



Seychelles Islands Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

The Vallée de Mai entrance in 1972
© Travel Services Seychelles

CEO's Message



Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley at the Vallée de Mai
Research Symposium © Romano Laurence

As we reflect on 2023, I feel immense pride and gratitude for all we have accomplished. This year marked an extraordinary chapter for the Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF), characterised by resilience, innovation, and our team's steadfast commitment to preserving and raising awareness of Seychelles' natural heritage.

The Vallée de Mai celebrated its 40th anniversary as a UNESCO World Heritage property. This living relic of ancient palm forests holds a profound significance for our small island nation and the world beyond Seychelles. Unfortunately, due to the unforeseen disastrous events of the 7th of December, SIF's board of trustees and management have decided to postpone the official ceremony and variety show planned for the 9th of December. Our thoughts are with our staff and the many families, businesses and individuals affected by these events. Instead the celebrations will be planned for February 2024 to honour this milestone.

This year reignited our dedication to nurturing the next generation of eco-warriors with the return of the Eco-School Aldabra Trip. After a three-year hiatus, students and teachers could once again experience the wonders of Aldabra.

To our dedicated staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters, you are the heartbeat of our mission. Your commitment inspires us to push boundaries and dream bigger as an organisation.

Innovation has been a hallmark of our work this year. In March, the launch of an online ticketing platform revolutionised access to the Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand, streamlining the visitor experience and bolstering our sustainable tourism efforts. Additionally, the official launch of the Rat and Cat Eradication (RaCE) Feasibility Project represents a bold step forward for SIF as we prepare to tackle this biodiversity challenge head-on.

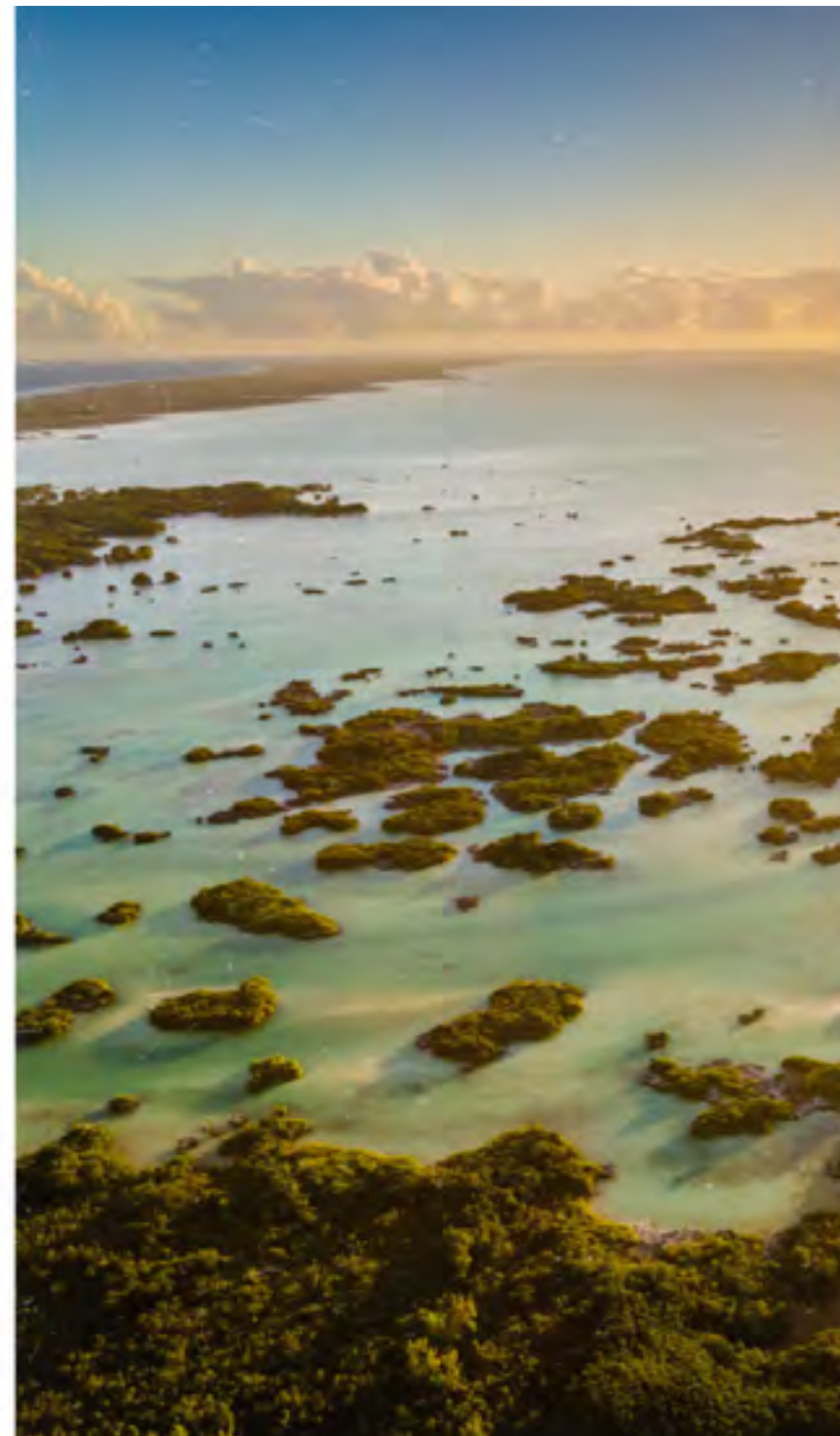
We were also honoured to receive international travel awards for both the Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand, reaffirming the global value of our natural sites and showcasing Seychelles not only for its beautiful coasts but also for the unique biodiversity it hosts.

To our dedicated staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters, you are the heartbeat of our mission. Your commitment inspires us to push boundaries and dream bigger as an organisation. Achievements that once seemed impossible have blossomed into new opportunities and possibilities. Thank you for being an integral part of the journey.



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

2 Highlights of 2023



President celebrates the longevity of SIF

Established as a public trust by the government of Seychelles on 15 February 1979, SIF celebrated its 44th anniversary this year. To celebrate this milestone, SIF's Patron, the President of the Republic of Seychelles, Wavel Ramkalawan, and members of the SIF team across the sites came together to create an interview-style video on their work.

[Watch here](#)



Vallée de Mai's celebrates 40 years as UNESCO World Heritage

On December 9th, the Vallée de Mai was set to celebrate 40 years since its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage property. SIF organised several activities throughout the year to honour this significant milestone, leading to an official ceremony and Variety Show planned for the day. However, due to the unfortunate events of December 7th, both events have been postponed to February 2024.



Eco School Returns!

Following a three-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, eleven Eco-School students and four teachers had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit Aldabra. An initiative sponsored by SIF that spans over two decades, the annual trip to Aldabra is awarded to the winners of the national Eco-School competition.



A new logo for Fond Ferdinand

The new Fond Ferdinand logo was launched and implemented this year. It was created by the Seychellois-owned Créatifs Studios, with the curated assistance of the SIF team. The emblem represents the site's diverse and unique characteristics, consistent with SIF's existing branding.



The launch of the SIF ticketing platform

As of March, visitors, Destination Management Companies, and tour operators have had the option to book their visits to Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand through a new online ticketing platform. This provides a convenient and efficient way to book and implement visitor management.

[Book here](#)





© Tourism Seychelles



Vallée de Mai awarded with excellence

This year, Vallée de Mai has earned not one but two travel awards! The Tripadvisor 2023 Traveller's Choice and the 2023 Experts' Choice Award from TripExpert, recognition based on professional reviews from respected sources, solidify Vallée de Mai's status as the top natural attraction in the Seychelles!



Launch of the RaCE project feasibility phase

Following the celebrations and insightful conversations instigated by the 50th anniversary of the Aldabra research station, the eradication of rats and cats on Aldabra Atoll was declared the number one priority by SIF's board of trustees in 2022. This year, we launched the Rat and Cat Eradication (RaCE) feasibility project, which aims to assess how one of the largest mammal eradications in the world could be achieved.



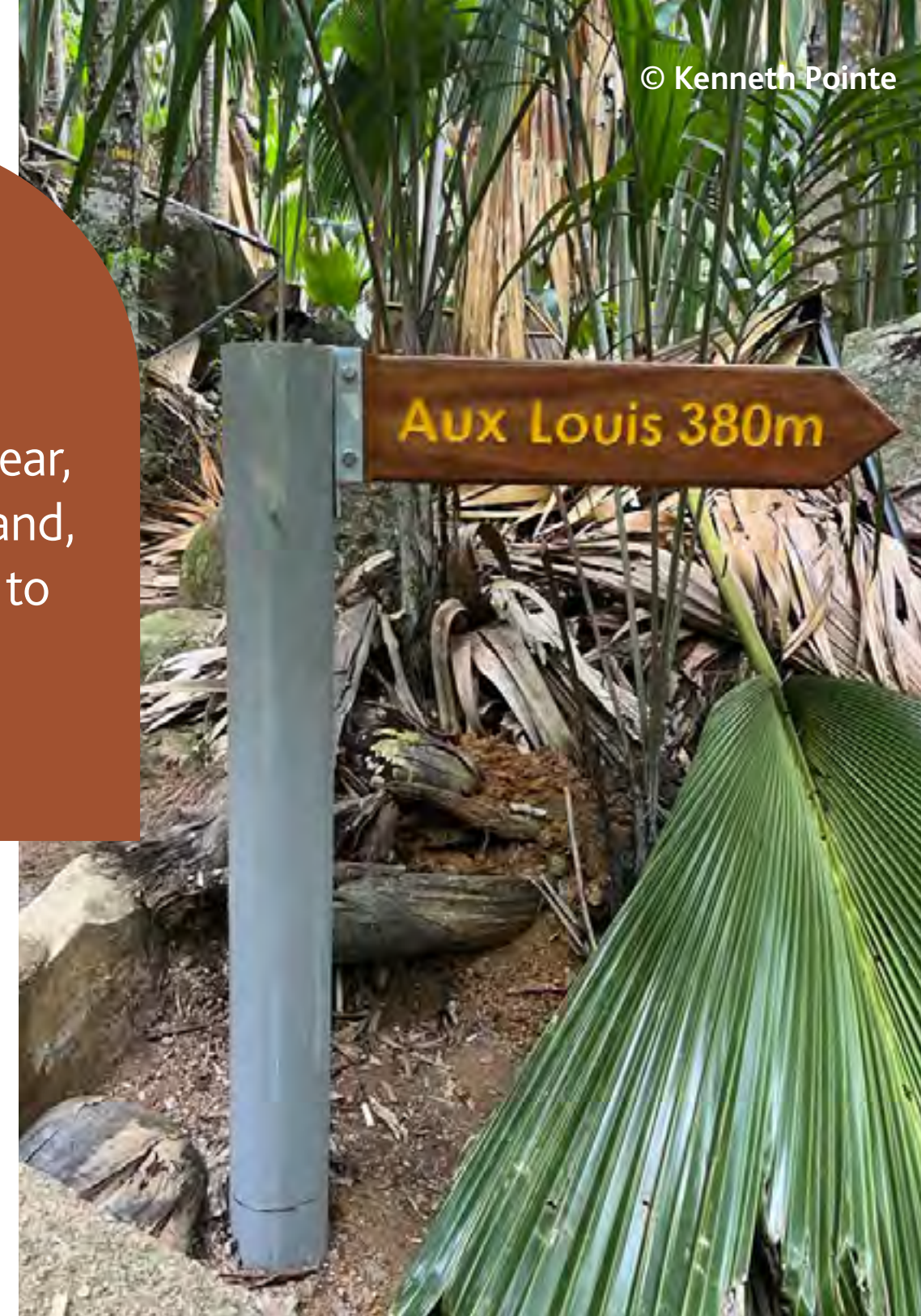
© Rich Baxter

© SIF



Launch of the self-guided trail

We are very excited to announce that this year, we opened self-guided trails at Fond Ferdinand, offering nature enthusiasts the opportunity to explore the site at their own pace.



© Kenneth Pointe



© Christophe Mason-Parker



SIF launches its online donation platform

In line with the recent launch of our website's online ticket purchasing platform, SIF also developed an online platform to facilitate donations to our conservation initiatives.

[Donate here](#)

[Make a Donation](#) [Purchase Tickets](#) [DMC Login](#) [Admin](#)

© SIF

We accept donations..

Thank you for choosing to support SIF. Your generous donation will assist our teams in protecting and better understanding the biodiversity and ecosystems found at our sites. Your support will contribute to our ongoing projects, education and outreach activities and the development of science and conservation management in Seychelles.

SIF tackles some of the most pressing and challenging issues threatening not only Aldabra, the Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand, but our entire natural world. Especially invasive alien species, marine pollution and climate change are serious issues that will not only hurt our environment but also our way of life and society.

Your support pushes the work we do forward and appreciates its significance. Thank you so much that you wish to help us.

To ensure you do stay up to date with our activities make sure to follow our social media pages and subscribe to our newsletters.

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Sustainable tourism management project meets all objectives!

The project entitled 'Establishment of a Sustainable Tourism Management System in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Vallée de Mai,' funded by the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust (NFiT), came to a successful close in September, delivering various outputs for the site's management.

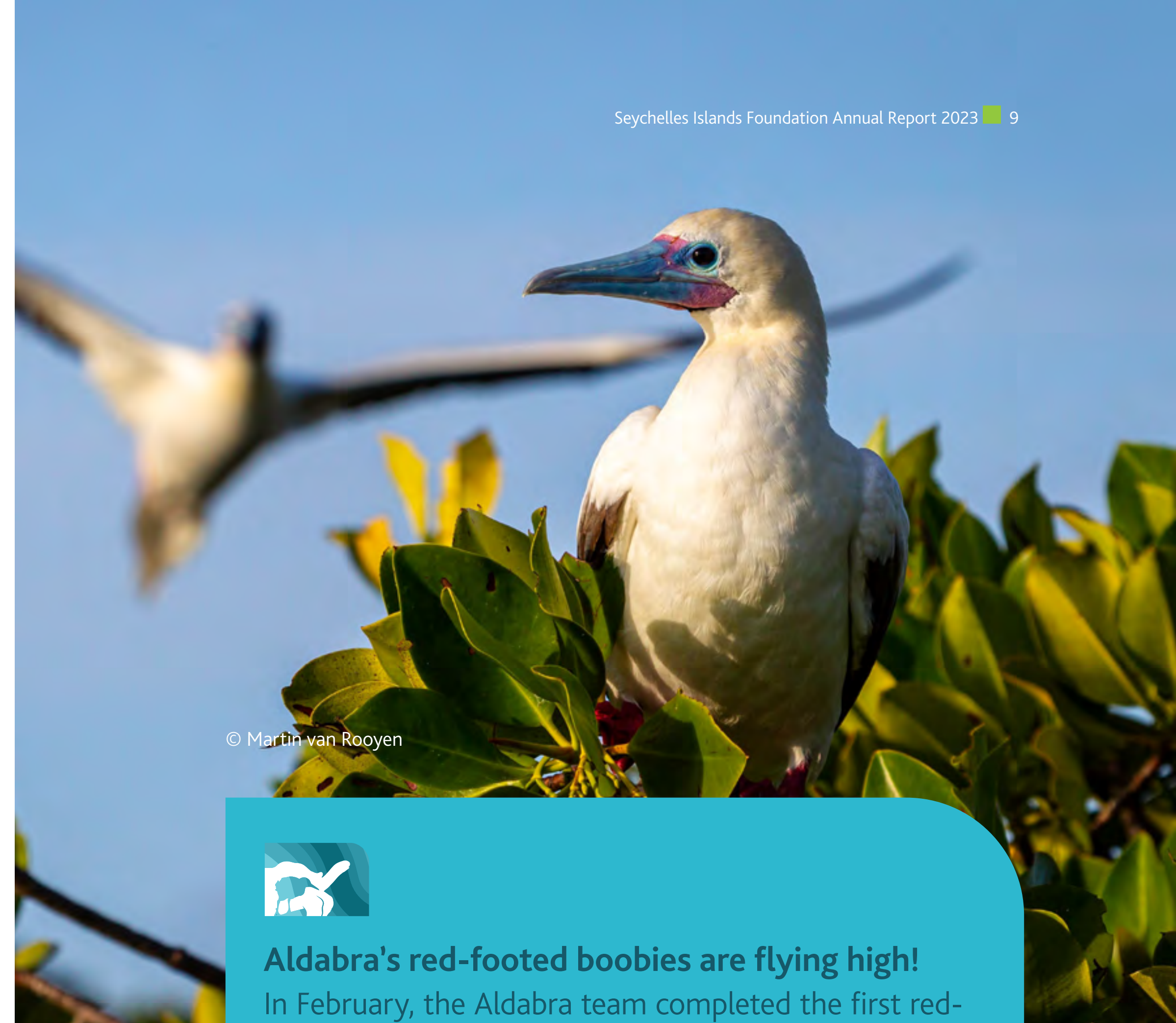


SIF signs a Memorandum of Understanding with the Seychelles Coast Guard

During the 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Aldabra, we began a future partnership with the Seychelles Coast Guard to improve the marine protected area's surveillance and enforcement capacity. This collaboration was formalised by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).



