

**Aride island, the flagship island of ICS**



# 20 it is!

Legally declared as an NGO under the Registration of Associations Act of Seychelles on April 10, 2001, the Island Conservation Society (ICS) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. What started out as a small NGO by only four trustees is now an established conservation organisation striving to sustainably manage island ecosystems.

ICS was created by its founders as a vehicle for their involvement in biodiversity conservation in Seychelles. The founding trustees were Adrian Skerrett (chairman), Glenn Savy (vice-chairman), Dr. Gerard Rocamora (secretary), and Professor Rolph Payet (treasurer), who were soon joined by others with similar concerns including Dr. Jeanne A. Mortimer, Pat Matyot, Eddie Belle and Bernard Georges.

As a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to promote the conservation and restoration of island ecosystems, sustainable development of islands, and awareness of their vulnerability and vital importance to the planet's biodiversity, ICS is proud of its two decades of achievements. "Conservation is at the heart of our very survival as an island nation. ICS can be proud of what it has achieved in its first twenty years but at the same time we have barely scratched the surface. A great deal remains to be done, and there is room for everybody to contribute to this," says Adrian Skerrett, founding chairman of ICS. Herewith is a timeline of our achievements worth sharing to all.

**2001**

- On April 10, Island Conservation Society is registered as an association under the Registration of Associations Act of Seychelles.
- Shortly after, a Board of Trustees is formed, consisting of a dozen of personalities from local or foreign origin with an interest in nature conservation.
- The eradication of Black rats from Anonyme Island starts, conducted by Dr Gerard Rocamora.
- Support is provided to the Seychelles White-eye Recovery Programme, initiated by the Ministry of Environment and led by Dr Gerard Rocamora, with the intention of ensuring the survival of the species and introducing this endemic bird to other islands.
- ICS produces some informative and scientific materials on the Seychelles' fauna.

**2002**

- Chairman of ICS, Adrian Skerrett, meets with Chairman of Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) of UK, owners of Aride Island, the largest nature reserve of the granitic islands of Seychelles. On behalf of ICS, Adrian proposes that ICS should take over management of Aride.
- The eradication of Black rats on Anonyme Island is successful.

**2003**

- On July 13, a MoU is signed with Islands Development Company (IDC), appointing ICS as conservation advisors for IDC islands.
- In October, RSWT agrees to a trial management of Aride by ICS with immediate effect.
- ICS launches the English version of a book entitled 'Zwazo Sesel', the first book to give Creole name to every species of bird that has been recorded in Seychelles. A book written by Adrian Skerrett, Dr. Gerard Rocamora, and Pat Matyot.

**2004**

- ICS UK, a UK Registered Charity established by ICS trustees and the Cadbury family, is formed in view of

facilitating fund raising from UK for Aride Island and ICS Seychelles.

- A three-year lease is signed with RSWT, setting a long list of conservation and management targets to be achieved by ICS. To date, ICS is still managing Aride Island Nature Reserve, home to the largest number of breeding seabird species, endemic reptiles and other flagship species of Seychelles.

**2005**

- ICS implements another project led by Dr. Gerard Rocamora funded mainly by the Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial (FFEM) and other small grants.

**2006**

- ICS launches its first DVD on Aride Island Nature Reserve narrated by Sir David Attenborough.

**2007**

- On January 29, an agreement is signed with IDC and endorsed by the Ministry of Environment, superseding and strengthening the 2003 MoU, establishing a long-term basis for the conservation, restoration and enhancement of the islands under IDC management.
- After successful completion of conservation targets implemented since 2004, the freehold of Aride island is granted to Island Conservation Society UK (ICS UK).
- Alphonse island Conservation Centre is opened, the first ICS conservation centre in the outer islands of Seychelles and within the Alphonse group.
- ICS launches the French version of its Zwazo Sesel book, funded by the French Embassy.

**2008**

- Desroches Island Conservation Centre is opened, the second conservation centre in the outer islands of Seychelles and within the Amirantes group.
- Island Foundations are established to foster partnerships on all IDC islands with a view to invite various stakeholders to finance conservation in the outer islands of Seychelles. These include

representatives from IDC, Ministry of Environment, hotel managers and villa owners, and ICS, which acts as secretary of the Foundations.

