



Seychelles Islands Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



www.sif.sc

CEO's Message



Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley at the Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP13) - February 2020

2020 is a year that probably will enter history as the “COVID” year. As 2020 closes, we reflect on how drastically we had to change our daily routine for the simple act of survival. The last 10 months have reminded us all how much we are connected, not only in our communities, but also globally. The Coronavirus – a LIVING organism – penetrated with no mercy one continent after the other. Seychelles being much more isolated than other countries, with the authorities applying the precautionary principle, has so far been spared an outbreak that could not be controlled. Nevertheless, our social lives and economy have been heavily impacted.

SIF, being one of the main custodians of Seychelles' natural heritage, has never been in a better position to communicate how much man and nature are intertwined, something the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us all. We hope that this new understanding of connectivity will also help towards cultivating new and different appreciation of a healthy and clean environment in Seychelles and worldwide. In addition, the pandemic has shown us that each individual can make a difference by adopting the right behaviours and changing our lifestyles! If only these two lessons of the many others can be translated into our everyday routines, along with the consciousness to reduce our negative impact on nature, we will all be winners!

The impact of COVID-19 on SIF's work has forced us to focus on what is important. Accepting the management of Fond Ferdinand in September was a bold decision, especially when considering that SIF's revenues are based on tourism and these were at the lowest level ever as a result of the pandemic. However, we feel a responsibility not only towards the Vallée de Mai, but also towards the Praslinois.

“...I AM CONFIDENT OF THE STRONG FABRIC OUR SIF TEAM IS MADE OF, AND YOUR SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION IS THE BEST FOUNDATION FROM WHERE TO WELCOME 2021!”

Providing continuous work and income to everyone who has been involved in the protection of Fond Ferdinand, another stronghold of the famous coco de mer, was an important consideration in this decision. Especially during the last months of 2020, the know-how and knowledge of the Vallée de Mai team is being transferred to Fond Ferdinand. For example, in the monitoring of black parrots, which have surprisingly started to breed again! In the future we hope that the team at Fond Ferdinand will monitor the black parrots breeding there independently.

After nearly eight months of no staff movement to or from Aldabra, new recruits and some of our Head Office staff, including myself, were able to visit. This visit not only brought fresh faces and supplies to a grateful research station, but also allowed for on-the-ground assessment of the Aldabra team's needs and the critical decisions that need to be made in direct consultation with the team, and specifically the Island Manager and Aldabra Science Coordinator. One very promising outcome of this visit was the initiation of a review of the Aldabra Atoll Management Plan to re-focus our work for better effectiveness. I also witnessed the start of the marine monitoring season that will be completed in early 2021!

Like everyone else, this year SIF witnessed many disruptions and an increase in the need to respond to competing imperatives. I am proud of the extended SIF family that has withstood the COVID-19 storm and would like to thank the whole team for showing resilience and for staying focused. Without the support of our partners, donors and friends we would not be in a position to acknowledge the results you will shortly read of. None of us are in the position to look into the future, however I am confident of the strong fabric our SIF team is made of, and your support and collaboration is the best foundation from where to welcome 2021!



Dr. Frauke Fleischer-Dogley
Chief Executive Officer, Seychelles Islands Foundation

Highlights of 2020



SIF welcomes new SIF patron

SIF congratulates and warmly welcomes President Wavel Ramkalawan as our new Patron. The foundation also takes this momentous opportunity to thank Former President Danny Faure for his dedication and support of SIF's mandate as the previous Patron.



© State House Seychelles



SIF Generates High Impact Science

2020 saw the publication of three scientific papers (among others) written or co-authored by SIF researchers in high-impact and well-recognised peer-reviewed journals such as Nature Scientific Reports and Biodiversity and Conservation. The realisation of quality research publications is the outcome of years of investment in SIF's science, ecological monitoring and human capacity.



© Annabelle Constance



SIF Takes on Management of Fond Ferdinand Reserve

In late 2020, SIF took on the responsibility of managing the Fond Ferdinand nature reserve on Praslin, an important site bearing one of Seychelles' largest coco de mer palm forests and filled with cultural and natural heritage. The transfer of this new site to SIF is a testament to the trust placed in SIF's ability to manage its sites effectively and has seen the organisation expand to approximately 100 staff mandate as the previous Patron.

© Nigel Valmont



Celebrating 20 years of Eco-school

This year SIF celebrated 20 years of the annual Eco-School Aldabra trip, a cornerstone of SIF's outreach and an indication of Seychelles' investment in its youth and environmental protection. To take stock of the impact of the programme over the two decades SIF undertook a monitoring and evaluation exercise, including a survey of past Eco-School winners, their teachers, and their families.

[Watch now](#)

© SIF



Yellow Crazy Ant Project Makes Impact

This year saw SIF continue its efforts to control yellow crazy ants (YCA) through the UNESCO World Heritage Centre funded project. The combined efforts of the project and research teams and the site management ensured baiting took place in record time. Impressively, the results are already showing effectiveness and success, with surveys indicating the Vallée de Mai is experiencing its lowest level of YCA abundance in a decade!

© SIF



Hammerheads and Orcas at Aldabra

While incredible sightings of rare and unique wildlife on Aldabra are to be expected, 2020 saw the Aldabra team's luck exceed their wildest expectations. Towards the end of the southeast monsoon, the staff based on the research station witnessed a pod of orcas – the fourth sighting around Aldabra since 2001 – as well as a group of 50–70 Critically Endangered scalloped hammerhead sharks.



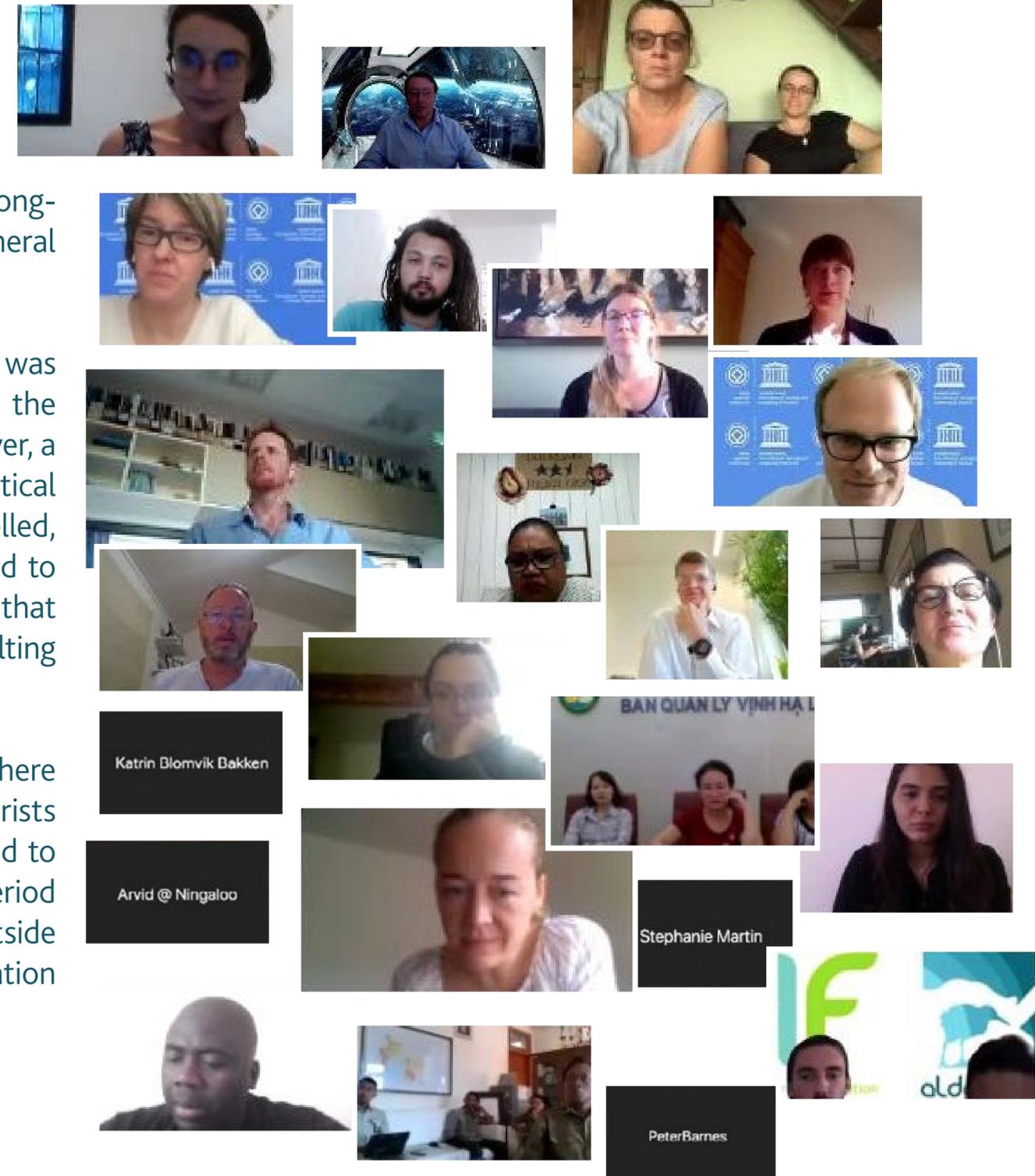
© Martin von Rooyen

3 The impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic began to impact Seychelles in March 2020 and many long-planned projects or events had to be delayed or cancelled, including the Annual General Meeting (AGM) which was scheduled to be held at the Vallée de Mai in April.

