



Newsletter

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Photo: Christopher Kaiser

The endemic Pic-pic pollinating a *Syzygium mamillatum*
Learn more about pollination & seed dispersal
in the Mauritian Rainforest (page 3)



Be Proud of Your Gecko Island

For the first time in Mauritius, a national awareness campaign on conservation will take place. The mascot is a Gecko. The Ornate day gecko (*Phelsuma ornata*), has been renamed to "Miss Ti" because of its head-pattern and thus also inspired by the famous TV series "Mr T".

Miss Ti will help promote the importance of the gecko's role in the local biodiversity, some of which are critically endangered and only found on the southeast islets of Mauritius. The campaign aims to promote the unique biodiversity in Mauritius to, for and with the Mauritian people and its local communities. Through this Pride campaign done in close corporation with the international RARE Organisation it is hoped that the damaging human behaviour such as littering and lighting of barbeques out of designated areas will stop and that the Mauritians will start playing an active protecting role to safeguard their natural heritage. After 6 months of project planning activities will be held from mid September 2008 to April 2009 where the local communities will be able to discover their gecko.

This project is supported by: Rare, Maurilait Ltd, Veronique Barnard & uptoten.com & Darwin Initiative UK



Plant Propagation Training in Ireland & England



Harel Begué, Nursery Officer, and **A**nieta (Sweetie) Shan Yu, Nature Reserve Officer, from MWF Rodrigues had the opportunity through the International Dendrology Scholarship to travel to Ireland and England for six weeks of training in plant propagation techniques. They spent four weeks with the National Botanic Gardens of Glasnevin, one week with Chester Zoo, and ended their training with a three day visit of Kew Gardens. They were trained on different methods of propagation including leaf cutting, simple cutting, air layering, grafting, and budding. This has enhanced and enforced their skills and will allow the MWF team to better propagate challenging rare plant species. Their time abroad was an enriching experience through which they were also able to observe various conservation projects throughout the UK.

Text: Andrea Waterstone – The training was supported by the International Dendrology Society & Air Mauritius



Sweetie & Harel practicing cuttings at Chester Zoo

Nesting attempt after successful Release



Olive White-eye

The Olive White-eye (*Zosterops chloronothos*) Recovery Project has been running since 2005. During this time MWF has been able to monitor 84 nests from the wild population in the Black River Gorges National Park. Out of these 84 nests, MWF successfully rescued 24 from predation that were transferred to the Gerald Durrell Endemic Wildlife Sanctuary for hand rearing. These rescues have resulted in the release of 34 Olive White-eyes on to Ile aux Aigrettes. The current population is 14 forming 7 pairs.

The 2007/08 season was a great success with the release of 18 Olive White-Eyes onto the Ile aux Aigrettes. One of the main highlights during this 2007/08 season was the first breeding attempts from

the Olive White-eye pairs on the island. There were a total of 20 nesting attempts throughout the season 3 of which produced chicks that unfortunately did not fledge.

This coming season MWF aims to release around 10 birds onto Ile aux Aigrettes and also hope to see the first fledglings from the released population. As well as the intense management MWF also plans to closely monitor both the wild population in the National Park and on Ile aux Aigrettes by using nest cameras to learn more about these small and mysterious birds.

The Olive White-eye is critically endangered and the total population is estimated to be 200 pairs (Safford, 1997b). With a successful breeding on Ile aux Aigrettes this Mauritian endemic bird will hopefully increase in numbers.

Text: Gwen Maggs Photo: @Gregory Guida
This project is supported by Chester Zoo UK, Conservation International, Gamma Civic Ltd, Sun Resorts, Rufford Maurice Laing, Ruth Smart Foundation

Pollination & Seed Dispersal In The Mauritian Rainforest

Mutualistic interactions between plants and animals, such as pollination and seed dispersal, are of critical importance in successful forest regeneration in Mauritius. Many forest trees need pollinators to set fruit, and fruit-eating animals to disperse the seeds. Christopher Kaiser, Dennis Hansen and Christine Müller from the University of Zurich, in collaboration with MWF, have recently studied these two processes in one of the many critically endangered endemic Mauritian plant species, *Syzygium mamillatum* (Myrtaceae), in the largest known population of this tree in and around Brise Fer CMA (Conservation Management Area).

