

TITLE OF PROGRAMME: ECOSYSTEMS RECONSTRUCTION USING GIANT TORTOISES

By **Mauritian Wildlife Foundation** [NCSR Reg No: NCSR/2017/0158]



PROJECT TECHNICAL SHEET

Project Type	Species Translocation
Start of Project	Late 1990's
Scientific Name	<i>Aldabrachelys gigantea</i>
Species	Ecological Replacement
Location	Ile aux Aigrettes and Round Island
Priority Area	Environmental & Sustainable development - Biodiversity
IUCN Status	Vulnerable

OBJECTIVES

Maximise the use of ecological replacement tortoises for the restoration of native Mauritian habitats.

ACTIVITIES BEING IMPLEMENTED

- Management of the tortoise herds on Ile aux Aigrettes and Round Island.
- Captive rearing of hatchling tortoises produced on Ile aux Aigrettes for future conservation projects.

- Tag juvenile tortoises hatched on Round Island.
- Maintaining high quality health and welfare standards through disease screening.
- Monitoring the movement and impact of tortoises on the vegetation of both islands.
- Increasing visitor awareness of the role of tortoises in the ecosystem on Ile aux Aigrettes.

PROJECT BENEFICIARIES

- Aldabra Tortoises, Islands Ecosystems, Mauritian Biodiversity.
- Mauritian population and its future generations, school children, tourists and the world at large.
- Republic of Mauritius, regarding meeting national biodiversity targets (e.g. the National Biodiversity and Strategy Action Plan 2006-15) and fulfilling obligations towards international biodiversity conventions (e.g. Rio Conventions, Aichi Targets, Millennium Development Goals).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Giant tortoises were once common in the lowland areas, and possibly upland areas too, of mainland Mauritius and some of the surrounding islands. The last wild endemic tortoise was collected on Round Island in 1844. Tortoises had an important role in the native ecosystem as browsers, grazers and seed dispersers. Many native and endemic plants have evolved with and have adapted to its presence. With the extinction of our endemic tortoise species, all the functional roles fulfilled by giant tortoises in the ecosystem have gone missing. To remediate this situation, we are using a pioneering method in wildlife conservation: the use of analogue (ecological replacement) species to replace lost ones.

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The Aldabra tortoise from the Seychelles, a close relative of Mauritian giant tortoises, have been used as substitutes to re-enact the lost 'plant-tortoise' interactions and help restore the native forest on Ile aux Aigrettes and Round Island.

The aim of this project is to manage up to 30 free-roaming adult tortoises on Ile aux Aigrettes and around 700 free-roaming tortoises on Round Island. Wild hatchlings ensuing from Ile aux Aigrettes' adult tortoises are collected and head-started in captivity on the island itself. The young offspring are on show to visitors and thus additionally serve an educational purpose. The juvenile tortoises will be used for other restoration projects. The wild hatchlings on Round Island are pit tagged when found and re-released. The tortoises on both islands are closely monitored and studies have been set up to assess their impact on the ecosystem.



REPORTING AND FINANCIALS

PROJECT DATES

The programme is continuous but the level of project activity is assessed yearly to adjust to the project aims and requirements. Annual report & other reports delivery is as per agreed timeframe with main funders.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Human Resources: Two Field Biologists supported by the Island Restoration Manager, biologists on Round Island and Ile aux Aigrettes, including one Animal Keeper on Ile aux Aigrettes and office staff.
- Equipment: Materials and tools to maintain enclosures and wallows on Round Island, fridge for storage of fruit and vegetables for head-started juvenile tortoises, shared use of one jeep, one laptop, two GPS units, transportation crates, PIT tag equipment and tags.
- Other: Food for tortoises, veterinary products and consumables.

BUDGET 2024-2025

Description	Budget (Rs)
Project Staff Cost	1,329,450
Transport and Travel	188,000
Equipment and Materials	258,610
Veterinary Costs	100,100
Other Operation Costs	118,800
Total Operational Cost	1,994,960
Administration Cost	240,000
TOTAL PROJECT COST	2,234,960

ANY LEVEL OF CONTRIBUTION IS MOST WELCOME.

If excess funds are raised, they are carried forward to the next year of the project.

A full and detailed project and budget write-up can be given to you on request.