



Tortoises back on Round Island



The tortoises are being brought to Round Island by helicopter

The 27th June 2007 marked a historic day as tortoises were returned to Round Island after being absent for over a century. Two species of giant tortoises once roamed pristine Mauritius, acting as important grazers & seed dispersers. Consequently, their extinction impacted the Round Island ecosystem.

The 12 Aldabran giant tortoises (*Geochelone gigantea*) and 12 Madagascan radiated tortoises (*Astrochelys radiata*) just introduced to Round Island will be studied to see what effect they have on the plant, reptile, bird & invertebrate communities & also to determine if they can fulfil the role of the extinct tortoises. It is hoped that they will provide a valuable management asset by preferentially grazing the exotic grasses & dispersing the seeds of the endemic plants, thereby reducing the necessity of human intervention & creating a self-sustaining ecosystem.

The Round Island project is supported by the National Parks & Conservation Services & The Mauritius Commercial Bank Ltd. special thanks to La Vanille Reserve des Mascareignes for all their help & the Police Helicopter Squadron.



International Biodiversity Day Celebrated in Mauritius

Together with the UNDP SGP-GEF, the Mauritian Government, the Private sector & other local NGOs, MWF celebrated the international Biodiversity Day through two weeks of various activities.

Special visits to places of biodiversity importance were organised for the local press & this resulted in a broad national press coverage which helped in creating awareness of the rare and endangered biodiversity in Mauritius. The general public was also invited to participate in various visits & conferences that covered different themes in biodiversity & climate change. The different activities were closed with an exhibition where the public was invited to come & write the names of Extinct & Critically Endangered Mauritian flora and fauna species, the names were later exhibited on a big board at the Waterfront in Port Louis.



Echo Parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) upgraded



Photo: Dennis Hansen

Jason stated how important the whole echo team of passionate, dedicated people has been in ensuring the species is well on the road to recovery, and congratulates all team members past and present. The echo programme has been so successful because of a conglomeration working as a team & because of innovative ideas in all areas of management.



The Echo Parakeet Programme recently had some great news. The IUCN has upgraded the status of this species from Critically Endangered to Endangered.

Current programme coordinator, Jason Malham from New Zealand has the dubious honour of being the longest running Echo coordinator in MWF, having been with the team for six, going on seven seasons. This coming season is his final one, and he will be leaving feeling pretty happy with what has been achieved over the past years. When he arrived to take on the running of the programme in August 2001 the estimated total population in the wild was 129 birds. This number has almost tripled during the past six seasons to the current total of 333 birds in the wild. The number of birds laying eggs in a season has risen from 16 in 2001 to 56 in 2006; with the number of eggs being laid rising from 40 in 2001 to 160+ in 2006. Because of the problem of a shortage of suitable natural nest sites as the natural indigenous habitat is degraded an important aim of the programme was to encourage birds to use nest boxes which has been extremely successful - gone from 1 user in 2000 to 41 birds who laid eggs in boxes 2006!

This project is support by IBL Ltd & Chester Zoo

A Conservation Education workshop was held in June 2007 to assess a different approach to sensitising school children to the biodiversity of their country and with the aim of encouraging interest in science. Ninety form 3 pupils from three participating schools were taught botanical drawing, were introduced to the restoration and conservation work being carried out in Mauritius including a visit to Montvert Nature Reserve where they practiced their newly acquired skills. Several prizes were awarded to schools and students. Pupils & teachers declared the workshop to be a resounding success, having applied new techniques which achieved the aims of the workshop. This activity was a major component under the project "Information systems for optimized data management" funded by the Mauritius Research Council.



The big 5 in Mauritius

Publication. Bird Extinctions Prevented

A paper describing the results of conservation programmes & their assessments worldwide based on the status given by the IUCN Red List was published last year. The paper is mentioning a total of 5 Mauritian bird species. 3 species namely: Mauritius kestrel (*Falco punctatus*), Rodrigues warbler (*Acrocephalus rodericanus*) & the Rodrigues fody (*Foudia flavicans*) are species judged likely to have been saved from extinction prior to 1994. The Pink pigeon (*Nesoenas mayeri*) & the Mauritius parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) are judged to have likely gone extinct during 1994-2004 **if** conservation action had not taken place.

Even though Mauritius is considered to have the 2nd most endangered biodiversity in the world it is encouraging to know that with the conservation efforts done by MWF & its partners the 5 above mentioned birds have been saved from extinction which ranks Mauritius as no 1 even before the USA & New Zealand who each have saved 4 bird species. However conservation efforts need to continue as the threat of extinction is still present in Mauritius as else where in the world.

(Stuart H.M. Butchart, Alison J. Stattersfield and Nigel J. Collar How Many Bird Extinctions Have We Prevented? 2006 FFI. Oryx. 40(3). 266-278)



HSBC renews **its** sponsorship to the Passerine Conservation **Programme**

Under the banner 'Together We Save The Mauritius Fody', the staff of HSBC will collaborate with the MWF Passerine Recovery Team through different awareness campaigns. Sandeep Uppal, CEO of HSBC (Mauritius) & Chairman of the CSR Committee, says that "...this is an extremely important project as this partnership will help the Mauritian population to learn more about this bird and ultimately safeguard its very future". He however states that such conservation campaigns are long haul projects but says that engaging the bank's different stakeholders – customers, shareholders and particularly the staff – can significantly shift the general perception about saving the environment.