For Aldabra, after years of prudent planning the dugong population assessment was delayed due to international travel restrictions. The same issue also prevented the Météo-France team from carrying out their maintenance visit to Aldabra. Moreover, a filming expedition for a nature documentary was cut short due to the global logistical uncertainties of COVID-19. In addition, the long-awaited Eco-School visit was cancelled, a great disappointment to both SIF and the lucky students who were scheduled to embark on their trip of a lifetime. The Seychelles ban on cruise ships also meant that planned visits to the atoll in March/April and later in the year were cancelled, resulting in revenue loss.

The Vallée de Mai was impacted in various ways. With a drastic drop in tourism, there was increased potential for illegal activity because so many incomes reliant on tourists dried up. However, despite the additional pressure, our security team persevered to achieve the very positive outcome of recording no poaching incidents during the period of restricted movement. Although coco de mer nut poaching was recorded outside the Vallée de Mai during the same period, demonstrating that effective collaboration with the health and police authorities delivered results.





Following instructions from Public Health Authority, the baiting team was geared up with face masks this year © SIF

This work to maintain the security of the coco de mer during this challenging period was aided by an SOS African Heritage grant, which provided additional surveillance equipment to the team.

While the temporary cessation in the number of foreign visitors to the site presented severe challenges to SIF, it also provided an opportunity for the Vallée de Mai team to upgrade and conduct outstanding maintenance work on the premises, which proved difficult when the site was hosting large numbers of visitors.

The pandemic impacted one of our most critical projects, the UNESCO-funded yellow crazy ant (YCA) project. The delay in the third baiting was a severe blow to the Vallée de Mai research team, knowing how aggressive and threatening YCA are to Seychelles endemic species, it was mentally difficult to wait and let its population increase in the Vallée de Mai, especially considering all the hard work that has been undertaken since last year to keep their numbers under control.

Despite these setbacks, the staff's commitment and resilience have allowed us to adapt and overcome much. Hear more from the staff about the impacts of COVID-19 in this video.

[Watch now](#)

4

Vallée de Mai



vallée
de mai

© Tourism Seychelles

4.1 Science & Conservation

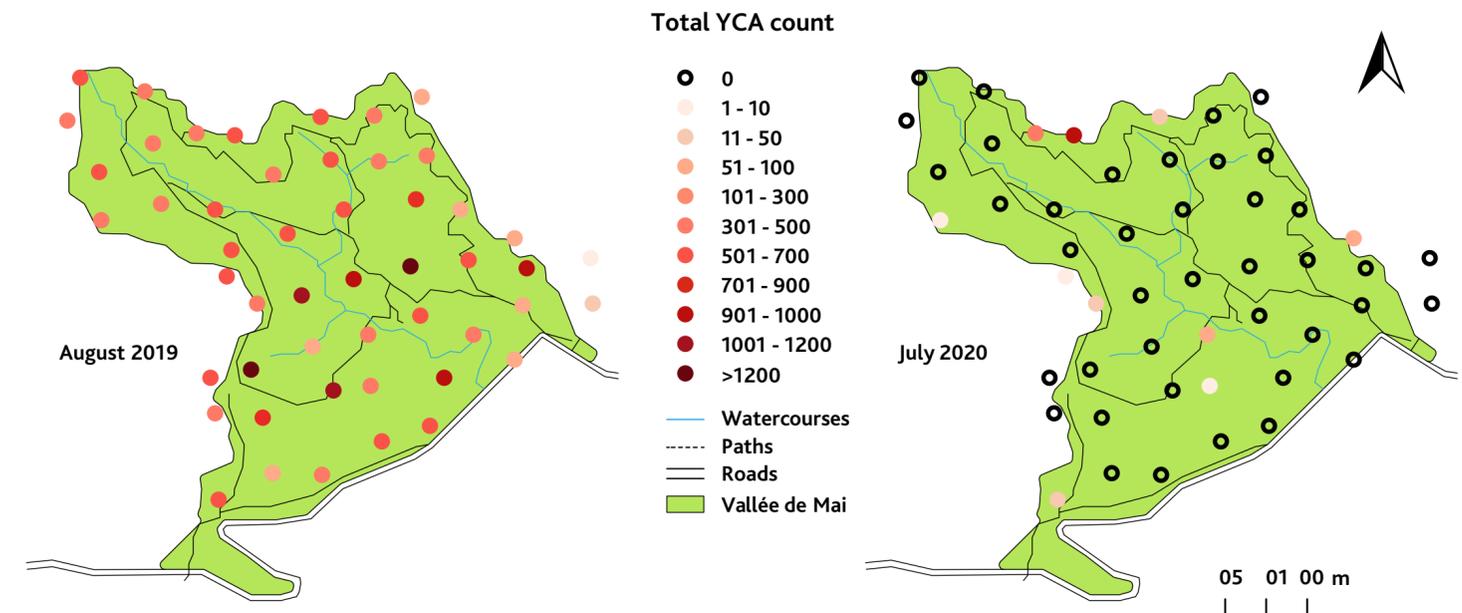
Yellow Crazy Ant Control Project Making Impact

In 2017, SIF secured emergency funding from UNESCO to reduce the number of yellow crazy ants threatening the unique ecosystem of the Vallée de Mai. This project has been ongoing throughout 2020 despite setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic the team was able to complete the third and fourth baiting for the yellow crazy ants (YCA) control project.

To measure the success of the baiting, several surveys are completed before and after every YCA baiting session. These surveys deliver crucial information about the success of invasive ant control and the presence of native species in the Vallée de Mai and Fond Peper. Following baiting and subsequent surveys, we recorded only 2% of the survey points showing yellow crazy ant presence, with the highest count being only seven individuals compared to 942 in July 2020!



Our Ranger, Lee-roy Estrale, identifying ants © SIF



Map and legend showing the drop in the distribution of yellow crazy ants in the Vallée de Mai. Map © Contance Tragett

Two Black Parrot Breeding seasons recorded in 2020

For the first time since Seychelles black parrot (*Coracopsis barklyi*) monitoring began 11 years ago, the black parrot team discovered eggs in July!

The team usually expect to find eggs in December, but with great astonishment, a nest containing two eggs was found in early July. In total, between July and October 2020, there were 10 fledglings from seven successful nests.

Although we can only guess at why the parrots were breeding at this time of year, it is good to know that, despite the unusual timings, they were able to find enough food to successfully raise their young. The parrot team then began preparing for the start of the usual breeding season. The signs suggested that at least some of the parrots were on track to breed with new breeding calls heard and parrots seen investigating cavities and displaying courtship behaviour.

Finally, in the last week of December the team discovered five active black parrot nests with eight eggs between them, confirming it was indeed a double breeding season for the black parrots in 2020.



Surveying Sooglossids

To understand the impact of the yellow crazy ant baiting on Praslin's tiniest endemic frog species, the sooglossid, the Vallée de Mai research team completed surveys pre- and post-baiting. The team use an auditory identification method, so they must be able to confidently identify the sooglossid's call. Once the third yellow crazy ant baiting session was completed, the team repeated the sooglossid frog survey and the data is currently being analysed to assess impacts of baiting on sooglossid activities.

The Praslin sooglossid was only discovered in 2009, therefore further research is needed to understand the impact of invasive species on this tiny frog



Launch of a Coco de mer Planting at Home Campaign



In August, SIF launched a campaign to enable property owners in Seychelles to grow a coco de mer palm on their land in an effort to encourage the general public to help conserve and build resilience for this iconic species.

By December, SIF had received 104 applications, 94 applicants on Mahé, 7 from Praslin and 3 from La Digue. Due to the ongoing pandemic restrictions, site visits were delayed but SIF plans to complete the validation of all applications and subsequent planting of nuts in the new year.

Proud Seychellois receiving their coco de mer seed prior to planting on their property.



