

# Vallée de Mai's 30th Anniversary as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

By N. TIRANT TODAY



**I**t was 30 years ago today that the Vallée de Mai was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Managed since December 1983 by the Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF), a public organisation set up in 1979 to manage and protect the two World Heritage Sites of Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai,

the Praslin-based pre-historic forest, once dubbed the original Garden of Eden by General Gordon of Khartoum, has been shared with the rest of the world for the past three decades.

In a message delivered for the occasion, President James Michel, who is the patron of the SIF, commended the organisation for its work over the years which he said

has contributed to the Vallée de Mai's success as an internationally recognised symbol of Seychelles' environmental commitment, calling upon everyone to work together to ensure that it remains one of the world's most celebrated sites.

The ancient forest is home to Seychelles' emblematic and unique Coco de Mer, and the endemic bird species, the Black Parrot.

"These universally important species need our protection, but it is impossible to put a price on the value of the protection afforded to the Vallée de Mai over the past three decades," the President said, adding that the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site on its own did not ensure the protection of the Vallée.

"It is due to the tireless work of many Seychellois, conservation-

ists, and pioneers in the tourism industry, scientists, researchers and many other supporters that the Vallée de Mai has been so successful, and to them I offer our thanks," he added.

The President acknowledged the staff's achievements and high degree of conservation success through the expert guidance of the SIF Board.

Referring to the Board's "unique structure" with 14 members appointed by the President, five of which represented organizations involved in wildlife conservation, natural history and academia, the President said this had "created a dynamic, insightful and principled organisation, entirely committed to the protection of the Vallée de Mai".

He acknowledged the investments made in education and the Friends of the Vallée de Mai club

in Praslin schools. "The forest is the perfect place for children to learn about their natural environment and how they can aid the conservation of this incredible realm," the President said.

The site has become a world class tourist destination and the most visited natural site in Seychelles, bringing many socio-economic benefits to the Praslinois, he added.

"We must also not forget the financial support that the Vallée de Mai has given to the jewel in the Seychelles crown, the Aldabra atoll. Without the Vallée de Mai, the operation of Aldabra would not be possible and this island refuge would not have received the protection that it so deserves over the past decades," the President said in his message.

