

issue one  
may 2017

stories from the field  
**Conservation Boot Camp**  
monthly magazine



**CONSERVATION BOOT CAMP™**  
**COUSIN ISLAND, SEYCHELLES**

a **unique** and **exclusive** program  
**award winning** & world renowned  
**nature reserve**



[www.natureseychelles.org](http://www.natureseychelles.org)

Project Concept: Nirmal Jivan Shah  
Project Management: Kerstin Henri & Nirmal Jivan Shah  
Chief Editor: Nirmal Jivan Shah  
Editing & Layout: Jedida Oneko

Published by © Nature Seychelles, June 2017  
All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher



funded by the  
GOS-UNDP-GEF  
Protected Area Finance project

*Cover Photos by Christien Le Roux*

# CONTENTS

4

## **I had a backyard, and it was Eden**

*Christien Le Roux Writes about her experience in Conservation Boot Camp*



12

## **Conservation Practice**

*Dr Nirmal Shah explains why he started the Conservation Boot Camp program*

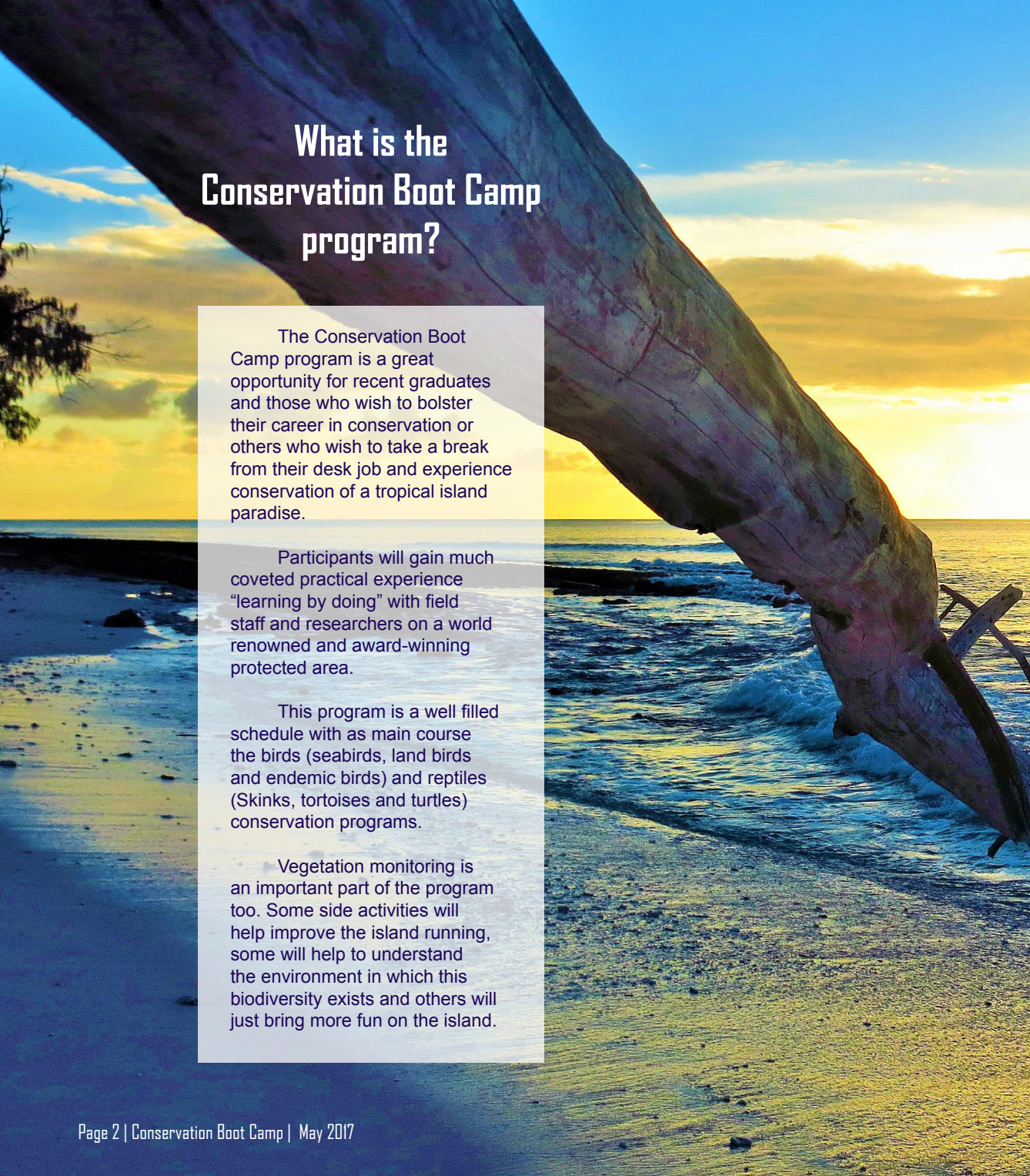


14

## **New program, new opportunity**

*Yan Coquet's take on Cousin Island as the new program coordinator*



A large, bleached piece of driftwood lies diagonally across a sandy beach. The background shows a sunset over the ocean with a golden sky and waves crashing onto the shore. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box.

# What is the Conservation Boot Camp program?

The Conservation Boot Camp program is a great opportunity for recent graduates and those who wish to bolster their career in conservation or others who wish to take a break from their desk job and experience conservation of a tropical island paradise.

Participants will gain much coveted practical experience “learning by doing” with field staff and researchers on a world renowned and award-winning protected area.

This program is a well filled schedule with as main course the birds (seabirds, land birds and endemic birds) and reptiles (Skinks, tortoises and turtles) conservation programs.

Vegetation monitoring is an important part of the program too. Some side activities will help improve the island running, some will help to understand the environment in which this biodiversity exists and others will just bring more fun on the island.

## What participants get out of the program

1. Be trained in monitoring techniques and gain field methodology skills.
2. Gain exposure to, and be involved in, eco-guiding and other ecotourism activities and meet visitors from all over the world
3. Interact with researchers and local conservation staff
4. Meet the Nature Seychelles' Chief Executive , a renowned and award winning Seychellois environmentalist.
