



### No sign of introduced Madagascar Fodies on Aldabra is promising for eradication success

After three consecutive seasons of intensive eradication of introduced Madagascar fodies in the Takamaka region of Grande Terre, Aldabra, and two previous follow-up trips, the SIF team were confident that there were few, if any, Madagascar foodies remaining on the atoll. However, further monitoring was needed to confirm this.

The eradication activities took place over three breeding seasons between January 2013 and April 2015 and post-eradication trips were conducted in October 2015, and April 2016. During the follow-up trips fine-scale surveys were done in areas of and around former Madagascar fody occurrence. No Madagascar fodies were detected on either of these expeditions. The third follow-up trip was made in November 2016, and promisingly, once again no Madagascar fodies were detected. The team did spot a few fodies which appeared to be hybrids of Madagascar and Aldabra fodies, which are known to occur in the area of former Madagascar fody presence. Reassuringly, the team observed the endemic Aldabra fody population to be abundant across the area and all bird sightings were confidently identified with no ambiguity over species identification.



### Island Ecology Symposium held at the University of Seychelles



*Island Ecology Symposium © SIF*

On the 18th November 2016, several SIF staff members attended the Island Ecology Symposium at the University of Seychelles. The Blue Economy Research Institute at the University of Seychelles in collaboration with the Island Biodiversity Conservation Centre hosted an afternoon of scientific talks presented by an international group of island ecologists who have conducted long-term terrestrial ecological research across several island groups around the world. These include the Galapagos, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands, Mascarenes, São Tomé and Príncipe in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as the Seychelles.



### Invasive Yellow Crazy Ant survey starts in the Vallée de Mai



*Yellow crazy ants © SIF*

The seventh yellow crazy ant survey has started and the research team is fully prepared. Since being first recorded in the Vallée de Mai in 2009, yellow crazy ants (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) have been surveyed several times to monitor the distribution of this highly invasive species in the reserve.



*Madagascar fody of the left and Aldabra fody on the right © SIF*

The latest survey team consisted of four members of staff. Observations were used to detect and identify Madagascar fodies, primarily by extensive slow walking or sweep surveys and stationary observations. The team was led by Senior Field Research Assistant, Terence Mahoune, who has spent several seasons on the Takamaka eradication. The other team members included the Aldabra Science Coordinator, April Burt; Marvin Roseline, Aldabra Logistic Assistant; and SIF volunteer, Rosie Gordon.



*Madagascar fody survey team © SIF*

The aim of this visit was specifically to search for the presence of any remaining Madagascar fodies in the Takamaka region. The team targeted priority areas, focusing on locations where Madagascar fodies had previously been sighted or caught. After three dedicated follow-up trips and no sign of a Madagascar fody, we are feeling fairly confident that this invasive species no longer occurs on Aldabra. A fourth post-eradication trip is planned later in the season, and should this trip yield no sign of Madagascar fodies, we hope that we will soon be able to declare the eradication a success.

The participants had the opportunity to listen to several ecologists, including:

- Prof. Anna Traveset (Professor, Spanish Research Council CSIC at IMEDEA on Mallorca) presented research into the importance of flowers as food for Galapagos birds, and the role of birds as pollinators for a wide array of plant species.
- Dr Pablo Vargas Gomez (Research Scientist, Royal Botanical Gardens in Madrid, Spain) explored the mechanisms by which plants colonise remote islands, and the difficulty in identifying actual vectors of dispersal.
- Dr Ruben Heleno (Researcher, Centre for Functional Ecology, University of Coimbra, Portugal) presented research on the impact of large introduced mammals on the seed-dispersal network in the native forests of São Tomé island.
- Dr Manuel Nogales (Research Scientist and Director, IPNA-CSIC, Island Ecology and Evolution Research Group, Canary Islands) discussed the ecological and evolutionary trends of vertebrates in the Canary Islands.
- Dr Christopher Kaiser-Bunbury (Senior Researcher, TU Darmstadt, Germany, and Honorary Lecturer University of Seychelles) presented the findings of a five year study on Mahé investigating the impact of glacia restoration on plant-pollinator interactions.

The symposium was well attended and enjoyed by local scientists, NGOs and University of Seychelles students, and thought provoking questions were posed after each presentation. The symposium was also an opportunity for the conservation community in Seychelles to catch up and share news.

**SIF on Twitter!**



Follow us on Twitter! 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](https://twitter.com/SIF_Seychelles), and follow all of our latest updates and news.



