



CONSERVATION BOOT CAMP™

MAGAZINE

Stories from the Field

ISSUE 5 | MAY - AUGUST 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**

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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



37 completed
the programme between
May 2017 – June 2018

FROM THESE COUNTRIES



South Africa (1)



Belgium (1)



India (1)



Switzerland (1)



Germany (6)



Pakistan (1)



USA (1)



France (6)



UK (2)



Canada (2)



New Zealand (1)



Madagascar (8)



Colombia (1)



Sweden (2)



Austria (1)



Seychelles (1)



Italy (1)

LEARN MORE AND APPLY:

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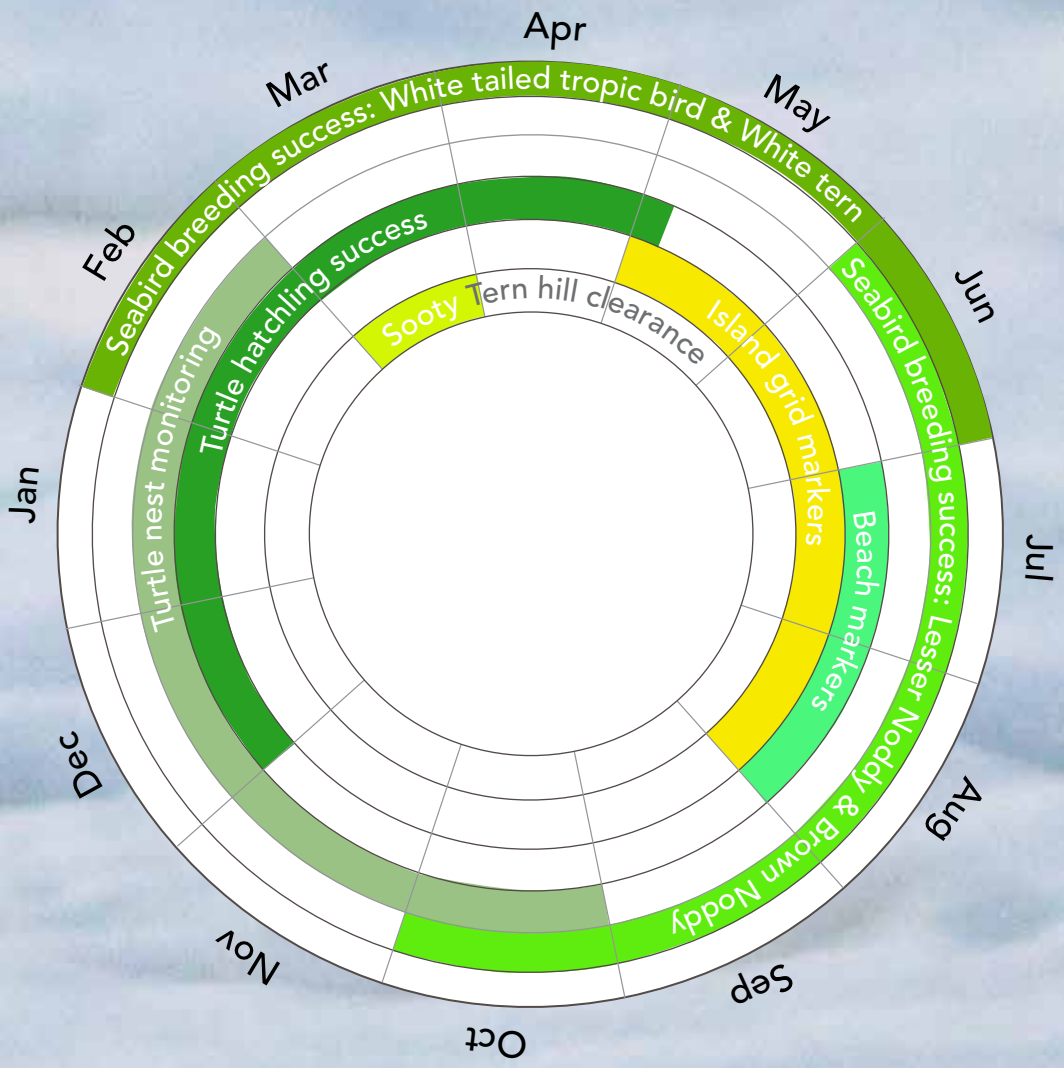
CBC PROGRAMME