© SIF



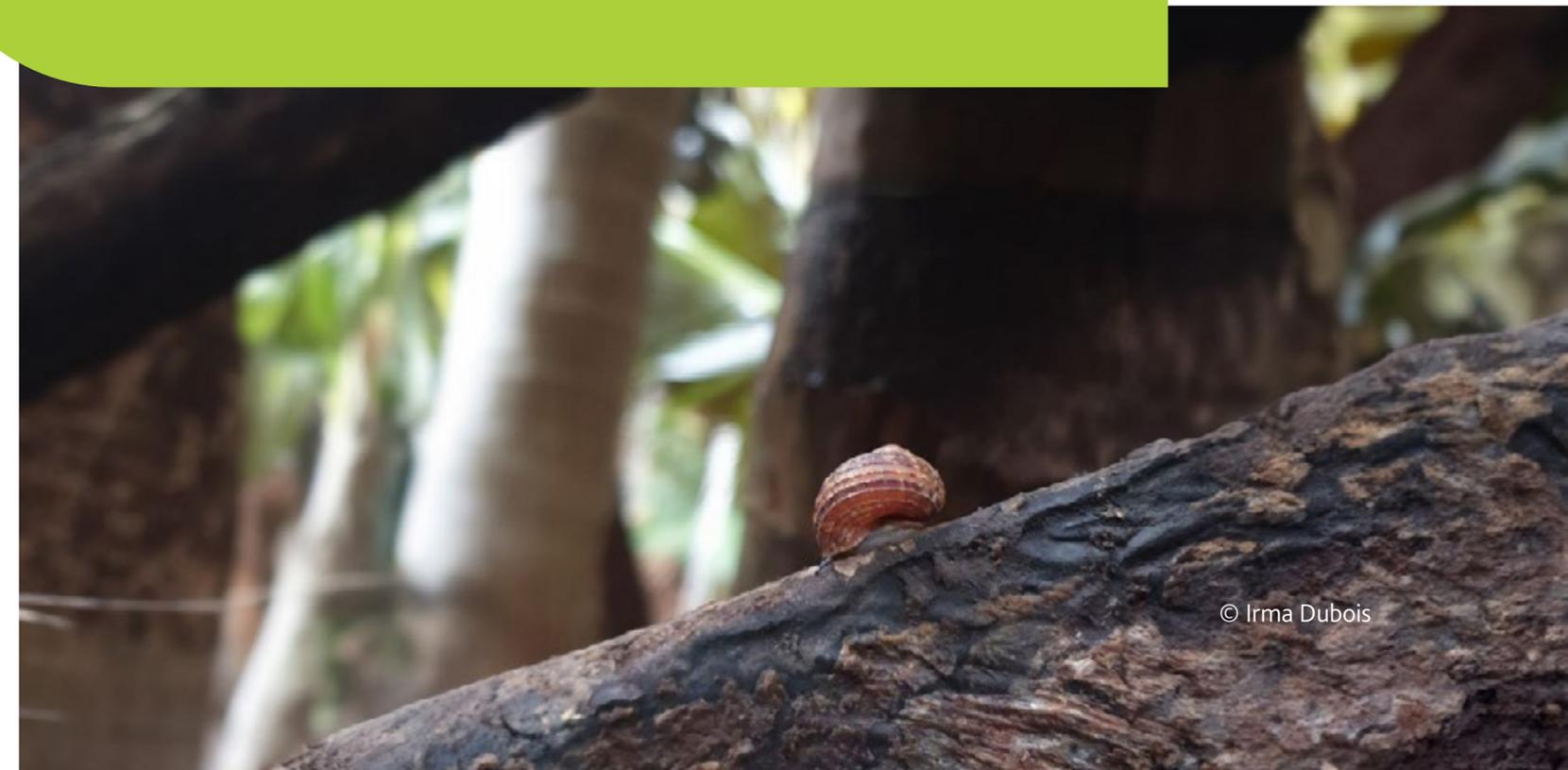
© SIF



© Emmanuel Morel

SIF identifies previously overlooked snail at the Vallée de Mai

January brought about an exciting observation in the Vallée de Mai. After numerous sightings of an unidentified snail, the team identified it as *Tropidophora pulchrum*, an indigenous species found on Praslin, Mahé, Silhouette and Felicite islands. Continuous conservation efforts from SIF, especially the control and eradication of invasive species such as yellow crazy ants, will help to protect native species such as *T. pulchrum*.



© Irma Dubois

4.2 Site Management & Sustainable Tourism

German Commission for UNESCO SOS African Heritage grant awarded to the Vallée de Mai

With support from the German Commission for UNESCO's SOS African Heritage Fund, the Vallée de Mai received a grant to help overcome impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on management and conservation.

The grant enabled SIF to maintain SIF staff and visitor safety by enforcing COVID-19 guidelines in the Vallée de Mai. It was also used to empower the local community participation in coco de mer protection via enhanced communication and implementation of the coco de mer planting at home campaign.

The Vallée de Mai Visitor Centre usually hosts thousands of visitors per month.



With the support of



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

German Commission
for UNESCO

© Sebastian Mühlig

Vallée de Mai wins 2020 Tripadvisor Traveller's Choice Award



Based on traveller reviews from 2019, the Vallée de Mai won this year's Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Award. Formerly known as the Certificate of Excellence, the award recognises destinations that consistently earn great reviews and are among the top 10% of listings on Tripadvisor.

Although 2020 has been a catastrophic year for global tourism, with Seychelles particularly affected, such recognition is heartening and hopefully helps attract tourists to not only the Vallée de Mai, but Praslin and Seychelles as a whole. Together with the site's new booking system, the discontinuing of cash payments, enhanced health and safety measures and safe tourism label, SIF feels that Seychelles most visited natural attraction is better prepared to navigate these uncertain times.

“Winners of the 2020 Travellers' Choice Awards should be proud of this distinguished recognition. Although it's been a challenging year for travel and hospitality, we want to celebrate our partners' achievements. Award winners are beloved for their exceptional service and quality. Not only are these winners well deserving, they are also a great source of inspiration for travellers as the world begins to venture out again.”

Kanika Soni
Chief Commercial Officer, TripAdvisor



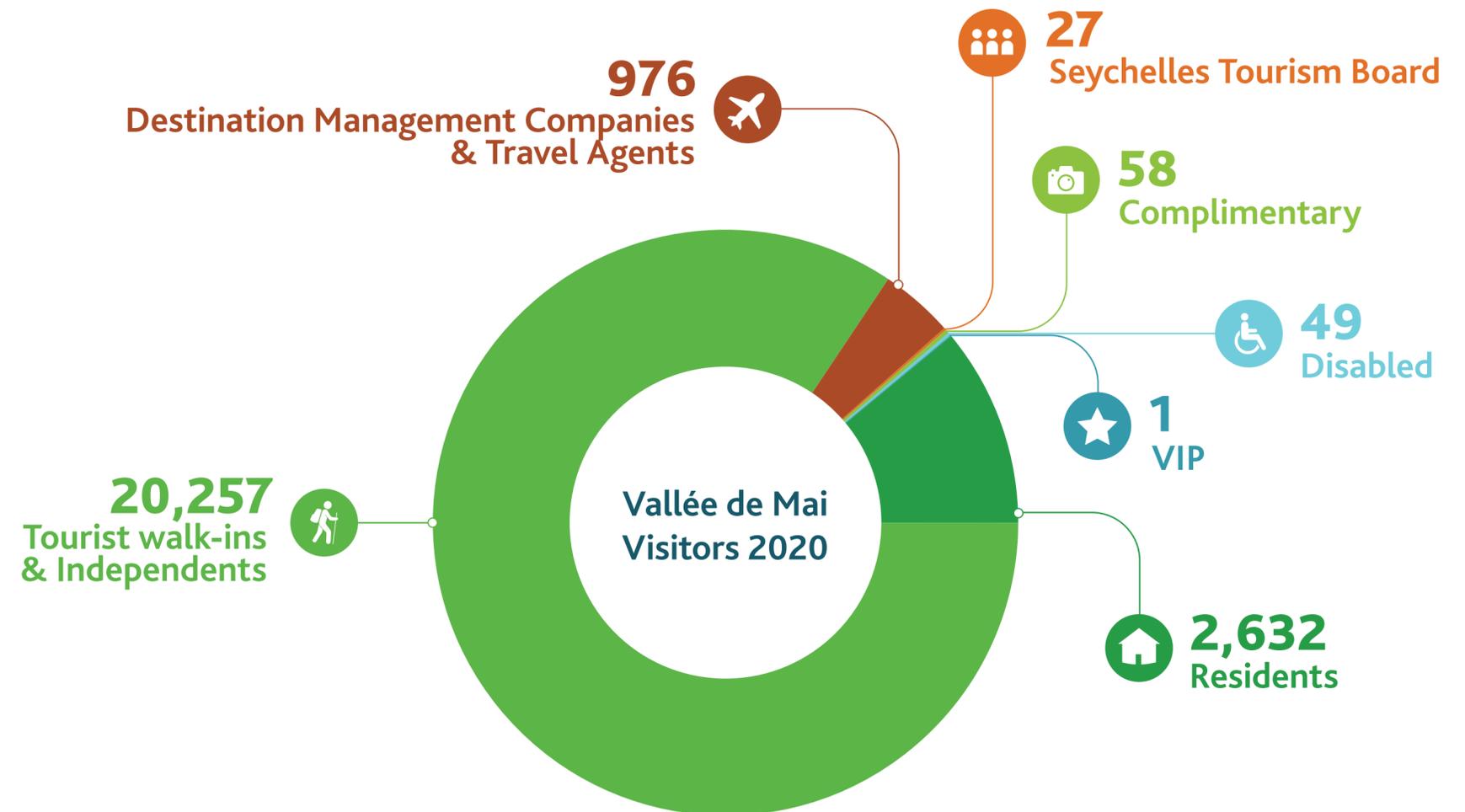
Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice 2020

Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve ●●●●○

Visitors to the Vallée de Mai

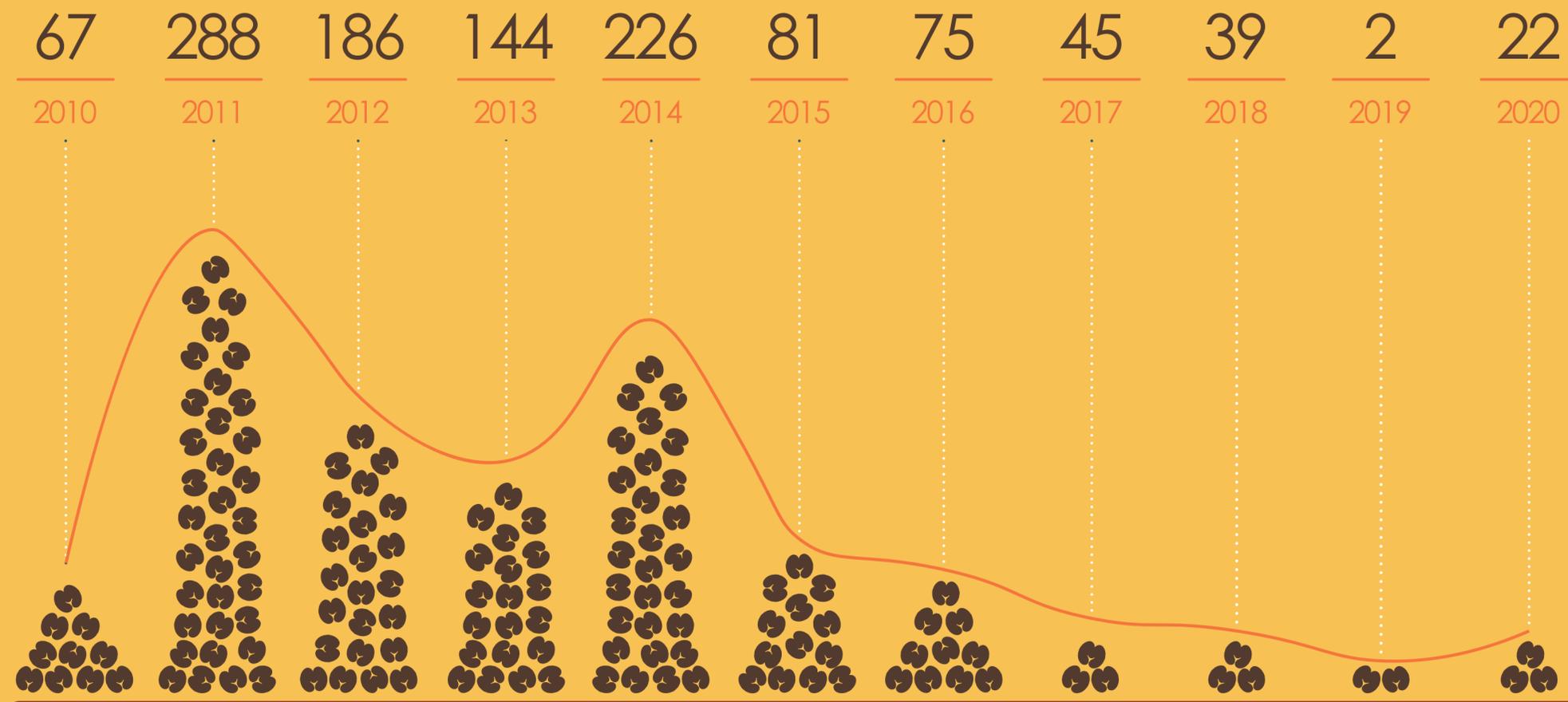
The Vallée de Mai welcomed only 24,000 visitors in 2020, a huge drop of 78% from the 111,358 visitors who came to visit the reserve in 2019. The Vallée de Mai has long held the title of Seychelles' most visited natural site, however, in 2020 only 18% of total tourists to Seychelles visited this natural reserve.

This year 2,632 Seychelles residents visited the Vallée de Mai, representing 11% of total visitors, compared with the 4048 residents (4% of total) who visited in 2019. The majority of the residential visitors came on scheduled school trips.



Poaching incidents

In total, SIF harvested 110 coco de mer nuts from the Vallée de Mai in 2020, of which 64 were sold for souvenir purposes. No poaching incident was reported in the Vallée de Mai following increased security measures, however, 22 coco de mer nuts were unfortunately poached in Fond Peper in 2020.



5 Aldabra Atoll



© Martin von Rooyen

5.1 Science and Conservation

Aldabra Clean-Up Project Research Impact

Following the five-week clean-up on Aldabra Atoll in 2019 where 25 tonnes of marine plastic litter was removed, the team have now published their findings. They estimated that there are up to 514 tonnes of litter remaining on the island. This is the largest accumulation of plastic waste reported for any single island in the world.



25 TONNES
OF MARINE PLASTIC LITTER
WAS REMOVED



514 TONNES
OF LITTER STILL REMAIN
ON THE ISLAND



83%
waste from regional
fishing industry



360000
individual flip-flops collected
*Estimated to be 7% of total accumulated
by weight

\$10000 Per
Day
estimated cost in removing plastic waste

\$8900 Per
Tonne
of litter for clean-up operations

They found that the litter is dominated by waste from regional fishing - buoys, ropes, nets - and 360,000 individual flip-flops. The estimated costs for removing the plastic waste equates to \$10,000 per day of clean-up operations or \$8,900 per tonne of litter —well beyond the capacity of non-profit organisations like the Seychelles Islands Foundation.

Given the serious detrimental effects of plastic litter on marine ecosystems, the researchers conclude that clean-up efforts are a vital management action for islands like Aldabra, despite the high financial cost and should be integrated alongside policies directed at 'turning off the tap'.

The research paper was one of the top 100 most downloaded papers from the journal in 2020 and the results were publicised by a huge number of international news outlets.

[Read the Full Paper](#)

[The Documentary
'Island Under Siege'](#)

[The Animation
'The Song of Aldabra'](#)



Marine debris monitoring

Over the past year, the Aldabra team have monitored certain beaches to collect data on the rate at which plastic is arriving. The marine debris is collected from the transects and weighed, providing information on daily arrival rates, seasonal differences in accumulation along the different coastlines and, over the long term, it will indicate trends and potential surges in global plastic pollution.

Although the ACUP project came to a close, the Aldabra team continued to monitor accumulating plastic debris on the atoll's beaches.



Setting up fish biomass monitoring

Despite complications relating to the pandemic, the team on Aldabra were able to complete total fish biomass transects in addition to the standard fish transects conducted in the annual Aldabra Reef Monitoring. Biomass is an estimation of the mass (or weight) of living organisms in a given area.

To do this, the team recorded every single species of fish they observed on the transect and estimated their length.

To assist with these surveys SIF enlisted the help of fish identification expert Chris Mason-Parker, CEO of Marine Conservation Society Seychelles. The results of these surveys will be compared with biomass surveys conducted in 2015 to see if there are any changes, and can also be used to compare Aldabra's fish biomass to other sites.



The Aldabra Reef Monitoring team

Rail Population Surveys

The first Aldabra white-throated rail (*Dryolimnas [cuvieri] aldabranus*) population surveys were conducted in the 1970's, then only Picard was re-surveyed in 2011.

So, in late November and early December, Aldabra staff took on the task and completed transects across the entire atoll to update the population estimate. The number of transects were increased to produce a more accurate estimate. The data is still being processed but we aim to have results on the Aldabra rail population soon.



New timing of Frigatebird Census brings surprise results

Since 2011, SIF has conducted a yearly frigatebird census in which all nests, of both great and lesser frigatebirds, are counted across the atoll. Then, additional monitoring of both species' breeding cycles was introduced in 2017.

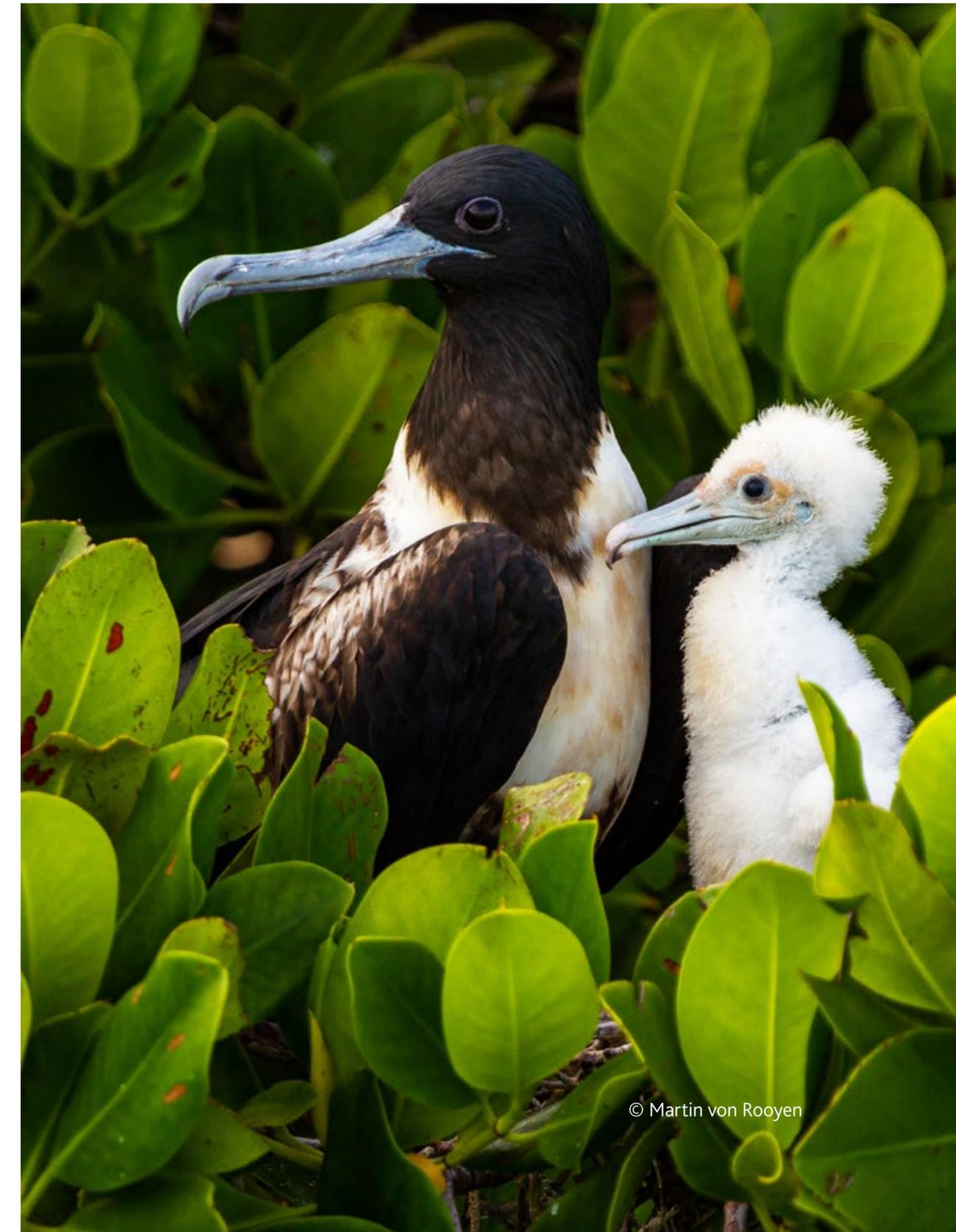
This monitoring indicated that the census was being conducted at the wrong time of year for at least one of the two species and it was recommended to move the census to October, when the great frigatebirds would be more accurately represented.