5. Be involved in the activities of an award winning NGO
6. Be immersed in the work of an award-winning land and sea Protected Area
7. Live and experience a tropical paradise
8. Be exposed to work with sea birds and/or sea turtles
9. Live amongst other rare species and in restored indigenous woodlands
10. Experience a new culture, meet new people and share a wonderful travel experience
11. Contribute to some of the longest running data sets in the world
12. 2 limited edition Conservation Boot Camp T Shirts and 2 Nature Seychelles board shorts.
13. Receive a Certificate of Participation in the Conservation Boot Camp. Nature Seychelles is a registered Private Education and Training Institution under the Seychelles' Education (Private Education Institutions) Regulations 2005 and as such can legally provide courses and issue certificates.



i had a backyard  
... and it was eden

by Christien Le Roux

*Spiderweb and Skink*  
by Christien Le Roux

**W**hile in Seychelles for holiday, I started doing research on conservation projects in the archipelago as I was in love, smitten with the Seychelles.

I never usually go on excursions on my travels as I like to venture and discover countries on my own, I like going off the beaten track but for the first time on a journey I felt utterly overwhelmed by all the glory a country could offer and I only had a fortnight to accomplish many an adventure.

I started searching through my Seychelles travel guide but I didn't know where to begin or which travel agency would be able to satisfy my appetite. I came across a section on Cousin Island and the brief history provided had me enchanted. I had to set foot on that island.

I found Nature Seychelles' number listed, phoned and spoke to Eric Blais, Nature Seychelles'


Island Coordinator. If I was in love with Seychelles and my spirit and life's work was recently married to the plight of conservation, Cousin Island was the one and only place to begin.

Eric made me the happiest person in the world upon uttering the sentence: "Well, then you are in luck as we have just launched a new program, the Conservation Boot Camp where you will be learning by doing for the duration of a month long period."

I was given paperwork and information from an amazing team of people at the head office and within days it was booked, paid and arranged. Soon I would be headed to Cousin Island.

What I crashed into over wild waves of Indian Ocean Bliss could never, ever be given justice by any amount of glamorous adjectives, images or descriptions.

The frosted peak was a broth of crusty granite and thousands of swirling wingspans.



