



CONSERVATION BOOT CAMP™

MAGAZINE



# Stories from the Field

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ISSUE 4 | FEBRUARY - APRIL 2018

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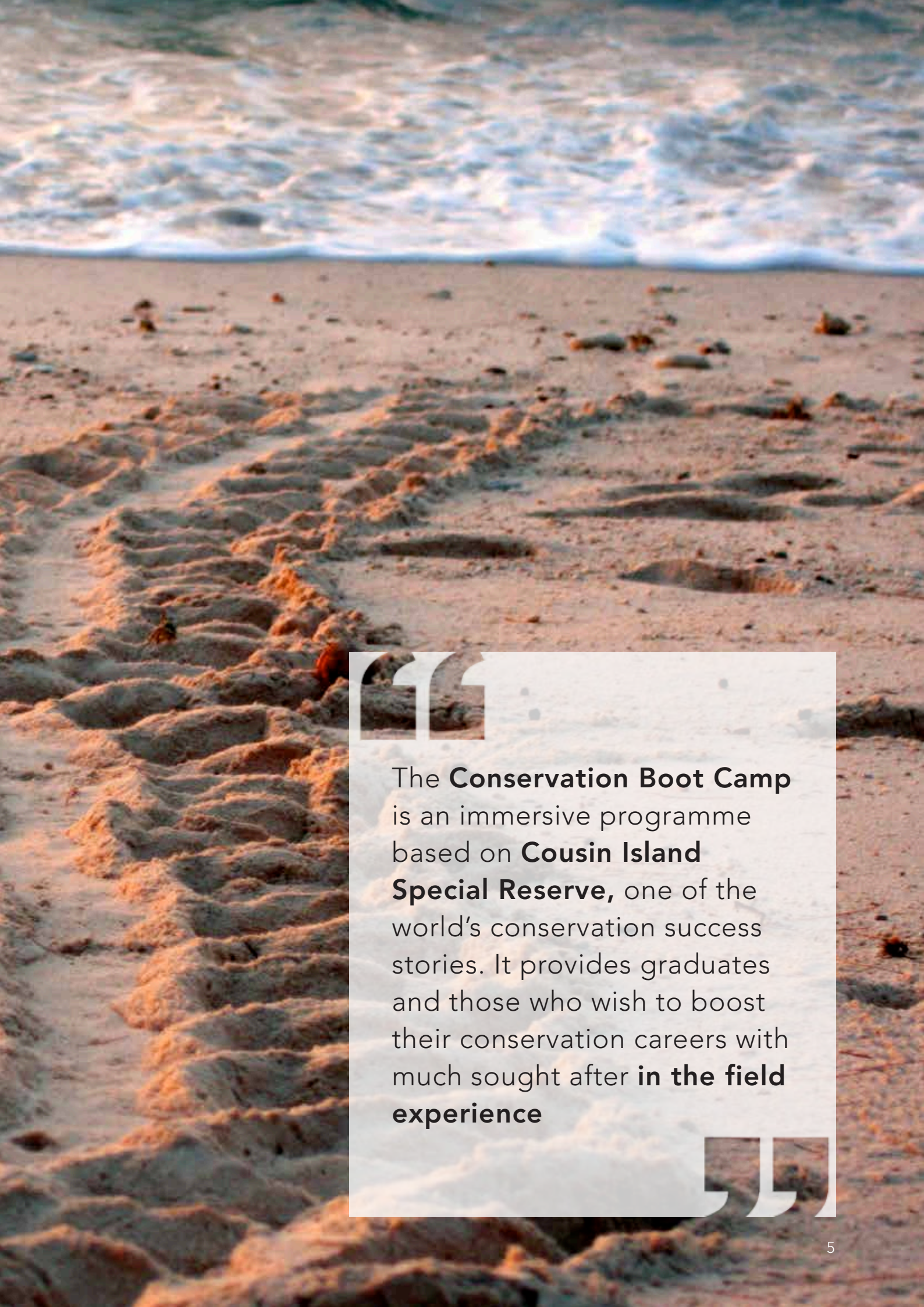
CONSERVATION BOOT CAMP™  
BOOTSTRAP YOUR CAREER!



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



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The **Conservation Boot Camp** is an immersive programme based on **Cousin Island Special Reserve**, one of the world's conservation success stories. It provides graduates and those who wish to boost their conservation careers with much sought after **in the field experience**



# WHAT PARTICIPANTS GAIN FROM THE PROGRAMME

- Trained in **monitoring techniques** and gaining **field methodology** skills.
- Gain exposure to, and be involved in, **eco-guiding and other ecotourism activities** and meet visitors from all over the world
- **Interact** with **researchers** and local **conservation staff**
- Meet the **Nature Seychelles' Chief Executive**, a **renowned and award winning** Seychellois environmentalist.
- Be involved in the activities of an **award winning NGO**
- Be immersed in the work of an **award-winning land and sea Protected Area**
- Live and experience a **tropical paradise**
- Be exposed to work with **sea birds and/or sea turtles**
- Live amongst other **rare species** and in restored **indigenous woodlands**
- Experience a **new culture**, meet **new people** and share a wonderful **travel experience**
- Contribute to some of the longest running **data sets** in the world
- 2 limited edition Conservation Boot Camp T Shirts and 2 Nature Seychelles board shorts.
- 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.

















# CBC PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

## NO OF PARTICIPANTS



**30 completed**  
the programme between  
May 2017 – June 2018

## FROM THESE COUNTRIES

 South Africa (1)	 Belgium (1)
 India (1)	 Switzerland (1)
 Germany (2)	 Pakistan (1)
 USA (1)	 France (5)
 UK (2)	 Canada (1)
 New Zealand (1)	 Madagascar (8)
 Colombia (1)	 Sweden (2)
 Austria (1)	 Seychelles (1)

LEARN MORE AND APPLY:

[WWW.NATURESEYCHELLES.ORG](http://WWW.NATURESEYCHELLES.ORG)

[WWW.COUSINISLAND.NET](http://WWW.COUSINISLAND.NET)