© Romano Laurence



© Martin van Rooyen



Aldabra's red-footed boobies are flying high!

In February, the Aldabra team completed the first red-footed booby census in over 20 years. Following two atoll-wide counts and aerial drone surveys, the Aldabra red-footed booby population was estimated to be almost 40,000 pairs, making it the largest (currently documented) breeding population in the Indian Ocean.



Holiday camp extended to three weeks

Due to popular demand, the SIF holiday camps on Praslin were extended to three weeks this year for August and December!



© Maria Brioché



Fond Ferdinand awarded with Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice

Although the Vallée de Mai has earned the Tripadvisor Travellers' Award multiple times throughout the years; in 2023, Fond Ferdinand earned this accolade for the first time, placing both Praslin sites among the top destinations worldwide.



The Dugong project is well underway!

Our SeyCCAT-funded project, 'The Last Dugongs of Seychelles', has made significant strides this year. Highlights include completing the first lagoon-wide aerial survey at Aldabra! Our research team, including the new Dugong Project Officer, has undergone specialised training and led outreach efforts, amplifying awareness of dugong conservation in the Indian Ocean.



SIF attends the 5th World Heritage Marine Managers Conference

Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, Chief Executive Officer and Julio Agricole, Operations Manager, represented SIF at the 5th World Heritage Marine Managers Conference in Esbjerg, Denmark, hosted at the Wadden Sea World Heritage site. Dr Fleischer-Dogley presented plans to conduct a feasibility study on eradicating invasive rats and feral cats from Aldabra, one of the greatest threats to the atoll's biodiversity and ecosystem health.



SIF undertakes another ambitious Aldabra Clean-Up Project

With the support of volunteers from the Seychelles Defence Forces, we geared up for the second Aldabra Clean-Up Project (ACUP II), which aims to remove 15 tonnes of marine debris from the turtle-nesting beaches of Aldabra. The project's reiteration is funded by the Ocean Conservancy, a grants organisation committed to combatting the devastating impacts of marine pollution.



© JC Vinaj



Dr Fleischer-Dogley joins the Seychelles delegation at Monaco Ocean Week

Dr Fleischer-Dogley participated in the Monaco Ocean Week alongside a Seychelles delegation in March in Monte Carlo, Monaco. This unique forum, founded by the Prince Albert II Foundation and fellow partners fourteen years ago, brings together international experts, researchers and the community.



10th Season of ARM

The Aldabra Marine Monitoring Programme (ARM) was launched in 2013, and the first season of surveys was completed. This year, we celebrated ten consecutive seasons since the programme's initiation and looked back at ten years of underwater work.



© Anna Koester



UNESCO World Heritage



3 Vallée de Mai 40th Anniversary as UNESCO World Heritage

3.1 The meaning behind the celebrations

The Vallée de Mai is the beating green heart of Praslin, a place that has inspired and amazed visitors over the years, locals and tourists alike. It is a remnant of the ancient palm forests of the Seychelles, home to many unique and endangered species that depend on one another for their existence and continuity.

One of the world's smallest UNESCO World Heritage properties and an integral part of Seychelles' natural heritage, the Vallée de Mai celebrates 40 years since its inscription in December 2023.

The anniversary campaign and its events had several key objectives, which included:



Launching the SIF give-back campaign to support the Praslin community, demonstrating a commitment to fostering positive local impact, community development, and sustainable collaborations.



Initiating a 'Giveback Programme' to the Praslin community and globally to promote the Vallée de Mai as a UNESCO World Heritage site, highlighting its irreplaceable value as a source of life and inspiration.



Connecting with the local community to cultivate a passion for the Vallée de Mai.



Educating local communities and showcasing the Vallée de Mai as a source of sustainable opportunities in science, education, tourism, and culture.

3.2 Celebration Events and Outreach Campaign

1.

A commemorative logo, designed pro bono by Mariaan Laubscher from Silkwater Graphics, featuring the iconic coco de mer nut was launched and was used throughout the anniversary year for videos, posters, banners, invitation letters, and limited-edition 40th-anniversary merchandise.



2.

On 17th March, Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, joined by members of the Special Events Committee - established as part of the campaign - hosted a press conference at the Vallée de Mai visitor centre to launch an exciting year-long calendar of activities to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Vallée de Mai as a UNESCO World Heritage property.

The press conference panel launched the 40th anniversary of the Vallée de Mai as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. © SIF





Praslin joins forces to give back to the Home for the Elderly © SIF

3.

The Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand staff teamed up to brighten the Grand Anse Praslin Home for the Elderly as part of the SIF Give Back Campaign. Ten bedrooms, the office and the ceiling, received a new coat of paint whilst two team members tackled the unruly grass and weeds in the garden.



Souvenir photo of the donation to the Centre for the Exception Child © SIF

4.

A donation ceremony was held at the Centre for the Exceptional Child on Praslin, where several items, including stationery, educational books and games, soft toys, sports equipment and more, were donated by SIF to the school's pupils.

5.

The Centre for the Exceptional Child celebrated its 15th anniversary. SIF volunteered to renovate and refurbish several classrooms and sponsor new floor mats and chairs for the students. Over three days in the April school holidays, Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand fieldworkers completed interior and exterior paintwork for the classrooms and the dining hall.



A souvenir picture of the SIF Praslin team, the Chairman of the Special Events Committee for the 40th anniversary, Romano Laurence, with the First Lady, Mrs Linda Ramkalawan, at the unveiling of the refurbishment of the Centre for the Exceptional Child © The Seychelles Nation

6.

In a remarkable blend of heritage preservation and humanitarian efforts, we launched our first-ever blood drive in June. Staff from Head Office, Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand participated in this activity, serving as a reminder that all can contribute positively to society, whether that is by preserving natural wonders like the Vallée de Mai or by supporting our fellow humans in times of need.



SIF Praslin staff donates blood © Marc Jean-Baptiste

The coco de mer anti-poaching march, led by Chief Executive Officer Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley and Site Manager for Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand, Marc Jean-Baptiste © Romano Laurence



7.

Through the collaboration of several local organisations and support from the Franklinia Foundation, SIF organised the Coco de Mer Anti-Poaching March on the International Day of Forests to raise awareness on the adverse effects of poaching on the coco de mer forest. With 120 participants from the inner islands joining forces on Praslin, the event exemplified the strength that arises when communities unite for a common purpose.

SIF staff member dons a Seychelles black parrot headdress © SIF



8.

On Independence Day, the 29th of June, Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand staff joined the Praslin float to highlight the importance of the Vallée de Mai. Symbolising Seychelles' endemic species thriving in the palm forest, the team engaged with the local community that gathered to witness the colourful parade featuring floats from various organisations.

A souvenir picture of SIF's Patron, President Wavel Ramakalawan, Vice President Ahmed Afif, and SIF Trustees with participants of the research symposium © Anna-Louisa Dogley



9.

On November 2nd, we hosted a hybrid research symposium, "Preserving Our Past & Inspiring Our Future," at the Savoy Seychelles Resort & Spa. Learn more about this event in section 5.1 Vallée de Mai, Science and Conservation.

[Watch here](#)

The mural revealed at the ERO passenger terminal on Praslin © Romano Laurence



10.

A captivating mural was unveiled at the ERO Passenger Terminal on Praslin in November. Measuring 11 by 5 metres, this permanent artwork is the result of a collaborative effort between five lecturers from the Seychelles Institute of Art and Design (SIAD) and SIF. The mural serves as a visual representation of the unique biodiversity and cultural significance of Vallée de Mai. It highlights the ecological richness that earned Vallée de Mai its UNESCO recognition.

11.

To raise awareness among visitors and residents alike on the importance of wildlife conservation, SIF launched the monthly Night Safari from May to October. With limited group sizes to minimise impact, knowledgeable guides shared their insights on the palm forest's nocturnal ecology, highlighting the unique adaptations of the creatures that thrive in the darkness. Through this initiative, local and tourist visitors gained a deeper understanding of the delicate balance of the ecosystem and the importance of conserving these habitats.

12.

Ten public buses on Praslin received a Vallée de Mai makeover in October to celebrate cultural pride and environmental conservation. Local business Beyond Design collaborated with SIF to bring the essence of the reserve to the roads, adorning buses with the tagline of the 40th-anniversary celebration, colourful coco de mer nuts and the iconic waterfall, an integral part of the water catchment area responsible for distributing water to many homes on Praslin.

Praslin staff proudly posing with the new design © SIF



The exhibition debuted at the research symposium © SIF.

SIF trustees, winners and sponsors in souvenir photograph © SIF



13.

In November, a travelling exhibition unveiling the ecological and cultural significance of Vallée de Mai took centre stage at the launch of the research symposium. Attendees were pleased to discover the intricate balance between scientific research, conservation practices, and the cultural values embedded within Vallée de Mai. The exhibition is set to embark on a journey to Praslin next year, where it will be prominently featured at the Visitor Centre during the official ceremony commemorating the 40th anniversary.



14.

In June, SIF and the Ministry of Education organised a national public speaking competition for primary and secondary schools in Seychelles under the theme "The Importance of Vallée de Mai as UNESCO World Heritage." The competition highlighted the site's significance for socio-economic growth on Praslin and its contributions to science, education, tourism, and culture. It brought together 32 schools (19 primary and 13 secondary) from Mahé, Praslin, and La Digue, with students delivering compelling speeches on topics like biodiversity conservation, sustainable tourism, the impacts of COVID-19, technology in science communication, and the consequences of losing the site's World Heritage status.



15.

Complimentary guided tours were organised for Praslin's hotel staff and the public, promoting increased local visitation and disseminating up-to-date information about this iconic reserve. Aligned with the celebrations, the goal was to foster conservation ambassadors within the community, with 101 participants engaging in the tours.

Hotel staff from Berjaya Praslin
Resort visit the Vallée de Mai © SIF



16.

From August to December, SIF hosted a weekly radio quiz every Tuesday on Paradise FM, giving listeners across Seychelles a chance to engage while showcasing the diverse opportunities offered by Vallée de Mai.

Baddy Lafortune from Praslin is the
first winner of the radio quiz © SIF.

To conclude the anniversary year, SIF had planned an official ceremony on December 9th, marking the 40th anniversary of Vallée de Mai's World Heritage designation. The event was set to bring together the community, key stakeholders, and partners to celebrate this significant milestone, followed by a festive Variety Show. However, both celebrations were postponed in solidarity with those affected by the flooding in the north of Mahé and the tragic events on December 7th. The official ceremony and Variety Show are rescheduled for early 2024. We look forward to welcoming you to these special occasions next year.

4

The SIF Board



41st Annual General Meeting held on Aldabra

SIF held its 41st Annual General Meeting (AGM) from April 4th to 9th, 2023, on Aldabra Atoll, bringing together trustees, staff, and Seychelles government representatives. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss SIF's conservation efforts and future initiatives, focussing on Aldabra. The meeting also offered a chance to review and amend the 1979 SIF Decree to enhance governance and increase the organisation's capacity to manage and conserve its three sites, including Fond Ferdinand and the UNESCO World Heritage properties.

Throughout the AGM, the SIF team showcased its recent accomplishments, including ongoing projects like the Rat and Cat Eradication (RaCE) feasibility assessment. This ambitious project aims to eradicate invasive species from Aldabra and will require careful planning, significant resources, and regional cooperation for success.

Furthermore, the board discussed the Aldabra House project, which will support scientific research, education, and sustainable development while promoting collaboration with local communities and stakeholders to raise awareness about Aldabra's biodiversity.

The AGM also provided the new board members with their first visit to Aldabra, strengthening their commitment to preserving its fragile ecosystems.



The trustees conducting a beach cleanup © Romano Laurence



© Romano Laurence



“I never cease to be amazed at the number of important challenges being dealt with simultaneously by SIF and the enthusiasm of everyone, at Head Office and at the three sites being managed, to ensure that the SIF remains a leader among the organisations in the country engaged in environmental management.”

-Chairman of the SIF Board of Trustees,
Hon. Bernard Georges

SIF marks a collaboration with the Seychelles Coast Guard

A key highlight of the AGM was the agreement to form a future partnership between SIF and the Seychelles Coast Guard, formalised by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Aldabra Atoll. This partnership will enable both parties to collaborate closely in enforcing laws and regulations for marine protection, focusing on monitoring and patrolling the Aldabra Special Reserve, which spans approximately 2,599km².

Colonel Jean Attala, Chief of Staff from the Seychelles Defence Forces, and Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, CEO of SIF, sign an MoU in the presence of SIF's patron, President Wavel Ramkalawan and Chairman of SIF's Board, Honourable Bernard Georges
© Romano Laurence



5

Vallée de Mai

vallée
de mai

5.1 Science and Conservation

Continued yellow crazy ants control

The highly invasive yellow crazy ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) has been controlled in the Vallée de Mai since 2019 with bait deployment in targeted areas combined with intensive monitoring.

The eighth baiting session for controlling the invasive yellow crazy ants in Vallée de Mai took place from June 29th to July 2nd, covering 26.7 ha, including key areas like the boulders, the bracken ferns, and Fond Peper. Target areas were decided using data from regular monitoring, including invertebrate pitfall trapping, ant-activity transects and opportunistic observations. Unlike the previous baiting procedure, Fond Peper had several yellow crazy ant observations, which concerned the team and required further baiting.

Despite challenges and setbacks, the team demonstrated incredible resilience. With the help of the field team, a third baiting group was formed, allowing the team to cover all of Fond Peper in one day.

Ongoing yellow crazy control is key to preserving the Vallée de Mai ecosystem © SIF.



Deploying liquid bait © SIF



The endemic white slug (*Vaginula seychellensis*) making a comeback at the Vallée de Mai
© Maria Monthy



Native molluscs and geckos see an increase following the control of invasive species.

Molluscs and geckos are essential to the Praslin palm forest ecosystem, playing a crucial role in pollinating and sustaining the coco de mer population. These species share a mutualistic relationship with the trees, receiving shelter and food while aiding in pollination, nutrient cycling, and seed dispersal.

In 2018, these species were severely threatened by yellow crazy ants, which then covered 100% of Vallée de Mai. The ants spray formic acid on their prey, rendering molluscs and geckos blind and vulnerable. In response, SIF initiated the mollusc and gecko survey in 2019, covering 150 coco de mer trees in Vallée de Mai and 84 in Fond Peper. Thanks to successful control of the invasive ants, the populations of molluscs and geckos are gradually recovering, restoring balance to the ecosystem.



The giant bronze gecko (*Ailuronyx trachygaster*) is an essential pollinator of the coco de mer plant © Ricardo Valmont.

Another late black parrot breeding season

Since November 2022, the team has been closely monitoring the black parrots (*Coracopsis barklyi*), conducting cavity checks and searching for signs of the upcoming 14th breeding season. Usually, the first signs of breeding appear in October when the parrots' brown beaks turn pale yellow, followed by breeding calls and prospecting for nesting sites. By early December, eggs are typically discovered, marking the beginning of the breeding season.

