



Ring-necked parakeet reports surface from Mahé and Praslin

In February, as part of the ring-necked parakeet eradication project follow-up, the team spent more than two weeks searching for signs of three parakeets that were reported on the west coast of Mahé. They surveyed key points in the area, including all areas reported by the public, to try to locate the reported birds. Additionally, the team carried out observations of known parakeet feeding sites and flight lines in other areas on Mahé for any remaining birds. After their observations, the team neither heard nor saw any parakeet activities on Mahé.



Ring-necked parakeet © SIF

Meanwhile, a reported ring-necked parakeet sighting surfaced from Praslin and a team was quickly set up on the island to follow-up the report. In spite of extensive observations and detective work, no parakeet was seen

on Praslin, so the presence of the species on Praslin cannot be confirmed. The Praslin ring-necked parakeet team has also intensified their public awareness campaign to reach a greater number of Praslinois residents, as this is the third report from the island in just under a year and none of the sightings have been confirmed. The campaign has included many more posters being put up in several parts of Praslin.



Posters have been distributed on Praslin © SIF

The last confirmed ring-necked parakeet in the wild on Mahé was shot in May 2016, and it is too early to say with certainty that the species has been entirely eradicated from the country. This is why the team depends on reports from the public to target any remaining birds. The bounty awards of **RS 200** for a confirmed parakeet sighting (i.e. a reported sighting which can be independently confirmed by the SIF team), and **RS 2000** for a sighting which then leads to a cull by the team, remain in place and SIF has teams ready to respond to all reported sightings. **If you have any information on recent sightings of these birds the team can be contacted on 2523623.**

Any remaining birds are likely to be very wary and

cautious due to the extensive eradication efforts, so please do not attempt to catch or approach them but instead call the team as soon as possible. There is a high risk that unsuccessful attempts to catch them could make the final birds even more difficult to target. While the ring-necked parakeet is a distinctive bird and easy to identify because of their sharp, shrill calls, long tail feathers and characteristic green plumage they have been confused with several other species occurring in Seychelles, including blue-cheeked bee-eaters and even mynah birds, Seychelles kestrels and juvenile Seychelles bulbuls which have all been known to make similar calls to parakeets.

the year the schools compile portfolios of evidence to record their achievements in the Seychelles' Eco-Schools programme. The six outstanding schools who placed 1st, 2nd and 3rd in the primary and secondary categories in 2016 have selected the list of students who will get the chance of a lifetime to spend a few days on Aldabra Atoll.



Clockwise from top left: blue-cheeked bee-eater © IUCN; mynah, Seychelles kestrel, Seychelles bulbul © SIF



The Eco-schools award winners © SIF

SIF and the Seychelles Department of Environment hope to be able to announce the eradication of this invasive species from Seychelles by the end of 2017, and the assistance of the public is integral to this success.

The first meeting of the selected Eco-schools students, their parents and the teachers that will be accompanying them on the trip took place on Friday 24th February. This was an exciting event for the students as they were able to meet the other participants for the first time. During the meeting Shane Emilie from the Department of Education gave presentations on the background to the Eco-schools award and on the trip logistics. Maria Briocche, SIF's education and outreach

10th Eco-schools award trip to Aldabra to take place in March

SIF is proud to once again be sponsoring the star prize of the Eco-schools competition; the 2016 Eco-schools award winners will be visiting Aldabra from 20th to 24th March 2017. The national Eco-schools programme is coordinated by the Environmental Education Unit at the Ministry of Education. It aims to promote sustainability through environmental education. Throughout



Maria giving her presentation © SIF

programme officer delighted the group with a presentation highlighting some of the exciting wildlife that they will see at Aldabra and giving them an idea of what to expect from the trip. The students left the meeting eagerly anticipating the next time they would all see each other on the day of their flight to the atoll!

New staff members welcomed to the team!

