

# Newsletter

## INDEX

- 1 First Pink Pigeon Chicks in the Lower Gorges
- 2 Rare Flower
- 2 Anse Quitor Nature Reserve in Rodrigues
- 2 My Sustainable Island
- 3 Mauritius Fody – Major Developments
- 3 Fruit Bat Workshop Held in Mauritius
- 4 First Olive White-eye Chicks on Ile aux Aigrettes
- 4 Restoring Grande Montagne in Rodrigues
- 5 A Thriving Reptile Community on Gunner's Quoin
- 5 Corporate Social Activity with HSBC
- 6 National Awareness campaign: "Anu sap nu lezar!"
- 6 Kestrel Work on the West Coast of Mauritius
- 7 Acknowledgements



Photo: Lucy Garrett

The Mauritius Fody (*Foudia rubra*) is unique to Mauritius and listed Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. (Read more about the latest developments on this project on page 3)



## First Pink Pigeon Chicks in the Lower Gorges in more than 200 years

The Lower Black River Gorges, located at the entrance of the National Park at Black River is the latest release site of the Pink Pigeon (*Nesoenas mayeri*). Between the 5th November 2007 and end of December 2008, forty-two juvenile and adult Pink Pigeons have been transferred from different sites within the park and released there, thus creating the sixth sub-population of the species. In May 2008, the first translocated birds started breeding at this site and made their first nesting attempts. On 16 September 2008, less than a year after the start of the releases, the Lower Black River Gorges celebrated its first on-site fledgling. The squab (pigeon chick) hatched on 1 September and the nest was monitored daily until the bird left the nest on the 16 September. The Pink Pigeon, named Menzeleen, was caught and ringed two and a half weeks later with the ID number 6A02603. Along with other fledglings from all over the National Park, Menzeleen brings the total count of Pink Pigeons in Mauritius to 393.

Text: Denis Li

This project is supported by: CIEL Group, National Parks &amp; Conservation Service &amp; Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust



## Rare Flower

*Nesocodon mauritianus* is an endemic small plant with beautiful purple bell-shaped flowers and spots of red nectar that are thought to attract pollinators such as endemic reptiles and birds. This species is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List with an estimated number of fifteen plants in the wild.

The *Nesocodon mauritianus* is found growing in small groups on mountain cliffs and is thus very difficult to access. However, MWF succeeded in collecting five cuttings from one mother plant in 2007 and for the first time propagation was carried out on the mist bench at Pigeon Wood nursery. One cutting succeeded and flowered in June 2008 (see photo). The propagation technique used will be used on other plants in the objective of increasing the population.

Text & photo: Jean-Claude Sevathian  
The Rare Plant Project is supported by Chester Zoo UK, Espace Maison & Sofap Ltd



## Anse Quitor Nature Reserve Work – Rodrigues

Anse Quitor Nature Reserve is located in the south-western part of Rodrigues near the airport. This reserve is near sea level, has a coralline substrate and a relatively dry area. At present, about 14 hectares of the 34 hectare native forest has already been restored in the valley of Anse Quitor and many of the endemic rare plants of Rodrigues have been planted in this reserve. Anse Quitor is home to several very rare endemic plants, with the only two of the three living individuals of *Xanthoxylum paniculatum*. Each year for the next three years Anse Quitor will see the planting of 3,000 endemic seedlings for the recently launched Air Mauritius 'One Take-off, One Tree' initiative. Currently, the selected plots in Anse Quitor Nature Reserve are being thinned of exotic and invasive species using machetes and chainsaws in preparation for the planting season, which will begin in early 2009. This restoration work helps to reduce water wastage, remove carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and prevent further extinction of plant and animal species.

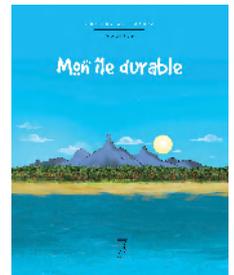
Text: Andrea Waterstone  
This project is supported by the DCP EU, Chester Zoo UK & British High Commission

## My Sustainable Island

Editions "VIZAVI" has created for Mauritian children the fourth educational book about nature and the environment: "My Sustainable Island" (in French "Mon Ile Durable").

The objective of the book is to teach children what sustainable development is about and how each one of us can take action and be part of this development. The book covers all aspects of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. MWF is proud to have been chosen as a partner for this project.