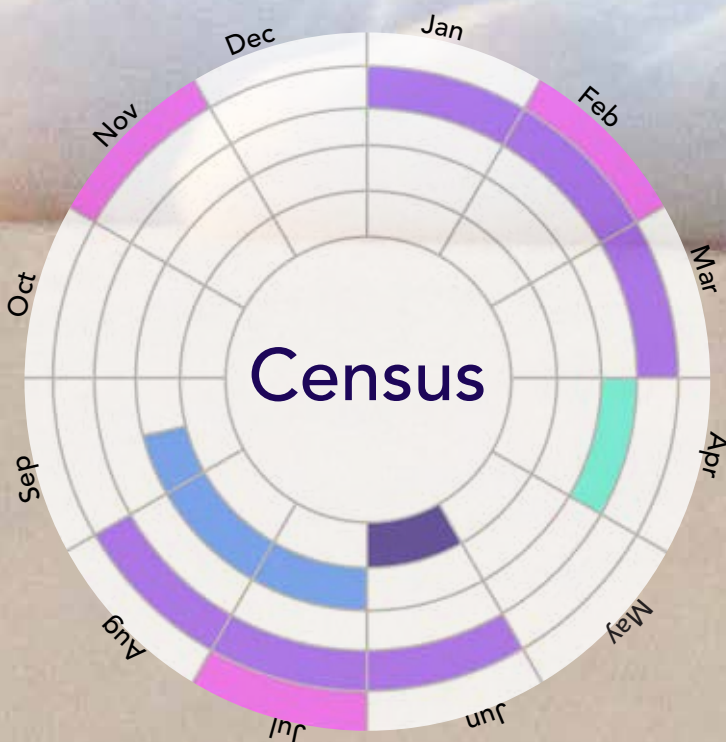
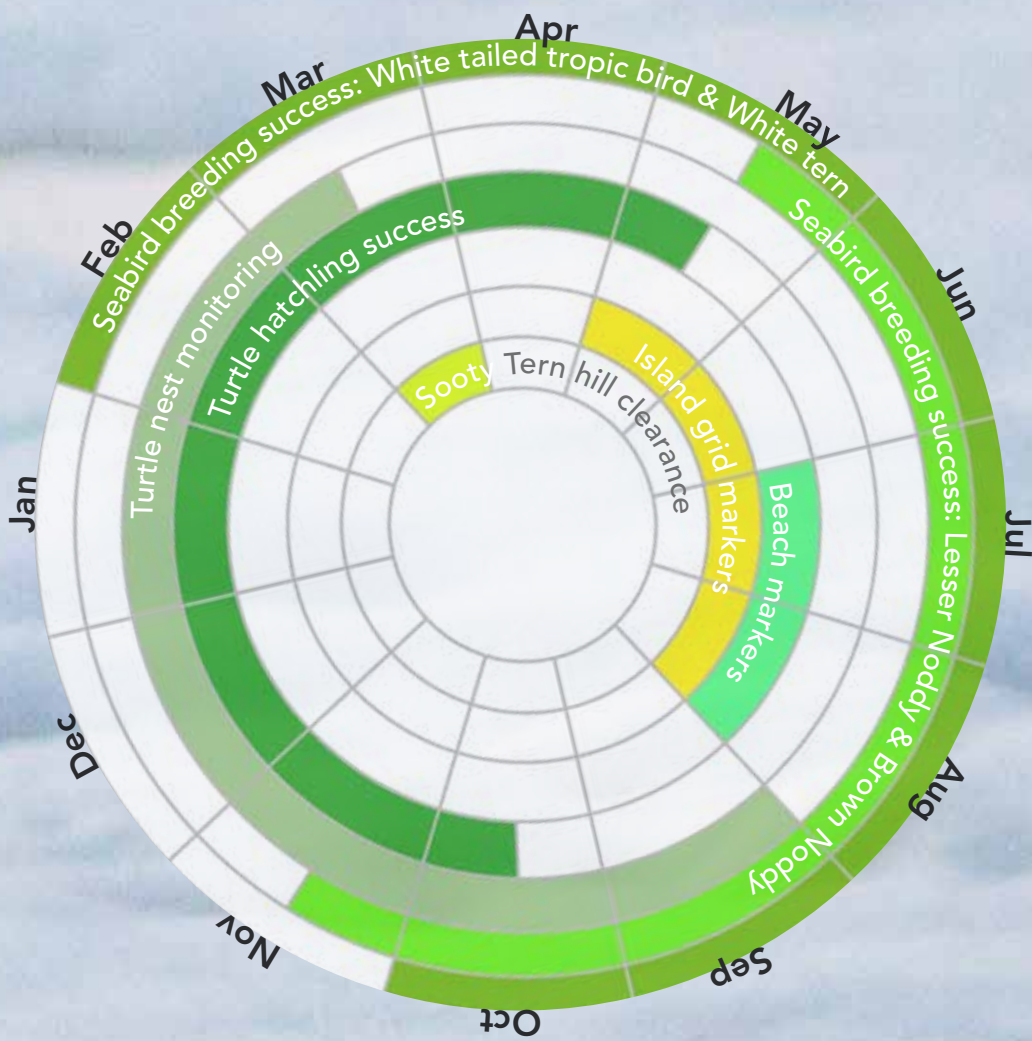
# CBC PROGRAMME

## CALENDAR

The Conservation Boot Camp takes place the **whole year**. This is a very exclusive program and with a **maximum of only 6 to 7 persons per session**. Each session lasts **for 4 weeks**. You will take part in some of the successful long term work here on Cousin Island. You will pick up a "fistful of skills" which, depending on the time of the year, include **monitoring of endemic land birds, sea turtles, seabirds, and vegetation, ecotourism guiding, invasive species control, and island maintenance**. The method is **Learning-by-Doing**. In-field training will be given for sensitive work such as seabird and turtle monitoring.

The normal working hours out of turtle season are between 5 – 7 hours, daily on weekdays. During turtle season, we can reach 9 hours of work daily with one day off including weekends. Below is an overview of the conservation work planning.





- Year-round activities
- Bird Ringing
  - Beach profiling
  - Invasive species removal
  - Beach clean-ups
  - Data entry

- Seabirds
- Bridled tern
- Land birds
- Tortoise
- Skinks



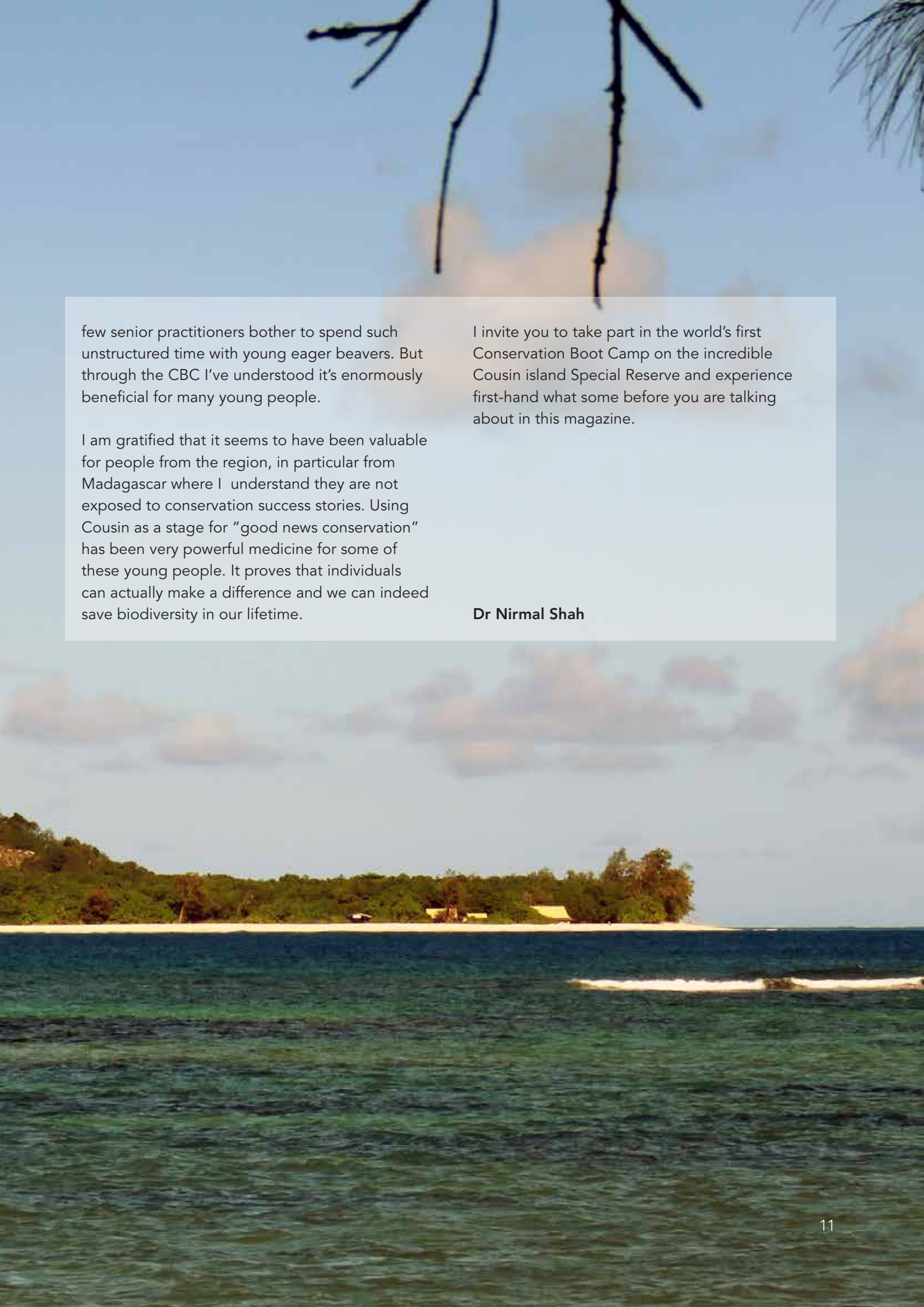
# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S LETTER

