



## President of Sri Lanka visits the Vallée de Mai

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena visited the Vallée de Mai on Tuesday 9th October. He was accompanied on his visit by high level officials from Sri Lanka, the Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture Minister Charles Bastienne, and the Principal Secretary for Environment, PS de Comarmond.



*President Sirisena with Dr Fleischer-Dogley and the delegation © SIF*

Upon arrival at the Vallée de Mai visitor centre President Sirisena and his delegation received a warm welcome from SIF's CEO Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley and Vallée de Mai staff. President Sirisena was given a guided tour through the Vallée de Mai, where he learned



*The President posed for a photo with staff © SIF*

about the Vallée de Mai reserve and about the endemic species occurring in the forest, with a particular focus on the unique coco de mer. The delegation was very lucky to see a Seychelles black parrot during the tour.

After the tour the group visited the souvenir shop and the education room followed by the presentation of a gift from SIF to the Sri Lankan President. It was an honour to host President Sirisena and we hope that he enjoyed his visit to the beautiful Vallée de Mai.

## Giants in our World Heritage sites

Island gigantism is a biological phenomenon in which the size of an animal or plant isolated on an island increases dramatically in comparison to its mainland relatives. This is usually an evolutionary trend and portrays adaptation of species to different environments. Being larger in size can sometimes confer a number of selective advantages, for example bigger creatures can exploit more and a wider range of resources. This is observed in several species in Seychelles' world heritage sites, for example the coco de mer and the giant bronze gecko in the Vallée de Mai and the giant tortoise on Aldabra.



*Female coco de mer © SIF*

The coco de mer (*Lodoicea maldivica*) holds world records for the heaviest fruit of any palm - up to 45kg, the heaviest seed in the plant kingdom - up to 20kg and the largest female flowers of any palm. The majestic palm can grow up to 30m in height and have leaves 10m in length. In the Vallée de Mai, the coco de mer exists in association with another giant, namely the giant bronze gecko (*Ailuronyx trachygaster*), one of the largest living gecko species in the world. Females are larger and heavier than males, measuring on average almost 26cm in length from snout to tail and weighing over 100g! The large and bulky giant bronze gecko feeds primarily on pollen from the inflorescences of the male coco de mer, but also eats insects, nectar and possibly other small vertebrates. The species is thought to occur only in the mature coco de mer forest of Praslin.



*A very large guest stops by for a visit! © SIF*

On Aldabra, giants rule the atoll. Giant tortoises (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*) are the most dominant species, with a population estimated to be more than 100,000 individuals, they form the largest population of giant tortoises in the world. Giant tortoises can weigh up to 250kg with an average carapace that is 122cm long.

Although these species exhibit huge sizes, they are all continuously exposed to a variety of threats such as invasive alien species, poaching and climate change. Sustained conservation efforts and protection are crucial to maintain healthy populations of these unique species in the wild. In addition, increased research on their ecology and life history is shedding more light on their evolution into some of the largest species of their types on the planet.

## **SIF communications officer attends communications and marketing training**

The GOS-UNDP-GEF Protected Area Finance project hosted a one-day training workshop on marketing and communication for protected area management. Communications and marketing is a vital component of both conservation and tourism and the training was part of the Protected Area Finance project's strategy for capacity building among protected area managers in Seychelles. The workshop was well attended by a large number of organisations including NGOs, government agencies, research organisations and funders.



*The training was provided by Marie Rignace © SIF*

The training was held at the Savoy and provided by Marie Rignace, a marketing consultant for Com & Click Digital Marketing Agency. She has more than 10 years of experience in marketing, communication, PR and e-commerce in the

tourism and travel industry. The programme included search engine optimisation, social media and influencer marketing, user generated content, newsletters, video content, press relations and marketing and communication strategy.



Participants discussing their marketing and communication strategies © SIF

The workshop was very useful, with interesting suggestions and discussions. It was helpful to focus on areas for improvement and gratifying to discuss the things we're doing right! Thank you to the GOS-UNDP-GEF Protected Area Finance project and Marie Rignace for the opportunity.

## International Year of the Reef Coral News: diversity of life

Coral reefs are exceptionally diverse ecosystems. They make up only 1% of the world's oceans but are home to about 25% of all known marine species! A range of benthic organisms from hard and soft corals to sponges and algae provide habitats for a multitude of fish and invertebrate species, creating the vibrant beauty of a coral reef. This diversity can be observed even on the small scale of the reef building corals themselves: various colours and beautiful patterns such as in these photos characterize the seascape. But this is only a small sample of the coral diversity we find around Aldabra, where more than 120 coral species were recorded in previous surveys. This diversity is not only beautiful, but also

very important for the balance, functioning and persistence of reef ecosystems. Check back in next month for another interesting insight into Aldabra's coral reef system!