February has been an exciting month for SIF in terms of new staff joining the team. At Aldabra we have had some vacancies for urgent recruitment and we are delighted to report that we have a new cook/gardener on the atoll. The position has been filled by Jean-Yves Payet and he has already risen to the challenge of limited supplies and has been preparing some very tasty dishes over on Aldabra! He has experience in both hot and cold dishes and pastry cuisines. We have also been joined by a new senior skipper, Lindsay Baker, to fill the position which became vacant when the previous senior skipper, Jude Brice, was promoted to island manger.

Several other staff will be joining the team shortly. The assistant Aldabra science coordinator position is to be filled by Jennifer Appoo, Dominic Jean will be going to Aldabra as a trainee ranger position and Joel Bonne, who was previously a junior skipper, has gained his 60 nautical mile coxswain license and will be coming back to the atoll as a skipper in March. The Aldabra team will also be joined by two new volunteers, Lorraine Cook to work as data processing volunteer and Jake Letori as a general volunteer.

In the Vallée de Mai there have also been some exciting additions to the team. The research section has seen the arrival of two new staff; Cheyenne-Mae Chang-Yunn and Emmanuel Morel, who were recruited as trainee field research assistants. Both have already integrated very well into the team. The operations section has also had a new arrival, Nelsonna Etienne, who has been recruited as a field worker.

We would like to welcome all of these new staff to SIF! There are still several vacancies available at Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai, so if you're interested, please get in touch with Mrs Bernadette Julie at hr@sif.sc or +248 432 17 35 for details.



Mai by the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Mr Didier Dogley, SIF board member Mr Victorin Laboudallon and SIF CEO, Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley.



President Faure interacting with SIF CEO and tourists at the Vallée de Mai © SIF

Visit from the Seychelles President as the highlight of several VIP visits this year



President Faure and delegation © SIF

The delegation was taken on a guided tour of the forest led by Dr Fleischer-Dogley and assisted by the site manager. They learned about the biology of the coco de mer tree and had the opportunity to guess the weight of the coco de mer nut. After the tour, the delegation visited the souvenir shop and had refreshments at the Kokosye Café. The visit ended with a brief visit in the education room. The President described his visit as wonderful and stated that “the youth of our country will need to be educated to take care of and love what God has given us”. The Vallée de Mai staff found the President’s visit to be very inspiring!



SIF staff had the opportunity to pose for a photo with President Faure © SIF

The Vallée de Mai has hosted some important people over the years and on the 18th February the staff were delighted to receive the first official visit from President Faure in his capacity as patron of SIF. Since SIF was established in 1979 we have been honoured to have each successive president as our patron. President Faure also visited the Vallée as vice president and guest of honour at the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the site’s designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2013. The President was joined on his tour of the Vallée de

The President was not the only VIP visitor so far this year, the Honourable Seetannah Lutchmeenaraidoo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade

of the Republic of Mauritius, also visited the Vallée de Mai on Saturday 4th February 2017. He was accompanied by his wife Suzanne Lutchmeenaraidoo, counsellor and head of Bilateral III (African and Indian Ocean) Directorate M. H. Chavrimooto and first secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs Jacques Belle. The EU Ambassador to the Seychelles, H.E Marjaana Sall also paid a short visit to the Vallée de Mai on the 22nd February. Ambassador Sall described her visit as a wonderful experience and said that she will cherish the memories for the rest of her life.

Seychelles black parrot breeding season draws to a close

The 2016/17 Seychelles black parrot breeding season is now over. We are pleased to confirm that it was a good season in terms of breeding activity and success and that 12 chicks have fledged from the active nests which have been monitored since the start of the season. These fledglings were all ringed and their movements and development will be monitored by SIF. Furthermore, the team have spotted at least three unringed fledglings which must be from nests which were not monitored, indicating that other nests were successful in addition to the ones we were able to monitor.



Black parrots feeding © SIF

As breeding activity is over now in the key breeding areas of Fond Ferdinand and the Vallée de Mai, more effort has been put into mist-netting to catch and ring adult parrots. So far, eight previously unringed adult parrots have been caught and ringed. This takes the total number of parrots ringed since the project started in 2010 to 219 individuals (including chicks ringed in the nest). Mist-netting will continue into April so we are hoping to further increase this number.

