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ENVIRONMENT

Island Conservation Society extends conservation work in the Aldabra group | 22 May 2023

Island Conservation Society extends conservation work in the Aldabra group

- **Opens its 6th Conservation Centre in Seychelles**

In its 22nd anniversary year, the Island Conservation Society (ICS) has extended its conservation presence in the Aldabra Group of islands of Seychelles through the opening of its 6th Conservation Centre on Astove.

The centre will also extend its work on the atoll of Cosmoledo where the Sooty Tern census is expected to be held later this month.

The new centre is located on Astove Atoll located over 1000km southwest of Mahé. The atoll is part of the Aldabra Group, comprising Aldabra, Assumption, Cosmoledo and Astove.

“Opening the centre is easier said than done,” states Jake Letori, the conservation officer on Astove. “The remoteness of the atolls with few transport options makes it logistically difficult and time-consuming to deliver equipment to the staff, especially in the southeast monsoon, making it challenging for the team.”

The other member of the ICS team on Astove are assistant conservation officer, Aurelie Hector, and senior ranger, Ricky Adeline. This event highlights the start of long-term presence of ICS on the raised coral atolls which host exceptional marine and terrestrial flora and fauna, being the most important unprotected biodiversity hotspots in Seychelles.

The current main conservation priorities involve undertaking habitat assessments and removal of invasive alien species (IAS) such as cats. This will allow the reintroduction of land bird species from neighbouring Aldabra Atoll. The removal of invasive vegetation will also help to increase habitat sites for seabirds.

While there is much to explore and monitor on Astove, the opening of the new centre will also facilitate the annual sooty tern (Golet) census on Cosmoledo, a task which will provide an updated estimate of the breeding population on the atoll.

During the census, other seabirds will be monitored including the only breeding population of brown boobies (Fou kapisen) in Seychelles, alongside masked (Fou zenero) and red-footed boobies (Fou bet). A small number of great frigatebirds (Gran frigat) and red-tailed tropicbirds (Payanke lake rouz) also choose to nest on Cosmoledo on rat and cat free islands.

“Although Astove and Cosmoledo do not fall under the same protection as Aldabra, ICS aims to conserve and monitor their unique wildlife populations and restore habitats to their natural state. This marks the beginning of a very lengthy mission and while it may take some time before the centres are fully operational, it is a historic step in the right direction for conservation. With so much to discover, a lot will be gained to benefit Seychelles and further global communities. Throughout the journey ICS will continue to share with you its progress and the extraordinary natural beauty that both atolls have to offer,” states the director of conservation and science, Gregory Berke.

With ICS’ presence and the support of the Islands Development Company (IDC) and Blue Safari Seychelles (BSS) who are present on both atolls, it is hoped that illegal fishing activities which have been a cause of concern in the area will be reduced or curtailed. In the future, ICS is aiming to expand its programmes on Astove and Cosmoledo to include monitoring of marine biodiversity including sharks.

About the Island Conservation Society

ICS was registered as a not-for-profit organisation on April 10, 2000. In 2004, ICS signed a lease agreement for the management of Aride Island with ICS UK, a Registered Charity. In 2007, ICS signed a formal agreement with the Island Development Company (IDC) and the Ministry of Environment of Seychelles that establishes a long-term basis for cooperation and assistance between the parties to conserve, restore and enhance island ecosystems and their associated marine environment. Following this, the first centre in the outer islands of

Seychelles was opened in 2007 on Alphonse, followed by Desroches in 2008, Silhouette in 2011 and Farquhar in 2015.

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