

Newsletter

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This *Tambourissa peltata* is one of the many endemic plants of Mauritius. MWF is working to save endangered plants and during our rare plants search species previously thought to be extinct are sometimes rediscovered (read more on page 2).

Photo: Christopher Kaiser



Protected Area Network

There is more hope for the Mauritian native forests following completion of the project preparation phase of the Protected Area Network project proposal for Mauritius. The UNDP project proposal on **expanding coverage and strengthening management effectiveness of the protected area network (PAN) on the island of Mauritius** is currently under review by the UNDP Technical Advisor and will be submitted to the Global Environment Fund for funding by the end of October 2009. Implementation of the project will *expand, and ensure effective management of the protected area network to safeguard threatened biodiversity by the public and private sectors as well as NGOs and the community.*

MWF was one of the consultants that prepared two of a number of reports under the PPG phase (Project Preparation Grant), namely *An Assessment of the Terrestrial Biodiversity Priority Areas Review and Rapid Biodiversity Surveys*, and *Invasive Alien Species Strategy and Action Plan Development for the Protected Area Network*, which were completed in mid-July 2009.

Fragmentation of native forest on the mainland island of Mauritius

1773



1835



1872



1935



1997



New Plant Discovery



The *Trochetia parviflora* (bois de rose) was believed to be extinct in the wild since 1830 and the initial location was noted on Mt Ory in the collection of Bojer.

In April 2001, the bois de rose was rediscovered on Corps de Garde and a population of seventy adult plants was recorded during an intensive survey over three months. In June 2009, this species was newly located on Mt La Porte at Chamarel region where an additional plant was found. The new find was due to the rare plant search project conducted by the plant team of MWF.

Text & photo: Jean-Claude Sevathian
The Rare Plant Project is supported by Air Mauritius, Chester Zoo UK, Bel Ombre Sugar Estate and Sofap



“One Tree, One Take-off”

Air Mauritius signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation in December 2007 to support its conservation projects. During 2008, MWF in Rodrigues propagated 6,000 native seedlings in its nursery at Solitude to be planted in Anse Quitar Nature Reserve under the ‘One Tree, One Take-off’ initiative which involves MWF planting one endemic tree for each take-off of an Air Mauritius aircraft from Mauritius. With this project, MWF has agreed to produce and plant 6,000 native and endemic plants each year during 2008, 2009 and 2010 to help in habitat restoration. Half of these plants are being planted in Mauritius and half in Rodrigues. During 2009 MWF has weeded invasive species and planted over 6,000 endemic seedlings at Anse Quitar Nature Reserve. On 8 September 2009, seven staff from MWF Rodrigues guided a visit to the Anse Quitar Nature Reserve with the staff of Air Mauritius, Rodrigues. Ms Anieta Shan Yu talked about the project and on the same occasion seven endemic plants, namely *Dodonea viscosa*, *Clerodendrum laciniatum*, *Gastonia rodriguesiana*, *Latania verschaaffeltii*, *Casine orientalis*, *Myoporum mauritianum* and *Sarcanthemum coronopus*, were planted jointly by Air Mauritius and MWF Rodrigues staff.



Flat Island

One of the challenges facing Mauritius in becoming a sustainable island is to find solutions to save its fast disappearing biodiversity. Currently 94% of the endemic flora and fauna in Mauritius falls under one of the World Conservation Union (IUCN 2009) threat categories and it has one of the most imperilled island floras in the world. Flat Island has the status of a nature reserve and is one of the sixteen islets that are integrated in a national management plan of islets with endangered wildlife. In 2007, the management of Flat Island was given to a private company which uses the island as a tourist destination. Mauritian and International environmental organisations are voicing concern since new plans for construction on the island are under way.



Red-tailed Tropicbirds are one of the seabirds that depend on Flat Island to build their nests
Photo: Gregory Guida



First Eggs of the Season

Olive White-eye



Two Olive White-eye nests rescued from the forest. The nests are made out of moss, spider's web and grass.

The breeding season of the Olive White-eye started early this year and so far we have had our first eggs and one chick on Ile aux Aigrettes. We also had three nest rescues in the National Park all from new pairs found this season. If we succeed in incubating the eggs and the chicks survive they will be released on Ile aux Aigrettes to increase the genetic diversity of this population. We currently have three eggs at our aviary from nest rescues and we hope to carry out another five to eight nest rescues during October and November. The nests are being saved from predation by exotic species such as monkeys and rats.

Text: Gwen Maggs

This project is supported by Chester Zoo UK, New Noah Canada and Rufford Maurice Laing

Echo Parakeets

The Echo Parakeet breeding season has begun with the first egg of the season found by an excited Echo worker Aurelie Chowrimootoo in a nest box in Bel Ombre. The first egg laid this year is later than in recent years, which is thought to be due to the cold, wet weather at the start of September. Eggs have also been discovered at a nest box close to Camp field station and at a cavity at the top of Grandes Gorge. In the coming week many more eggs are anticipated.



