



CONSERVATION BOOT CAMP™  
MAGAZINE

# Stories from the Field



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CONSERVATION BOOT CAMP™  
BOOTSTRAP YOUR CAREER!



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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

- Train in **monitoring techniques** and gain **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



**64 completed**  
the programme between  
May 2017 – April 2019

## FROM THESE COUNTRIES

 South Africa (2)	 Belgium (1)
 India (1)	 Switzerland (2)
 Germany (13)	 Pakistan (1)
 USA (1)	 France (6)
 UK (9)	 Canada (2)
 New Zealand (1)	 Madagascar (18)
 Colombia (1)	 Sweden (2)
 Austria (2)	 Seychelles (1)
 Italy (2)	 Kenya (1)
 Australia (1)	 Nigeria (1)

**LEARN MORE AND APPLY:**

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

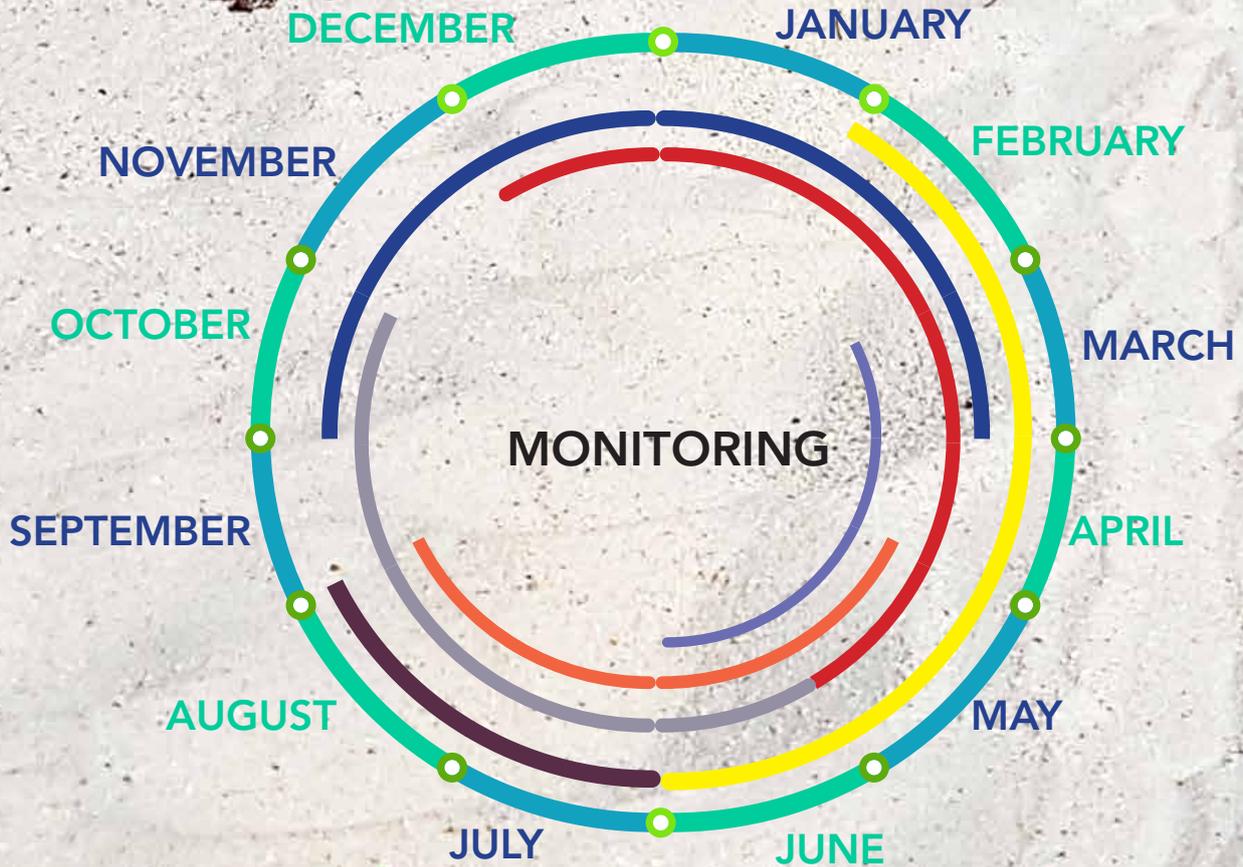
[WWW.COUSINISLAND.NET](http://WWW.COUSINISLAND.NET)

# 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.



Seabird breeding success:  
White-tailed tropicbird &  
White tern

Turtle nest monitoring

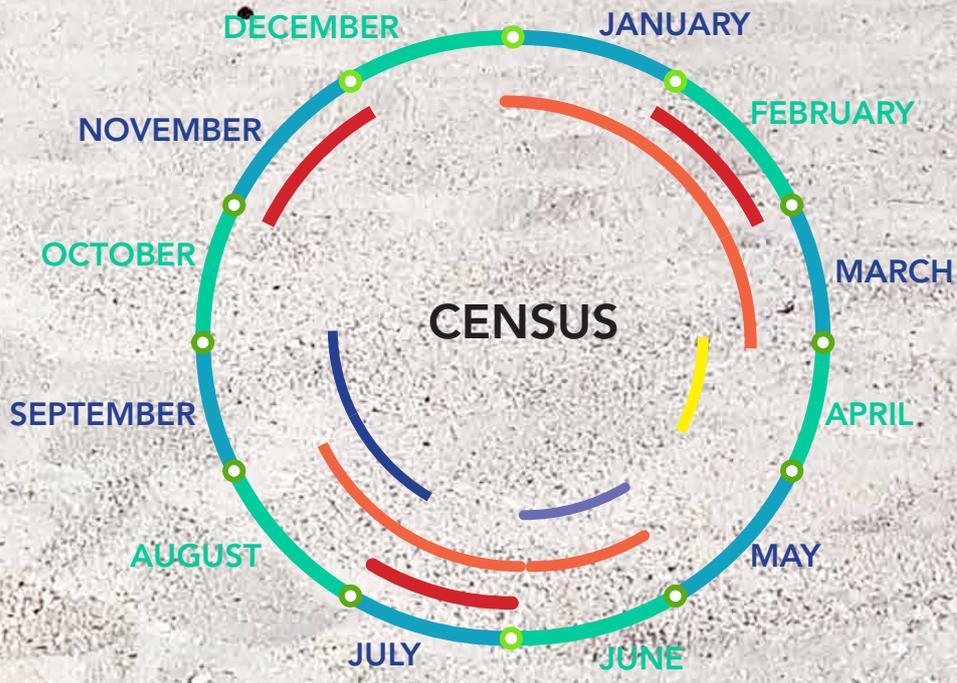
Turtle hatchling success

Beach markers

Seabird breeding success:  
Lesser Noddy & Brown  
Noddy

Island grid markers

Sooty tern hill clearance



- Seabird census
- Landbird census
- Bridled tern census
- Tortoise census
- Skink census





# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S LETTER

DR. NIRMAL JIVAN SHAH

## Conversations on Conservation

The first half of this year saw much international media attention on Nature Seychelles' work. A podcast on [conservation-careers.com](https://www.conservation-careers.com) and a blog on [natural science careers](https://www.natural-science-careers.com) interviewing me shone a bright light on the successful work we are doing in training, capacity building and mentoring not only young Seychellois, but through our Conservation Boot Camp (CBC) program, budding conservationists from all over the world. Smart practitioners know that conservation is an art as well as a science. A University education, however, does not provide the mental and emotional tool kit needed to work in this multi-disciplinary arena. I was motivated to create the Conservation Boot Camp (CBC) to bridge that gap between what is learned in the classroom and what is absorbed by working with all kinds of people and facing different real-life situations.



The CBC was designed to impart "competencies and character qualities." Part of the program is that I, a conservationist with over 3 decades of experience, would meet with each participant and discuss their experience in the CBC and their careers and aspirations. The meetings reinforced the importance of being a conservation mentor. Many of the participants clearly said their interactions with me gave them confidence and catalysed their determination and career choices.

The CBC program has turned out to be inspiring and useful for the majority of people who took it. People have said good things like:

"I honestly believe the skills and knowledge I have learnt with Nature Seychelles, will come in handy in my career in nature and marine conservation, either back in South Africa, or abroad somewhere else." Louise - South Africa

"My stay at Cousin Island was one of the best experiences I've ever had. My direct contact with nature and with the island team increased my motivation to protect and conserve the environment." Berthin - Madagascar

"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." Caitlin - Germany

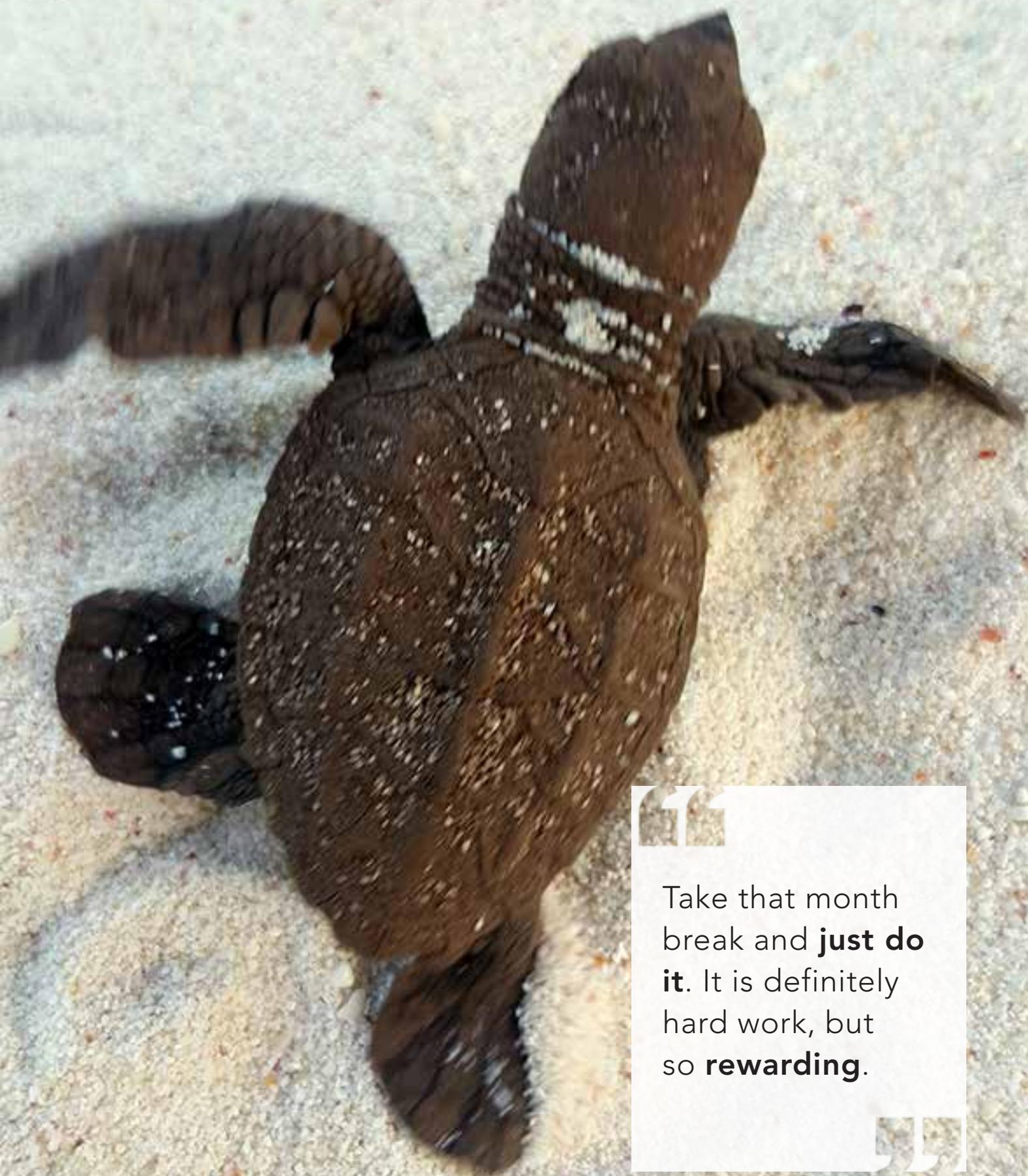
The CBC is a pretty unique program because it takes people with academic education in conservation and related fields and throws them literally in the deep end of conservation work in a small island, in a small country, in the tropics. My conversations on conservation on the two international sites has been generating a lot of buzz. I have had at least 100 emails on the subject since they were released. The CBC is an amazing program. Why don't you try it?



# PARTICIPANTS' STORIES







Take that month break and **just do it**. It is definitely hard work, but so **rewarding**.





# The CBC: My leap of faith

By Louise de ROUBAIX

Late in 2018, I stumbled upon the Nature Seychelles website whilst surfing the internet, looking for volunteer opportunities abroad. So I decided to do the 1 month Conservation Boot Camp with Nature Seychelles in February this year.

