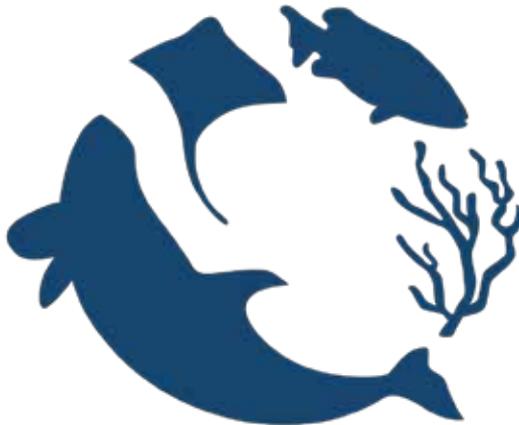




Aldabra awarded prestigious Blue Parks Platinum level designation

On 24th October, the Marine Conservation Institute and its international science council recognised Aldabra’s special reserve as an outstanding marine protected area (MPA) with a Blue Park designation. Aldabra was awarded the Platinum Level Blue Park status which is the highest level of the award and only 10 sites in the world have this designation. This is Aldabra’s fifth international designation, which demonstrates the rigorous and effective management in place at this spectacular protected area.



BLUE PARKS

Blue Parks logo © Marine Conservation Institute

“Blue Parks like the Aldabra Atoll Special Reserve are the antidotes to the barrage of threats to life in our oceans,” said Dr Sarah Hameed, Senior Scientist of Marine Conservation Institute. “We may not be able to stop climate change impacts immediately, but we can create or maintain strong protected areas in the right places today which will enable ecosystems to build or maintain resilience for the future. That’s the objective of each Blue

Park.”

“This is a time of great peril for ocean life as it faces off against increasing marine industrialization and climate change,” said Professor Douglas McCauley of UC Santa Barbara, Director of the Benioff Ocean Initiative and a member of the international science council for Blue Parks, “Blue Park Awards are shining a light on protected areas that are leading efforts to protect marine biodiversity and help promote resiliency to climate change impacts.”



Aerial view of Aldabra Atoll © SIF

“Many of today’s marine protected areas do not offer effective protection and don’t protect the best places,” continued Dr Hameed. “They’re often ‘paper parks’ appearing to meet national commitments but lacking substance. But Aldabra Atoll Special Reserve meets science-based standards we know will protect the oceans for generations to come. If we elevate and bring recognition to Blue Parks like Aldabra, we believe it will encourage more countries and leaders to satisfy this critical standard going forward.”

Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, Chief Executive Officer of the Seychelles Islands Foundation,

said, “We are thrilled to receive this prestigious award for the unique and spectacular treasure that is Aldabra Atoll. My personal mission over the last 20 years has been to ensure that nature conservation and protected area management is firmly based on science. This award recognizes these efforts and shows the world that science-based management is possible in a region which has very limited resources for science and research. Commitment and strong collaborations by stakeholders at local, national and international level makes this possible. I hope that more protected area practitioners will follow this lead and that governments internationally will assist with resources so that we can achieve effective protection for all the special places on our planet.”



SIF Project Officer Jeremy Raguain with the Blue Parks award © SIF

SIF's Project Officer attends Our Ocean conference and AfrAsia Bank sustainability summit

SIF's Project Officer was pleased to have the chance to attend the 'Our Ocean 2019' conference in Oslo, Norway, on the 22nd to 24th October. The annual conference is organised by the ministries of foreign affairs of host nations to bring together leaders from governments, businesses, civil society and research institutions to share their experience, identify solutions and commit to action for a clean, healthy and productive ocean. SIF's Project Officer Jeremy Raguain applied to attend the summit in July 2019 and was one of 100 young people selected from around the world.



Jeremy Raguain with Minister Cosgrow and the Seychelles delegation at the conference © SIF

The summit was an opportunity to inspire, inform, and empower youth participants to build holistic solutions that better balance the needs

of society, industry and the ocean environment. This year's theme was co-creating the Sustainable Blue Economy. Jeremy was also given the chance to pitch the Aldabra Clean-Up Project to fellow youth attendees, inviting them to collaborate with SIF in future clean-up expeditions and other SIF activities.

Dr Lance Morgan, President of Marine Conservation Institute, also presented Aldabra's Platinum level Blue Parks Award to Minister Cosgrove, on behalf of Seychelles and to Jeremy on behalf of SIF, at the event.