CALENDAR

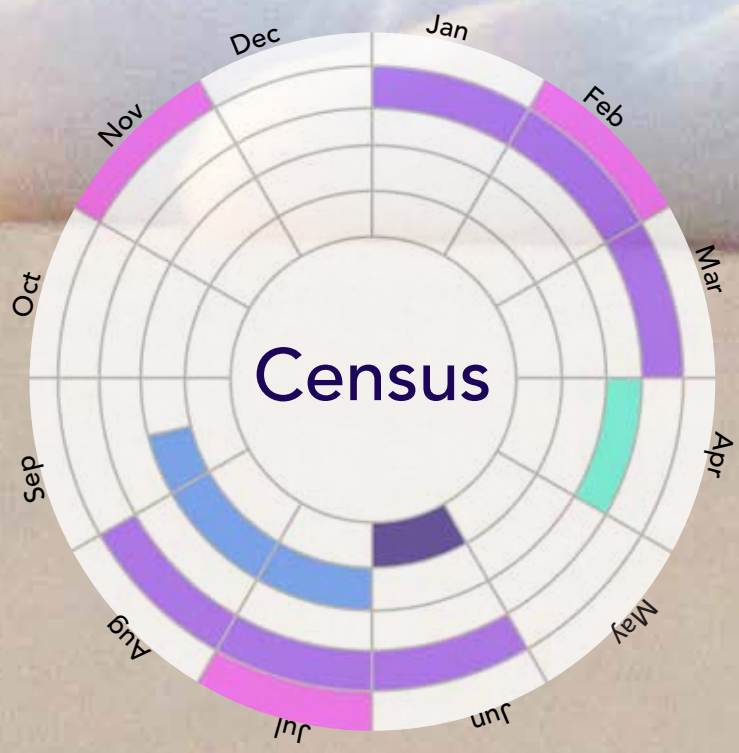
The Conservation Boot Camp takes place the **whole year**. This is a very exclusive program and with a **maximum of only 6 to 7 persons per session**. Each session lasts **for 4 weeks**. You will take part in some of the successful long term work here on Cousin Island. You will pick up a "fistful of 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

Do you have the "Right Stuff" for conservation?

Whilst in college I read Tom Wolfe's book "The Right Stuff" about the space race and was struck by how Wolfe described that elusive quality which separated the best pilots from the rest. For the test pilots during the space race era, Wolfe demonstrates there was no single quality that made up one with "the right stuff" and it's not put all together in flying school but in the field.

And, so it is in conservation. [A study in 2012](#) said that "Graduate education programs in conservation science generally focus on disciplinary training and discipline-specific research skills. But "non-academic conservation professionals often require an additional suite of skills." In 2017 [another study](#) found that "Although many people with postsecondary degrees in biology are finding careers outside academia, many programs and mentors continue to prepare students to follow-in-the-footsteps of their professors. "Yet, in their analysis of the job market, the researchers discovered that "Positions in non-profit organizations were the most abundant, whereas academic jobs were only 10% of the current job market". It recognised that "Unfortunately, information regarding how to prepare for today's conservation-based job market is limited in detail and scope."

This gap between academia and practice is what we try to bridge in the CBC. Participants in the program have gained a suite of skills, which have better prepared them for successful careers.



Wolfe says that people with the “right stuff” are relentless and completely committed to their ideal and drive as well as ready for a challenge with each new day. If you want to get “The Right Stuff” look into the CBC program on Cousin Island Special Reserve. Like the amazing participants who describe their experiences in the following pages of this magazine, you may be thrilled, amazed, learn many things, get fitter and even discover yourself a little better. The biodiversity of the Seychelles awaits you on the conservation paradise that is Cousin Island.

Dr. Nirmal Shah







PARTICIPANTS' STORIES



CBC: No better way to spend a summer

By Kathleen DALE

Waking up and out your front door you see a white sand beach, a turquoise/blue ocean, the sun streaming through the mountains on a neighbouring island, and a tortoise snoozing on the beach. Does it get better than this?

This is the view from the field station on the Cousin Island Special Reserve, where I have spent the past 4 weeks in conservation bliss. I am a 2nd year Marine biology major and this was my first experience doing field work. Needless to say I was not disappointed, if a little out of my element at first. You wake up every morning greeted by, or tripping over, a tortoise on the way out to the long drop and the Lesser Noddys that kick up a fuss when someone walks by. The boot camp is hands on field training program where you help in the monitoring of the many different species of flora

and fauna, this first-hand experience was more than I could have asked for.

The island took some getting used to, you can't run to the grocery store if you've forgotten something for dinner and the food availability is different than what I was used to. Once I settled in though things took a turn for the incredible. Every day is different on this little island and everything is always growing. I spent my days checking on different sea bird nests to check on their status and watch their little chicks get bigger. The transformation in the chicks from one week to the next was a bit surprising every time. One week they're a little fluffy puff ball and the next they have a bunch of their adult feathers.