During one mist-netting session in Fond Ferdinand, an adult parrot was caught that had originally been ringed as a chick at nest during the 2014/15 season. The parrot was caught close to where the nest was found and it is interesting to see that it has not moved far. Re-sighting a chick from a previous year is always very rewarding for the team and it was great to see that it was still looking healthy.



Recaptured parrot © SIF

Vallee de Mai celebrates International Tourist Guide Day

The Vallée de Mai welcomes hundreds of visitors from various part of the world every day. Visitors come to see this unique palm forest and SIF is proud to introduce them to some the species occurring in the forest with two free English language tours daily. To commemorate International Tourist Guide Day on the 21st February, SIF organised special free guided tours in other languages for the visitors who visited the Vallée de Mai on the day. The tours, conducted in French, English, and German, enhanced their experience of the reserve. There was also a special tour conducted in Creole for a group of

Vallée de Mai



Bronze gecko information station © SIF



French group at the black parrot information station © SIF

senior citizens from the Old People's home on Praslin. These tours were also longer than the standard tours and each lasted for approximately 2 hours. Lengthening the tour allowed the guides to share more of their knowledge with the visitors.

The group of visitors in the English tour were privileged to witness the dehusking of a coco de mer nut by security officer Andrea Radegonde and they were also able to smell the inside of the seed immediately after it had been separated from the husk.



German and English language tours © SIF

The senior citizens very much enjoyed their visit and many said that it had been a very long time since they visited the Vallée de Mai. One visitor was visiting for the first time! After their memorable time spent in the Vallée de Mai they were offered with afternoon tea at the visitor centre's education room.



aldabra atoll

7th annual frigatebird census completed at Aldabra

Aldabra holds the largest frigatebird population in the Indian Ocean with approximately 4400 pairs of greater frigatebirds *Fregata minor* and 6600 pairs of lesser frigatebirds *F. ariel* breeding annually. In early 2011 SIF initiated annual surveys of the four known frigatebird colonies on Aldabra and the 2017 survey has recently been completed. Since 2011 the four colonies have been surveyed using methods that give basic information about the number of nesting pairs and population change.



Frigatebirds in flight © SIF

This year the survey got underway in February, in keeping with previous years. While the breeding

at Aldabra is somewhat synchronised in both species, it is more prolonged and variable in lesser frigatebirds than in greater frigatebirds. Conducting the annual survey in January/February ensures that most breeding pairs of both species are likely to be at the chick rearing stage, which limits disturbance to incubating birds.



The team conducting surveys © Adam Mitchell

All lesser frigatebird adults on nests (incubating or brooding a small chick), greater frigatebird adults on nests and chicks on nest were recorded, with one observer assigned to each category. Prior to starting the actual census a trial run was done whereby the survey team completed a section of a colony then swapped count 'objects' and did the same section again. This helped the surveyors to clarify any identification issues and ensure no double counting or missing birds. When the survey starts, the team work their way slowly by boat along the colony sections, counting and recording GPS points for each colony subsection. The results provide an estimate of the number of breeding pairs as well as mapping the colony size and extent.

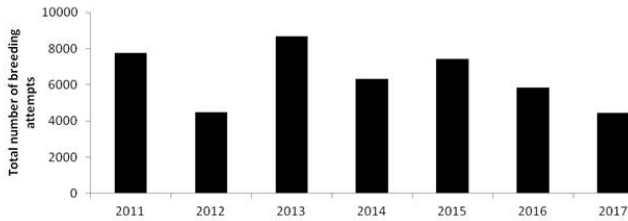
The total number of breeding attempts recorded in 2017 was 4453, the lowest for the last 7 years although similar to that of 2012. Despite being a low year for breeding attempts, large annual fluctuations in the breeding population appear to be normal,



Frigatebird adult and chick © Adam Mitchell

Aldabra

particularly in species which do not necessarily nest annually. Factors such as food availability and competition influence individual fitness and there is annual mortality and recruitment into the breeding population which can substantially increase/decrease the annual breeding population.



