



Newsletter

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Plants brought to the islands by boat from the mainland for planting

Island Restoration in Rodrigues

Since July 2006 MWF Rodrigues has been working in collaboration with the Forestry Services, Discovery Rodrigues, and the local Tour Operators on Ile Cocos and Ile aux Sables to restore the habitat of both islets. These two islets are known for their seabird population and Ile Cocos is a principal tourist attraction in Rodrigues. One of the objectives of this project is to recreate an endemic forest for the seabirds that are native to these islets, specifically the Common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), Lesser Noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*), Fairy Tern (*Gygis alba*) & Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*). The MWF staff, with the help of volunteer groups, are weeding the islets of invasive species, propagating seedlings in the Solitude Endemic Nursery, and transporting and planting the seedlings on the two islets. Species such as the Vacoas (*Pandanus heterocarpus*), Latanier jaune (*Latania verschaffeltii*) & Bois matelot (*Lycium tenue*) are among the 8000 native & endemic plants that have been planted so far.



Oiseau la Vierge (*Gygis alba*) - one of the several sea bird species found in Rodrigues

Text: Andrea Waterstone Photo: Alfred Begue



First Certified Female Skipper in Rodrigues

MWF is proud to have Anieta Shan Yu, who is the first certified female Rodriguan Skipper, as part of its Rodrigues team. Three members of the Rodrigues staff, namely Alfred Begué, Cliff Jean, and Anieta Shan Yu, followed a Skippers Training Course offered by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, Chief Commissioner's Office, & Tourism Authority. All three staff attended and passed the theoretical exam on the 19th January 2008. One month later, on 19th February 2008, the MWF staff members successfully passed the practical test, despite the rough weather conditions. The Skipper Licences are important for the project that the Rodrigues Team is implementing on Ile Cocos and Ile aux Sable and will help the team to facilitate the transport of plants and staff to the islands.

Text: Andrea Waterstone



BLOOMING & FLOWERING

Pink Pigeons, Echo Parakeets & other endemic Mauritian birds are highly dependent on the native forest for food availability; their diet consists mainly of leaves, flowers and fruits. Food shortage due to depletion & degradation of the important feeding habitats is thus known to be one of the major factors limiting population growth of these endangered birds. Population management has been very successful in increasing the number of these birds (~380 Pink Pigeons and ~340 Echo Parakeets as of April 2008). However to ensure the ongoing recovery and long term survival of these species we need to understand quality and quantity of natural

food available in the remnants of native forest throughout the year.



Bois bouquet banane (Ochna mauritiana)

Thus a Phenology Project was initiated by MWF at the beginning of 2007. Plant phenology is the scientific study of cyclic biological events of plants such as leaf shading, leaf flushing, flowering, fruiting and seed setting in relation to seasonal and climatic changes. 37 native and 10 exotic plant species have been identified as important food plants across all the sub-populations of these birds. 10 individuals of each available species are monitored at five study sites in Mauritius (Plaine Lievre, Pigeon Wood, Combo, Bel Ombre and Ile aux Aigrettes). Phenology study will help understand availability of natural food throughout the year across fragmented remnants of native Mauritian forest. It will also assist to address certain unexplained annual breeding trends in these birds such as length and timing of Pink Pigeon moulting period and start of Echo Parakeet breeding season which could be linked to failure and/or poor production of crops from key fruiting species or changing phenology activities of their food plant species in the forest. This study will assist in the development of restoration management plans and the enhancement of habitat protection. It will not only benefit long term restoration of Pink Pigeons and Echo Parakeets but also other endemic fauna species.

Text & Photo: Amruta Rane, Poonam Gangaram



RARE PLANT



The picture below shows a successful propagation made from cuttings in the mist bench at one of the MWF's managed nurseries. The Bois corail (*Chassalia boryana*) is critically endangered and is known from only one individual left growing in a natural reserve in Mauritius. Cuttings have been taken to make a graft on an other cousin in the same genus (*Chassalia capitata*) and from this successful grafting two cuttings were taken to propagate in one of our mist benches.

Only one cutting succeeded and was re-potted last December. The plant looks well and we hope that from this experiment we will be a step forward in saving this species from extinction.



Chassalia boryana (bois corail)

Photo & text: Jean-Claude Sevastian



ECHO PARAKEET - FACTS AND NUMBERS

The 2008 Echo Parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) breeding season was the third season of the minimal management regime, and was very successful. A record number of birds bred this year, with corresponding records in the numbers of eggs laid, hatched and chicks fledged.

