Island Conservation Society

Scientific Expedition to Cosmoledo Atoll



Panoramic of Grande Ile (Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)

osmoledo atoll is pignon outcrop" islands cade Somali pirate activity logistical and financial supmostly shallow lagoon and of marine turtles, nesting near future. So, it was in this upraised limestone "cham- reefs. During the past de- of IDC, and thanks to the

even more remote forming a ring around the further complicated efforts port provided by the owner and even less vis- central lagoon. Cosmoledo, to visit Cosmoledo. But Is- of the M/Y Pangaea vessel, ited than Aldabra (110 km like Aldabra, hosts some of lands Development Com- that a research team from to the west). Uninhabited the richest biodiversity in pany (IDC) now plans to Island Conservation Society since 1992, Cosmoledo is the outer islands in terms re-open Cosmoledo in the (ICS) was able to visit Cosmoledo for a week in March offshore reefs, with 13 small sea birds, fishes and coral context, with the support 2014 to conduct baseline and follow-up studies of some of the most important terrestrial and marine ecosystems and species of the

In this article we describe



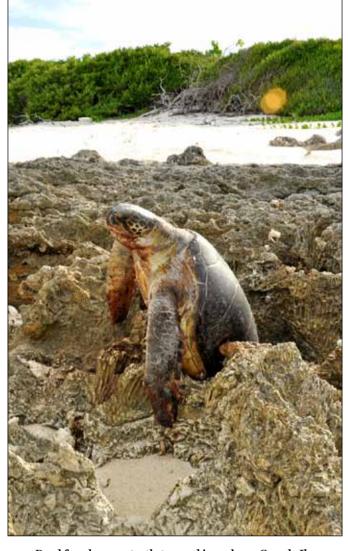
In 1999, the first ICS or- this threat, ICS implement- inputs, including two aerial in March 2014 enabled Dr. the harvest of turtles at that nithological survey of Cos- ed the "Rehabilitation of rodenticide baitings done by Rocamora to spend enough moledo atoll conducted by Islands Ecosystems" proj- helicopter.

Was the 2007 Rat and on the three largest islands complex operation required In 2007, in response to tant logistical and technical

Dr. Rocamora putting out bait for feral cats at Grand Polyte

(Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)

Dr. Gerard Rocamora, Dr. ect which was co-funded A year after the eradication the long-term success of the has been uninhabited since Chris Feare, Adrian Sker- by the Fonds Français pour tion, in November 2008, 2007 ICS eradication proj- 1992, but the turtles have revealed the largest sea- (FFEM), with substantial intensive survey trapping ecosystem.

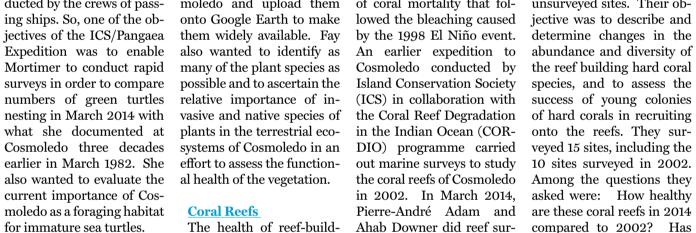


Dead female green turtle trapped in rocks on Grande Ile (Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)

bird colony in Seychelles in-kind support from Is- mission. Its preliminary tives of the studies we con- with over 1.2 million pairs lands Development Com- findings indicated that the ducted at Cosmoledo. In of Sooty terns nesting, and pany (IDC), a key purpose rat eradication had been large numbers of green articles published in the over 20,000 pairs of three of which was to eradicate successful and that cats had Today newspaper in the different species of boobies rats and cats on three of the died out on Grand Polyte. coming weeks we will de- across the atoll. But, these most important seabird is- But, after a long period of no scribe our actual scientific seabirds were threatened lands of Cosmoledo: Grande access to Cosmoledo due to by large populations of in- Ile, Grand Polyte and Petit the threat of piracy, further Dr. Jeanne Mortimer, who vasive rats and cats present Polyte (165ha in total). This proof was needed to verify that the islands were truly several missions and impor- free of rats and cats. The moledo for five months in ICS/Pangaea Expedition early 1982, estimated that time on Cosmoledo to assess the long term. Cosmoledo

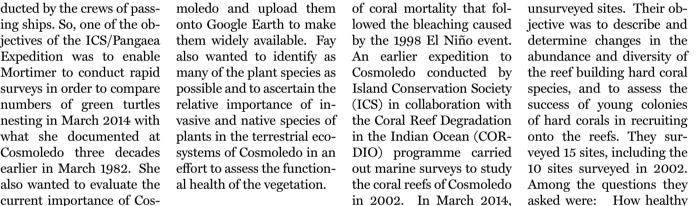
During the 1980s when

turtles were being killed legally for meat in Seychelles, Cosmoledo was the site of the heaviest exploitation. lived with the fishermen and turtle hunters on Costime was not sustainable in illegal poaching raids con-



Terrestrial Vegetation

The vegetation of Cosmoledo Atoll had been studied only superficially prior to 2014. This changed when Dr. J. Michael Fay, a globally renowned botanist and conservationist with ties to the National Geographic Society, the Missouri Botanical Gardens, and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) joined our ICS/Pangaea Expedition in March 2014. Dr. Fav intended to produce detailed photographic transects of the vegetation of each of the islands of Cos-



chelles given the high levels addition to other previously abundant are the macro- in the coming weeks.

Abbott's Sunbird (Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)

what she documented at plants in the terrestrial eco- in the Indian Ocean (COR- onto the reefs. They sursystems of Cosmoledo in an DIO) programme carried veved 15 sites, including the earlier in March 1982. She effort to assess the function- out marine surveys to study 10 sites surveyed in 2002. ing corals is a topic of great vevs at many of the same the species composition tails of our findings in articoncern throughout Sey- points surveyed in 2002 in changed in 12 years? How cles in the Today newspaper

Turtle nesting beach at Grande Ile (Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)

jectives of the ICS/Pangaea them widely available. Fay by the 1998 El Niño event. determine changes in the soft corals, sea anemones, Expedition was to enable also wanted to identify as An earlier expedition to abundance and diversity of etc.? This information will Mortimer to conduct rapid many of the plant species as Cosmoledo conducted by the reef building hard coral help in efforts to sustainably surveys in order to compare possible and to ascertain the Island Conservation Society species, and to assess the manage the marine habitats numbers of green turtles relative importance of in- (ICS) in collaboration with success of young colonies of Cosmoledo and adjacent nesting in March 2014 with vasive and native species of the Coral Reef Degradation of hard corals in recruiting areas in the coming years. the coral reefs of Cosmoledo Among the questions they terrestrial and marine ecoin 2002. In March 2014, asked were: How healthy systems of Cosmoledo Atoll Pierre-André Adam and are these coral reefs in 2014 are generally healthy. We The health of reef-build- Ahab Downer did reef sur- compared to 2002? Has will report some of the de-

invertebrates – i.e. sea cucumbers, sea stars, urchins,

We found that both the



Red Tailed Tropic Bird Chick (Photo credit: Dr. Mike Fay)





Frigatebirds and Boobies flying overhead (Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)



André Adam, Dr. Gerard Rocamora (Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)

Dr. Fay examining vegetation at Menai Island (Photo credit: Dr. Sophie Mounier)

