

ICS and SCG formalise partnership in fighting poaching | 27 March 2021



Lt Col. Attala and Mr Skerrett signing the MoU (Photo: Patrick Joubert)

The Seychelles Coast Guard (SCG) and the Island Conservation Society (ICS) yesterday morning formalised their cooperation in efforts to prevent and deter illegal taking of wildlife, such as sea birds, on Aride Island.

This was through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) at the request of ICS for the SCG to assist in the former's anti-poaching programme following the resurgence in poaching events in the island's special reserve.

This includes more patrols among other protection engagements by SCG in the island's nature reserve.

The MoU, renewable after two years, was signed on behalf of ICS by its chairman Adrian Skerrett and the acting commander of SCG, Lieutenant Colonel Jean Attala, in a small ceremony held at the SCG headquarters, Ile Perseverance.

Present were senior officers of SCG and representatives of ICS.

With the resurgence in poaching events inland and in the island's maritime boundary, ICS held meetings with SCG in November 2020 to discuss on the possibility to collectively counter the menace. The discussion resulted with the SGC assisting in patrolling the maritime protected area surrounding the special reserve since December 2020 up to date, while ICS continues with its usual patrol inland, observe and report poaching activities in the terrestrial and marine parts of the special reserve to SCG.

The overall objective of the MoU is to establish stronger cooperation between both parties on the above but specifically in the area of protection of biodiversity, biodiversity law enforcement and compliance with domestic legislation, based on the core principle of promoting the protection and preservation of species that are significant to Seychelles' diverse biodiversity and are protected by law in special reserves.

Addressing all present, Mr Skerrett described the MoU as a milestone for Aride Island nature reserve.

He stated that conservation laws in Seychelles have always been very good but however, what has been lacking has been the ability to enforce the approved legislations.

“Sometimes poachers have been able to act almost with impunity, coming to Aride Island and taking whatever they want. I think there is a difficulty when you have good legislation but no enforcement because it means that people do not respect the law,” he said, noting that lack of resources has prevented ICS to on its own enforce the law.

He noted that the SCG has fantastic resources and fantastic ability and the ideal combination teamwork between them were ever too lacking.

He noted that it has been more than forty years now since Aride Island nature reserve received official protection.

“Now with the backing of the Seychelles Coast Guard and with our rangers and conservation officers on the island itself, I think we are now in a very different situation. So after more than 40 years of protection, we can really make sure that the island is fully protected,” Mr Skerrett said, thanking SGC for partnering with ICS.

On his part, Lt Col. Attala noted that the MoU was a milestone as well for SCG as it was the first time in SCG's history that it enters in agreement with a non-governmental organisation other than with government ministries and agencies.

Lt Col. Attala said that SCG is very happy to put its assets for a good cause but reminded that in doing so it is not going there (Aride special reserve) to prevent people from earning their livelihood but rather to educate and to sensitise them on respecting the law with regard to the protected area.

“Even though our main aim is protecting our sovereignty, we have other subsidiary roles and responsibilities and assisting organisations like yours is one of these special roles that we have to play. This plays well with the civil /military relation that we want to establish between the military and civilian entities,” Lt Col. Attala added.

The granitic island has seen a rise in the number of boats, manned by Seychellois, coming to the island to poach seabirds and bird eggs, especially during the breeding season, including illegal fishing within the island's 1km maritime protected area.

The deputy chief executive of ICS, Shane Emilie, said that as ICS has no legal power to arrest poachers, SCG having legal arresting powers will be of great help in deterring poachers coming to the island.

He noted that ICS can only inform legal enforcement authorities upon sighting poachers while it awaits for their reinforcement.

He called on members of the public to respect the conservation of Aride's nature reserve, breeding ground to many species of sea birds, fish and flower and fauna among other endemic species.

Captain Gerald Wong-Pool from SGC said that their presence in the area more frequently since December 2020 is having an effect as they have not witnessed poaching incidents within the island's 1km marine protected area or inland except for one call by ICS, two weeks ago, for help in the interception of a boat with poachers that managed to escape.

He noted that the SCG patrol boat was at that time patrolling in an area a bit far from Aride.

Patrick Joubert