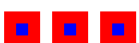


One of MWF biologists accessing a nest to collect data from a juvenile Echo parakeet

Sixty eight breeding age females were closely monitored and sixty four of them laid eggs. At least one hundred and eighty eggs were laid. One hundred and thirty four chicks hatched from one hundred and forty nine known fertile eggs. A new record total of **one hundred and one chicks fledged in the wild**. Thirty four females, four of which were not supplementary fed, fledged two *or more* chicks each. Of these, thirteen fledged three chicks each, this includes two pairs which are not supplementary fed. As last season, one supplementary fed pair fledged four healthy chicks. In terms of the numbers of eggs laid and chicks fledged in the wild, this season was the most productive since the conservation management programme began back in the early eighties where only 14 birds were left in Mauritius and in the world . As the PBDF* disease is still a serious issue for the Echo Parakeets, studies on the virus continued this season. More than a hundred of blood samples were obtained from Echos & from the exotic Indian ring-neck Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*). The data is currently being analysed to see what future strategies are to be used to try to minimise the danger of the virus on the endemic Echo Parakeet.

* Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease

Text: Anna Reuleaux Photo:Elaine Fraser



IS THE KESTREL IN DECLINE?

The Mauritius Kestrel (*Flaco punctatus*) population is mainly found in three subpopulations: in the north, east and south-west of Mauritius. The population in the east has been monitored continuously since the Kestrel's reintroduction to the East coast Bambous Mountain range in 1987, but the south-western population had not been surveyed since 1999, and the north not since 1996. Recent observations indicated that many periphery and lowland pairs in the south-west had disappeared in the last five years, as have the two suburban populations in Black River and in Point D' Esny.

MWF therefore began a survey in October 2007 of the whole island to find out the current distribution and numbers. The survey will allow us to detect future changes and take appropriate action if necessary to maintain numbers of this Endangered bird. The first results of the survey seem to indicate that there are around six hundred Kestrels, which are fewer than first believed. The survey will continue next season starting in October 2008.

The Mauritius Kestrel is endemic to Mauritius and was brought back from extinction "in extremis" by MWF in the 1980ies when there were only 4 birds left. This spectacular bird recovery program is renowned throughout the world.



Richard from the Kestrel team is accessing a Kestrel nest on a mountain slope



PLANTING "TAKES OFF" WITH NATIONAL AIRLINE

The endemic flora and fauna of Mauritius is considered one of the world's most endangered and is at a critical stage of recovery. The indigenous natural habitat is still shrinking and climate change is a real threat.

Air Mauritius has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with MWF to show its commitment to protect the precious natural heritage of our island and this exclusive partnership brings hope to future successful conservation projects. One of the main initiatives included in the programme is the one take-off / one tree initiative which involves planting one endemic tree for each take-off of an Air Mauritius aircraft from Mauritius. Under this project, 6,000 endemic trees will be planted each year in Mauritius and Rodrigues to help restore natural habitats and create local awareness.

This initiative, though symbolic, depicts the new mindset within the airline regarding the protection of the environment. It also fits well within IATA's (International Air Transport Association) vision for the air transport industry to achieve carbon neutral growth in the medium-term, on the way to a carbon emission free future as well as ICAO's (International Civil Aviation Organisation) commitment for the aggressive action to mitigate the impact of aircraft CO₂ emissions. It is no coincidence that Air Mauritius partnership with the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation occurs at this particular time when IATA appoints as new Director for its Environment Programme, Paul Steele, previously serving as Chief Operating Officer of the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) International, who said "*Businesses must be actively engaged in building a sustainable future for our planet*".



BABY TELFAIRS, FIRST IN 150 YEARS

In January of this year the first of a new generation of Telfair's skinks, (*Leiolopisma telfairii*) was discovered on Ile aux Aigrettes. The island Nature Reserve is one of two locations where Telfair's skinks were re-introduced as part of the Darwin Initiative reptile conservation project. This is the first time that the skink has reproduced naturally in the wild, outside of Round Island, for more than 150 years. The skinks survived on Round Island and nowhere else, because introduced rats never reached this remote northern sanctuary.



Baby Telfair skink

The first five baby skinks were found around the lime kiln on the western side of the island and would have hatched from one clutch of eggs; females usually lay an average of 6 eggs per clutch. The hatchlings measured approximately 10cm in length, of which 6cm is tail, and weighed around 1.6 grams. At about a quarter of the length of fully grown skink, they are only a hundredth of an adult's body weight and as such are extremely slender. Finding and capturing these new tiny additions on Ile aux Aigrettes is far from easy, but more individuals have been found at different locations across the island. Finding juveniles on Gunners Quoin, the other release location, will be more of a challenge, as the vegetation is virtually impenetrable to the field-workers, but not to the skinks.

Photo: Suzie Coombes
Text: Dr. Nik Cole



DONATIONS ON-LINE



Starting this month you can now safely give a donation to MWF with your credit card directly from the internet on: <http://www.mauritian-wildlife.org/donate>

Mauritian Wildlife Foundation is a Non profit making organisation & can only work through the support of voluntary donations. Please take this opportunity to support vital conservation work & become one of our funders.



Acknowledgements



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

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