



Tribute to David Stoddart, an Aldabra champion



David on his last visit to Aldabra Atoll with Ronny Renaud (left) and Lindsay Chong-Seng (right) © SIF

It is with great sadness that we have to announce the death of Professor David R. Stoddart (1937 – 2014) who died on 23rd November 2014. Prof. Stoddart was a life-long champion of Aldabra and one of the founding fathers of the research station. We owe a great deal to David's commitment, passion and tireless determination for the protection of Aldabra in the face of adversity. We hope that his legacy will live on, not only through SIF's Professor David Stoddart Scholarship for Seychellois university students, which was established 3 years ago, and his many published works that continue to be key references for Aldabra and the Seychelles, but also through the continued protection and conservation success of Aldabra. David was deeply interested not only in Aldabra but Seychelles as a whole, and his book 'Biogeography and Ecology of the Seychelles Islands' remains the definitive publication on the ecology of the country and a highly treasured reference. A special edition of the SIF newsletter will be issued shortly in tribute to David detailing his vital role in Aldabra's preservation.

Marine monitoring surveys undertaken



Undertaking a photo quadrat survey © SIF

SIF's marine monitoring programme for 2014 got underway this month with SCUBA-based surveys on the east coast of the atoll.

SIF's marine monitoring programme was started in 2013 as part of its UNDP-GOS-GEF protected areas project, now continued under the Outer Islands Project. The programme



Update on bird eradication on Assumption

Since the last Assumption eradication update in June, Jessica Moumou has been continuing the efforts to remove the two species of introduced bird from this island. The near-final phase of this project, which is the first large-scale invasive bird eradication in the world, has been a time of lessons and challenges for the whole team.

The two introduced bird species which are the targets of this eradication project, the Red-whiskered Bulbul and the Madagascar Fody, are now down to very low numbers. Jessica has been monitoring and targetting the remaining birds with hunter Nick Page. The two of them have reduced the Madagascar fody numbers by more than 10 birds over the last few months bringing the fodies down to less than 30 birds remaining. However, the fodies have now started breeding, making it more challenging for Jessica and Nick to ensure the constant decline in numbers necessary to eradicate the species.

On the Red-whiskered Bulbul front, one of the remaining bulbuls was shot to the team's great jubilation in November and the remaining 1-2 birds are now being pursued. The bulbuls are intelligent, wary and have very large home ranges, making targetting the final birds extremely difficult.

We remain confident of success but the lack of experience and lessons from other bird eradications is making this a testing but exciting time, with every new step marking new and untested ground for the team. The target bird populations are still declining, but it has taken longer than expected to get to this stage, making it very difficult to predict an end point for the eradication. We are so very close but, as with mammal eradications, targetting every last bird is essential for success. The question on all SIF staff lips now is how long will this take? We are hoping for success in early 2015... to be continued!

Annual Yellow Crazy Ant survey undertaken in the Vallée de Mai



Yellow Crazy Ants consuming a white slug in the Vallée de Mai © D Poupanneau

The invasive species team on Praslin started the annual Yellow Crazy Ant (*Anoplopes gracilipes*) survey this month in the Vallée de Mai. This will be the fifth survey undertaken since 2010, after this invasive ant species was first discovered at the Vallée de Mai in 2009.

Yellow Crazy Ants, named for their chaotic movements, are listed in the top 100 worst invasive species in the world. Despite their small size, these aggressive ants pose a threat to other insects, reptiles, birds and even small mammals. Control options are limited due to the very sensitive



The Black Parrot breeding season gets underway



A Seychelles Black Parrot prospecting a potential nest site © SIF

The Vallée de Mai has been buzzing with activity this month as the Seychelles Black Parrots start to actively search for nests and call to each other through the forest. Since the start of October, a dedicated team have been searching for and monitoring potential Black Parrot nest sites. This season, work will concentrate at locating as many nests as possible in the Vallée de Mai, Fond Ferdinand and the surrounding National Park area to monitor breeding success in these different areas. Nest checking involves the use of an infrared camera, which is attached to a pole and pulley system and can be lowered into the tree cavity. The inside of the cavity can then be observed on a monitor on the ground.