**2009**

- The FFEM project concludes. Major achievements include eradication of rats on Ile du Nord (North Island Ltd), Conception, Ile aux Rats and three islands of Cosmoledo Atoll, as well as eradication of cats and Barn Owls on Ile du Nord, and cats on Grande Ile and Grand Polyte. Seychelles White-eyes are introduced to Ile du Nord, Black Mud Terrapins to Ile du Nord and Aride. Land habitats (over 40 ha) were restored on Ile du Nord and Aride with thousands of native trees planted and alien species removed.

**2010**

- ICS partners with IDC to launch the first edition of the 'Outer Islands of Seychelles' book, which tells the human and environmental story of these remote islands for the first time.

**2011**

- ICS establishes a conservation centre on Silhouette, the third largest island of the granitic group of islands in Seychelles.
- After having obtained an MSc at Université de La Réunion, Seychellois Elvina Henriette defends her PhD at the Muséum Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris), as well as French student Gaëtan Galman. This is a delayed major output of the FFEM project.
- Aride Shearwater Project starts on Aride, with the aim of acquiring knowledge on the ecology of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica* and the Tropical Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*, with funding provided by Fondation Total, CNRS Chizé, James Cadbury Foundation, Miguel Torres wineries and ICS.

**2012**

- Big-headed Ant Project starts on Aride Island, with the aim of eradicating one of the most invasive ant species, the Big-headed Ant *Pheidole megacephala* that were having an impact on White-tailed Tropicbird nestlings, and on invertebrate populations, especially native ants, native plants and the ecosystem as a whole.
- On March 18, ICS creates its Facebook page: ICS Seychelles.

**2013**

- Pangaea Project begins in the outer islands, with the aim of strengthening understanding on key environmental threats related to climate change and other anthropogenic pressures, and assist in determining conservation management actions.
- Aride island reduces its dependency on electricity produced from diesel generators and goes solar.

**2014**

- Seychelles Sheath-tailed Bat Project begins on Silhouette, with the aim of increasing national awareness of the Sheath-tailed Bat and the risk of extinction through public education and outreach.
- Outer Islands Project is implemented, with the aim of promoting the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial and marine biodiversity in the Seychelles' Outer islands.
- ICS-led Seychelles White-eye conservation activities conclude with remarkable improvement of the bird population on some of the inner granitic islands, for example, the 37 White-eyes transferred from Conception to Frégate Island in 2001 had increased to c.130 birds by 2010, and the 25 birds transferred to Ile du Nord in 2007 to c.70 birds by 2013. Responsibility for this programme is passed over to the UniSey Island Biodiversity and Conservation Centre.

**2015**

- Farquhar Island Conservation Centre is opened, the third conservation centre in the outer islands of Seychelles and the first within the Farquhar group.

**2016**

- Farquhar Island Conservation Centre is opened, the third conservation centre in the outer islands of Seychelles and the first within the Farquhar group.

- Aride Shearwater Project concludes following the PhD defense of ICS Research Officer Licia Calabrese at Université Pierre et Marie Curie, a research supervised by Dr Vincent Bretagnolle (CNRS Chizé) and Dr Gérard Rocamora. Information collected contributes to improved scientific monitoring of the shearwater populations and efficient conservation measures on Aride and their replicability on other islands.

- Pangaea Project concludes. Information collected provided rich insight on the biological diversity across the islands of Boudeuse, Etoile, Remire, African Banks, Cosmoledo, Farquhar, Astove, St. Pierre, Providence and Bancs Providence.
- Seychelles Sheath-tailed Bat Project concludes after a series of educational activities organized in the community with schools and other groups. Training was conducted with various conservation practitioners on the critically endangered bat species. Participants developed a better understanding on its ecology and how to perform scientific monitoring. To date, the ICS resident team on Silhouette is still conducting regular roost monitoring and maintenance of bait traps for predators.

- Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund Project (CEPF) begins on Silhouette, with the aim of improving conservation management on the island through partnerships.

- Turtle Tracking Project begins in the Alphonse Group, with the aim of tracking migrations of 10 adult turtle nesting at Alphonse & St. Françoise Atolls.