However, this year, the parrots confused our research team. Although pale beaks were first observed in November, breeding calls were not heard until mid-December, and it wasn't until January that they became more frequent. Just as the team began to think the parrots might not breed this year, a single egg was found on January 23rd, followed by another nest with three eggs the next day. Despite the delay, this season proved to be more successful than anticipated. Twenty-two nests were found and monitored, and 12 fledglings were recorded by the season's end. The team has been busy tracking these fledglings as they explore the world, learn to fly and forage with the guidance of their parents.

In an exciting development, nests were discovered for the first time in introduced santol trees and endemic latannien lat trees, bringing the total number of species used by parrots for nesting to 14. As always, each breeding season offers discoveries, keeping the black parrot project dynamic and full of surprises.



First egg found © Monica Griffith.



Black parrot on cavity © Toke

Increasing the resilience of Seychelles' flagship species

With the support of the Franklinia Foundation project, 'Increasing the resilience of Seychelles' flagship species coco de mer', the research team successfully launched the coco de mer population census in the Vallée de Mai.

The census began on January 4th, following a pilot survey to train key staff on data collection methods and familiarise them with new equipment. This census is a vital part of enhancing our ability to track long-term trends in the species and provide crucial data for conservation policy and management, as the coco de mer is currently listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. The collected data will help determine the species' distribution, as well as its age and sex structure.



We launched the coco de mer census in the Vallée de Mai in January © Tourism Seychelles.

By the end of January, most of the Vallée de Mai survey area had been completed, with 297 females, 352 males, 342 immatures, and 138 juveniles recorded. The team is now extending the census to Fond Peper using a newly developed data collection app, which digitalises the process and links it to an online database. This new system will enhance the efficiency of storing and analysing coco de mer population data, supporting our ongoing conservation efforts.

Marking of a coco de mer tree © SIF



One of our Rangers measures the height of a coco de mer tree using a laser range finder © SIF.



The research team called to assist with yellow crazy ant control on Mahé

In response to a reported increase of yellow crazy ants (YCA) at Bel Ombre on Mahé, SIF was first called to conduct a survey and baiting session in January. This followed a similar session the previous year, when the Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change, and Environment (MACCE) sought SIF's expertise to address the YCA incursion.

Marc Jean-Baptiste, Site Manager at Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand, armed with ant bait and GPS coordinates, begin casting © Terance Payet.



A survey was conducted before deploying the bait to assess the effectiveness of the previous session in 2022, which showed a reduction in numbers in some areas. After the survey, five trained staff spread bait over 0.4 hectares, and yellow crazy ants were immediately observed scavenging the pellets.

YCA gathering on casted bait © Terance Payet



Preserving our past & inspiring our future

On November 2nd, over 150 local and international scientists gathered with Seychelles Islands Foundation staff at the Savoy Resort and Spa to commemorate decades of research achievements and milestones under the 40th anniversary of Vallée de Mai's UNESCO World Heritage inscription. The event, attended by Praslin community members, conservation stakeholders, and government representatives, also reached an online audience of 564 viewers, featuring presentations exploring the unique biodiversity of the Vallée de Mai, the conservation of its iconic coco de mer palms, and advancements in research and sustainable management practices.

SIF's Patron, Board of Trustees, staff and participants gather for a group photo © Anna- Louisa Dogley





© Romano Laurence

The final session focused on practical conservation efforts, such as managing invasive species like the yellow crazy ants. Closing the sessions, SIF's CEO, Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, emphasised the broader impacts of Vallée de Mai research on policy, tourism, and education, affirming its role as a national and global conservation model.

Hon. Bernard Georges, Chairman of the SIF Board, delivered closing remarks, expressing sincere gratitude on behalf of SIF and the board of trustees to all the outstanding speakers for their contributions and everyone involved in the conservation of this site.

In his words, this Vallée de Mai 40th UNESCO inscription anniversary ***“engaged many people on many levels about such a wonderful institution ... and reserve”***.

[Watch full symposium](#)[Watch sessions](#)[Read recap](#)

Chairman of the SIF Board, Hon. Bernard Georges, President Wavel Ramkalawan, Vice-President, Ahmed Afif and SIF's CEO, Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, at the research symposium © Anna-Louisa Dogley

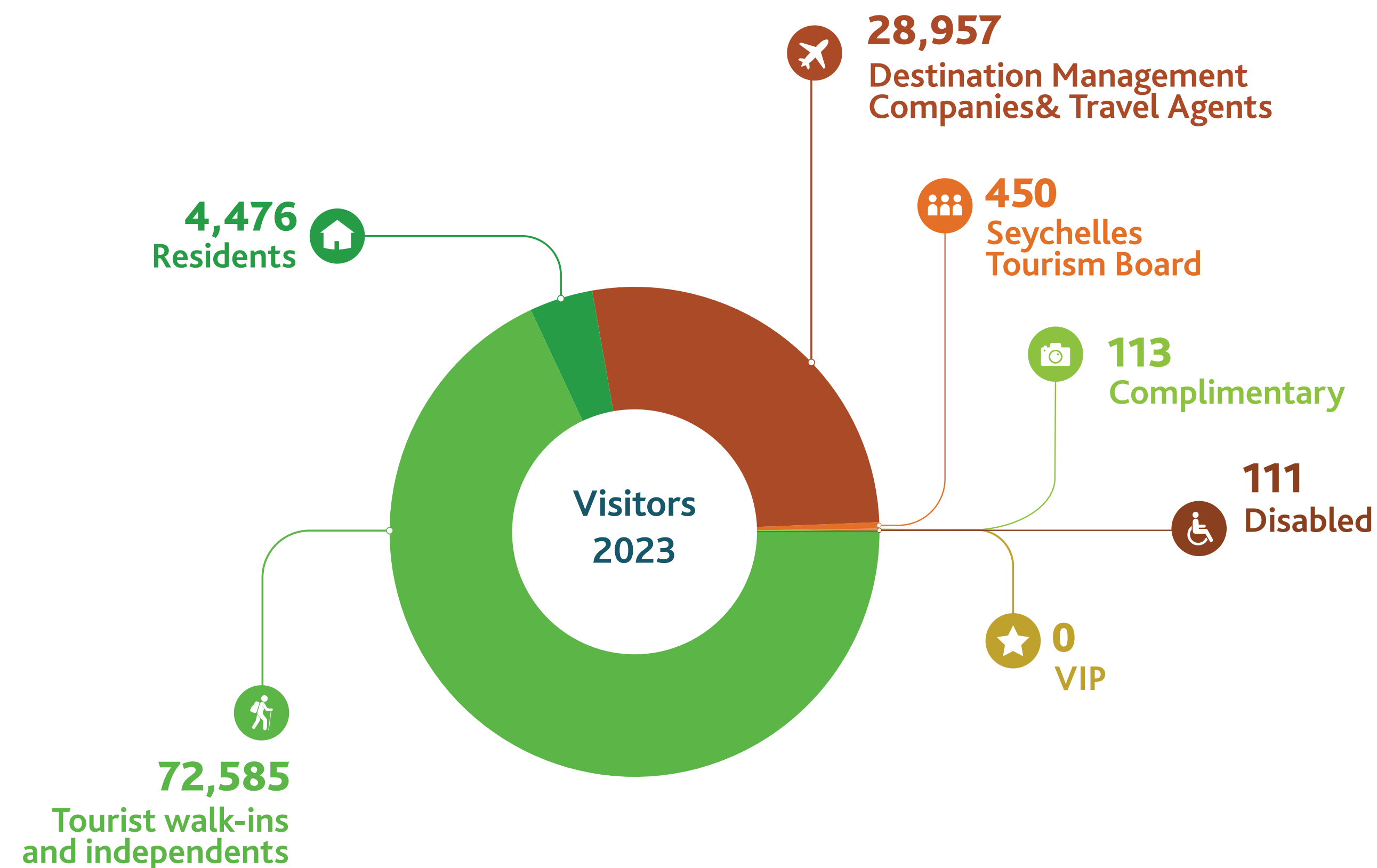


5.2 Site management and sustainable tourism

Visitors to the Vallée de Mai

In 2023, Vallée de Mai received 106,692 visitors, making up 30% of visitors to Seychelles. This is only a slight increase of over 300 to the 2022 visitor numbers.

However, we saw an 18% rise in resident visitors, with increased organised visits to the Vallée de Mai for the 40th anniversary campaign to raise awareness and connection to this site among Praslinois and Seychellois.



Vallée de Mai shines with double award

The Vallée de Mai has received well-deserved worldwide acclaim again, securing further accolades from Tripadvisor in 2023. Tripadvisor, which annually recognises top destinations, hotels, restaurants, and attractions based on traveller reviews and ratings, honoured the Vallée de Mai with its Traveller's Award based on reviews from visitors that year.

Adding to this achievement, the Vallée de Mai also earned the esteemed 2023 Experts' Choice Award from TripExpert for the first time—a distinction reserved for less than 2% of attractions globally and based on evaluations by professional reviewers from respected sources.

These accolades reaffirm the Vallée de Mai's status as an unmissable gem for visitors to Seychelles, celebrated for its natural beauty and cultural significance!





Advancing Sustainable Tourism at Vallée de Mai

The 'Establishment of a Sustainable Tourism Management System in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Vallée de Mai' project, funded by the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust (NFiT), concluded successfully this year. Launched in December 2021, the project aimed to modernise tourism management and conservation practices at the Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand.

Key achievements include a new point-of-sale (POS) system for seamless ticketing, integrated data capture, and an online booking platform offering automated sales statistics. Staff training ensured consistent operation of these systems, improving efficiency and accuracy. In June, retail management training equipped Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand sales teams to optimise the Retail Man (RMAN) POS system, which supports stock control and collects critical visitor statistics for tourism management.

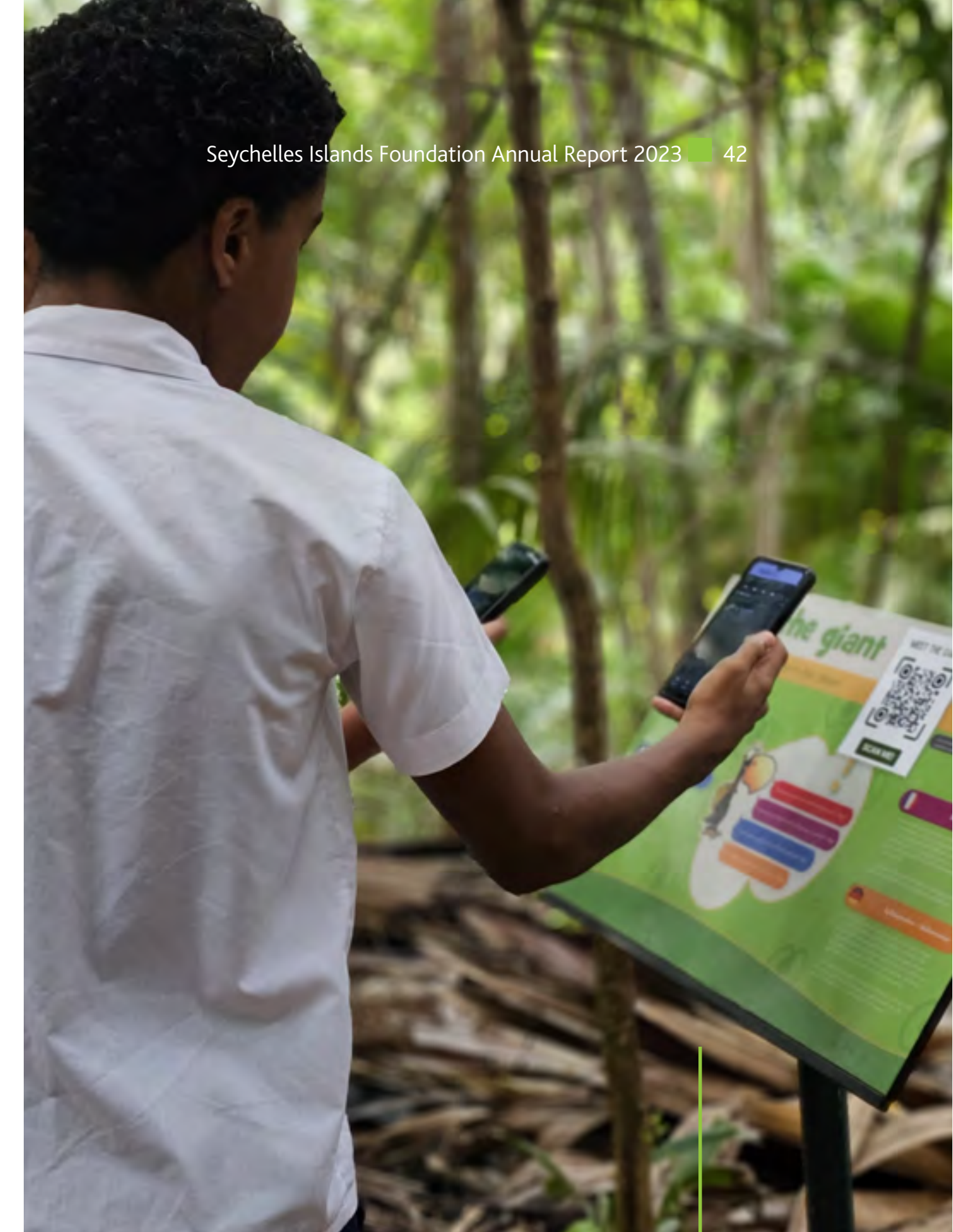
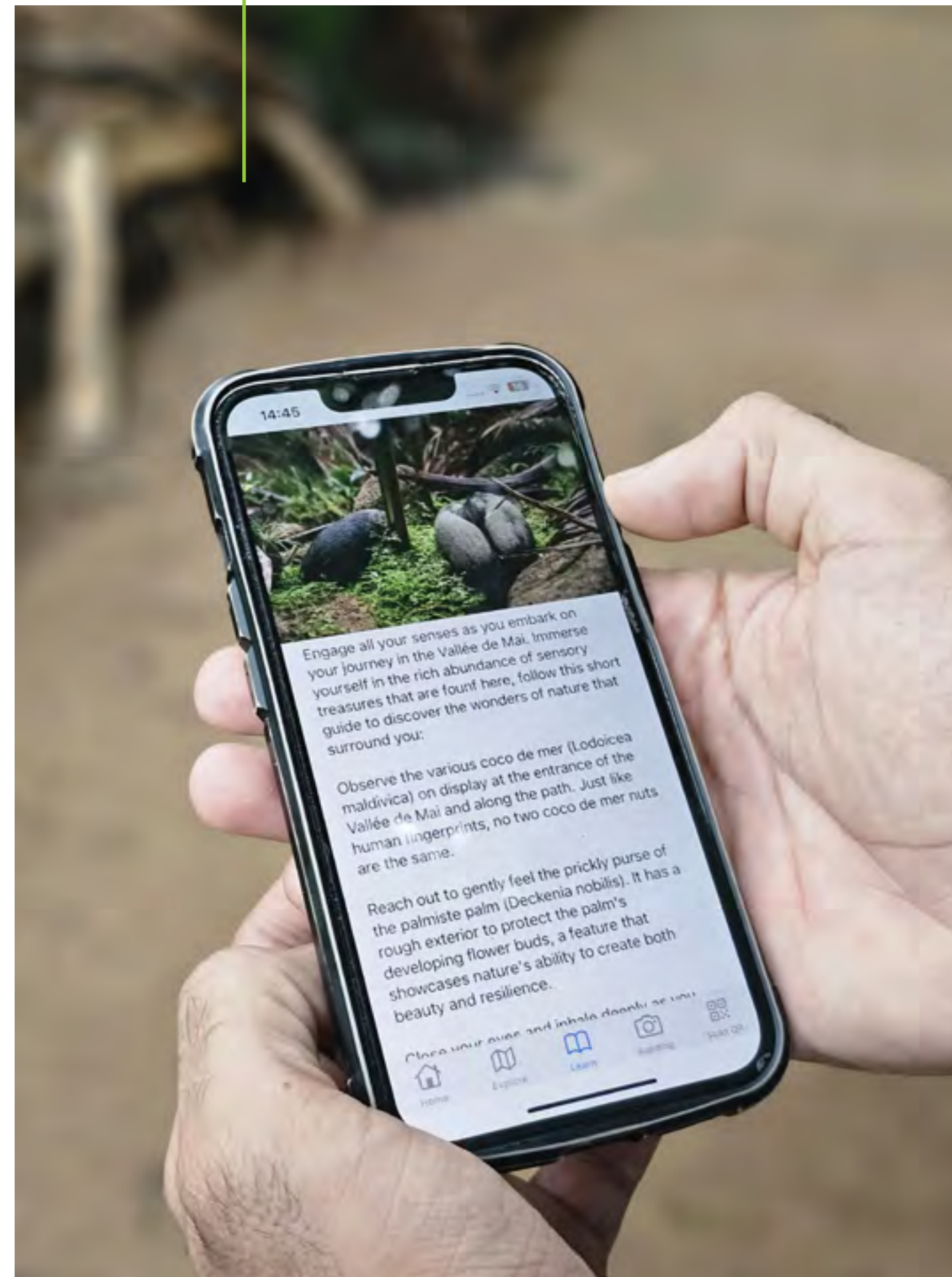
The Praslin team attending the training for the new RMAN software © SIF



The project introduced digital tools, including a Visitor Science App for real-time tourist activity data and another app for the research team's use. These tools enable location-based field data collection and analysis, enhancing conservation efforts and actively involving our visitors in citizen science initiatives.