Echos mutual preening

New Echo Cavities There has been great excitement over the discovery of two new Echo cavities by Andy Skinner. Both of the new cavities have Echo pairs using them; the breeding location of these pairs was previously unknown. This takes the number of nest sites maintained and monitored by the Echo team to over a hundred!

Words: Heather Richards Photo: Simon Tollington

This project is supported by Ireland Blyth Limited, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, University of Kent and Leverhulme

Mauritius Fody

The Mauritius Fody was also out early with the first nesting attempts in May this year; so far 80 nests have been discovered and monitored, and from these 20 fledglings have been produced. The first young generation this year of Mauritius Fodies are already flying around on Ile aux Aigrettes. At the moment there are around 20 active nests being monitored on the island. This season has also seen some interesting behaviours, such as young females helping at nest building. The total population of Mauritius Fodies on Ile aux Aigrettes now stands at 170 birds.

Text: Laura Bambini This project is supported by HSBC Mauritius, Ruth Smart Foundation, Chester Zoo UK, New Noah Canada, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and Rufford Maurice Laing

Completion of the Darwin Initiative Reptile Project



In May 2009, the three-year Darwin Initiative Reptile Project run jointly by Durrell, MWF and NPCS was completed. The project aimed to reduce the risks of extinction by re-establishing reptile species back to islands within their former range, to raise awareness about reptiles and to train Mauritian staff in herpetological techniques. The project has been a great success and has ensured additional support from the Conservation Fund and the Harcroft Foundation for the partners to continue with the Mauritius Reptile Recovery Programme.

Reports on activities undertaken during the Darwin Initiative project can be obtained from <http://darwin.defra.gov.uk/project/15038/>. Technical reports and other project outputs can be obtained from MWF.

Reptile team member Leanna Racine weighing a skink on Ile aux Aigrettes

Genetic Work Supports Reptile Translocations

In the previous newsletter (No.13, May 2009) it was noted that the translocation of a critically endangered sub-species of Bojer's skink (*Gongylomorphus bojerii* sp.) from Ilot Vacoas to Ile aux Fouquets had more than doubled the world population in just two years. To conserve the uniqueness of the south-eastern *Gongylomorphus* we needed to capture as much genetic material as possible from the Ilot Vacoas population. If only a small proportion of the genetic variability was captured it could affect the long-term survival of the translocated population, as there would be less opportunity for adaptation to occur over time.

Recent research conducted by MSc student Sozos Michaelides at Durrell's genetics laboratory in the UK has shown that the south-eastern skinks have a lower level of genetic variation compared to the genetically differentiated and larger populations in the north. Despite the lower variability the south-eastern skinks are still relatively robust and exhibit low levels of inbreeding. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that the translocation of approximately 10% of the skink population from Ilot Vacoas to Ile aux Fouquets has captured much of the genetic material of the source population. However, Sozos recommends an additional translocation of twenty skinks to Ile aux Fouquets to ensure genetic equality between the two populations.

These findings are very encouraging for the future of these unique lizards, as we look to support their establishment on islands within their former range.

This project is also supported by the Darwin Initiative, UK, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, UK, and the National Parks and Conservation Service Text & photo: Nik Cole



A Day with Pink Pigeon Workers

It's **6** o'clock in the morning. There goes Lucy's alarm clock. It's time to leave the bed and get the feet moving. Soon the Pink Pigeons will be arriving at the hoppers to feed on the wheat grains. We have to be ready for the morning hopper watch. Our day has already started.

Lucy, Wendy and I are having breakfast while waiting for the birds to turn up for their supplementary food. Oh, I can hear a pigeon! Who's here at 6.20? Lucy is trying to identify the bird by looking at the colour and ID rings on its feet. Yellow/ID black. It's Austen. He's been coming at the suspected time for male birds to be on nests the last couple of days. Hmm...Is it just a coincidence or has he found someone? His official partner, Mary, has been missing for the last few months. What's our plan for the day, going to be- a territory watch and a feeding walk for Austen after the hopper watch or going to the Uppers? There are more pigeons arriving now at the hoppers. Lucy and I are trying to identify them while Wendy is quickly writing down their names and colour-ID rings.

By 7.30 am we have finally decided to stay in the lower territories and split up into two teams. Wendy and I are going to watch Austen's territory while Lucy is going to do a nest watch to see whether the two birds (Cyclone and Mrs Potter) already have a squab in their nest.

Arriving in Austen's territory, Wendy and I split up to wait for the bird. As soon as a T-coo (the territorial sound made by pigeons) is heard in the vicinity, the sound needs to be followed to observe the behaviour of the bird. Already we can hear a faint T-cooing. It's coming from Tedwin's territory which is next to Austen's. Just to be sure, I decided to follow the sound. Wendy is staying in the same place in case Austen arrives. Since the sound was coming from far, I headed back. As soon as I arrived to where Wendy was standing, she pointed out a pink pigeon to me. There was our bird walking fearlessly on the ground as a king in his territory.

