



Paper published on genetic impact of Madagascar Fody to Aldabra avifauna

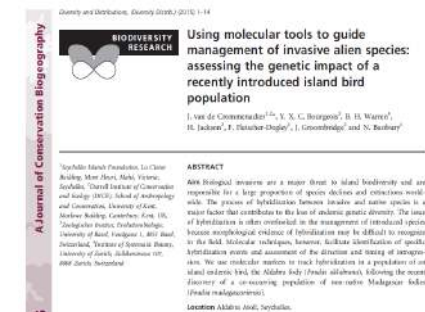


The Aldabra Fody © Fotonatura

An SIF-authored paper was published this month in the journal *Diversity and Distributions* on the genetic impact to the Aldabra Fody of the Madagascar Fody's introduction to Aldabra.

Aldabra was previously the largest tropical island in the world with an entirely native avifauna. This changed in 2012 when Madagascar Fodies (*Foudia madagascariensis*) were discovered in the Takamaka area on Grande Terre. The presence of this invasive species is considered a severe threat to Aldabra's avifauna, as the occurrence of hybridization between the Aldabra Fody (*Foudia aldabrana*) and Madagascar Fody could contribute to the loss of endemic genetic diversity.

Due to this threat, a programme for the eradication of the Madagascar Fody was started by SIF in March 2012. As part of this programme, fodies (both species) were caught using mist-nets and blood samples taken from all birds. SIF's resident research scientist Dr. Janske van de Crommenacker led the study in collaboration with the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), the University of Basel and the University of Zurich. The study used genetic molecular techniques to identify whether hybridisation had occurred between the two fody species and also to assess the direction and timing of the invasion of the Madagascar Fody to Aldabra.



In the lab, Janske used a combination of genetic analyses to assess whether hybridization had occurred on Aldabra. The results of the study confirmed that there had indeed been a recent hybridization event between the two species of fody. Furthermore, through modelling techniques and comparing different hybridization scenarios to assess the direction and timing of the invasion, it was shown that the Madagascar Fody population on Aldabra had originated from the neighbouring island of Assumption, where the birds had been introduced in the 1970s for decorative purposes. The arrival of the Madagascar Fody predates the SIF led

Update on the Ring-necked Parakeet programme

The last update from the Ring-necked Parakeet team was in June when the team were on the hunt for any yellow parakeets that had been seen. Since then the team have continued to make progress, despite going from two hunters to one, and the finish line looks closer than ever.

After reaching out to the public for more information on any yellow birds, the team managed to locate two which were removed as soon as possible. Other interesting birds seen included a female with no tail, which has been nicknamed "Short stuff", and a female that was found to have a lump of wood stuck in her breast. The team have successfully culled >530 birds since the project started, and currently estimate that there are <10 birds remaining in the wild. Locating these remaining, and likely most intelligent (since they have eluded the team so far), birds on such a large island will be the real challenge. The team will continue to try to locate these birds based on flight lines, feeding sites, roosts and of course, information given by the public.

We are still reaching out to members of the public to provide any information on any Ring-necked Parakeet activities that they see, be it feeding, nesting or even flying in a particular area. Our phone line is available at any time of day and anyone wanting to contact the team can do so on 2523623 or through SIF head office.

Warm welcome to new SIF staff



Dr Karen Chong-Seng © SIF

Several new key members of staff have joined SIF recently and we are excited to welcome them to the team.

Karen Chong-Seng has taken up the position of Acting Science and Projects Programme Coordinator with SIF while Dr. Nancy Bunbury is on maternity leave. Karen completed a PhD with James Cook University in 2014 where she researched coral reef recovery in Seychelles, and has since undertaken a short post-doc on Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTs). With a strong academic background and extensive experience in coral reef research, Karen will also be leading this year's marine monitoring surveys at Aldabra. We are very pleased to have Karen on the SIF team and look forward to working with her.

World Tourism Week



The opening of the newly designed education centre and art exhibition by Dr Fleischer-Dogley and Ms Belmont © SIF

SIF planned several activities at the Vallée de Mai this month to celebrate World Tourism Week from 21st – 25th September. This year's tourism week was celebrated under the theme '1 billion tourists, 1 billion opportunities'.

For the launch of this special week, SIF took the opportunity to officially open its newly designed education centre at the Vallée de Mai. This new education centre was also hosting an exhibition by local artists. In collaboration with the Small Enterprise Promotion Agency (SeNPA), the exhibition showcased the link between tourism and biodiversity conservation, and aimed to strengthen opportunities for local artisans. The education centre and art exhibition was officially opened by SIF CEO, Dr Fleischer-Dogley, and SeNPA CEO, Mrs Penny Belmont.