Vallée de Mai staff checking a potential nest using an infrared camera © SIF

So far, many parrots have been seen actively checking out nest sites and pairs have been observed prospecting for nest cavities, vocalising loudly. The birds have also been seen courting each other by mutual feeding. This year there will be also more efforts to minimise disturbance to these sensitive birds by guides and visitors to the Vallée de Mai during the breeding season. The visitor attendants will be ensuring that there is no whistling, knocking on trees

continued under the Outer Islands Project. The programme includes two main survey methodologies; SCUBA-based surveys and Remote Underwater Video Camera systems (RUVs).

The SCUBA-based monitoring records sea temperature, substrate cover, and fish diversity, abundance and size, at 12 fixed sites around the atoll. Each site has two transects at 15 m and 5 m depth. The data collected enable SIF to determine how these variables change over time and whether they are linked to changes in water temperature.

After the team's preparation for the marine monitoring (described in the October 2014 newsletter) they got off to a flying start and completed 9 of the 12 permanent transects in November. The sites near the research station on Picard were surveyed first, and the team then set off for the annual marine monitoring expedition to the east of Aldabra. Eight SIF staff set up camp at Middle Camp hut on Malabar Island, taking plenty of food, water, dive equipment and even a dive compressor! Camps at the more remote locations on Aldabra require extra preparation and precaution to ensure the safety of the divers at all times.



A friendly Potato Grouper © SIF

The diversity at the dive sites on the eastern side of the atoll, such as Passe Houareau, is incredible. Steep slopes and spur and groove formations harbour a wealth of marine life including sharks, big groupers, turtles and stingrays. The divers were all overwhelmed by this astounding marine environment and felt very privileged to be working in such a unique place.

After the day's activities the team pulled together to rinse dive kit, fill dive cylinders, recharge lights, transcribe data and prepare for the next day of diving. Everyone took turns cooking meals, and discussions of the day's diving and briefings for the following days' work were held over dinner. It was a highly successful expedition, and this has set the tone for the remaining surveys.

Next month SIF will be continuing its RUVs surveys before completing the SCUBA surveys in the south of the atoll. We will share these experiences with you in next month's newsletter.

Invasive bird eradication resumed at Takamaka



The 2014 Takamaka team © SIF

The arrival of the northwest monsoon at Aldabra also marks the commencement of the landbird breeding season, including that of Aldabra and Madagascar Fodies. This means that the third season of the introduced Madagascar Fody eradication project at Takamaka could get underway.

Three staff members spent three and a half weeks in the field in November starting a comprehensive survey of the remaining Madagascar fodies. Team Leader Terence Mahoune begins his third season at Takamaka, with Invasive Species Technical Officers (ISTO) Frankie Gamble and Stephanie Marie both returning for a second season on the project.

The team are covering a survey grid that encompasses the whole Takamaka area, to estimate the size of the remaining Madagascar Fody population. The survey results will be used to produce a distribution map of Madagascar Fodies

environment of the Vallée de Mai. Previous surveys have shown that the majority of the crazy ant population is located in the northern and eastern parts of the Vallée, and the ants have so far failed to spread to other areas. One of the focuses of the survey this year is to try to further understand why these ants have not spread further as this could be used in future to control their spread if necessary.

Some modifications have been made to the survey this year to increase the amount of data collected. More sampling locations are being surveyed to obtain a finer-scale picture of the distribution and facilitate more detailed analysis of the effect of variables at different locations. The principle survey method has changed from using a piece of card and sugar water, to pitfall traps.



The Praslin IAS team building pit-fall traps for the ant survey © SIF

The new survey will also examine the effects of environmental factors (e.g. relationships with other animals or plants, temperature, canopy cover) on ant abundance. For example, there is a known mutualistic relationship between Yellow Crazy Ants and scale insects, in which ants 'breed' the scale insects in exchange for the honeydew they secrete, which is believed to be an important energy source for the ants. Such a relationship may be key to the ant's population distribution and the team will be looking closely for evidence of this relationship in the Vallée de Mai.

Once the population survey is completed the team will be testing the efficacy of potential control methods for the Yellow Crazy Ants. The methods to be tested are non-invasive and non-aggressive, and therefore appropriate for use in an area as ecologically fragile as the Vallée de Mai.



