

Conservation

# New centre on Farquhar

After having worked for several years in a perfect “Franco-Seychellois tandem” on Alphonse for three years, Aurélie and Richard have been sent to Farquhar in order to set up an ICS Conservation Centre under the GEF/UNDP Outer Island Protected Area Project. The team’s first experiences are told below...

By Aurélie Duhec, Conservation Officer on Farquhar

**O**ur mission on Farquhar Island: While the Seychelles’ populated inner islands have suffered from over-fishing and other anthropogenic influences, the remote coralline islands still offer important conservation hotspots that require immediate protection. For that purpose, ICS sent us to Farquhar on 16 September 2014 to set up a Conservation Center under the ‘UNDP-GEF Outer Islands Protected Areas project’. Our mission will be to improve the knowledge of the Atoll’s biodiversity and ecosystems. Our collected data will be used to define boundaries for protected areas and sustainable use. The information we collect will enable the implementation of effective protected area management plans. The proposed protected area will be: South Island, Ile Goëlettes, Banc de Sable and the marine seascape extending 1km from the edge of the reef flat as Protected Areas.

**A spirited team, including us**



The importance of planting.

**and our island partners:** Since our first days on the island, we have been warmly welcomed by the islanders. We feel happy on Farquhar, we have a good relationship with the staff, which is

very important in a restricted area and small community. Fly Castaway and Island Development Company (IDC) are very supportive. IDC provided us with house, office and manpower. Be-

cause of the big size of the island and Ilets, our schedule is very dependent on IDC skippers Garry, Dave and Karen and we are sincerely grateful that they have always assisted us in our daily work. The IDC Manager George Marie is very appreciated by his staff and a strong team spirit on the island can be felt, which brings happiness at work. To date we have successfully worked together in the release of giant tortoises kept in captivity, the clean-up of Goëlettes Island with the help of Fly Castaway fishing guides and the set-up of sorting waste on the island.

**Our lifestyle on Farquhar:** Our

life on the island is organised by our endless work. Once we finish with the field work we move onto office duties, we try our best to not keep our extensive data accumulating, to avoid it becoming unmanageable! When the day ends, we start with home duties, like most of the staff on the island we have to plant our own vegetables for our subsistence, while fresh fish is provided four days a week. Luckily for us, Richard is a great gardener and cook! Richard planted pumpkin, water melon, sweet melon, potatoes, corn, and lettuce. We needed to construct a barrier to protect our precious garden from the turkeys that are roaming freely in the village.

noticed that the species is expanding with many birds roosting in North Island as well, according to the islander their presence on the islands is very recent.

The monitoring of the eastern and windward coasts of the North and South Island, 10.7km and 7.4km respectively, were much less pleasant, we have been shocked by the impressive abundance of marine debris, and especially concerned by the presence of plastic bags, probably the most threatening items for marine wildlife as well as fishing lines and FADs. Those beaches that are sadly repeatedly polluted by human debris are critical nesting habitats for sea turtles. The same side also offers a flying training ground for the many juvenile boobies. Booby Birds, are incredibly funny, and often fearless to humans, they startled us many times while trying to land on our head! With our partners we intend to make regular plans to clean-up the 18km of shorelines from tons of litter.

**First sensational observation:**

From the sky, Farquhar Atoll looked huge, and from our seats in the plane we already dreaded the routine turtle patrols around the islands. Under a blazing sun, we’ve been walking more than 35km in 5 days to explore North Island, South Island, Goëlettes and Banc de Sable while monitoring see turtle emergences and counting birds. With the two main islands, North and South Islands, leading us to the limit of exhaustion! But, what an incredible atoll. The beauty of the landscape and of the wildlife kept us going ahead, in a constant wonder.

We started monitor the west coast of North Island edged with the lagoon, if the beach is not a suitable nesting habitat for sea turtles in due to the fact of the risen and sharp limestone, the lagoon is a perfect nursery for marine animals; in the crystal clear turquoise water, foraging moustache trigger fish, permits, young whip rays, black tip and lemon sharks, continually offer us an exciting spectacle. The next day Farquhar offered an even better surprise: in an expedition in the western coast of the South Island we did not expect to see a large red-footed booby breeding population. We observed chicks at different stages of development and

We were struck by the abundance of birds on Goëlettes, Farquhar is recognised as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Birdlife International, due to significant numbers of breeding seabirds found on the islets. Effectively, Goëlettes island supports a huge breeding colony of Sooty Terns (200,000 to 400,000 pairs), as well as Roseate Terns, Black-naped Terns, Brown Noddies and a small population of Lesser Brown Noddies are nesting there as well.

Banc de sable is only roughly 45 years old, recorded on a 1969 map as a small sandbar with limited shrubs. It is today a well vegetated island and a good breeding site for black-naped terns, and a great nesting site for turtles.

All these experiences in such a short time on Farquhar, we feel very privileged and we are grateful for having been chosen to lead the ICS Center on Farquhar and to protect this fragile, exciting and unique environment. Fishing lines.



Beach clean-up.



Three weeks later.



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