

# Newsletter

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This is the second issue in a row that the Mauritius Fody is making our front page. This beautiful songbird has just been downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered on the IUCN Red List. (Read more on page 3).

Photo: Gregory Guida



## BAT FESTIVAL

As part of MWF's **Rodrigues** Environmental Education Project, a Bat Festival was organized for the first time from the 6 to 11 April 2009. The Bat festival was launched on 6 April 2009 at Alliance Française. Different activities were carried out on this occasion such as an art competition among Standard VI pupils in all 13 primary schools with the theme "The Future of Bats in Rodrigues". A week-long exhibition was organized where information on bats of the Indian Ocean, and the Rodrigues Fruit Bat was displayed. All visitors were given a brochure on the Rodrigues Fruit Bat and a MWF sticker. Furthermore, a video was shown on the Livingstone Fruit Bat of the Comoros Island. Other activities included a one-hour interactive radio talk, and an educational article published in all the local newspapers on the Rodrigues Fruit Bat. On 17 April 2009, the population at large was invited to participate in a bat count survey at several locations throughout the island, to see the animals in the wild and to learn how MWF monitors their population. The Bat Festival emphasized the importance of educating young people and the local community in general about protecting their natural heritage including the Rodrigues Fruit Bat. A sticker and poster on the Rodrigues Fruit Bat will be produced and distributed later this year to reinforce what was learned during this Bat festival. Text: Andrea Waterstone The Bat project in Rodrigues is supported by Philadelphia Zoo USA & Chester Zoo UK



## Launching of Ile Cocos Guide - Rodrigues



Visitor enjoying the wildlife on Ile Cocos

On 12 February 2009, a field guide entitled “Guide de la Faune et de la Flore de l’Ile Cocos, Rodrigues” was launched in Rodrigues. This field guide is part of the Small Grants Programme GEF UNDP project being implemented on Ile Cocos and Ile aux Sables. The 47-page field guidebook describes the history, legislation, fauna and flora of Ile Cocos. All schools on Rodrigues received a free copy for educational purposes and the guide is available to locals and tourists for purchase in book-shops in Mauritius and Rodrigues and from MWF head office. This field guide will help the visitors to better identify the plants and animals during and following their trip to Ile Cocos.

Text & photo: Andrea Waterstone

The Ile Cocos project is supported by Small Grants Programme GEF UNDP & Barclays



## Propagation of Rare Plants



More than 70,000 seedlings were produced during the year 2008 at the MWF Solitude Endemic Nursery in Rodrigues. Over 50 different species of plants were propagated, amongst which were some very rare species of plants such as *Vepris lanceolata* (bois patte poule), *Eugenia rodriguesensi* (bois clou), *Lomatophyllum lomatophylloides* (ananas marron), *Foetidia rodriguesiana* (bois puant), *Scolopia heterophylla* (goyave marron), and *Carissa xylopicron* (bois de ronde). One species of fern, *Ctenitis lorenceii* which is endemic to Rodrigues and very rare was also grown.

The *Ramosmania rodriguesii* (café marron), is the rarest surviving plant in Rodrigues with only one individual remaining in the wild at Mont Plaisir. From this parent plant, three plants are now found at the MWF nursery and one in Grande Montagne Nature Reserve. None of these plants has ever produced seeds until in 2008, when for the first time ever; the café marron in Grande Montagne Nature Reserve produced one fruit. Seedlings were successfully propagated from this seed in the MWF nursery in 2008. Currently, eight seedlings are still growing well and hopefully will be planted near the parent plant at Mont Plaisir and at Grande Montagne Nature Reserve next year. Another success story is the propagation by cuttings of seven *Gouania leguatii*, one *Badula balfouriana* (bois papaya), and one *Dombeya rodriguesiana* (bois pipe), which are all endangered plant species endemic to Rodrigues.