SIF CEO attends World Parks Congress



SIF CEO (on the left) with other World Heritage Site managers at the Congress © UNESCO

Held from 12th – 19th November in Sydney, Australia the IUCN World Parks Congress was a landmark global forum on protected areas. The Congress shared a great deal of knowledge and innovation, setting the agenda for protected areas conservation for the decade to come. Building on the theme "Parks, people, planet: inspiring solutions", it presented, discussed and created original approaches for conservation and development, helping to address the gap in the conservation and sustainable development agenda.

Over 6000 participants from over 170 countries participated in the congress including the UNESCO Marine World Heritage Site Managers. SIF CEO, Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, joined these managers at the congress and presented the conservation success stories of Seychelles' UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Aldabra Atoll and Vallée de Mai. When presenting Aldabra as a beacon of hope the audience

trunks or gathering of groups of people at active nests in Vallée de Mai, behaviour which has sadly caused Black Parrot nests to fail in the past.

This will be the sixth Black Parrot breeding season to be monitored by SIF. This research has so far yielded important information on the breeding and feeding ecology of this endemic bird. Several scientific publications have already been produced from the research, and the now long-term monitoring will help to answer many more important questions which can only start to be addressed with data over many years. These questions include how and why breeding activity and success fluctuates between years?; How old are Black Parrots when they first breed?; Is individual breeding success consistent between years?; Do Black Parrot offspring disperse or stay close to their parents?; How many males are involved in raising chicks and does the number of males affect breeding success? All of these and other questions should be possible to be addressed over the next few years to improve understanding of the breeding ecology of this charismatic and endearing endemic bird.

We will be keeping you regularly updated during the breeding season so stay tuned for more Black Parrot news from Praslin in our next issues!

Vallée de Mai featured at World Heritage seminar in Morocco



Site Manager Marc Jean-Baptiste presenting at the seminar © SIF

The Vallée de Mai Site Manager, Mr Marc Jean-Baptiste, gave a presentation at an international seminar in Morocco this month entitled 'Experiences of World Heritage in Africa', organised by the African World Heritage Fund in collaboration with the Moroccan Ministry of Culture.

Over two days, natural and cultural World Heritage site managers from 14 African countries and one Middle Eastern country, met in Marrakech, Morocco to present the work they are doing in their respective sites to protect and preserve the Outstanding Universal Values of their sites.

The aim of the seminar was to review the implementation of recommendations from the "Living with World Heritage in Africa" conference that was held in South Africa in 2012. The seminar also brought site managers together to share experiences and learn from each other's achievements.



Marc Jean-Baptiste at the seminar with one of the other delegates © SIF

Marc said of the experience, "It was a privilege to share our experiences in the Vallée de Mai with an international audience, and to learn from the challenges and achievements of other sites". Marc gave a presentation on the actions taken by SIF in the fight against poaching of Coco de Mer from the Vallée de Mai, highlighting that awareness programs in the Praslin community are essential in engaging the public in the protection of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

SUBIOS celebrated on Praslin



across the whole area, including the project when it moves into its eradication stage in January.

The whole survey grid consists of sixteen 1 x 1 km squares labelled A-P. These squares are made up of smaller 250-m grid squares which contain 16 points that are 62.5 m apart from one another. The team move up and down these points in unison, surveying each point for 10 minutes, and recording all fody activity they see and hear. They also note any opportunistic bird sightings which so far has included Madagascar Pond-herons and Greater Flamingos.

The team have prioritized certain areas which were known to be hotspots in the two previous seasons. As expected, the now legendary 'Rasputin', a male Madagascar Fody which has survived the last two eradication seasons, has been again spotted in his usual area. One other previously undiscovered male Madagascar Fody has also been recorded but so far no others have been located, which is very promising. The team has been pleased with the small number of Madagascar Fodies so far encountered during the survey, as it indicates that the previous seasons' eradication efforts have been effective. During the survey the team also found nests of many native bird species such as the Souimanga Sunbird, Aldabra Fody, Madagascar Bulbul and the Madagascar White-eye. The team will be continuing and completing the survey in December.

Update on landbird breeding season



Madagascar Nightjar with chicks © H Richards

Aldabra's landbird breeding season is now in full swing and the research team are locating nests on Picard Island to monitor the breeding success of these birds and possible causes of failure.

