



SIF Newsletter September 2019

We're changing our look!

You might have noticed the format of this newsletter has changed. If you'd like to share your comments and feedback, please email communications@sif.sc.

SIF supports Climate Action Week in New York, Mahé, Praslin and Aldabra

Global Climate Action Week saw over 7.6 million people take to the streets across the world, the biggest mobilisation to protect the climate in history.

SIF's Project Officer, Jeremy Raguain, attended the UN Youth Climate Action Summit in New York on the 21st September as one of the recipients of a 'Green Ticket'. The Summit brought youth climate champions together from more than 140 countries and territories to share their solutions on the global stage, and deliver a clear message to world leaders; "we need to act now to address climate change".



Jeremy Raguain with President Danny Faure at the UN Climate Summit in New York © SIF

The event gave voice to the demands of young people for far swifter action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. 100 'Green Ticket' winners received funded travel as carbon-neutral as possible to New York, after being selected from a group of over 7000 applicants between the ages of 18 and 29, based on their demonstrated commitment to addressing the climate crisis and advancing solutions.

Back in Seychelles, SIF supported 'Climate Action for Peace Day' on the 21st September, which saw hundreds marching on Mahé and Praslin to show their support for tackling climate



Climate Action March in Mahé, Seychelles © SIF



Tree planting activity on Praslin © SIF

change. Participants wore white to symbolise peace. The march had the same purpose as all the protests around the world that week—to demand climate justice. Participants carried posters with written messages and chanted throughout the walk. The event reflected people’s support for climate action and justice, and was successful in engaging the younger generations.

Vallée de Mai staff also took part in a tree planting event on 25th September at the coast of Anse Kerlan. Deforestation is a leading cause of climate change and destabilising communities, but trees take in climate polluting gases and help stabilise coasts from erosion caused by rising sea



Aldabra Climate Action demonstration © SIF

SIF was proud to support these events and hopes that the strong surge of global support will influence world leaders to make bold policy changes and protect our planet for future generations.

SIF's scholarship students thriving at University



Shanone Hibonne (left) and Ella Nancy (right) at UniSey © SIF

In September, SIF's two scholarship students, Shanone Hibonne and Ella Nancy, enrolled on their Environmental Science degrees at the University of Seychelles, funded by SIF. SIF offers its Professor David Stoddart scholarship to Seychellois students who have a place to study Environmental Science at the University of Seychelles.

The scholarship is awarded in honour of Professor David Stoddart, the British physical geographer known for his groundbreaking research on coral reefs and atolls. David Stoddart was instrumental in setting up the research station on Aldabra and also played a major role in protecting the atoll from being used as a military base in the 1960s.

SIF's Communications, Education and Outreach Officer took the opportunity to interview Ella to find out how she found her first month at university.

You're almost at the end of your first month of studying; how has your experience been so far?

I have met so many new people that are also inspired by nature conservation. It's been challenging to adapt to the new university life but I'm getting used to it. Sometimes lectures have been overwhelming but I have a lot of time to do my own research and learn more about topics I find challenging. My classmates are also very helpful, especially Shannone.

What has been the most interesting thing you have studied/learned so far?

I have been doing some independent research for a presentation in the Earth and Atmospheric Science module and my topic is World Overshoot Day. I find this topic very interesting and important. It's about how humanity uses more ecological resources and services in a given year than earth can regenerate in that year.

What are you most excited about studying in your degree?

I'm most excited to study marine ecology. The marine world has always been my personal favourite.

How will the Professor David Stoddart scholarship help you in your studies?

The Professor David Stoddart scholarship is the main reason I'm able to do a degree in Environmental Science. This is a fantastic opportunity and I want to do the best I can to complete this course and graduate after three years.

What are your future ambitions after you graduate and how will your degree help you achieve these?

After I graduate I hope to still work in conservation, this degree will help me move forward within SIF. With the knowledge and skills I will acquire I want to teach and inspire my colleagues and other people. Overall this degree will help me to be more equipped in conserving the rich biodiversity of my home country, Seychelles.

World's flagship marine protected areas gather in milestone conference



From the 4th to 9th September, managers from the 50 marine sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List gathered in an incredible setting at Glacier Bay, Alaska, to discuss challenges and solutions toward reaching the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. With the oceans facing rapidly increasing existential threats and global targets only a decade away, time is critical. Bringing managers together provides an opportunity to accelerate conservation successes and prevent costly mistakes that could have been avoided if knowledge was shared.

Humpback whales at the Marine Protected Areas conference in Alaska © SIF

Across the globe, marine World Heritage sites are under increasing pressure from the effects of climate change. Rising sea levels, heat waves, droughts, fires and extreme weather events have a growing impact on habitat and wildlife. Climate change effects further exacerbate the already existing stressors such as overfishing, pollution, or declining water quality in a mix of cumulative impacts of which the true extent is yet to be discovered.

