

# Filling tourist void, students aid scientific studies on Seychelles' Aride island

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Lesperance said that this experience has provided a hands-on opportunity to see what it takes to work in the field. (Island Conservation Society)

Seychelles' remote Aride island is using more students as volunteers to continue its scientific monitoring programmes which have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Island Conservation Society** (ICS) which manages Aride, a nature reserve, said in a press release that the island is struggling with a loss of tourist revenue and the departure of many volunteers.

"One positive to arise, however, is the expansion of an **internship programme** between ICS and **Seychelles Maritime Academy (SMA)**," said the Society.

When Aride lost a majority of its volunteers, professor Michael Barbe of the Maritime Academy "responded to the call for assistance and began sending more students than in previous years. Thanks to this collaborative internship program, Aride's scientific monitoring programs have been able to continue," added the Society.

Aride Island is the northernmost granitic island in the Seychelles. Over 1.2 million seabirds regularly breed on the island including the world's largest colony of lesser noddy, the largest Seychelles population of roseate tern and the world's largest colony of tropical shearwater.



Bhageerutty together with Lesperance arrived on Aride in August.

Two volunteers under the internship, Kiran Bhageerutty and Jean-Yves Lesperance, arrived on Aride in August and both are working towards an Advanced Certificate in Fishery Science and Fish Technology.

Some of the work that Bhageerutty and Lesperance have been involved in includes monitoring Aride's population of Seychelles Magpie Robin, analysing invertebrate pitfall traps, patrolling the beach for nesting sea turtles, and cleaning up beach debris.

Bhageerutty says that he "enjoyed monitoring the Seychelles Magpie Robins as well as rescuing seabirds from *Pisonia grandis* seeds. These seeds are very sticky and when a bird accidentally gets entangled, it cannot free itself and will die if left unassisted. This phenomenon has earned this tree the nickname bird-catcher tree."

Lesperance's interest in conservation comes from seeing what happens when conservation is not a priority and how an area can thrive with proper management.

"This experience has provided a hands-on opportunity to see what it takes to work in the field," he said.

Aride island is an important source of biodiversity and consequently the wildlife needs to be monitored and demographic trends analyzed and researched to understand the health of the island ecosystem. The most important work on the island is the monitoring of species and populations of birds, marine life, vegetation, and wildlife in general that can make ecosystem dynamics understandable.