



## SIF participates in Biodiversity Day exhibition at Orion Mall

The International Day for Biological Diversity was celebrated by SIF on many fronts, on Mahé SIF head office staff joined in on the festivities organised by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change to celebrate the day and third Year of the Reef. The exhibition showcased the work of a variety of environmental organisations, as it is the Year of the Reef most groups focused on marine environments in general and coral in particular.



*The team were happy to interact with many children during the day © SIF*

The exhibition was opened by the Principal Secretary for environment, Alain de Comarmond, and was attended by Minister Wallace Cosgrove, and the Principal Secretary for energy and climate change Wills Agricole. SIF was honoured that Jeremy Raguain, the project officer for the Aldabra Clean-Up Project was asked to deliver a short address to the attendees about working for an environmental organisation and the challenges and opportunities faced. There was also a poem presented by Plaisance Secondary student Laurent Lalande about the importance of coral reefs.



*Aldabra's coral, marine plastic pollution and the Aldabra Clean-Up Project were featured at the SIF stand © SIF*

The SIF stand showcased the marine diversity of Aldabra with videos and photos, as well as the marine research and monitoring being done at the atoll. This was also the first time the Aldabra Clean-Up Project was introduced to the Seychelles public and the SIF display included examples of common marine debris and solutions to avoid using plastic. The exhibition was very successful with a large number of children and adults interacting with the organisations on display. It was also a wonderful opportunity to interact with all of the other environmental organisations active on Mahé. None of us can conserve and protect the environment on our own and it's very valuable to be reminded that we're all small parts of a bigger picture!



*Visitors to the stand were very interested in footage of life at Aldabra © SIF*

## SIF CEO attends Inva'Ziles steering committee meeting in Mauritius

Dr Frauke Fleischer-Dogley recently attended the steering committee meeting in Mauritius for the Inva'Ziles project. The European Union funded IUCN Inva'Ziles project is focused on preventing and managing the spread of invasive alien species in the western Indian Ocean, and SIF is a permanent member on the steering committee. It has been over a year since the last committee meeting, hosted by SIF in April 2017, and this was therefore an opportunity to track the progress of the various regional projects.

Dr Fleischer-Dogley presented a summary of the Inva'Ziles work done in the Vallée de Mai on rats, tenrecs and yellow crazy ants, which was well received by the committee.

## SIF holds public speaking competition in secondary and post-secondary schools



Students during their public speaking presentation © SIF

The SIF public speaking competition that was held in secondary and post-secondary schools this year aimed at celebrating the biological diversity of the country's UNESCO World Heritage sites. The theme encourages the youth of Seychelles to reflect the importance of the biodiversity of Aldabra and the Vallée de Mai, particularly as the Convention on Biological Diversity is celebrating 25 years of existence this

year. The public speaking competition was open to all secondary and post-secondary schools in Seychelles.

SIF was very pleased that nine secondary schools and three post-secondary schools registered to compete in the competition and the event was held on Friday 18th June. The presentations made during the public speaking competition were very well researched and the large amount of effort put in was evident. The high quality of the presentations made narrowing down the winners a difficult task, but the top three entrants in each category were selected.

The successful schools were announced at a prize giving ceremony on Tuesday 29th May at the Roche Caiman Community Centre, and we were honoured by the presence of the Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Minister Wallace Cosgrow.



All participating students attended the prize giving ceremony © SIF

The programme of events included public speaking by the Independent School, dance performance by Plaisance Secondary School, and a song performance by Seychelles Business Studies Academy, as well as the presentation of certificates to all participating schools and the presentation of prizes to winners.

The winning schools in the secondary category were:

- 1st: Independent School
- 2nd: Perseverance Secondary School
- 3rd: Praslin Secondary School.

The winning schools in the post-secondary category were:

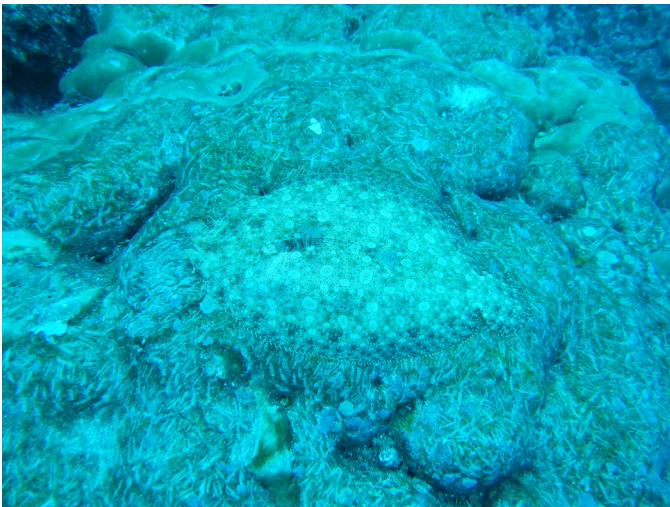
- 1st: Seychelles Business Studies Academy

