

A chat with... SAID HARRYBA

A Ranger Turned Assistant Conservation Officer for the Island Conservation Society (ICS)

by A. Vandervalk

The Island Conservation Society (ICS) is a non-governmental organisation and employs 9 Rangers who are stationed in 7 islands/atolls of the Seychelles archipelago. The vast majority of their work involves monitoring various marine and terrestrial species; rangers also serve as a deterrence to illicit behaviour.

Said Harryba, originally a ranger who is stationed home his home Island, Silhouette, started as a Ranger after his studies at the Maritime Academy and has, since then, worked on various other islands.

Promoted to Assistant Conservation Officer, the next step in his career, Mr. Harryba hopes to achieve more after completing a BSc in Environment on a University level.

What does a Ranger do?

A ranger is the first step in conservation commencement. A ranger is the person that collects data on the field, and they form the group that assists the conservation officers to help implement biodiversity programmes on the islands in Seychelles. As well as that, a ranger may go through times when they patrol to ensure the safety of the ecosystem and environment, ensuring that everything is running smoothly by communicating to higher officers. We also monitor specific species, at sea and on land.

What made you want to become a ranger?

Because I grew up on an island; the



inner island of Silhouette. I have always been interested in the environment, and I started to watch documentaries and nature channels when I was in post-secondary, I believe.

I think this added on to the exposure and interest. It encouraged me to lean towards this career path and I really enjoy it and would like to progress and take it further in the future.

Do our ecosystems face a lot of damage?

Yes! Coral is one of the habitats in Seychelles and around the world that faces a lot of danger on a wide scale; this is known as coral bleaching. This happens when there is an increase in temperatures in the ocean which leads to the corals dying. This is one of the obvious sightings in conservation that experts and even by-passers may notice. It is

something that is regularly observed, and it's an aspect that is affecting the country on a large scale.

What ways can we, as the community, help scouts and help the environment?

Firstly, you could become a ranger, enter into the conservationist society and make a difference to the ecosystem and to the country. There are people that you come across and talk to, let's say in terms of poaching, of which they would not consider it to be an issue, because of the tradition they grew up in.

If the matter was brought forward to them, highlighting that there is a need to protect and save turtles in their natural habitat, they would defend themselves based on the culture that was broken into them and that they were brought up in. The move to help the environment would be to change one's mind-set; this would be one of the biggest ways to help us make our jobs easier as there are people that aren't easy talk to. They are hard headed and set on doing things the way they were done in the past. Just a change in perspective would do the trick.

Is your job interesting and educational?

Yes, you do learn a lot from the minute



you step foot into this job of conservation. In fact, the whole job is just about learning, learning, learning; the journey consists of mostly this. We also are involved in a lot of educational awareness raising whereby we conduct talks and presentations for visitors consisting of a lot of school children and youth. It broadens their knowledge and awareness. School children visit the island and it is our job to educate them. So yes, it has the educational aspect.

Are there illegal activities that conservationists come across?

Illegal activities are all over in all areas of society, so of course we will come across it in conservation activities. Poaching is the main illegal activity we come across; it's not the only one but it is one of the main ones that all conservation communities are faced with.

Seabird and illegal fishing is another we face frequently for example in the Seychelles marine park. It is an official protected area that is not meant to be touched and disturbed, but people still chose not to listen and harm the environment, fish and other sea life.

In terms of helping and giving back to the environment as opposed to only protecting it, what gets done?

Conservation is actually all about giving back to the environment. I would say planting is one, especially where I work, there is a nursery for plants and native/

endemic species. There are also rewilding projects for animal protection and stations for giant tortoises to protect them, as well as bird species and bats.

There are also night shifts that go on to monitor protected animals and ensure their safety as night time is one of the times where poaching is common.

What are examples of things that you and your compound have done as projects?

There are night safaris in place where groups of people are brought out for tours to get a better understanding of what happens and what the conservationists look out for on their shifts. There are the banana bats in the Seychelles that are critically endangered and are the rarest bat in the world; since they are that rare and hard for everyday voyagers to spot them, there is a programme in place for people to get a chance to spot these animals on their natural feeding grounds. We ensure less disturbance for the bats, with a bat detector put at a distance to not scare them and for visitors to be able to listen to them.

What made you want to transition from a ranger to an officer?

I would say it was half from the opportunity that was presented to me and the other half came from the desire to move forward. Even in my studies and job I've always had the drive to do and help more.

