

A researcher's dream island

17-March-2014



Silhouette could be considered a dream island for many scientists and researchers, especially those looking for rare endemic plants and animals.

Island Conservation Society (ICS) Silhouette staff have been lucky enough to accompany a few experts deep into the forest interior to investigate some of these rare species while learning valuable lessons along the way.

Old-growth, nearly pristine forests in the higher altitude areas contain plants that are found nowhere else on earth – some plant species are also found in various parts of Mahé, but unfortunately, these areas are constantly under threat and many are degrading rapidly due to anthropogenic impact.

Endemic species of flora and fauna are commonly found on islands, as a result of biogeographic isolation, and the Seychelles archipelago boasts species that are endemic to only a few islands, or even just one, which makes a conservation agenda especially urgent in this part of the world. The historical influx of coconut, cinnamon, and other plantations likely contributed to the extinction of many native species, and many of the introduced crops are still invading sensitive areas on Silhouette and elsewhere. Seychelles' legendary biodiversity is further challenged by an ever increasing global human population, whose relentless 'modernisations' clash with the natural world.

On the conservation front, a local research team recently visited Silhouette to continue mapping the island's vegetation and to assess orchid species in the glaciais eco-zone near Mont Pot-à-Eau. We were also visited by scientists from the Natural History Museum of London who were researching caecilians and tree frogs, and who undertook an arduous overnight expedition to Mare-aux-Cochons – no ghosts were encountered (!), but plenty of amphibians were seen during this waterlogged adventure. The information collected by these and other researchers will help guide ICS Silhouette's long-term protection of the island's diverse and interlacing ecosystems.

Due to its virtually impenetrable interior, much of Silhouette may well remain undiscovered and unspoilt for many years to come, and could possibly become an ark for the restocking of other islands in the future.

By Melinda Curran and Angela Street, Island Conservation Society

In 2010, 93% of Silhouette island was designated as a national aark. As a bio-security measure, visitors to the most sensitive areas of the park are asked to disinfect their footwear and remove any foreign seeds from their clothing prior to entering the park, in order to prevent further transmission of invasive species.