- 2nd: Seychelles Institute of Art and Design
- 3rd: National Institute of Health and Social Studies

SIF was very pleased with the number of entrants in this year's competition and would like to thank all schools that participated. We are extremely grateful to all of the sponsors that offered fantastic prizes to the winners of the competition; sponsors include Zil Air, the Island Development Company, Les Laurier hotel, Green Island Foundation, the Education Unit at the Ministry of Environment Energy and Climate Change, and the Seychelles Sea Turtle Festival Committee. Your support made this a very special day for the passionate and talented winners!

## International Year of the Reef *Coral* News: Master of Camouflage

Can you see who is hiding in this photo?



*Camouflaged peacock flounder © SIF*

This is a peacock flounder, one of the less obvious but nonetheless fascinating reef creatures. Having both eyes on top of its flat body, it is a rather odd sight, but these are the features that make it a fierce ambush predator! Camouflaging itself in its environment, it snatches up small fish that unknowingly venture a bit too close. Often they lie on the sandy bottom of the reef, where they appear very pale. This one here at Anse

Mais reef is showing off its beautiful patterns and bright colours on the dead top of a *Porites* coral, which in itself has an interesting story to tell. Check back in on next month's *coral news* to learn the reason for the pattern of this coral's surface.

## SIF Vacancies

We have several vacancies at the Vallée de Mai and at Aldabra which need to be filled urgently, check out our website at <http://www.sif.sc/jobs> or contact HR on 432 17 35 if you are interested in any of the following positions:

Aldabra:

- Tourism Coordinator
- Shopkeeper
- Maintenance and Logistic assistant

Vallée de Mai:

- Visitor Centre Service Coordinator
- Property Maintenance Supervisor



## Vallée de Mai receives VIP visits!

The Vallée de Mai management and staff were so pleased to welcome two very important people to the Vallée de Mai this month.



*Minister Gonçalves testing the weight of a coco de mer nut © SIF*

The first visit was from the minister of tourism of Cape Verde, Minister José Da Silva Gonçalves, on Wednesday 16th May. Upon arrival at visitor centre Minister Gonçalves was welcomed by the visitor centre services coordinator Yanny Didon, and then he and his delegation received a guided tour in the Vallée de Mai conducted by senior visitor attendant Missia Dubignon. During the tour the Minister witnessed the dehusking of a coco de mer nut before heading back to the visitor centre for the signing of the visitors' book.

The minister described the Vallée de Mai as a “paradise on earth” and stated that it is so well cared for.



*Minister José Da Silva Gonçalves signs the visitor's book © SIF*

The new minister for environment energy and climate change, Minister Wallace Cosgrov visited the Vallée de Mai on Thursday 17th May. The aim of his visit was to familiarise himself with the site in terms of his role as the newly appointed minister, while there he interacted with staff, discussing their duties and their role at SIF. Minister Cosgrov spoke to all the different teams at the Vallée de Mai; with each team Yanny explained their work and staff were able to answer any questions from the Minister. In his comment in the visitor book the Minister said that it was a pleasure for him to visit the Vallée de Mai, and commented on the amazing work being done by SIF to preserve this World Heritage site.



*Minister Cosgrov and his delegation with SIF staff © SIF*

## Black parrot census update



*Large boulders make access difficult © SIF*

By the end of May 2018, the black parrot census team had managed to cover almost 200 points on Praslin, meaning that there are only about 50 points left on the island. These last points will be covered in the beginning of June. It's hard work but the team is happy to be making good progress. The major challenges are still big boulders that block the way and can be very slippery, and the invasive coco plum bushes that grow in dense clusters. Minor challenges are native bracken fern and the seemingly endless palm tree thorns, which need to be removed out of the hands after almost each survey day!



*The points are located in a variety of different vegetation types, including mangroves! © SIF*

Access to all of the private properties was kindly permitted, and Raffles resort additionally

showed particular interest in how to manage their property to make it more 'parrot friendly'. Our outreach officer Maria Brioché and black parrot team leader Terance Payet have followed up on the request and are planning to present the black parrot work to the resort management and guests. This interest in the black parrot census team's work is very gratifying and contributes to SIF's efforts of educating the public and tourists on Seychelles national bird!



