

MCSS cetaceans training

Songs below the sea

Whales are famed for their underwater acoustic prowess. Four ICS members recently received training in recording and recognising the sounds they make.

CONTRIBUTED BY SAM BALDERSON, ICS



The participants scored highly in the exams after the course.

There are 27 species of marine mammal that have been recorded in the Seychelles. Whales and dolphins account for 26 of these with the other being the dugong found at Aldabra. These creatures have legal protection in Seychelles waters but a number of threats exist, including entanglement in fishing gear, poaching, noise pollution and habitat loss. Improved understanding of numbers and distribution of marine mammals is vital for their future protection. Four Island Conservation Society (ICS) staff members (Sam Balderson, Lucy Martin, Aurelie Duhec and Richard Jeanne) recently attended a four-day training course in Marine Mammal Observation (MMO) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) conducted by Peter Holden and Jo Bluemel at the Marine Conservation Society Seychelles (MCSS) office in Glacis.

The course involved lectures on marine mammal identification, MMO techniques, as well as the physics of sound and sound recording techniques. These were followed up by short exams in which the four participants all scored very highly. The third day was more practical, with an introduction to the underwater acoustic recording devices and the methods involved in their deployment. The afternoon involved all participants going out on a boat with The Underwater Centre at Beau Vallon. Unfortunately, sea conditions were not great for spotting marine mammals along the coast from Beau Vallon to Baie Ternay, but all involved gained a better understanding of the skills that had been learned in the lectures. At Baie Ternay, the boat stopped so that everyone could get in the water with scuba gear and practice deploying the PAM devices. The deployment involves good team work as heavy mooring stations have to be lowered to the sea bed, with divers in the water to prevent any damage to coral and other marine life. Again this was a great practical session where everyone got to practice

the skills that had been taught in the classroom. On the return trip to Beau Vallon, there was again time to practice the MMO techniques. On the final day of the course, the participants learnt how to analyse the data recorded by the acoustic equipment. This involved listening to the incredible sounds produced by a range



Learning how to analyse the data.



An introduction to underwater acoustic recording device.



There are still gaps in our knowledge of whales.

of whales and dolphins, and looking at the unique signatures that these sounds form when displayed on a graph on a computer. This training was undertaken as part of a UNEP funded collaborative project between MCSS and ICS designed to expand the collection of marine mammal data across a wider area of the Sey-

chelles Exclusive Economic Zone. The ICS teams stationed on Alphonse, Farquhar and Desroches will over the coming months deploy PAM devices around the islands which will complement the work already being carried out by MCSS around the inner islands. There are still big gaps in our knowledge of the distribu-

tion and numbers of whale and dolphin species throughout Seychelles waters. It is hoped that through the use of these modern monitoring techniques, that utilise sophisticated technologies, a greater understanding will be achieved thus enabling for better protection of these important enigmatic species.

2015 Special Valentine's Poetry Competition

Say what's on your heart and win fantastic prizes!
 Pen down your most romantic thoughts and send them to us by 12 February and you will stand the chance to win a stay at the luxury AVANI Resort for you and your Romeo or your Juliet, a romantic sunset cruise for two or a meal for two at Berjaya .
 Poems should be 100 to 200 words, in any style, in English, French or Creole. Send your entries to: info@today.sc, with your name, contact number, age and if you wish, the name of your special someone.
 Must be over 18 to enter.

First Prize: One Night Stay for Two at AVANI Seychelles Barbarons Resort & Spa on Bed and Breakfast including dinner on Valentine's Day.

Second Prize: Two Tickets to the Sunset Cruise on Sat 14th of February with Masons Travel

Third Prize: Dinner for Two at Parrot Restaurant at the Berjaya Beau Vallon Bay Resort & Casino (not valid on 14 February 2015)