- Seychelles Manta Ray Project begins in the outer islands, with the overall objective of improving the current knowledge of the connectivity and seasonal patterns, spatial ecology and habitat use of manta ray species within Seychelles.

- ICS partners with SIOTI and IDC in the FAD Watch Project. The aim of the project is to intercept and remove Fish aggregating devices (FADs) before they cause more harm to the marine and coastal habitats as well as associated species around the islands of Aride, Silhouette, Alphonse, Desroches and Farquhar. This project is still ongoing.

- To commemorate 40 years of nature conservation on Aride Island, ICS publishes its first informative book on Aride Island Special Reserve, entitled 'Aride Island, tread lightly', edited by Tim Sands and Adrian Skerrett.

**2017**

- SeyCCAT funds the Giant Trevallies (GT) Project on St François and Alphonse, with the aim of examining the spatial ecology and catch and release response of the GT. In addition, it provides valuable insights as to how they respond to the potential pressures imposed by recreational angling for better handling and conservation management actions.

- Red-footed Booby Project starts in the Alphonse Group in collaboration with the UniSey IBC center to determine the movements of Red-footed Boobies in the western Indian Ocean and other potentially unknown roosting areas.

- ICS adopts additional technologies to gather scientific data from the field based on available literature and expert advice, for example, the Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags are being used to track movement patterns, grower rates, and population size of Giant Trevallies caught by recreational anglers around Alphonse.

**2018**

- CEPF Project concludes. Conservation management plan and biosecurity plan for Silhouette were developed and are still being implemented. A study concluded that Silhouette can be used as a potential translocation site to host a population of Seychelles Black Parrot.

- Seychelles Fishing Authority funds the SEYFISH Project on Desroches and Farquhar, with the aim of determining the level and extent of contamination in different marine species caused by marine pollution.

- White-tailed Tropicbird foraging study begins on Aride led by Dr Annette Fayet (University of Oxford) and Dr Gerard Rocamora (UniSey IBC centre). The aim of the project is to develop a better understanding on the feeding ecology of White-tailed Tropicbirds using GPS tracking devices. This project is ongoing.

- SeyCCAT funds a second project, with the aim of gathering information on the population size estimates, geographical distribution and trends for two of the main breeding colonies of the Red-footed Booby (RFB) in Seychelles. Moreover, to identify the foraging areas exploited by this species and its habitat selection at sea around Farquhar, UniSey IBC centre, the Université de la Réunion and the Zoological Society of London are partners of this project.

- ICS strengthens its partnership with the Seychelles Maritime Academy to accommodate post-secondary students for work attachments on the islands of Aride and Silhouette.

- ICS and IDC produces a second edition of the 'Outer Islands of Seychelles' with new chapters and additional information.

**2019**

- Big-headed Ant Project concludes with signs that eradication has been successful. To date, ongoing monitoring of the invasive species continues and biosecurity measures are also enforced to control the spread of the Big-headed Ant on Aride.

- ICS contributes to another project to develop a better understanding on the regional value of the British Indian Ocean Territory Marine Protected Area to seabirds during the non-breeding period. This project is still ongoing.
- ICS reviews and improves its database comprising various data sets on marine and terrestrial species. To date, this is still work in progress

**2020**

- The Outer Islands Project receives a satisfactory score at its terminal evaluation in December.

- In view of the devastating impacts of plastic pollution on island ecosystems and species, ICS helps to build on previous studies to evaluate the risk of marine plastic on several small pelagic seabird species. This project is still ongoing.

- ICS participates in a Project, with the aim of predicting and mapping at-sea the foraging areas of seabird species breeding across the entire Great Barrier Reef by building on existing global models and using tracking data from multiple colonies across the globe.

- ICS improves its Media and Communications Strategy and Programme to facilitate and maintain effective communication to all its internal and external stakeholders.

- ICS improves its Monitoring Protocols and Anti-Poaching Programme on Aride Island Special Reserve.

- ICS develops its first Education for Sustainability Programme so as to raise awareness on various critical issues affecting the fragile island ecosystems towards a call for action from different groups in society in favour of environmental stewardship and advocacy.

- ICS develops its first Covid-19 SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) to prevent and control the spread of the virus on Aride and is also awarded the Covid Safe tourism label for the special reserve.