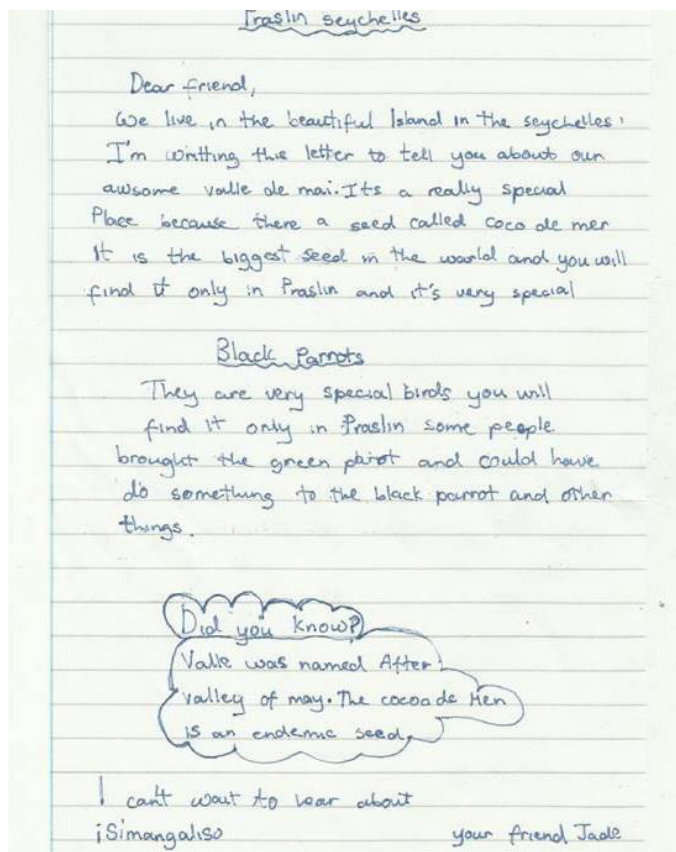
*The team are treated to some very nice views © SIF*

Overall, only three points could not be reached due to barriers, one of which was at the runway. In the case that the team is not able to access the assigned point, an additional point at the nearest possible location has to be created. For the three inaccessible points, the new points were all within 50m of the originals. The most encountered bird is at the moment is the Seychelles bulbul, followed by the invasive Indian myna. In smaller numbers the Seychelles blue pigeon and Seychelles black parrot follow respectively. The team are looking forward to completing the field survey so that they will finally be able to do the analysis.

## The Vallée de Mai partners with iSimangaliso to celebrate African World Heritage day

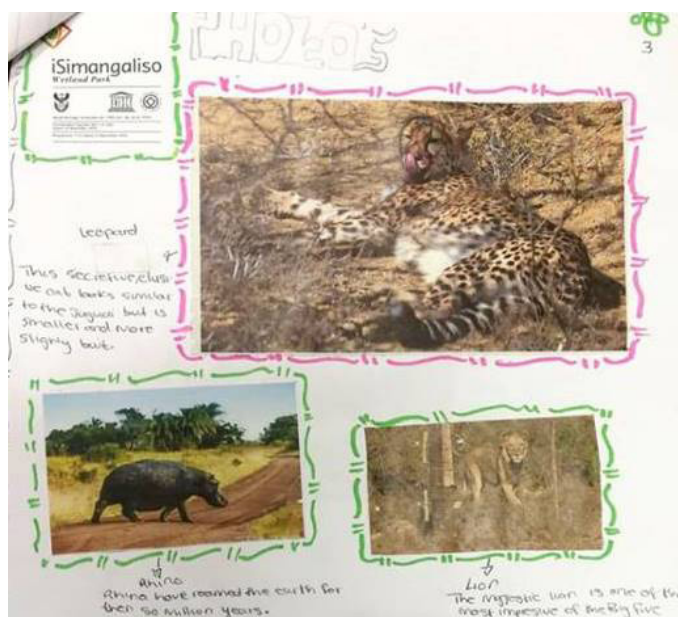
On the 5th of May each year African World Heritage day is an opportunity to celebrate the exceptional cultural and natural heritage of the

African continent and islands. The aim of the day is to increase awareness of African World Heritage sites, locally and globally. This year the Vallée de Mai and iSimangaliso, a protected area in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province, teamed up with an exchange of letters between children in and around the sites. Through poems, pictures and stories, the students from each site shared facts about their unique natural heritage.