Text: Andrea Waterstone

The Rare Plant project in Rodrigues is supported by Air Mauritius, DCP EU, Chester Zoo UK, Moroil & the British High Commission



## Managing Data for Conservation

Thanks to the three-year support of the Mauritius Research Council (MRC), several species conservation databases have been designed (Round Island Boa, Round Island Petrel and Nursery/Rare plants) or upgraded (Pink Pigeon, Echo Parakeet, Mauritius Kestrel). The project allowed us to improve our knowledge of the species we are saving. Several field guides were produced under the project namely ‘Phenology Monitoring Manual’, ‘Guide de la Faune et de la Flore de l’Ile Cocos’ and ‘A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Mauritius’ partly using information derived from the databases. This project provided a great opportunity to take conservation science to secondary school children through education workshops. These have created interest and awareness in biodiversity related issues, and demonstrated that this science can be fun and popular! The databases, field guides and increased awareness remain a lasting legacy of the project, upon which MWF will build to strengthen conservation further.

Text: Poonam Gangaram. This project was supported by the Mauritius Research Council





## Mauritius Fody – Downlisted to Endangered



MWF was thrilled to learn that the Mauritius Fody has been downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered by BirdLife International in its annual evaluation of the world's birds. This downlisting is a direct result of the translocation of the Mauritius Fodies to Ile aux Aigrettes (starting in 2003), where we now have a self-sustaining population of around 160 birds. The mainland Mauritius Fody population stands at around 130 breeding pairs. Through reintroduction on the predator-free restored habitat of Ile aux Aigrettes, the Fody population has increased by about 40% in just a few years, demonstrating the value of this strategy for bird conservation. The success follows the downlisting of the Mauritius Kestrel, Pink Pigeon, Echo Parakeet, Rodrigues Fody and Rodrigues Warbler. Mauritius has now broken its own previous record in the number of endangered birds downlisted ! Despite the success of the translocation to Ile aux Aigrettes, MWF still needs to take steps to protect the surviving Mauritius Fody pairs in the Black River Gorges National Park and reintroduce birds to Round Island in the near future. It is hoped that the Mauritius Fody can be downlisted further, to Vulnerable, in a few years!

You can also read more at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/8045971.stm>

Text Vikash Tatayah, photo Gregory Guida. This project is supported by HSBC Mauritius, Ruth Smart Foundation, Chester Zoo UK, New Noah Canada, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust & Rufford Maurice Laing



## MWF ANNUAL REPORT

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation Annual Report 2007/08 is now available. You can download a copy directly from our website at [www.mauritian-wildlife.org](http://www.mauritian-wildlife.org). This informative full-colour report gives a brief introduction to the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation and the need for conservation in Mauritius. Each of our current conservation and restoration projects is explained, with information about recent achievements and future plans. Beautiful photographs, taken by staff and volunteers at MWF, illustrate the project descriptions. The report was compiled and project managed by Liz Weaver of Ex Libris Consulting Ltd and the printing was sponsored by La Prudence Mauricienne and Précigraph Ltd.



## New Numbers for Pink Pigeons



Once Critically Endangered with less than 10 Pink Pigeons (*Nesoenas mayeri*) in the wild the 400-mark has finally been passed in February 2009, with 422 Pink Pigeons have been seen and identified in the wild. This is good news as now, less than 200 birds need to be ringed in order to reach the golden target of 600 pink pigeons flying within the forests of Mauritius. This would then downlist the species from an 'Endangered' to a 'Vulnerable' status given in the IUCN *Red List* criteria. What a kick boost for pigeon workers' spirits! The end of the tunnel is in sight. Nevertheless, there is still work to do and there is no time to rest on our laurels. With this in mind, nine birds have recently been translocated to the Bel Ombre site, increasing the subpopulation size as well as bringing in new breeders which will hopefully reproduce successfully.

This project is supported by Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Ernest Kleinworth, University of Kent & Leverhulme

Text: Emilie Chavel

Leverhulme





## Restoration

### Publication Community structure of pollination webs of Mauritian heathland habitats

“In Mauritius, only about 2% of the island is covered with native forest, which is itself heavily degraded. In situ restoration of degraded habitats in Mauritius consists primarily of hand-weeding introduced plant species in plots across a range of different habitat types. Over the past 20 years the weeding has resulted in a gradual regeneration of native flora within restored plots. However, there is little information on whether the pollinator community has also been restored, which is essential if the restoration is to be sustainable. We compiled and compared quantitative pollination webs of two communities, one managed site where restoration is in progress and one heavily degraded, unrestored site. The objective of this study was to characterise the structure of two complete tropical plant–pollinator webs, both of which contain birds and reptile pollinators in addition to insects. Once constructed, the study discusses the likely impact of invasive species on network structure and the likely success of the restoration effort on native plant–pollinator interactions.”