Despite challenges such as procurement and recruitment delays, the project achieved all its objectives and laid a solid foundation for continued progress. SIF is committed to sustaining these outcomes by further modernising conservation practices and improving visitor management systems to support sustainable tourism in Seychelles' unique palm forests.

The new app aims to enrich the experience of our visitors © Cheyenne-Mae Chang-Yunn.



Students from Praslin Secondary School test the new Visitor Science app © Cheyenne-Mae Chang-Yunn.

Strengthening the resilience of our flagship species

Our project, “Increasing the Resilience of Seychelles’ Flagship Tree Species, Coco de Mer (*Lodoicea maldivica*),” funded by the Frankinia Foundation, has achieved significant progress this year. The project focuses on combating threats such as forest fires and illegal nut harvesting and is critical to preserving the iconic coco de mer and the unique ecosystem it supports.

Regular fire drills, conducted in collaboration with the Seychelles Fire and Rescue Services Agency (SFRSA), have enhanced institutional readiness to address forest fires. Additionally, stakeholder consultations, including the Seychelles Parks and Gardens Authority and the Attorney General’s Office, are progressing toward a robust response protocol to curb the illegal poaching of coco de mer. Upcoming plans include the development of a comprehensive fire prevention and contingency strategy with specialised expert guidance.

Through several trainings, equipment purchasing and policy drafting, this project will strengthen our preparedness against forest fires and poaching
© Romano Laurence.



A stakeholder workshop held at the Baha'i Centre on Praslin marked a pivotal step in improving fire prevention measures. Attended by organisations such as the Disaster Risk Management Department (DRMD), SFRSA, and the Terrestrial Restoration Action Society Seychelles (TRASS), the workshop focused on identifying roles, assessing fire risks, and integrating fire prevention into broader community frameworks.

Furthermore, a validation workshop was conducted in November to ensure the effectiveness of the fire prevention and contingency plan. Participants, including Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand staff and key stakeholders, engaged in a tabletop exercise to evaluate the plan's feasibility and emergency procedures.



Conducting fire drills © SIF

Lastly, community engagement and education have been central to the project's goals. An anti-poaching march saw participation from 16 organisations, raising public awareness of the coco de mer's ecological and cultural significance. Infographics highlighting the species' importance and the impact of poaching further amplified our outreach efforts.

Through collaboration, innovation, and sustained community involvement, this project aims to safeguard one of Seychelles' most treasured species for generations.

Sheils Barra, Consultant for the fire prevention and contingency plan, presents the plan to the group © Cheyenne-Mae Chang-Yunn.

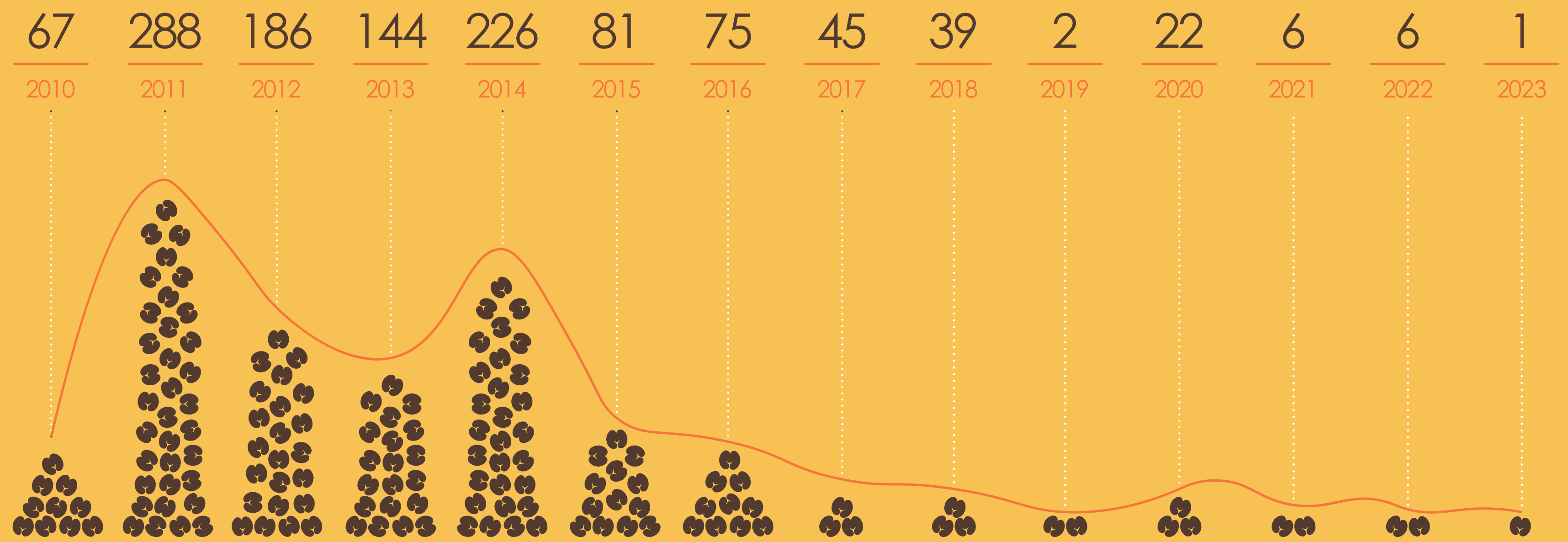


The Praslin community rallies against coco de mer poaching © Romano Laurence



Coco de Mer Stats

In 2023, 602 coco de mer nuts were sold, with 309 sold at Vallée de Mai, 209 at Fond Ferdinand, and 84 at the SIF Head Office. Additionally, nut collection efforts yielded 728 nuts, including 149 from Vallée de Mai and 579 from Fond Ferdinand. Notably, only one nut in the jelly nut stage was poached across Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand during the year, reflecting significant progress in anti-poaching measures.



6

Fond Ferdinand



6.1 Site Management and Sustainable Tourism

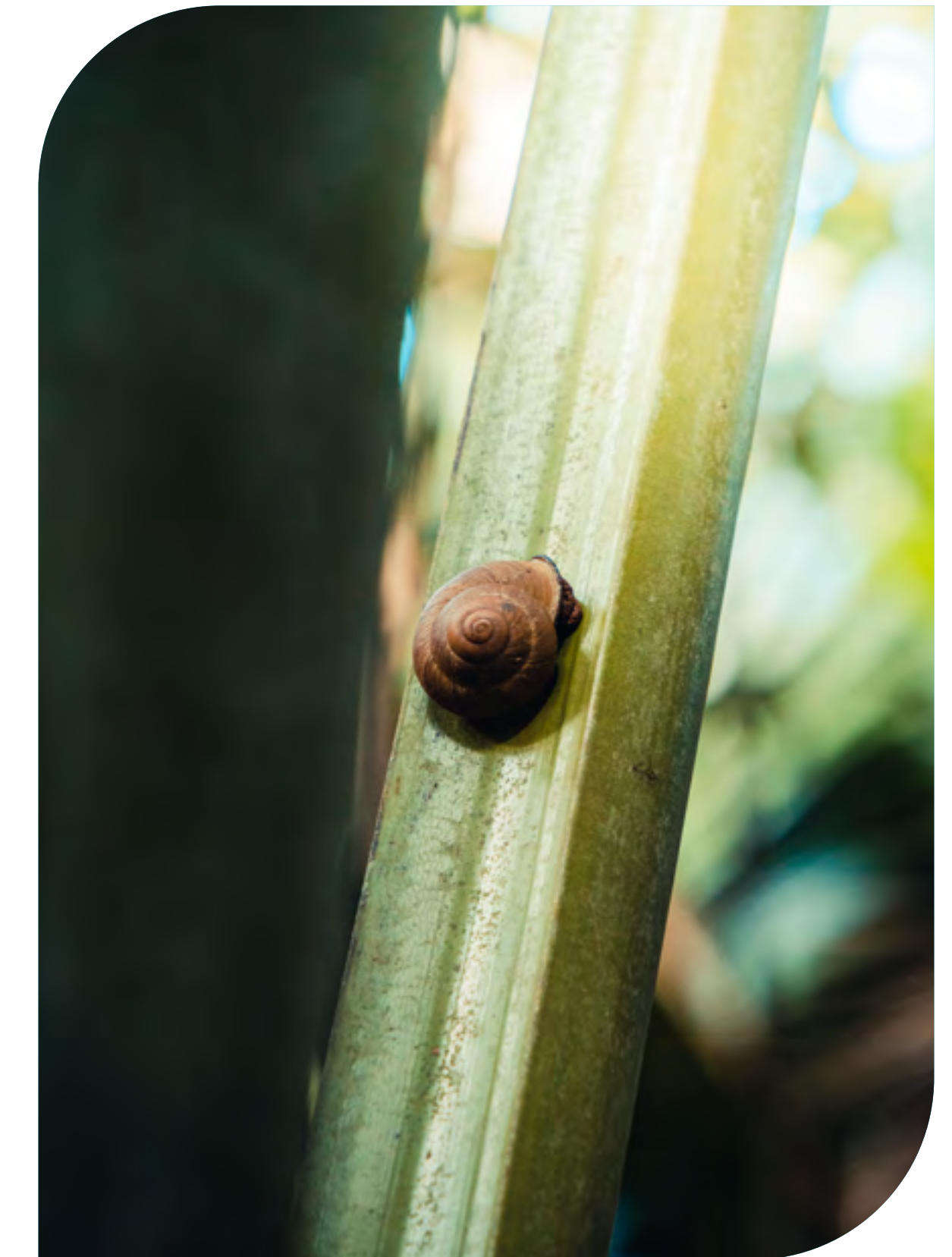
The new logo for Fond Ferdinand revealed!



Entrusted to SIF's management in late 2020, Fond Ferdinand has undergone transformative developments over the past few years. As part of these advancements, we are proud to unveil the new Fond Ferdinand logo, which Seychellois-owned Créatifs Studios designed with the collaboration of the SIF team.

The logo highlights the reserve's unique biodiversity, featuring three key elements: the iconic coco de mer nut (*Lodoicea maldivica*), representing Fond Ferdinand's significant population of this species; the freshwater eel (*Anguilla bicolor bicolor*), a cherished resident of the reserve's streams; and the endemic coco de mer snail (*Stylodonta studeriana*), often found on leaf stems and trunks of the coco de mer.

This new emblem reflects the ecological and cultural richness of Fond Ferdinand while aligning with SIF's broader brand identity. As we continue to enhance this site, we invite visitors to experience and appreciate the remarkable heritage it protects.

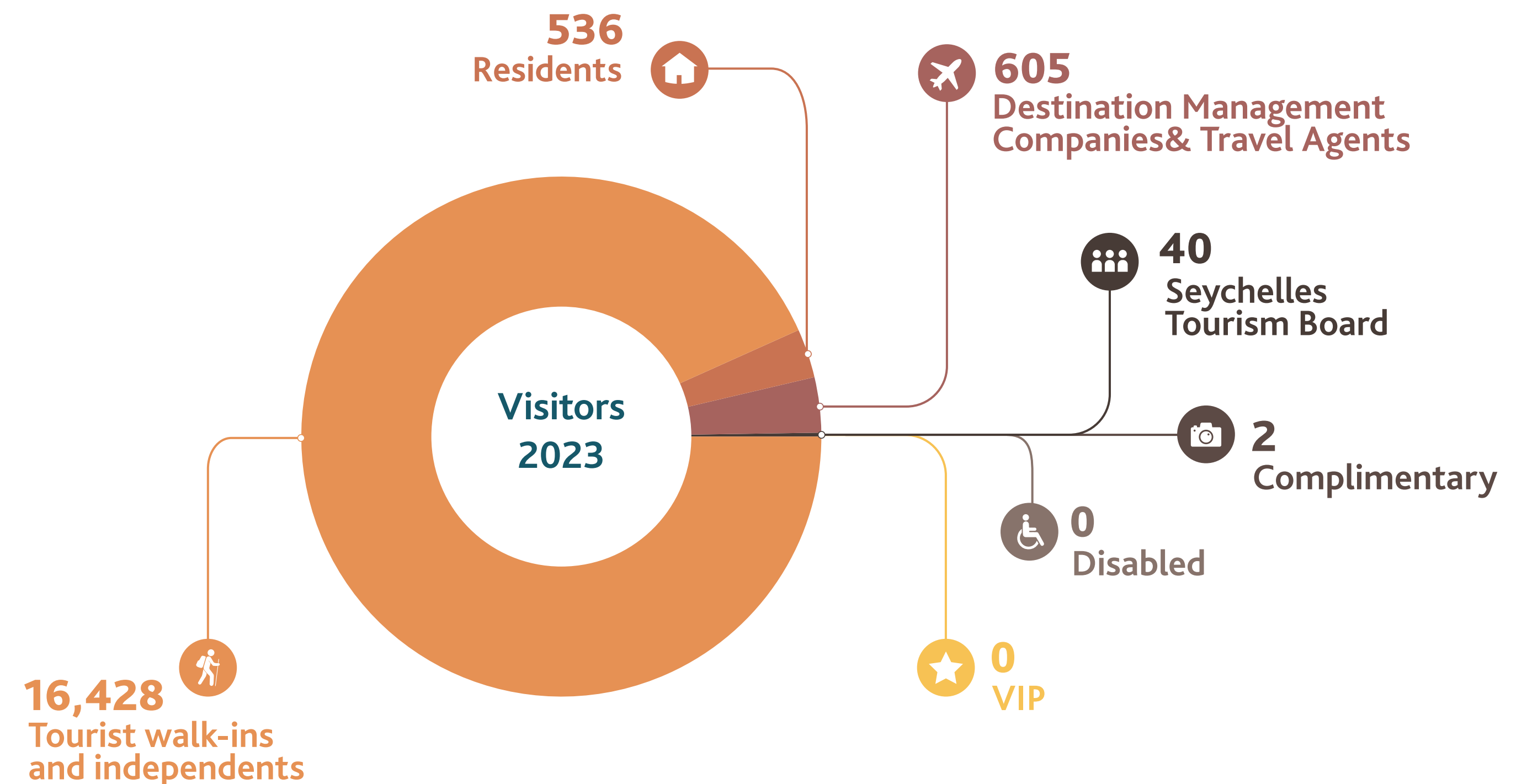


Fond Ferdinand is known as a stronghold of the coco de mer, so it was essential to feature the coco de mer and species that rely on it © Tourism Seychelles.

Visitors to Fond Ferdinand

In 2023, Fond Ferdinand welcomed 17,611 visitors, showing a modest increase from the 17,110 visitors recorded in 2022. Tourist walk-ins saw more growth, rising from 14,731 in 2022 to 16,428 in 2023. However, visits facilitated by Destination Management Companies (DMCs) were lower, with 605 in 2023, following a sharp decline from 2022. Resident visits, which were higher in 2022, experienced a slight decrease in 2023, totalling 536 compared to the previous year's figures.

These trends highlight the need to market Fond Ferdinand's appeal as a natural destination while underscoring further need for targeted efforts to engage residents and revitalise DMC-led visits.



