



MAURITIAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

CONTENTS

- 2 Project to restore a lost seabird community on Ile aux Aigrettes now in its third season
- 3 Plant and animal imports threaten our native biodiversity
- 4 MWF secures the long-term protection of a last remnant of Mauritian forest
- 5 Students complete the first postgraduate course in endangered species recovery
- 6 University of Mauritius students volunteer for MWF
- 7 UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme approves landmark funding for conservation in Ferney Valley

NEWSLETTER

No. 22— September 2013

- 8 Carl Jones is re-nominated for the Indianapolis Award
New T-shirts on sale for MWF
- 9 The third annual Dodo Trail is 'run' in aid of MWF
Exhibition - BIODIVERSITY the end for wildlife?
- 10 Get involved! Supporter and funder information
- 11 Acknowledgements

Project to restore a lost seabird community on Ile aux Aigrettes now in its third season



White-tailed Tropicbird on Round Island
Photo: J. Cole

The Mauritian offshore islands, especially Round Island and Serpent Island, play an important role in supporting some of the largest breeding colonies of seabirds in the Indian Ocean.

Many seabird populations are facing escalating threats and declines, and moves to protect breeding colonies are becoming increasingly necessary. The Seabird Translocation Project began in 2009 with the aim to restore a lost seabird community on Ile aux Aigrettes and to learn as much as we can in the process. Translocations are now a major tool in ensuring the survival of threatened species worldwide. With the project now in its third season, 280 seabirds of five different species have been released and the project continues to gain momentum.

Building on the successes of releases in 2009 and 2011, collections continued this year with an exciting trial

translocation from Serpent Island, which took place on 20 March with the assistance of the National Coast Guard (NCG) and the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS). Releases of 17 Common Noddies (*Anous stolidus*) and 21 Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*) ran smoothly with all but a single bird fledging successfully. Harvested nestlings were translocated to a cordoned off area on Ile aux Aigrettes. Unlike previously translocated species these birds were fed twice a day on communal feed trays after the initial weeks of individual hand-feeding, and remained around the release site for some weeks after fledging.

It was not previously thought that these species would be suitable for hand-rearing as they show post-fledging aftercare. However, the birds continued to come back to the island to be fed before gradually spending extended periods out at sea, and the initial releases went very well. This is the first time, as far as we know, that these species have been translocated or hand-reared in any numbers, so any information we gain during this trial is of great importance. The mix of different seabird species show diverse behavioural, nesting and feeding requirements, meaning many techniques can be practised and perfected from these trial releases. Information on fledging times, growth and provisioning rates and also fledgling survival will add to the current knowledge on seabirds that is all too often incomplete.

The project has confirmed the number of nestlings of each species that it is possible to hand-rear at any one time with our available facilities. This was tested with

the Serpent Island translocations and also with recent helicopter transfers of around 30 tropicbirds from Round Island to Ile aux Aigrettes. Ongoing tropicbird collections will continue throughout the season until September. Nestlings are harvested at around two to three weeks before fledging and are hand-reared on a diet of fish, squid and octopus. We are eagerly awaiting the return of birds released in previous seasons. White-tailed Tropicbirds have been frequently seen flying over the island and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters have been heard calling near release sites. These are all encouraging signs, and we hope to find returning birds on the island over the coming seasons.

These translocations demonstrate our long-term commitment to seabird and island restoration and will lay the groundwork for more challenging seabird restoration work in the future, such as the establishment of some rarer seabirds, including the Round Island Petrel (*Pterodroma arminjoniana*) and the Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*).



Common Noddy
Photo: J. Cole



Breakfast time!
Photo: J. Cole

Plant and animal imports threaten our native biodiversity



The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation has been monitoring the introduction and spread of introduced species to Mauritius, and we are alarmed at the extent of the problem. Encouragingly the Government of Mauritius is working towards finding solutions and a number of initiatives have been proposed in the forthcoming *Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Bill*.

MWF is working to inform the Mauritian government and general public about the damage that invasive species can cause to our wildlife, tourism and agriculture, as well as having other negative impacts. We are building support for an approach where Mauritius is guided by the examples of New Zealand, Australia, Israel, Canada and the European Union to introduce strict controls on the importation of exotic animals and plants.

The period since the mid-1990s has seen an acceleration in the number of introduced animal species becoming established in Mauritius. If all the feral species here become established we will be witness to the highest rate of introductions in our history. Although many believe that species brought into Mauritius for the pet trade, public display, aquaculture and other purposes have little or no effect upon our ecosystems, if they escape or are released these species are in fact the biggest threat facing our native wildlife today. Furthermore, the nature of some invasive species means that they can spend many years at low numbers and then show explosive population increases.