The average day involved getting up early, having a cup of coffee and then out to do beach patrolling – looking for any signs or tracks of possible hawksbill or green turtles which might have come ashore to lay their eggs. Then back at base, make communal breakfast, head to the visitor shelter where we would assist in ecotourism. Other duties varied on some days, from doing sea bird breeding success monitoring, Seychelles magpie robin monitoring, beach profiling, invasive species control, visiting the coral nursery, to name a few. On off time we would snorkel, relax on the beach or just socialize on the

patio of the research centre.

What I loved the most was working with the sea turtles, counting the eggs and just observing the general behaviour of these gracious animals. I also enjoyed seeing some of the seabirds such as the white terns and white-tailed tropicbirds lay their eggs and weeks later seeing the chick sitting in the nest or tree branch where the egg had been and just rooting for the little one on to grow each day we would pass the nest.

The most interesting was definitely the hawksbill sea turtles (both watching the mummies preparing the nests, laying their eggs and the babies hatching and making their way to the sea!) and also visiting the coral nursery. I also enjoyed doing the night surveys (although it made the working day really



long), as I personally enjoy exploring the night creatures, and was very happy to find a lot of the endemic Centipedes one evening with the CBC Coordinator, Yan. I also enjoyed seeing lemon sharks out along the coastline, whilst on patrol.

The most challenging part was the fact that the island has a swamp, which meant a lot of mosquitos after any rains. The work was really physical and we had to do a lot of patrolling on foot.

We were a small group of people, which made the experience much more enjoyable and personal. We had people from Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Australia, UK and then myself from South Africa of course. We all got along, and worked well together. We are still in contact from time to time after the program.

The staff were easy to get along with. The rangers normally did their own thing and from time to time did some night surveys with us. I found it interesting chatting to the guides from Seychelles, to talk about their passions for their home country and conservation work. It was also insightful to interact with the Science Coordinator and CBC Coordinator, and tap into their experience in the

Seychelles and more specific marine and terrestrial island conservation.

The CBC program initially was really hard work, from the get go! We were exhausted the first week, but thereafter, we got used to the fast paced-long hours and the humidity of the Seychelles. It was really interesting to learn the new monitoring techniques and environmental conditions. Of course it helps that the setting is the gorgeous and remote Cousin Island.

What I enjoyed the most, was being able to work and live on a picture-perfect island, which is also a declared Special Reserve. I found it an enormous privilege to be living here for a month, as this island is not open to the general public, apart from organized, very strictly controlled day touring trips.

The staff was experienced and knowledgeable and training was done in a professional and clear manner.

There was always support from the CBC Coordinator and Science Coordinator.

I feel very proud to have been part of the continued



conservation success of Cousin Island, however small my contribution may have been.

Before doing the CBC Program, I had been working mostly at middle management positions in nature conservation and Protected Area management, in the South African environmental sector for the last 19+ years, so I initially thought it would be challenging to go back to doing internship work. But I am so glad I took the leap of faith and just did it!

I have learnt so much about myself in the process. Especially in terms of being in a close social environment with new people and sharing your personal space, being able to work together with people from different walks of life and with varied personalities, being able to get along with far less (facilities and leisures) than you would be used to back home, and being more than able to still learn new skills and have new ideas - even after being established in your career. Although I have travelled abroad a bit, this was the first time I travelled on my own and also the first time I would 'work' abroad. So I am very proud of my own personal accomplishment! This had been a personal goal for a while, and I do believe one should never stop

learning new things and having new experiences!

I honestly believe the skills and knowledge I have learnt with Nature Seychelles, will come in handy in my career in nature and marine conservation, either back in South Africa, or abroad somewhere else.

I would definitely recommend anyone to go do the Conservation Boot Camp Program with Nature Seychelles! Whether you are fresh out of School, University, or settled in your career. Take that month break and just do it. It is definitely hard work, but so rewarding to know you are contributing towards conserving some pretty special wildlife! ■



# Step back in time

By Ute HINTERLEITHNER

When I first read about the Conservation Boot Camp I already knew Cousin Island from a visit as a tourist many years before. I had beautiful memories of this special place with its abundance of exotic birds and was excited about this rare opportunity to live and work in a Special Reserve.

Unlike some of the other participants, I don't have a background in science or conservation. But I love nature and have a deep interest in wildlife conservation and environmental protection.

After one week of intensive learning and training in the field, it's the weekend and I have time to wander off to discover the island on my own. There is plenty of wildlife wherever I look. Walking through the forest I come across a couple of giant

tortoise. There are white-tailed tropicbirds nesting in crevices on the ground. They are not scared because on this island they are safe from predators. When I whistle, the friendly magpie robins come by. I have learned to identify and name them by the colours of their rings. To be able to observe them more closely I clear a bit of the ground so that they can feed on the insects there.

I am heading to my favourite beach Anse Fregate to go for a swim and spend the afternoon there resting in the shade. I have this untouched tropical beach all to myself. The sky is full of white terns, tropicbirds and shearwaters flying around - a scenery almost too beautiful to be real. I look at the sea because any time a turtle might come ashore to look for a spot to lay her eggs. My eyes



Cousin is a great place to enjoy **time alone with nature** and **wildlife** in a stunningly beautiful setting

are delighted by the colours of the white sand, the turquoise sea and the lush vegetation. The pristine beauty of this beach gives me the feeling of being the first person to discover it, civilisation seems far away. There is a plane in the distance landing on Praslin - the only evidence of modern times I can see.

The overall atmosphere of this island is peaceful and pure and it feels to me like stepping back in time, experiencing the Seychelles islands as they must have been hundreds of years ago. At sunset the colours are fading and I walk back to the field station along the beach. The sunsets and also the sunrises are magical here. At night I sit on the beach gazing at the thousands of stars.

Cousin Island is a great place to enjoy some time alone with nature and wildlife in a stunningly beautiful setting. But it is also a place to meet wonderful people who all share this passion about nature, wildlife and the environment. We have a lot

in common, a lot of fun together, good teamwork, great conversations and prepare delicious meals together.

The days I spent on Cousin were very happy ones and I look forward to coming back one day. ■



# Beautiful nature

By Maura SOLDINI

*A year to enjoy travelling beginning in Cousin.*

I took a year off to travel and avoid closed places such as offices. I would like to work in the outdoors.

In 2016 I came to Cousin as a tourist for just few hours and I had a good memory of the island therefore I decided to join the Nature Seychelles' Conservation Boot Camp for a month.

