

Outer islands model hailed as exemplary - 24.12.2012

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Aerial views of Desroches (below) and Alphonse (above) islands



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Seychelles was represented at the 'Regional Workshop and 4th Meeting of the Western Indian Ocean Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF)' by Dr Jeanne A. Mortimer, an internationally recognised expert on sea turtles.

The meeting, held in Port Elizabeth, South Africa from December 4-7, 2012, was attended by representatives from ten countries in the region for the purpose of enhancing sea turtle conservation.

One of the issues discussed by the Task Force was how to ensure that tourism economically benefits a

nation without destroying its environment.

Dr Mortimer gave an overview of the unique model for outer island development devised by the Island Development Company (IDC) in collaboration with its conservation advisors, Island Conservation Society (ICS), which brings together the mutual interests of conservation and eco-tourism bodies.

Under this model, foundations have been registered with the Seychelles Registrar for each of the outer islands and for Silhouette, with representatives on the boards from all sides, including ICS, investors in the islands, IDC and Ministry of Environment, and (on Silhouette Island) the Seychelles National Parks Authority. Also on Silhouette, the local community is encouraged to take part. The driving force of the foundations is conservation funded by responsible eco-tourism.

The model involves the establishment of an endowment fund to pay for environmental work on each island, with money coming from a conservation levy on guests, landing fees from visitors, environmental tours and donations.

An earlier endowment fund was established for Aride Island by Christopher Cadbury in 1987. This fund was held by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) in UK and built up to exceed £500,000 (about R11 million). Then in 2004 after ICS successfully met a series of conservation targets set by RSWT needed to assure them of the competence of ICS, both the island and the fund were transferred to Island Conservation Society UK, a UK Registered Charity related to ICS Seychelles and established solely to contribute money to conservation projects in Seychelles.

ICS has established conservation centres on Alphonse, Desroches and Silhouette. Annual Plans and budgets are produced for each island by ICS for endorsement by the relevant foundation. Once this has been achieved ICS then gets on with the all-important conservation work.

"The secretariat of the Indian Ocean South East Asian Sea Turtle Conservation MoU (IOSEA MoU) has asked me to write a profile article describing our model in order to make it better known throughout the region," said Dr Mortimer. "This will be good for Seychelles and good for conservation."