The first October census recorded the highest count of lesser frigatebird nests in any census since 2011 and a staggering 5098 great frigatebird nests. This indicates that the number of breeding pairs of great frigatebirds is higher than the previous estimate of 4000 pairs.

Aldabra is home to the largest frigatebird breeding colony in the Indian Ocean and the second largest colony in the world



© Martin von Rooyen



© Martin von Rooyen



Invasive species, like this sisal plant, are one of the biggest threats to island ecosystems © SIF

Aldabra Atoll's Invasive Alien Species Eradication Successes shared amongst the giants of UNESCO World Heritage Sites

A team of international scientists have devised a new monitoring and reporting framework to help protect World Heritage Sites from almost 300 different invasive alien species globally, including rats, cats and invasive ants.

Lead author, Dr Ross Shackleton joined invasive species experts from around the globe – including SIF's Dr Nancy Bunbury – who developed the new 'tool' to help protect World Heritage Sites like Aldabra, the Galápagos, and the Serengeti from future threats. One key element of the new framework is listing all invasive alien species present allowing us to track the changes in threat or implementation of effective management over time. This is exemplified by work done on Aldabra, where there has been a decrease in the number of invasive alien species listed due to effective eradications, highlighting management success at the site over the last few years.

The paper is available open access here:



Delving into the Genomics of Giant Tortoises

The team on Aldabra have taken on the task of collecting blood samples from tortoises for genomics research being conducted at the University of Zürich.

On the atoll, the populations on the different islands of Aldabra are, for the most part, isolated, but there are rare events where tortoises are caught by the tide and drift onto the beach of a nearby island that would add to the genetic mixing of island populations. This genomics study will hopefully shed light on these events and how they have shaped the genetic make-up of the different sub-populations of tortoises on the various islands of Aldabra.



A ranger takes approximately 0.3ml of blood for genomics analysis. The blood is taken from the tortoises' 'armpits' between its leg and plastron.

© Bruno Senterre



New Research reveals Aldabra's Coral reef resilience and recovery capacity

Research on the impacts of the 2016 global coral bleaching event on Aldabra's coral reefs, led by PhD student and former SIF Marine Research Assistant, Anna Koester, was published in October. The paper reports that coral mortality following the 2015/2016 bleaching event was not only substantially lower in Aldabra's lagoon than on its seaward reefs, but lagoonal reefs also recovered to their pre-bleaching coral cover and community composition within only four years after bleaching.

This finding indicates that high daily temperature fluctuations inside Aldabra's lagoon are likely to enhance the corals' tolerance to heat stress in these sheltered waters.

“The results show that rapid reef recovery is possible, and highlight that reducing local stressors to coral reefs can enhance their resilience against climate change.”

Anna Koester
Marine Researcher

Aldabra's reefs bound with life.

This research underlines the link between protection and resilience. Corals are critical to marine life, however severe bleaching events expected to occur annually on 90% of the world's coral reefs by 2055.

Environmental factors driving mangrove species distribution and extent on Aldabra

Seychellois PhD student, Annabelle Constance is investigating local factors driving mangrove forest structure on Aldabra. The factors being scrutinised include seawater depth, salinity and soil properties. The Aldabra team have been assisting by downloading data from the 12 autonomous data loggers that have been recording water depth and salinity every 10 minutes in mangrove areas around the atoll. The data has been sent to Annabelle to process and we look forward to sharing the results!



Digging out mangrove soil samples the old-fashioned way © SIF



Annabelle with an installed data logger © Annabelle Constance

Mapping coral population connectivity

Under the SeyCCAT Blue Grants Fund round 3 funding call, SIF were successful in gaining funding for the project “Mapping coral population connectivity and ocean currents to inform management & policy of the coral reef system in Seychelles”. This project forms part of the PhD research of April Burt, former Aldabra Science Coordinator and Noam Vogt-Vincent, both PhD students at Oxford University.

This will be the first research to address coral population connectivity and larval dispersal pathways across Seychelles. The project aims to use population genetics and high-resolution numerical models, as well as remote sensing data products to understand how coral larvae disperse and how connected the reefs in Seychelles are.



April and the team ready for their dives.
© April Burt



April collecting coral samples © SIF

Aldabra Sightings

Rare pod of Orcas sighted from the Aldabra Research Station

To the astonishment of the entire Aldabra team one morning in August, a pod of orcas (*Orcinus orca*) was spotted just off the reef opposite the research station. Soon everyone had binoculars and telescopes watching the pod!

This was only the fourth time since 2001 that orcas have been seen around Aldabra. Photos of some of the individuals were sent to a PhD student who was able to use a photo database to identify one of the individuals seen, previously recorded in Mayotte in 2015. It was a timely reminder of Aldabra's magic and the richness of Seychelles' waters.



Aldabra Team swim with a Scalloped Hammerhead aggregation

On a staff whale-watching trip one Friday afternoon in August, the team headed along the settlement reef and spotted a whale, but the team's attention was quickly diverted to a couple of dorsal fins sticking out of the water. The team jumped in with their snorkels and were greeted with a sight they had never expected: an aggregation of 50-70 scalloped hammerhead sharks!

This humbled the rest of the team, most of whom have been on the atoll for less than a year and made them extremely thankful. It is believed that hammerhead species aggregate in large numbers to breed, but due to massive population declines worldwide, sights like this are now rare.

“It was the most amazing sighting I’ve ever seen in all my time spent on the atoll.”

Jude Brice
Aldabra Island Manager

5.2 Island Management and Sustainable Tourism

Strengthening Biosecurity Measures for Aldabra



SIF was awarded €100,000 by BIOPAMA for the project:

'Strengthening Biosecurity Measures To Safeguard Aldabra's Unique Biodiversity'

The grant will support SIF in purchasing equipment for biosecure shipping of high-risk supplies to Aldabra, alongside further biosecurity training and capacity building.

The Aldabra Clean-up Project officially completed

The Aldabra Clean-Up Project officially came to an end with the submission of the final narrative and financial report to the Seychelles' Conservation and Climate Change Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT). With an impactful outreach and education campaign, the impact of global plastic pollution on Aldabra became more widely understood through over 50 education and outreach activities, dedicated social media channels, documentaries, international live-news features and even being showcased at international political events.

SIF's board of trustees endorsed the idea of a second iteration of the project to ensure the sustainability of SIF's efforts to manage this threat to Aldabra and to extend its impact. SIF remains fully committed to continue tackling the problem of plastic pollution through action, education and research.



[Continue Reading](#)

25

Metric tons of marine plastic pollution removed

3.5

Tons of the collected waste recycled

60,000

Individual flip-flops collected

514

Metric tons of marine plastic pollution remaining

6

Women out of a team of 12 persons

9

Persons out of a team of 12 was youth under 30 years old

Aldabra Tourism halted due to COVID-19

The 2019/2020 Aldabra tourism season recorded the highest number of visitors since the 2008/2009 season, finally generating a revenue that could sustain the operational costs of running the research station.

However, as the outbreak of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic grew in the first quarter of the year, activities came to a sudden halt with the ban of cruise ships being implemented in Seychelles. A total of five visits were cancelled for March, April and May, with a further eight also cancelled for visits in November and December.





6

Fond Ferdinand

SIF Takes on Management of Fond Ferdinand

Following the retirement of Mr Michel Gardette, Ravin de Fond Ferdinand's previous Chief Executive Officer, the government took the decision to transfer the responsibility of the Fond Ferdinand nature reserve to SIF. This took effect from 1st September 2020.

In assuming this responsibility, SIF is extending its conservation mandate to one of Praslin's and Seychelles' most cherished protected areas. The reserve is 122 hectares in size and another stronghold of Seychelles' coco de mer population.

SIF has a long track record over several decades of scientific research and monitoring of coco de mer, and a proven capacity for holistic protected area management. Consequently, SIF's expertise and evidence-based approach will be extended to Fond Ferdinand.



© Seychelles Parks & Gardens Authority



© Tourism Seychelles

Public Survey

As part of SIF's ongoing efforts to ensure the Praslin community is consulted and able to participate in the next chapter of Fond Ferdinand's management, a public survey was carried out throughout October. The 26-surveyor team were able to record 432 responses!

Initial analysis shows that most respondents see Fond Ferdinand's natural beauty (50%) and tourism (25%) as its most recognised attributes. Data from this survey will be analysed and shared widely and the results will help inform SIF's way forward in our journey to adopt the aspirations and concerns of the local community in our management strategy for Fond Ferdinand.