Beautiful colours and patterns characterize the seascape © Anna Koester

## SIF Vacancies

We have several vacancies at the head office on Mahé, in the Vallée de Mai and at Aldabra which need to be filled urgently. 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:

Mahé

- IT and Database Development Officer

Aldabra:

- Shopkeeper
- Cook /Gardener

Vallée de Mai:

- Visitor Attendant
- Field Worker
- Housekeeper



## Seychelles black parrot census results presented at the congress of Funds for Endangered Parrots



Sascha being introduced to the congress members © Gottfried Blankenheim

The Seychelles black parrot census coordinator Sascha Dueker recently had the opportunity to present the results of the census to the congress of “Fond für bedrohte Papageien” (Funds for Endangered Parrots) in Hamburg, Germany. The Funds for Endangered Parrots is a German conservation NGO which supports and operates projects worldwide for the protection of endangered parrot species. The black parrot census project was generously supported by the Funds for Endangered Parrots, so that they

were especially keen to hearing the results of the study which revealed an estimated black parrot population of 1382 individuals on Praslin.



Congress participants © Gottfried Blankenheim

The congress took place in the Lindner Hotel of the Tierpark Hagenbeck, an animal park, in Hamburg on Saturday 13 October 2018. In addition to the presentation on the Seychelles black parrot, presentations from other researchers covered topics such as veterinary science and parrot captivity breeding. The day was packed with interesting and informative talks, with delicious food provided by the hotel! The day ended with a show of parrot photographs in Brazil.

## Creole festival celebrated in the Vallée de Mai

Once again October featured a variety of SIF organised activities at the Vallée de Mai to celebrate the 33rd edition of Creole Festival. The activities were held from the 22nd to the 31st October. These activities aimed to give visitors



Traditional dancing © SIF

the opportunity to experience Seychelles' traditions and cultures.



*The lively music helped spread the Creole spirit © SIF*

Performances of the traditional dances kanmtole, sega and moutya allowed staff to introduce visitors to the different forms of dance and music in Seychelles. There was a fantastic atmosphere at the visitors centre as the music played in the background. Most visitors preferred to watch while the staff danced but others enthusiastically joined in! Staff, senior citizens and the some guides also gave a few vocal performances of some of Seychelles' most popular creole songs.

Although Creole Festival is often viewed as an opportunity to introduce visitors to the Seychelles to local culture, an even more important impact of the festival should be promoting traditional culture with the youth. Students from Baie Ste Anne primary school were privileged to spend some time with senior citizens during the week, and they learned about some of the popular traditional games that were played in the past. After being taught by the senior citizens the children in return shared what they had learnt with the visitors to the Vallée de Mai.

Local artisans on Praslin were invited to showcase their products to visitors. They could also sell the craft works made from local materials. Available on sale were different products that was made from recycled items, shells and seeds. The creole festival wouldn't have been complete without providing the

visitors with the chance to taste Seychelles creole food, snacks and beverages. On sale at the Vallée de Mai Kokosye Café was a variety of creole food such as moukat, creole cakes, banana fritters, local lime juice and many others for visitors to choose from.



*School children learned traditional games from senior citizens © SIF*

There was an exhibition on the deck showing the evolution of the lifestyle in Seychelles. This exhibition showcased traditional items that were commonly used in the households in the past. Senior citizens from both districts on Praslin were present at the Vallée de Mai to demonstrate to visitors how they used the coconut leaves to make various useful items. They also participated in the dance and song performance. A highlight was a short parade done by the senior citizens in their traditional clothes. A photo exhibition was also on display to show the development through the years that has occurred in the Seychelles. We hope that all of our visitors during Creole Festival enjoyed the festivities as much as we did!

## **Black parrot breeding season 10 monitoring begins**

The Vallée de Mai research team have officially kicked-off another season of exciting black parrot breeding monitoring. This year will be the tenth season since the monitoring programme began but like last year, one of the key objectives is to determine the impact of rats on black parrot breeding success.



*The team have been hard at work looking for nesting cavities © SIF*

In early October the search started for potential nesting cavities in the Vallée de Mai, Fond Pepper/Glacier Noire and Fond Ferdinand, which are the three main areas where black parrot breeding monitoring is conducted. To assess the condition of cavities a pole and a pulley system is used to lower a camera to look inside dead standing coco de mer trunks, which are the preferred nesting locations of black parrots. Suitable nesting cavities have a reasonably flat and dry floor, are at least half a metre deep and have an entrance more than 2m from the ground. As cavities in standing, dead coco de mer trunks are by nature open at the top and exposed to the elements, ideal nesting cavities have good coverage from palm leaves which shade the cavity and deflect rain. So far the team has identified 70 potential nesting cavities and hope to find additional ones throughout the season. Although the majority of these cavities appear to us to be suitable for nesting, it is still to be seen which of them will be deemed suitable by the parrots themselves, they are usually very picky about their nest sites!