During August while I was a part of the boot camp



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Each moment
was **unique** and
impactful.
”

program we started to census the Giant Aldabra Tortoises. This, I would have to say, was one of my favourite things to do. While not always easy, the smaller ones are pretty quick or I would mistake them for a rock, they are really incredible creatures to be around and scouring through the incredible forest is an added bonus. This process requires measuring the length and width of their carapace (top shell) as well as looking at some other male/female identifying features. Since the tortoises take a mud bath every day this measuring process is usually pretty dirty but in the end they (males only usually as the females are shy) get a nice rewarding neck scratch.

There is frequent monitoring of the endemic Seychelles Magpie Robin who come for a snack when they hear you whistling through the forest. They are kept under close watch to help keep the population on an upward trend. This month during one of these daily checks a new un-rung fledgling was found and, on another day, a new egg was found in one of the many nest boxes around the island.

Weekends were for sitting on the beach, snorkelling, wandering through the forest, collecting coconuts from the grounds and baking. This past month has been full of first experiences and I will never forget a single part of it. From the communal dinners every Wednesday, to the drenching boat rides to and from Praslin, from the smallest of hermit crabs to the largest of the tortoises, each moment was unique and impactful. There was no better way to spend a summer, or to solidify my want and need to help all species and join the world of conservation. ■



Good things come in 3s!

By Charlotte COURRIERE

My first visit to Cousin Island was in November 2017 as a CBC participant during the turtle nesting season. Those 5 weeks went by so fast and it was time for me to leave the island, my head filled with unforgettable moments and encounters, but also with a heavy heart. The desire to return came quickly. In January 2018, I got in touch with Yan, the CBC Program Coordinator to find out if it would be possible for me to participate again in the program on this little paradise.

I came back for 3 months this time, which flew by just as fast as the first 5 weeks. The work and life on the island is so enriching that we do not notice the time passing. During these 3 months I shared work and life with several people from all over the world. Seychellois, Mauritians, Malagasy, Canadian, Colombian, Swedish, Dutch, German and Austrian, a very rich canvas. I cannot forget all the Wednesday nights when we shared a meal together - there was a bubbling of joy, heat and flavour in



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is different
and there is
something
new to learn
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the kitchen! It is an exchange and discovery of culinary know-how and an explosion of sensations in the mouth with each spoon! Even with Jovani's (former chief warden's) lentils!

After such meals I was full of energy the next morning to go in search of the grid poles. While some are very easy to access and spot from afar, others were a real challenge! They helped me to develop a sense of direction, and better mastery and knowledge of the island. I climbed to reach those perched on the hill at the heart of dense vegetation and uncovered hidden little corners, which I had not yet visited.

The island always has pleasant surprises in store when you take the time to get lost and observe. Like a “Payanke” egg that has just hatched, a giant tortoise laying eggs, a line of dolphins breaking the horizon of the ocean, beautiful sunset every night or a fight between the magnificent Seychelles magpie robins and a centipede and many others. I also had the chance to attend 2 happy events: the birth of 2 Seychelles magpie robin. What a joy to see the success and to assist the development of these 2 new inhabitants of the island. I was also fortunate to be able to help Kara in several Seychelles magpie robin ringing sessions. As well as sharing 2 weeks with 2 researchers working

especially on the famous Seychelles Warbler. It was another chance for me to be able to learn more about the birds of the island.

Every day is different and there is something new to learn, to observe but also moments of fun with friends such as games on the beach and magnificent outings in fins, mask and snorkel or “mosquito” experiments. My worst experience with mosquitoes happened during a beach profiling session on the side of the island that is without wind. It took huge mental effort to focus on the work we had to do and to hold stationary postures, and to ignore the mosquitoes! I felt them landing on me, even through my clothes, and on the beach they followed us in clouds. When all measures to keep them off failed, we ended up throwing ourselves into the sea to get rid of them. An afternoon full of drama.

To come for a second time to Cousin Island, to learn conservation work with people full of knowledge and willingness to share, to live to the rhythm of the island, to dive into Seychellois culture was like a dream come true. I will leave Cousin a second time with my head and my heart filled with unforgettable moments. Thanks again to all the team and thank you Cousin. As they say, “Good things come in threes” ■



Microcosm – so BIG

By Uli PIEST

It seemed to be a good idea: Live a month on a little island, contribute to the daily conservation chores and get face to face with the flora and fauna I usually only encounter, if at all, while reading or writing about them at my desk. But what I received was so much more: In the end I was living with the island, capturing its rhythm and feeling aligned with its pace.