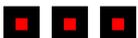


The researchers discovered that generalist flower-visiting birds, both endemic and introduced, provided a good pollination service, but that altering of forest structure during clear-cutting of invasive plants in CMAs may influence pollination interactions negatively, at least until regeneration of native plants has reached sapling stage. Afterwards, in a study of the seed dispersal and seedling establishment of *S. mamillatum*, they found that there are no animals currently eating the fruits. That is, with respect to seed dispersal, the forests of Mauritius are filled with ghosts – extinct animals and their extinct interactions with plants. For *S. mamillatum*, it turned out to be critical for seeds to be dispersed away from the mother tree to survive and thrive in the seedling stage. Luckily, the researchers also illustrated how extant animals can be used to resurrect the ghosts, by replacing some of the extinct Mauritian species. In this case, they used giant Aldabran tortoises as stand-ins for the extinct Mauritian giant tortoises. The tortoises ate the *S. mamillatum* fruits, and gut-passed seeds in tortoise faeces put out in the forest germinated successfully.

Kaiser, Hansen & Müller (2008) Habitat structure affects reproductive success of the rare endemic tree *Syzygium mamillatum* (Myrtaceae) in restored and un-restored sites in Mauritius. *Biotropica*, 40, 86-94.

Hansen, Kaiser & Müller (2008) Endangered endemic plants on oceanic islands: seed dispersal, seedling establishment, and the use of ecological analogues. PLoS ONE, Open Access article: <http://www.plosone.org/doi/pone.0002111>

Text & photo: Dr. Dennis Hansen



Rodrigues Golden Fruit Bat- Population Surveys

In the 1970's, the Rodrigues Golden Fruit Bat, *Pteropus rodricensis*, had a population of only about 150 individuals. This fruit bat is the only mammal left in Rodrigues and it is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The Golden Fruit Bat plays an irreplaceable role in the eco-system as an important pollinator and disposer of plants. MWF Rodrigues works to protect the Rodrigues Golden Fruit bat and with the help of Chester Zoo UK, Forestry Services, non-governmental organisations, schools, and community volunteers conduct intra-island bat count surveys three times per year at 11 roost locations throughout Rodrigues. This year, surveys were conducted in February and July and the third survey will be carried out in November 2008. Recent surveys estimate the bat population to be approximately 5,500 individuals. The population can be considerably reduced during cyclones due to strong winds and post-cyclone food shortages. As the last large cyclone in Rodrigues was Kalundé in March 2003, another large cyclone is expected in the upcoming years; thus, it is important to continue to safeguard this species which is also being done thanks to the long-term support of Philadelphia Zoo US that support a local education program



Text: Andrea Waterstone
This project is supported by Philadelphia Zoo US & Chester Zoo UK



Mauritius Fody

The Mauritius Fody (*Foudia rubra*) is still classified as Critically Endangered, though since its establishment on Ile aux Aigrettes population size has continued to rise. Over the past four years the number of territories and pairs has increased, and this year was no exception, with a total of 50 pairs at the end of the season and 146 birds (end March 2008). Rates of breeding success and productivity have slowed, but 50 fledglings were still produced from 18 pairs with a staggering 291 nesting attempts monitored. Chances of survival on Ile aux Aigrettes remain high at 72%. These interesting findings may indicate that the Ile aux Aigrettes Fody population is starting to reach density dependence, and are encouraging for the long-term sustainability of the population on this islet.



Last season also saw the completion of a proposal for establishing a second sub-population of Mauritius Fodies on Round Island. Presentations were given in order to gain approval and support from Government bodies. Successful permission and backing was achieved, and preparations for the exciting new translocation of Mauritius Fodies to Round Island are underway.

Text: Lucy Garrett 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





Orange-tail Skink Translocation



As part of Darwin Initiative Reptile Translocation project teams from MWF and NPCS

(National Parks and Conservation Services) staff embarked on the translocation of the orange-tail skink, (currently an un-described species of *Gongylomorphus*) from Flat Island to Gunner's Quoin.

Flat Island is the only islet supporting two species of *Gongylomorphus*. One of them is the Orange-tail skink. The skink was only discovered in 1995. It is believed to be the lowland form of the Macchabé skink, but is restricted to Flat Island.

Plans to increase tourism on Flat Island increase the risk of introduction by alien invasive predators, such as the wolf snake, shrew and rats. To protect against the potential loss of this unique skink, its translocation to the nearby predator free island, Gunners Quoin, was deemed necessary.

A total of 84 skinks were caught between the 19th and 28th of February 2008. The captures were made by hand and baited pitfall. Two of the captured individuals were deemed unsuitable for translocation so were released back to their capture locations. The lizards were held captive for up to 3 days at the National Coast Guard (NCG) station on the island and were fed and watered daily. Each skink is identifiable by its unique marking and therefore allows progress monitoring if recaptured. The translocation of 82 individuals (32 males, 38 females and 12 sub-adults) was carried out in February 2008 by the NCG boat. The skinks were translocated in individual cloth bags within a well aerated barrel.