This is a celebratory year for us. We celebrate 50 years of Cousin as a nature reserve and 20 years of Nature Seychelles' existence. The Conservation Boot Camp program is also 1 year old and so many things have happened and so many adventures have taken place. Thirty participants from 16 countries including Seychelles have successfully completed the program. You can read about some of their experiences in this magazine.

When I first envisaged the program I was really thinking of straight-out-of-university and early career conservationists being interested in it.

But the range of participants has been wide and has taken me by surprise. I've learnt that the pull of tropical nature is very strong and one doesn't have to take up a career in conservation to want to participate in the CBC program. I've also learnt I had a super power I didn't know I possessed. Of those who were thinking of further environmental studies or jobs in this field, the time I spent with each apparently had a strong and positive influence on their next steps.

As part of the CBC program I spend some time with each participant and we talk about whatever the participant wants to bring up. I've been told



few senior practitioners bother to spend such unstructured time with young eager beavers. But through the CBC I've understood it's enormously beneficial for many young people.

I am gratified that it seems to have been valuable for people from the region, in particular from Madagascar where I understand they are not exposed to conservation success stories. Using Cousin as a stage for "good news conservation" has been very powerful medicine for some of these young people. It proves that individuals can actually make a difference and we can indeed save biodiversity in our lifetime.

I invite you to take part in the world's first Conservation Boot Camp on the incredible Cousin island Special Reserve and experience first-hand what some before you are talking about in this magazine.

**Dr Nirmal Shah**





# **PARTICIPANTS'** STORIES



# Wild thinking

By Caitlin SCHINDLER

While following a guided tour, a honeymooner chatted to me about CBC. '4 weeks away – don't you miss home?' he asked. I gestured towards the beach and said, 'Of course not, I'm in paradise!'

Nearly every CBC participant has written about how incredible Cousin Island is. The sea is infinity shades of blue and turquoise and changes every day. There is so much biodiversity that the seabirds, geckos, skinks, and crabs literally get under your feet. A Hawksbill turtle plopping her eggs into your hand or a Seychelles Magpie Robin flitting through the forest on your whistle are things that need to be experienced first-hand to be fully appreciated.

The wildlife, sun, and sea had me dazzled for the first couple of weeks. However, as I got settled into the daily CBC routine, my 'regular' life in the UK slowly faded back into focus and I found myself wondering what I would take away from

Cousin. Rather than having some incredible yet alien experience for 4 weeks and then returning to my daily slog, I was keen to identify elements that I would take forwards in my life. On reflection, there are a few themes my thoughts have centred around...

Firstly was the importance of communication in conservation. Although I have an educational background in conservation, I had never done field work before and was a bit nervous about coming out.

However, one thing that my desk job as a CSR Manager had unexpectedly prepared me for was the marketing angle: the simpler and more captivating you can make something, the more easily people will get on board with it.

The guided eco-tours on Cousin have proven so popular that Mr. Shah, the CEO of Nature Seychelles, told me that they have made the island more profitable than when it was a coconut plantation – with the funds now able to be put back into conservation. Following the wardens' tours



CBC has been a **transformative experience** for me.

as well as giving my own provided an opportunity to simplify and tell captivating stories about what we do here on the island, with the aim that more positive reviews will be written, tourists will continue to come, and Cousin's conservation will fund itself. The importance of simple and emotive communications is a principle I will carry forwards in my conservation career, with Cousin as a strong case study.

My second, and entirely unrelated, theme of thinking was marine plastics. I arrived at CBC in the wake of Blue Planet II, and a particularly passionate colleague insisted before I came that I would be astonished by how much plastic I'd see. I now have to admit that he was right. On my daily turtle patrols, I picked up the rubbish I washed up on the beach, normally consisting of plastic bottles, bottle tops, Styrofoam, lighters, and (strangely) lost shoes.

Seeing this on such a small island, which is otherwise so well protected, forced me face-to-face with the plastics issue. Although I already prided myself on being an eco-conscious consumer, there is more that I could be doing.

My final focal point was the people I've met on Cousin and their different perspectives. One of the most refreshing things about my experience here has been the distance (both mental and physical) I've gained from my usual life and the discussions I've had with the other volunteers and staff. Although people are drawn in by the island's conservation, everyone has a life beyond that and can offer you a perception outside of your typical frame of thought – whether you're discussing the best way to remove a tropicbird from a mist net, or mulling over your relationship and career options. Don't underestimate the impact of an escape on your mental health!

As evidenced by my meandering thoughts, CBC has been a transformative experience for me. Although I won't miss the smell of the long-drop or the loss of my toenails to scrambles over unforgiving granite boulders, I would repeat the experience if I had the chance and would encourage others to as well. The diverse experiences I've had in conservation, as well as my reflections beyond, would have been worth it alone, and the incredible setting is just the icing on the cake. ■

# Grid poles, corals, and nest boxes

By Isabela ECHEVERRY

Conservation work is tough. It takes a lot of hiking, in the heat, with mosquitos, in the rain, in the humidity of the forest.

It is also rewarding, it builds self-confidence. You have a task at hand, you get it done in the heat, using a compass, navigating through the forest!

Take Grid Pole checks. Once every six months, the team must locate, assess and fix the 114 Grid Poles that divide Cousin into different plots. The Grid Poles are fundamental for Conservation work: among other work they are used to demarcate territories for birds, or to randomly select the samples which are to be assessed.

We checked for poles in the plateau and forest as well as the hilltop. Hortensia, David and myself while looking for pole 33 and 32 on the hilltop, not only found them but a spectacular view of the bay to boot. Such are the rewards of conservation work on Cousin.