The transformations could hardly be steeper: From barely being able to recognize a path through the woods during our first orientation walk, to distinguishing different parts of the island according to their vegetation or even finding specific nests

and making my way back – at night. From an ear-deafening cacophony of bird-noises all over the place to chasing individual birds and judging their mood by their songs. From not seeing the wood for the trees to explaining it in detail to tourist groups and to differentiating and plucking invasive species. What initially seemed to be a single entity – beautiful Cousin Island – became a captivating mosaic of intricately linked species and interactions in a joint ecosystem.

The conservation success story and the related work might be the big selling point for Cousin Island and the CBC. Nevertheless, its intangible, cultural ecosystem services should not be forgotten. The near-complete absence of the noises of modern civilization was very soothing to me, as were the varied shades of vegetation green and ocean blue. And the pristine sandy beaches are a dream – but beware, once you've experienced them, you will be spoiled for any beach other than on Cousin! The island atmosphere is so relaxing that I barely felt the urge to pick up my cell phone, nor did I spend



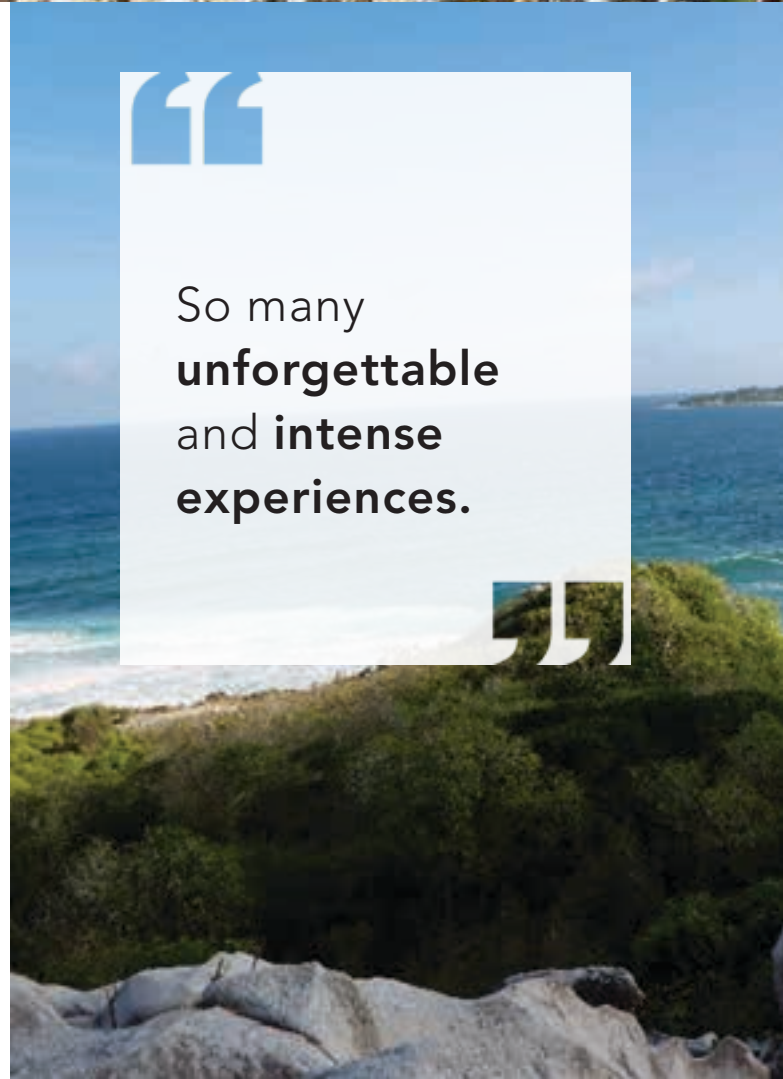
a single thought on writing postcards to the 'outer world'. For those among you to whom that sounds too remote and disconnected: It is but a rumor that phone connectivity is only possible above nest box 6... ;-). It's just that you do not feel the need.

Lastly, spending a month on Cousin is also much about engaging with people. There is a marvelous conservation team in place, some reticent at first, others less shy – and of course the CBC team.

Running tasks jointly, sharing dinner or just chilling together is a perfect opportunity for cultural exchange and bonds. THANKS A LOT to the whole team, wardens and managers alike, for having made this incredible journey possible!



So many
unforgettable
and **intense**
experiences.





