



Newsletter

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© 2007 Gregory Guida

Wildlife photographer Gregory Guida shot this stunning photo of the Paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone bourbonnensis desolata*) while he visited MWF in connection with the ISLA Course (see p. 3)



Rare Pride Campaign in Mauritius

Some of the world's most important sites for biological diversity are threatened by a lack of awareness and local community support. Rare, an international conservation organization, works globally to equip people in the world's most threatened natural areas with the tools and motivation they need to care for their natural resources. For the last 30 years, at more than 90 sites, and in more than 40 nations, Rare has focused as much on people as on science addressing the underlying social and economic factors that create environmental threats. Rare's signature Pride campaign builds grassroots support for environmental protection by training local conservation leaders in the use of commercial marketing tactics to build awareness, influence attitudes, and enable meaningful change. Rare's mission is to conserve imperilled species and ecosystems around the world by inspiring people to care about and protect nature.

The Rare Pride Campaign will start in **December 2007** in Mauritius with a 18months national awareness campaign. Much more will be heard about this campaign!



How does habitat restoration affect pollinator communities in Mauritius?

The National Parks and Conservation Service & MWF restore heavily degraded native habitat by hand-weeding invasive alien plant species within Conservation Management Areas (CMAs). As habitat restoration in CMAs aims to restore entire ecosystems, it is crucial to understand whether pollination services by native animals, which are often essential for natural plant regeneration, are affected by the restoration scheme.

To understand these processes, Christopher Kaiser, who recently finished his PhD at the University of Zurich in collaboration with MWF,

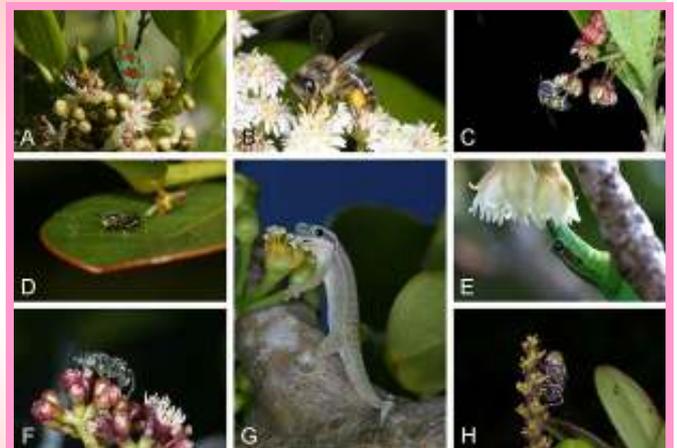


observed pollinators of all flowering plant species in Pétrin CMA and in a neighbouring unrestored area. Pollinator species richness was 25% higher in the restored habitat and the number of interactions between pollinators and flowering plants was almost double of that of the unrestored area. Of several common plant species in both sites, 57% performed better in the restored site, suggesting that habitat restoration improved reproductive success, possibly partly due to an increase in pollination quantity and quality.

The role of pollinators in habitat restoration has been largely neglected. The results of this study suggest that restoration schemes may act on several levels: first, through reducing direct competition for natural resources between native and introduced plants, and second, through reducing indirect competition for pollinators between neighbouring plants. Flowers of invasive plants, such as guava, can be very attractive to pollinators, which may result in fewer visits of the same pollinators to flowers of neighbouring native plants. By eradicating invasive introduced plants, the risk of such competition between plant species is reduced and natural regeneration of native plants is likely to increase. Consequently, conservationists should account for such interactions and also consider the possibility that introduced animals may substitute now extinct native pollinators. Finally, the success of such restoration schemes can only be assessed by monitoring species diversity of both plant and animal species and by ensuring the long term sustainability of ecological interactions.

Text & photo: Christopher Kaiser

Acknowledgements: The National Parks and Conservation Service, Christine Müller and Jane Memmott. The study was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. **This information is extracted from and published in greater detail in:** Kaiser C.N. (2006) Functional integrity of plant-pollinator communities in restored habitats in Mauritius. PhD thesis. University of Zurich, Switzerland. **Further reading:** Kaiser, C.N., Hansen, D.M. & Müller, C.B. (2008) Habitat structure affects reproductive success of the rare endemic tree *Syzygium mamillatum* (Myrtaceae) in restored and unrestored sites in Mauritius. *Biotropica*. 40,1: doi: 10.1111/j.1744-7429.2007.00345.x Kaiser, C.N., Hansen, D.M. & Müller, C.B. (in press) Exotic pest insects: another perspective on coffee and conservation. *Oryx*.