The book is available in French and English and can be bought at MWF or at major Mauritian bookshops for Rs 150.



## Mauritius Fody – Major Developments

This season the Mauritius Fody project has seen major developments. The focus has largely been on the creation of an additional sub-population on the island north of Mauritius, Round Island, using the fodies from Ile aux Aigrettes as the source population. The Ile aux Aigrettes population has been growing every season since release in 2004, and so far this season has been no exception, with the largest number of individuals on record – 152 birds! The number of fledglings produced on Ile aux Aigrettes has also been high for this time of year and over 50 fledglings have already been successfully raised.

The preparations for the arrival of Mauritius Fodies on Round Island scheduled for 2009 are well underway. The harvest of eggs from Ile aux Aigrettes has been very successful and so far the hand rearing team have raised 10 fledglings, and another three chicks are being reared. The parent-raised fledglings have also been transported from Ile aux Aigrettes to the Black River aviaries, where they are being quarantined before transfer to Round Island.

Also of importance is the commencement of monitoring of Mauritius Fodies in the upland forests at Pigeon Wood. This important work is the first to be carried out in over two years. Thus far, twenty nests have been found and initial nesting outcomes have shown that predation continues to be a large problem, with several of the nests being ripped apart, presumably by monkeys which have been witnessed in the area. However, three pairs have been seen with fledglings, and several new areas have been found to contain territories. This important work will facilitate potential harvests from this population next season in order to increase the genetic diversity of the Round Island (pending initial trials) and the Ile aux Aigrettes populations.

Congratulations to Lucy Garrett (Fody Coordinator), who had one of her photos of a male Mauritius Fody published in Birdlife International's "Rare Birds Year Book 2008"!



Text & photo Lucy Garrett

This project is supported by HSBC Mauritius, Ruth Smart Foundation, Chester Zoo UK, New Noah Canada, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust & Rufford Maurice Laing

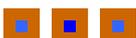


## Fruit Bat Workshop Held in Mauritius

Bats are often the only native mammals on oceanic islands such as Mauritius. Animals on islands are often more prone to extinction, where small population sizes, limited distribution and high endemism render them more vulnerable to climatic events and man-made threats (including habitat destruction and fragmentation, hunting (firearms), pollution, introduction of exotic species and spreading human populations). The Western Indian Ocean Islands (WIOI) are home to seven *Pteropus* fruit bat species, three of which are Critically Endangered. Many of the WIOI species face similar pressures of habitat destruction and conflicts with humans. MWF organised in collaboration with Conservation International Madagascar a workshop to establish conservation management plans and priority actions that benefit all seven extant WIOI bat species. As part of these plans we must establish the status, ecology, habitat requirements and ecosystem function of each of the species, but also recognise and address potential and existing conflict issues. Fruit bats play a valuable ecological role in native tropical forests and have been described as keystone species in tropical forest ecosystems. *Pteropus* fruit bats alone have been shown to be important pollinators and seed dispersers for 289 plant species, in 92 genera and 50 families (Fujita and Tuttle, 1991).

Please also learn more on: [http://www.lexpress.mu/display\\_search\\_result.php?news\\_id=118067](http://www.lexpress.mu/display_search_result.php?news_id=118067) & <http://www.mbcradio.tv/contents/?m=20081112> [http://www.lexpress.mu/display\\_search\\_result.php?news\\_id=117715](http://www.lexpress.mu/display_search_result.php?news_id=117715) & <http://www.mbcradio.tv/contents/?p=1405>

This project is supported by Philadelphia Zoo US, Chester Zoo UK & Conservation International Madagascar



## First Olive White-eye chicks on Ile aux Aigrettes

Since the start of this season we have had a lot of success from both the wild and the released populations of Olive White-eyes. At Combo the wild population has been busy nesting and we have seen eight pairs produce healthy fledglings. MWF has also rescued three nests from Combo producing six eggs for hand rearing. Unfortunately two chicks died due to unknown reasons and the other four are currently hatching and are doing well. We plan to translocate and release these next year onto Ile aux Aigrettes.