A way to disconnect

By Birgit PONIATOWSKI

I came to Cousin looking for a place and a way to disconnect, to do something completely different from the usual office routine. The idea of learning about conservation while actually helping out on a nature reserve – and one that is a beautiful island in the middle of the Indian Ocean at that (this was my annual holiday, after all) – seemed like the perfect match. And it sure was! On the one hand, we followed a varied programme of bird, skink, tortoise, insect monitoring; fixing nest boxes; pulling invasive weeds; or cleaning the beach and counting the numbers of plastic bottles and flipflops we picked up. On the other, we swam and snorkelled in pristine waters or hung out on endless



Looking to
disconnect?
**Mission
accomplished**

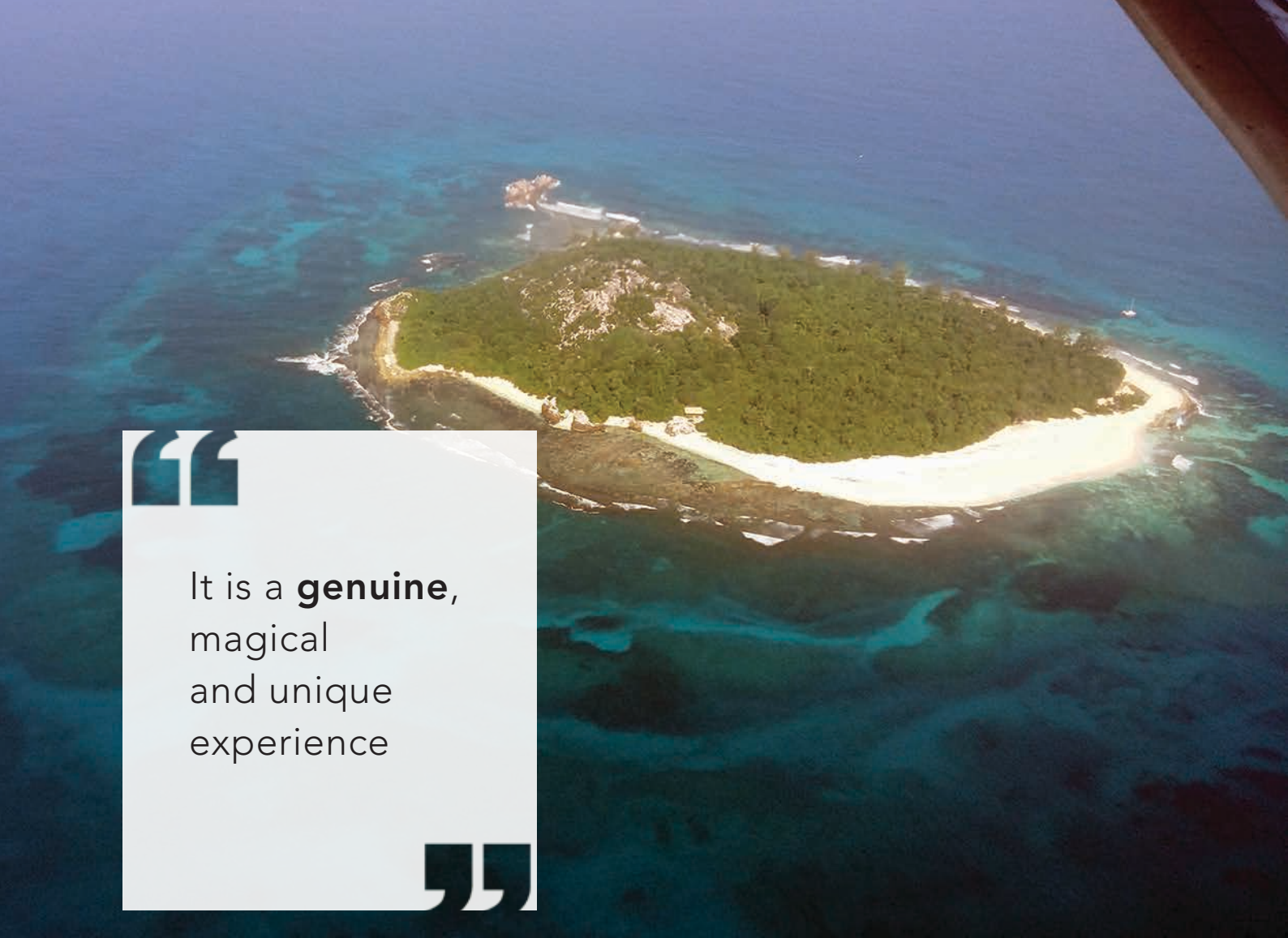
white sandy beaches with no one else around. Or sat around the barbecue and chatted with everyone else on the island who are a great mix of people from different places and walks of life, and all with their own inspiring stories to tell.

It never felt like work - what could be more enjoyable than going out for an early walk in the forest, charged with tracking a specific Seychelles Magpie Robin, and actually finding it? Or seeing the chick that was a fluffy little white ball of feathers when you arrive having grown into a proper young bird by the time you leave? (It helps that chicks of this particular bird species never move around...) The Conservation Boot Camp works whether you have prior knowledge in biology or conservation (as others in my group did) or whether you are interested in nature but rather clueless (me).