The Seychelles students wrote about their favourite species in the Vallée de Mai © SIF

The students at Vijay International School and English River Secondary School, as well as Ikusasaletu High School and Echwebeni Primary School in South Africa were very excited to share their precious UNESCO sites with people in another country, and equally to hear about another African protected area. For all the students that participated in the exchange their passion for the sites was obvious, we were delighted to give them the platform to share it!



The South African students included pictures of some of the species in the protected area © iSimangaliso

## The Vallée de Mai organises activities for biodiversity day

At the Vallée de Mai a series of activities were organised for visitors to learn more about the Vallée de Mai's biological diversity. A display of the different animal species found in the Vallée de Mai was placed on the deck at the visitor centre, and visitors were fascinated by the species on display, especially those not easily seen in the forest.



Preserved species on display © SIF

As visitors walked along the trail past information stations they learned more about the work done to control invasive alien species in the Vallée de Mai. The link between controlling invasive species in order to protect endemic species was highlighted. There was also a black parrot station which provided them with detailed information on Seychelles' national bird and the palm forest habitat in which it lives.



SIF staff marked each completed quiz © SIF

Visitors who wanted to challenge themselves on how much they knew about the Vallée de Mai could participate in a trail quiz. Upon arrival at the start of the central trail they were provided with a question sheet containing ten questions. Along the trail different fact sheets were displayed, allowing them to find the answers for the question on the sheet. The participants appreciated the opportunity to learn more about



Visitors wrote about their visit on a blackboard © SIF

the Vallée de Mai and they received a small token for their participation. After visiting the forest, visitors were given the opportunity to write about or draw the species they saw in the Vallée de Mai on a black board displayed at the monitoring gate.

The final event of the week was a night safari at the Vallée de Mai on Friday 25TH May. This event is always very popular as it allows visitors to discover the Vallée de Mai's nocturnal species. A large group of staff and visitors gathered at the visitor centre for the night safari, before embarking on the two-hour tour. During the night visit they discovered a variety of species including giant bronze geckos, a tree frog, snakes, a chameleon and many other species.



aldabra atoll

**Aldabra Clean-Up Project Launched**



Toothbrushes are common marine plastic pollution © SIF

Aldabra is affected by the global problem of marine debris; for decades the atoll's shorelines have been inundated with human-created waste, predominantly plastic. This waste affects many of Aldabra's marine and terrestrial species. The increasing volume of rubbish drove SIF board members and current and former staff to take action, thus the Aldabra Clean-Up Project was

conceived. The Aldabra Clean-Up Project unites six Oxford graduate student volunteers with six Seychellois volunteers, selected through a national video competition. The team of 12 will remove waste from Aldabra's shores on a five-week expedition in March 2019. The waste will then be transported over 1000km back to Mahé for proper processing. The project also encompasses fundraising, raising awareness, finding creative and innovative ways to repurpose the waste that is collected, and conducting research on the problem.

The Aldabra Clean-Up Project saw two exciting developments in May. The first was the launching of a national video competition to find the six Seychellois volunteers for the project. The competition opened on the 3rd of May with the release of a video that introduced the project and gave details of how to apply, with the English and Kreol versions of the video shared widely on social media. The competition also featured in two television interviews, a radio broadcast and several newspaper articles, and was promoted during visits to the University of Seychelles and the Seychelles Maritime Academy. The extensive coverage of the video competition and the public interest it generated is a testament to the love people have for Aldabra and the



The video competition featured in the national Nation newspaper © SIF



outrage they feel at the thought of the oceans being inundated by plastic pollution. In order to apply for the project applicants had to be 18 years old by March 2019 and be a Seychellois citizen. They also had to demonstrate their physical fitness, and their understanding of and passion for the cause. The Aldabra Clean-Up Project is an opportunity for Seychellois from all walks of life to visit the beloved atoll, and by the end of May the SIF team were delighted with the large number of video applications that were received!



The Oxford volunteers © SIF

Meanwhile, Oxford based team members were busy with the second big event for the month; the official United Kingdom launch of the Aldabra Clean-Up Project took place at the Royal Society of London on the 22nd of May, the International Day for Biological Diversity. The team were extremely honoured to present a recorded speech by President Danny Faure of Seychelles who gave his support to the project, thereby highlighting its national significance. The event was hosted by Queens College Oxford, two members of SIF's board trustees, Dr Lindsay Turnbull and Sir Tim Smit, and the six Oxford graduate students that will participate in the project. Among the six volunteers is April Burt, Aldabra's former science coordinator. The launch was well attended with the Seychelles High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and the British High Commissioner to Seychelles

being present, as well as Royal Society fellows, Old Members and Friends of Oxford, 'silver' project sponsors Noble Caledonia, and Paul Rose, who led National Geographic's Pristine seas expedition to Aldabra in 2015.