So far 10 Madagascar Nightjars have been found incubating eggs, these highly camouflaged birds are very difficult to spot, with most nests found at night when the parents are active and their large reflective eyes can be seen. Three of the incubating pairs have already failed at egg stage; however, the other nests are still active, and two nests have been seen with two chicks being protected by the adult. As the chicks grow it becomes increasingly difficult to monitor them as they move with their parents and are not always necessarily in the same location.

Of the two Madagascar Kestrel nests that are being monitored, excitingly one now has three chicks that are growing fast! The eggs in the other kestrel nest have not hatched. Two Madagascar Coucal nests have been located, both of which are thought to be at incubation stage with the adults seen sitting in their nests, that are cleverly concealed in the dense part of thorny *Azima tetraacantha* shrubs. Several of the Aldabra Drongo nests now contain chicks and the parents have been seen bringing in insects and aggressively guarding the area around the nest.



Aldabra Drongo feeding its chicks © C Onezia

The team have observed interesting differences in the breeding activity of some landbird species in comparison to last year. For example, in the last breeding season Madagascar Turtle-doves showed low breeding activity and only a small number of nests were found late in the season, while this year the sound of turtle-doves calling to attract a mate can be heard everywhere and they have been observed chasing, copulating and nest building in earnest. It

applauded even before the talk was ended because of its remarkable resilience and recovery of the atoll due to its strict protection for the last 50 years. Dr Fleischer-Dogley said "Attending the World Parks Congress where we can share our experiences and can learn from others made me realise that for many of our challenges, such as climate change, poaching and invasive species, the solutions have already been found, it is just a case of finding it. Often the sharing of your own experience brings you nearer to the long sought solution." Aldabra also featured in the new film on UNESCO's Marine World Heritage narrated by Gisele Bündchen, which was launched in front of a large audience of over 5000 people at the congress.



One of the major outcomes of the congress was the 'Promise of Sydney'. This vision for the future incorporates innovative approaches to the challenges protected areas face, commitments to advancing this change and solutions that show these changes are within reach. The Promise is constructed of four pillars – A Vision, Twelve Innovative Approaches to Change, Solutions, and Promises. The World Parks Congress provided a perfect platform to network and now the time has come to follow up on many fruitful opportunities, not only for the two World Heritage Sites but all protected areas in Seychelles.

Conservation prospects for Aldabra and Vallée de Mai assessed in IUCN World Heritage Outlook report



Aldabra Giant Tortoise © D Hansen

Both Aldabra Atoll and the Vallée de Mai received a positive conservation outlook in the first ever analysis of all 228 natural UNESCO World Heritage Sites by IUCN.

The report is the result of detailed assessments of all 228 natural World Heritage Sites by hundreds of experts, and rates the conservation outlook of all of the sites. Sites are divided into four categories: 'Good', 'Good with some concerns', 'Significant concern' and 'Critical'. The Vallée de Mai and Aldabra were both rated as 'Good with some concerns'. The concerns are based on the threats to the sites, including invasive species (both sites), poaching (Vallée de Mai), fire (Vallée de Mai) and climate change (both sites).

The protection and management of these sites by SIF was assessed as 'Highly Effective' and it was noted that management actions had already been taken to mitigate or remove some of the threats to the sites. The report also found that the Outstanding Universal Values of the two sites, which is the core reason for their inscription as World Heritage Sites, were 'stable' and of 'low concern'. SIF's key management objectives include conserving these values and it is gratifying to see this reflected in an independent assessment.

Of the 228 sites assessed, 21% have a good conservation outlook, 42% were deemed to be 'good with some concerns', 29% have 'significant concerns' and a further 8% are listed as 'critical', which means they are deemed to be 'severely threatened' and require urgent attention to avoid their natural value being lost. The report found that invasive species, tourism, poaching, dams and logging are the most pressing threats to World Heritage Sites worldwide, but climate change may soon be the most significant threat.