Yan, and everyone else on Cousin, never tired of answering questions. As a result, I see birds with different eyes now, and also have a much more granular appreciation of the complexity of

ecosystems (introducing tortoises to make a bird species thrive???). And I am seriously thinking of ways to make it back to Cousin for turtle season this year or next.

After three weeks on Cousin, I opened my laptop top to write this blog. And for a moment could not remember where the "on" switch was. Looking to disconnect? Mission accomplished. ■



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It is a **genuine**,
magical
and unique
experience
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So many birds

By Ella PONIATOWSKI

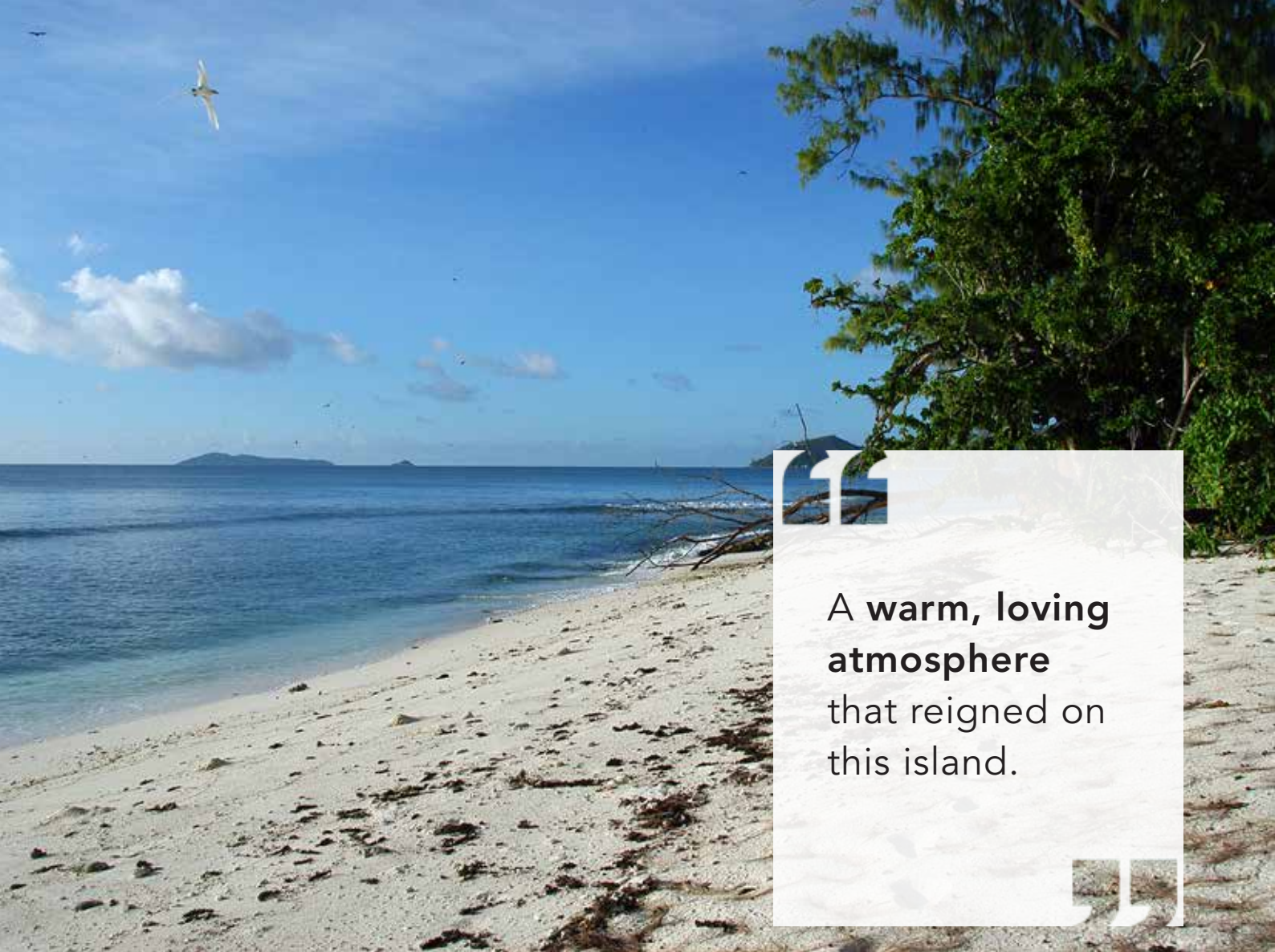
My first impression of Cousin was the incredible number of birds. Wherever we looked there were birds. In the air, on the trees and even on the ground. Large birds, white birds, grey birds, chicks. I had not imagined that there could be so many birds on such a small island.