Olive- White-eye chick

The current population on Ile aux Aigrettes is also busy breeding. We have had thirty-five nesting attempts from six pairs. Out of the thirty-five attempts thirteen have produced eggs, three have reached chick stage and one has managed to successfully fledge two chicks. We are currently monitoring three nests with eggs, one nest with two young chicks which are both healthy and awaiting ringing and we are also awaiting the fledging of another chick which was ringed recently. The breeding success on Ile aux Aigrettes is an amazing accomplishment for the project and is the result of three years hard work by all the field staff involved. Monitoring of both populations will continue into the new year and all nesting attempts will be followed closely for any more Olive White-eye fledglings.

Text & photo: Gwen Maggs

This project is supported by Chester Zoo UK, Conservation International, Gamma Civic Ltd, Sun Resorts, Rufford Maurice Laing & Ruth Smart Foundation



## Restoring the Grande Montagne Nature Reserve in Rodrigues

Rodrigues Island has suffered an almost total destruction of its forests and has the second most endangered plant community in the world. Conservation work has been carried out by MWF and its stakeholder for many years and a MWF team and office is found on a permanent basis in Solitude village.



The ambitious restoration work on Grande Montagne Nature Reserve started in mid 2008 and currently approximately 10 hectares of the 30 hectare nature reserve has been restored. This restoration work has been vastly successful due to the high success rate of the seedlings planted. Several rare plants such as *Ramosmania rodriguesii*, *Poupartia castanea*, and *Gastonia rodriguesiana* are being successfully conserved in this reserve. An

additional 5 to 6 hectares will be restored by the end of 2009. Twelve Restoration labourers have been recruited from nearby villages and by working strenuously over the last six months have nearly completed the initial thinning of invasive species in 6 hectares. This initial thinning involved the cutting of exotic species with machetes and chainsaws, uprooting, and killing standing exotic trees. Furthermore, over 12,000 seedlings have been propagated in the Endemic Nursery and planted on Grande Montagne. During 2009, this 6 hectare plot will be further planted, weeded, and a guide (extended brochure) to Grande Montagne Nature Reserve indicating the pathway and identifying certain rare plant and animal species found in the reserve will be created. This restoration work helps to create a habitat for the only two remaining endemic birds on Rodrigues, the Rodrigues Warbler and the Rodrigues Fody, which are classified as Endangered and Vulnerable respectively, along with the Rodrigues Golden Fruit Bat.

Text: Andrea Waterstone

This project is supported by the Decentralised Cooperation Programme EU, Chester Zoo UK & British High Commission



## A Thriving Reptile Community on Gunner's Quoin

**G**unners Quoin (76 hectare islet, 5 km north of Mauritius) was known to have maintained a rich reptile diversity including giant tortoises, boas, lesser night geckos, ornate day geckos and Telfair's, Bojer's and Bouton's skinks. Given the position of the island it was also likely to have maintained Guenther's geckos and orange-tail skinks. However, following human disturbances, extensive habitat destruction and the arrival of rats, approximately 150 years ago, only the lesser night gecko, ornate day gecko, Bojer's skink and Bouton's skink survived. In 1993, two years prior to the eradication of rats on the island, it was feared that the lesser night gecko that was only discovered in 1982 had become extinct. However, our repeated bi-annual estimates of the reptile populations over the past two years demonstrate that the lizards are now thriving with approximately 22,400 night geckos, 14,400 day geckos, 6,500 Bojer's skinks and 2,250 Bouton's skinks.



As part of the current Darwin Initiative project to restore island reptile communities (reported in previous newsletters) the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, MWF and National Parks & Conservation Service have re-introduced the Telfair's skink and Orange-tail skink to Gunners Quoin. Both species are doing extremely well, particularly the Telfair's skinks, which produced an estimated 600 babies (*see photo*) at the beginning of 2008, from the 250 individuals that were released in February 2007. These babies are growing rapidly and most should be ready to breed by the end of 2009. Within two month's time the next batch of baby Telfair's skinks will hatch and this is expected to double the number of new skinks on the island. The findings of this project shows that successful reproduction of the Mauritian endemic reptiles depends on first removing introduced mammalian predators from the island reptile populations.