Surveyor conducting interviews © Maria Brioche



Education and Outreach Programme Officer, Maria Brioche interviewing a respondent © SIF

Fond Ferdinand received Safe Tourism Certification

After a tremendous effort by staff from Fond Ferdinand and the Vallée de Mai, as well as the guidance and assistance of the Public Health Authority, Fond Ferdinand received its Safe Tourism certification in December 2020.

COVID-19 has drastically reduced visitor numbers to Seychelles, and both Fond Ferdinand and the Vallée de Mai have experienced corresponding declines, so ensuring that these sites follow national health laws and guidelines has been vital. The certification will allow SIF to welcome visitors and staff in a safe environment.

Ensuring safety for our staff and visitors, Fond Ferdinand is now Safe Tourism Certified.



7.1 Communications, Education and Outreach

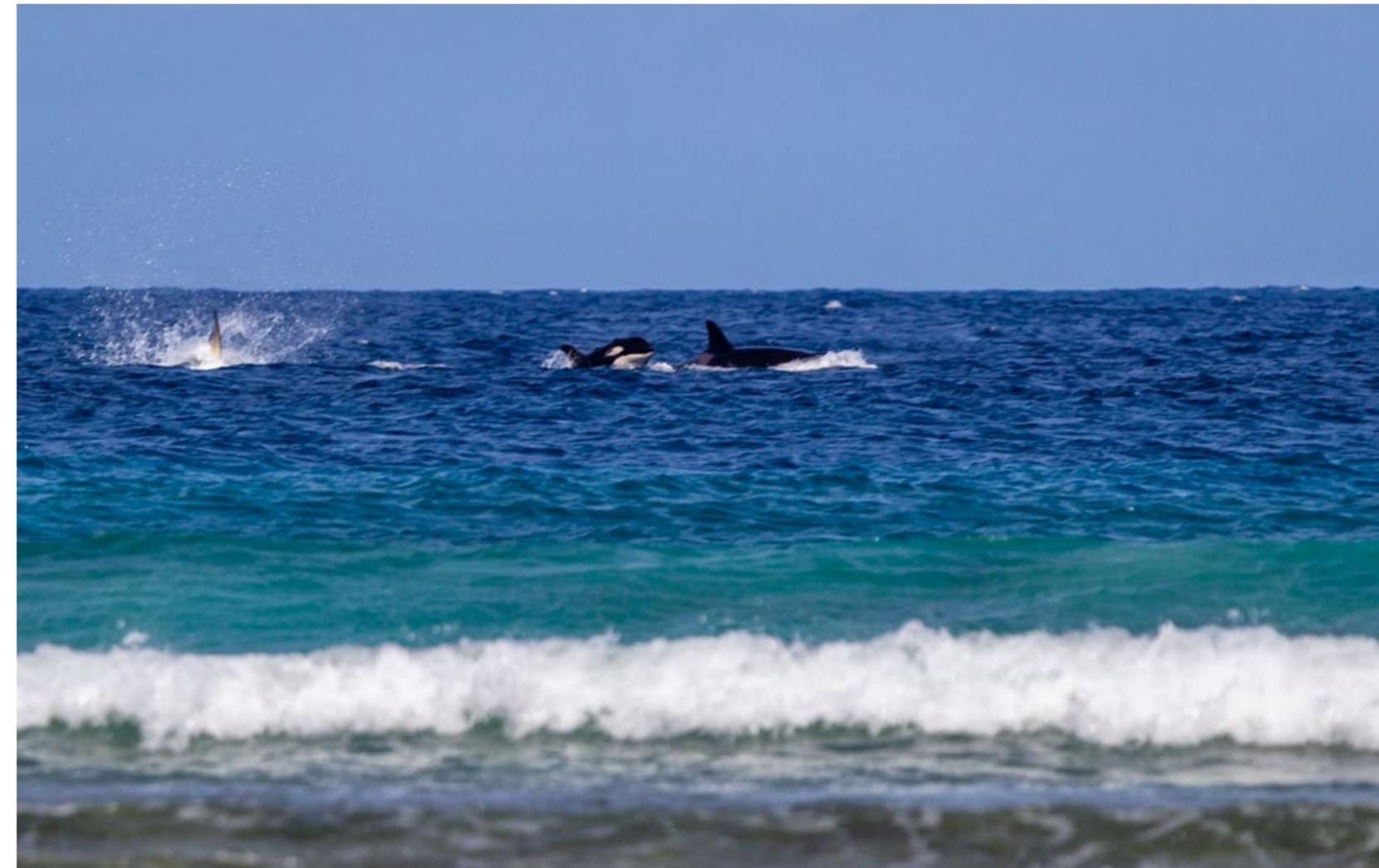
Media Summary

 **54** Newspaper Articles

 **5** National Television & Radio features

 **5** International features

 **12** E-newsletter



This orca pod was our most viewed post on Facebook in 2020 © Martin von Rooyen

Social Media Analysis 2020



160 Times posted

584 Accounts reached

Followed & liked
8699
times

Most viral post reached
46,598

[View post](#)



71 Times posted



89 Times posted

Accounts reached
142,600

Most viral post reached
7,800

[View tweet](#)



15 Videos posted

7,069 Accounts reached

Followed & liked
137
times

Most viral post reached
1,288

[Watch now](#)

Newspaper Articles (List)

Nation	Year 2020 news highlights (mentioned)
Nation	President Ramkalawan's working visit to Praslin
Nation	Minister Joubert undertakes familiarisation visits on Praslin
Nation	Coco de mer nut planted in Anse Royale secondary school compound
Nation	New research reveals Aldabra's coral reef resilience and recovery capacity
Nation	SIF seeks Praslin community's view on future of Ravin de Fond Ferdinand
Nation	Vijay Patel gifts 30 NGOs with R75,000 each on his 75th birthday
Nation	Unesco World Heritage Site Vallée de Mai wins prestigious award
Nation	Invasive species eradication: Aldabra's success story shared amongst the giants of Unesco
Nation	SIF assumes responsibility of Ravin de Fond Ferdinand
Nation	Children learn about impact of debris on Aldabra
Nation	Fourth Orca sighting on Aldabra Atoll
Nation	Private property owners invited to help in conserving the coco de mer
Nation	Investigating the marine predator community around Aldabra to assess connectivity between shallow and deep-sea ecosystems and the effectiveness of the Aldabra marine zonation strategy
Nation	International Biodiversity Day 2020
Nation	SIF takes part in freshwater fish surveys
Nation	New research published on the coco de mer reveals equal proportions of females and males in early life stages
Nation	SIF staff take part in fish-tagging training
Nation	SIF looks back at 21 years of juvenile turtle monitoring
Nation	SIF celebrates gender equality on International Women's Day

Nation	Major UN meeting on wildlife addresses critical threats to migratory species
Nation	YCA surveys in the Vallée de Mai suggest that baiting has reduced numbers of ants
Nation	SIF's research reveals the impact of coral bleaching on Aldabra's reefs
Nation	Tortoise sweeps provide insights into Aldabra's populations
Nation	Aldabra listed as important marine mammal area in sixth international designation
Nation	New research into flightlessness in the Aldabra rail indicates it could be a distinct species
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' Vallee de Mai reserve sees 97 pct drop in visitors, loss of \$2 million in revenue
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' Aldabra atoll has tolerance for heat-induced coral bleaching, research shows
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' Aldabra Atoll to be part of study to protect World Heritage Sites from invasive species
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' Vallee de Mai, home of coco de mer, wins Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Award
Seychelles News Agency	La réserve de coco de mer de Fond Ferdinand à Praslin placée sous une direction de la « Seychelles Islands foundation »
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' coco de mer reserve on Praslin's Fond Ferdinand under new management
Seychelles News Agency	Fourth sighting in 20 years: Killer whales seen off Seychellois island
Seychelles News Agency	Les graines de coco-de-mer aux Seychelles sont divisées entre 50-50 mâles et femelles, selon une nouvelle étude
Seychelles News Agency	Gender of coco-de-mer seeds in Seychelles are split 50-50 male and female, new research finds

Seychelles News Agency	Shade, large seed-dispersing animals key to large size of Seychelles' coco-de-mer: study
Seychelles News Agency	Coco de mer palm in the front yard? Property owners in Seychelles can now plant one
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' Vallee de Mai reopens doors to visitors with online booking system
Seychelles News Agency	Environmental activist from Seychelles featured in book about climate change
Seychelles News Agency	New research finds that flightless bird in Seychelles should be own species
Seychelles News Agency	L'atoll d'Aldabra aux Seychelles reçoit une désignation spéciale en raison d'une rare population de dugongs
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' Aldabra Atoll given special designation due to rare dugong population
Seychelles News Agency	Seychelles' Aldabra Atoll wins prestigious designation as protected ecosystem
Today	SIF begins survey on Praslin for community's view of future of Ravin de Fond Ferdinand 05/10
Today	Creature feature series (20/09)
Today	Appointment of new FF OM 07/12
Today	Republishing request for two sea turtles entangled in marine debris 13/11
Today	Republishing request flamingo sighting 14/06
Today	Request for black parrot pics 06/08

International Coverage

Mongabay	Flip-flops, fishing gear pile up at Aldabra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
UNESCO	Expedition removes 25 tons of waste from remote Aldabra Atoll
UNESCO	Une expédition a permis de ramasser 25 tonnes de déchets dans l'atoll isolé d'Aldabra
eTurboNews	Vallée de Mai reopens on Seychelles
Down To Earth	Aldabra's coral reefs recovered faster from bleaching, finds new research

TV & Radio Coverage

Telesesel[2]	Flip-flops, fishing gear pile up at Aldabra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
	Expedition removes 25 tons of waste from remote Aldabra Atoll
1	New research reveals Aldabra's' coral reef resilience and recovery capacity 29/10
2	Aldabra Atoll's invasive species eradication successes shared amongst the giants of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, like the Galapagos
02/09	Aldabra's coral reefs recovered faster from bleaching, finds new research
3	Press conference on the programme "Promoting the conservation of the coco de mer by all Seychellois" to take place on 7/10
SBC[3]	
1	Press conference on the programme "Promoting the conservation of the coco de mer by all Seychellois" to take place on 7/08
Radyo Sesel	
1	Interview with Sophie and Jude, CEO and Marc on Covid-19 impacts on SIF 25/08

7.2 Education & Outreach

For over a decade SIF has delivered an exciting education and outreach programme comprising of various activities to commemorate UN theme days, holiday camps and educational presentation at schools throughout the year.