It was strange to see so many chicks on the floor, and I wanted to pick them up. When doing the Aldabra giant tortoises' census we saw juveniles, which could even be held in one hand. Being a person who loves tortoises a lot, it was really amazing to be able to walk around the island and see them everywhere without even looking for them; get up in the morning, go behind the house and see two huge tortoises lying down and sleeping, and also to be able to caress them without being afraid.

It was lovely living on this island with really nice people, having communal dinners with fresh fish obtained on the same day on Praslin for the barbecue, lots of laughter and having a real good time.

It is a genuine, magical and unique experience to be able to live on this island, in basic conditions but at the same time fantastic because the place is just magnificent. It is very interesting to be able to discover all the different dimensions of conservation work, working in harmony with the birds, tortoises, lizards and even during the free time, going for a swim and enjoy observing the big diversity of fish of all kinds and all colours very close to the shore. I enjoyed so much my time on this island even if it was for only 3 short weeks. For my first time in Seychelles, I am sure Cousin is the best place to see Seychelles wildlife biodiversity. I would highly recommend this place for nature lovers.■





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A warm, loving atmosphere that reigned on this island.
”



An exclusive experience

By Noah PONIATOWSKI

When I first came to Cousin, the first thing I said to myself was "Is this really where I will be living for three weeks?" It was really amazing: white sandy beach, some palm trees among all the other trees, and most of all, it was exclusive - not too many people. Paradise! And above all, I open the door, I cross the porch and I'm directly on the beach. It was the dream.

On the other hand, when I saw the schedule of the week I was a little shocked by the morning hours. I thought 7 o'clock was a bit too early. But after a week I quickly got used to it. The best moments for me were the sunsets. They were really beautiful.



What I also loved was the warm, loving atmosphere that reigned on this island. Everyone was welcoming and always had a smile on their faces. ■





“
Allows the
closest
observation of
this **ecosystem**
”

The CBC, a generous experience

By Sophie MAZEAUD

I was surprised by the abundance and profusion nature when one arrives on Cousin. In the absence of predators, the island teems with birds and reptiles. This is the result of important conservation work that has preserved not only the fauna but also the flora. The success of the conservation work allows the closest observation of this ecosystem, which makes it a great opportunity and rare experience.

The abundance also lies in the number and diverse activities that we accomplished. We didn't have a

minute to get bored on Cousin!

All teams on site were generous in their welcome and kindness.

I will not forget the richness of the human encounters with other participants of the program with whom we formed a united team and shared strong moments.

Inevitably and obviously it is the birds which are most generous; they fill the sky with their silhouettes and their cries and sometimes a small gift on the t-shirts or in the hair!

A special thanks to Yan for his availability and his involvement in the passing of his knowledge and passion! ■