The islands around Mauritius and Rodrigues are particularly vulnerable to invasion by a whole range of introduced species. It might be expected that our islands would be free from recent introductions,

especially since from the 1970s to 1990s a huge amount of effort went into clearing the most important islands of goats, rats, mice, cats, rabbits and hares. However, the Asian House Shrew (*Suncus murinus*), now found in Mauritius and Reunion, spread to Flat Island in 2009/2010 where it caused the complete loss of three species of endemic reptiles amounting to over half a million individuals. Alarming in 2008 the highly poisonous Australian Red-backed Spider (*Latrodectus hasseltii*) was found on Gunner's Quoin, a closed nature reserve. These species often stow away on visiting boats suggesting that closer policing of the islands is necessary.

Introduced reptiles are proving to be a growing threat to biodiversity. For example, the Giant Madagascar Day Gecko (*Phelsuma grandis*), introduced for the pet trade in the early 1990s, is having a severe impact, and wherever it occurs the number of endemic lizards drops dramatically. Similarly, the Panther Chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*) is an effective predator of our endemic geckos and also young birds.

The trade in parrots threatens to be particularly damaging due to the range of viral diseases that they carry. Our wild Echo Parakeets (*Psittacula eques*) are being affected by Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease which kills many of the young birds, and detailed studies at the University of Kent, UK, have suggested that this disease is a strain introduced with captive parrots from South Africa in the 1950s. We have also discovered another strain that was introduced in the last decade from South-east Asia.

Our freshwater systems too have been badly affected by introduced fish, plants and invertebrates that are impacting upon our native and endemic fish, invertebrates and plants.

Alien invasion

The Indian Ring-necked Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) can transmit diseases to our endemic Echo Parakeets.
Photo: V. Tatayah



The Asian House Shrew has caused complete extinction of ground reptiles on Flat Island.
Photo: N. Cole



The Panther Chameleon and the Giant Madagascar Day Gecko are both having a severe impact on our endemic geckos.
Photos: N. Cole

MWF is recommending a policy of reverse listing which entails a complete ban on the importation of all exotic plants and animals with exceptions for domesticated species, in order to ensure that our efforts over the last four decades to conserve our wildlife are not squandered.

MWF secures the long-term protection of a last remnant of Mauritian forest



Gabriel d'Argent who has spent thirty years working to conserve Mondrain's plant communities Photo: N. Clarke

In August 2013, the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation signed a 20-year contract to oversee the ongoing restoration and management of Mondrain reserve. Mondrain is a private reserve owned by the Medine Sugar Estate which covers about five hectares of hillside and is located on the crown of the Vacoas Ridge, overlooking the Magenta Valley. MWF has been restoring the forest in partnership with the Medine Sugar Estate and the Royal Society of Arts and Science since 1985. Mondrain was leased to the Royal Society of Arts and Science from 1979 to 2009 for the purposes of preserving its unique flora.

quickly, grows easily from cuttings or seeds and is tolerant to a wide range of weather conditions. It has been grown in many Mauritian gardens. Unfortunately, it forms hybrids with common garden hibiscus species and so replanting alone may not save the endemic species, making a protected and isolated site away from other hibiscus necessary.

As part of the endangered species recovery course run by Durrell and MWF in 2013, a project was undertaken to carry out a census of plants in the reserve and plot GIS locations of the best specimens of each species. MWF also supported a BSc study at the University of Mauritius on the assessment of the habitat restoration of Mondrain. These studies form part of an outline management plan and strategy that will govern Mondrain and how it is managed and developed, and most importantly help to preserve this forest for future generations.



Students on a field trip to Mondrain Photo: N. Clarke

Due to its remote location, Mondrain is one of the best-preserved examples of native forest and one of the last viable areas of such ecosystem types in Mauritius. The reserve retains significant biological importance with its unique plant community of over 200 plant species that have become extremely rare or extinct elsewhere in Mauritius.

Although its characteristic low ridge-type, mid-altitude vegetation is rich and diverse, some species are present in very low numbers and will need continued assistance to ensure their sustained survival. Most of the remaining part of the ridge adjacent to Mondrain has been degraded through collection of firewood and invasion by introduced species.

The importance of preserving Mondrain was kindled by the discovery of a beautiful pink hibiscus (*Hibiscus genevii*) in 1969, which is unique to the reserve. The plant regenerates



The beautiful pink hibiscus found only at Mondrain Photo: J. Sevathian

Students complete the first postgraduate course in endangered species recovery



Students learn about population modelling
Photo: N. Clarke

This year, the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation teamed up with its long-standing partners the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) to deliver a new course on endangered species recovery, the first of what we hope will be a permanent training programme in Mauritius.