“Overall, the results indicated that the community structure was highly complex in comparison to temperate heath and communities. We discuss the observed differences in plant linkage and pollinator diversity and abundance between the sites with respect to habitat restoration management and its influence on pollination web structure and complexity. For habitat restoration to be successful in the long term, practitioners should aim to maintain structural diversity to support a species-rich and abundant pollinator assemblage which ensures native plant reproduction.”

Text & photo: Christopher Kaiser

This information is extracted from and published in greater detail in: Kaiser-Bunbury, C.N., et al., Community structure of pollination webs of Mauritian heathland habitats. *Perspect. Plant Ecol. Evol. Systematics* (2009), doi:10.1016/j.ppees.2009.04. @Rubel Foundation, ETH Zurich. Published by Elsevier GmbH. Available on-line at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)



## Echo Parakeets

This Echo breeding season has been another very successful one. Of the 98 monitored sites 64 have had eggs laid in them. A total of 112 young fledged successfully. Two pairs even raised four chicks each to fledging. Nests producing four fledglings are very unusual and have only occurred twice in the history of the Echo project. The total population is now estimated at 412 individuals that are likely to be alive and 328 of these birds have been sighted recently. Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (Pbfd) is still a major factor in slowing population growth. In the past two seasons it has mainly been affecting young birds. No new cases have been observed in adults this year.



Evicting bees from a nest box with the smoker



Female (with a dark beak) & male Echo Parakeet preparing for a successful breeding season

A new PVC nest box prototype was trialed during the season and was accepted by a female immediately. Two healthy chicks fledged successfully from this box without complications. As a consequence more of these durable boxes were built and placed in the forest in the end of the season.

Text: Anna Reuleaux Photos from left: Dennis Hansen & Heather Richards

This project is supported by Ireland Blyth Limited, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, University of Kent & Leverhulme





## Mauritian Reptiles Go to New Home in Jersey



The Telfair's skink

In December 2008, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, MWF and National Parks Conservation Service (NPCS) initiated a captive breeding programme for the vulnerable endemic Lesser night gecko, (*Nactus coindemirensis*). There are only 390 geckos on Ilot Vacoas, which represents the last surviving population in the south of Mauritius. Populations are also found on three of the northern islands, but all of which are all highly restricted in range on the islands. The Darwin Initiative Reptile project has been working to enhance the longterm survival of endemic reptile species restricted to one or a few small islands. For example, in 2007 a sub-species of Bojer's skink (*Gongylomorphus bojerii*) sp., isolated on Ilot Vacoas was translocated

to the neighbouring island Ile aux Fouquets.

This action has effectively doubled the World population of this skink in just over two years. A trial translocation of the Lesser night gecko has shown that the release of a small number of geckos can produce a new established population. However, it was also shown that the introduction of exotic predators to islands can cause the extinction of a small number of geckos prior to the detection and removal of the predator. It is therefore beneficial to release a larger number of individuals to enhance population growth to withstand any initial threats long enough for action to be taken. Ile Marianne, also in the south of Mauritius, is the only island available for enhancing Lesser night gecko populations. To retain regional variation, the geckos need to be harvested from Ilot Vacoas, but harvesting a large number of individuals would be detrimental to the population. Therefore, less than 10% of the population was harvested from Ilot Vacoas and relocated to Durrell's Herpetological Department, Jersey, (UK) for captive breeding. It is hoped that by 2010, Durrell will have more than 100 geckos ready for release onto Ile Marianne. If this proves successful, it could be used as a model system for enhancing other reptile restoration activities in Mauritius and elsewhere. Durrell also received ten Telfair's skinks (*Leiolopisma telfairii*), which were collected on a trip to Round Island in December 2009 by Durrell's CEO Paul Masterton. The skinks will be on display as part of a Mauritian exhibit in Jersey to promote conservation work in Mauritius.