Fond Ferdinand wins Tripadvisor Award for the first time!

Fond Ferdinand was recognised with a Tripadvisor Traveller's Award for the first time © Kenneth Pointe

Fond Ferdinand has received a Tripadvisor Award based on reviews from 2022. This recognition reflects visitors' positive experiences and high ratings about the reserve. Tripadvisor acknowledges popular destinations, attractions, and businesses each year based on guest feedback collected over the past year.

This award highlights Fond Ferdinand's ongoing commitment to providing an excellent experience for our visitors, further enhancing its status as a valued natural destination in Seychelles.



Discovering Fond Ferdinand with self-guided trails

In May, we proudly introduced self-guided trails at Fond Ferdinand, allowing visitors to explore the site at their own pace. As of this year, these trails feature improved signage to guide and ensure visitor safety.

Alongside this new, unguided experience, we aim to promote responsible tourism, emphasising adherence to the designated paths to protect both the safety of our visitors and the forest. All are encouraged to leave only footprints and take only memories as they visit this exceptional forest and hidden gem of Praslin. Plans are underway to further enhance the experience with informational boards featuring flora and fauna identification and key points of interest found at the site.



New signage for the Fond Ferdinand trail © Tourism Seychelles

Renovation enhances infrastructure at Fond Ferdinand

Fond Ferdinand is undergoing significant renovations to enhance its infrastructure while safeguarding the site's natural diversity. This transformative project includes natural palm-leaf barriers, fencing the tortoise pen, selective demolition of old structures, and paving works, all designed to improve the visitor experience and ensure the long-term conservation and sustainability of the site.

The palm-leaf barriers now guide visitors along their designated paths, protecting vegetation while blending more with the environment. A new secure fence around the tortoise pen provides a safe habitat for the resident Aldabra giant tortoises, allowing visitors to observe them from a respectful distance.

As the project nears completion, these new initiatives exemplify our dedication to the conservation efforts and visitor engagement at Fond Ferdinand.

Aldabra giant tortoise enjoys eating leaves in its new pen © Jim Nibourette.



The natural barriers made of palm leaves serve as visual markers and guide visitors to designated paths © Jim Nibourette.



Building capacity to combat forest fires

SIF has significantly strengthened its preparedness against forest fires this year through practical training and hands-on drills.

To commemorate World Day to Combat Drought and Desertification on June 17th, SIF, in collaboration with Seychelles Fire and Rescue Services Agency (SFRSA), organised a fire drill at Fond Ferdinand. This event emphasised the realities of operating firefighting equipment in challenging terrains, such as Fond Ferdinand's steep and narrow climbs. Staff also familiarised themselves with the new firefighting equipment sponsored by the Franklinia Project, which focuses on building capacity in forest fire management and increasing the resilience of Seychelles' iconic coco de mer.

From September 11th to 15th, six team members from Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand participated in an intensive forest firefighting training programme at the SFRSA station on Praslin. Facilitated by Consultant Johan Mendez and instructors Peter Cherry and Andrew Francois, the training brought together personnel from SFRSA, SIF, and the Terrestrial Restoration Action Society Seychelles (TRASS). Funded by the Ridge to Reef (R2R) project, the programme provided participants with essential skills and strategies to address forest fire threats effectively.

These initiatives demonstrate a proactive approach to protecting and ensuring the safety of our flagship species while fostering collaboration and skill-building across the conservation and emergency response teams for collective action.



Learning to deploy firefighting equipment at the site © SIF



SFRSA and the Praslin team demonstrate the realities of carrying equipment through steep and narrow staircases at Fond Ferdinand © Marc Jean-Baptiste



The participants pose in a souvenir photograph at Fond Ferdinand © Andrew Francois.

Fond Ferdinand was selected for this year's Festival Kreol poster!

This year marks the 38th edition of the Creole Festival, with the theme 'Lave dan Larivyer,' which translates to 'river washing.' River washing was a traditional practice where families and communities gathered by freshwater streams to wash clothes and household items. It was not just a chore but a social event where people shared stories, engaged in friendly gossip, and sang traditional songs, making it a lively and communal occasion.

For this festival edition, the Creole Festival Committee selected Fond Ferdinand as the perfect backdrop for the event's poster. The site is home to two main rivers, which divide into ten smaller streams in the lowland areas near the trails. These streams are known for their remarkable clarity, as the water catchment area is pollutants-free.

The backdrop of the new Festival Kreol poster features Fond Ferdinand © Creative Seychelles Agency & Seychelles National Institute for Culture, Heritage and the Arts.



7

Aldabra Atoll

7.1 Science and Conservation

Aldabra's Rat and Cat Eradication Feasibility Project



In June, we launched the feasibility phase for the Rat and Cat Eradication (RaCE) project on Aldabra. SIF's board made the decision to prioritise the eradication of rats and cats in response to the profound impacts these invasive species have on terrestrial and marine environments.

Invasive rats (*Rattus rattus*) on Aldabra have caused devastating effects © Rich Baxter.

Historically, the main barriers to eradicating this scale have been the size and remoteness of the atoll, which substantially increase the costs. Another obstacle is the large areas of mangrove and tidal flats, which require specialist methods to tackle. Furthermore, the potential impacts to endemic and native species by the eradication require considerable planning, mitigation and management. With the support of advances in eradication science and Aldabra's biosecurity, SIF is now poised to assess the feasibility of this large-scale eradication effort.

To initiate this crucial phase, a workshop was held remotely at the Hilton Seychelles Northholme Resort & Spa, bringing together the SIF Head Office and the Aldabra team. The primary focus was integrating the RaCE project into the current operational framework, discussing logistical considerations, and identifying lessons learned from previous projects. The team also reviewed how to manage staffing, finances, and resources effectively, ensuring that this project takes priority.

SIF management gather to discuss
the feasibility of an eradication
© Thiwanka Rajapaksha





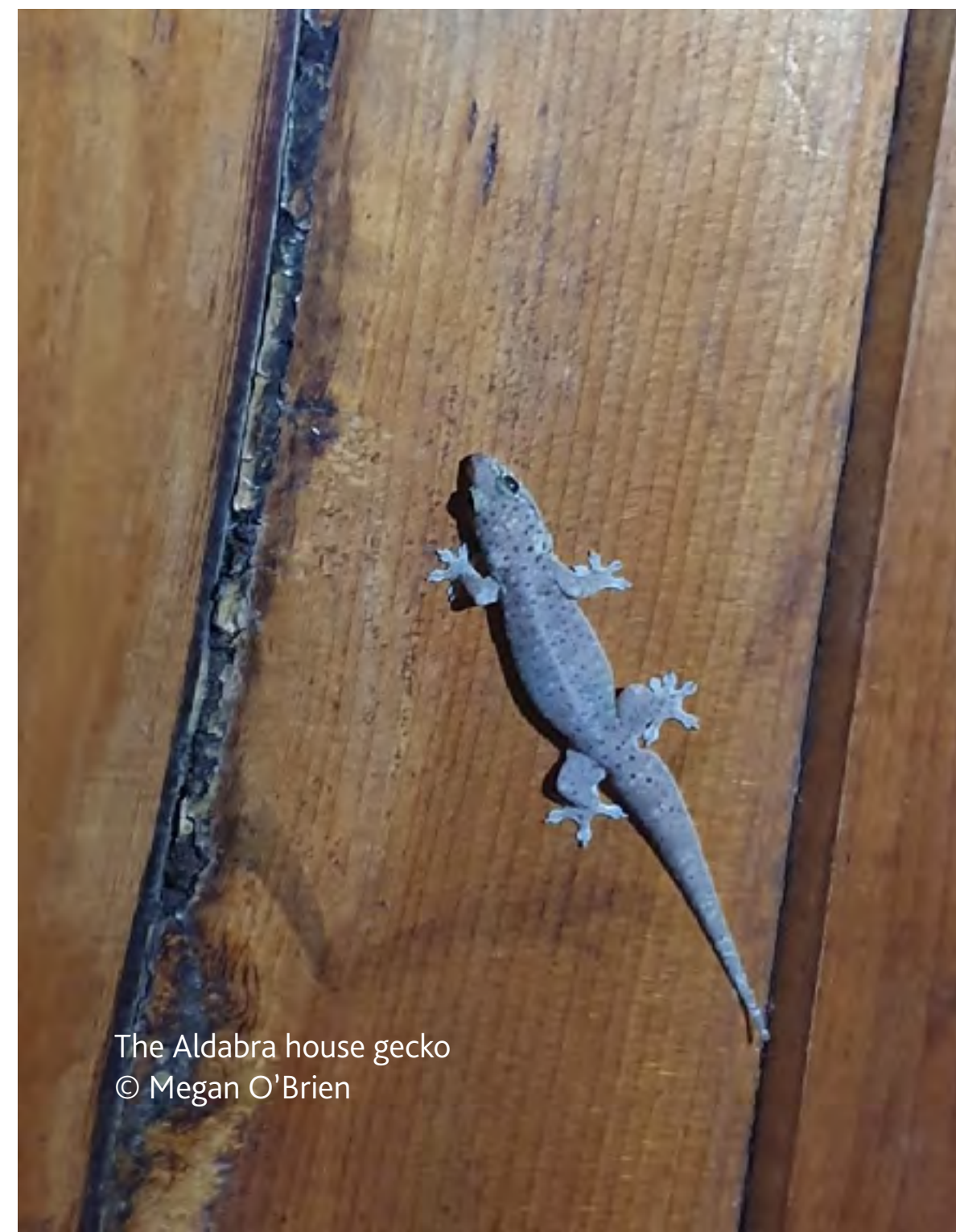
The Vulnerable Aldabra
snake-eyed skink © SIF

The pre-eradication monitoring commences

Under the Rat and Cat Eradication (RaCE) project, the research team has begun to develop new long-term monitoring programmes. This includes piloting methods on Aldabra's small reptiles, land crabs, insects and other species groups that may be affected by rats and cats and their eventual eradication. The new monitoring programmes are designed to fill gaps in existing ecological knowledge and better understand how an eradication may influence Aldabra's biodiversity.



The Aldabra day gecko
© Megan O'Brien



The Aldabra house gecko
© Megan O'Brien

Rat and cat eradication feasibility study underway

The three-year feasibility phase will involve extensive field trials, including studies on rat and cat density, bait uptake rates, and developing specialised baiting strategies for Aldabra's challenging terrain. Through the collaboration with global experts and recruiting additional field staff to support the project, the outcome of this phase will guide the development of an operational plan, all for the mighty mission of a rat and cat-free Aldabra. With confirmed funding from SIF and plans for further recruitment, we're excited to embark on this complex yet vital project, aiming for a positive, long-term impact.



Navigating Aldabra's challenging terrain and large-scale mangrove forests will render the eradication a costly endeavour © Georgette Savy.

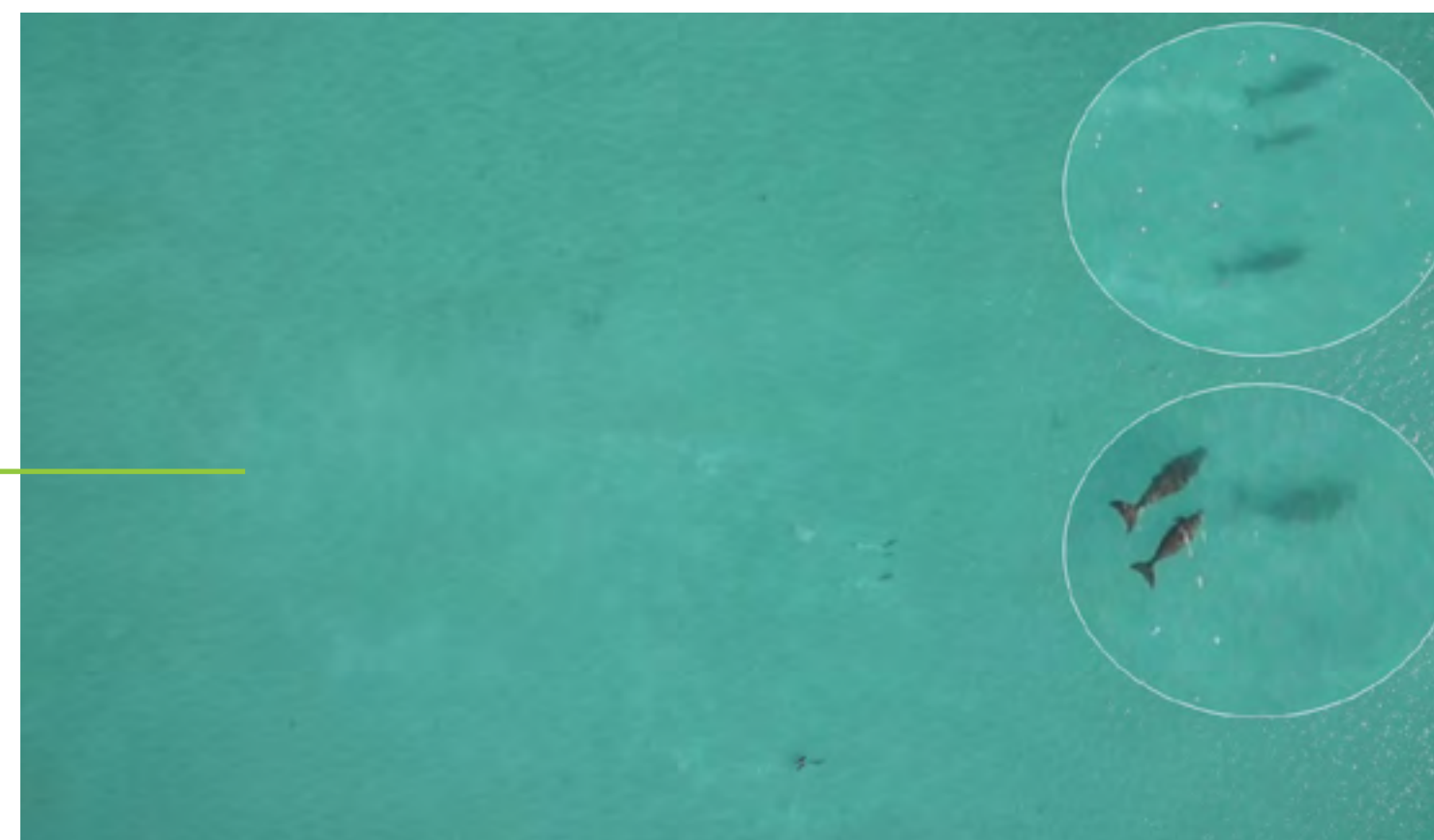
First Aldabra-wide dugong survey completed

Our SeyCCAT-funded Blue Grants Funds (BGF) project, “The last dugongs in the Seychelles: baseline population assessment of Dugong dugon at Aldabra Atoll”, is well underway. With the support of researchers from James Cook University, the project aims to conduct the first baseline population assessment of dugongs on Aldabra Atoll using special drones. Information collected from the surveys will inform the protection of dugongs on Aldabra and contribute to regional efforts to determine their location, migratory routes and whether Aldabra may have a breeding population.

After extensive training with Wingtra, the project team completed a detailed survey of the vast Aldabra lagoon, revealing the presence of at least 16 dugongs—a promising initial finding! Moving forward, the focus will shift to analysing captured images to establish a baseline population estimate and conducting further surveys of the outer reef, where dugongs have been previously sighted.

After the survey, the images will be analysed to assess Aldabra's population © SIF.

The Aldabra research team with the new drones © Christopher Jones



© Sebastian Cowin



The team conducting test flights © SIF




Aldabra's red-footed boobies are flying high

In February, the Aldabra team completed the second atoll-wide census of the red-footed booby breeding population. This followed previous counts conducted in August 2022, which marked the first-ever count incorporating the southeast breeding peak.


The latest census revealed even higher numbers than the August count, confirming Aldabra as a critical stronghold for this species. Combining data from both breeding seasons and incorporating individuals observable only through drone surveys, Aldabra's red-footed booby population now stands at nearly 40,000 breeding pairs! This means that Aldabra is currently home to the largest documented breeding population of red-footed boobies in the Indian Ocean.