I do not have a background in biology or any special skills in the field, but I like animals and nature and I try to do my best to preserve them.

If you are ready to live in basic conditions and you can stand mosquitos bites you will enjoy an enriching experience. The first week on Cousin was the toughest one, because of the warm climate and high humidity compared to Switzerland. Moreover at the beginning there were many new tasks to learn such as patrolling the beach looking for turtles, understanding how birds censuses work and

other information on conservation projects.

Luckily in February it is possible to work with birds and also with sea turtles, as is the ending of the turtle nesting season.

During the Conservation Boot Camp training on Cousin I got the opportunity to help to conserve really special creatures as the critically endangered Hawksbill turtle and many birds such as the Seychelles magpie robins, white terns, and tropicbirds.

My highlights are the amazing landscape from the island and the peculiar animals living here. I also appreciate the beautiful turquoise of the sea so bright in the sun, contrasting with other blue shades and green vegetation. Sunsets are also stunning and every time different.

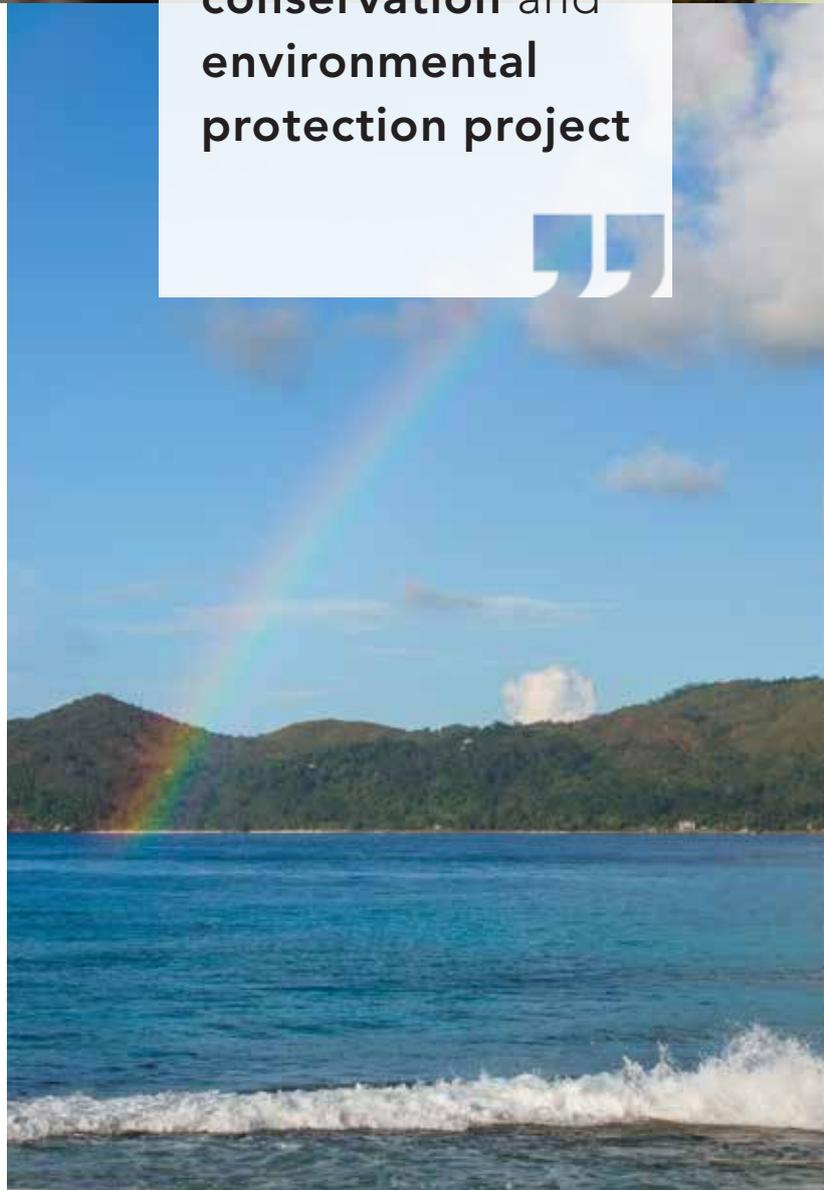
Time flies when you are having busy days on the island. I spent my spare time swimming, snorkelling



I really **wanted to help** in a **conservation and environmental protection project**

in the protected area around Cousin and taking some pictures of the wildlife and landscape while wondering around.

I liked my stay in Cousin so much and making this new experience. ■





# An inspiring experience

By Aina SOAELINA

Taking part in the CBC program was a great opportunity for me. I had the chance to discover Cousin's wildlife, especially its marine wildlife. I was so amazed to see turtles so close while snorkelling. I have always been fascinated by these marine animals but much more since I learned more about them thanks to the monitoring that occurs here and the documentary that we watched entitled "the incredible journey". Also, having the chance to see hatchlings going to the sea was the most exciting event that I could have seen here.

Carrying out activities such as excavation and beach profiling was like an attempt to solve issues by assembling the pieces of a puzzle. I enjoyed

these moments. Plus, as a biologist I wanted to learn more about the methodology adopted here to collect data about turtles, and there are some techniques that I didn't know until I was here. The data entry was so helpful to understand how the data are analysed and how the result influences the management of the reserve.

However, I also liked the activities related to seabirds like the breeding success monitoring. Looking for nests by following the instructions was a little bit like a game and finding the nest and the bird growing weeks after weeks brought some satisfaction. Doing the guided tour was challenging for me as I had never done that before but I realized that it was an opportunity for me to learn something new. It was a new experience to live and maybe which I can use later.

The beauty of Cousin's beach and the view on the top of the hill is just unbelievable. All the islands around, the vegetation and the very clear and blue ocean make it a landscape that I haven't seen



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It was an **opportunity** for me to **learn something new**. It was a **new experience**.  
”

anywhere.

Furthermore, the conviviality that I felt made my stay more pleasant. The first dinner together, on the Wednesday of the week we arrived gave me a very good first impression. Eating together, different food, hearing many languages, laughing and knowing new people gave me a warmth that I did not expect. But that's not the only great moment I lived here. There was the parties for birthdays, admiring the view on the "sofa" and on the top of the hill on the other side, the snorkelling, and the lone walk on the beach during the sunset and much more.

