

Interview

A project for the conservation and rehabilitation of Seychelles outer islands is due to get underway soon. The \$1.7 million project is financed by the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and will be implemented by the nongovernmental organization, Island Conservation Society (ICS). ICS has a long history in island management conservation and is the current owner of Ile Aride, a nature reserve. ICS is also working with the governmental parastatal, Island Development Company (IDC), so the society can implement conservation projects and monitoring on islands managed by the company. Today LSH speaks to the Chief Executive Officer of ISC, Ahad Downer, to know more about the outer island project.

LSH: How did ICS get involved in this project?

Mr. Downer: ICS has a long standing history in island conservation in Seychelles with our work on Ile Aride and islands managed by IDC so we have the background and capacity to do this project. So ICS was the natural partner for the Government of Seychelles and the Ministry of Environment, UNDP and GEF to implement this type of activity in the outer islands.

LSH: Four main islands have been identified under the project, why them?

Mr. Downer: First of all because Desroches and Alphonse islands are relatively accessible, which means accessibility is a major factor because you want to have a field team on these islands. There are also well established tourism entities on these two islands which finance some of our projects to enable us to do monitoring activities as well as educational activities for the guests of these two establishments so IDC were very keen to have our assistance to perform these activities. The other islands are Farquhar and Poivre. On Farquhar there is a long established tourism entity as well so there are infrastructures there, the island is vast and has a great deal of biodiversity and fishing also takes place there. Farquhar like Alphonse is an important fly fishing destination. On the other hand Ile Poivre is an island where the North is well adapted to human habitation and was in the past a tourism destination and I think that it may well become one in the future and the Southern Island of Poivre has remained largely untouched and is also deemed to have a largely intact ecosystem which is deserving of protection, further study and restoration.

LSH: Is the project targeting only the protection aspect of the biodiversity on these islands?

Mr. Downer: Through this particular project and program there is research to guide conservation activities, quite a bit of restoration going on which will include the native habitats of Desroches and Alphonse. We may well identify areas on Farquhar and Poivre that deserve restoration as well in which case through this project we would amass enough information to go and look for additional funding to undertake those activities. We are seeking to have a better understanding of the ecosystem, the species, develop better methodologies for managing them, restoring them and also building awareness on the islands within Seychelles and across the world about these ecosystems, what measures have to be taken to protect them, what is the im-



port of climate change on the islands and their species. So it will be a sweep of conservation and different sustainable management activities.

LSH: What kind of manpower would ICS need to implement such a huge project?

Mr. Downer: ICS currently has approximately 25 staff working in Seychelles. We would be increasing that by 5 to 10 extra people. We will rely quite a bit on consultants, whether national or international to help us achieve some of our targets. We also have a long standing history of using volunteers from abroad, very often Masters students coming from Europe or North America and we often have individuals coming from abroad on a volunteer basis provide assistance to help us further develop methodologies which may have been implemented successfully elsewhere which can be adapted here. A lot of the work will also be done by our partners in the field, such as IDC as they will be contributing massively to our efforts to restore the native vegetation on these islands. This is very labour intensive.

LSH: Is there any possibility that under the project these islands can become more accessible to locals (tourism), like Aride currently is?

Mr. Downer: Aride is far more accessible but ICS does not have any control of accessibility to these islands and even if the Government of Seychelles chooses to give them protection status over time and if access is given then ICS will be more than happy to help manage the access and what occurs in these areas under our purview. Currently all these four islands are accessible by flights and boats. In any case it will be in everybody's interest to have sustainable tourism that valorizes the efforts made to protect that biodiversity which can be available to everyone.

LSH: Under the project there are proposals for some areas of these islands to be set aside for protection, why is it important for a small island like Seychelles to protect these areas?

Mr. Downer: That will be entirely up to the Government of Seychelles to decide. But as part of the marine spatial planning that is ongoing, as part of a network of protected areas which Seychelles wants to achieve, as part of an effort to sustain a fishing industry that wants to have a long term approach you need to have protected areas for all the species, be it terrestrial or marine, dwelling or migratory you have to have these areas where these species can raise their young or what we call nurseries. So outside of those reserves the species become exploitable resources for Seychelles and contribute to the overall health of the economy. It's a methodology that has been proven to work around the world.