Managers from these flagship marine protected areas, "the beacon of hopes", shared a wealth of best practices and solutions about what works and what doesn't in ocean conservation. Collectively, they have faced every imaginable threat to the ocean and hold an unparalleled reservoir of experience on how to deal with them. As UNESCO World Heritage sites, having received the highest international recognition for conservation, they are uniquely positioned to help chart a course forward toward reaching the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development agenda.



SIF's CEO, Dr Frauke Fleischer Dogley at the conference © SIF

Speakers included Patrick Dunagan, Director at the Paul Allen philanthropic organization Vulcan Inc and Claire Bonham-Carter, Sustainable Director at AECOM. The conference took place in the Tribal House of the indigenous community of the Huna Tlingit at Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, USA, in collaboration with the National Park Service.

Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley, SIF's Chief Executive, represented Aldabra Atoll at the conference. Her interactions with other site managers catalysed her to urgently rethink how to address the climate crisis and protect both UNESCO World Heritage sites from its impacts. Subsequently, SIF submitted a funding application to BIOPAMA to implement climate change adaptation plans for Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai. Watch this space for updates.

SIF Vacancies

We have several vacancies in the Vallée de Mai and Aldabra which need to be filled urgently. We are actively seeking Seychellois applicants for all of the positions. Details can be found on our website at www.sif.sc/jobs or contact HR on 432 17 35 if you are interested in any of the following positions:

Vallée de Mai:

Sales clerk
Housekeeper

Aldabra:

Electrical technician
Marine mechanic
Cook/Gardener



Vallée de Mai and Acajou Beach Resort clean up Praslin

World Clean-Up Day on the 21st September saw Vallée de Mai staff join forces with Acajou Beach resort to take on a beach and road clean up on Praslin.



Staff clearing waste on Praslin © SIF

Staff collected discarded rubbish and sorted it into piles of different materials to be disposed of accordingly. In only a couple of hours of collecting between Cap Samy and Au Cap, over 40kg of glass litter was collected, as well as 11kg of metal bottle caps. These activities took place before the Climate Action for Peace Week, which was a good way to set the tone for the following week.

Although waste in the ocean is not directly related to climate change, it worsens its negative impacts and is an additional threat to wildlife. As the ocean rapidly becomes more acidic due to the excess CO₂ in the atmosphere, marine life has no time to adapt and food webs are likely to collapse. Waste that ends up in our oceans, therefore, further

endangers all life in the oceans. This activity was a means to empower people to make a change in their local communities in improving the state of their environment. Collaborating with different organisations to work together highlights the fact that collectively we can have a greater impact.

Vallée de Mai visitors celebrate Tourism Day

SIF celebrated Tourism Week this year with a special day of various exciting activities for visitors to the Vallée de Mai on Thursday 26th September. Visitors received a free postcard as a gift from SIF and we also offered free guided tours in French and English at 9am and 2pm. Visitors had the opportunity to go on special tours which included bird watching at the Vallée de Mai viewpoint. We offered a coconut to visitors who joined a tour free of charge.

Visitors also took part in the fun activity of guessing the weight of an unhusked coco de mer nut by lifting it. They were enthusiastic to play this game however very few people could guess the right weight or even close to the actual weight of the coco de mer nut which was 15.3 kg! Winners of this game received posters.



SIF's Education & Outreach Officer speaking to tourists at the Vallée de Mai © SIF



Tourist guessing the weight of a coco de mer nut © SIF

Another interesting activity was for visitors to indicate which country they came from on a large map of the world using bird stickers. Most of the visitors to Vallée de Mai on that day came from European countries.

Research staff also provided guests with detailed information about the work that they do in the Vallée de Mai. Visitors were very pleased to learn about their work and asked a lot of questions.

La Digue students enjoy Sea Turtle Festival



Children taking part in Sea Turtle Festival activities © SIF

The Sea Turtles Friends of Seychelles organised activities on La Digue to commemorate the Sea Turtle Festival on Friday 27th September. SIF used this opportunity to inform students on La Digue about our turtle monitoring work on Aldabra. Students could view some footage about the sea turtles in their natural habitat on Aldabra. SIF also took part by exhibiting photos and some reports on sea turtle monitoring.

Children also had a chance to enjoy arts and crafts activities. Some students made turtles out of egg trays and paper. They had a lot of fun decorating the turtles they made. They then

coloured their turtle in any colours they wanted. It was really nice to see the turtle of many colours. A couple from Germany on a visit to La Digue were really keen to help out with the activities. With a different group of students they made drawings of a beautiful beach which students later used to place their baby turtles on.



Children's pledges to protect the sea turtles © SIF



Aldabra sees increase in tropicbird chicks



White-tailed tropicbird in flight © SIF

Aldabra supports the largest breeding population of red-tailed and white-tailed tropicbirds in the Seychelles, around 2,000 pairs and 2,500 pairs respectively. Tropicbirds are ground-nesting seabirds and are extremely sensitive to the presence of introduced and native ground predators such as rats, crabs and herons. We assume they nest more successfully on the rat free islets in the lagoon, although there are some nests on Picard. We generally only see a few fledglings (older chicks which are preparing to leave the nest) per year.