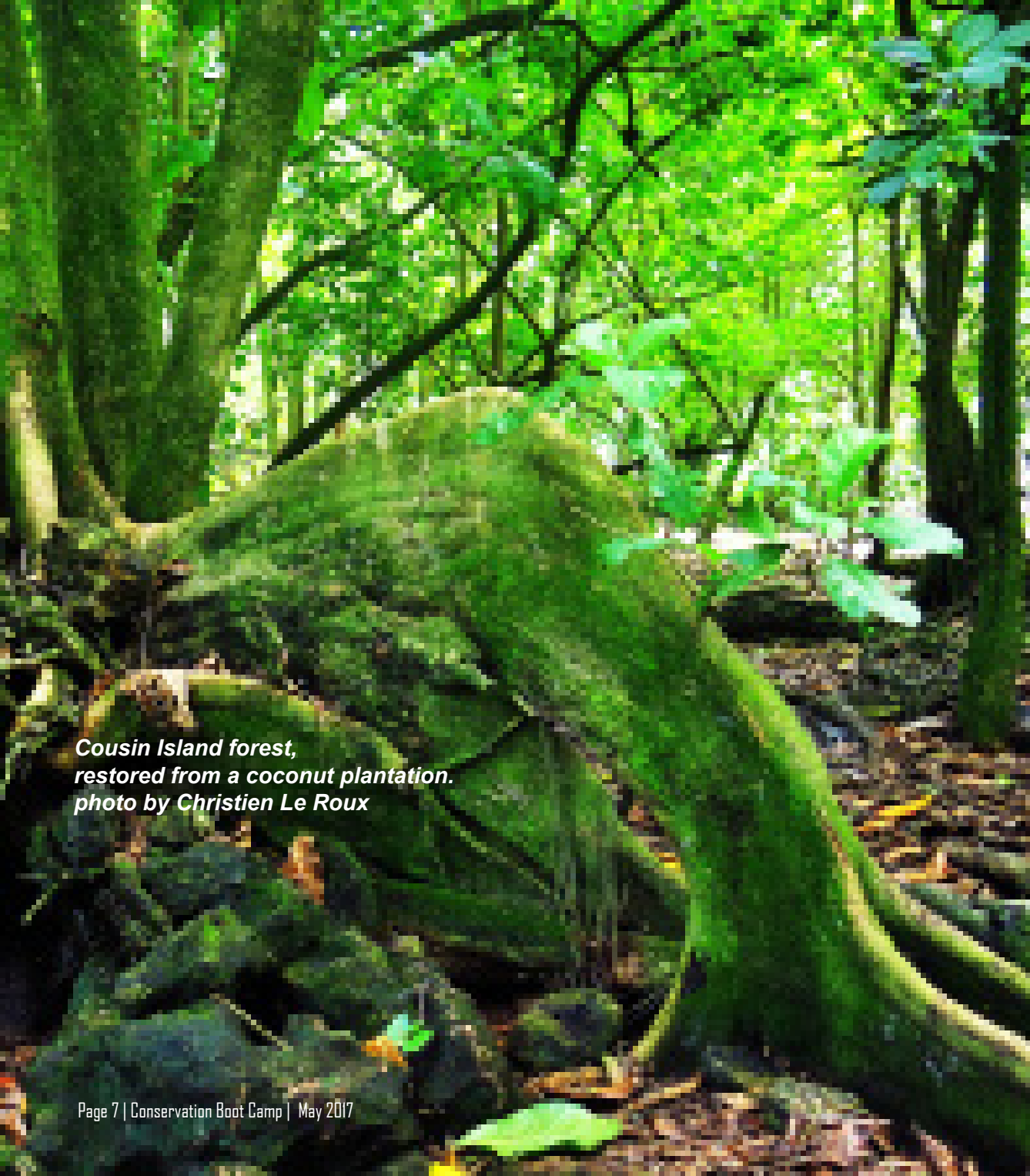
The lush woodlands burbled over the island right behind white sands and merely three roofs suggested human population.

I tried to keep my cool and to come across as un-touristy as possible. It was futile. I had discovered the glorious landscape which would chain my soul to its existence.