- ICS launches its Instagram and Twitter accounts.

- ICS improves its main website and that of Aride Island with a new design, enhanced layout and additional information.
- Following sustained habitat management and maintenance of 53 rodenticide bait stations on Alphonse Island, the Wedge-tailed Shearwater burrows increases from 17 in 2017 to 71 in December 2020.

- ICS receives news from the Seychelles Bird Records Committee that Alphonse and other outer islands where it operates are hotspots for migratory birds. To date, around 110 different species were identified in the Alphonse Group.

- All targets for the SeyCCAT Giant Trevally (GT) Project were achieved with a total of more than 450 GTs tagged and closely monitored.
- The population of the Manta Rays around the Alphonse Group are healthy and growing, with around 61 rays recorded as part of the Manta Ray Project launched in 2016.

- ICS conservation teams across islands continue with the vegetation restoration programme by planting more native plants across various designated areas with the support of IDC and investors on the islands.

- Tortoise adoption Programme on Desroches continues to support the breeding of Aldabra Giant Tortoises on Desroches to prevent predation of baby tortoises by birds and rats.

- The ongoing Red-footed Booby Project funded by SeyCCAT has reached most of its targets for year 2020 aimed at studying the population of this seabird, its habitat preferences, and movements at sea using GPS devices and drones.

- In collaboration with The Ocean Project and IDC, around 674 kg of litter were collected along specific shores of the atoll.
- ICS participates as a guest speaker in the Sea Turtle Festival webinar.

- Said Harryba participates in a short video for the BBC StoryWorks Programme in partnership with the Seychelles Tourism Board. The Media Programme promotes stories on various themes so as to inspire curious minds across the globe, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- A holistic assessment of Aride's current and future power needs is carried out successfully. One of the recommendations emphasises on the need to upgrade the solar PV system installed since 2013. ICS welcomes donations in any form to assist with the realisation of this project.

- Following resurgence in poaching events on Aride, ICS partners with the Seychelles Coast Guard to counter poaching in the reserve.

**2021**

- To commemorate the National Protected Area Day, ICS participates as a guest speaker in an online symposium organised by SIF.

- ICS partners with the Ministry of Education for the Trust for Sustainable Living International Schools Essay Competition and Debate based on what can be done to address the sixth mass extinction, conserve and increase biodiversity and achieve the UN's 2050 vision of Living in Harmony with Nature.

- 26th March, ICS and the Seychelles Coast Guard formalises cooperation to counter poaching in the Aride Island Special Reserve by signing an MoU which is seen as a profound and important milestone for both parties and Seychelles. The first time that the Coast Guard signs an MoU with a non-governmental organisation in the area of protection of biodiversity, biodiversity law enforcement and compliance with domestic legislation.



**One of the ICS Board of Trustees meetings held in 2002**



**Planting more native trees on the outer islands**



**Sea turtle tagging**



**Seychelles Maritime Academy students ringing a Seychelles Magpie Robin**



**The Seychelles Sheath-tailed bat, one of the endemic species that we continue to monitor**

Last words from the founding chairman, Adrian Skerrett: "Conservation is about saving the planet including the human race. We should all be conservationists, because we should all be concerned to protect the earth's resources for future generations."

We wish to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all the honorary members and trustees of ICS, Islands Development Company, Seychelles Government, donors/businesses, partners, and other members of the public for the support given throughout the twenty years of service in biodiversity conservation. We look forward to strengthening partnerships so that we can collectively tackle various issues that continue to impact our fragile island ecosystems.

ICS reiterates its commitment to promoting and protecting the fragile island ecosystems that belong to every Seychellois with the support of organisations and the wider community.

To learn more about ICS, please visit our websites: [www.islandconservationseychelles.com](http://www.islandconservationseychelles.com) [www.arideisland.com](http://www.arideisland.com)

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Contributed by ICS management



**Intercepting and removing FADs**



**Conducting coral reef survey**



**Monitoring the eagle ray population in the Alphonse lagoon**



**Part of the monitoring programmes across islands also requires collection of data**



**Our conservation programmes across islands include monitoring of species such as the Aldabra Giant Tortoise**