A lover of the fauna and flora of the Mascarenes, Jean Vinson passed away on May 8, 1966, during a biological expedition to Ile aux Aigrettes. He was one of the most influential Mauritian naturalists, who made interesting observations on the kestrel and its prey. He created an awareness of our fauna and flora and was an early champion of conservation.

Some key people who contributed to saving the Mauritius Kestrel

Francois Staub was a Mauritian dentist who combined his practice with a lifelong interest in ornithology, orchids, history, art, and good living. France devoted most of his free time to the observation of the birds and study of botany in the Mascarenes and the adjacent islands. He published three books including Birds of the Mascarenes and Saint Brandon (1976) and Fauna of Mauritius and Associated Flora (1993). He is commemorated in a vine, ‘Iane calé Cynanchum staubi’ (Apocynaceae), which he collected in 1905 on Ile aux Aigrettes.

Tom Cade was an American ornithologist most notable for his efforts to conserve the Peregrine Falcon. He was a founder of the Peregrine Fund, a nonprofit credited as “the world’s most important raptor conservation organization” which funded the Mauritius Kestrel conservation programme in its early days. In 1998, Audubon magazine included Cade in their list of 100 “Champions of Conservation”.

The Peregrine Fund has been involved in the conservation of the Mauritius Kestrel ever since Stan Temple a biologist came to Mauritius in 1972. Stan came here to determine the status of the bird. Later the Peregrine Fund sent Willard Heck to Mauritius every breeding season for a decade. Willard is one of the best falcon breeders in the world and he hatched the kestrel eggs in an incubator and hand-reared the chicks. The Peregrine Fund also played an active part in the breeding efforts, as they produced 46 birds at their US captive breeding programme from 1985-1991. The birds subsequently returned to Mauritius and successfully joined the wild flock.

Abdulk Wahab Owadally was Conservator of Forests from 1969 to 1997. He was the author and co-author of several articles and books on forests, wildlife, and the environment. Wahab was a major architect of the conservation work, he set up the Parc Nature Reserve in 1971 and set up the Gerald Durrell Endemic Wildlife Sanctuary and drove the conservation work on the Mauritius Kestrel, Pink Pigeon and Echo Parakeet. He recommended the Trocheta boutonniana as the National Flower.

Richard Lewis is a conservation biologist who now lives and works in Madagascar saving their rare wildlife. Richard is an experienced bird of prey biologist who before working in Mauritius had worked on the restoration of the kestrel, studying and looking after the wild birds and releasing captive-bred birds.

Abdulk Wahab Owadally
Peregrine Fund

Richard Lewis
Mauritian ornithologist, Yousoof Muniruoo was the very first graduate of Durrell Wildlife’s International Training Centre in Jersey. Yousoof and Carl Jones worked together to develop the conservation work on the Mauritius Kestrel, studying the birds in the wild and in running the captive breeding and reintroduction project. Yousoof became the first director of the Black River Girges National Park.

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Gerald Durrell founded the Jersey Zoo in 1959 which later became the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. He wrote forty books about his life as an animal collector, zoo owner and conservationist, one of these being “Golden Bats and Pink Pigeons”, an entertaining story of his experience in Mauritius and Rodrigues where he collected rare specimens to start saving them in his Jersey Zoo. Gerald Durrell was instrumental in forming the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation.

Carl Lewis
Richard Lewis
India, began working on the Mauritius Kestrel programme. Few believed that such a rare bird could be saved, some thought they would have genetic problems caused by inbreeding and did not want to be associated with a project with such a high chance of failure. They claimed the money needed to conserve the kestrel could be better invested in other species more likely to be saved. But Carl went against the orders.

Indianapolis Prize Winner, Chief Scientist at the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and Scientific Director, and a founder of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Carl is an Honorary Professor in ecology and conservation biology at the University of East Anglia. Carl is also credited to have led five successful bird restoration projects where the starting population has numbered less than 12 known individuals; as a consequence, Mauritius has averted more bird extinctions than any other country.

A conservation biologist who now lives and works in Madagascar saving their rare wildlife. Richard is an experienced bird of prey biologist who before working in Mauritius had worked saving the Philippine Eagle and he led the early work on the restoration of the kestrel, studying and looking after the wild birds and releasing captive-bred birds.

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Born on 20 June 1954, Carl is a Welsh conservation biologist who came to Mauritius with the mission of... closing the Mauritius Kestrel programme. Few believed that such a rare bird could be saved, some thought they would have genetic problems caused by inbreeding and did not want to be associated with a project with such a high chance of failure. They claimed the money needed to conserve the kestrel could be better invested in other species more likely to be saved. But Carl went against the orders.

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The Mauritius Kestrel is a small falcon. They are a lovely warm brown colour with the feathers barred with black, and a pale ivory-white front with round and heart shaped spots. The males (c. 125 g) are smaller than the females (c. 170 g).

There are other species of kestrels found elsewhere in the world, although the Mauritius Kestrel is different, and unlike the others is a specialist forest living falcon, with a unique lifestyle.

The Mauritius Kestrel feeds mainly on day-geckos and has short, rounded wings which gives it great flying manoeuvrability to chase geckos around branches, and longish legs to reach and grab them in its claws. They will also feed on insects and occasionally small birds, introduced agama lizards and shrews.

The kestrels leave the nest at between five and six weeks. The brood size at fledging is usually only one or two. The fledgling kestrels cannot fly properly since their wing feathers are still growing.

In the very early morning in August and September kestrels may fly above their nesting areas calling loudly with a strident white ‘keea-keea-keea’. This is to show other kestrels that the area is occupied, and to keep out.

Features
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Bird Sound
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The kestrel pair soars together and show each other how fit they are by rapid flying with steep and perpendicular stoops followed by sharp climbs, zigzagging across the sky, and sometimes flying slowly with deep wing-beats.

Feeding Habits
The Mauritius Kestrel feeds mainly on day-geckos and has short, rounded wings which gives it great flying manoeuvrability to chase geckos around branches, and longish legs to reach and grab them in its claws. They will also feed on insects and occasionally small birds, introduced agama lizards and shrews.

Growing up
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Breeding Season
Mauritius Kestrels are monogamous and breed from September to March. They can lay a clutch of up to five eggs. Incubation takes between 28 and 30 days and the fledglings may remain in their natal territory up to the beginning of the following breeding season.

How we started to save the kestrels? (1970s - 2000s)
The first job was to find out as much as possible so we would be better informed about what could be done to save it. Slowly over the decades the kestrel has revealed some of its secrets although there is still much to learn.

Young Carl Jones feeding captive-bred chicks