The total number of breeding attempts (both lesser and greater frigatebirds, adult with egg/chick or lone chick in nest) recorded during the annual frigatebird census for the past seven seasons.

Marine survey finds signs of recovery following the coral-bleaching event in 2015/2016



Marine monitoring © SIF

This season marks the first year in which the marine monitoring was carried out as part of the standard work-plan completed by the Aldabra research team. Operationally, it has been a great success; all core monitoring was carried out and was topped up by coral recruitment surveys, additional replicates and the initiation of baited remote underwater video (BRUV) surveys. All data from this season's coral reef monitoring has

already been analysed and protocols have been improved and continue to be reviewed to enable an efficient and successful continuation of the Aldabra reef monitoring programme next season and thereafter.



Marine monitoring team at work © SIF

Following the coral-bleaching event in 2015/2016, hard coral cover has seen an overall reduction of ca. 50% and more severe loss was observed for soft corals. The highest overall coral cover remaining was ca. 23-28% at two sites within the lagoon. These sites also had the highest cover of coral recruits and the highest proportion of herbivores in relation to total fish abundance on shallow surveys across all survey sites. Overall, herbivores were the most abundant fish feeding guild across all sites.

Despite such a high level of coral mortality the reefs are already showing signs of recovery and thankfully this year the sea temperatures



Marine monitoring © SIF

did not reach dangerous levels, allowing corals a reprieve from temperature stress. One thing that is widely apparent at Aldabra compared to other regions is the sheer abundance and size of herbivores such as parrot and surgeon fish, a good indicator of the resilience of the Aldabra coral reef ecosystem; these species graze extensively on algae, freeing up space for corals to re-colonise.

Aldabra

The next step for the marine monitoring is to collect BRUVs to assess the effectiveness of Aldabra's management zones on fish abundance and diversity. The team are very excited to see what footage we can retrieve and are guaranteed a few close-up shark shots as seen from the previous BRUV footage. An update on the BRUVs will be provided in the March newsletter.

Construction of cyclone shelter begins

The construction of a cyclone shelter at Aldabra has been planned since April last year when cyclone Fantala destroyed infrastructure and vegetation the island of Farquhar. Fantala was the strongest cyclone on record in the south-west Indian Ocean, tied only with cyclone Agnielle from November 1995. The damage to Farquhar was a stark reminder of the vulnerability of Seychelles' outer islands, many of which lie at the edge of the western Indian Ocean cyclone belt, and as ocean temperatures continue to warm, cyclones are likely to occur more often and with greater intensity in future.



Cyclone shelter construction begins © SIF

Construction on Aldabra always presents logistical challenges, primarily with the transport and landing of building materials and equipment, which is only possible for 6 months of the year. The materials for the construction of the shelter were delivered to Aldabra in October 2016, and with the arrival of the construction workers in February the construction finally got underway.

The site selection of the shelter was hampered by surface conditions generally not being conducive to buildings of this scale due to lack of soil and the hard limestone surface which is not level and riddled with holes. The shelter also has to be located away from the beach and in an area that minimises environmental impacts. Taking these factors into account a suitable site was found at



Foundations completed © SIF

Aldabra's old settlement.

Construction started at the selected site in late February with clearing of vegetation and marking of the area, followed by the digging of foundations. As of the end of February the foundation has been completed and the construction work is progressing well. It is hoped that the construction will be completed by mid-April.

SIF would like to thank the IDC construction team for their efforts to reduce the impacts of the building on the environment, including using the minimum possible water and working with our team to source environmentally friendly materials. The 2016/2017 cyclone season is drawing to a close and it is with relief that we expect to have a functioning cyclone shelter available to ensure staff safety by the start of the next cyclone season.

Articles contributed by: Lynsey Rimbault, April Burt, Annabelle Constance, Maria Brioche, and Willow West; Editing by Lynsey Rimbault and Nancy Bunbury.