On our third week we went out with the Reef Rescuers to learn about the ins and outs of Coral Gardening. This is an absolutely interesting project where healthy corals are harvested and grown in a nursery for about a year until they are ready to be transplanted to the substrate of a degraded reef. We had an opportunity to snorkel and free dive around the coral nursery, and see the pipes, ropes and jerry cans which are fundamental to maintaining the nursery.

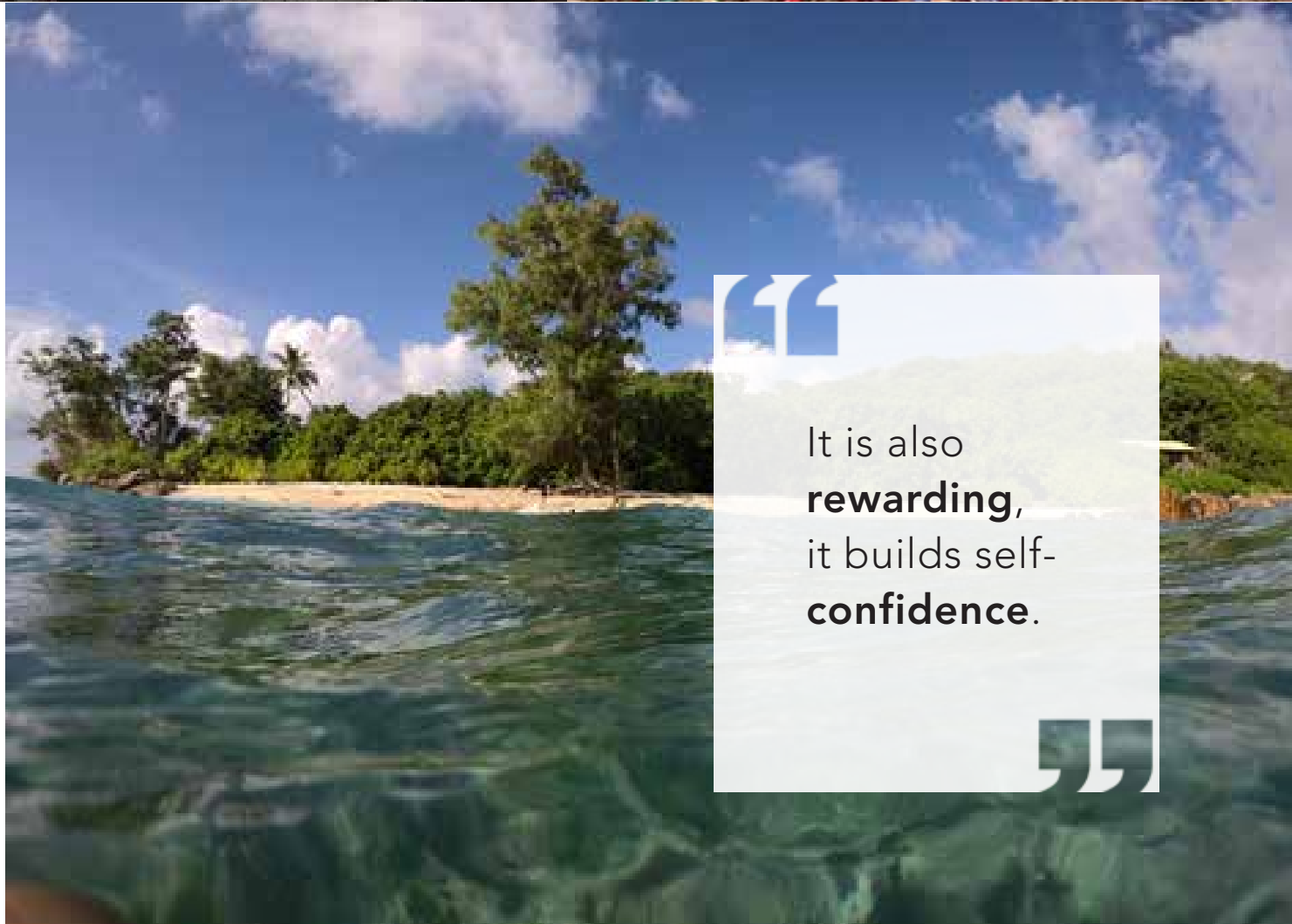
SMR – Seychelles Magpie Robin - are a big deal here. After the Seychelles Warbler population stabilized at a nice 3000 (but still being monitored), Nature Seychelles started working on bringing back the Magpie Robin population. A big part of



this work involves “Quality of Habitat” – which is all about having a good food supply (tasty invertebrates in the soil) and nesting opportunities.

Finally, being part of the CBC group, is having the opportunity to meet with Mr. Nimal Shah, Nature Seychelles CEO. We actually had a very nice morning with a cup of tea when we discussed Nature Seychelles financing, management style, purpose of the Conservation Boot Camp, and most importantly, tips and recommendations for my young colleagues who are about to finish University and will soon be looking for work opportunities in Conservation. A big piece of advice for anyone entering this field of work - learn English. It is the basis not only of tourism and business, but also of scientific and conservation work.

Hasta luego! ■



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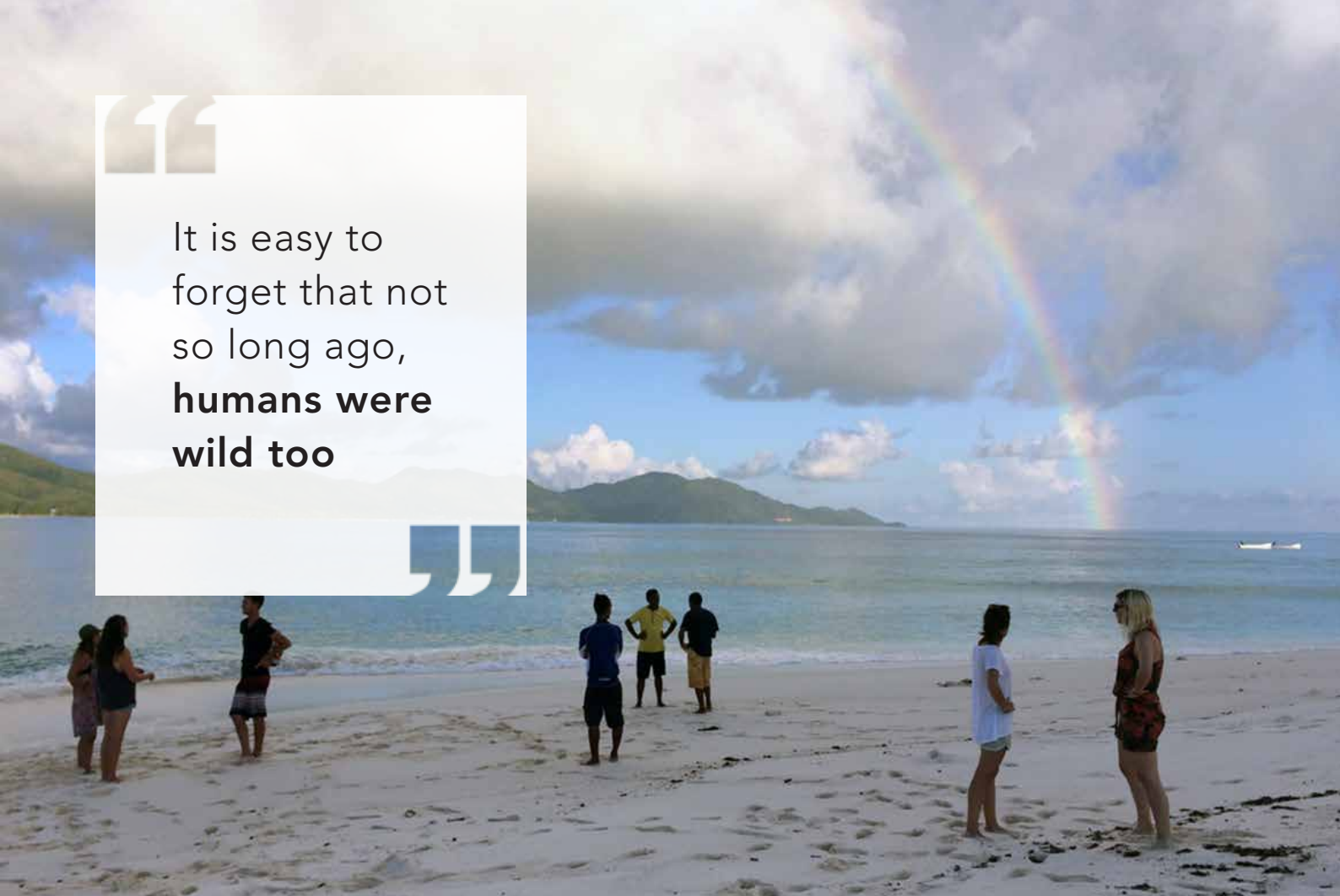


