

Ecological restoration of islands in the Seychelles

Shah N.J.

Nature Seychelles, Seychelles, Indian Ocean

SUMMARY

An integrated island biodiversity restoration programme was initiated in 1999 on the Seychelles. It has inspired both governmental and non-governmental organisations to undertake numerous conservation programmes on several islands in the archipelago.

BACKGROUND

The natural habitats on most of the islands of the western Indian Ocean have been severely degraded. Restoration of such islands is a long, difficult and expensive process as exemplified by ongoing rehabilitation efforts in Mauritius and Seychelles. However, successful restoration of ecosystems on small to medium sized islands (20 to 250 hectares) has been proven to be possible in various regions of the world, exemplified by the examples of Cousin and Aride islands in the Seychelles archipelago.

ACTION

An integrated and comprehensive island restoration programme initiated in 1999 in the Seychelles, has put in place all the necessary mechanisms, from assessment and choice of islands, to management aiming to restore biodiversity. A collaborative effort between an NGO, Nature Seychelles, private island owners and the Seychelles Government, the programme is ongoing.

Components include biological assessment of granitic and coral islands, socio-economic valuation of restored ecosystems and ecotourism, cost analysis of restoration and maintenance, education and awareness, island management plans, removal of alien predators such as rats *Rattus* spp. and feral cats *Felis catus*, and other invasive alien species, establishment or rehabilitation of native habitats and translocation of globally threatened endemic species. The various components of the programme included the private islands of Cousine, Fregate, North, Darros, Bird and Denis. The programme has

successfully built upon existing conservation projects.

CONSEQUENCES

Establishment of new populations of endangered species such as the Seychelles magpie robin *Copsychus sechellarum*, Seychelles warbler *Acrocephalus sechellensis* and Seychelles fody *Foudia sechellarum* in restored habitats has not only led to down grading of the threat status of these species but also to enhancing ecotourism potential. This has encouraged hotel owners to contribute to conservation efforts. Cousine, Fregate and Denis are all funding their own full-time conservation officers who run the programme. The private islands, particularly Cousine, have gone into full scale conservation works including research, monitoring and new restoration projects.

The programme has inspired other organisations and NGOs to undertake similar integrated restoration programmes on different islands. The programme has been financed by two Global Environment Facility (GEF) Medium Sized Projects to Nature Seychelles through the World Bank, and by the island owners and the Seychelles Government. It has been supported by technical assistance from British and other Universities, and BirdLife International.

REFERENCES

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For further information see:

www.natureseychelles.org

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