



## **The growing threat of introduced species[1]**

Mauritian endemic species are found no-where else in the world and are a source of pride for all Mauritians. As Ecotourism grows, our unique plants and animals attract visitors to our islands thus also have economic value.

However the increasing problem of introduced invasive species is a grave and real threat to our unique animals. The establishment of many species that come from other countries and are harmful to our native wildlife has increased dramatically in recent years and the problem shows every indication of getting worse. Exotic, often including wild caught animals of many species have been, and continue to be, imported to the Republic of Mauritius for the pet trade or for business purposes. Some of these escape and it has also become common to release pet animals to the wild in the belief that they beautify the island or that it is morally and spiritually correct to release animals. Hence many exotic birds have become established in the west of the island.

Some may think that these species add colour and diversity to the islands' wildlife but they are actually causing a great deal of harm. World-wide, introduced animals have caused extinctions of the native fauna and this problem is particularly severe on islands such as Mauritius. Due to the possible impacts introduced species have, many countries including Australia, Canada, Europe, Israel, New Zealand, USA and many island states have banned the importation of wild caught animals for the pet trade, on ethical, welfare, animal health, human health, conservation and ecological grounds. World wide the problem of introduced animals is being recognised and their import is being halted. Here in Mauritius the number of introduced species establishing themselves in the wild is rising sharply.

Mauritius has developed an international reputation for the quality of its conservation work and the many notable successes it has had. This is now being undone by the problems being created by the increased flow of introduced species into the island that are threatening our native wildlife.

We appeal to the public to think carefully before buying or accepting as a gift a pet animal especially ones which are difficult to care for. Please do not release it. Seek the advice of your local animal care centre or vet.



**04 June 2012**

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*[1] Although this press release exposes the threats posed by the continuous introduction of potentially invasive animals into the Republic of Mauritius, it does not diminish the seriousness of plant introductions.*

### **Les espèces introduites : une menace croissante[1]**

Les espèces endémiques de Maurice ne se trouvent nulle part ailleurs dans le monde et sont une source de fierté pour tous les Mauriciens. Avec le développement de l'écotourisme, ils attirent également les visiteurs dans nos îles et ont donc aussi une valeur économique certaine.

Cependant, le problème croissant de l'introduction d'espèces envahissantes est une menace grave et réelle pour nos animaux uniques. L'introduction de nombreuses espèces qui viennent d'ailleurs, et qui sont nocifs pour notre faune indigène, a augmenté de façon vertigineuse ces dernières années et tous les signes indiquent une aggravation. Exotiques, incluant souvent des animaux capturés directement de leur milieu, de nombreuses espèces ont été - et continuent d'être - importés sur le territoire de la République de Maurice pour le commerce d'animaux et d'autres exploitations. Certains d'entre eux finissent par s'évader et il est aussi devenu commun de libérer des animaux de compagnie en pleine nature en croyant qu'ils embellissent l'île ou qu'il est moralement et spirituellement correct de libérer les animaux. Ainsi de nombreux oiseaux exotiques se sont établis dans l'ouest de l'île.

Certains peuvent penser que ces espèces ajoutent de la diversité et de la couleur dans la faune des îles, mais elles causent un tort indescriptible. A l'échelle mondiale, les animaux introduits ont provoqué des extinctions de la faune indigène et ce problème est particulièrement grave sur les îles insulaires comme Maurice. En raison des impacts possibles des espèces introduites, de nombreux pays dont l'Australie, le Canada, l'Europe, Israël, la Nouvelle-Zélande, les Etats-Unis et de nombreux états insulaires ont interdit l'importation d'animaux sauvages capturés pour le commerce animalier, se basant sur des questions d'éthique, de la santé et du bien-être des animaux, de la santé publique, de la conservation et des raisons écologiques. Dans le monde entier le problème des animaux introduits est reconnu et leur importation est freinée. Ici à Maurice, le nombre d'espèces introduites qui s'établissent dans la nature est en forte hausse.

Maurice a acquis une réputation internationale pour la qualité de son travail dans le domaine de la conservation et les nombreux succès notables qu'elle a eus. Ceci est maintenant remis en cause par les problèmes créés par l'augmentation du nombre d'espèces introduites dans l'île qui menacent notre faune indigène.

Nous lançons un appel au public de bien réfléchir avant d'acheter ou d'accepter un animal de compagnie en cadeau, en particulier ceux qui sont difficiles à soigner. Et surtout nous vous prions de ne pas le libérer. Nous vous recommandons de demander l'avis de votre centre de soins d'animaux ou de votre vétérinaire.