Pollinators at work

Searching for the Lighthouse Skinks



The Darwin Initiative's reptile translocation team has just re-visited Ile aux Fouquets. The 2.5ha island stands out from the others in the Mahebourg bay because of its impressive, albeit dilapidated, lighthouse. This recent trip is the third the team has made since the release of twenty Bojer's skinks from the unique and highly threatened population on Ilot Vacoas in January 07. The first four-day trip was not what you would call a success; only three individuals were re-sighted. To the team's defence you have to consider that there are only twenty Bojer's on the 25,000m² island and that these skinks are small, very fast, semi-fossorial, cryptic and inhabit dense grassland and porous coralline rock – "needle in a haystack" comes to mind. Nevertheless, the team persevered and were soon back to search again, this time re-sighting nine individuals and managing to capture a further three. Much to the team's delight, these searches resulted in discovering two new individuals within the population. This is fantastic news, because this shows that this small founding population is surviving and growing. In January 2008 an additional twenty skinks will be translocated from Ilot Vacoas to join the Ile aux Fouquets' population.

Nik Cole



MWF Hosts International Conservation Course

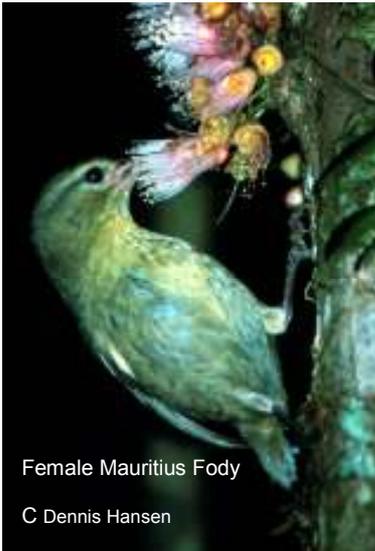
The course "Building Bridges for Biodiversity Conservation" was held in Mauritius November 2007 in Mauritius. The course was facilitated by two Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust lecturers & supported by local scientists specialised in their field of work. The ISLA Course had been designed in collaboration with the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation to meet the needs of conservationists working in government and non-government organisations in the Mascarenes. Ultimately the course has been designed to capture the lessons learnt to date in island species conservation in the Mascarenes and beyond to help build local capacity for the future of biodiversity conservation in the islands.

The course combines new understanding in island species conservation with practical skills development in hands-on species management. Topics such as island ecosystem restoration, endangered species recovery, invasive species control and eradication and the use of analogue species to replace lost ecological niches were covered.

An additional important component of the course was the focus on institutional collaboration, team-building and stakeholder interactions. This aspect had been included to assist in building local capacity to work in inter-disciplinary groups for the betterment of Mascarene biodiversity conservation. The course is now planned to take place in Mauritius on a yearly basis.

The Difference is...

Publication



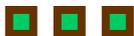
Female Mauritius Fody
C Dennis Hansen

This month sees the publication of the important work carried out as part of an MSc research dissertation by Lucy Garrett, now coordinator of the Mauritius Fody (*Foudia rubra*) project. This work formed the basis of a paper which will be released this month in the highly respected scientific journal Biological Conservation. The study focused on the interactions between the released population of Mauritius Fodies (*Foudia rubra*) on Ile aux Aigrettes and the introduced Madagascar Fody (*Foudia madagascariensis*), also present on the island and was carried out between July 2005 and Feb 2006. This work provides the first quantitative account of the feeding ecology of both species, and the habitat which they use. The Mauritius Fody feeds mainly on insects, whilst the Madagascar Fody eats seeds in more open areas. Thus the findings suggest that the Mauritius fody is capable of surviving on predator-free offshore islets and that co-

existence between the Mauritius and Madagascar Fody is possible, however, further monitoring of the two species is essential.

Publication of scientific research projects allows the important work which has been carried out on the Mauritius Fody recovery programme and on other projects in MWF to reach the greater scientific community, and this is a great achievement for MWF which we hope to continue.

Garrett, L.J.H. et al, Competition or Co-existence of reintroduced, critically..., Biol. Conserv (2007), doi: 10.1016/j.biocon.2007.07.018



New Bird book for Children

Why does the bird have wings ? Where do they make their nests and what do they eat ? What are the endemic and native birds of Mauritius & Rodrigues ?