Visitor attendant Medina Laboudallon with some of the early visitors during tourism week at the Vallée de Mai © SIF

To kick off the week of activities for the visitors, the first 10 lucky visitors on the first day received complimentary tickets to the Vallée de Mai and were taken on a special bird watching trip as part of their free guided tour with one of the SIF visitor attendants, Ms Medina Laboudallon. Visitors throughout the week could also learn more about the endemic Seychelles Black Parrot at a special 'black parrot station'. This activity was held inside the reserve and was hosted by ranger and black parrot research team leader Terence Payet. The visitors centre's café also had some interesting special offers with waffles and special local juices on sale all week. On the last day there was live entertainment to welcome visitors, who were invited to take free guided tours in a number of languages (German, Italian, French or English).

Clean up the World Day

eradication programme. Over the past few years the Madagascar Fody eradication programmes on Aldabra and Assumption have made great progress, and it is hoped that both islands will soon be declared free of this invasive species.

This open access paper is available to download from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ddi.12364/full> or please contact SIF.

The full citation for this paper is: van de Crommenacker, J., Bourgeois, Y. X. C., Warren, B. H., Jackson, H., Fleischer-Dogley, F., Groombridge, J. and Bunbury, N. (2015) Using molecular tools to guide management of invasive alien species: assessing the genetic impact of a recently introduced island bird population. *Diversity and Distributions*. doi: 10.1111/ddi.12364.

Improvements made at Aldabra research station



The Aldabra team working hard removing rotten floorboards from the laundry room at the research station © SIF

The quieter southeast monsoon season on Aldabra has given the team the opportunity to focus on making improvements and maintaining the buildings at the research station. This month, the whole team got involved in doing some much-needed repairs on the staff houses.



The new wooden floor in the laundry room © SIF

Due to the harsh, salty conditions of the atoll, the staff houses and other buildings need regular maintenance to keep them in good condition and pleasant to live in. The staff houses were given a great deal of attention, with new wooden floors and kitchens installed in two of the houses. Two of the houses had repairs made to their bathrooms, particularly to the showers, which are susceptible to mould and wood rot. All of the houses were given a new coat of paint inside and out, helping to preserve the materials and making them look smarter. The staff laundry room was also renovated with the entire floor and supports replaced due to rotten wooden panels. A new wooden floor was installed and coated with wood preservative to lengthen its life.

The logistics team were invaluable in doing these renovations and with the assistance of the research team, they have ensured that all the staff on the atoll can live comfortably while undertaking valuable research.

Humpback Whale season comes to a close at Aldabra



Jakawan Hoareau © SIF

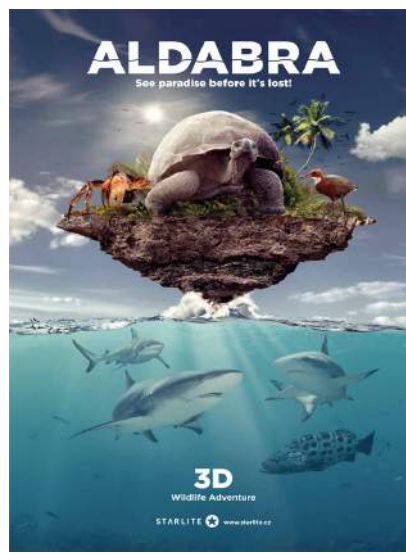
Jakawan Hoareau has joined the team as Aldabra Island Manager and is no stranger to Aldabra, having worked there in 2011 for three months as a Ranger. He also assisted on the invasive bird eradication programme in 2012. Most recently Jakawan was working as a Course Leader and Lecturer in the Fisheries Science department at the Maritime Training Centre on Mahé. We are delighted to welcome him back to SIF and Aldabra, and are confident that he will be an excellent manager of the team.



Edmé Melton-Durup © SIF

Edmé Melton-Durup rejoined SIF as Operations and Logistics Officer this month. Edmé previously worked for SIF in 2013 as Team Leader of the Ring-necked Parakeet programme following several months as a Trainee Invasive Species Technical Officer on Aldabra and Assumption. After taking some time out to work on a family business, Edmé has returned to SIF's Head Office and will be making good use of his previous skills and knowledge at SIF in his new position.

Aldabra 3D film soon to premiere



Poster for the new 3D film

The first 3D film on Aldabra is due to be premiered later this year and in preparation we wanted to share a teaser of the film with you.

The film entitled 'Aldabra: Once Upon an Island' was filmed on location at Aldabra in 2005. It is being produced by Czech company, Starlite Pictures, in conjunction with Disney and has an award winning team behind it. The film will take you on an exciting 3D journey around one of the most unique atolls in the world. Viewers will wait anxiously as turtle hatchlings tumble into the shallows teeming with hungry sharks and gaze in wonder at the world's largest terrestrial crabs. They will explore an island that rose from the sea, was then engulfed by rising seas, only to later rise again. Many of the key species of Aldabra feature in this



The group pose for a group photo after working hard cleaning the roadside © SIF

Every year, SIF marks Clean Up the World Day with a community event that attempts to raise awareness of our natural environment and the need to protect it. This year was no exception, with a clean up event held at the Vallée de Mai.