**04 juin 2012**

*2 Ce point de presse expose les dangers posés par l'introduction continue d'animaux potentiellement envahissants sur le territoire de la République de Maurice, il ne diminue aucunement ce même problème en ce qui concerne les plantes.*



## **APPENDIX TO PRESS RELEASE**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2012**

#### **Invasive Species: Bird and Reptiles**

##### **Agricultural Pests**

Many introduced bird species can be agricultural pests. The Indian Ring-necked Parakeet (*petite câteau de l'Inde*) which has been established on Mauritius for over a century decimates maize crops so that it is now impractical to grow this crop in many parts of the island. Cockatoos and other parrots of all species are potential pests of lychees, mangoes and other fruits. Captive parrots of many species readily eat sugar cane. Recently introduced Apple Snails are causing extensive damage to watercress and taro plantations, and may threaten rice cultivation in Mauritius given that it is a recognised pest of rice in Asia.

##### **Virulent Diseases**

Many of the introduced species bring diseases with them that harm our local wildlife and in some cases a threat to human health. All imported animals come with a health certificate and are disease screened, yet many of the worst diseases cannot be detected by standard screening techniques and for some of the more virulent viruses screening techniques to detect them do not exist.

Diseases are particularly common in parrots, and their trade has been responsible for moving viruses to new countries. The Echo Parakeet that Mauritius has been active in conserving for three decades is badly affected by a circo virus called Psittacene Beak and Feather Disease. This disease, probably introduced with exotic birds, kills many of the young parakeets annually. While studying this virus in other species of captive parrots in Mauritius it was discovered that another strain of this disease has been recently imported from South-east Asia. A further strain of this disease is very common in South Africa and the importation of birds from there could introduce yet another virulent strain. Different strains of this disease may have a compounding or displacement effect and further endanger our endemic Parakeet.

The Pink Pigeon (*pigeon des Mares*) suffers from a disease called Trichomoniasis caused by a parasite that lives in the mouth and throat resulting in hardened pus that blocks the throat and air passageways. This disease was introduced to Mauritius with introduced doves, and it kills most of the young Pink Pigeons. The population of Palm Doves that became established in the west of Mauritius in the 1990's carry this disease and are possible vectors. This disease comes in different strains of varying virulence and we fear new strains will be introduced. Pheasants can carry this disease and the recent release of large numbers of this species for hunting purposes seems foolhardy. Trichomoniasis in Europe and North America is spreading as new strains develop and is badly affecting many wild bird species. This disease has recently been found to kill Mauritius Fodies and has also been found to infect the Mauritius Kestrel.

### **Concerns for Human Health**

Terrapins and other reptiles are well-recognised sources of human salmonellosis when maintained or handled without correct sanitisation. Elsewhere, Apple Snails have been identified as a concern to human health through the transmission of parasites.

### **Threats to tourism and airports**

Two species establishing on Mauritius are threats to tourism elsewhere.

In the Caribbean, the large Green Iguana has spread so rapidly that it occupies much of the lawn of hotel gardens, and threatens tourism. These large lizards also bask on open tarmac and have become a hazard to transport; even causing collisions on runways and have frequently disrupted aircraft operations at Puerto Rica's International Airport.

The Egyptian Goose which has a small population in the west of Mauritius is also regarded in some countries as a threat to aviation since it grazes on the grass on the sides of runways and poses a threat of air-strike.

## **Aggressive Invaders**

Many introduced species aggressively displace our natives. The Madagascar Giant Day-gecko, a large and spectacular bright green lizard up to 25cm long became established in Baie de Tombeau, Cascavelle and Floreal in the early 1990s and has since spread widely. Where it occurs it wipes out the populations of our endemic geckos by preying on them or competing with them for food. It is possible that some of our endemic geckos could become extinct because of this introduction.

Our streams and rivers are becoming homes for exotic animals, such as the Red-eared Terrapins, these eat all sorts of aquatic animal life, and elsewhere within their introduced range they have radically altered the food web and wiped out native species. Apple Snails, now well established in our rivers, have the potential to be major agricultural pests and they disrupt aquatic ecosystems in other countries where they have been introduced and displace native snails.

Cockatoos free in the Black River Gorges National Park compete with and have displaced the endemic Echo Parakeet (*grosse c ateau verte*) from its nest sites.

On Rodrigues the introduction of the Musk Shrew has resulted in the complete extinction of the large native centipede from the mainland. This shrew was introduced to Flat Island in 2010 and within a year and a half wiped out three species of endemic reptile (Orange-tailed Skink (*scinque   queue orange*), Bojer's Skink (*scinque de Bojer*) and Lesser Night Gecko (*gecko diurne*)), totalling half a million individuals. On Agalega, yellow wasp (*mouche jaune*) and spiralling white-fly (*mouche blanche   spirale*) have spread over the last decade, and are nuisances to public health and agriculture.