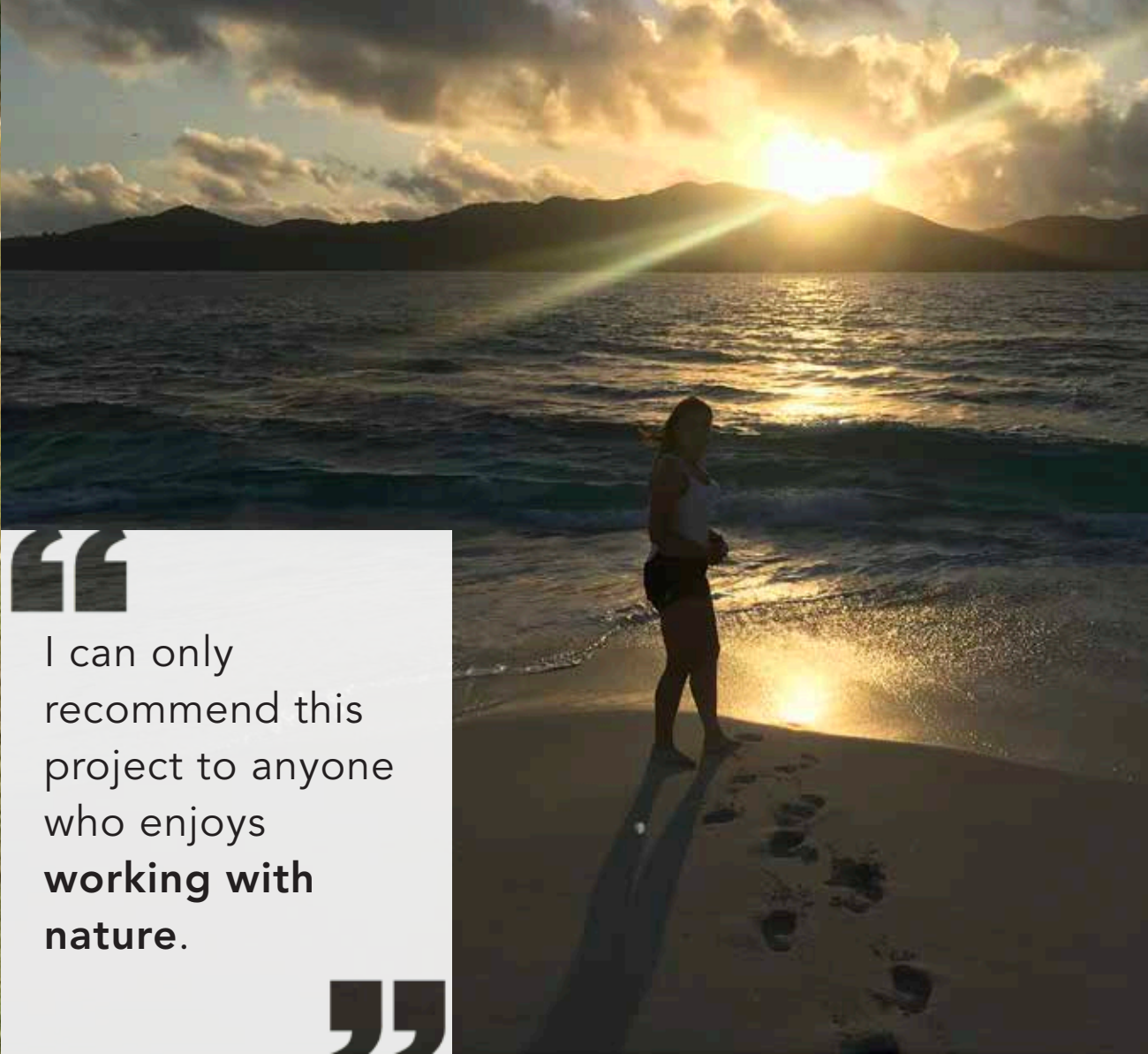


A highly recommended program

By Jasmin SCHMID

Through my adventures on cousin I got a clear view of my future plans. I learned a lot here and had interesting tasks. The task I enjoyed the most was called Beach profiling and the wall painting. I like that because I had never heard of beach profiling before and it was so funny when the others were in the water and they were hit by a big wave.

After work it's your free time and you can drop yourself in the hammock, go swimming or whatever you want. Most of the time we spent our free time



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I can only recommend this project to anyone who enjoys **working with nature.**

”

at the research house because we were always very tired from the heat and the amount of walking we had done. Whenever we had energy we played volleyball, table tennis, went for a walk, or went swimming. We had our lunch break every day from 12-13:30 clock. I especially liked the evenings at the beach, in particular when there was a breathtaking starry sky.

Every Wednesday we sat with the others together and made a big group dinner. That's how we all got to know each other better. After eating my wilderness partner Joelyn and I would visit the viewpoints on the island. On the weekend, we visited the boys and watched football or played Domino. They were very friendly. I can only recommend this project to anyone who enjoys working with nature. ■





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**I improved
my skills
in the field.**

”

From tourist to CBC

By Ada BANDI

I came on Cousin Island for the first time last year as a tourist. I was amazed by the ecosystem of the island that I really wished to come back as soon as possible. And here I am, a year later as a participant of the Conservation Boot Camp (CBC). I fell in love with this island since the first day: living in nature so far away from your “normal” life, surrounded by the sounds of the forest and the sea. A perfect paradise.

I’m really satisfied about this experience, I learnt a lot about the ecosystem and I improved my skills in the field. Every day was a new discovery: whistle to call the Seychelles magpie robin (SMR), check the Noddies’ breeding success, skink census, and beach profiling.

Thanks to the CBC I could do things that I never expected to do in my life such as climb hills to look for skinks, climb trees to check on SMR nests and also guide my personal tour. I also met really nice people here and I learnt a lot from them and gained information for my future and my career as a biologist.

I really enjoyed my last week here because I was the only participant left for the month. It was a hard and stressful week because I was on my own but I’m satisfied; I acquired skills and now I can go on my own in the forest, I can assist to ring birds and I had the opportunity to observe the warbler researchers at work.

I came here to improve myself and also to be sure about my future career. I really hope to come back again as soon as possible because I already miss this island. I hope to come back and stay longer than a month to help for turtle season so I can learn more and more. Can’t wait to come back again, Thanks for everything Cousin. See you soon. “Mon mank ou!” ■





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