Clean Up The World is a community-based environmental campaign that inspires and empowers people around the globe to clean up and protect their environment from waste. Waste falls into different categories such as plastic, glass, and paper, and can be hazardous both to people and wildlife, especially in areas that are a nature reserve. The proper disposal of waste reduces the amount of toxins that enter the local environment therefore reducing the threat to wildlife. Through Clean up the World, SIF try to encourage better practices amongst the local community when dealing with waste.

In line with this, SIF organised a clean up of the roadside areas between the Vallée de Mai and the Nouvelle Découverte water treatment plant at Grande Anse. A group of eight students from the Praslin Scout Association joined staff from the Vallée de Mai, splitting into two groups to collect rubbish on either side of the road. All categories of waste were collected and a total of 75kg of rubbish was collected during the clean up activity.



Collecting rubbish from the roadside near to the Vallée de Mai © SIF

Feeling satisfied with a job well done after the clean up, the group gathered for a group photo proudly showing off their contribution towards the Clean Up The World campaign this year. We hope that by highlighting this issue every year it will be possible to change people's attitudes towards waste and make them more responsible in their actions.

Reflections on the ZSL EDGE programme



Vallée de Mai Ranger Terence Payet undertaking valuable research on the Seychelles Black Parrot © SIF

As the EDGE programme comes to a close for the Seychelles Black Parrot, we spoke with Terence Payet, a ranger at the Vallée de Mai and ZSL EDGE programme fellow for the



Breaching Humpback Whale

Sightings of Humpback Whales at Aldabra have started to become less frequent as the season comes to a close. The season at Aldabra coincides with the southeast trade winds in the region, as the whales migrate north from the sub-Antarctic to reproduce in tropical waters.

So far this year, there have been a total of 19 separate sightings with a total of 46 individuals recorded. The highest number recorded in one sighting was an estimate of 10. The maximum number of sightings recorded in one season at Aldabra was 98 with 169 individuals recorded. Frustratingly for the staff, many of the sightings this season were from shore at Settlement Beach on Picard, making it hard to get quality photographs that can be used to identify individuals. However, it is certainly a highlight for the staff when looking out of the office window or walking around the research station to see a large spout of mist shoot into the air telling them there is a whale around. There is then another spout, followed by the dorsal fin breaching and the 'hump', and eventually that characteristic tail fluke raise vertically upwards, giving you a better view of how large they actually are, before they dive down under the surface.

It is reassuring to know that this slow growing and long-lived species still migrates to Aldabra's waters, using the same routes and breeding grounds as previous years. Aldabra is not only home to a wonderful array of marine life but supports globally important populations of these migratory whales. With plans in place to extend Aldabra's marine protected area this will be good news for our visiting humpbacks!

story full of excitement, emotions and unexpected twists.

For more information on the film and to watch the trailer go to the Aldabra 3D website - <http://www.aldabra3d.com/>

SIF on Twitter!



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Don't forget to like our Facebook page! The page has regular news and updates on research and events at both World Heritage Sites. 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!

Seychelles Black Parrot, on the difference he thinks this programme has made to the protection and awareness of this endemic bird.

What is the aim of the ZSL EDGE programme?

The aim of the ZSL EDGE programme is to provide investment, expertise and targeted training in conservation, ecology and taxonomy in order to improve the knowledge, management and conservation status of the 12 EDGE (Evolutionarily Distinct & Globally Endangered) species in Seychelles.

What has been achieved under this programme for the Seychelles Black Parrot?

The EDGE programme has assisted me in acquiring further training that will help me to better protect and manage this species. My abilities regarding how to monitor and collect data in the field have improved which will assist SIF in their black parrot research programme and in turn will allow us to better manage and protect this species. Through education and outreach activities I was also able to raise awareness and improve the knowledge of the Praslin community on the Seychelles Black Parrot.



Ranger Terence Payet presenting at a recent EDGE workshop © SIF

What skills do you think you have gained through this programme? How will they help you in your job as Ranger at the Vallée de Mai?

Under this programme I was able to visit the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation and learn about their Echo Parakeet programme. Whilst there I gained skills in climbing, field data collection, and learned more about the threat that the Ring-necked Parakeet poses to other parrot species as well as the black parrot. Through several workshops that were held under the EDGE programme I also developed my skills in education and outreach, leadership, and report writing. These skills have already helped me in my work at the Vallée de Mai and I have been able to pass on this knowledge to other SIF staff.

How do you think this programme has helped the conservation of the black parrot?

I undertook a questionnaire as one of the activities of this programme and this has provided invaluable information on the perception of the black parrot by the Praslinois. This additional knowledge, as well as the skills that I have developed, will be essential in making decisions on actions needed to protect and conserve the black parrot.