We monitor tropicbirds on Aldabra every two weeks. The past month, and past quarter, have

seen impressive increases in the numbers of successful nests and fledglings. In September there were six new white-tailed tropicbird nests and two new red-tailed tropicbird nests. We tagged four chicks near fledging age which enables us to track them throughout their lives. Additionally, for this exciting month, two new red-tailed chicks fledged, one of which we also tagged this month. Between July and September we tagged six red-tailed and one white-tailed tropicbird chicks. Two red-tailed and one white-tailed chicks fledged, and due to the older age of the other tagged chicks, we anticipate that they will also fledge soon. This was a very successful quarter for tropicbirds. If this trend continues, in 2019 there will have been at least seven successful nests for the year, compared to only four in 2017 and four in 2018. Although the success rate is still low, 2019 is a standout year for tropicbird chicks.



Red-tailed tropicbird in flight © SIF



White-tailed tropicbird with chick © SIF

Molluscs on the menu?

Are you a fan of seafood, particularly molluscs? Molluscs are a prestigious dish in seafood cuisine all over the world and their importance in healthy ecosystems often goes unnoticed. However, a collaboration between Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA) and SIF aims to improve the long-term sustainability of marine resources in Seychelles, and molluscs have been added to the research menu.



Molluscs collected by researchers © SIF

Molluscs are one of the most diverse groups in the animal kingdom, with nearly 100,000 species. The class Gastropoda is the largest class of molluscs, and has at least 3000 species in the region. They are found in terrestrial, as well as shallow and deep water habitats.

Subsistence fishing is allowed in Aldabra's marine protected area for staff consumption only. SIF started a fish sampling programme at Aldabra in 2016 to improve understanding of the stock structure of key demersal fish species. In March 2018, following two years of fish sampling, we introduced new sampling to determine the level and extent of heavy metals and organic pollutants present in the fish. The collaborative research is comparing the levels of contaminants to those of fish found around the Mahé plateau to see if there were differences between areas of low and high human impacts, which has implications for people who consume these fish.

The new research is on both fish and mollusc species, and aims to determine the level and extent of contamination in different marine species. Gastropod molluscs (snails and sea slugs) were selected because they feed on microalgae and microalgae filters what is in the water (including pollutants). Isotope analysis (i.e. the different elements found in the molluscs) will reflect what is found in the water in different areas.

In September the Aldabra team collected 20–40 individuals of each species, from three different areas; Picard research station (northwest), Middle Camp (northeast) and Cinq Cases (southeast). They measured the length of each shell and sent them to SFA on the next available flight.

We are looking forward to the results and gaining more insight into how much human activity is impacting these important creatures in such a



Aldabra staff measuring mollusc shells © SIF

remote place as Aldabra.

Staff make great progress in measuring and clearing Aldabra's waste



Aldabra staff with collected marine debris © SIF

Marine debris is a growing issue in Seychelles and around the world. It is difficult to calculate how much is currently washing up on the beaches each month, meaning it's difficult to gauge and plan a response. We are carrying out accumulation surveys on various beaches on Aldabra to work out how much waste is washing ashore. This is the next phase of the war on marine pollution.

The data from these surveys will form part of a much larger PhD project by April Burt, looking at the connectivity of small island states. The results will advise Aldabra's management about the scale of waste they are dealing with, and the level of effort it will take to keep Aldabra as clean as possible.

In September, we prepared selected beaches across the atoll, three on Grande Terre in the south and three areas of Settlement Beach. These are fixed pathways of 50–100 metres long where we collect any items that have washed ashore, and then count and weigh them.



Clearing marine debris on Aldabra © SIF

We hope to visit each location once a month: Settlement beach is easily accessible and we can use similar methods as in the rest of Seychelles to measure accumulation rates. This means monitoring three fixed areas for 11 consecutive days. We will repeat this process twice each windy season to gain an understanding of how much washes ashore in each season.

Sadly, despite the Aldabra Clean-Up project earlier this year, which removed 25 tonnes of plastic

debris from the atoll, Aldabra still has large areas that are still littered with trash, particularly where the rough coastline and jagged rocks make it difficult to safely bring a boat close to shore. The Aldabra staff team sometimes organise beach clean-ups in these areas when the weather is good enough.

For World Clean-Up Day on the 21st September, a team of 12 people targeted a beach on Polymnie that we have slowly been trying to clear, as well as a beach on Malabar Island. The teams completely cleared Polymnie beach and removed all the trash from the Malabar beach. This is a total area of 1500 square meters cleared of 600 kg of trash in roughly three hours!



Marine debris being collected on Aldabra © SIF

If you wish to help clean up the beaches of the Seychelles you can visit <http://www.theoceanprojectseychelles.com/> and find out when your next local beach clean-up is and how you can get involved.



aldabra atoll

SIF

seychelles islands foundation



vallée de mai