This program is also sponsored by our international partners namely: Ruth Smart Foundation & Chester Zoo both in the UK. The Mauritius Fody (*Foudia rubra*) is listed on the list of IUCN as Critically Endangered.

Kew Gardens Gives Hope of Survival For the Cafe Marron

There was only one individual left in the world of the Cafe marron (*Ramosmania rodriguesii*) an endemic plant of Rodrigues.

The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew succeeded in propagating cuttings that later produced seeds. The seeds were brought to the Rodrigues Forestry Nursery in Solitude and on the 20/03/07 MWF sowed 15 seeds of the *Ramosmania rodriguesii* the with the help of Kew Horticulturist Jose Carlos Magdalena Rodriguez. The first germination was noted on the 27/04/07 & so far 7 seeds have already germinated.

With these fantastic results there may be hope of avoiding yet another extinction of a Rodrigian plant species.



One of the seedlings of the *Ramosmania rodriguesii*

PhD on The Pink Pigeon & The Threat of Disease

The pink pigeon population, although now numbering around 380 birds, still faces a number of complex problems, which have limited population growth over the past few years. A recent PhD study of the effects of one of these problems, parasitic disease, was completed in 2006 by Nancy Bunbury in collaboration with MWF and the University of East Anglia, UK. The main parasite affecting the pink pigeon, *Trichomonas gallinae*, a flagellate protozoan found only in birds, is thought to have been introduced to Mauritius with one of several species of dove. This relatively recent exposure to the parasite may explain why the pink pigeon is so susceptible to the infection & the disease.



The research found that infection with *T. gallinae* is common in all Pink Pigeon subpopulations & in all dove species examined (ramiers, zebra doves, spotted doves). The parasite is also found at all times of year although slightly more commonly during the warm, dry periods. Infection reduces survival of adult pink pigeons & causes particularly severe effects on nestlings, with most infected chicks dying within a few days of the resulting disease. A few infected nestlings do survive, however, and these birds may be the key to the future of the pink pigeon population in the presence of this parasite. Treatment seems to be an obvious 'solution' but may cause greater problems in the long-term due to the effects of over- or under-dosing birds, the short-term effect of treatment and an increased chance of the parasite developing resistance to medication. For the time being, the pigeons have to live with infection of this parasite and we have to hope that the birds develop resistance over time, as is seen in other species. This makes it even more important that other threats to the species – food shortage, lack of habitat and predation – continue to be mitigated. The imminent releases of pink pigeons into the Lower Gorges & the Ferney Valley should provide an additional safeguard for the population of this precious species.

The Pink Pigeon program is supported by the CIEL Group & Durrell (DWCT)



This information is extracted from and published in greater detail in:

BUNBURY N. 2006. Parasitic disease in the endangered Mauritian pink pigeon *Columba mayeri*. PhD thesis. University of East Anglia, UK.

BUNBURY N, JONES CG, GREENWOOD AG & BELL DJ. Epidemiology and conservation implications of *Trichomonas gallinae* in the endangered pink pigeon *Columba mayeri*. *Biological Conservation* (under review).

BUNBURY N, JONES CG, GREENWOOD AG & BELL DJ. (2007) *Trichomonas gallinae* in Mauritian columbids: implications for an endangered endemic. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 43: 399–407.

One year into the Darwin Reptile Translocation Project



A Telfair's skink (*Leiolopisma telfairii*) is being released

The first sets of post translocation monitoring trips have now been completed. Monitoring involves visiting all of the islands (mentioned below) to: assess the health and disease, distribution, diet and habitat use of the translocated reptiles; survey the resident invertebrates & vertebrates and to obtain comparative data from the donor populations. All of this monitoring is to detect the success & impact of the translocations. This is however an ongoing process & will now continue seasonally for the duration of the three year project. So far all appears successful & the initial impacts are positive.

It has been a very busy first year for the reptile translocation team. Initially they surveyed all of the recipient islands prior to translocation to obtain baseline information on Gunners Quoin, Ile aux Aigrettes, Ile aux Fouquets & Ilot Chat. The health & status of all reptile populations on the donor islands, Round Island and Ilot Vacoas was also obtained. From October 2006 through to February 2007, 30 lesser night geckos, 30 Durrell's night geckos, 20 Ilot Vacoas Bojer's skinks and 500 Telfair's skinks were translocated.

Photo & text: Nik Cole



CNN mentions Ile aux Aigrettes

Ile aux Aigrettes is a very special island & is often being mentioned in the international press. An article was published on the CNN web-site with the title: "Mauritius island provides wildlife sanctuary". Please see more on: CNN.com.htm

You can reserve your ticket to visit Ile aux Aigrettes on phone number: (230) 631 2396 or visit our web-site for further information: www-mauritian-wildlife.org

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