These routine checks and searches will allow

the team to find as many nests as early in the season as possible, which will allow higher quality data on success or causes of failure of black parrot nests.

This season's breeding monitoring will continue part of the Inva'Ziles project work from last season by determining the impacts of rats on black parrot breeding success. To do this, an experiment is being run, whereby the monitored nests will be subject to several trapping regimes that will allow us to determine the effects of rat trapping and therefore the impacts of rat predation on nesting success.

The team has also been keeping an ear out for breeding behaviours and calls and was excited to have heard the first breeding calls in Fond Ferdinand and the Vallée de Mai already. The breeding season has begun! More to come next month.



aldabra atoll

## **Aldabra Clean-Up Project update: Sharing our solutions and making promises**

In October the Aldabra Clean-Up Project published its financing solution to Panorama – Solutions for a Healthy Planet. Panorama is an open resource programme that records and

shares encouraging, replicable conservation and sustainable development solutions. This is the second Panorama solution that SIF has submitted as part of an application to the inaugural Pathfinder Award, the solution focused on innovation and excellence in protected and conserved area financing and resourcing. The Pathfinder Award, an initiative of the United Nations Development Programme and International Union for Conservation of Nature, aims to recognise outstanding and innovative solutions for protected areas. The Aldabra Clean-Up Project's funding approach of mixed financing from crowdfunding, corporate sponsorship and grant applications is a novel solution for SIF, Seychelles and the region that was recognised as worth sharing.



Funding is constant challenge for conservation, with current studies indicating that the global annual funding gap estimated to be \$35 billion. Considering that protected areas have an economic return of as much as fifty to one, and the Aldabra Clean-Up Project's continuing success, it made sense to share our insights with the hope that this funding solution helps other projects succeed. To read the full solution for



Members of the public made pledges at Regatta © SIF

yourself go to: <https://panorama.solutions/en/solution/funding-aldabra-clean-project-through-corporate-sponsorship-and-crowdfunding>

This month also saw the Seychellois volunteers engaging the public at Regatta. With vox pops (short interviews with members of the public) and pledge boards, the team went out to ask questions about people's perception of the issues related to plastic pollution and consumption, as well as record the ways they are willing to help solve this global problem in Seychelles. In the coming weeks the team will be releasing episodes of the vox pops. Ultimately, the Aldabra Clean-Up Project can only be successful if it reaches many people and inspires changes in our daily actions.

## Seychelles International Year of the Reef Symposium

On 5th October, over 80 researchers, marine conservation practitioners and students gathered at the University of Seychelles for a marine science symposium held in Seychelles to commemorate the International Year of Coral Reefs 2018. A total of 15 presentations were given across a broad range of topics from coral reef restoration to crown of thorns management and sustainable fisheries management. SIF contributed three presentations to the programme:



The symposium included presentations from several organisations © SIF

## Four years of the Aldabra reef monitoring programme: trends and lessons learned

This was presented by the former Aldabra scientific coordinator April Burt. The presentation explained the SIF objectives for the monitoring programme and why monitoring Aldabra is particularly important as a regional benchmark of marine ecosystem health and changes. April explained the complex logistical challenges that marine work at Aldabra presents, caused by the unique coastal oceanographic processes.... not to mention the curious groupers who like to get up close whilst the team survey!

The methods adopted by SIF were explained as was the rationale for choosing these methods; consistency, continuity and comparability of data over time and with other sites. This was also an opportunity for SIF to present data on the impacts of the 2016 bleaching event on the Aldabra reefs, with 50% coral mortality observed in 2016. One of the most interesting points discussed was that by comparing the percentage of coral that bleached with the eventual percentage of coral mortality it is evident that despite the extensive mortality there was also extensive recovery from bleaching within certain coral species. As many organisations in Seychelles likewise collected peak and post bleaching data it would be greatly beneficial to pull this data together and compare which sites had greater survival rates from bleaching across Seychelles.

Lastly, the upcoming projects and research were outlined, showcasing SIF's collaborations with several universities to answer key ecological questions regarding Aldabra's marine ecosystems and their role in regional ocean health.