Royal Society Aldabra Clean-Up Project launch © SIF

Highlights of the night were Sir Smit's moving speech which enthralled the audience, and excellent presentations by Dr Turnbull and April, which detailed the global plastic pollution crisis and the Aldabra Clean-Up Project's role in helping to solve the issue. After these presentations the guests enjoyed the opportunity to mingle with the Oxford team and learn more about Aldabra and the Clean-Up. To learn more about the project and support it, please follow along on twitter: <https://twitter.com/AldabraCleanUp> or facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AldabraCleanUp/>. The project also has a page on the Queen's College, Oxford website: <https://www.queens.ox.ac.uk/aldabra> where you can meet its team members and donate.

## Green turtle conservation at Aldabra showcased in PANORAMA webinar

In the month of April, the IUCN celebrated World Heritage Day 2018 with a PANORAMA webinar focusing on nature's iconic treasures. Although World Heritage sites are designated due to their outstanding value, many face significant threats requiring conservation intervention. PANORAMA

is a partnership which promotes examples of inspiring and replicable solutions across a range of conservation and development topics. This platform allows people and organisations to share their experiences and learn from their peers through case studies. “Building blocks” or success factors are shared and solutions explained on the online platform and through the webinar. The solutions themselves are specific successful case studies.



*A female green turtle returns to the sea © SIF*

This webinar included an overview of the importance of World Heritage sites by Tim Badman (Director, World Heritage Programme, IUCN), and three different ‘solutions’ from Jamaica, Mauritania and Seychelles. SIF was invited to contribute a full solution from Aldabra to celebrate World Heritage Day. The solution “Protection of nesting beaches to prevent extinction of green turtles on Aldabra atoll” was presented by Cheryl Sanchez, Aldabra science coordinator.

Historical exploitation of green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) on Aldabra led to a dramatic decline in nesting numbers, with some of the lowest numbers seen in the late 1960s. Starting in the late 1960s, a series of regulations protecting sea turtles, combined with elevated protection of Aldabra led to protection of the nesting population. These conservation efforts protected nesting beaches from poaching, development and pollution. The population has seen a boost

of 500-800% increase over a period of 40 years (Mortimer et al. 2011). Now, Aldabra holds one of the largest nesting rookeries for green turtles in the West Indian Ocean.



*Staff record turtle tracks daily on Settlement beach and monthly on less accessible beaches © SIF*

When this conservation story is broken down, it can be dissected into three building blocks:

- Proclamation of no-take marine protected area;
- Enforcement of protection of a remote marine protected area;
- Long-term monitoring to assess effectiveness of protection

The webinar was an incredible experience for SIF to share one of the many conservation stories of Aldabra, and to also learn about other successful conservation stories. The full solution has been published online: <https://panorama.solutions/en/solution/protection-nesting-beaches-prevent-extinction-green-turtles-aldabra-atoll> and the webinar is available for anyone to listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFc-wC2FKPQ>.

## **Aldabra team celebrates International Biodiversity Day with a big beach clean**

In celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity on the 22nd May, the Aldabra team organised a beach-clean event on several

beaches on west Grande Terre. These are very important nesting sites for green turtles.



*Flip flops are frequently found on Aldabra's beaches © SIF*

The team was pleased to find less rubbish than expected on some of the beaches, although a few had a large amount of plastic pollution. The majority of the items were plastic consumer and packaging items; mainly flip flops, bath products, plastic drink bottles and containers. There were also a significant number of fishing related items including fishing ropes and buoys. In an effort to begin to understand the sources and pathways of marine pollution items with identifiable brand names were photographed and recorded. Glass bottles are usually easily recognisable as the brand name or logo is engraved in the glass itself or visible from the lid. The most common branded glass bottle found on that day, and during previous beach cleans,

is Krating Daeng, a Thai energy drink sold in over 165 countries. Many flip flops were also removed from the beaches, with the identifiable branding of knock-off and original Adidas and Puma recorded on the day.

All staff participated and between them they managed to collect a total of 175kg of rubbish in just two and a half hours. Although beach cleans have previously been organised on this part of the atoll, this location is not always accessible due to weather conditions and changing tides; staff are not able to access these beaches for cleaning very often. The amount of plastic pollution washed up on this side of the atoll varies during the South-East and North-West monsoons. This adds to the difficulty of estimating the amount of rubbish that is washed up at Aldabra, hopefully a question that the Aldabra Clean-Up Project will help us answer!



*A happy team after the successful beach-clean © SIF*

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