...oh, there flies off Austen. He's now on a pine tree, feeding on the leaves. Any observation is written down. We just have to keep an eye on him to see which tree he's got a nest on. Oh, oh. He's disappeared on a tecoma tree now. It's really hard to see in tecoma trees with their broad leaves and dense foliage. Wendy and I are both trying to see if we can find anything. Ah, he's gone in a pine tree now. No, wait...That's not yellow /ID black. I can see dark blue/ID black. That's Ave koko, a young bird recently ringed. Was that a change-over just now? Usually the male incubates the egg during the day and the female during the night. So Ave koko is a girl. That's good news. We need more females in our bird population. Wow. We have a new official pair and a nest. We can't wait to tell Lucy. I wonder what's happening on her side.

Back to the field station, Lucy told us some exciting news. The nest she's been watching probably has a squab on it as the adult birds left the nest unattended for a while. Hopefully we'll be able to see the nest better tomorrow on our daily nest checks. After a yummy lunch and a mid-day hopper watch, we set off for the uppers for more territory watches. Again we made two teams to do different birds. Wendy and I are now in Gammon's territory. Lucy on her side is doing the feeding walk on Princess Superstar's territory.

...A couple of hours later, still no sign of any birds. It's quite late to still see birds now. Maybe a few more minutes of hanging around while waiting for Lucy to pick us up. Meanwhile we decided to check again in trees around where Wendy saw two birds flying when we first got to the territory. What's that up there? Where did that come from? There's definitely a bird on a nest up in the pine tree. How did we miss it earlier? Wow. The pigeons are getting more active these days. We'll need to do another territory watch for this bird in order to identify both pairs. For now, it's time to head back before it gets dark. Tomorrow is going to be another exciting day.



Text Zairabee Ahamud Photo: Ellie Bernager

This project is supported by Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Ernest Kleinworth, University of Kent and Leverhulme

Education and Awareness

The Rare Education and Awareness Campaign in Mauritius was terminated after 18 months of hard work and a steep learning curve by a final meeting at the University of Kent in the UK. Six other countries were implementing the campaign at the same time as Mauritius namely: Guam, Palau, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Bahamas, Belize and St Lucia. The seven campaign managers were awarded a Diploma in Conservation Education from the University of Kent for the completion of the first phase of the campaign. Therefore MWF is now able to implement education and awareness activities in biodiversity issues on a larger scale which also will include corporate social activities.



The Rare campaign's objective was to raise awareness among local communities in order to make a change in behaviour leading to a better protection of wildlife. Mauritius has evaluated its campaign based upon the change of behaviour of adults regarding the habitat of the endangered reptiles of the south-east coast of Mauritius. The pre-campaign and post-campaign surveys conducted in the district of Grand-Port suggest the beginning of a change in behaviour beginning amongst the population living there and in the skippers who use the islets for ecotourism activities. Moreover, there was an increase in knowledge and positive attitudes regarding the wildlife. One of the activities organised during the campaign involved setting up workshops with skippers to give information on conservation in general and on the endangered species found on the islets. The workshops comprised theoretical and practical sessions such as site visits of the islets with biologists explaining the main threats to the wildlife and introductions to the native flora and fauna. The campaign will continue in 2009-10.

Text: Cathleen Cybelle; Logo: Veronique Barnard
This project was supported by Price Waterhouse Coopers, British High Commission and Rare



ROUND ISLAND

The Round Island Nature Reserve, which covers an area of 219 ha, is one of the six islets off the north coast of Mauritius. Round Island is internationally renowned for its unique biodiversity of flora and fauna, in particular its reptile species and seabird community. MWF is restoring Round Island's natural habitat and more than a thousand endemic and native plants were planted during the rainy season this year. Moreover weeding is being carried out regularly as exotic weeds still cause problems for the native plants. One of these is the *Chromolaena odorata*, a fast-growing perennial shrub with rambling branches, which bears purple to dull off-white flowers and is native to South America and Central America. It has been introduced into the tropical regions of Asia, Africa and the Pacific, where it is an invasive weed. It forms dense stands that prevent the establishment of other plant species. It is an aggressive competitor and may have allelopathic effects. The leaves smell of turpentine or paraffin when crushed, and it is a nuisance weed in agricultural land and commercial plantations. In Mauritius it grows in the dry regions in wastelands and forest clearings and poses a serious fire hazard when dry. In October 2000 *Chromolaena odorata* was found for the first time on Round Island. At the time sixty-eight adult plants and seven seedlings were uprooted (after flower heads were bagged and removed). Removal of *Chromolaena* continues, and is reported monthly. **Tortoises were released to the island for the first time in 2007 as they provide an important role in the ecosystem as dispersers of seeds of endemic plants, thereby reducing the necessity for human intervention in the planting process. Currently, Round Island has twenty-one tortoises free ranging on the island. Of these eleven are Aldabran Giant Tortoises and ten are Madagascan Radiated Tortoises. It is proposed to put some fifty more tortoises on the island soon.**



Text: Ashok Khadun Photo: Christine Griffiths



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Ile aux Aigrettes

You can reserve your ticket to visit the island by phone on: (230) 631 2396

Acknowledgements

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Edited by Lone Raffray