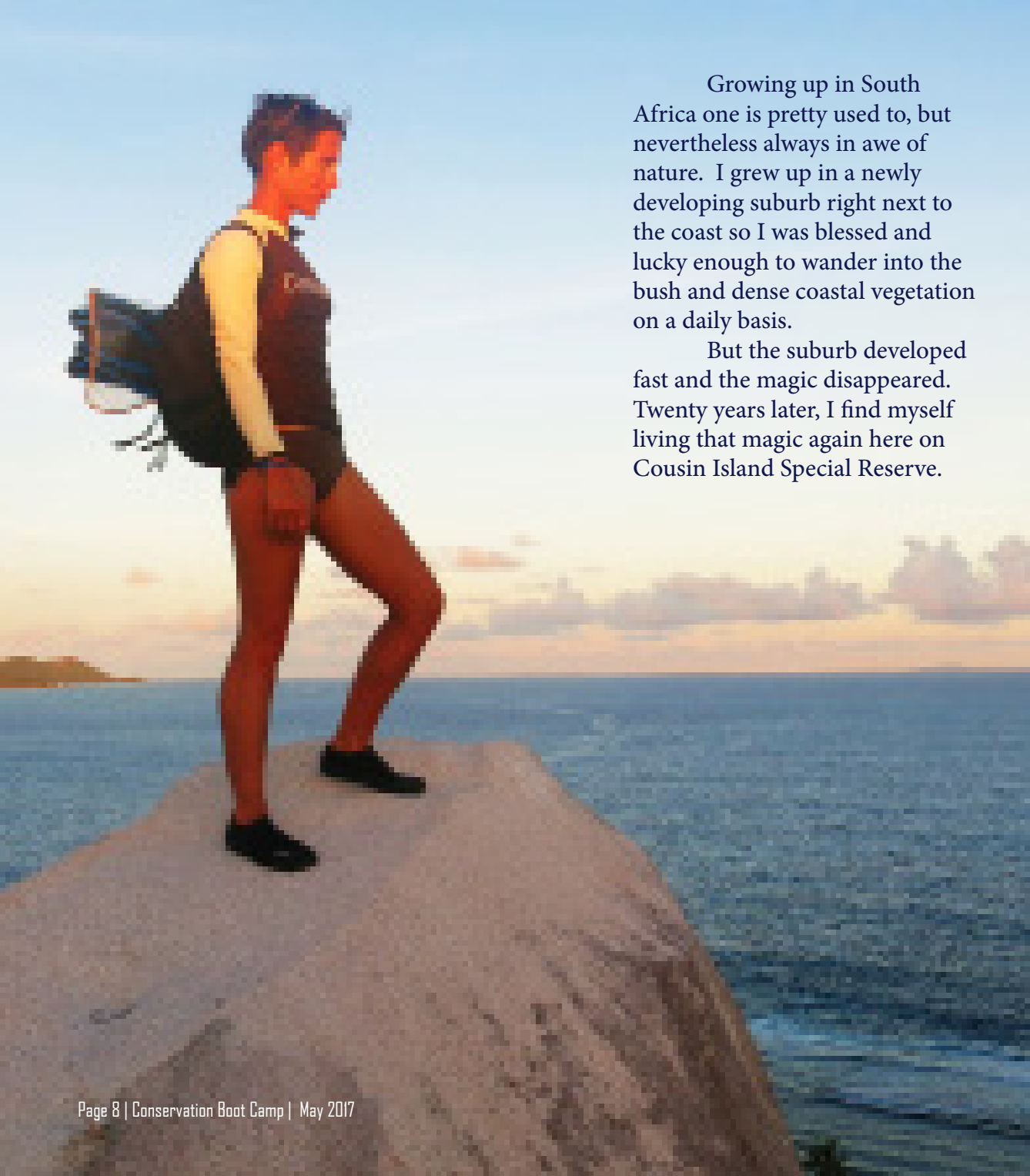
Within an hour of arrival I had to take a moment. I sat down on my overly stimulated picturesque patio of the field centre which was to be my home for the next four weeks.

And here I sit still, amongst the ghost crabs digging their holes in a frenzy creating small white sand mountains all around me as I write.

The sky is littered with a thousand black specs along the coast and into the magical maze of the woodlands by the seabirds that choose Cousin as their home for however a brief period. Behind me there are birdlife screeches and I have accepted that the forest has a voice of its own.