The first major impact of the crisis was that with great regret, we had to postpone the annual Aldabra Eco-School trip, which had been scheduled to take place in March 2020. The annual trip has been funded by SIF since 2000, rewarding the winning classes from the national Eco-Schools programme ran by Ministry of Education, with the trip of a lifetime to spend a week on Aldabra. However, as saddened as we were to postpone, the safety of the children and our staff are our first priority.

Similar to other SIF operations, our outreach programme was not spared from the effects of the pandemic. With our outreach activities mainly involving direct contact with others, social distancing restrictions imposed a tremendous challenge for this department, or as we see it now: an incredible opportunity to expand our reach even further!

By increasing our use of technology, we have been able to organise outreach activities ranging from online quizzes and virtual classrooms, even expanding our audience beyond Seychelles! This showed us that although the pandemic presented extra barriers to how we approach outreach, it motivated our team even further to find new ways to reach out.

Eco-school trip documentary

This year SIF embarked on a mission to evaluate the return on its investment in the annual Eco-School Aldabra trip and celebrate 20 years of the Eco-School competition star-prize.

Project Officer, Emeline Lafortune, used online surveys to collect responses from past participants, inviting people to share memories and provide insightful feedback. A short documentary was created to showcase the results, including powerful interviews with participants on their experiences and views. The documentary 'A Trip of a Lifetime: Celebrating 20 Years of the Eco-School Aldabra Trip' is now freely available online on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook.

74 %

of participants were satisfied with their experience on Aldabra

61 %

agreed that visiting Aldabra influenced their behaviour and decisions going forward

76 %

found the trip had a positive impact on their life

While the monetary value of the trip's benefits is incalculable, this evaluation shows SIF's SCR 4.9 million investment over the past two decades is creating a legacy with multiplier effects that are advancing Seychelles' sustainability and conservation generally. Although the 2020 trip was postponed, this project was an incredible way to celebrate 20 years of the Aldabra Eco-School Trip!

A Trip of a Lifetime

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF THE
Eco-School Aldabra Trip



Watch now!



© Fotonatura

While the monetary value of the trip's benefits is incalculable, this evaluation shows SIF's SCR 4.9 million investment over the past two decades is creating a legacy with multiplier effects that is advancing Seychelles' sustainability and conservation.

Previous schoolkids on their trip of a lifetime, left 2006, right 2018.



© SIF



© SIF

Virtual classrooms kickstarted via “Exploring by the Seat of your Pants”

SIF joined forces with “Exploring by the Seat of Your Pants”, an international organisation whose goal is to inspire the next generation of scientists and explorers by bringing those on the frontlines of science, exploration, adventure, and conservation, live into classrooms through virtual guest speakers and field trips.

The 250 students were given presentations on black parrots and the coco de mer palm, taken through a virtual tour of Vallée de Mai and learnt about one of the major threats to the site, yellow crazy ants, and the efforts SIF are taking to control their impact. Unlike social media posts, these virtual classrooms allow students to ask direct questions to our team and learn a lot from engaging and interactive presentations.

The Vallée de Mai Research Team gearing up for an exciting virtual classroom.



Bioblitz Challenge

To commemorate international day for biological diversity, and its central theme; “our solutions are in nature” SIF invited the public to discover Seychelles’ endemic species via the SIF Bioblitz Challenge 2020 that took place from the 23rd to 24th May.

The Bioblitz is an online activity based on the iNaturalist app, therefore making it ideal for respecting social distancing guidelines and encouraging citizen science. By photographing wildlife and uploading these captures along with other details to the iNaturalist app, participants as groups or individuals found rare endemics, as well as invasives that threaten our biodiversity. When the bioblitz challenge closed, our team identified the uploaded images of species and allocated points to announce the winners of the SIF Bioblitz 2020 Challenge!



Some of our Bioblitz winners collecting their certificates and prizes © SIF

The Seychelles Ocean Science Symposium

SIF teamed up with the Ministry of Environment Energy and Climate Change, Nekton Mission, Seychelles' Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust, Fisheries Research – Seychelles Fishing Authority and the University of Seychelles to host the Seychelles Ocean Science Symposium, which took place from the 9th to 12th November.

SIF's role included chairing sessions and presenting on the results of the Aldabra Clean-Up Project and the coral connectivity project. The presentations were recorded and are available below:

[Watch here](#)

Estimated total waste removal from Aldabra:

\$4.68

Million in cost
(USD)

191

Days for
collection

82

Days to move
waste from
shore to ship

Two holiday camps

The SIF holiday camps on Praslin have been running now for 9 years. This year, SIF hosted two holiday camps, including a Christmas and an Easter camp. The camps were held over two weeks involving children from Praslin's two primary schools and jam-packed with activities based at the Vallée de Mai.

The camps taught the children about important environmental issues but also about the importance of healthy living, the need to maintain a balanced diet and to exercise regularly, and how this is also connected to living in a healthy environment. SIF would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Children's Special Fund Office for their continuous support for this important programme.



SIF and Holiday Camp kids pose with previous President of Seychelles and SIF Patron, Danny Faure © Maria Briche



SIF's Board members participated in 'You and the Planet'

Two of SIF's Board members were proud to take part in a filmed panel event entitled 'You and the Planet', which was run by the Royal Society. The event took place at the Eden Project in Cornwall, UK on 26th February. Sir Tim Smit, executive vice chair and co-founder of the Eden Project, and Dr. Lindsay Turnbull, associate professor in plant sciences at Oxford University, were the two SIF trustees on the panel. The panel was focused on biodiversity and how human activity affects the variety of life on earth.

[Watch video](#)

World Environment day Virtual tour

This World Environment Day on the 5th of June the team organised a virtual tour of the Vallée de Mai through Facebook Live, where members of the team gave an overview of the research and monitoring programmes.

[Watch video](#)



Meet our team

World wetlands day

SIF celebrated Wetlands and Biodiversity Day with an activity for schoolchildren at the marsh at Raffles hotel on Praslin. Once there, the teams carried out a biodiversity assessment in the marsh, discovering species of birds, crustaceans, fish and mangroves.

They also assessed the water quality in the area and planted 100 mangrove seedlings! We thank Raffles Seychelles for supporting this activity.



© SIF



© SIF



“Safeguarding the Seychelles Biodiversity and its Conservation Work”

Seychelles National Museum Webinar



Seychelles
National Parks
Authority

ICOM
International
Council
of Museums
Seychelles



Webinar on safeguarding Seychelles biodiversity

In collaboration with the Seychelles National Parks Authority and the International Council of Museums National Committee, SIF co-hosted a webinar in June to bring awareness of the need to safeguard Seychelles biodiversity via conservation work. Several speakers represented different institutions sharing information on their work progress. The SIF speakers included the Vallée de Mai Science Coordinator, Aurelie Hector, the Yellow Crazy Ant Project Officer, Constance Tragett, and the Black Parrot Project Officer, Monica Griffith.

Aldabra Clean-up Project Outreach Event

The National History Museum hosted a half-day event to showcase the Aldabra Clean-Up Project. The event was dedicated to activities and education surrounding the project for a group of schoolchildren who are registered club members of the Seychelles National History Museum.

Emeline Lafortune, project officer and the Aldabra Clean-Up Project's focal point for Mahé, delivered an interactive presentation followed by an arts and crafts activity, where plastic collected from Aldabra was upcycled into sculptures by the children. The children also watched *Island Under Siege*, the project's feature documentary which gave them a deeper understanding of this major undertaking.



Vallée de Mai Night safari

The Vallée de Mai night safaris took place on 19th June and 10th July. The passionate participants were eager to learn and discover the reserve's different nocturnal species and were overwhelmed by what they discovered as most encounters cannot be easily seen during the day. Some of the participants were prize winners of the iNaturalist competition SIF hosted for International Day of Biodiversity.

“Visiting the Vallée de Mai at night was truly remarkable. It was the first time I saw this many endemic animals such as; the Seychelles chameleon, Seychelles tree frog, the three species of bronze gecko, the two species of green day gecko, spiders and crickets, the coco de mer snail, and some freshwater species such as the endemic crayfish, and freshwater crab”

Alvin and Darnel
Tourists



“The safari itself was an unforgettable experience. Not only did the Bioblitz and night safari help to familiarise us with the indigenous fauna and flora of Seychelles, but it truly augmented our appreciation of the incredible biodiversity of these special islands. We are extremely grateful to SIF for hosting the competition and sponsoring part of a remarkable weekend away.”