# Rewilding the mind

By Toria HARE

As others here have attested, Cousin Island is a feast for the senses. A thriving carnival of colour and light, pulsing to the drum of the crystal-clear breakers that surround it, and festooned in a blanket of tropical heat. The island's feathered tenants fill the air with their lyrics, and the earth tirelessly shifts, day and night, with life.

This natural fiesta is a wonder to take in; it creates a very healing environment. Your senses become taken up until there is no space for thinking. And with thinking adjourned, you can simply feel. It is possible to remain truly in the present moment, almost without effort. The ability to tune in and sense like this, and more specifically not to think, is a skill that so many of us have lost by choosing the frantic consumer culture we inhabit. Yet it is so vital for our wellbeing, and Cousin brings us wellbeing in spades.



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It is easy to forget that not so long ago, **humans were wild too**  
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There is no doubt that those of us privileged enough to volunteer on Cousin have a common goal and interest; to contribute to the conservation of its wildlife. The unique ecology that occurs on islands, the rare species, and the abundance of creatures that are mostly unfazed by human company, produces an indulgent location for anyone wanting to observe, study and protect the natural world.

But there are many other reasons that bring people here too. A big part of my own motivation for applying to volunteer was the opportunity to quietly surrender to the island's wild nature, to disconnect from my devices, take off my shoes and mindfully absorb my surroundings. For me, regularly stepping into an all-consuming piece of wilderness is a basic need, a strategy for survival and good health. I balance my year around finding time for remote and natural places whether that is via work, volunteering, or the moments that I deliberately leave free.

It is easy to forget that not so long ago, humans were wild too. A few communities still live in harmony with their environment, and they are a useful marker for the rest of us. It is my belief that

reconnecting with our natural selves is as important as brushing our teeth, and it will become more so as we speed up. We think of conservation as being about people protecting and repairing biodiversity, but I think people need biodiversity just as much as the rest of the planet.

Cousin Island provides a rare opportunity to step away. Decades of hard work by conservationists have restored a thriving oasis of wildlife that is finally allowed to be itself. We can take part in that work too, but why not let the wildlife teach us a thing or two at the same time?

I believe that anyone would benefit their wellbeing from four weeks on Cousin Island, no matter what takes them there. If you are lucky enough to land on those shores you will meet wonderful, skilled and like-minded people, you will undoubtedly gain fantastic CV-boosting experience and have a lot of fun, and you will have the chance to be nose to nose with charismatic and inspiring species. Do all of these things, but leave your phone completely behind, listen to the island and let your mind be wild and free. ■



# Unique, accessible, surprising

By Andriatsilavo DAVIDSON

The first time I was told about participating in Conservation Boot Camp, I was immediately hooked. To live a month on an island, a special reserve, to practice my knowledge in conservation and to learn new things by doing was a dream come true.

For those wanting to do conservation or just have a hands on experience, you will be more than satisfied with the Conservation Boot Camp. The fauna and flora of Cousin is unique, but also accessible. You will be able to approach very

closely, and in some cases touch, all the animals and plants of the island. I participated in the monitoring of the Seychelles Magpie-Robin, which is one of the rarest Seychelles birds and I was able to see one closely.

For those who just love nature, the island will provide you with so many unforgettable and intense experiences. One of the highlights during my stay on Cousin was to observe a Hawksbill turtle laying eggs; and I was right behind her throughout the process.

On Cousin, every time you step out of the house, there is a surprise waiting for you. Be it baby turtles that are heading to the sea, giant tortoises mating or a white tern feeding a chick. I will not mention them all at the risk of spoiling your surprise. And this is only what you could see on dry land, but believe me, the ocean has just as much to offer you. As on the mainland, every time you go in the water you will be surprised.

But the CBC program is not only about flora and



fauna, there is also the human relationships. It is an opportunity for exchange and sharing with people from all over the world. The atmosphere on Cousin is great, and I want to thank all the people I met during this month on Cousin. Thank you everyone for making this month unforgettable.

Thanks to my volunteer friends for their solidarity, understanding and "Joie de vivre". Thanks to all the residents of the island: the wardens, chief warden and science officer Jovani and Kara. I particularly want to thank Yan Coquet, the coordinator of this program, for his hospitality, his kindness, his accessibility that has guided us throughout this program. I would like to thank all the people and entities who contributed to my extraordinary trip to Cousin. This month spent on cousin is probably one of the best months of my life. Thank you Cousin, see you soon I hope. ■

*David participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*



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You will be  
more than  
**satisfied** with the  
**Conservation  
Boot Camp**  
”



# Falling in love with Cousin

By Berthin Edmond RAZAFINDRAZANAKA

My stay at Cousin Island was one of the best experiences I've ever had. It started spectacularly during the first week of our arrival. We saw a sea turtle while having the introduction tour with Yan, the Program Coordinator. She was the first marine turtle I had ever seen. And in addition, the turtle was tagged with the number 1203 which is my birthday (March 12). I was overwhelmed by the serendipity. The moment was a beautiful memento -- like a gift from God.

I am pleased to have undergone training as a CBC participant on Cousin Island Special Reserve. I thank God for the opportunity.



CBC participants are like family – we dined together, read, fished, played together.



I had a wonderful time here. I fell in love with the island thanks to its rich biodiversity and the management and conservation of biodiversity applied by the team on the island.

My direct contact with nature and with the island team increased my motivation to protect and conserve the environment. It taught me ethical behaviour towards wildlife. Yan gave us strict instructions to avoid walking on crabs - even accidentally - and not to approach the birds for no reason.