*Data collection © SIF*

This seventh survey is part of continued annual monitoring to track whether the ants have spread into new areas or whether they are still largely confined to their current distribution. In previous years the population remained restricted to the north and east area of the Vallée, with higher activity towards the disturbed areas of the firebreak and the borders of the site. The aims of the survey are also to investigate yellow crazy ant distribution in relation to other factors (e.g. temperature, humidity patterns, presence of other ant species, management measures). The survey should also provide early indications of whether control of invasive alien plants exacerbate or improve the problem.



*Yellow crazy ant close up © SIF*



## Renovation completed on Aldabra's Cinq Cases field hut



Completed hut © SIF

Aldabra's Cinq Cases hut, situated on the south-eastern coast of Grand Terre, is at last ready to again welcome researchers and Aldabra staff for their monthly monitoring trips. The renovation has been planned for more than a year, but because of the tricky landing conditions at Cinq Cases, which very often has substantial surge, it was necessary to wait for optimal conditions before the work began. These conditions finally occurred at the start of the North-West monsoon season, in October.



New comfortable interior © SIF

With the supply boat, Enterprise II, still being at Aldabra, the Aldabra team was lucky to receive a huge amount of assistance



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](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!

## Black parrot breeding season begins!



Seychelles black parrot © SIF

The 2016/17 black parrot breeding season, which is the eighth consecutive season to be monitored by SIF, has started very well and looks to be a promising year. The team were overjoyed to discover the first two eggs in a nest in the Vallée de Mai on 25th November. This is quite early as we usually start seeing the first eggs in mid- to late December. Since this discovery the team have found a total of 12 eggs in six different nests in the Vallée de Mai and Fond Ferdinand. There is still a number of promising potential nest sites which are seeing a lot of parrot activity and will hopefully lead to more active nests in the next few weeks.

This is a fantastic start to the season, especially when compared to last season which saw only three nests discovered in the whole season, none of which had a chick survive to fledging stage.



The first two eggs! © SIF

from the crew. After careful planning the SIF logistics staff and the Enterprise II crew embarked upon the task of unloading construction materials from the boat, and then shifting them to the hut. Once all of the construction materials had been carried to the hut it took three long days for the SIF logistics staff to complete the outstanding work on the hut. The team did a marvellous job and the camp is now the epitome of luxury, with new shower facilities, a new roof with gutters for harvesting rainwater, new beds and a dining table with benches. This will surely make life far more comfortable for anyone visiting this fascinating part of Aldabra.

## New research volunteers and staff arrive on Aldabra

The SIF Aldabra research team are working hard to organise, review and revise the monitoring programme. This includes checking and analysing past data and identifying areas that can be improved to better contribute to the overall research aims. One of the most important factors is data management; which includes data collection and entry methods, data storage and also analysis capabilities. To help us achieve these goals we advertised several highly competitive volunteer research assistant positions. These positions required volunteers with specific skill-sets to assist the research team.

After an intensive recruitment process we were delighted to welcome three excellent volunteers to Aldabra, who are now getting stuck into various tasks. Marine assistant Anna Koester, who has experience in Seychelles marine conservation and marine monitoring planning and data management will be assisting with the marine monitoring and subsequently with the data analysis of this programme. Adam Mitchell, who has spent several years working in Africa managing large, complex data sets, will be working on some of Aldabra's databases to improve the data management systems. Long-term volunteer Rosie Gordon, who has been with SIF since May this year and has extended her stay, has been working on the subsistence fishery review and improving the fishery database. Rosie will be involved in all aspects of the research work and continue to make improvements to several of the long-term monitoring databases.

The team have also started mist-netting adult parrots with the new equipment sourced from a grant awarded to Team Leader Terance Payet by the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. The new equipment has already allowed the team to catch and ring four previously un-ringed parrots, which is a great start to the season. This takes the total number of parrots ringed by SIF to 191 and we hope to significantly increase this number by the end of the season.

## Visit by rehab centre members



*Rehabilitation centre guests viewing coco de mer © SIF*

The Vallée de Mai management and staff were once again honoured this year to welcome a group of young men currently following a rehabilitation programme at the Dove Rehabilitation Centre on Praslin. The group visited the Vallée de Mai on Friday 4th November 2016 and were given a guided tour by Maria Brioche, Education and Outreach Programme Officer, where they received detailed information about many of the amazing species found in the reserve.



*New Aldabra volunteers © SIF*

New staff member Ronny Marie has also recently joined the team as a ranger. Ronny has a wealth of experience as a ranger in Seychelles and will be a great help to all aspects of the monitoring work.

