

## Angel, the blue pigeon from Silhouette Island

13-June-2016



On May 28 at 8am, the Island Conservation Seychelles (ICS) team of Silhouette Island received a juvenile blue pigeon from a Hilton member of staff who wanted to release it in the wild. Unfortunately, it was too weak to fly and the team decided to keep it for a while so that it gathered some strength. We gave him the name Angel.

Angel had first been fed with bread crumbs and was very friendly and naïve. He would jump on my arm, walk on my elbow or on my head without any fear. When we first gave him some food, he would only take it from our hand or from the dish next to him. In order to make him more independent, we arranged a space in the house and started to look after him.

The Seychelles Blue Pigeon (*Alectroenas pulcherrimus*) or Pizon Olande in Kreol is one of the endemic land birds of Seychelles. It is a fairly large, broad-winged pigeon, mainly dark blue with a whitish bib and red bare skin around the eyes and on top of the head. In the 1980s, numbers of blue pigeons had been greatly reduced by persecution (for food) and were rarely seen below 200m. Fortunately, the hunting ended and the population quickly recovered, recolonising coastal areas and islands. Today, it can be found in almost all the granitic islands, including on Mahé, Praslin, La Digue or Silhouette, and it is considered as a species of Least Concern by IUCN.

Blue Pigeons feed mainly on seeds and fruits, including takamaka, vouloutye, cinnamon and guava. Unlike other pigeons, they have muscular gizzards, which break down seeds to aid digestion. As a result, no viable seeds are left in their droppings. Having plenty of guava on Silhouette, we had no difficulties to provide them to Angel. Indeed, he liked it very much and after two days was already able to eat by himself and fly much. A week later, Angel seemed better still and was practicing a lot to fly. We decided to take him outside to see if he could be released. At first, he jumped to my elbow and stayed there till we were outside. To our amazement, he flew off after a few seconds and looked at us from a high branch of a Kalis-di-pap (*Tabebuia pallida*) close by. He was back where he belonged.

Silhouette Island is the third largest granitic island in the Seychelles. In addition to the blue pigeon, it hosts also the endemic Seychelles Kestrel (Katiti), Seychelles Sunbird (Kolibri) and Seychelles Bulbul (Merl).

Anyone interested to see these birds and the luxurious forest of the island is welcome and the ICS people will be there to inform you. Our office is open five days a week.

**Francois Baguette**