I feel very lucky that I was able to come to Cousin through my studies to practice what I'm learning. I have gained expertise mainly in bird conservation and I know now how to guide an eco-tour. I helped improve Sooty tern breeding conditions through the removal of invasive plants, and participated in the breeding success monitoring and census of the Fairy tern, White-tailed Tropicbirds, and Seychelles Magpie-Robin. In addition, the turtle nest excavation for hatching success was pretty amazing.

I feel like I left my heart on this island. I happily marked my 26th birthday here, which also happens to be the Mauritius Independence Day.

CBC participants are like family – we dined together, read, fished, played ping-pong, went snorkelling, helped in boat pushing, and generally had great team relations.

I learned a lot on island during the 28 days spent here. I would like to especially thank the CEO Dr Nirmal Shah for his candid advice shared during our meeting. Many thanks also to our unforgettable leader Yan (thank you for the cakes and candy during my birthday) and thanks to all the team on the island. Finally, I want to thank infinitely my lovely colleagues who are very motivated and dynamic. God bless us all. ■

*Berthin participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*



# A chance to learn

By Irene ZAFIZARA

My name is Irene ZAFIZARA, a young Malagasy marine and coastal conservationist. I joined the Conservation Boot Camp on Cousin Island Reserve in April.

I felt right at home on Cousin: sharing, and discovering this unique island with my fellow participants. When we arrived from Praslin by boat, I could see from afar the greenery of the forest, the birds going back and forth all around the island and I was awed. I finally arrived to live in the jungle that I always dreamed of in my adolescence.

The CBC programme aims at equipping young people with in the field experience. The highlights

of my experience was participating in island eco tours as a guide and all the activities related to the sea, particularly helping in cleaning the coral nursery for the reef restoration project.

There was also plenty of camaraderie among the participants with weekend barbecues and dinners together every Wednesday. I also cherished the moments when I took walks alone on the beach at night. It was very relaxing after a full day of work. However, as so often happens in life, there were difficult moments when I was missing my family and home.

The CBC program is a fruitful collaboration of certain entities to which I would like to say thank you: "Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM)", Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), Nature Seychelles and Cousin Island. The completion of this training would not be possible without their dedication.

I am also indebted to all the staff of Cousin Island



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The highlight of my experience with CBC was participating in **island ecotours**  
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and the Reef Rescuers team for their support and especially their benevolent welcome.

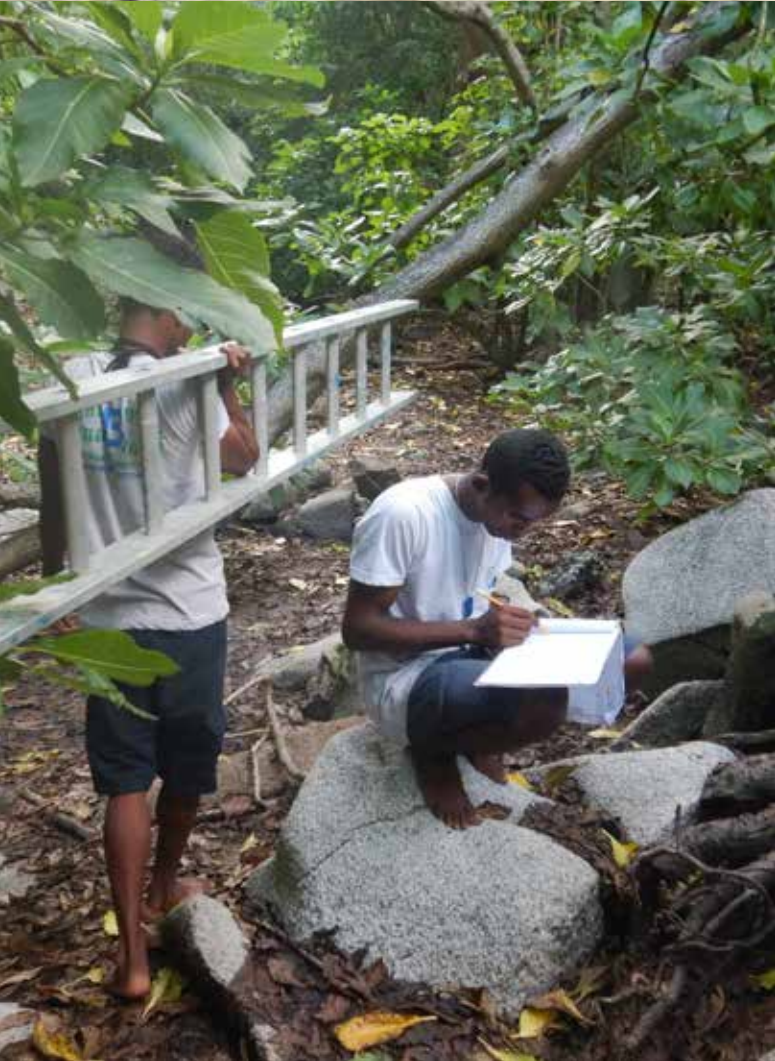
I'm grateful to Yan for his advice and sacrifice. We have had the chance to learn, practice and also see new things of all kinds. It was a challenge living in the field but ultimately a pure adventure when one is well-guided and accompanied.

Thanks to the CEO Mr. Shah for giving me the courage and motivation for conservation. His advice and encouragement are great, I hope they will not be in vain and CBCers adopt them.

I also thank my CBC colleagues for sharing their friendship, as much as their precious presence during our stay, kisses to you !!! ■

*Irene participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*





# Worth the experience

By Onja MIANDRIMANANA

I had never left Madagascar before coming to join the Conservation Boot Camp on Cousin Island. Going abroad was a bit daunting, but it's an experience I shall cherish.

The story starts with the Nature Seychelles' invitation to visit Cousin and participate in the Conservation Boot Camp. I could hardly wait a day more when I heard, because this was an opportunity for me to get professional experience in nature conservation. We flew into Praslin. Upon our arrival here, I felt like I was in heaven because of its natural beauty. The next day, the Cousin Island team took me to the island where an even



“  
I learnt how  
to imitate and  
call **Seychelles  
magpie robins**  
”

closer view of paradise was waiting for me: the sea, birds, tortoises, lizards.

A week into the programme, I began to understand the ecosystem and its interactions as I spent most of my time in the forest observing and monitoring birds. In the evening I learnt about marine turtles breeding. During the Seychelles magpie robin monitoring, I was very surprised by the bird's call and I learnt how to imitate and call magpie robins for monitoring. It was a fantastic experience.

I would like to thank all Nature Seychelles Staff and Cousin Island wardens who helped me, trained me and advised me in all the different activities - guiding, monitoring, and surveys. A month on the Island seemed like 10 years of experience for me. This training has given me a lot and will allow me to compare conservation tools and methodologies in my country. ■

*Onja participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*





# Unity in diversity

By Hortensia RAZAFIARIVELO

Research, discovery, adventure, good mood. These are the words I would use to summarize my trip to the lovely Cousin Island, during the month of April 2018. I am lucky to have been able to be a part of the Conservation Boot Camp. It was astonishing to see the island: all those huge trees, the small Whitetailed tropicbird chicks, the Aldabra giant tortoises and the famous colour of the Seychelles magpie robin upon arrival on the island.

This was my first time living in the wild for such a long period of time. It was breath-taking to wake up and see the birds flying, the tortoises wandering around, and hearing the sound of the waves and the chirps of the birds.