Children will get the answer to all of these questions and many more in the new book by "Editions VIZAVI" « Our Friends the Birds ». The book is the 3rd educational book in the collection : « Curios About Nature » The objective of the books is to create awareness and sensitise the Mauritian children to get to know their environment.

The book is available in French and English and can be bought at MWF or at major Mauritian libraries for Rs 150,-



Invasive Alien Species

The problem of IAS (invasive alien species) goes hand in hand with habitat destruction and poses the greatest threat to global biodiversity. In Mauritius the abundance and distribution of the natural fauna and flora has been highly modified and shaped by IAS. Despite the fantastic work conducted in Mauritius to control predators, weed and replant vegetation, the threats from IAS continue as new alien species take a foothold. One recent introduction, which is now posing a threat to Mauritian biodiversity, is the Madagascan day gecko *Phelsuma madagascariensis grandis*. Introduced to Baie du Tombeau in the mid 1990s this large green gecko has been moved to numerous locations around Mauritius, such as Grand Baie, Pamplemousses, Port Louis, Vacoas, Floreal, Flic en Flac, Casella, Tamarin, Black River, Bel Ombre and more recently Pointe D'Esny. Observations of



Madagascan day gecko

this gecko in Mauritius reveal it as a predator and potential competitor of the smaller endemic day geckos, some of which are already highly threatened by loss of habitat. Unfortunately this invasive alien has now spread from Pointe D'Esny to Le Preskîl Hotel opposite Ile aux Aigrettes. There are no known methods by which we can remove this gecko once it has established, such that we now must remain highly vigilant to prevent its introduction to the Nature Reserve Island Ile aux Aigrettes.

Nik Cole



Awareness

MWF in partnership with the CIEL Group (local sponsor of the Pink Pigeon Program) & Winners supermarkets have made available, to shoppers at the Winner supermarkets nationwide, tissue shopping bags with a Pink Pigeon design. The objective of this action is to offer a beautiful and non pollutant alternative to the plastic bags and the hope is that the design and text will evoke the curiosity of the Mauritian to get to know more about the Pink Pigeon conservation history as well as the nations other beautiful and unique wildlife.



Pink Pigeons Are Flying into New Home in the Lower Black River Gorges



The Pink Pigeon (*Columba mayeri*) project has been undergoing some exciting developments in recent months. This endangered species, only found on Mauritius, is currently found at five subpopulations across the island, the last of which was set up at Combo in 1999. There are currently approx. 390 wild birds spread across these sites. However, this is all soon to change with the establishment of a long-awaited sixth subpopulation of birds in the Lower Black River Gorges National Park (LBRG). This new site will form a collaborative project between MWF and the National Parks and Conservation Service and will allow visitors closer access to these wonderful birds.

In June 2007 it was agreed that the MWF's proposal to set up a sixth subpopulation of birds using individuals translocated from the other five sites could go ahead. In the months that followed a lot of work took place to set up the site (preparing the release aviaries, setting up a base for the staff, controlling predators etc.) ready for the new arrivals. On November 16th 2007, the first two birds were translocated from Pigeon Wood subpopulation into the release aviaries at the LBRG. They were soon after joined by two other birds from Plaine Lievre and a fifth from Combo and they formed release group One.

Two weeks after the first birds arrived on site the second release group was ready to be transferred. The first bird from this release group came from Pigeon Wood and was soon joined by two others from Ile aux Aigrettes and another two from Combo.

To date, all 10 of the birds are doing very well and are itching to be given their freedom! To allow the birds time to adjust to their new surroundings and familiarise themselves with the location they are retained in the release aviaries for approx. four weeks prior to release. The first two cohorts will both be released before the end of year 2007 and for the first time, a released subpopulation of Pink Pigeons will be found in the lowland forests of the Black River Gorges National Park. The establishment of this sixth subpopulation into a new area of forest is a big step towards the ultimate goal of 600 free-living of Pink Pigeons and will help to secure the long-term survival of this species.

Kelly Edmunds



Acknowledgements

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Thank you for supporting us! (in alphabetic order)

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- ❖ Send a Cheque or postal order, made payable to Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Grannum Road, Vacoas, Mauritius, OR
- ❖ Send a direct credit, Beneficiary Bank: The Mauritius Commercial Bank Ltd.- Port Louis – Mauritius Swift BIC: MCBLMUMU / Account Number: 010204792 / Account Currency: MUR OR
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Please include your full name and contacts including e-mail address, with all donations & address your correspondence or questions to:

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