The reptiles were released in paths and tunnels cut through the vegetation where an ideal humid microhabitat prevails. This region was not yet colonised by the recently released Telfair's skink, *Leiolopisma telfairii*, also part of the Darwin project.

During a trip to Gunners Quoin to clear transect lines, relay new cords and confirm the absence of rodents in April 2008, four orange-tail skinks were re-sighted and one caught. During a monitoring trip in June 2008 a further 10 individuals were sighted, one of which was caught and found to be gravid (with eggs). All initial observations show the skinks to active and in good health.

Text: Rouben Mootoocurpen e & Zayd Jhumka
This project is supported by the Darwin Initiative UK & National Park & Conservation Services

How Can You Become Involved?

If you are part of a Corporate various activities linked to Corporate Social Responsibility are possible to organise with MWF or you can simply become a Friend, please contact us for more information on: lrffray@mauritian-wildlife.org

You can also give an on-line donation to MWF 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.



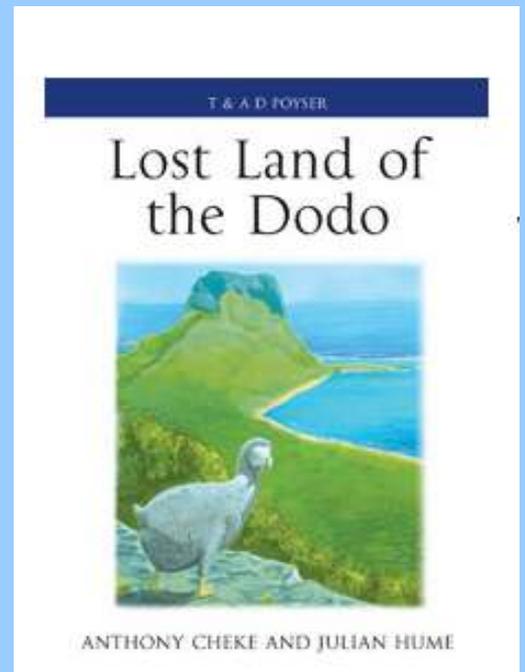
New Publication

MWF is proud to recommend the new book by Anthony Cheke & Julian Hume the “Lost Land of the Dodo”.

The Mascarene islands in the southern Indian Ocean — Mauritius, Réunion and Rodrigues — were once home to an extraordinary range of birds and reptiles. Evolving on these isolated volcanic islands in the absence of mammalian predators or competitors, the land was dominated by giant tortoises, parrots, skinks and geckos, burrowing boas, flightless rails & herons, and of course (in Mauritius) the Dodo.

Uninhabited and only discovered in the 1500s, colonisation by European settlers in the 1600s led to dramatic changes in the ecology of the islands; the birds and tortoises were slaughtered indiscriminately while introduced rats, cats, pigs and monkeys destroyed their eggs, the once-extensive forests logged, and invasive introduced plants from all over the tropics devastated the ecosystem. The now-familiar icon of extinction, the Dodo, was gone from Mauritius within 50 years of human settlement, and over the next 150 years many of the Mascarenes’ other native vertebrates followed suit.

The product of over 30 years research by Anthony Cheke, *Lost Land of the Dodo* provides a comprehensive yet hugely enjoyable account of the story of the islands’ changing ecology, interspersed with human stories, the islands’ biogeographical anomalies, and much else. Many French publications, old and new, especially for Réunion, are discussed and referenced in English for the first time.



The book is richly illustrated with maps and contemporary illustrations of the animals and their environment, many of which have rarely been reprinted before. Illustrated box texts look in detail at each extinct vertebrate species, while Julian Hume’s superb colour plates bring many of the extinct birds to life. *Lost Land of the Dodo* provides the definitive account of this tragic yet remarkable fauna, and is a must-read for anyone interested in islands, their ecology and the history of our relationship with the world around us.

Published by T&AD Poyser, an imprint of A&C Black Ltd, London Format: Hardback, 464 pages. 252x188 mm. ISBN 9780713665444 Illustrations: [NB: published in the USA by Yale University Press]

To purchase the book please contact: Dodo Books / The Inner Bookshop
111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1HE, UK: www.dodobooks.com
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In Mauritius the book can be purchased at the Printemps Bookshop - Vacoas



Ile aux Aigrettes

Ile aux Aigrettes Nature Reserve, a 26ha offshore islet, harbours Mauritius's last remnant of coastal ebony forest and also rare endemic fauna such as the Pink pigeon, the Mauritius Fody and the Telfair skink. Important education facilities are currently being upgraded and the staff is being trained to better respond to the needs of both ecotourism and local education.

This project is supported by The Japanese Government & Chester Zoo UK

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



Acknowledgements



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

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Edited by Lone Raffray