Last but not the least, meeting wonderful people like Charlotte, Yan and the wardens made life in the reserve unforgettable. And I cannot imagine Cousin without them. The energy, the humour and the solidarity of the warden are just something that I really appreciate. Charlotte is a person that is so courageous for me because she gave a lot for us and for the reserve. She lived with us every day,

worked with us, helped us, talked with us without any aloofness and made cake for everyone during the common dinner. And Yan is someone who works really hard but found time to talk with us as if we are all on the same level. He always tries to push people to do better. He is more than a good coordinator, he tries to guide us on a personal level. I will always admire his perseverance, his interest for nature and his sense of humour. So, if I have to describe my experience here in one word, I would say inspiring. For me, it is a new beginning.

Now, it is really hard to say goodbye so I will just say "fotespere mon a war zot ankor byento"!! ■

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



# The best place for avifauna

By Francklin Aimé SIMIKINTSY

Dear reader,

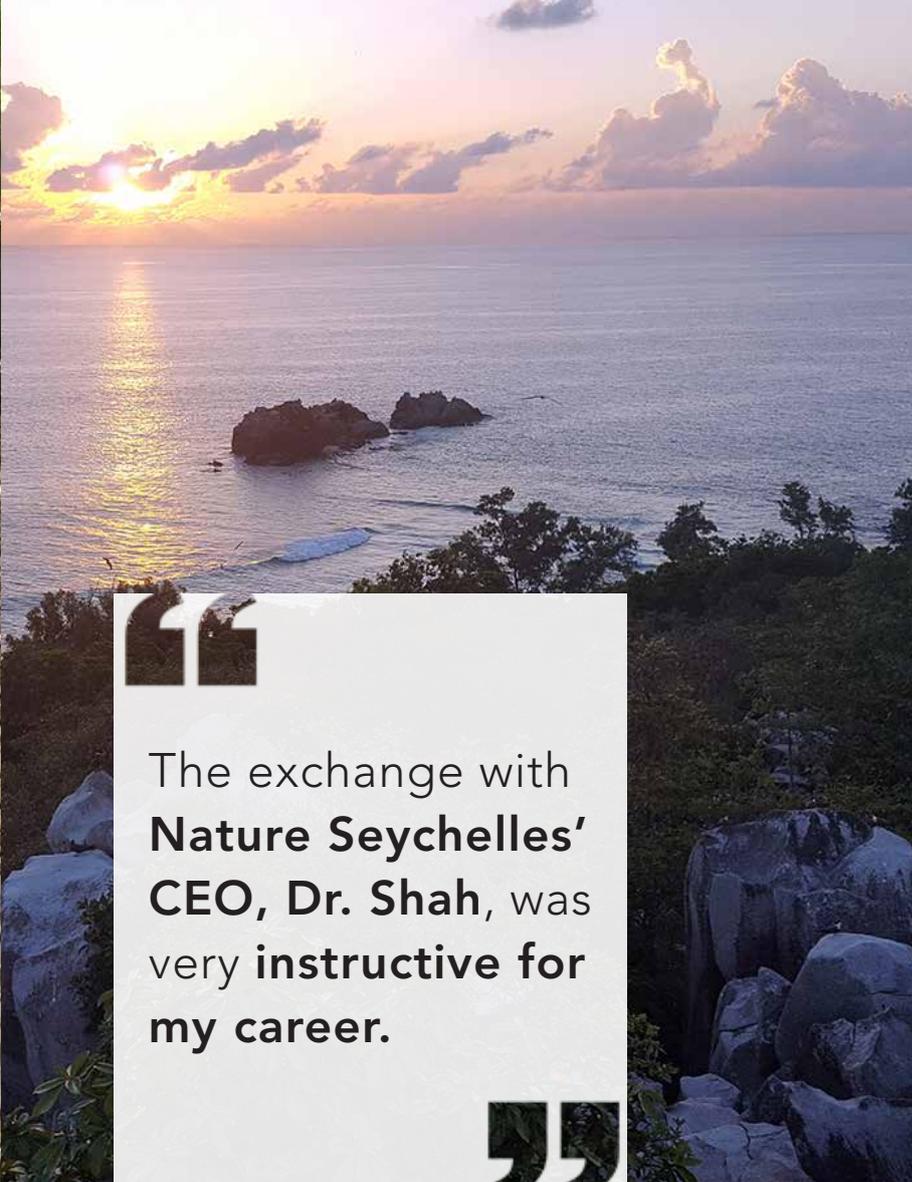
Today, I am going to tell you about my time and experience on Cousin Island Special Reserve. Before coming here, I had asked myself, "What could I see on Cousin that I haven't seen in Madagascar?" At home in Madagascar, I had already seen tortoises, land birds and seabirds and we have many nature reserves. But once I got to Cousin and I got to learn its story, I got my answer. I said to myself: "Wow, they worked hard here!" Transforming a coconut plantation into a new ecosystem where its flora and fauna are interdependent was not easy, but they managed to do it.

I often heard the tourists saying: "It's a bird paradise here!" Yes it is! Cousin is one of the best places for the avifauna. Birds nest nearly anywhere

without fearing predators. On Cousin, the White-tailed tropicbird nests on the ground because there are no rats, cats or snakes who would predate its egg or chick. 5 bird species endemic to the Seychelles live on Cousin and one of them, the Seychelles warbler, once existed only here and is also the reason the island became a nature reserve. My favourite bird is the Seychelles magpie robin for how smart they are.

As for the reptiles, Cousin is the main hotspot for Hawksbill turtle nesting in the Indian Ocean. Also there are between 60 and 80 Aldabra giant tortoises who wander on the 29ha plateau and hill. This surface area of Cousin hosts one of the densest population of lizards in the world with endemic Geckos and Skinks roaming the forest floor.

Being used to vehicles' noises that wake me up



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The exchange with **Nature Seychelles' CEO, Dr. Shah**, was very **instructive for my career**.  
”



every morning where I live, I felt a big difference since I arrived on Cousin because it is the sound of waves that rocks me at night and wakes me up in the morning, accompanied by birds' songs.

From the reserve, the view of the sea and the neighbouring islands that decorate the horizon is just amazing. Not to mention that the huge beach is only a few steps away from our house and once in the water you can admire different fish and other marine species sometimes only a few meters from the shore, also a result of the fauna and flora protection.

