

Business Interview with Emma Médéric, Science and Projects Officer at the Island Conservation Society

“I always held a balance between loving biology and the ocean. I just connected them and decided I’d study marine biology!”

TODAY Business interviews 26-year-old Emma Médéric, Science and Projects Officer at the Island Conservation Society where we discuss what it’s like to be a young scientist, her experience aboard Ocean X’s recent research expedition, and other marine-science and environmental related subjects.

by A.K. Laporte

Introduce yourself and tell us about your professional background

Emma Mederic, Science and Projects Officer at the Island Conservation Society (ICS). I have been working there for a year now, and prior to that I was working as an Assistant Science Coordinator on Aldabra with the Seychelles Islands Foundation; I did that for two years.

Before that I was on an internship as a Scientific Advisor and Projects Officer at SeyCATT.

I studied for a Bachelor’s Degree in Marine Biology and Environmental Sciences at Deacon University in Australia. I studied there for three years before coming back to start work with SeyCATT and SIF and so on.

Did you always have the intent to be a scientist, or would you say that it was more to do with a passion for ocean, or both?

It’s funny because during my primary studies and secondary school, I was very academic, so it was always a notion that I’d go on to study medicine. For a long time, my decision was actually based on other peoples’ views of what I should be doing.

I have always had a love for the ocean, though. Growing up on this island, every Saturday and Sunday I’d go to the beach, or go fishing with family. This was a routine for me, as well as visiting the islands close by.

I can say that I always had a love for the ocean but never really explored it. At the same time, I’ve always loved biology, and working in labs. I enjoyed math and statistics and these sorts of things. So, when I went to A Levels after Post-Secondary school at Pointe Larue, I did Biology, Geography and Math and got a scholarship.

I decided that in fact, medicine was not what I wanted to do, so I put marine biology as my first



• Emma Médéric, Science and Project Officer, ICS

option, since I always held a balance between loving biology and the ocean. I just connected them and decided I’d study marine biology!

I don’t regret it at all!

The notion of being a scientist comes off as a big deal to many, but how is it for you working in the sciences, and what do you do?

It is a fancy word! Everybody reacts to it like ‘Oh my gosh, you’re a scientist, you’re a super-nerd!’ But actually, it comprises from the simplest things, up to the more complex things. In the day of a scientist, everything starts with data collection and that is usually the simpler, more straight forward thing because you have protocols we need to understand, and benefit from training. That’s where you start, and once the data is collected you go into data analysis.

It’s a step-by-step thing, and in fact you can start off as a scientist by being a data collector; you work with animals, and need to understand what data you’re looking at, and then it’s progressive. You start with writing reports, and if the data needs to be analysed in a lab, you pick up skills related to that, and then you keep building on it until you become a super-scientist!

Talk to us about your experience aboard Ocean Xplorer, what it meant to you and what it means for Seychelles

I had been following Ocean X for a while on social media, and I already knew that they are the most advanced research and media vessel in the world. Just stepping aboard, it was an experience!

So, we walked in, and saw the deep sea exploration subma-

rines, which was already mind-blowing because while you see these things online, and Nekton has been in the Seychelles, but this was really amazing.

The crew were talking to us about the technologies on the different subs; not just the ones dedicated for science, but for media as well, helping to demonstrate their findings to the public.

They have four labs on the ship, and as a scientist, this was super exciting. They are built with the most advanced infrastructure and instruments; you can conduct DNA sequencing, have live aquariums, and so on. There is a mapping tool on the vessel too, which means a lot for us since a lot of the Seychelles ocean floor hasn’t been mapped.

All of this was truly exciting for me, but also being in a group led by Seychellois scientists, was something very exciting. This is because in the past, during expeditions, Seychellois crew had been assisting, where as this one, Seychellois were leading different scientific objectives that we had going on.

Also being in the presence of all these doctors, scientists and others who have been all over the world who come with a lot of experience and are ready to assist, was just priceless!

What was your specific role for the expedition?

A lot of the expedition took us to many islands that are managed in terms of conservation by ICS. So, they needed ICS presence on the vessel; I was like a liaison but also ensuring that all the different teams working on all the different projects (like BRUVS, ROVs, cetacean surveys and such), and objectives were met in the context of what ICS would need.

There are specific areas that we monitor around the islands, and what we wanted was to add to the research and data we have already collected, so as to build a better understanding of the areas we manage

Since I had done some BRUVS work with SIF, I was also there to assist with the shallow BRUVS. The fact that I also have experience working with dolphins and whales, I was assisting in surveying from a helicopter. Additionally, I assisted the leader of that project.

I worked closely with Sheena, as she is Seychelles’ first deep sea scientist, and she wanted to mentor younger scientists. I was attached to her in the ROV in mission control.

What would you say was the biggest or most significant discovery or observation that you came across?

Personally for me, it was going down into the Amirantes trench. It was previously thought to be around 3,000m deep, but when it was mapped, we realised that it was 5,000m deep. It is an area where no scientific research had taken place before, so we didn’t know what it looks like, what species are there; we just didn’t know much about it.

It is important in terms of marine spatial planning because we are planning for an area to be managed, yet we don’t know what’s really there. Before saying it needs to be managed in this or that way, we truly need to understand what is there.

When we did go down there, it was actually a record for the ROV, which is named ‘Chimera’; they hadn’t been down to such a depth with that particular instrument. So, it was also a milestone for them and for Seychelles as a country as well; this meant a lot because we were able to map the whole trench as well.