Drawing participants from as far a field as New Zealand, Ireland and Hawaii, in addition to those from Mauritius, this year's four-month postgraduate internship course involved an international group of young conservation professionals. On the course, our interns learned about conservation biology, community-based conservation and conservation project management and leadership, with extended periods embedded within MWF's field teams, working to save some of the world's most threatened species across Mauritius and its offshore islands.

Durrell's Head of Learning and Development, Jamie Copsey, is excited about the future for a permanent training base in Mauritius: *'This island contains some of the world's most successful species recovery projects; through the work of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation we have been able to show that it is possible to save even the most critically endangered species if we have the determination and skills to do so. We hope that this new partnership between Durrell and MWF with the support of NPCS, will help us create a globally recognised centre of excellence in capacity building for species conservation.'*

The aim is to develop a training programme that helps build the skills for species recovery across the Indian Ocean region, drawing on the practical experience gained in Mauritius. Through this course we have already begun to work closely with related organizations in Madagascar to bring in their experience of engaging local communities and combining it with MWF's skills in direct species conservation interventions.

This year's course was a pilot for the first Postgraduate Diploma in Endangered Species Recovery to be run from April through to September 2014, validated through the University of Kent, England. The course will consist of intensive, classroom-based week-long taught modules in biology, conservation and ecology, community conservation and conservation project leadership, taught by leading experts in the field. These taught modules will be complemented by at least ten weeks of learning within the field teams, and pilot conservation science projects with tutorial support.

Next year's course will build on the success of the pilot internship course run this year, where participants have gone on to take up conservation jobs or continued with their studies to enter the conservation profession at a management level.

Durrell is already receiving applications for the 2014 course. As places are limited, any MWF supporters who would like to apply to join the course are recommended to email Jamie.Copsey@durrell.org without delay.

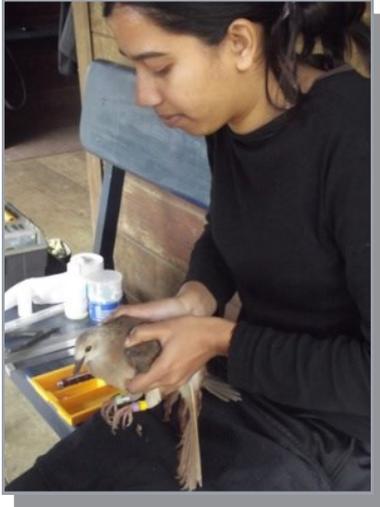


A student from Auckland Zoo surveys Red-tailed Tropicbird nests on Round Island
Photo: N. Clarke



The ESR students on a field trip to Mondrain
Photo: J. Copsey

University of Mauritius students volunteer for MWF



Leshmah on the Pink Pigeon team
Photo: L. Harrah

In order to progress in our projects, MWF needs dynamic, committed and skilled volunteers who can support our staff in the field. Volunteers come from various countries, but also from Mauritius and we are very grateful to some young students from the University of Mauritius who gave up their holidays to volunteer in our field programmes. Some of them – Leshmah Harrah, Oormila Sahodree and Pouvalen Seeneevassin - agreed to share their experience.

Leshmah who is from Petit Raffray is doing a BSc (Hons) Agriscience and Technology (2nd year). She has always been fascinated by nature and the work of MWF. Since her childhood she has watched MWF staff taking the helicopter to Round Island from the football ground of Petit Raffray. She was really pleased to be selected to work with MWF. *'I was posted at Pigeon Wood but had the opportunity to work at Camp, Petrin and Black River Lower Gorges field stations. I also visited Combo and Bel Ombre. I carried out almost all of the tasks of a Pink Pigeon biologist. The first time I went in the field alone it was really weird to be far from people, alone in nature. Volunteering for MWF has been one of the best experiences of my life.'*

Pink Pigeons, seeing them doing the "bow coo" to attract female pigeons. When I finally returned home I could still hear pigeons cooing! That was funny. I would definitely encourage young Mauritian to join MWF and learn about conservation and environmental protection. I have met many people from different countries and we all worked together in a friendly atmosphere. It has been an exciting experience for me. Maybe I will come again during my next holidays!'