LSH: If there is one island in the Seychelles that ICS can get its hands on to protect but is not part of this project, what would it be?

Mr. Downer: Quite honestly ICS is keen to work across a great swath of other islands and once again it depends of accessibility. Cosmoledo has a very rich biodiversity, both on the terrestrial and marine side. Marie Louise, likewise the bird population there is quite intact and extraordinary. Astove also, the marine environment is unparalleled and Providence as well is less visited and very intact, vast and again extraordinary. I think extraordinary places deserve a closer look, to protect and find a way to not put them under a glass but rather to make that richness and natural heritage available to everyone without impacting its integrity.

COIN DE PARTAGE

Faire mal à un enfant... Qui a le droit?...

Les coupables ne succombent point ! A tour de rôle, les agressions sur les enfants augmentent à une vitesse alarmante dans un Seychelles si petit, déjà confronté par d'autres calamités sociales. Nous voici à l'heure actuelle, en train de nous battre avec ténacité contre des agresseurs qui prennent un malin plaisir à s'en prendre aux membres les plus innocents et vulnérables de notre société, nos petits enfants. On parle spécifiquement, des cas d'agressions sexuelles récents, chez nous. Les principaux fautifs, des adultes, peut-être déroutés ! Des individus auxquels nous pourrions faire référence comme "Pédophiles". Mais qui sont-ils ?

Les experts ayant étudié des tels cas, en concluent ...« Ce pédophile de proximité,

tout enfant est susceptible de le croiser. Un éducateur, un entraîneur, un voisin, un membre de la famille... Il n'existe aucun profil type qui permette de démasquer le loup sous les atours de la brebis. Inutile, donc, d'axer la prévention sur la diabolisation du « méchant monsieur qui va te faire mal » : « Les pédophiles avertis vont jouer sur la curiosité et la naïveté de l'enfant, qu'ils auront au préalable sécurisé »... C'est bien là que réside le vrai danger, et toute l'horreur du piège qui se referme sur les plus jeunes. Pareillement, nos petits Seychellois deviennent victimes de l'instabilité mentale de ces personnes.

Pour l'enfant, l'adulte est une représentation du parent, celui qui peut user de son autorité et faire jouer les liens affectifs. Le pédophile de proximité bénéficie soit

d'une position sociale qui le place de facto « au-dessus de tous soupçons », soit de la confiance familiale. Ce qui entraîne davantage du mal à la famille, sauf si jamais d'autres membres sont au courant de ce qui se passe et restent passifs, comme fut le fait dans certains cas rapportés.

Bien souvent ces enfants sont encore trop jeunes à comprendre ce qui leur arrive et ne peuvent à peine articuler des mots pour se faire secourir. A part les dommages physiques qu'ils subissent, c'est alors leurs petites âmes qui saignent. Nous nous posons toujours la question, mais pourquoi ?...

Qu'est ce qui ne va pas chez un adulte, jusqu'au point d'imposer des relations sexuelles (précoces surtout) à des enfants ou des adolescents à peine pubères, sans

distinction de sexe. Il ne faut pas oublier que, La pédophilie (abus sexuels, exploitation pornographique, tourisme sexuel ou toute autre forme de violence faite aux enfants afin de les contraindre aux rapports sexuels) est punie par la loi.

Les pédophiles possèdent parfois des qualités bien différentes l'un de l'autre. La société peut surtout être dupée par les caractères attrayants de certaines personnes ou leur statut social. Désormais, on doit se méfier des apparences et il faut qu'on soit toujours sur l'alerte. On ne fait pas le tri selon ce qu'on pense soit le grand méchant ou le protecteur. En réalité, personne n'a le droit de faire d'un enfant un objet sexuel... Ni d'un adulte d'ailleurs !

Liana