The research team ready to tackle the second iteration of the census © Christopher Jones



Aldabra is home to the largest documented breeding population of red-footed boobies in the Indian Ocean. © Michael Sur



Images from the drone surveys for the red-footed booby census revealed a flock of flamingos flying by! © SIF

These findings underscore the success of Aldabra's conservation measures over many years and support its vital role in supporting seabird populations. With the population still growing, the team will continue to monitor the colony for further increases.

Exploring seabird guano benefits to mangrove forests

Seabirds play a crucial role in the nutrient dynamics of their ecosystems, feeding across vast ocean areas and transporting marine nutrients back to their breeding colonies. These nutrients, deposited primarily as guano, fuel the base of the food chain and support both terrestrial and marine communities.

Mangrove leaves covered in nutrient-rich seabird guano
© Jennifer Appoo



Aldabra also hosts the most significant mangrove extent in Seychelles © Joey Latsha.



Sample collection on the field © Jennifer Appoo



University of La Réunion PhD student and former Assistant Aldabra Science Coordinator Jennifer Appoo has been researching Aldabra better to understand the impact of seabirds on mangrove ecosystems. Over several months, Jennifer collected data at multiple sites to compare mangroves with and without nesting seabird populations. Her research includes assessing mangrove forest structure, such as tree height and above-ground biomass, and evaluating fish abundance, diversity, and other mangrove-associated fauna like molluscs and crabs. Jennifer also sampled seawater to investigate how seabird-derived nutrients are transferred across Aldabra's lagoon by tidal flows. This research will provide valuable insights into the intricate connections between seabird colonies, mangroves, and the broader ecosystem.



Seabird guano also falls in the tidal waters beneath the mangroves and is carried away by lagoon currents © Jennifer Appoo.

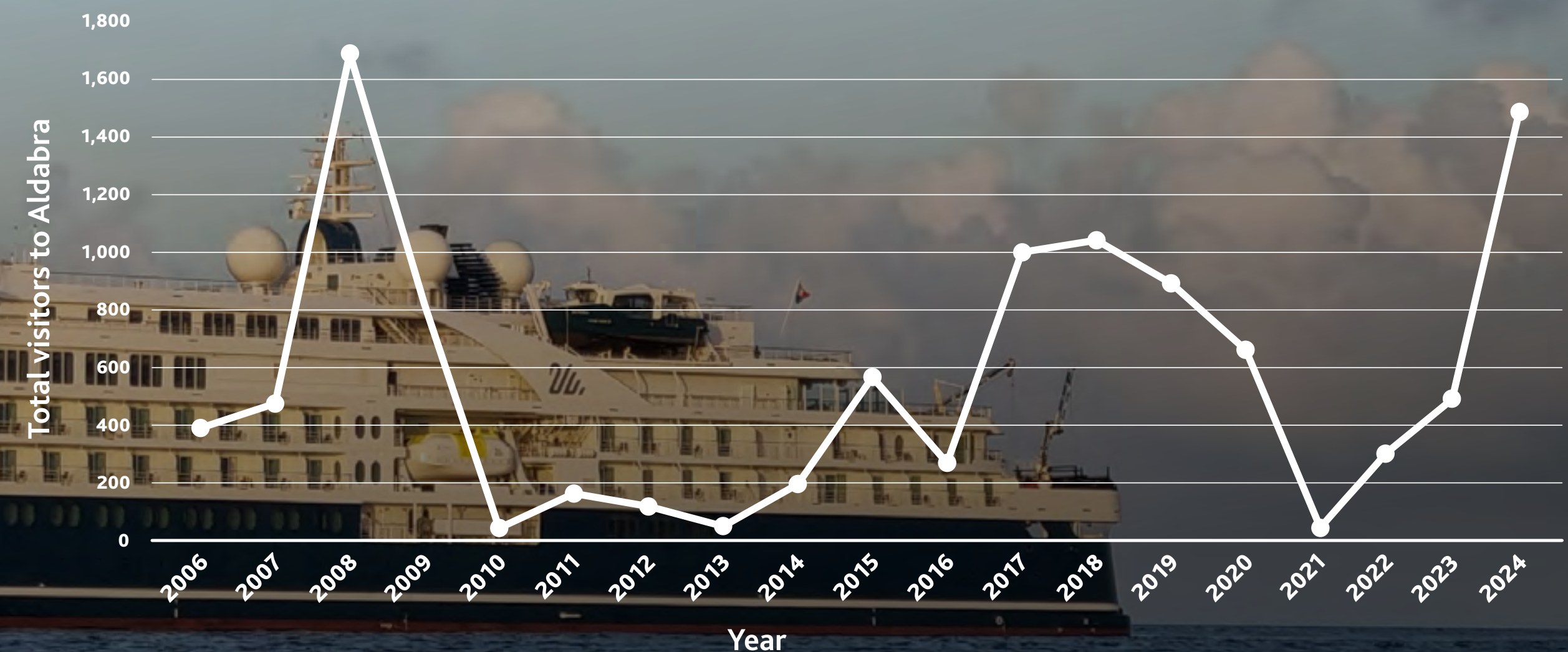
7.2 Island management and sustainable tourism

Tourism numbers boosted in 2023

The primary objectives of tourism activities on Aldabra during the Northwest season (November to May) are to foster education and awareness about the atoll's conservation efforts and financially support the management of this exceptional site.

The 2023-24 season marked a new milestone with 1,483 visitors, the highest in Aldabra's recent history, surpassing pre-pandemic figures. This remarkable growth demonstrates the increasing interest in the atoll's unique biodiversity and underscores the importance of sustainable tourism in supporting conservation efforts. Visitor numbers more than doubled, rising from 677 in 2022-23 to 1,483 in 2023-24—an impressive 117% increase.

To ensure that reserve regulations are maintained, a maximum of 120 people are permitted on land at a time, and SIF staff accompany all visit activities.





Enabling the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan under the Oceans5 Project

Under the Oceans5 project, “Enabling the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan,” SIF has been working to refine Aldabra’s Marine Protected Area (MPA) management. This includes assessing the effectiveness of the current management plan (2016–2026) and aligning it with a new national MPA management plan template being developed with the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT).

Following the management plan assessment, findings show that 60% of the 2016 plan’s strategies have been achieved, particularly in biosecurity and tourism operations. Key gaps include the need for updated legislation, a surveillance and enforcement plan, and the inclusion of deeper reefs and pelagic ecosystems under expanded MPA boundaries. Enhanced data management and improved performance metrics are also priorities for future revisions.

Furthermore, we launched an online survey this year, gathering input from stakeholders across various industries, including scientists, government and the community:

Surveillance and enforcement

Over 90% of respondents called for stronger enforcement, suggesting collaboration and improved national resources, including a coastguard station on Assumption Island.

Tourism

Stakeholders praised current tourism management but suggested immersive conservation activities and upgraded facilities to enhance visitor experiences.

Revenue

Recommendations included premium experiences, higher impact fees, and establishing an Aldabra exhibition on Mahé, paired with better donor engagement.

Research

While research processes were well-received, SIF clarified that its data-sharing policies promote ethical and collaborative practices. As a Seychelles organisation, we prioritise collaborations that, from the outset, include co-development and planning, that endeavour to allow participation from regional students or scientists, and that acknowledge the experience and knowledge of SIF staff in supervision, advisory or support roles.

Future priorities

Stakeholders prioritised the rat and cat eradication project, relocating the research station, and addressing plastic pollution as key management actions, reaffirming a commitment to safeguarding Aldabra’s ecological integrity over expanding tourism capacity.

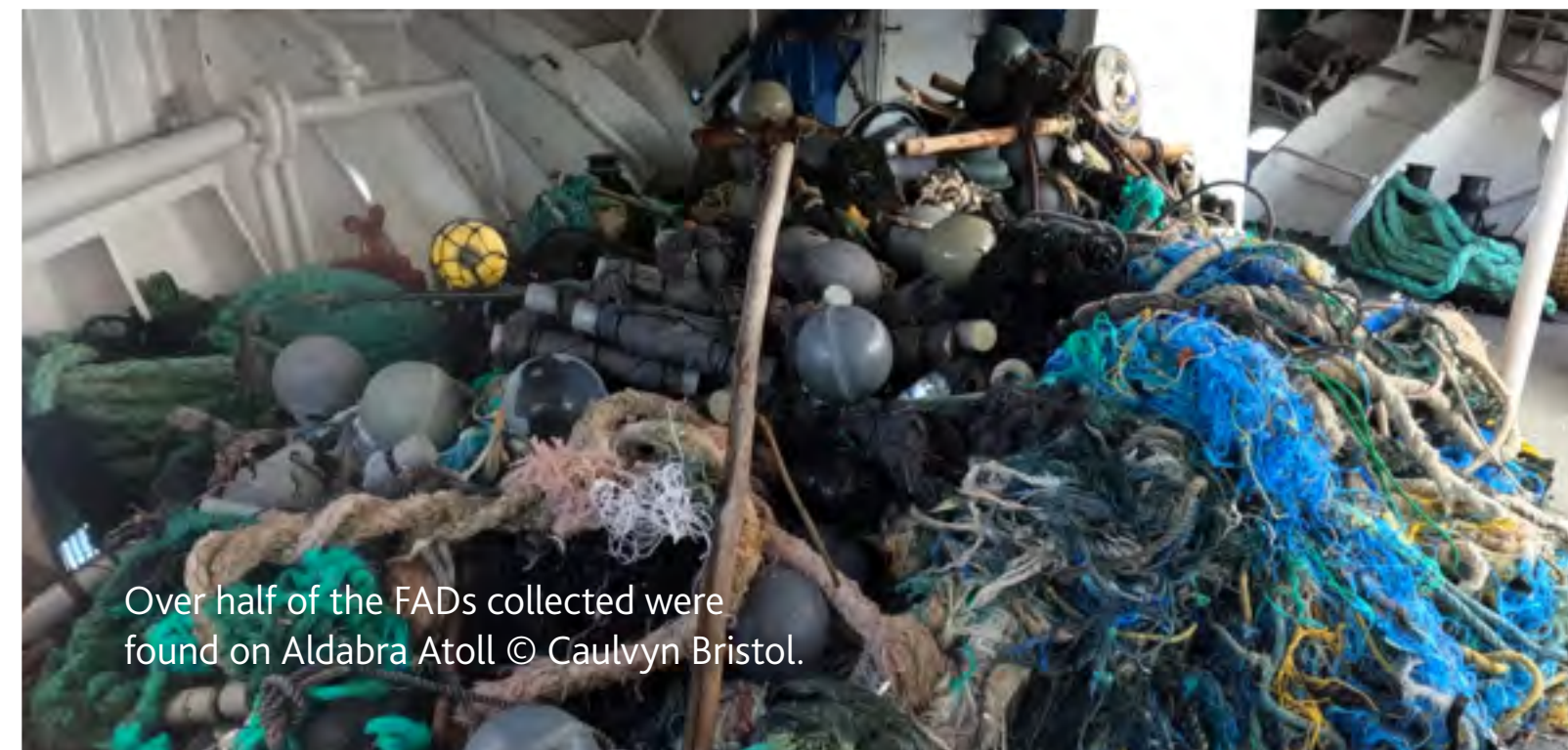
Removal of hundreds of FADs from Aldabra

In April, a joint effort between the Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF), Seychelles Maritime Academy students and SIF staff led to successfully removing over 110 Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) from the Aldabra Group. Initial reports indicate that 114 FADs were collected in this expedition, with more than half found on Aldabra.

These devices, used by commercial fishing vessels to attract fish, pose a significant threat to marine life, including fish, sharks, rays, and turtles, which can become entangled or caught as bycatch. FADs also contribute heavily to marine pollution and are incredibly difficult to retrieve in the outer islands.



A souvenir photo of the Seychelles Defence Forces, SIF and Seychelles Maritime Academy © SDF



Over half of the FADs collected were found on Aldabra Atoll © Caulvyn Bristol.



Map of Aldabra atoll showcasing areas of FAD removal in red © SIF



Dugong Project Officer Caulvyn Bristol took part in the mission © SIF.

SIF undertakes second Aldabra Clean-Up Project

With the support of volunteers from the Seychelles Defence Forces, SIF staff from Aldabra, Fond Ferdinand and Vallée de Mai geared up for the second Aldabra Clean-Up Project (ACUP II) to remove at least 15 tonnes of marine debris from the turtle nesting beaches on Aldabra Atoll. This project is funded by the Ocean Conservancy, a grants organisation committed to combating the devastating impacts of marine pollution.



Ocean Conservancy

The Seychelles Defence Forces and the Aldabra team pose in a souvenir picture
© Francis Salomon



Overall, efforts exceeded expectations by removing 23.5 tonnes by the end of December 2023. The project has made a significant impact thanks to the collaboration of various partners, including the crews of the La Digue Glory and the coast guard vessel Saya de Malha, along with the assistance of the Landscape and Waste Management Agency (LWMA) in storing and disposing of the transported debris.

While these efforts represent our local commitment, they also serve as a global call to address the widespread challenge of marine pollution, particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Seychelles.



Old settlement chapel under renovation

Built-in 1959 from mangrove timber by James Larose, the Aldabra chapel is one of the few remaining standing buildings from the Old Settlement on Picard. Its original foundations date back to the 1900s. The chapel's renovation commenced in June 2023 following a decision by the SIF's Board of Trustees.



Ongoing work at the chapel
© Annabelle Cupidon



The chapel renovation was one of the SIF's
Board of Trustees AGM decisions. © SIF

Maintenance on Aldabra

One of the main priorities for the logistics team on Aldabra is to carry out yearly boat maintenance on SIF's vessels, including Manta, a walkaround catamaran used for routine monitoring, patrol and subsistence fishing.

One of the main issues for SIF's boats is coral rubble at the mooring area, which causes friction on the hull on low tides. During last year's maintenance, the team installed a thicker layer of fibreglass under the boat, and thankfully, less damage was observed this year. The team added new fibreglass layers and polished these to improve boat efficiency and reduce drag. The boat was treated to a fresh coat of paint and was ready for the busy Aldabra Marine Monitoring (ARM) programme dives.

While the skippers were busy with Manta, the rest of the team concentrated on carpentry work in the workshop to maximise space for storing spare parts and tools.



Bringing maintenance material to the atoll © Caulvyn Bristol

Manta, a walkaround catamaran used for monitoring, patrol and subsistence fishing, undergoes boat maintenance © Ervin Ally.



7.3 Aldabra Sightings

A pod of orcas

This year's unusual sighting was a pod of orcas (*Orcinus orca*). On Aldabra, encounters with this species are rare, and they have been spotted only a handful of times since 2001.



7.3 Aldabra Sightings

Manta ray

Reef manta rays have also been observed before Settlement Beach, feeding in the shallows or cruising towards the channels.



7.3 Aldabra Sightings

Hammerhead aggregation

In August, an aggregation of 10 scalloped hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna lewini*) was seen at Anse Var, an annual occurrence in Aldabra waters since 2020.

7.3 Aldabra Sightings

The largest group of flamingos spotted

The Aldabra team spotted the largest flamboyance of flamingos this year, with an estimated 73 individuals seen near Takamaka.



7.3 Aldabra Sightings

Humpback whales

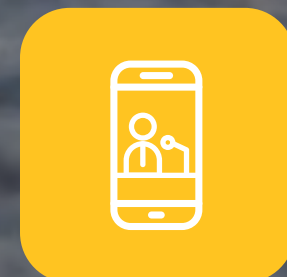
A seasonal visitor to Aldabra, the humpback whales return each Southeast season, with many observations made from the research station.

A mother and calf observed by a drone off settlement reef © Annabelle Cupidon



8 Communications, Education and Outreach

8.1 Communications

**45***Newspaper
Articles***59***National Television
& Radio features***27***International
features***17***E-newsletter***11***Press
release*

A comprehensive list of news items, in accordance with the Seychelles Islands Foundation Communications Effectiveness Assessment (CEA 2023), can be obtained upon request via email to info@sif.sc.

Social Media Analysis 2023

SIF social media platforms experienced slow growth in 2023. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube grew by 8.15% on average (with 6%, 9.7%, 1.9%, and 15% respectively). This is a lower growth than in previous years, which may indicate that our follower accretion is plateauing.