We are glad to have all of these new faces on Aldabra and are hoping to achieve a great deal of progress over the coming months, with such a super team in place!

### **Fourth season of Aldabra's marine monitoring underway!**

The fourth season of the Aldabra Reef Monitoring programme was launched at the end of November – and unlike previous seasons, is being carried out solely by the SIF Aldabra staff team. With some initial practice survey dives the team were able to test their methodologies, identify and eliminate some remaining flaws in the plan and establish the final procedures for the now ongoing marine monitoring work. The team consisted of the skipper and boat hand as well as four divers tasked with collecting data on benthic cover, coral recruitment and fish abundance and biomass. Two of 12 sites have already been surveyed, leaving the team highly motivated and excited to be spending 4 nights at the beautiful Middle Camp to survey the five most remote sites.



*Looking for elusive wildlife © SIF*

The group of seven was accompanied by two staff from the Rehabilitation Centre. They spent two wonderful hours together in the Vallée de Mai, experiencing all the rich nature that the reserve has to offer, while also discussing the benefits of the rehabilitation programme they are currently following.

### **SIF participates in Oceans Day celebration at Cote d'Or**





*Marine monitoring team © SIF*

The monitoring will collect crucial coral reef data following the major bleaching event earlier in 2016. Due to the remoteness of Aldabra and the lack of major local stressors, its coral reefs offer an exceptional opportunity to track trajectories of reef systems in response to global changes.

Coral reef monitoring, by nature, requires advanced planning and resources and is affected by logistical difficulties, especially on Aldabra. To ensure the success of annual collection of reef monitoring data by SIF staff in the future, the team has also been working to establish a straightforward monitoring protocol that keeps the procedures simple and easily repeatable while ensuring the collection of high quality data.

Even though a lot has been achieved already, there is still much work to be done before finalising the details of this protocol. The team is very excited and proud to be part of this project and feel exceptionally lucky to experience some of the world's most pristine coral reefs, including some unforgettable encounters with Aldabra underwater wildlife. A particular highlight of the monitoring was having the company of an extremely inquisitive potato grouper. Look at this stare off between Ella and the 1.5m fish who gave her a hard time to lay the survey tape!



*Activities on Oceans Day © SIF*

To commemorate Oceans Day on 26th November, the Education unit at the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, and various other organisations, including the Seychelles Islands Foundation, organised activities at the Cote d'Or beach for Prasinois children. The Oceans Day celebrations aim to raise awareness about the importance of protecting marine species, and this year most of the activities organised were related to a Christmas theme. Children worked in groups to make various Christmas related objects using things found in the environment around them. The children showed their creativity in making these objects, making them as beautiful and distinctive as possible.

Staff from Global Vision International were also present at the beach to conduct various activities for the children. One of the most popular activities involved children pretending to be sea turtles laying eggs, each participant was given a back pack with a sea turtle shell on it and an egg was then attached to a belt. Children had to run for about 6 -10 metres and lay the egg in the hole without breaking it. If the egg was broken then the child had to go back and get another egg. This game captured the attention of both children and adults!

To conclude the day's events there was a presentation of prizes to the most outstanding decorations and creations, and all of the children received a souvenir for their participation in the celebrations.



*Ella and a 1.5m potato grouper © SIF*

Check back in on the next newsletter to learn more about our progress and to read about our underwater adventures.

## **Indian Navy visit Aldabra**

The INS Shardul, a ship in the Indian Navy, visited Aldabra in late November. The new Aldabra ranger Mr Ronny Marie was also onboard, and was very excited to have finally made it to Aldabra. After an early morning welcome to Aldabra by the Island Manager, 18 Indian Navy personnel were posted on shore for the day to assist with construction work on the new water tower. The water tower was desperately needed to improve and increase the storage capacity of fresh water on the atoll.

After giving the Navy crew a small briefing, the group was separated into two teams, one of which was responsible for transferring construction materials to the site of the tower, while the other was tasked with coming up with a plan on how to erect and align the two pillars. The team worked amazingly well and after many attempts were able to erect and align the pillars by midday, when they had a well-deserved lunch break.

To show appreciation for the assistance given by the Navy, the Aldabra Island Manager invited the Commanding Officer of INS Shardul on Aldabra for a short visit, including a tour of the research station and a lagoon cruise to the west channel. The ship departed in the early evening after a successful and highly appreciated visit.



*The INS Shardul © SIF*



**Articles contributed by:** *Lynsey Rimbault, Nancy Bunbury, Terence Mahoune, Jude Brice, April Burt, Anna Koester, Vicky Stravens, Willow West, Maria Brioche.*

---