Dr Lance Morgan presenting the Blue Parks award to Minister Cosgrove and Jeremy Raguain © SIF

October was a busy month for Jeremy who also attended the AfrAsia Bank Sustainability Summit from the 14th to 15th October in Port Louis, Mauritius. The theme of the summit was: "Driving the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) to the Next Level". The event saw leaders from regional corporates and other organisations that are leading, involved, and interested in embodying the sustainable development goals to share experiences and lessons learnt, upcoming projects and innovative solutions as well as recognise those leading by example.

Jeremy was invited to the summit to present about his experiences coordinating the Aldabra Clean-Up Project, with a specific focus on how funding for the project leveraged corporate social responsibility tax contributions. Jeremy felt very privileged to speak at the summit, sharing the same floor with speakers such as Gunter Pauli, entrepreneur and

author of the Blue Economy. Jeremy also learned a lot from panels discussing the Blue Economy, Sustainability and inclusive growth, responsible tourism and business of tomorrow. Ultimately the summit was an excellent opportunity to increase the Aldabra Clean-Up Project's reach as well as SIF's visibility with regional corporates and organisations interested in collaborating.



Jeremy Raguain speaking at the AfrAsia Bank Sustainability Summit © SIF

SIF welcomes two new project officers

SIF was delighted to welcome two new project officers to its Head Office staff body in October. Emeline Lafortune and Veronique Banane are both recent BSc graduates and have a lot of knowledge and enthusiasm to bring to the organisation. Veronique studied Marine Biology at the University of Aberdeen and Emeline studied Environment and Sustainability at Keele University.

Both Veronique and Emeline started off their new roles by carrying out biosecurity checks on all the supplies destined for Aldabra on the imminent supply boat. Since then Emeline started working on SIF's Eco schools trips to Aldabra project to understand how these trips make a difference to the students who had the chance to go on this once in a lifetime trip. Veronique is developing an online survey to help with improving the Vallée de Mai management plan and working on protocols for the invasive yellow crazy ant project in the



Veronique Banane, SIF Project Officer © SIF

Veronique said, "Working at SIF has been a fun rollercoaster so far. One day I'll be cleaning onions for biosecurity checks for Aldabra and the next I'll be at a fancy workshop learning about national policies. I am expanding my skillset significantly and have also met so many friendly and welcoming people. My favourite experience so far has been cheering on the SIF team at the raft race competition and helping to build the raft!"



Emeline Lafortune, SIF Project Officer © SIF

Emeline said, "Working at SIF has been my first official leap into the working world. I could not have imagined a better starting experience. Everyone has welcomed me with open arms and are always so willing to help with any task at hand. As Project Officer, I'm given a voice to pitch in all my ideas and receive great feedback and advice in return. I am grateful for being given the opportunity to attend innovative workshops and conferences as I find them ever so interesting and I'm grateful for all the support I am receiving on my career journey!"



Emeline and Veronique at the 2019 Raft Race © SIF

SIF Vacancies

We have several vacancies in the Vallée de Mai and Aldabra which need to be filled urgently. We are actively seeking Seychellois applicants for all of 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:

Vallée de Mai:

- Visitor Attendants x 3

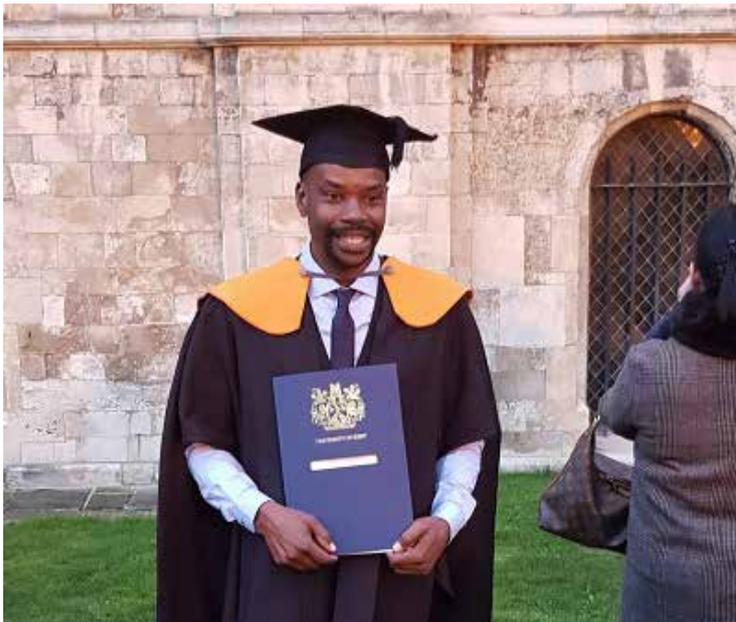
Aldabra:

- Cook/Gardener
- Marine mechanic



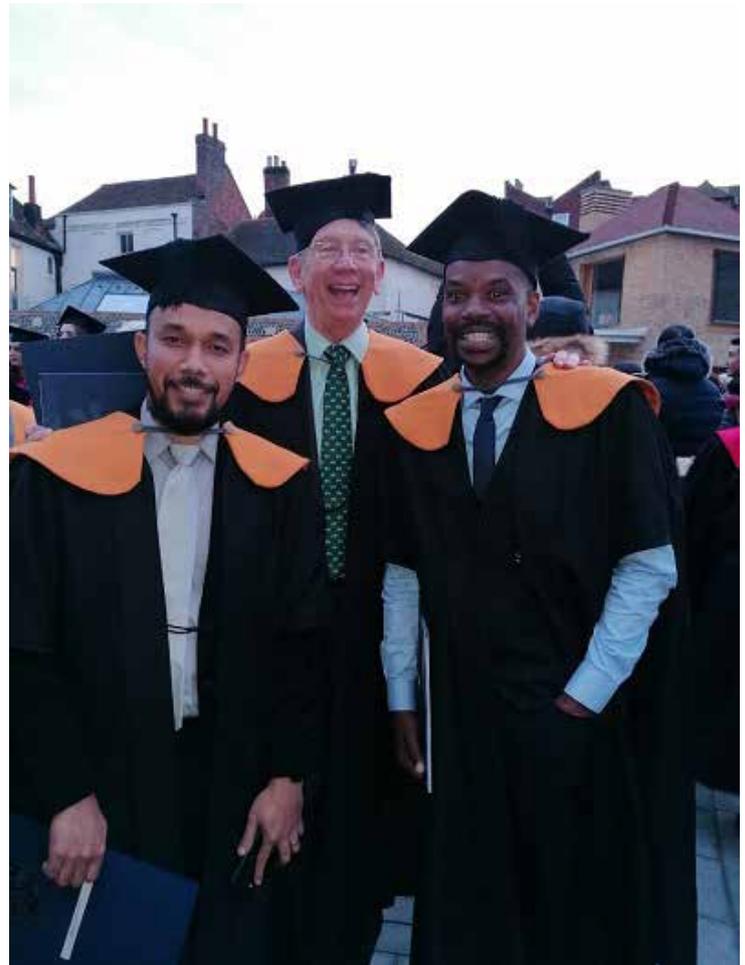
Vallée de Mai welcomes back newly graduated Site Manager Marc Jean-Baptiste

Marc Jean-Baptiste was glad to return to the Vallée de Mai after spending a year in the UK studying for his MSc in Conservation Biology. Marc graduated with a Merit from the University of Kent. He is pleased to return to the Vallée de Mai and resume his old position after broadening his learning and experience.



Marc Jean-Baptiste at his graduation ceremony © SIF

Marc's MSc dissertation was on the habitat preferences of chameleons in the granitic Seychelles, a subject about which he is extremely passionate and knowledgeable. His studies were also extremely relevant to his work in the Vallée de Mai, as he studied the Seychelles Chameleon which is endemic to Praslin and relies on the coco de mer habitat found in the palm forest. SIF is confident that Marc's knowledge will enable him to oversee and manage the Vallée de Mai even more effectively and enable him to make informed conservation decisions.



Marc celebrating his graduation with fellow students
© SIF

Marc is extremely grateful to Julio Agricole who stood in as Acting Site Manager of the Vallée de Mai while Marc was studying. Julio did a fantastic job leading the site in Marc's absence and is now returning to Aldabra as the Relief Island Manager for the next month.

Marc's priorities now he has returned are to implement a new Vallée de Mai management plan to improve the operations of the site. Watch this space!

Vallée de Mai celebrates Creole Festival

Seychelles' Creole Festival is a famous celebration and regarded as one of the most important annual events in the country. The festival takes place each year to bring Seychellois together, revive Creole traditions and cultures whilst also embracing the opportunities of the present.



The Vallée de Mai team at the Laserenad © SIF

To kickstart the festival, the District Administrators on Praslin organised a "Laserenad" (a lively parade with music, dancing and display of clothes). The theme of the "Laserenad" was to show the different uses of a coconut tree. Participants were judged on their displays and how innovative they could be with the parts of a coconut tree. SIF was proud to win first prize in this competition!