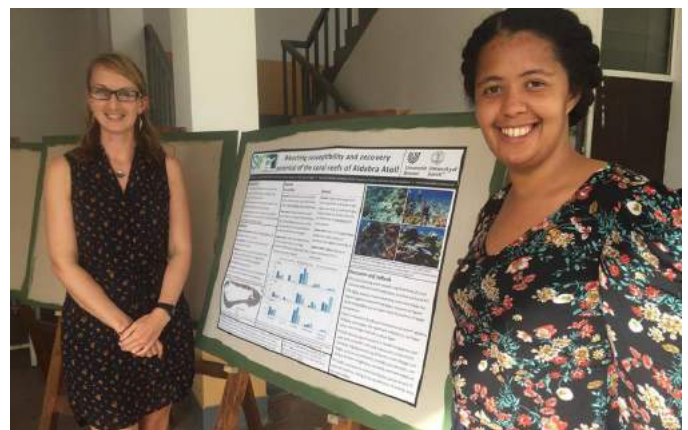
## Mapping coral population connectivity to inform management & policy of the coral reef system in Seychelles.

The second presentation by SIF was outlining the research to be undertaken by April Burt for her PhD with the University of Oxford. See the next article for more details!

## Movement patterns of blacktip reef sharks along the northwest coast of Aldabra

The third Aldabra presentation was by Sheena Talma, who presented her undergraduate BSc thesis on the data obtained from tagging blacktip sharks at Aldabra and tracking their movements using an acoustic array (a set of acoustic recorders positioned at certain points along the coast). The aim of the research was to determine how residential the sharks that aggregate around the station are. Results were inconclusive due to the loss of one acoustic receiver; however they did indicate a high level of site fidelity around Picard station. Sheena pointed out that the study was a good pilot study and could be up-scaled to obtain more conclusive and interesting results. She remarked that as she didn't get to actually come to Aldabra to collect the data herself, she is very happy to soon be going there as one of the Aldabra Clean-Up Project team members!

All the presentations were well received by the audience and elicited interesting questions. People were particularly interested to hear about the challenging diving conditions as a result of the lagoon flood and ebb and were also keen on the idea of pooling data to answer some key coral reef questions for the region. The symposium was an extremely valuable forum for hearing what other organisations are doing and opening up the channels of communication, sharing lessons learned and successes to improve all of our efforts towards effective conservation of Seychelles coral reefs.



April and Sheena at the symposium © SIF



## Former Aldabra scientific coordinator back in Seychelles for PhD research

Leaving Aldabra in September 2017 to embark on a PhD at the University of Oxford was not easy for April Burt, but knowing that she would be designing a project in collaboration with SIF was a great motivation. Now a year down the line she is back in Seychelles and on Aldabra to conduct her fieldwork, and things couldn't be more exciting!



*April aims to identify keystone reefs that supply coral larvae to the region © SIF*

With the mentorship and guidance of SIF's strong female leaders, Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, Dr Nancy Bunbury and board member Dr Lindsay Turnbull, she has developed an ambitious and exciting research plan, which aims to enhance management effectiveness of island ecosystems by investigating the theme of connectivity, both at a management and an ecological level.

The research will conduct a global assessment of island ecosystem management using social science methods to conduct in-depth interviews with island management and conservation practitioners across Seychelles. This will then be up-scaled using an online questionnaire format to island ecosystem networks globally. The aim of this will be to hear first-hand how island ecosystems are currently being managed and what factors influence effective management.

April will also map coral population connectivity

across Seychelles using genetic techniques to inform management and policy of the coral reef system. This involves collecting coral samples from as many reefs in Seychelles as possible. The idea is to see which reefs in the region are most highly connected, i.e. which are the keystone reefs supplying coral larvae to the region. This is extremely important to inform effective management of Seychelles reefs, especially under the current climate of increasing threats and disturbance events such as coral bleaching. This is the main activity for the current field season and April has so far received overwhelming support from organisations across Seychelles, assisting her with collecting samples. She is now collecting data on Aldabra and hopes to also reach some of the other outer and additional inner islands in the coming months.



*Samples are being collected from all over Seychelles © SIF*

The third pillar of her research will be to investigate the threat of marine plastic pollution to island ecosystems. In collaboration with the Aldabra Clean-Up Project, April will conduct research that will determine the quantity, composition and accumulation rate of waste arriving on Aldabra and the resources required to remove this waste in the long-term. She will also investigate the threats posed by accumulation and the increased rafting opportunities that marine debris presents to non-native species. The aim will be to gather information that will be useful

for effectively managing the threat of plastic pollution arriving at islands. April has already conducted some pilot trials of beach transects and plans to continue these throughout her stay on Aldabra with the help of SIF staff and the Aldabra Clean-Up project team.

None of this would be possible without the immense help and support of the Aldabra staff team as well as partner organisations; the Island Conservation Society Seychelles, Global Vision International, Seychelles National Parks Authority, Marine Conservation Society Seychelles, Seychelles Fishing Authority and

the other private islands who have pledged their assistance.



*April conducting transects of accumulated waste on Aldabra © SIF*

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