Pouvalen is following a BEng (Hons) Electronic and Communication Engineering course. Needless to say he is also a nature lover! As he was in search of adventure, he signed up to be a volunteer for MWF and was posted at Combo. He reckons that the days at the field station were not as easy as he initially thought they would be: *'Every day I had to wake up before 6.30 am for hopper watch till 7.30. Then we all have breakfast till 8.00 and from 8.00 to 10.30 we go out into the forest to find birds. We usually have lunch around noon. From 12.30 to 14.00 there is hopper watch around the field station. After 14.00, there is more field work which usually includes nest watching. Then we do hopper watches again from 16.30 till the last bird flies away or as it gets dark.'* Pouvalen admits that being a MWF volunteer is a wonderful experience and would recommend all nature lovers to give some time to MWF.



Oormila at Camp field station
Photo O. Sahodree



Pouvalen came to MWF in search of adventure
Photo: P. Seeneevassin

If you would like to volunteer like Leshma, Oormila and Pouvalen, for a minimum of one month, please send your CV to executive@mauritian-wildlife.org or visit our website www.mauritian-wildlife.org for more information.



UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme approves landmark funding for conservation in Ferney Valley



A Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*) with an Agamid Lizard (*Calotes versicolor*) in Ferney
Photo: J. Skewes

In August 2013, the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) approved a project to the tune of MRU 4.5 M to improve the health and diversity of native wildlife in the Ferney Valley, by improving the quality of the habitat and reintroducing endemic bird species. This is the first strategic project approval of its kind for Mauritius.

The project entitled *Optimising the Ferney Valley into a Mauritian biodiversity conservation and awareness hotspot* will cost a total of MRU 19 M. It will be implemented by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation in partnership with the Vallée de Ferney Conservation Trust, which was created in 2008 and is dedicated to the restoration and protection of Ferney's natural habitats and unique biodiversity in a conservation area of approximately 200 ha. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in January 2013 between MWF and the Trust to develop the conservation management of the valley and its endemic species.

The GEF SGP provides funding to civil society organizations in 126 countries. Grants are provided in the following focal areas: mitigation of climate change, conservation of biodiversity, protection of international waters, reduced impact of chemicals and persistent organic pollutants, prevention of land degradation, and promotion of sustainable forest management. The SGP also seeks to generate sustainable livelihoods, reduce poverty and create community empowerment.

The Trust is a public-private partnership between the Government of Mauritius and CIEL Group. Other partners in this project include the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, North of England Zoological Society (Chester Zoo) and HSBC.



Carl Jones is re-nominated for the Indianapolis Award

For the second time in his career, Carl Jones (MWF's scientific director), has been nominated for the coveted Indianapolis Prize, the world's leading award for animal conservation. This is in recognition of his tireless dedication to preserving the ecology and native species of the Mascarene Islands and saving a dozen species from extinction, including the Mauritius Kestrel, Pink Pigeon and Echo Parakeet.

The Indianapolis Prize is awarded every two years, honouring an individual who has made an extraordinary contribution to conservation efforts involving a single animal species or multiple species. The winner receives a cash prize plus the prestigious Lilly Medal. The nominees are reviewed by two international committees — a nine-person nominating committee that narrows the field down to six finalists, and a jury that selects the winner. New nominating committee and jury members are chosen for each two-year cycle, and they include some of the leading people in the conservation field.

Carl was a finalist for the 2012 Indianapolis Prize. Previous winners include Save the Elephants founder Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton in 2010, and Dr Steve Amstrup, chief scientist of Polar Bears International in 2012.



Professor Carl Jones and Dr Vikash Tatayah examining a White-tailed Tropicbird on Round Island
Photo: Durrell

New T-shirts on sale for MWF

Mauritian clothing company Habit has just completed the design of a new set of T-shirts for MWF, featuring some of our endemic bird species.

These designs, named 'Rooted', 'Kestrel Line' and 'Singing Birds', join the popular 'Home Tree' T-shirt which was produced last year. The T-shirts come in adult and children's sizes and are made from 100% cotton in five different colours. They will be available in all Habit shops and in the Ile aux Aigrettes shop from November 2013.

Habit will donate Rs 25 to MWF for each adult T-shirt sold. Anyone who purchases one can wear it in the proud knowledge that they are directly supporting the protection of biodiversity in Mauritius.



News and Events

The third annual Dodo Trail is 'run' in aid of MWF

Runners of all ages came out in force for this year's Dodo Trail, a challenging mountain race through the spectacular peaks and tropical forests of the south-west of Mauritius, including the Black River Gorges National Park where MWF conducts some of its conservation work. The first Dodo Trail was held in 2011 on a different track from the one held this year, and the friendly atmosphere and guaranteed adventure for which the race has become renowned did not disappoint the 800 people who took part.