Text & photo: Nik Cole

This project is supported by the Darwin Initiative, UK, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, UK and the National Parks & Conservation Service



## Mauritian Native Forest Vanishing – New Project Gives Hope

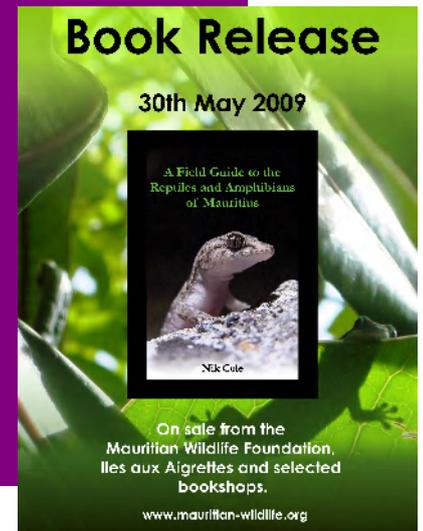
Mauritius wishes to market itself as a sustainable island but still struggles to find sustainable solutions to its environmental problems, among them saving its biodiversity from disappearance. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the support of Global Environment Facility (GEF), has launched the Protected Area Network (PAN) project the aim of which is to expand the network of terrestrial protected areas in Mauritius by catalyzing the working partnerships between private, public, NGO and community stakeholders. This will enable Mauritius to conserve the little there is left of its biodiversity where it is still found both on public and private land. Currently 94% of Mauritius's endemic flora falls under one of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) threat categories and it is among the most imperilled island floras in the world. MWF has been appointed as consultant to the PAN and is currently undertaking surveys to assess the status of biodiversity and level of threat by invasive species. Private land owners who wish to protect their native forests from disappearing are most welcome to contact MWF for further information.





The guide starts with a short introduction to Mauritius, its history of habitat destruction and the impact this has had upon the unique reptiles. Brief details are then given of the Mauritian reptiles that are now extinct and exotic reptiles and amphibians that may soon find their way into the wild. Each of the 39 types of lizard, snake, tortoise, turtle and amphibian, currently found in Mauritius are clearly described and are illustrated with colour photographs, so that the reader will be able to identify the reptiles that they have in their house and garden, or may see around the island. It is the **only complete guide** to the reptiles and amphibians of Mauritius and its offshore islands. The guide has been funded by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation and Defra's Darwin Initiative. The guide was also supported by the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, National Parks and Conservation Service Mauritius and the Mauritius Research Council.

*All profits made from the sale of the book will be used to protect the unique Mauritian wildlife*



## New Education Project on Ile aux Aigrettes

A new education project was launched with our partner Chester Zoo - UK in May 2009. Learning with Nature on Ile aux Aigrettes has been devised to cover Form Two curriculum topics such as the Food Web, and the Environment among others. These topics are well illustrated by the conservation work carried out on the island. Learning will be measured against the curriculum via post-visit interviews with teachers and debriefs with MWF staff. To get a feel for 'pupil's voice' MWF we will collate evidence of participation from the children in the form of diaries, wildlife activities, writing and art competitions. The Education Division at Chester Zoo will carry out evaluations of education initiatives which will be used for the programme that MWF plans to offer to Mauritian schools in 2010. The Education Division at Chester Zoo have acted as advisors and trainers for the development for the ecotourism elements of the project. Children will follow an immersive trail through a restored Mauritian lowland coastal forest, rich in ebones, see free-roaming giant tortoises in the wild, grazing on the vegetation and learn how they support the biodiversity of the island.

You can reserve your ticket to visit Ile aux Aigrettes on phone number: (230) 631 2396



## First Seabird Translocations

MWF has embarked on a new and exciting seabird translocation project. Seabird populations have shown a worrying worldwide decline for years. Many breeding colonies on offshore islets have been heavily impacted by introduced species such as cats and rats. Ile aux Aigrettes was once one of these islands but continues to be restored with two decades of work by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation. Worldwide studies have demonstrated the importance of seabird colonies for enhancing the productivity of islands benefitting plants and animals alike. The trial reintroductions of two

species of seabirds; the Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*) and the White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaeton lepturus*), is now well underway. This will restore a lost seabird community acting as a safeguard for other seabird colonies, bringing much needed nutrients on to the island, increasing invertebrate diversity and reactivating many ecological interactions. The experience gained from these releases will feed into a long-term study looking at other islands and additional species of seabirds and also enhance knowledge on translocation and release protocols in the conservation world.

Text: Julie Cole Photo: Adem F This project is supported by Conservation Matters Trust





# Acknowledgements

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Edited by Lone Raffray