This project is supported by the Darwin Initiative, UK, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, UK and the National Parks & Conservation Service Text & photo: Nik Cole

## CSR Activity with HSBC

HSBC is the local funder of the Mauritius Fody project and in November 2008, HSBC Mauritius, organised (in collaboration with MWF and the National Parks and Conservation Service) an **Endemic Treasure Hunt** in the National Park. The participants were HSBC's corporate clients. HSBC's objective was to further reinforce relationships with their clients and engage them towards one of their Corporate Sustainability projects and at the same time, giving their customers the opportunity to discover the threatened endemic flora and fauna of Mauritius. In brief, the participants had a questionnaire, where they had to identify endemic as well as exotic plants and birds in the forest. It was all done in a relaxed and enjoyable way! Teams all learnt a few things like what the fody call sounds like, that, yes, Ravenale is a pest and how difficult it is to take pictures of butterflies!! ... They also had fun drawing their bankers!!!

Various activities linked to Corporate Social Responsibility are possible to organise with MWF, please contact us for more information on: [lraffray@mauritian-wildlife.org](mailto:lraffray@mauritian-wildlife.org)



## National Awareness campaign: “Anu sap nu lezar”!



This campaign aims to promote the unique biodiversity in Mauritius to, for and with the Mauritian people and its local communities for a sustainable tourism. The campaign focuses on protecting the unique reptile communities found on the islands of the Mahebourg Bay (see campaign poster left). The campaign activities started in September 2008 with Maurilait Ltd launching a publicity of gecko-tattoos for children and in November with two workshops for boat skippers. A theoretical session on the endangered reptiles and their habitat was given to twenty boat skippers who learned more about the biodiversity of the islets where they carry out their daily professional tourist activities. The second workshop was a field trip to Ile aux Fouquets and Ilet Vacoas during which the threats affecting the reptiles such as barbecues, fire and littering were raised.

The Regatta day was held on 27, 28 & 29 November 2008 at Pointe d’Esny situated in the Mahebourg area. The Regatta is a sportive, touristic and cultural annual event in Mauritius organised by Incentive Partners Ltd. Regattas of “pirogues” (traditional wooden boats) are carried out during three days and are open to all. MWF and other environmental NGOs were present at the event to promote nature conservation. MWF was promoting Ile aux Aigrettes which is situated in the Regatta area and also the protection of the endangered reptiles through a puppet show, gecko mascot and face painting. Face painting was a complete success! (see photo right). You can learn more about the event by visiting: [www.laregatta.com](http://www.laregatta.com) and watch the film on [www.spintv.mu/laregatta](http://www.spintv.mu/laregatta).

This project is supported by: Rare, Maurilait Ltd., National Parks & Conservation Service, Darwin Initiative UK, the British High Commission, Price Waterhouse Coopers & Incentive Partners Ltd

Text & photo: Cathleen Cybelle poster: Naresh Gopaul & Veronique Barnard



## Kestrel Work on the West Coast of Mauritius



The Mauritius Kestrel (*Falco punctatus*) is endemic to Mauritius and was brought back from extinction in “extremis” when there were only four birds left in 1974. Thanks to conservation efforts over the past thirty years the Kestrel population increased to about 700 birds. However, recent observations indicated that many periphery and lowland Kestrel pairs in the south-west had disappeared. Since the south-western population had not been surveyed since 1999 MWF therefore began a survey in 2007 to find out the current Kestrel distribution and numbers in order to detect changes and take appropriate action if necessary to maintain numbers of this Vulnerable bird. The population on the east coast has been monitored continuously since the Kestrel’s

reintroduction to the east coast Bambous Mountain range in 1987 and continues to date with a second team monitoring the west coast population this season. This season most Kestrel sites in the west coast now have eggs with many pairs feeding young chicks. There are now thirty-three confirmed breeding pairs, with a further nine pairs yet to lay eggs and birds with territories at another eight locations. Many of these additional territories relate to single males, but it is hoped that some may yet pair up and make a belated breeding attempt. Eighty-eight eggs have been laid in thirty-three first clutches and forty chicks have hatched. Twenty-nine chicks have been ringed and eight unringed adults have been trapped & ringed. Full clutch, brood, fledging and morphometrics data will also be collected and additional data collection will involve details of cavities, attacks on prey and prey species identified. In 2009-10 and beyond, with the island survey completed, intensive monitoring will continue at the main west coast sites and with a study population re-established in the west comparative work with the east coast data will then become possible.

Text: Richard Dale Photo: @Gregory Guida

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# Acknowledgements



We proudly list our donors. Thank you for supporting us! (in alphabetical order)

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Edited by Lone Raffray