I especially appreciated the monitoring activities that we undertook on Cousin. They helped me improve my knowledge and most importantly, my capacity to work in the field. I spent beautiful moments here on Cousin. One of my favourite moments was to observe the growth of the White-Tailed Tropicbird (*Phaeton lepturus*) chicks. We had the chance to identify the different stages of their evolution with weekly monitoring.

It was also the first time that I had ever seen a Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). She was laying eggs. This sight helped me think about the beauty of nature and all the differences between animals. The nest excavations to determine Hawksbill hatching success with taught me patience and perseverance, and also, solidarity through working as a team.

I will remember the day that we climbed up the hill for the grid pole project and the land birds Census. It was exhausting but I really enjoyed the view there, we could see all the islands surrounding



Cousin, like Mahé, Praslin and Cousine.

I also enjoyed the harmony between the staff members and the volunteers. Barbecues, dinners, pushing the boats; a lot of stuff is done collectively. I felt really useful during my trip here.

I also liked the diversity in volunteers, coming from different continents to all do the same thing; conservation. I think one month isn't enough to explore all of the island but I can definitely say that I learned a lot here. I left a hint of my presence with the conservation work I did.

I would like to thank all the staff on Cousin and Nature Seychelles, especially Dr Nirmal Shah, the Conservation Boot Camp coordinator, Yan Coquet, science officer and the wardens, and the Reef Rescuers and the other CBC participants. ■

*Hortensia participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*



A lot of stuff is done **collectively**. I felt really useful during my trip here.





# Time flies on Cousin

By Edouard SOAVATSARADIA

Cousin was my first field experience. It's an island filled with treasures. An island of such beauty you could call it paradise. The first mornings when I arrived as a CBC participant were a little hard, but being this close to this exceptional nature helped a lot. Cousin is populated by numerous birds and I enjoyed seeing its various endemic birds.

We learned to work as conservationists both on land and at sea. We participated in monitoring of the breeding success of seabirds, census of the Seychelles magpie robin and guiding tourists on the island. After one week of training, I patrolled the beach to find turtles nesting and collect crucial data used for monitoring.



I won't easily forget my first encounter with a turtle. I found it searching for a place to lay its eggs. Unfortunately, it didn't find a suitable one and returned to the sea. A short moment after that, I saw another one. This one was ready to lay eggs. I moved closer and carefully started to count the eggs and marking the nest. An unusual and unforgettable moment for me. Seeing a hatchling was also really memorable; the baby turtles dash to reach the sea while lurking crabs try to eat them.

Time flies, here on Cousin. Being here for a month was great. I hope to one day come back, especially for the breeding season of the noddies. I would like to thank Nature Seychelles for giving me this opportunity. A big thank you to our Coordinator, Yan, for sharing his knowledge. Thanks to the staff, the other CBC participants and the wardens for their cooperation. ■

*Abdou participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*

Seeing a **hatchling** was also really **memorable**





# Completely speechless

By Hobitina HANITRARIMBOLA

Cousin Island Special Reserve is just magnificent. I miss the words to describe the incredible adventure I had. Arriving on the island, I was completely speechless.

I have always been passionate about nature and conservation. This is what prompted me to apply to the training of young conservationists in marine and coastal environment at the "Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marins" in Tulear, Madagascar. One of the components of this training allowed students to spend a month in Cousin to acquire new experiences, put into practice and reinforce the knowledge on conservation.

Being here for me is more than a great opportunity. I would say "C'est comme un rêve" – it's like a dream - but it's real, I am here.

Seeing Cousin through the porthole of the plane I was dumbfounded by its beauty because even seen from the top the island exudes a charm quite unique. In addition to arriving, the reception was warm. The boat ride from Praslin to Cousin seemed already to promise a new adventure.

The first two weeks on the island were paced progressively to learn the different activities and it went well. Every day was always a new adventure. One of my best moments here was to see a sea turtle laying eggs (on Vakwa beach) one evening and also to have helped a little. Seeing turtle hatchlings go to the sea the same evening was an exceptional moment for me.

The best moment during the activities was to find chicks during the breeding success monitoring for seabirds. I felt strong emotions for these little birds,



to see them grow little by little. On Wednesdays, it made me very happy to eat all together like a family and to play games together.

The conservation information I received is very rich. I was able to see the way in which conservation has been managed in a Special Reserve. The different activities that I was able to participate in are so beneficial to me, strengthening already acquired knowledge and providing experience in this field. It's a real asset for my future career. One of the advantages that we also had on Cousin Island came through communicating with others: I had the opportunity to develop and practice my English.

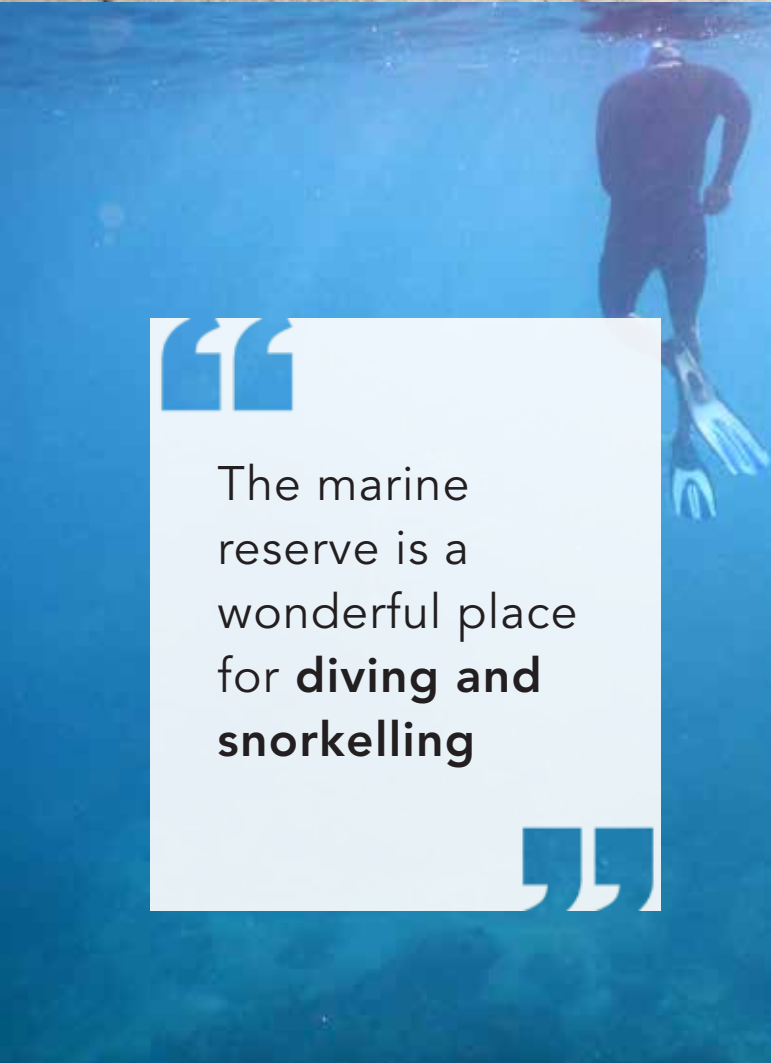
Many thanks to the Nature Seychelles team on Cousin Island and Conservation Boot Camp participants. Thanks for the advice Yan, Isabela and Charlotte. ■

*Hobitina participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF).*



The CBC is a  
real asset for my  
**future career**





# A feast for the senses

By Abdou CHAHERDINE

Cousin Island is abundant with flora, marine and land fauna. There are thousands of birds that breed on the island each year.