*Cousin Island forest,  
restored from a coconut plantation.  
photo by Christien Le Roux*

A woman with a backpack is standing on a large, light-colored rock that juts out into the ocean. She is wearing a dark vest over a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark leggings. The background shows a vast blue ocean under a sky with soft, orange and yellow hues from a setting or rising sun. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Growing up in South Africa one is pretty used to, but nevertheless always in awe of nature. I grew up in a newly developing suburb right next to the coast so I was blessed and lucky enough to wander into the bush and dense coastal vegetation on a daily basis.

But the suburb developed fast and the magic disappeared. Twenty years later, I find myself living that magic again here on Cousin Island Special Reserve.

The first week was jam packed with presentations on the wildlife and fieldwork that lay ahead of me. I couldn't take it in fast enough.

White Tail Tropicbirds swinging throughout the forest with their spirited long feathered tails crept over and through the air like a thousand saints on a permanent pilgrimage.

Crabs livened up the pathway, sluggishly groping over everything and anything. Every few seconds leaves or shrubs would shake from skinks that would dive into them.

And the waves had a sound system blasting of their own design.

Sunbirds amplified our arrival and then, there it was, the infamous and spectacular Seychelles Magpie Robin (SMR), once at the gates of extinction but now faring incredibly well here on Cousin Island.

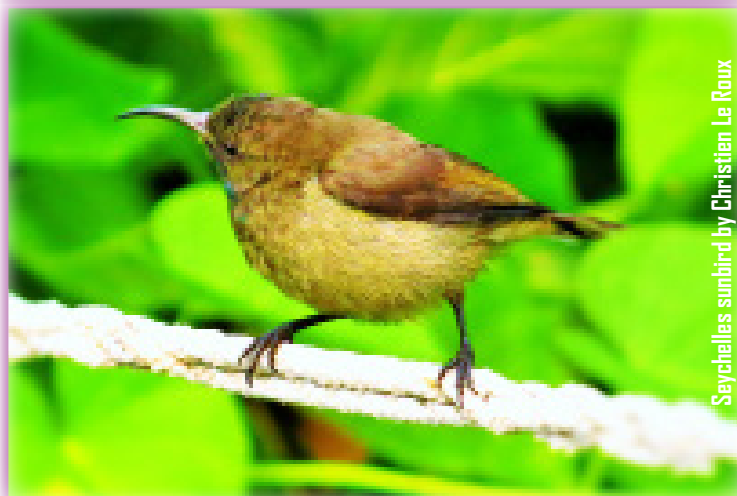
Yan Coquet, the program coordinator stopped dead. I stopped dead. He started whistling. Little did I know that he was a man with a plan and what an awesome exhibit of human - nature friendship was about to take place.



Seychelles Magpie Robin by Christian Le Roux



Ghost crab by Christian Le Roux



Seychelles sunbird by Christian Le Roux



*photos (L-R):*

- 1. Monitoring the Seychelles Magpie Robin in the forest*
  - 2. Invasive species Clearing;*
  - 3. Monthly invertebrate pitfall sampling of the forest floor;*
  - 4. Taking part in Cousin Island's ecotourism program*
- photos by Yan Coquet*

The SMR trotted from branch to branch coming closer constantly communicating, then another neared us, and another bounced along. The SMRs came down ever so trusting of our presence and they pecked-away continuing in a dialogue of “tjirps” to the human whistle.

I was stunned. I didn't want to leave that spot but was assured it was not a rare occurrence and there would be ample time to feast on this experience. Within days I, myself felt like the SMR whisperer and could never shake the



One of the tasks I helped with was monitoring the breeding success of White-tailed Tropicbirds and White Terns which involves observing nests for pairing, laying, hatching, and the various phases of growth. Every 5 to 7 days the growth and success rates need to be recorded - and that is a lot of time in the ever magical labyrinth of the woodlands.

Every morning I felt a lot like Indiana Jones, armed with compass and map, and using numbered poles to find my way - although I still managed to get lost and was convinced that someone had



moved the poles around during the night. Luckily, this never affected my productivity. It was always a five star adventure and the discoveries of literally going off the beaten track remains priceless and will stay with me for the rest of my life. Cousin Island has changed my life forever.