The 2013 Dodo Trail offered three unique and challenging trails for experienced enthusiasts as well as novices and families. These comprised: the 50 km Xtreme Dodo Trail with 3,500 m ascent of climbing going through the highest peak of Mauritius, won by Rene-Paul Vitry (Reunion) with Vishal Ittoo (Mauritius) finishing second; the 25 km Ti Dodo Trail with 1,500 m ascent, won by Martial Germane (Reunion); and the 10 km Mini Dodo Trail with 500 m ascent, won by Xavier Verny (Mauritius) in 47.07, only 7 seconds ahead of Vikash Narain (Mauritius).

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation again partnered with the organisers, firstly by providing volunteers to staff a refreshment post in Macchabée, headed by Melanie Moutou, MWF's fundraising assistant, and driven there by MWF's driver, Samade

Bissesur. The team consisted of four volunteers: Rudy, Olivier, Jerome and Emmanuel.

Secondly, as an innovation this year, MWF and Ze Dodo Trail Ltd partnership offered trail participants the opportunity to make a donation to the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation online as they registered for the race. More than 220 participants responded positively and together with the organiser's contributions a total of Rs 55,000 was donated to the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation on the day of the event. Joe-Ann Chavry, MWF fundraising executive, collected the cheque.

MWF is very grateful to Ze Dodo Trail Ltd and everyone who took part in this event.



Vishal Ittoo (Mauritius) finished second
Photo: Dodo Trail

Exhibition - BIODIVERSITY the end for wildlife?

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation recently participated in an exhibition for the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (2011-2020), curated by UNIVERSCIENCE of Paris, at l'Aventure du Sucre. The exhibition presents the research work of scientists, artists and associations of Mauritius working for biodiversity. Participants were invited to showcase their work for a six-month period from April to September 2013.

MWF contributed eight panels of photos and text which walked visitors through our projects, explaining the concept of endemism on islands and highlighting the importance of our work towards saving the endangered Mauritian fauna and flora.



Panels with striking photos showcasing our projects
Photo: l'Aventure du Sucre

Get involved!



Stay in touch

Follow MWF news on a regular basis via our website www.mauritian-wildlife.org under 'News and Events' or find us on Facebook at 'The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation'.

Also see our new weekly MWF Files on the Osmose page of *L'Express*, every Tuesday.

Volunteer

•Volunteer

If you are over 18 and are interested in volunteering for MWF please visit our website or email us on: volunteer@mauritian-wildlife.org. Expatriate volunteers must be over 21 years of age. Be sure to give details of your availability and which area of volunteering you are interested in.

CSR Activities

•Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

If you are part of a private company, various activities linked to Corporate Social Responsibility can be arranged with MWF, please contact us for more information by email on: fundraising@mauritian-wildlife.org

Visit

•Ile aux Aigrettes

You can book a visit to the island by phone on: (230) 631 2396, or by email: reservation@mauritian-wildlife.org

Donations

MWF is an accredited NGO (reg. charity number: 2143) for CSR activities (NEF reg. N/1070) (www.nef.mu/csr) and is seeking funds for its 18 different projects in 2013.

•To make a donation you can either:

Send a cheque or postal order, made payable to: The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Grannum Road, Vacoas, Mauritius

Or donate online at: www.mauritian-wildlife.org

Or make a bank transfer to:

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Mauritius Commercial Bank, Port Louis, Mauritius Swift BIC: MCBLMUMU / Account Number: 010204792, IBAN: U52MCBL0901000000204792000MUR Please include your full name and contact details, including email address, with all donations and address your correspondence or questions to: The Fundraising Manager, Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Grannum Road, Vacoas, Mauritius.

Or by email: fundraising@mauritian-wildlife.org

To make a donation, UK residents can email: fundraising@mauritian-wildlife.org
Attn Robert Wesley

Adopt

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation has introduced an alternative approach to raise funds for its conservation projects; you now have the possibility to adopt an animal species for only Rs 1,000 (this is a symbolic adoption that gives no right to the species).

Five animal species are available for adoption:

- Pink Pigeon (*Nesoenas mayeri*)
- Mauritius Fody (*Foudia rubra*)
- Olive White-eye (*Zosterops chloronothos*)
- Aldabra Giant Tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*)
- Ornate Day Gecko (*Phelsuma ornata*)

The animal adoption is valid for one year, commencing from the date the adoption is processed. By supporting our animal adoption scheme you are also contributing to our conservation projects.

•To adopt an animal please contact us:

Phone: (230) 697 6097, 697 6117, 697 6137

Email: adoptions@mauritian-wildlife.org

Online: www.mauritian-wildlife.org

Acknowledgements

We proudly list our funders as at August 2013.

Thank you for supporting us!



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