Additionally, SIF's overall reach has decreased, mainly due to X, which saw the most considerable decrease in total impressions at 66%. X recently underwent a rebranding and restructure, and naturally, an algorithm change has been observed. We have, however, seen increases in reach for other platforms, like Facebook (8.7%), Instagram (13%) and YouTube (626%).



191 Times posted

Accounts reached
150,099

Followers
11,200

Most viral post:
Orcas spotted on Aldabra

[Click here](#)



172 Times posted

Accounts reached
153,608

Followers
8,006

Most viral post:
Dugongs on Aldabra

[Click here](#)



204 Tweets posted

Impressions
42,400

Followers
1,963

Most viral post:
NFIT Project app update

[Click here](#)



10 Videos posted

Accounts reached
11,229

Subscribers
324

Most viral post:
SIF's 44th Anniversary video

[Click here](#)

8.2 Education and Outreach

Eco-School winners embark on a trip of a lifetime to Aldabra Atoll.

After a three-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the much-anticipated Eco-School Aldabra trip returned on Friday, March 31st. Sponsored by SIF for over two decades, the annual trip is awarded to winners of the national Eco-School Award, coordinated by the Ministry of Education's Education for Sustainable Development Section and the Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment. This year, 11 students and four teachers from schools across Seychelles had the unforgettable experience of Aldabra.



Students from Mont Fleuri Secondary, English River Secondary, Plaisance Secondary, Baie Sainte Anne Primary, Beau Vallon Primary, International School Seychelles, and the School of Advanced Level Studies participated in a jam-packed schedule of activities.

Highlights included nature walks to observe endemic wildlife, turtle track counts with rangers, witnessing hatchlings reach the sea, Settlement Beach clean-ups, eDNA water sampling, mangrove identification, shark awareness sessions, and boat cruises and snorkelling adventures. We are thrilled to see the Eco-School Aldabra trip back and inspire the next generation of environmental stewards!

Excited students and teachers ready to depart from the IDC airport © SIF



Plant identification
© Joey Latsha



Conducting fieldwork with the research team © Aruna Sunassee



Francis Solomon, Island Manager, leads the fleet of boats on one of several lagoon cruises © Karen Port Louis.

World Wetlands Day

On February 3rd, in honour of World Wetlands Day, SIF joined environmental organisations and hospitality sector representatives for a day on Curieuse Island focused on mangrove conservation. The event featured a presentation by Dr Annabelle Constance, who shared insights from her PhD research on Aldabra's mangroves, highlighting their ecological importance.

Volunteers then participated in a hands-on restoration project, learning how to plant propagules of the native red mangrove, or “mangliye rouz” (*Rhizophora mucronata*), and successfully planting 150 seeds to support wetland recovery efforts.

Dr Annabelle Constance
presenting her mangrove
research © SIF



The team planting
propagules as part of the
wetland restoration © SIF.

World Water Day

SIF hosted a workshop for farming stakeholders to celebrate World Water Day. The workshop aimed to raise awareness of the significance of water sources from the Vallée de Mai and Fond Peper to the local community and agricultural endeavours. Participants then took direct action, joining forces to clean the river at Nouvelle Découverte. Efforts included clearing leaf litter and overhanging branches and collecting debris, contributing to the goal of ensuring clean water for all.

Maria Monthy, Field Research Officer, explains the importance of the Vallée de Mai water catchment area © Maria Brioche.



© Maria Brioche.

Participants join forces to clean the Nouvelle Découverte river
© Maria Brioche.



World Wildlife Day

To mark World Wildlife Day, Fond Ferdinand hosted an educational visit for the Friends of Vallée de Mai clubs on Praslin to highlight the importance of biodiversity conservation and the efforts made to protect the species that inhabit this area.

Fond Ferdinand supports a diverse array of endemic flora and fauna, including the coco de mer, Wright's gardenia, pitcher plant, black parrot, day gecko and blue pigeon. SIF's Education and Outreach Coordinator, Maria Brioche, and the Operations Manager, Kenneth Pointe, conducted a short tour of the site's plateau area.



Kenneth Pointe, Operations Manager, conducted a short tour of the plateau area © Maria Brioche.

World Heritage Day

To commemorate World Heritage Day in April, Education and Outreach Coordinator Maria Briocche presented to a group of 27 students at the Praslin secondary school to introduce them to Seychelles' UNESCO World Heritage properties, the Vallée de Mai and Aldabra Atoll.



Education and Outreach Coordinator, Ms Maria, gives a presentation on our natural heritage © SIF.

World Earth Day

To mark this event, the team created a pledge tree to honour SIF's commitment to environmental conservation at the Vallée de Mai. The "One Pledge, One Tree Planted" initiative recognises the impact that individual actions can have on the environment.

Fifty pledges were received from visitors on the day, equating to fifty trees planted in an upcoming outreach activity. Creating a pledge tree at Vallée de Mai was a meaningful way to unite individuals and communities in their commitment to environmental conservation, symbolising our collective responsibility to protect our natural heritage.

Visitors make their pledges
© Maria Brioche.



The Holiday Camp kids
also add their pledges to
the tree © Maria Brioche

World Endangered Species Day

Each year, on the third Friday of May, World Endangered Species Day aims to raise awareness of endangered species' continued plight and celebrate those who have recovered because of conservation efforts.

This year, we conducted a virtual dugong classroom supported by SeyCCAT. Several secondary schools, including Anse Boileau, International School, Perseverance Secondary, Beau-Vallon Secondary, Anse Royale and Mont Fleuri Secondary schools, as well as external participants from the international community, participated. Participants interactively learnt about the importance of protecting endangered species and SIF's ongoing efforts to understand and protect the population of Aldabra.

[Watch here](#)

Schools tune in virtually from their classrooms © SIF.



World Oceans Day

To celebrate World Ocean Day, SIF organised two activities across its sites. Firstly, the Aldabra team conducted a beach clean-up at Dune Jean-Louis, a key green turtle nesting beach. The team of eight left the research station for a three-day camp at Dune Jean-Louis and Dune d'Messe. It took approximately three hours to clean the entire beach, and 214.7 kg of marine debris was collected and placed in a new enclosure that was built during the camp trip.

Meanwhile, on Mahé, the Head Office participated in a three-day Ocean Fair at Camion Hall organised by the Danny Faure Foundation. The theme for the fair was “Planet Ocean: Tides are changing,” which aimed to sensitise the public to ocean advocacy.

The team set up the SIF stall showcasing Aldabra projects, including the Aldabra Clean Up Project and the Dugong Project and discussed the reef monitoring on Aldabra
© Julio Agricole.



The team collect 214.7 kg of marine debris at Dune Jean-Louis © Nikita Pothin.

World Environment Day

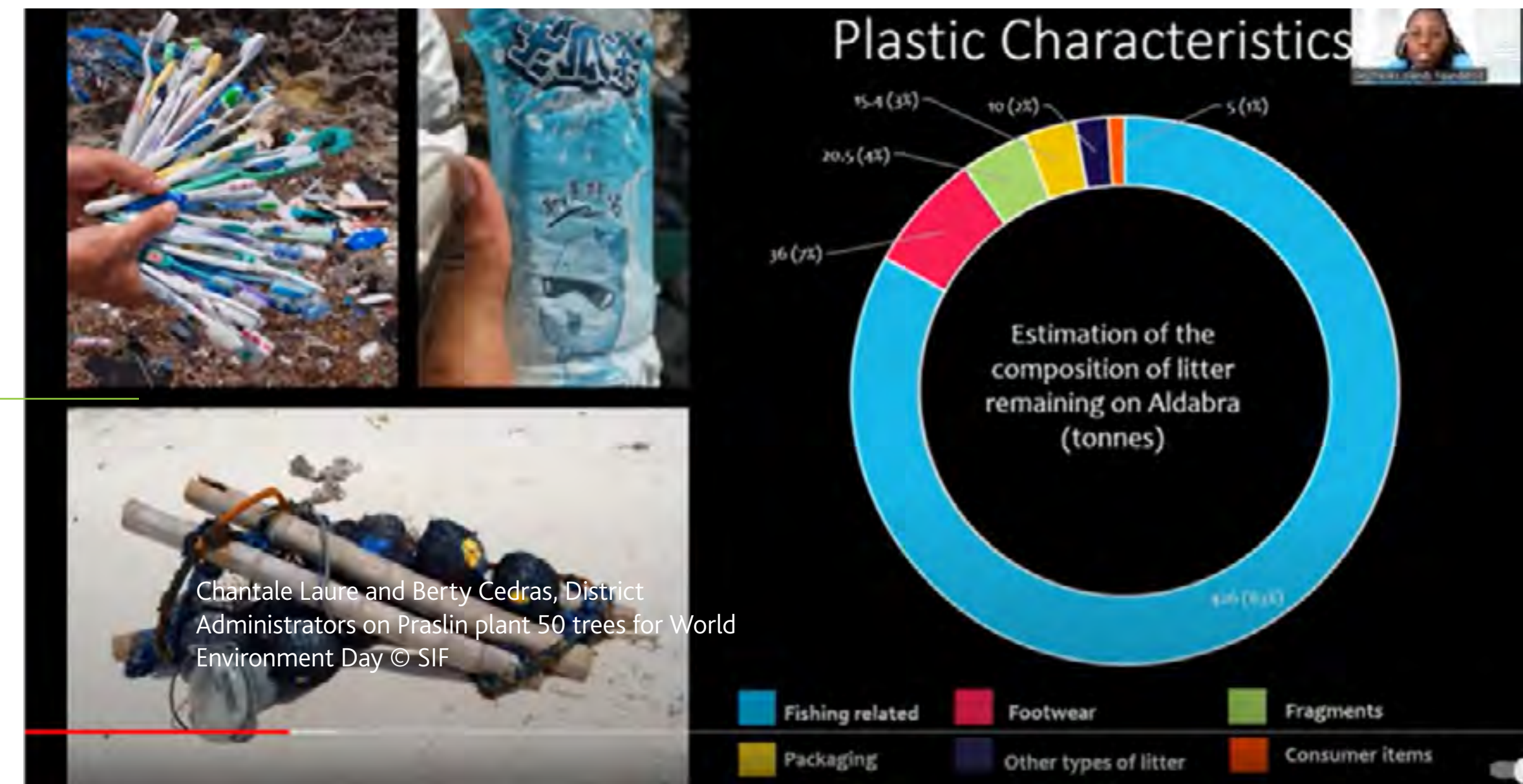
SIF hosted a virtual classroom on June 28 to raise awareness about plastic pollution and discuss solutions. The event brought together 79 students from schools across Seychelles, including the Independent School, International School Seychelles, Anse Boileau Secondary, and the University of Seychelles. Speakers included Katrin Perchat of Yes Consulting, who defined plastic pollution and its global impacts. Camilla Labonte, SIF Science Officer, highlighted the Aldabra Clean Up Project's local efforts to address the issue. Mariette Dine, a UNISEY graduate, shared her innovative research on using seaweed as an eco-friendly alternative to plastic. At the same time, Kyle de Bouter, co-founder of Brikole Ltd., showcased his company's recycling initiatives for fishing nets and gear.

In parallel, SIF collaborated with Praslin's new District Administrators, Berty Cedras and Chantale Laure, and the Terrestrial Action Society of Seychelles (TRASS) to plant 50 trees at Pasquère as part of the "One Pledge, One Tree Planted" initiative.

Watch here

The classroom hosted speakers from SIF, Brikole, Yes Consulting and independent researchers © SIF.

Chantale Laure and Berty Cedras, District Administrators on Praslin plant 50 trees for World Environment Day © SIF



Careers Week

SIF hosted two groups of students from Mont Fleuri and Praslin secondary schools during “Careers Week,” an initiative to prepare youth for the workforce. On Mahé, 32 Mont Fleuri students visited SIF’s head office and attended presentations from various departments, including human resources, accounting, logistics, science, and marketing. These sessions highlighted the diverse roles within conservation work and emphasised the importance of collaboration in achieving SIF’s mission. By showcasing its operations and values, SIF inspired students to consider careers in conservation, regardless of their academic focus.

On Praslin, 13 students explored the Vallée de Mai UNESCO World Heritage Site and Fond Ferdinand, gaining insight into the ecosystems and the roles of staff dedicated to their protection. These tours offered students a unique perspective on environmental stewardship. Additionally, SIF’s research team participated in a career exhibition at Praslin Secondary School, demonstrating survey equipment and sharing its applications in conservation research, further igniting interest in preserving Seychelles’ natural heritage.

Bernadette Julie, Senior Administrative and Human Resources Officer welcomes the students to the head office on Mahe © Aruna Sunassee.



Shanone Hibonne, Assistant Field Research Officer, explains how to use the equipment to two students © Maria Monthy.



Property Maintenance Supervisor Jim Nibourette conducts a site visit at Fond Ferdinand © SIF.

International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem

A souvenir photo of the participants of the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem workshop
© Constance Ephelia



SIF partnered with English River and La Retraite primary schools to organise a workshop for the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem at Constance Ephelia Resort. The workshop aimed to raise awareness of the importance of mangrove ecosystems, the need for their conservation, and sustainable management. Corianna Julie, Science Officer from SIF's Head Office, conducted the presentation to a diverse group of 30 students from the Wildlife Club.



Seychelles scouts visit Fond Ferdinand

Fond Ferdinand hosted the Seychelles Scouts for a day of education, creativity, and local practices, fostering appreciation for heritage and sustainable practices.

The Scouts explored Fond Ferdinand's agroforestry zone and garden, learning to prepare traditional culinary treats like gato banann (banana fritters) and coconut nougat. They also cracked open and tasted seeds from the bodamyer tree (Indian almond), discovering how to create nutritious snacks using ingredients from the reserve and home gardens. The day also featured interactions with elderly community members, where the scouts learned artisanal skills, such as weaving with palm leaves. These activities celebrated Seychelles' cultural heritage and showcased traditions with potential for future economic opportunities.



From frying to weaving, the group embrace the traditional art of weaving palm leaves into baskets and hats © Kenneth Pointe.

SIF Holiday Camp

Over three weeks, the SIF Holiday Camp engaged Praslin schoolchildren in activities promoting environmental education and creativity. Guided by SIF staff and facilitators, the program is supported by partners and sponsors to provide a meaningful experience for the young participants each year.

Campers participated in an art workshop led by Terance Payet, Assistant Field Research Officer and facilitator Chantale Rose, transforming everyday materials into creative artworks. They also demonstrated their commitment to environmental protection by creating pledges, which were added to our Earth Day pledge tree.



© Maria Brioché



Crafting with recycled materials © SIF

Festival Kreol

The Vallée de Mai UNESCO World Heritage Site and Fond Ferdinand celebrated the 39th Creole Festival with a vibrant array of cultural activities on Praslin.

At the Vallée de Mai, the Visitor Centre featured displays of traditional household artefacts and furniture, offering visitors a glimpse into historical Seychellois life. Interactive demonstrations included “larap koko,” showcasing traditional coconut grating, and craft workshops on sewing purses, handbags, and hats using latannyen (palm) leaves. A highlight was the inter-house Creole quiz competition for primary schools, with Team Diamond from Grand Anse taking first prize. Senior citizens also participated in the festivities, enjoying a guided tour of the Vallée de Mai.

The Vallée de Mai Visitor Centre hosts a display of artefacts showcasing traditional household equipment and furniture © Maria Brioche.



Visitors had the opportunity to view and participate in “larap koko”, a demonstration on how to traditionally grate the coconut flesh © Maria Brioche



Two teams join the podiums for the inter-house creole quiz competition © Maria Brioche.



Past practices live on
through Festival Kreol
© Lindsay Chong Seng.