Throwing yourself smack in the middle of nature is a rare experience the **Conservation Boot Camp** program offers - living in it, without interference, as an outsider looking in ●

# Conservation Practice: The gap between skills taught and skills needed

*Dr Nirmal Jivan Shah*

*Nature Seychelles' CEO, a conservationist with 35 years of national and international experience, explains why he created Conservation Boot Camp*

The gap between the skills people learn and the skills people need is becoming more obvious. The World Economic Forum report “New Vision for Education” says that today’s job candidates must be able to collaborate, communicate, and solve problems. As in many other fields of work, In conservation these skills are in short supply despite a host of degree and training programs being offered. This is probably because these much needed 21st century skills are acquired not through traditional academic or online learning but through social and emotional learning (SEL) in real world situations.

The report defined a set of 16 crucial proficiencies or skills needed in the 21st century. Those skills include six

“foundational literacies”, such as literacy, numeracy and scientific literacy, and 10 skills that were labeled either “competencies” or “character qualities”. “Competencies are the means by which students approach complex challenges; they include collaboration, communication and critical thinking and problem-solving. Character qualities are the ways in which students approach their changing environment; they include curiosity, adaptability and social and cultural awareness” says the authors of the report.

When I came up with the concept of the Conservation Boot Camp I took into account several competencies and character qualities needed in the 21st century. If you embark on the Conservation Boot Camp journey I believe you can acquire a dozen fundamental proficiencies or skills.

*Photo : Sunset on Cousin Island by Christien Le Roux*

# Conservation Boot Camp 12 skills

## Foundation Literacies

*(how you apply your skills to everyday tasks)*

*(how you apply your skills to everyday tasks)*

scientific literacy

creativity

cultural literacy

adaptability

initiative

## Character qualities

*(how you approach complex challenges)*

*(how you approach complex challenges)*

## Competencies

*(how you approach complex challenges)*

communication

collaboration

critical thinking /  
problem solving

persistence/ grit

social & cultural awareness

leadership

curiosity





**NEW PROGRAM  
GREAT OPPORTUNITY  
FOR YOUNG  
CONSERVATIONISTS**

*by Yan Coquet  
Program Coordinator  
Conservation Boot Camp*



White / fairy terns on Cousin Island photo by Christien Le Roux



*This is how  
visitors to the Island arrive,  
on a special Cousin boat  
photo by Yan Coquet*



I landed at Praslin airport where I was met by two of Nature Seychelles' wardens based on Cousin Island Special Reserve. Jules and Alex came to pick me up, barefoot.

I then got on the Cousin boat that was moored just next to the airport and we took off for Cousin.

What a spectacular landing! Alex simply said "Hold on tight!" as he expertly zoomed the boat at high speed straight onto the beach. Wow! These two guys just introduced me to the island spirit.

My name is Yan Coquet and I hail from the sister island Mauritius where my work was managing an international conservation volunteer program.

Nature Seychelles chose me from a long list of applicants to coordinate its new and innovative learning program.

This is a capacity development program designed by Nature Seychelles' Chief Executive Dr. Nirmal Shah who, over 35 years of experience, realised there is a large gap between what budding conservationists and environmentalists are taught at University or in online courses and the real practice on the ground.

The program will "embed" participants from all over the world in the

conservation world of the incredible Cousin island where both training and "learning by doing" will be conducted.

Cousin is truly one of the world's great conservation success stories and this is what makes the new program unique. What an amazing place. I have enjoyed each encounter from the nesting turtles to the crawling giant millipedes. Birds, reptiles, fish, trees and invertebrates are now my neighbours and friends.

Ok, so it's not always easy with some of them. Those fodies which invite themselves in my kitchen looking for the good food I cooked sometimes leave a small 'souvenir' on the table, in the plate or on the windows.

Then there are the skinks that are always around for dinner. But we are improving our mutual relationship.

Learning happens every day by getting trained or by observation. It is just not possible to get bored on this island. When you think you've seen it all, Bam! Another surprise and discovery waits for you somewhere.

I'm keeping my eyes wide open to take the most of this lively theatre of life. I am convinced that the participants we will be hosting here will feel the same.