A week of exciting activities took place in the Vallée de Mai to celebrate the Creole festival and give visitors the chance to experience Creole spirit and way of life. The activities started with a debate between the youth from Praslin secondary school and the senior citizens of Praslin about the different stages couples go through before they can get married. The younger children were

very surprised by some of the practices that had taken place in the past, particularly in cases where they saw inequality between males and females. Lively and frank discussions came from both groups, and everyone found it an interesting learning experience.



The Vallée de Mai team dancing at the Laserenad © SIF

The deck of the Vallée de Mai visitor centre was transformed into a typical traditional Creole house. Antique household items were on display on the deck. Visitors were mostly interested to learn about the functions of some of the antiques. The guides had the chance to demonstrate how some of the items were used in the past.



A display of a traditional Creole house at the Vallée de Mai © SIF

Visitors could also taste some of the Seychelles traditional snacks like banana cakes, chilli cakes and moukat (local snacks made from banana and wrapped in banana leaves). Local music was also played throughout the week.

The Baie St Anne District Administrators office, in partnership with SIF, held a Creole quiz throughout the week. The questions comprised of local riddles (zedmo), Creole expressions, Creole proverbs, Seychelles history and general questions about Seychelles.

On Friday senior citizens performed traditional Creole songs and traditional dances. In the afternoon there was a prize-giving ceremony for the quiz champions, alongside a fashion show of traditional clothes by senior citizens, songs and dance performances by the primary schools, and a dance performance by the Vallée de Mai staff. Congratulations to the Youth of Baie St Anne who came first followed by Senior citizens 2nd and Grand Anse primary school 3rd. The Creole festival at the Vallée de Mai ended with a lively “moutya” (traditional dance and song) by the “Latanier Group’.

Thank you to everyone who celebrated the Creole Festival with us this year – we hope you enjoyed it as much as we did!

YCA Taskforce carries out monitoring in the Vallée de Mai

This time last year a survey indicated that, for the first time, 100% of the Vallée de Mai had been invaded by yellow crazy ants (YCA). This prompted an intensive control programme which is still underway. Before that could take place however, we established various programmes to monitor YCA activity along with other animal species in the forest. Robust monitoring is crucial for determining the effect of the bait on YCA numbers as well as assessing how other species respond to the bait and to a decrease in YCA numbers over time. Frequent monitoring will also allow seasonal patterns of abundance to be investigated for a number of species. Additionally, the surveys are being carried out in Fond Peper, across the road from the Vallée de Mai, which is not being treated with ant bait so will provide a comparison with the treated area.

The monitoring programmes target YCA specifically, ant communities in general and also gecko, mollusc, skink and crab species which are monitored through

specifically designed surveys. Firstly, levels of activity and abundance of YCA are monitored throughout the forest by using a jam lure (they love sugar!). Ant communities are monitored to assess how they may be impacted by YCA presence and abundance. Geckos and molluscs are monitored due to their vulnerability to YCA attacks, particularly molluscs, being soft bodied and slow moving. Finally, skinks and crabs are monitored as they are predominantly ground-based, and may be threatened by high densities of YCA but are also at risk of consuming the ant bait.



Freshwater crab at the Vallée de Mai © SIF

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bodied and slow moving. Finally, skinks and crabs are monitored as they are predominantly ground-based, and may be threatened by high densities of YCA but are also at risk of consuming the ant bait.



Praslin snail at the Vallée de Mai © SIF

These fauna surveys will be repeated throughout the YCA control programme and beyond as it will take a long time to get clear results. However, monitoring has already shown a substantial decrease in YCA in the Vallée de Mai after the first treatment round which is a very promising result.



aldabra atoll

Aldabra's giant tortoise monitoring given boost by Odense Zoo

In October SIF was delighted to receive an extremely generous donation from Odense Zoo in Denmark towards its giant tortoise monitoring programme on Aldabra. Odense Zoo have Aldabra giant tortoises in their collection and they are keen to support the work of SIF in monitoring this wonderful species.



Giant tortoise on Aldabra © SIF

SIF's giant tortoise monitoring programme monitors giant tortoises at two key sites on Aldabra; Picard and Grand Terre. The overall goal is to collect long-term data on population trends and dynamics on the different islands to be able to detect and act on population decreases quickly and build up our knowledge of individual tortoises, including movements and, at some point, genetics/genomics

and reproductive ecology. The programme is a continuation and expansion of monitoring that has been ongoing at the atoll since the 1990s. For the first 15 years the monitoring programme counted but did not mark tortoises, and there were enormous benefits in data quality and information once we started to mark individual animals. We've now marked most tortoises on Picard by branding their scutes or shells with a three letter code.