We now have a better understanding of that location. We saw giant squid which means even bigger things must be down there; if there are giant squid, there is the chance to find

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• Seychellois team aboard Ocean Xplorer vessel



Average Exchange Rates of Authorized Dealers Based on Wholesale Trading	Average All Authorized Dealers					Notes				TT/Drafts			
		Buying	Selling	Mid-Rate	Change from previous day 1	Buying	Selling	Mid-Rate	Change from previous day 1	Buying	Selling	Mid-Rate	Change from previous day 1
March 4, 2024	USD	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000
	EUR	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000
	GBP	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000

1. The Change is in relation to the mid-rate. A positive (negative) sign denotes a depreciation (appreciation) of the Seychelles Rupee.

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blue whales and sperm whales around the area. We saw some really cool-looking sea cucumbers, and we called them bunny sea cucumbers because they look like they have ears! All of this was so exciting and we were able to see all of this in a matter of two hours.

If we push for more of these research missions to continue, we could truly continue to build on our understanding of what’s



Emma poses in front of Ocean X submersible

there.

For me, that was the highlight!

Where and how does science and data collection come into the environmental aspect of ICS?

The way ICs is set up, it is kind of a collaboration; each island has its own foundation. We manage islands like Aride, Silhouette, Desroches, Alphonse, and others. Essentially, we open

up a centre when there is economic development on an island, for instance, any island that IDC is developing.

So you would see that any island with tourism infrastructure on them would see ICS there as conservation advisors and actors. Soon we will be opening on Platte Island because there will be a hotel there. If Assumption happens, we will be there as well.

So, it’s a collaboration between IDC, ICS, private foundations present on the island as well as the Ministry of Environment, who are on all of our boards.

We act for the ministry as well, as we have assigned mandates, and automatically the data we collect is not analysed and published only for ourselves, but the ministry, can at any time they require have access to our reports.

This is how it all feeds back in. Another activity we do is the sooty tern census on all the outer island we work on, and feed this information back to the ministry, which then goes to the Cabinet for any management decisions needed to be made.

There is also the seagrass project that was conducted a few years back; we collect the data and feed it to bigger national projects and for policy decision



Emma exploring the ocean floor

making.

How do you feel about the trend of all these islands seeing hotel development on them, and do you feel that this clashes with your environmental efforts?

Generally speaking, I think that sustainable development is essential, but the way that we conduct sustainable practices is very key.

We take examples from mainland Africa where they have a lot of eco-certified establishments that actually work, integrated with their safari areas, and wherever they go they set

up eco-camps. This is the way forward for us; development is required for the economy. We still need to develop it but in a sense that is very much eco-conscious.

We have seen a lot of conservation wins when it comes to having a tourism establishment alongside conservation. When you have a conservation-minded tourism industry, it actually helps conservation work.

There are many people who care and are willing to donate towards making the environment better.

I think it’s just about tapping into the right people, and the right kind of tourism that we’re

looking at; maybe a change in tourism, instead of high-luxury, rather centred around people who really care for and want to develop a touristic establishment that promotes the country as it is naturally, as opposed to just looking to change it.

Our islands are special and mean a lot to us. Many of them are yet to be discovered, meaning we need more time to understand the species that are there, how the geography and geology works with the biodiversity there, and so I think whilst tourism development is essential, we can do it in a better way that truly upholds the conservation of our islands.

Visitor arrivals

90% of arrivals came for a holiday during eighth week of the year

by A.K. Laporte

Seychelles Tourism Surges in Week 08 of 2024, Setting Positive Tone for the Year

It is apparent indeed that Seychelles is currently experiencing a significant uptick in tourism; one only needs to drive between Victoria and Beau Vallon to see it.

The official figures of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reflect the same when looking at the latest data from the eighth week of 2024 (ending on 25 February).

NBS states that a total of 7,653 visitors touched down in Seychelles during this week, contributing to the overall year-to-date figure of 58,100 visitors.

This remarkable increase of 14% compared to the same period in 2023 indicates a robust resurgence in the country’s tourism sector.

However, in a year-over-year analysis, the week 8 arrivals in 2024 demonstrated a slight decline of -7% compared to the same week in 2023. Nevertheless, when evaluating the year-to-date figures, Seychelles witnessed a remarkable growth of 14%, with 58,100 visitors disembarking, in contrast to 51,174 during the same period in 2023. This growth signals a positive trend for our tourism industry.

Breaking down the week in question by arrivals by region, it is evident that Europe, as usual, played the biggest role, contributing 79% of the visitors, with

6,037 arrivals. As is customary, Asia followed, representing 12% of the total with 930 visitors. The top countries of residence for these visitors were the traditional markets France, Germany, and Russia, contributing 17%, 14%, and 14%, respectively.

An insightful analysis by the purpose of visit revealed that an overwhelming 90% of the visitors who arrived in Seychelles during week 8 were on holiday. This indicates the enduring allure of Seychelles as a premier tourist destination, attracting visitors primarily for leisure and relaxation.

In week 8, visitors comprised 82% of the total passengers arriving, while residents accounted for 15%. The data further highlights that 98% of the total ar-

rivals were facilitated through scheduled flights, showcasing the significance of air travel in Seychelles’ tourism landscape.

Conclusion:

The tourism landscape in Seychelles is thriving, evident from the robust week 08 arrivals and the impressive year-to-date figures for 2024. The notable growth of 14% compared to the previous year reflects the enduring appeal of Seychelles as a holiday destination. As the country continues to welcome visitors from diverse regions, the tourism sector’s positive trajectory sets the stage for a prosperous year ahead, highlighting Seychelles as a beacon for travelers seeking an idyllic tropical getaway.