They nest in a place safe from predators. I was surprised to come across many Whitetailed tropicbirds (*Phaethon lepturus*) nesting on the ground. I found out they can dive down to 16 meters deep to look for fish. The white tern (*Gygis alba*) was also quite fascinating – birds pair for life, remaining faithful all their life. The way they nest on the branch of trees hanging precariously on branches was mind boggling.

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The marine reserve is a wonderful place for **diving and snorkelling**

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Knowing these facts about the seabirds made them interesting to monitor. We checked hundreds of eggs and nests of the the white tern and white-tailed tropicbird are monitored to monitor breeding success and growth. We also checked on the beautiful Seychelles magpie robins every week.

Cousin Island is a marine reserve also, and it's the site of a coral reef restoration project called Reef Rescuers. We learnt about this project and how it is using the coral gardening method to grow corals and transplant them.

Cousin Island is one of the most important nesting sites for hawksbill turtles and we were able at the tail end of the nesting season to see both turtles and hatchlings. In addition, one can find many skinks on the island, and geckos. It is also a beautiful view for the sunset, and a wonderful place for scuba diving and snorkelling. ■

*Abdou participated in the CBC through a partnership between Institut Halieutique et Sciences Marines Toliara (IHSM) Madagascar and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*



# Come here, get dirty and give back

By Mathias MALMQVIST

I joined the Conservation Boot Camp programme with my fellow student Frida. As CBC participants, we have been discovering the island and contributing to the conservation work. Being one of the most successful conservation-stories in Seychelles, and even the world, we were keen to join the programme.

We came to the Seychelles to carry out research for our bachelor degree thesis. Both of us are studying sustainability in using voluntourism at conservation sites. For two months, we have travelled and joined

different programs, to do our study and collect useful data.

The time spent at Cousin has been interesting and instructive, while also fun and exciting. From the first day as we got picked up with a boat and then landed full speed on the beach at Cousin, until the last day getting soaked from high waves leaving it.

I am very satisfied with my stay, wildlife, tasks, staff and fellow volunteers. During our stay, we focused on tasks related to monitoring the Seychelles Magpie Robin. Prior to our arrival our knowledge about birds was equal to nothing. Cousin Island is an example of how a site, run by educated and social staff, can inspire you to learn.

We have been spending long days in the forest, with lots of work, heat and mosquito-repellent. 'Not for everyone' one might say, but I think it is. No matter where you come from and what background you may have, you will gain something from the experience. It's different for all, but the most important thing is that you gain a perspective.



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A place or  
**experience**  
will always be  
**whatever you**  
**make** out of it

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We saw how climate and our consumption have impacted nature while also gaining a certain perspective on how privileged we in the western world are. Come here, get dirty and give back is what I concluded. One thing is for sure, you will sleep deep and well.

During our leisure time, Frida and I got to work on our thesis while also socializing with others. Many times, we had dinner together, which was truly nice. A barbecue that could last all night, ending with a spectacular clear night-sky with thousands of stars on the beach.

Frida and I wanted to be somewhat smart about our spending and therefore focused on only having canned-food. It was cheap and less calories, but it would only last for so long. As we had a supply-trip once a week to get more food from Praslin, we did treat ourselves more than expected. Also, with great people on the island, treats were being offered quite often, and it's not polite to say 'no thanks'! No complaints what so ever, we loved it. A new passion for baking was also picked up

during the stay, as some cravings for sweets were too strong. Resulting in failure quite often, but also success every now and then!

I believe it's the people who make a destination, defining what meaning and memories a certain place might give you. A place or experience will always be whatever you make out of it. If one comes here with a negative attitude, that's the sort of experience they can expect in return. But, come here with positiveness and an openness to adapt and learn, then you are guaranteed to have a great time! Unfortunately, it's only after you leave a place as you realise what mattered and how much you will miss it.

Would do it again.

With best regards to the conservation team at Cousin ■



# My Cousin adventure

By Mathieu MAUFRONT

As the boat approached the island, I felt my excitement rising; the warm water splashing behind my back, the wind caressing my face, and, right in front of us, standing strong, the wilderness where I would be living for a month. I felt like an adventurer on his way to discover an untouched part of the globe. Soon, I could see roofs peeking out of the green. As we got closer, birds started to appear all around the island. I knew I was in for something special. The boat landed directly on the beach. Finally, I was here, walking in the white sand of Cousin Island.

We headed to our house. It was small with a nice covered terrace facing the sea and Praslin. In

the centre there was a large table, at the front, hammocks hanging from the pillars supporting the roof. The inside was simple yet comfortable; in the living room, a table with chairs and couch, two desks and a much needed electric fan. A kitchen, three small bedrooms and a bathroom completed it. Some lizards were already here to welcome us as we settled down. It was now time for our first encounter with the forest. Barefoot, we started the tour, guided by Yan, our coordinator for the month.

Entering the forest for the first time was a totally unique experience. As we stepped in, the atmosphere changed, sounds of the waves were now muffled, the large Pisonia trees filtering the light and a handful of unknown bird calls. As we walked, Yan introduced the local wildlife; Tropicbirds, White terns, Noddies, Skinks – only the mosquitoes needed no introduction.

Suddenly, Yan started whistling and a Seychelles magpie robin landed on a branch right next to us. It looked at us, intrigued, and when Yan disturbed the soil with his foot, it jumped to the ground,



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There are  
so many  
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moments  
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approached carefully, while still looking at us and suddenly ate an exposed insect.

Yan then took us to the island's "view point" and what a breath-taking moment that was. Squeezing through a small, bushy path and landing there, on a small rocky plateau towering the forest and the sea, birds flying all around, islands in the horizon. From that moment on, I enjoyed every moments up the hill with the same enthusiasm.

Back at the house, Yan introduced the conservation work. We then ate our first lunch on Cousin, facing the ocean. I met the adorable but pesky Seychelles foddies as they hopped towards my plate until I chased them with a hand motion. The birds flew to the end of the table and then started hopping closer again. This marked the beginning of a new ritual that I would follow every day of my stay on the island.

Waking up to the sounds of waves and birds was surprisingly easy. Eating breakfast to the sun rising behind Praslin with giant tortoises wandering

around the house becoming the new norm. I felt like I went back in time, or landed in Jurassic Park. The first week was really interesting as I got introduced to the conservation field, something that I was totally new to. Whistling to call the magpies became a routine that didn't age at all.

Everything on this island felt so untouched and preserved but at the same time so close. Noddies would poop on you frequently, it was sometimes hard not to step on a skink as they are numerous and curious. It was normal to find a skink or two in the kitchen while cooking. White terns feeding their chicks, tropicbirds yelling at you when you passed too close to their nest, ghost crabs running away on the beach, helping baby turtles reach the sea - there are so many memorable moments.

But hearing the eerie cries of the shearwaters while watching the sun set really was a one-of-a-kind experience. ■



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