## **Recently Introduced Species**

In the last two decades we have seen the following species of introduced animals become established in the wild: Mallard Duck (*colvert*), White-faced Whistling-duck (*dendrocygne veuf*), Fulvous Whistling-duck (*dendrocygne fauve*), Egyptian Goose (*oie d'Egypte*), Palm Dove (*tourterelle maill e du S n gal*), Panther Chameleon (*cam l on panth re*), Madagascar Giant Day-gecko (*gecko de Madagascar*) and Giant Apple Snail (*escargot g ant de l'Am rique du sud*).

This above list is incomplete and there are several other species including introduced fresh water and marine fish that have become established, and there are small populations of other species that may become established such as the Green Iguana (*iguane verte*), Gold-dust Day-gecko (*gecko diurne   pouss re d'or*), Red-eared Terrapin (*tortue de Floride*), Ring-necked Pheasants (*faisan de Colchide*) as well as cockatoos and parrots flying wild in various parts of the island.

On Rodrigues during the same period it has acquired the Musk Shrew (*rat musquée*), Agamid Lizard (*agame*), and the Madagascar Giant Day-gecko.



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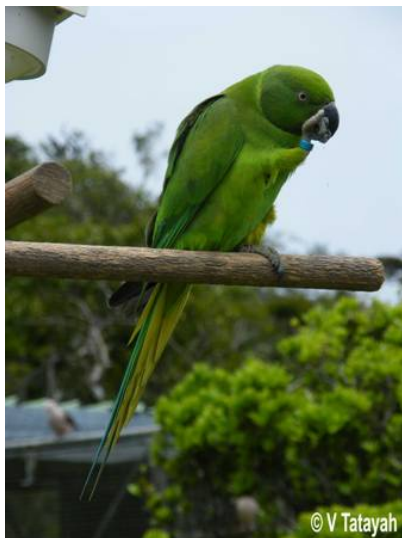
June 2012

**Echo Parakeets** are affected by Pssitacene Beak and Feather Disease (Pbfd): introduced animals can bring diseases which may kill our native species.

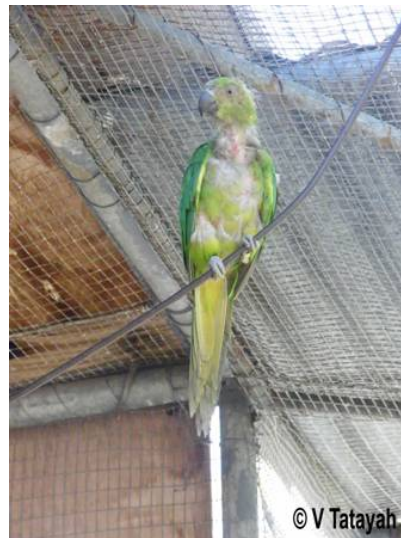
**La grosse câteau verte** est affectée par 'la maladie du bec et des plumes'.

Les animaux importés peuvent colporter des maladies mortelles à nos animaux indigènes.

First Photo (non-infected) *Première photo – oiseau sain*



Second photo (infected bird) *Deuxième photo – oiseau infecté*



**Egyptian Geese:** Can increase the risk of bird strikes to aeroplanes

**L'oie égyptienne** peut augmenter le risque de collision avec des avions.



**Panther Chameleon:** Feeds on native Mauritian geckos.

**Le caméléon panthère** est un prédateur des geckos mauriciens.



**Apple Snail:** Reduces crops of taro and watercress and could threaten rice.

**L'Apple Snail :** détruit les cultures d' arouilles (et de 'bredes songes'), et pourrait affecter les cultures de riz.



**The Musk Shrew:** is a pest in agriculture, homes and in conservation. Feeds on native Mauritian geckos and skinks and its recent introduction to Flat Island has resulted in a massive reduction of native reptiles on the island and probably complete extinction of ground reptiles.

**Le rat musqué** est un fléau domestique, agricole et biologique. Il survit au dépens des geckos et scinques mauriciens, et son arrivé récente à l'île Plate a entraine une réduction drastique, voire l'extermination, des reptiles terrestres.





**Madagascar Giant Day-gecko:** Feeds on native Mauritian geckos. Is now entering homes and can elicit fear.

**Le gecko de Madagascar** se nourrit de lézards indigènes de Maurice. Il s'infiltré dans les maisons où il peut effrayer les occupants.



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