The CBC program and its activities enabled me to strengthen my conservationist skills through the different monitoring projects but also introduced me to Ecotourism by being trained to guide the tours on Cousin. Another highlight of my time here is the exchange with Nature Seychelles' CEO, Dr. Shah, which was very instructive for my career. From my point of view, what was done on Cousin should be an example for Madagascar and other

countries in the world. I feel honoured to be able to participate in this program and to be able to enjoy the results of 50 years of hard conservation work and I would like to thank the team and all the people who contributed to the accomplishment of Cousin Island Special Reserve. I would like to also appreciate the warm welcome and hospitality. Like we say at home « *ho hela velona anie i Cousin !!* » (Long live Cousin!). If one day I have an opportunity to come back, I will not miss it, you can be sure of it!! ■

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



The **Seychelles magpie robin** got my attention. They are smart birds.

## Birds and cultural exchanges

By Edwin Hubert ZAFIMAMPIRAVO

For the first time in my life, I crossed my country's border and headed to Cousin Island, Seychelles. I was excited to see a bit of how life is out there. It is a child's dream coming true.

Once I arrived at Praslin Island (close to Cousin), the welcome by the Cousin team was warm, which is something I experienced during my whole stay on the island. From Charlotte, whom I personally call Mum because she was always there for us, to Yan, the one who found the right funny stories to tell when we felt a bit down, everyone was kind.

What struck me the most on the island is its abundance of birds. There are so many birds on the island that we named it "bird island". The bird that got all my attention was the Seychelles magpie

robin. I have never seen birds smarter than them.

I would like to share an anecdote that happened on Thursday 11th April 2019 morning: During the monitoring session, we had the mission to find the nesting spot of a pair of birds but they made us go round in circles for more than an hour (we could feel that they were fooling us because they didn't want us to locate the nest) and we had to accept our defeat and come back home with a growing challenge. As they are land birds, they generally feed on invertebrates found in the ground. They sometimes follow the Aldabra giant tortoise, for when the latter walks, it drags what's on the surface revealing hidden food. Observing this behaviour and interaction is just magic and unique.

Apart from the Seychelles magpie robin monitoring, I had the chance to participate



in different interesting activities including the turtle nest excavations, the seabird breeding success monitoring, (white terns and white-tailed tropicbirds), land bird monitoring, and beach profiling. These experiences and skills acquired could be useful in my future conservationist career in the marine and coastal environment field.

From the social point of view, I had some cultural exchanges with the wardens. I learned some basic creole words and in exchange I taught them some Malagasy words, and music, dancing and football... I would like to thank Yan, Charlotte, Kara and the wardens for their help in this adventure, even if it was only 4 weeks spent on the island, I already consider them like family - my cousins ... Cousin Island is in my heart forever! ■

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





# Interesting discoveries, lived experiences, challenges met

By Joellah RAHARINANDRASANA

We all have lots of dreams in our head. It starts at an early age; we dream of growing up, of accomplishing studies, of getting married, of discovering the world but some dreams don't come true. Sometimes, we don't even believe enough in our own dreams or they might change with time. My dream came true and I came to Cousin. I have learned a few things about life and about myself through my personal experience. I am now writing down a sample of my delightful moments on Cousin Island.

First, the boat trips were very enjoyable with the required "boat pushes" which made me realise how team work is important and essential wherever we

are. Secondly, was climbing Cousin Island boulders to clear areas for Sooty terns to nest and the shearwaters' night monitoring sessions in the forest - they revealed some skills I didn't even suspect I had. Thirdly, all the mosquitos that surprised me at the beginning by their abundance and their bites - they taught me patience, endurance and the meaning of the expression "we got to deal with it". All these form part of Cousin Island and contribute to its uniqueness.

In addition, things I learnt about Seychelles greatly surprised me. The fact that there are more Aldabra giant tortoises in the Seychelles than Seychellois, astonished me and made me think a bit more about the context in my country, development wise. What was interesting also was to learn that there



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**Meeting with Nature Seychelles’ CEO, Dr. Shah, on Cousin helped me to widen my viewpoint.**  
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is enough jobs for every Seychellois and that there are many scholarships that Seychellois can apply to for University studies. I was touched by this situation because in Madagascar, there are many unemployed and students who want to continue their studies in universities abroad but cannot because of lack of funds.

Meeting and exchanging ideas with Nature Seychelles’ CEO, Dr. Shah, on Cousin helped me to widen my viewpoint. There are many nice and enjoyable moments lived on Cousin as a CBC participant but the one moment that moved me the most was when I saw with my own eyes without any technological intermediary, Hawksbill turtle hatchlings on the beach right after they left their nest and egg shells. I would never have thought that I would see marine turtle hatchlings rushing towards the sea and having their first contact with what will be their element for the rest of their life.

Also finding an Indian Almond tree in Cousin forest, in the first country I visited outside Madagascar,

nourished my faith and I saw how much God is great and all that I see is his work and that if I arrived in Seychelles it is not for nothing but rather to make me recognize that at all times God watches and protects these creations: humanity and biodiversity around it.

In addition to the enjoyable moments on Cousin, I must admit that the knowledge/ know how gained through the Conservation Boot Camp makes me feel blessed and I would then like to thank God and all those who shared their knowledge with me particularly Charlotte and Yan. Thanks also to the wardens for their welcome and help in the logistic and thanks to those who contributed to make this adventure so sweet and full of new perspectives. Thanks to my family and friend who always supported me. ■

*Joellah 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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It was a pleasure to have **contributed** to this legacy of more than **50 years of conservation.**

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## Cousin and its mysteries

By Toky Justino MORY

It was on a Monday, when we first encountered Cousin. Seen from the sky, this island seemed small, covered with dense forest, as if trying to hide its wonders. The boarding on the boat was done at Praslin, and the man who welcomed us - we were a team of 5 people - had a smile so natural that we knew we could not go wrong. We had great, enjoyable, intense moments of fun with our coordinator Yan and the rest of the Cousin team: Charlotte, Kara, Georgia, Leroy, Dailus, Topher, Chris, Alex, Ruud, Kelvin, Tara, and Tom. They were more of a family than just a conservationist's community.



Familiarization with the island is the first activity on Cousin, a guided tour that will be repeated with other activities until we are able to wander on our own in all parts of the island. And then you discover Cousin's secrets, its trails, its 114 grid poles and its A to Z beach markers with which one finds oneself, its shortcuts, its gigantic rocks where different birds nest, its sandy beaches where sea turtles make their nests, some of its trees on which the white terns make their nest and its cavities occupied by some White-tailed tropicbirds, its magnificent lagoons where you can swim freely with fish, its 11 Seychelles Magpie-robin territories, these magnificent territorial birds with particular behaviours, the culminating point of Cousin, a view point where one can see the whole island and its surroundings. All this is impregnated in our memories, and when one begins to know a place and the people who live there, we start to like it, the hardest thing would be to leave it.