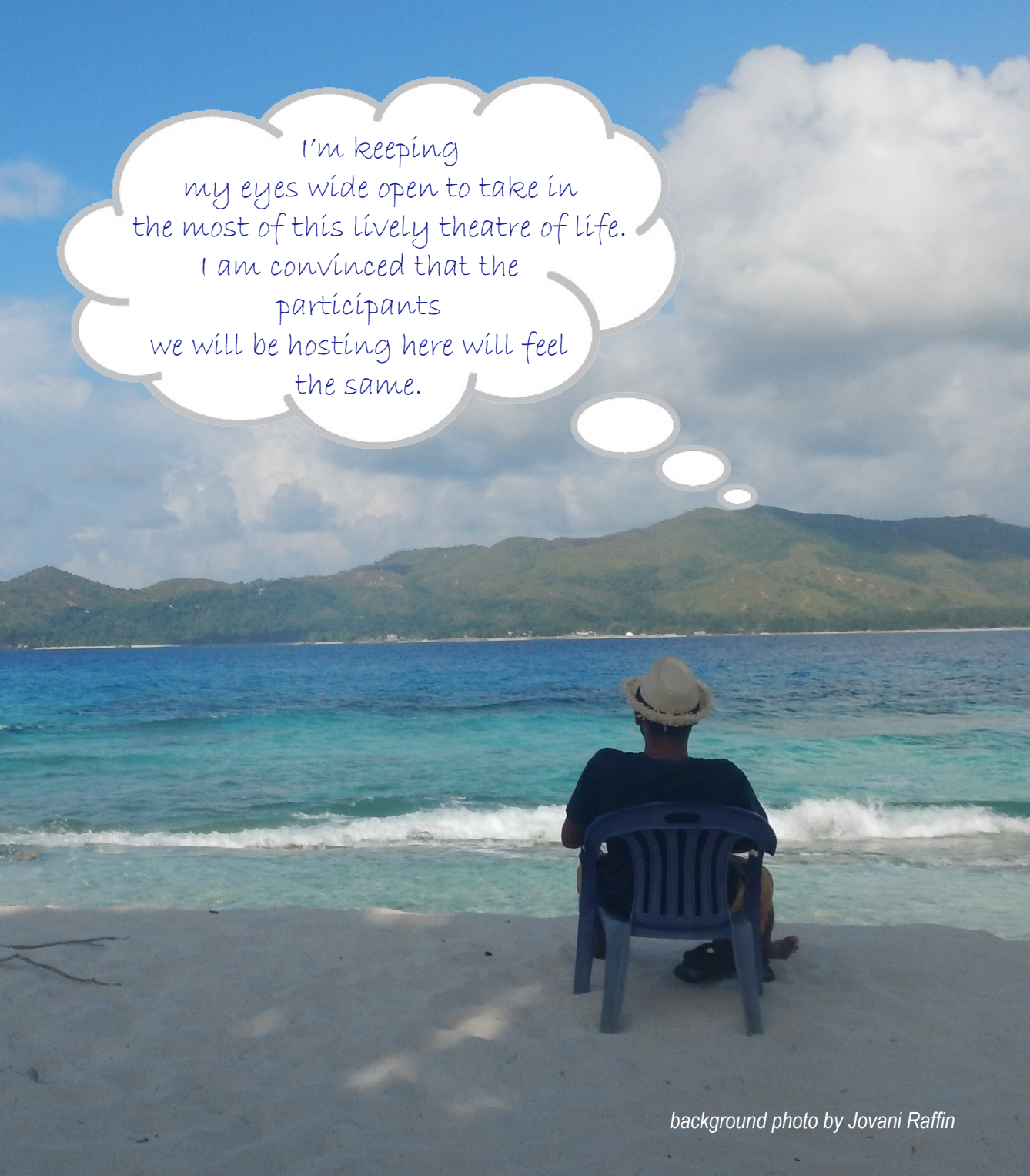




*Millepede by Yan Coquet*



*Wildlife on Cousin Island  
Photos by Christien Le Roux*



I'm keeping  
my eyes wide open to take in  
the most of this lively theatre of life.

I am convinced that the  
participants  
we will be hosting here will feel  
the same.

# APPLY NOW

exclusive  
to seven  
participants  
at a time


[www.cousiniland.net](http://www.cousiniland.net)  
[www.natureseychelles.org](http://www.natureseychelles.org)



Nature Seychelles 

@naturesey 

Nature Seychelles 

@naturesey 

Nature Seychelles 

NatureSey 

