend the official launching of the values programme for 2017. The ceremony was held at the Pension Fund Conference Room. During the ceremony there were several presentations and performances such as poems and songs by schoolchildren. The highlights of the ceremony were the speech by Minister for Youth, Sports and Culture, Ms Idith Alexander and the speech by SNYC CEO Mr Alvin Laurence. In her speech Minister Alexander emphasized her ministry’s commitment to developing good values among the youth. Mr Laurence’s speech focused on activities that were organised over the past three years and made special mention of its faithful partners on Praslin, for which SIF was mentioned. Mr Laurence’s speech ended with the showing of a video of the activities that SNYC has organized under this programme since 2014.



Ms Alexander and Mr Laurence delivering their speeches © SIF

US Embassy Visits the Vallée de Mai

During their official visit to the Seychelles, the US Embassy's Chargé d' Affaires, Melanie Zimmerman, and the Consul, Jenn Barr, was hosted on Wednesday 18th January 2017 to the Vallée de Mai. Site Manager Marc Jean-Baptiste was delighted to formally welcome the delegation at the Vallée de Mai Visitor Centre. As their time was limited, Mr Jean-Baptiste took them on an introductory tour, following the Vallée de Mai's shorter circular path.



US Embassy delegation with Vallée de Mai Site Manager Marc Jean-Baptiste © SIF

The guests learnt a lot about the palm forest ecosystem and were particularly impressed by the gigantic size of the coco de mer leaves, nut and catkins, as well as by the palm dominated forest canopy which they described as 'amazingly incredible'. They expressed their wish to come back to the Vallée de Mai another time and to spend more time exploring and appreciating this unique biodiversity hot spot.



aldabra atoll

Aldabra's Landbirds: Flurry of Breeding Activity in the Rainy Season

The north-west monsoon season is a busy period for Aldabra's avian inhabitants. The higher monthly rainfall between November and April substantially increases the productivity of this otherwise extremely dry, terrestrial ecosystem, and with more rainfall comes a greater availability of food in the form of flowering and fruiting plants and all the other life forms supported by plants. Aldabra's eleven endemic species and subspecies of landbird use this time of comparative bounty to concentrate on rearing the next generation, with mating activity and nesting attempts occurring from November to April.



Souminga sunbird © Adam Mitchell

For the effective conservation management of Aldabra's landbirds, it is important that the nesting success of these species is quantified and the factors that limit recruitment are understood. Generally the trend of Aldabra's landbird population sizes is increasing apart from the drongo population which remained stable; however, their population sizes are relatively small (i.e. in the hundreds or thousands) and are likely to be particularly vulnerable to environmental changes and random events.



Aldabra drongo © SIF

Nesting success and post-fledging survival is the main factor governing landbird population recruitment, and the Aldabra research team locates and regularly monitors nesting attempts on Picard island throughout the north-west season. This year, three endemic landbird species and subspecies are being focused on: the Aldabra drongo, Aldabra fody and souminga sunbird. More than 50 nesting attempts have been located thus far across a large area of southern Picard, with records kept of habitat type, nesting stage, nest contents, adult activity, predation and failure cause.

Happily, tens of sunbird chicks have successfully fledged, as has a (tricky to find) single drongo. While a few fody nests are still in progress, a substantial number of those monitored have failed, more often due to nest collapse or abandonment than any evidence of predation. The many potential Aldabra nest predators are mostly native species: coconut crabs, herons, geckos, drongos, pied crows, coucals, rails,

and kestrels; but introduced rats are also a major nest predator, so all successful fledglings have overcome unfavourable odds against their survival.

Improving knowledge of reproductive success and failure in Aldabra's landbirds over the long-term helps us to assess impacts of potential and actual ecological changes, and provides baseline data that can inform conservation management decisions and understand whether interventions would assist or be unnecessary. In the next newsletter we will update our findings of this season and hope that there will be many more successful fledglings to report on completion of the monitoring in April.

Aldabra's mangroves at the forefront of MSc thesis



Annabelle collecting data © SIF

University of Zurich MSc student and SIF staff member, Annabelle Constance, recently completed and presented her thesis, which focussed on mangrove distribution and composition on Aldabra. Mangrove habitat is a globally important but highly threatened coastal ecosystem. Mangroves occur almost all around the lagoon shores of Aldabra and, although they are a major component of Aldabra's status as a Ramsar wetland site of international importance, there has been limited research on the structural

properties and distribution over time of mangrove habitat at the site.



Rhizophora mucronata © Fotonatura

Firstly, to address the research gap on mangrove species structural characteristics on Aldabra, Annabelle conducted field surveys in a remote part of eastern Grande Terre called Bras Cinq Cases. In April–May 2016, she observed a total of three of the seven mangrove species known to occur on the atoll. Structurally, the most dominant species in the stand was *Rhizophora mucronata* (mangliye rouz) followed by *Ceriops tagal* (mangliye zonn) and *Avicennia marina* (mangliye blan). The tallest mangrove tree recorded was 8.1 m and the largest had a stem diameter of 47.4 cm. Seedling density was high, which indicates a high regeneration rate and recruitment potential of mangroves in this area and means that the mangrove species occurring here have the capacity to multiply and spread.