Finally, it was a pleasure to have contributed to this legacy of more than 50 years of conservation

work. It is an honour to have left some footprints on Cousin, but in the end, it is Cousin that left a great imprint in our hearts. ■

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



# An unforgettable experience

By Mirana RANDRIAMANANTSOA

I'm a sciences and engineering of the environment Master's student at the Polytechnic School of Antananarivo (ESPA). I decided to participate in the Conservation Boot Camp to develop my knowledge and my experience.

To love the environment is to take care of it. Each of us is responsible for conservation, each of us should know what the importance of conservation is to ensure sustainable development.

Cousin Island is for me an ideal place to learn about environmental conservation. The island is home to a great diversity of birds, each of which is exceptional. During our stay, we took part in the monitoring of some birds like Seychelles magpie robin (*Copsychus sechellarum*). We called them by

whistling and by moving the soil and rocks a little to expose tasty invertebrates. We also monitored seabirds such as White-tailed tropicbirds (*Phaeton lepturus*) and White terns (*Gygis alba*).

The female White-tailed tropicbird is very faithful to its nesting place and very protective of her chick. The white tern is always in pairs, and is said to be the most romantic of birds because they are monogamous. The ability of terns to build their nest without nesting material, by laying the egg directly on tree branches, is incredible to me. Of all the seabirds on the island, these are the two seabirds that I loved the most.

To reduce the pollution of the sea and the risk of danger for marine fauna such as turtles, the collection of waste including plastic bottles, flip flops and polystyrene boxes deposited on shore by



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**Cousin Island** is for me an **ideal place** to learn about **environmental conservation**.  
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the waves is part of the activities of the CBC.

Cousin Island also allowed us to go on beautiful adventures. During the hikes on the hill, we would admire the the surrounding beautiful landscape in. We had the opportunity to make a nocturnal census of a seabird called the Tropical shearwater (*Puffinus bailloni*). We also had the opportunity to snorkel to have a closer observation of the marine landscape and fauna among which you can find beautiful multicolored fish.

An exciting moment is when we go for a supply run to Praslin by boat and when returning to the island, the beaching is done by surfing the waves. How would I describe the sensation? I do not have the right words but it's so much fun.

Cousin Island gave us the opportunity to live a unique experience that we will never forget, the work done on the island shows a real example of good conservation.

Our goal is to participate in conservation in order to slow down the rate of degradation that weighs on our environment. It is necessary to know why we do conservation to be able to act.

I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to Yan, Charlotte, Georgia, Kara and the wardens for their contributions to the various activities during our stay. ■

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



# Birds, our wild companions on Cousin

By Vatosoa Mampihavana RANOELISON

Cousin Island is home to a wild nature consisting of plants and animals. It is also home to a small community of scientists and wardens. Their houses are quiet and isolated. This serenity attracts some animals that are not too shy. Among these animals is the Seychelles fody, a bird species that over time has become a companion very close to the community. At every opportunity, this wild species rushes to enter the house. Without hesitation, the bird wants to taste and partake in the daily menu: cereals, vegetables, fish, which we do not allow. Shamelessly, the little bird leaves its droppings everywhere in the house. From time to time, it approaches and stays to participate in the morning meetings, and the evening conversations, as if it

wants to be part of the family.

Another species, a little shy at first sight, is the moorhen. Unlike the fody, the moorhen is happy to wander around the house and not get in. A great asset for the Cousin wild birds is that they can live harmoniously with the persons who live responsibly. We are not a threat to them. Because of this, some of them are attached to the community. Unfortunately they stay but we have to leave.

The stay with these birds was unforgettable. Personally, it was a truly magical and exceptional moment. In addition, the welcome and atmosphere with all cousin teams was warm and pleasant. A big thank you to them for this moment of sharing,

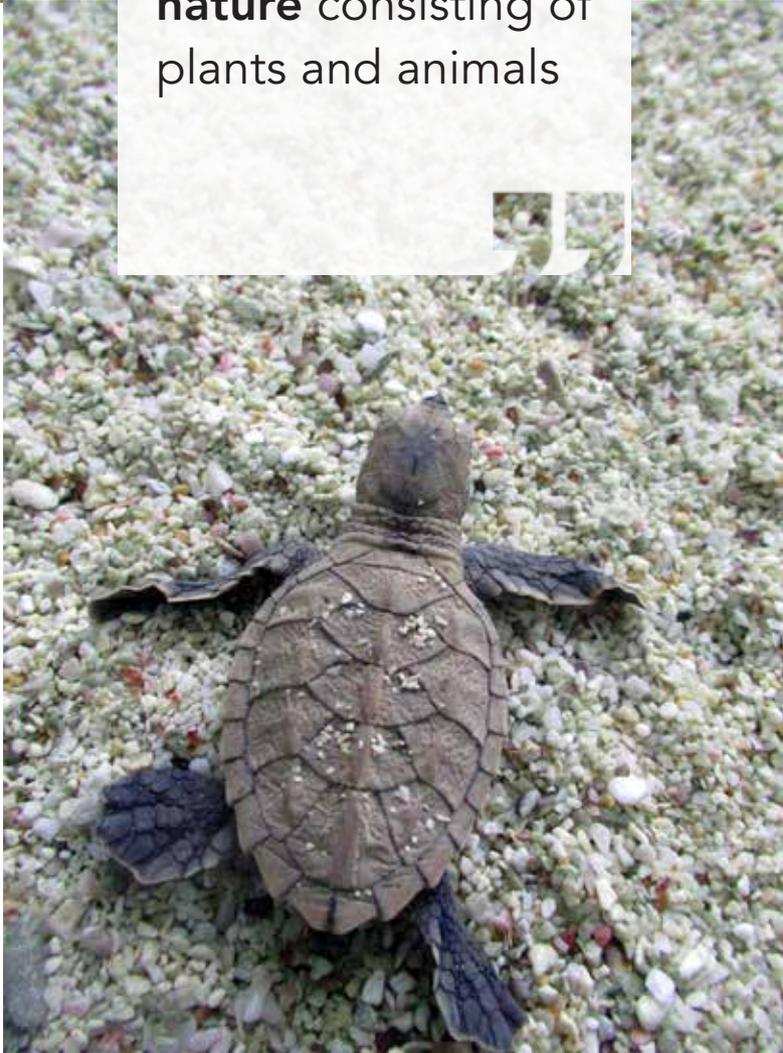


Cousin Island is home to a wild nature consisting of plants and animals

discovery and joy. It was just a month but the memories will stay in my heart. Thanks to Yan and Dr. Shah for their guidance and encouragement, and Charlotte, who I will really miss: her frankness, her kindness, her advice, her dishes and her jokes.

