



Seychelles

template for conservation

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1600 kilometers from the East African coast in the Indian Ocean lies a group of 115 islands that cartographers marked as the ‘Seychelles.’

Travel brochures promote these luxuriant tropical islands as paradise beneath the equatorial sun. By our reckoning, it’s one of the rare places in the world where nature and humanity live in idyllic harmony.

The Seychelles’, remote location from the rest of civilization has perhaps preserved its rich diversity of flora and avifauna rarely found elsewhere in the world, fairly well. Indigenous to *Vallee de Mai* on the island of Praslin, the *Coco de Mer* (*Lodoicea maldivica*) whose archaic botanical name, *callipyge* meaning ‘beautiful rump’ in Greek, is one such rarity and an inevitable banter topic, weighing in as the heaviest coconut at 20 kg or more! The Seychelles is also home to one of the world’s most successful nature reserves. Not more than 1 km in diameter, the Cousin Island Nature Reserve founded by Bird Life International and run by Nature Seychelles, it is home to 300’000 nesting seabirds. Neither distance nor isolation is sufficient protection for the local wildlife; if not for this Reserve, and the dedication of its people, the

Seychelles Warbler and the Seychelles Magpie Robin would’ve been extinct. So effective is the conservation programme at the Reserve that these once endangered species live no longer in fear of humans and approach us freely. Dishon Murage, Seacology’s Kenya based East Africa field representative’s expression, “It is such a humbling experience to see conservation’s success within one’s own lifetime. I feel lucky to be here,” is an apt reverberation of great hope for conservation.

Besides the birds, this Reserve is also the western Indian Ocean’s largest concentration for the hawksbill turtles. Aldabra Atoll in the Seychelles is home of the Giant Tortoises (*Geochelone gigantea*) suspected to live beyond centenarians. In our experience, it appears that a critical factor for conservation programmes to succeed is its leadership and its people. The Director of Nature Seychelles, the charismatic Nirmal Shah, and his father before him, have tirelessly inspired their people for more than 30 years to achieve what they have now.



The waters surrounding Cousin Island is a *no-take* zone marine reserve, requiring demarcation buoys for the local fishing community to know where fishing is prohibited. Signages were installed for visitors to appreciate the bird and turtle species living within the reserve and their importance in conservation. With their track record of excellent leadership and management, Seacology was inspired to assist Nature Seychelles to meet these needs. Our assistance included state of the art composting toilets for rangers and visitors as another important step in keeping the ecosystem pristine.

Seacology’s mission continues undeterred and most pertinently affirmed in Shah’s commitment. Many islands in the Indian Ocean are, in the face of global ocean changes, tethering on the brink of catastrophe. Because of the clear and present danger, it is essential for dedicated organizations to support the preservation of these islands. The Seychelles is not only a great tourist destination, but an excellent conservation template for emulation. 