Kara and Brett
Tourists

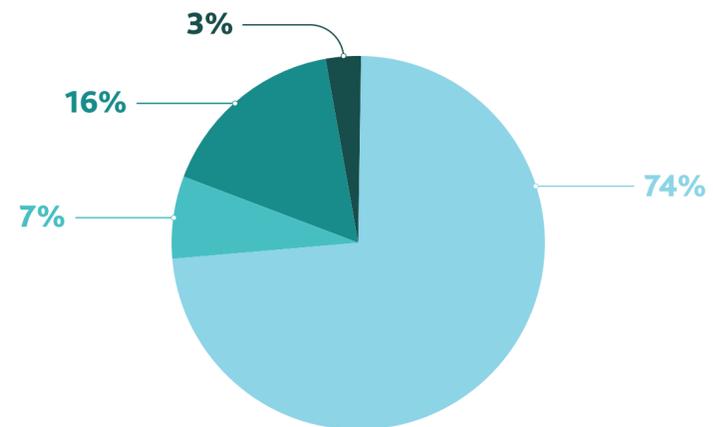


Kara and Brett, second and third on right, on their night safari with Vallée de Mai and family © SIF

8 Finances

Revenue

Total SCR 65,442,583.00

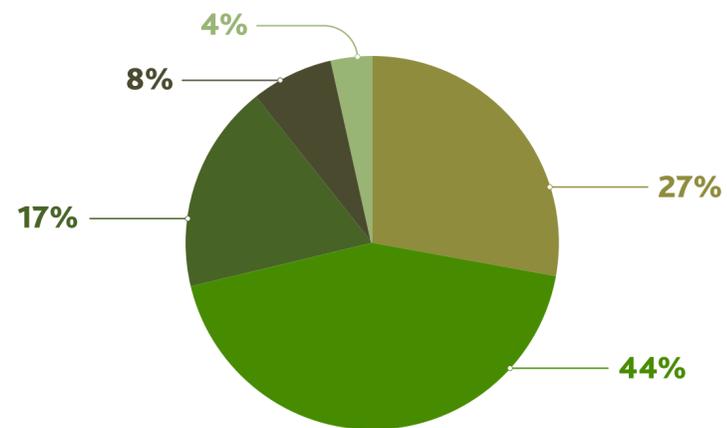


Income from VDM, FF & Aldabra	48,112,541.00
Income from Project Activities	4,618,126.00
Income from Financial Instruments	10,790,672.00
Inventory Adjustments	1,921,244.00

Expense

Total SCR 44,390,790.00

Net Surplus SCR 21,051,793.00



Direct Cost	12,184,192.00
Employee Cost	19,586,477.00
Operational & Marketing Expenses	7,442,296.00
Expenses for Project Activities	3,612,760.00
Other Expenses	1,565,065.00

9 Scientific Publications

Aldabra's Plastic Problem

In September the results of the research conducted alongside the Aldabra clean-up project were published. The publication and associated press-release was picked up by international media, including the Sky News channel amongst others.

[Read more...](#)

Monitoring Biological Invasions

SIF's consulting Director of Research and Conservation was among the authors of this important publication to track the status of biological invasions in World Heritage Sites and proposed monitoring and reporting framework.

[Read more...](#)

Aldabra's Coral Resilience

SIF's ex-marine monitoring volunteer and current PhD student Anna Koester published her first PhD chapter which used data collected in the Aldabra Marine Monitoring Programme to explore the impact and recovery of Aldabra's coral and how it varied across the atoll.

[Read more...](#)

Coco de mer Sex Ratios Revealed

A new research paper published by scientists from ETH Zürich, in partnership with SIF, has uncovered some of the mysteries surrounding sex determination in coco de mer trees. This exciting new research shows that sex determination in coco de mer is genetic, and not environmentally determined.

[Read more...](#)

Aldabra Contributes to Fish Morphometrics Study

Since 2016 the Aldabra team have been contributing data on fish morphometrics to this study to assess length-weight, length-length and weight-weight relationships in 39 marine species from 10 families caught in the Seychelles waters by the artisanal fishery.

[Read more...](#)

Impacts of the 2016 Bleaching Event

A research collaboration between SIF and the University of Zurich whereby SIF shared data to be analysed by Masters student Julia Cerutti has resulted in a peer reviewed publication. The paper goes into great detail on how the bleaching event impacted corals at Aldabra.

[Read more...](#)

Green Turtle Population Connectivity

A new paper investigates the links between turtle populations in the South-West Indian Ocean (SWIO). The researchers used a combination of ocean drift simulation models to investigate the dispersal of green turtle hatchlings and analysis of DNA from eight developmental turtle habitats across the SWIO region, including Aldabra.

[Read more...](#)



Thanks and acknowledgements

Our thanks to...

The outgoing Patron former President of the Republic of Seychelles, Danny Faure.

SIF's Board of Trustees

Mr Maurice Loustau-Lalanne Chairman/ Trustee

Mr Bernard Jackson, Trustee

Mr Calvin Gerry, Trustee

Ms Veronica Lanza, Trustee

Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley CEO/ Trustee

Prof. Lindsay Turnbull, Trustee

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Mr Patrick Lablache

Prof. Peter Edwards, Trustee

Ms Sherin Francis, Trustee

Mr Selby Remie, Trustee

Prof. Stephen Blackmore

Sir Tim Smit, Trustee

Dr Victorin Laboudallon

Our Supporters

- Alexander Müller & Thomas Heber
- Children's Special Fund Office
- Coco de Mer hotel, Praslin
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Mauritius Commercial Bank
- Odense Zoo, Denmark
- Raffles Seychelles
- Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
- Seychelles Climate Change Adaptation Trust (SEYCCAT)
- UNESCO
- UNDP – Project Coordination Unit
- University of Zurich
- Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA)

Our Partners and Associates

- Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change
- Ministry of Education
- Seychelles National Parks Authority
- Seychelles Fishing Authority
- Seychelles Coast Guard
- Island Development Company
- Island Conservation Society
- Praslin Development Fund
- Seychelles National Meteorological Service
- Seychelles Agricultural Agency
- Simon Taylor
- Global Vision International (GVI) Seychelles
- Seychelles Police Force
- Seychelles People's Defence Force
- Indian Ocean Turtle project, La Reunion

Our Research Collaborators

- Anna Koester and (University of Bremen, Germany)
- Annabelle Constance (University of Zurich, Switzerland)
- April Burt (Queen's College, University of Oxford, UK)
- Prof. Arpat Ozgul (University of Zurich, Switzerland)
- Prof. Brendan Godley (University of Exeter, UK)
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- Prof. Christian Wild (University of Bremen, Germany)
- Dr David Gower (Natural History Museum, London, UK)
- Prof. David Newbery (University of Bern, Switzerland)
- Dr Dennis Hansen (University of Zurich, Switzerland)
- Prof. Gabriela Schaepman-Strub (University of Zurich, Switzerland)
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- Prof. Jim Groombridge (Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent)
- Dr Jim Labisko (DICE, University of Kent, UK)
- Prof. Lindsay Turnbull (Queen's College, University of Oxford, UK)
- Dr Lori Lach (James Cook University, Australia)
- Noam Vogt-Vincent (Earth Sciences, University of Oxford)
- Olivier Bousquet (Météo-France)
- Prof. Peter Edwards (ETH Zurich, Switzerland)
- Philip Haupt (Rhodes University, South Africa)
- Dr Simon Maddock (Natural History Museum, London, UK)
- Dr Wilfredo Falcon (University of Zurich, Switzerland)



The Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF), is a non-profit charitable organisation that was established as a public trust by the government of Seychelles in 1979. SIF manages and protects the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Aldabra Atoll and the Vallée de Mai as well as the Fond Ferdinand reserve. It has the President of Seychelles, Wavel Ramkalawan, as Patron.

SIF is managed by a Board of Trustees of 15 members who are appointed by the President. This board represents individuals and organisations from both Seychelles and overseas who are concerned with the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, and bring relevant expertise and knowledge to the management of SIF.

SIF is the longest established local organisation working in nature conservation in Seychelles and has taken a pioneering management approach by twinning the two sites. The foundation is mandated and dedicated to ensuring that the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Seychelles are well-managed protected areas where conservation, research, education and tourism are sustainably balanced. A major focus is on scientific research to direct, support and improve the evidence base for conservation management of the unique biodiversity and ecosystems of these two very different sites.

To successfully operate and protect two World Heritage Sites which are more than 1000 km apart, each with their specific set of challenges, SIF relies on income generated primarily by entrance fees and sales from the Vallée de Mai. This is supplemented by project funding, grants and donations. Aldabra does provide some direct income through visitor impact fees but piracy in the Western Indian Ocean, and now Covid, has compromised this source of revenue in recent years. SIF's work with and management of these sites will continue to be dependent on visitor numbers and the generosity of our supporters and funders for the foreseeable future.

If you are passionate about the work we do and want to help, then there are several ways you can get involved!



SPREAD THE WORD

Help us share our exciting updates by interacting with our pages on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and signing up for our e-newsletter.



VISIT VALLÉE DE MAI & FOND FERDINAND

There is no better way to truly understand and support our work than by exploring the sites. Your entrance fees go towards the conservation and management of both Seychelles' World Heritage Sites, the Vallée de Mai and Aldabra Atoll, and the Fond Ferdinand Reserve.



ATTEND EVENTS

We often need assistance at our outreach events. If you have some free time and want to get involved, we would welcome your support and/or participation in these events, give us a call or email for more information. Check out our Events page for details of upcoming events.



JOIN US

A great way to contribute is to work for SIF, either as a paid member of staff or as a volunteer. Check out our Jobs page for more details.



MAKE A GIFT

If you would like to make a financial donation to SIF contact info@sif.sc. Your support could purchase some of the vital equipment required for our work.

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