Secondly, to understand how the size of the mangrove habitat is changing over time in this low-lying plant community, Annabelle used satellite imagery from several years to detect changes in the mangrove area across the atoll. Over a period of 15 years from 1995 to 2009, mangrove extent varied considerably and a small overall gain of 174 hectares of mangrove area occurred. Mangrove vegetation changed most on the landward edges, where both significant expansion into new suitable areas and retraction in others occurred.

Aldabra

Annabelle's results confirm that the mangroves in the well protected area of Aldabra are highly stable over time and are likely to expand in the right conditions. This is at least some good news for mangroves here, at a time when essential mangrove habitat is in decline and threatened across much of the rest of the tropics.

A technical recommendation emerging from Annabelle's work is that satellite data can be continuously used to monitor habitat change trends in mangrove areas, which are important sentinels of climate change impacts in this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Cruise Ship Guests get a Taste of Aldabra

In the north-west monsoon season, a small number of cruise ships are given the opportunity to visit Aldabra with their guests; this season, three ships - the Silver Discoverer, MV Island Sky, and Le Lyrial - were granted permission to anchor offshore in the newly designated 'parking' area to ensure no damage to Aldabra's coral reef. Guests were treated to presentations by the Aldabra Scientific Coordinator, April Burt, and volunteer, Adam Mitchell, addressing Aldabra's uniqueness, SIF's research and monitoring goals, and the stringent regulations to which all visitors to the island must adhere at all times.



Presentation by April © SIF

Guests were taken on snorkelling and diving trips, lagoon zodiac cruises and tours of the research station and surrounding area.



Aldabra outings © SIF

Snorkelers and divers enjoyed the Settlement Reef and Anse Var sites tremendously, seeing a wide assemblage of reef fish; nurse, tiger and lemon sharks (and great hammerheads spotted from one of the ships!); and mating green turtles. Some were lucky enough to meet a staff favourite - Hank the giant and (sometimes overly) friendly potato grouper. More confident snorkelers were taken to Passe Nicoise, a tributary of the main channel into the lagoon, for a drift snorkel. These guests were able to see first-hand the speed and power of the current as it passes in and out of the lagoon; the highlight here was drifting through a huge school of paddletail snappers. Many guests went back to the start of the drift multiple times to repeat the experience!

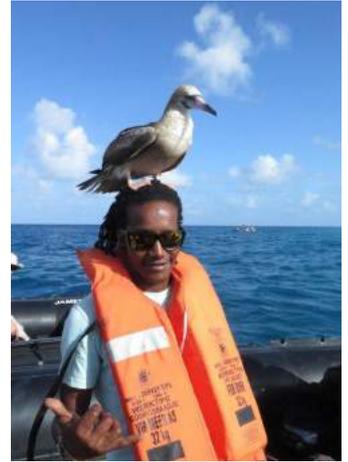
Guests were also taken on sunset and sunrise trips into the lagoon on their ship's zodiac RIBs, stopping by the frigatebird and booby colonies at Grand Poche on the way. Part of the remit of SIF staff on Aldabra is to ensure that guests and ship staff adhere to the strict rules set down to protect the atoll, including maintaining 30 m distance from the breeding colonies of frigatebirds and boobies – these regulations were kept to at all times, and the birds were so relaxed that one young booby even decided to use SIF staff

Aldabra

member Marvin Roseline's head as a resting spot! After viewing the breeding colonies, guests were taken around Picard Island, emerging through the West Channels at La Gigi, with its extreme champignon formations and abundance of turtles, sharks, and wading birds.

While ashore, guests had the opportunity to undertake tours of the research station and surrounding areas. Tours were conducted to La Gigi, to see the west channels, tropicbirds, and get close up views of the champignon and to an inland area of Picard, where 12 of the 13 land bird species were seen (only the nocturnal and highly camouflaged nightjar was not seen on this occasion - perhaps not a surprise!); guests had a taste of the terrain SIF staff must traverse while monitoring and tracking tortoises on other islands. They also went on an historical tour to the Old Settlement area, where guests loved the derelict church and were treated to a spectacular display by a colony of up to 40 Aldabra fruitbats roosting in one of the Settlement's large almond trees, while Biskwi the giant tortoise browsed the lower leaves beneath them.

tiring for the staff, everyone stepped up the task of ensuring all regulations were followed while making sure that Aldabra was showcased to maximum effect to the guests. As one guest wrote in the guest book; "A dream of mine for many, many years – a pleasure to be here at last!"



Booby with a new perch! © SIF



Cruise ship guests enjoying a presentation by SIF staff © SIF

Although cruise ship days are very long and

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