Thatched hut created by Fond Ferdinand team
showcasing traditional architecture © Kenneth Pointe



© Kenneth Pointe



© Kenneth Pointe

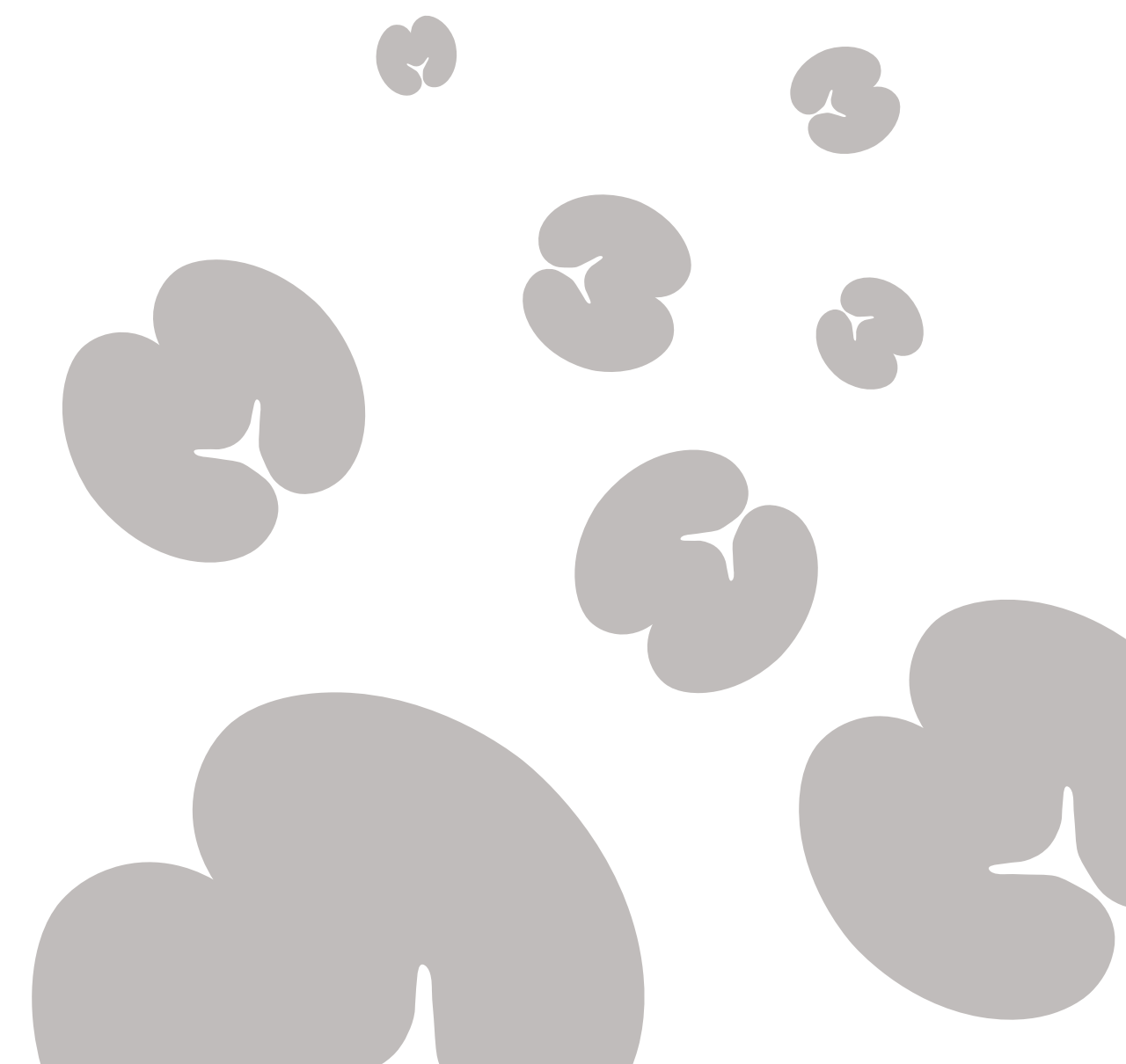
Fond Ferdinand complemented the celebrations with traditional moutya performances, showcasing artifacts, photographs, and thatched hut replicas reflecting traditional architecture. Visitors enjoyed complimentary guided tours and tastings of local delicacies, offering a sensory journey into Creole culture. The festivities concluded with a lively moutya demonstration and the sale of local drinks and manzay (Creole snacks), making it a memorable celebration of Seselwa traditions.

30th Anniversary of the Eco-School Programme



Students queue up to guess the weight of the coco de mer
© Rico Payet.

The Education for Sustainable Development Section at the Ministry of Education organised a roadshow at Camion Hall on 14 September to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the inception of the national Eco-School programme. SIF participated in the roadshow with two stalls to showcase the Friends of Vallée de Mai club and the programme's annual star prize, the Aldabra Eco-School Trip, which SIF has supported for over two decades.



Montessori School Presentation

On 27th October, Black Parrot Officer Monica Griffith gave a presentation to a group of 16 children at The Children's House Montessori School on Mahé. The group had recently studied bird life cycles and adaptations and was keen to learn more about them in a local context.

Black Parrot Officer Monica
provides insight on the
Seychelles black parrot
© The Children's House
Montessori.



Presentation at Raffles Seychelles

The Praslin team were invited to present to hotel guests during a cocktail hour at Raffles Seychelles. The team consisted of Maria Brioche, Rico Payet, Jasmine Khan, and Maria Monthy, who focussed on highlighting the importance of the Outstanding Universal Value of the Vallée de Mai, coco de mer pollination and the successful control and monitoring of invasive yellow crazy ants.

The Praslin team gives a presentation to hotel guests at Raffles Seychelles © Maria Brioche.



World GIS Day

To commemorate World Geographic Information System (GIS) Day, the Ministry for Lands and Housing organised a fair on November 17th at the Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education to showcase national GIS applications and promote their adoption among non-users. SIF, represented by Shanone Hibonne and Corianna Julie, participated in three interactive stations demonstrating the role of GIS in our monitoring and conservation work. Participants were able to explore GIS tools for managing yellow crazy ants and tracking black parrots, use the Cybertracker app for the coco de mer census, and attend QGIS tutorials on map-making.



Corianna and Shanone are ready to welcome visitors at the SIF stall © SIF.



Demonstration of GIS Equipment
© Corianne Julie

9

Scientific Publications

Sources of marine debris on Aldabra & other remote islands identified

A new paper published by researchers from the University of Oxford confirms that most plastic pollution washing up on the remote island of Aldabra Atoll, a marine World Heritage site, has travelled thousands of kilometres from distant countries around the Indian Ocean, including Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka.

[Read here...](#)

New study reveals positive influence of seabird guano in mangroves

Research conducted on Aldabra has shed light on the influence of seabird guano on mangroves. The research, published in iScience and conducted by Seychellois PhD student Jennifer Appoo, shows strong links between seabirds nesting in mangroves and the nutrient status of the mangrove forests.

[Read here...](#)

A new study identifies the impacts of coral bleaching on reef fish abundance, biomass, and assemblage structure

A recent study led by Dr Anna Koester, SIF's Marine Researcher, sheds light on the impact of coral bleaching on reef fish communities on Aldabra. Coral bleaching, linked to climate change, threatens the reef ecosystem, impacting coastal communities reliant on fish for food and income. The study assessed changes in fish abundance, biomass, and community composition before and after Aldabra's 2015/2016 coral bleaching event.

[Read here...](#)

New research sheds light on how closely related seabirds coexist on Aldabra.

A newly published paper has shown the two species of tropicbird nesting on Aldabra Atoll forage in different areas of the Western Indian Ocean. The paper examined how white-tailed and red-tailed tropicbirds (*Phaethon lepturus* and *P. rubricauda*, respectively) coexist, especially in Aldabra's challenging environment.

[Read here...](#)

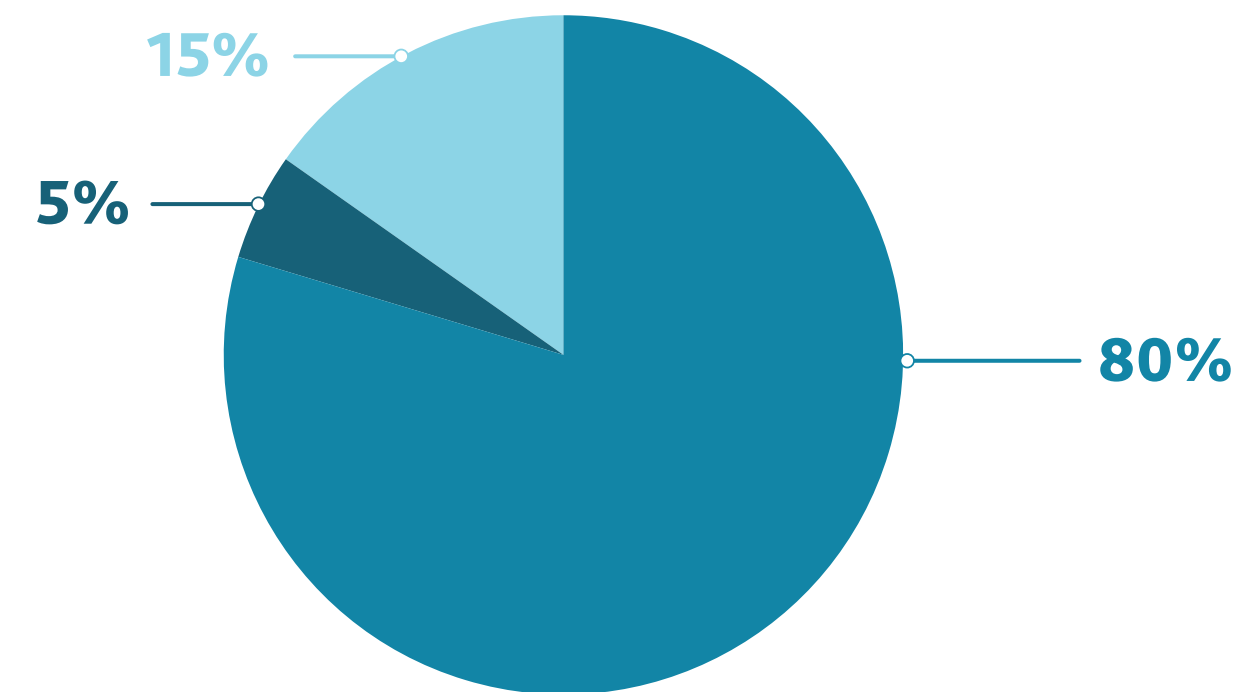
A genetic study reveals insights into the coco de mer's unique reproductive traits

A novel study by Dr Emma Morgan and colleagues has determined that coco de mer plants prefer to undergo reproduction with a mate to which it is closely related, also referred to as inbreeding. They also found that several father trees often pollinated mother trees and that the average distance between parent trees was just 26.8m, suggesting a restricted pollen dispersal range and short distance seed dispersal.

[Read here...](#)

10 Finances

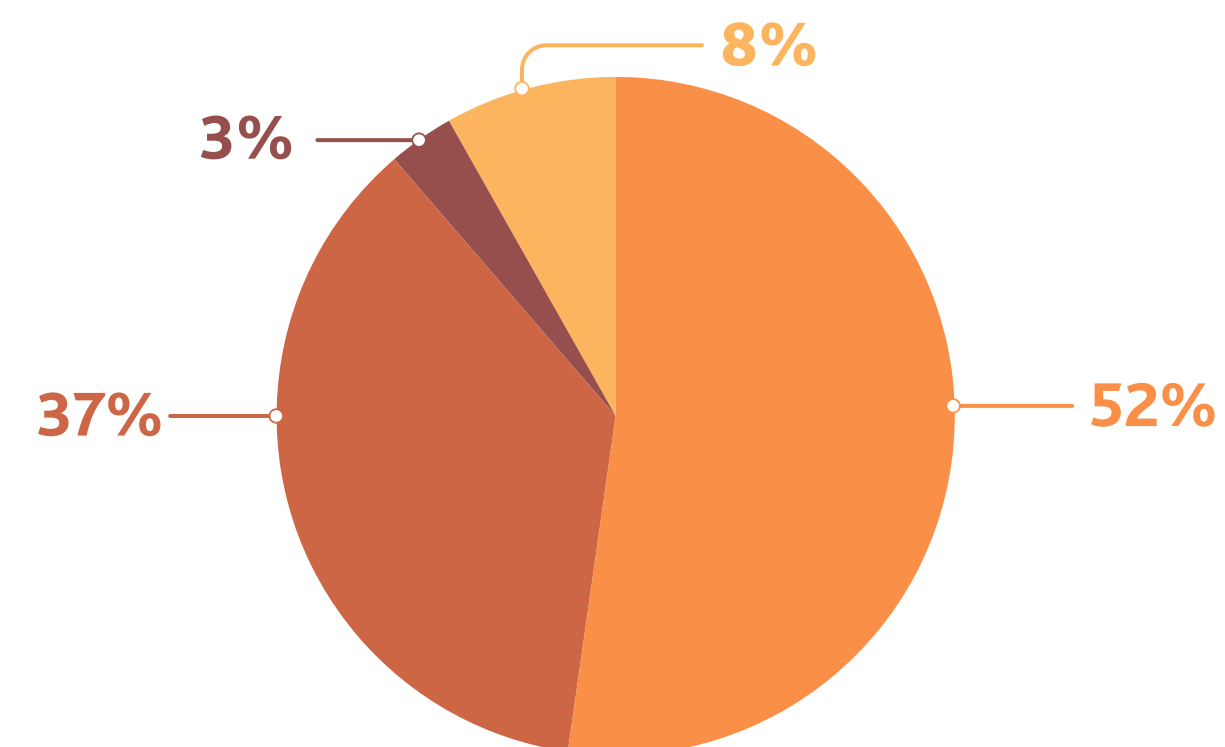
Revenue



Total **SCR 77,617,219.00**

Income from VDM, FF & Aldabra	61,828,519.00
Income from Project Activities	3,966,719.00
Income from Financial Instruments	11,821,981.00

Expense



Total **SCR 62,948,257.00**

Net Surplus **SCR 14,668,962.00**

Employee Cost	32,893,427.00
Operational & Marketing Cost	22,927,234.00
Expenses for Project Activities	1,976,914.00
Other Expenses	5,150,682.00

Thanks and acknowledgements

Our thanks to...

The Patron of the Seychelles Islands Foundation and President of the Republic of Seychelles, Wavel Ramkalawan.

SIF's Appointed Board of Trustees

- Chairman Hon Bernard Georges
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- Colonel Jean Attala
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- Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley

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- Mauritius Commercial Bank
- University of Zürich
- Coco de Mer hotel, Praslin
- BDO Associates
- UNDP – Project Coordination Unit
- The Royal Society
- Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation (SBC)
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- AP Designs and Créatifs
- Mauritius Commercial Bank (Seychelles) Ltd
- Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT)
- Rosa Luxembourg Foundation
- Biodiversity and Protected Area Management Programme (BIOPAMA)
- German Commission for UNESCO
- Franklinia Foundation
- Netherlands Funds-In-Trust (NFIT)

Our Partners and Associates

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

Our Research Collaborators

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- April Burt (Queen's College, University of Oxford, UK)
- Noam Vogt-Vincent (Earth Sciences, University of Oxford, UK)
- Dr Lori Lach (James Cook University, Australia)
- Prof. Brendan Godley (University of Exeter, UK)
- Prof. David Newbery (University of Bern, Switzerland)
- Dr. Olivier Bousquet (Météo-France & Laboratoire de l'Atmosphère et des Cyclones, France)
- Anna Koester and Prof. Christian Wild (University of Bremen, Germany)
- Dr Wilfredo Falcon (University of Zürich, Switzerland)
- Dr David Gower (Natural History Museum, London, UK)
- Dr Jim Groombridge (Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK)
- Dr Dennis Hansen (University of Zürich, Switzerland)
- Philip Haupt (Rhodes University, South Africa)
- Dr Christopher Kaiser-Bunbury (University of Exeter, UK)
- Dr Jim Labisko (DICE, University of Kent, UK)
- Dr Simon Maddock (Natural History Museum, London, UK)
- Dr Arpat Ozgul (University of Zürich, Switzerland)
- Dr Gabriela Schaepman-Strub (University of Zürich, Switzerland)
- Annabelle Constance (University of Zürich, Switzerland)
- F. Gözde Çilingir (University of Zürich, Switzerland)
- Dr Janske van de Crommenacker (University of Groningen, Netherlands)
- Switzerland)
- Dr Janske van de Crommenacker (University of Groningen, Netherlands)



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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