Giant tortoise at sunset on Aldabra © SIF

However, Odense Zoo's generous donation of 6000 euros has enabled SIF to embark on a pit-tagging project for the giant tortoises, which is a vast improvement on the previous tracking method and will allow us to track tortoises on Grande Terre and those individuals that have smaller, thinner shells which cannot be branded. A PIT tag is a small radio transponder that contains a unique code, which allows individual tortoises to be assigned a unique 10 or 15-digit alphanumeric identification number.



Giant tortoise in mud at Aldabra © Dennis Hansen

We will be training our staff in deploying the pit tags and we will be commencing the programme in 2020.

The data that we will collect by monitoring tortoises with pit-tags will be much richer and more informative about individual tortoise life-histories, survival and movements, giving us better insight into tortoise biology and ecology and ultimately supporting more effective conservation decisions. A big thank you to Bjarne Klausen and Odense Zoo!

Intensive biosecurity efforts pay off

SIF partnered with La Digue Glory barge in October to transport much-needed supplies and equipment to the Aldabra and make sure our strict biosecurity standards are met. After some very intense weeks of purchasing, doing biosecurity checks and re-packing supplies with great team spirit, all efforts finally paid off during the final loading days of the supply boat. After six months without supplies, and a busy north-west season coming up, it was one SIF's biggest cargo supplies to Aldabra and a massive operation. Two shipping containers, 36 fuel drums, construction materials, the renovated Aldabra boat Manta and much-needed new food supplies finally sailed off to Aldabra.



*Supplies leaving Head Office after biosecurity checks
© SIF*

We treated the supply boat containers and supply storage areas with pesticides, a new initiative, and conducted thorough biosecurity checks with a very supportive crew. On the last day of loading

we discovered a yellow crazy ant queen in front of the loading ramp on Mahé, which reinforced for the whole team how real the threat of invasive species is and how important their biosecurity work is.



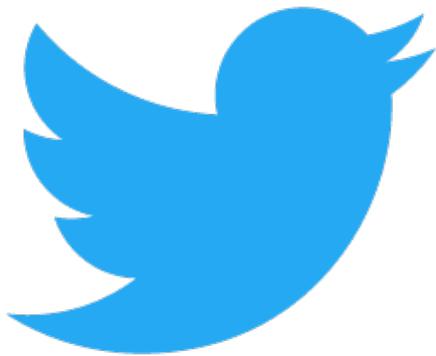
Aldabra's renovated boat Manta being loaded onto the supply boat © SIF

biosecurity team on Aldabra did an amazing job spotting a Wright's skink jumping off the supply boat which had managed to escape biosecurity checks on Mahé. Wright's skinks are only found on Aride, Fregate, Cousin and Cousine islands and, considering the boat's previous itinerary, the skink probably got on to the vessel when it was at Fregate, which was the boat's previous stop before coming to Mahé. The fact that the skink managed to remain so well-hidden highlights the very real biosecurity threat facing Aldabra. Luckily the team managed to catch the skink after five hours of watching with the incoming tide. Well done to the Aldabra team! This incident shows how important it is to further improve our biosecurity measures to protect our natural treasures.



Wright's skink intercepted at Aldabra © SIF

SIF on Twitter!



Follow us on Twitter! As one of the top ten most used social media websites, Twitter offers us a chance to connect and share with a truly international audience. If you are regular Twitter user then you can find us under @SIF_Seychelles. For those of you new to this social media page why not sign up now? You can find the link to our page here,

https://twitter.com/SIF_Seychelles, and follow all of our latest updates and news.

Find us on Facebook

Don't forget to like our Facebook page! The page has regular news and updates on research and events at both World Heritage Sites. We would invite all friends, supporters, partners, colleagues, and anyone else who has an interest in staying up to date with the management and protection of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Seychelles, or in Seychelles' biodiversity and conservation in general to become a fan of our page. For those who have a Facebook account already please use this link https://www.facebook.com/pages/Seychelles-Islands-Foundation-SIF/1414466072110654?hc_location=stream and 'Like' our page. For those that are not on Facebook then perhaps you can receive updates through a friend or family members account, or maybe now is the time to join Facebook for yourself! We look forward to welcoming you onto this page!

SIF on Instagram...



Instagram is the fastest growing social media site and SIF is growing with it. Follow us on Instagram to see Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai showcased as

the spectacular sites they are! If you're on Instagram then you can find us @SIF_Seychelles. You can find the link to our page here: https://www.instagram.com/sif_seychelles/.

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

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