The full report can be accessed at: <http://worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/>
Aldabra assessment: <http://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/search-sites/>



Marine themed face painting © SIF

A large group of enthusiastic children came to the Cote d'Or beach on Praslin on Saturday 29th November to participate in a belated activity for the national festival of the sea - SUBIOS. This activity was organised by the Education section of the Ministry of Environment and Energy in partnership with Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF). Support was also provided by other organisations such as Global Vision International (GVI), Seychelles National Parks Authority, White Tip Diving Centre, Octopus Diving Centre and Sagittarius Diving Centre.

A number of fun and marine based educational activities were planned on the beach for the children. A group of 15 children were lucky enough to take a trip to Curieuse Island which was organised by Sagittarius Diving Centre. This was a special trip for them as it was the first time that they had visited Curieuse. The children were delighted to see the Aldabra Giant Tortoises and learn more about the flora and fauna of Curieuse. They had a wonderful time on the island and it was an unforgettable trip for them.



Snorkelling at Cote d'Or beach © SIF

While this group was away at Curieuse the other children participated in activities on the beach at Cote d'Or. They had the chance to make Christmas cards, key rings from flip flops that were found on the beach and a competition to make the best marine themed sand sculpture. The children showed their creativity in making their Christmas cards and used the natural resources around them to make the cards as beautiful and distinctive as possible.

White Tip diving centre were kind enough to organise a snorkel trip to St Pierre Island a short distance from Praslin. The children who went spent almost two hours observing the marine life around this small island. For those who could not swim and were not able to go to St Pierre, a snorkelling activity was organised in the shallow water at Cote d'Or. The Seychelles lifeguard officers were on site to ensure the children were all safe.

After lunch the GVI and SIF staff were left with the difficult task of judging the sand sculptures, Christmas cards and key rings. After much deliberation the group finally decided the 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize winners for each competition. Even the bad weather could not stop the children from enjoying the day!

will be interesting to see whether this burst of activity at the start of the breeding season will translate into a greater number of incubating nests and fledglings for the turtle-doves. In contrast, the Souimanga Sunbirds seem to be slower in their activity in comparison to last year. Although many birds have been seen in breeding plumage the number of nests found at this point is lower than last year.

For effective conservation management of Aldabra's landbirds it is essential that the nesting success of these species is quantified and the factors that limit recruitment are understood. Baseline data for nesting success rates are vital should changes in the abundance of landbirds or environmental disturbances occur. Data can also be used to predict likely recruitment and population growth of these species under similar conditions. The team will continue to monitor landbird nests throughout the breeding season.

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Vallée de Mai assessment:
http://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/search-sites/-/wdpaid/en/9628?p_auth=HSEn9S47

SIF 2013 annual report released



We are delighted to announce the release of our 2013 Annual Report. Covering all of SIF's research, management and protection activities at the two World Heritage Sites, the report is a comprehensive account of SIF's achievements, work and milestones in 2013.

Highlights of 2013 included: the 30th anniversary of the Vallée de Mai as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the eradication of the Red-whiskered Bulbul from Aldabra, and the highest number of visitors to the Vallée de Mai to date. We would like to thank once again all of our partners and supporters that made 2013 such a remarkable year. You can download an electronic copy of the report from our website - <http://www.sif.sc/index.php?langue=eng&rub=8>

SIF on Twitter!



Continuing the development of SIF's communications and social media tools, we have launched our official page on Twitter! We hope that Twitter will allow us to reach and communicate with an even wider audience. As one of the top ten most used social media websites, Twitter offers us a chance to connect and share with a truly international audience.

If you are regular Twitter user then you can find us under @SIF_Seychelles. For those of you new to this social media page why not sign up now? You can find the link to our page here, https://twitter.com/SIF_Seychelles, and can follow all of our latest updates and news.



Find us on Facebook

Don't forget to join us on our Facebook page that was launched last year! The page has regular news and updates on research and events at both World Heritage Sites and has been well received. We would invite all friends, supporters, partners, colleagues, and anyone else who has an interest in staying up to date with the management and protection of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Seychelles, or in Seychelles' biodiversity and conservation in general to become a fan of our page. For those who have a Facebook account already please use this link https://www.facebook.com/pages/Seychelles-Islands-Foundation-SIF/1414466072110654?hc_location=stream and 'Like' our page. For those that are not on Facebook then perhaps you can receive updates through a friend or family members account, or maybe now is the time to join Facebook for yourself! We look forward to welcoming you onto this page!

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