Thanks to Kara who gave me an opportunity to practice English, thanks for the delicious potatoes and for Wednesday's communal dinner. Thanks to Georgia, a good teammate. Thanks to all the warden team - Dailus, Alex, Christopher, Chris, Leroy, Kelvin, Ruud, they were always sociable and cool. ■

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





# He who dares, wins!

By Vahatriniaina RAKOTOSALAMA

The biodiversity of Cousin Island offers various reasons for conservation as well as a visit.

The flagship “products” of the island are mostly birds and turtles, land and marine. A true living witness of ecosystem restoration and conservation, it is the result of long and laborious work done on the island. Coconut plantations of the early 20th century were abandoned and the regeneration of native species such as *Pisonia grandis* and *Ochrosia oppositifolia* in the 1970s allowed. This made the restoration of the habitat of the Seychelles Warblers (*Acrocephalus sechellensis*) possible. At the time the warbler was found only on Cousin with only 26 individuals in the world. Seeing these birds currently breeding on the island is a glimmer of hope not only for the environment but especially

for all of humanity.

Cousin is also a turtle nesting sanctuary. From October 2018 to March 2019, hundreds of nests of hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) have been recorded on the island. Which makes the reserve one of the most important Hawksbill turtle nesting hotspot in the world. Seeing the young turtles leave their nest, after about 55 to 65 days of incubation in the sand, is quite rare and a great opportunity for a conservationist in the marine and coastal environment field. And playing even a small part in this conservation work provides pride and particularly ambition.

Although disliked by some, invertebrates play important roles in the functioning of the ecosystem of the island such as feeding reptiles like the



**Cousin** is a good example to popularize in every country in the world like Madagascar

skins or birds such as Seychelles magpie-robin (*Copsychus sechellerum*). The reserve includes a terrestrial area of about 29ha and a marine protected area of 400 m around the island in the sea. Classified in the first category of IUCN and managed since 1998 by the local NGO Nature Seychelles, the Cousin Island Special Reserve also offers guided tours lasting about an hour, welcoming researchers from around the world as well as conservation training through the Conservation Boot Camp.

If the Reserve is in a good ecosystem balance now, it is due to its strict environment conservation policy. This is a good example to popularize in every country in the world like Madagascar where there is a wealth of biodiversity still poorly protected.

At the end, I would like to thank the whole team of the Special Reserve of Cousin especially Yan, Charlotte and Georgia, as well as Kara and all the wardens. I would also like to congratulate all

my compatriots from the "Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines" in Toliara (Mirana, Vatosoa, Joellah and Justino) for participating in this Conservation Boot Camp and I would like to encourage them to do more to conserve our ecosystem. The key is to start and the duty is to continue. HE WHO DARES, WINS! ■

*Vahatriniaina 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 program offers a **multitude of conservation-related activities**



# I will miss Cousin

By Toky RAZAKARISOA

Coming from Madagascar, I came to Seychelles, more precisely to Cousin Island to follow the Conservation Boot Camp program with the aim to expand my experience with conservation.

As a special reserve, Cousin belongs to various species of birds, giant tortoises, lizards and without forgetting mosquitoes. This island is recognized in the world in terms of conservation. The restoration of the forest is the greatest achievement. There is also the restoration of the coral reef which is currently underway. From the beach, 400m around the island is a Marine Protected Area. And the beaches of Cousin are nesting places for marine turtles, mainly hawksbill and green turtles.

From our first day, with a guided tour, we could see the wealth of the island in terms of biodiversity and

also to see the work that awaited us during our stay.

The CBC program offers a multitude of conservation-related activities, including seabirds (White-tailed tropicbird and White tern), land birds (Seychelles magpie robin) monitoring, and sea turtles egg hatching success monitoring and monitoring the evolution of the beach. Finding each bird's nest for the monitoring is a challenge because it's like a game of hide and seek. But you just have to follow the instructions and know how to orient yourself. This is one of my favourite activities.

The Seychelles magpie robins are very intelligent and agile birds, especially when you want to find where they are building their nest. They lead us to a false track and when they realize that we are close to finding the nest, they change places. Seeing chicks of White-tailed tropicbirds and White terns growing each week during the follow-ups is very



beautiful. Even more when you see the parents feed their chicks. The turtle nest excavation is an exciting and mysterious moment, because every time we do this activity, I always ask myself how many eggs have hatched for each nest. We were most impressed during an excavation (carried out some days after a nest has hatched), to find some turtle hatchlings still alive.

The removal of invasive plants is very important to the ecosystem. That's why, every week, a series of cutting and removal of these plants has to be done. This activity is sometimes followed by a snorkelling session with fish and sea turtles. In order to help the marine species, we did beach clean ups. Plastic bottles, polystyrene and various other garbage that also came from other countries was removed from the beach and sorted to find out where they came from. A very impressive moment was when hundreds of baby sea turtles were seen coming out of their nest and rushing towards the sea, with some crabs waiting for them. This was the first time in my life to see this.

But the moment that struck me the most and certainly will mark me for all my life was on my birthday. Yan brought us to see the "Cousin couch" which is at the top of the hill. It was there that I could see the beauty of the island and the surroundings. I could see the birds flying over the forest, and the sunset especially was wonderful. There are no words to express how I felt. So apart from the animals that live on the island, there are also people living there who contribute a lot to the protection of the environment. I thank them all, especially Yan who taught us a lot about conservation, Charlotte whom I consider as our big sister who helped us along the program and all the wardens who are all friendly, kind and admirable. I also thank Dr. Shah for his career tips.

I will miss Cousin. ■

*Toky 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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The CBC is to summarize:  
**learning, leisure, passion and will, combined**

# An adventure like no other

By Valisoa RAVELOSAONA

My first trip out of my country, my first adventure away from home, I did it in an exceptional place, fascinating, endearing and breath-taking, it's called Cousin Island. It's true that at first, after a long trip, the tiredness and the heat, I needed a little time for acclimatization but after that it was great I got used to it. We started to visit the island, to know a bit about the history and its functioning as a special nature reserve. And then we started to work by monitoring different seabirds and land birds on the island, while overcoming my fear of skinks. During the sea turtle nest excavations post hatching, I felt good when we found many more eggs that have hatched than unhatched ones. And then we often cleaned the beach, things I really like to do where I come from, which made the beach of the island even more beautiful.

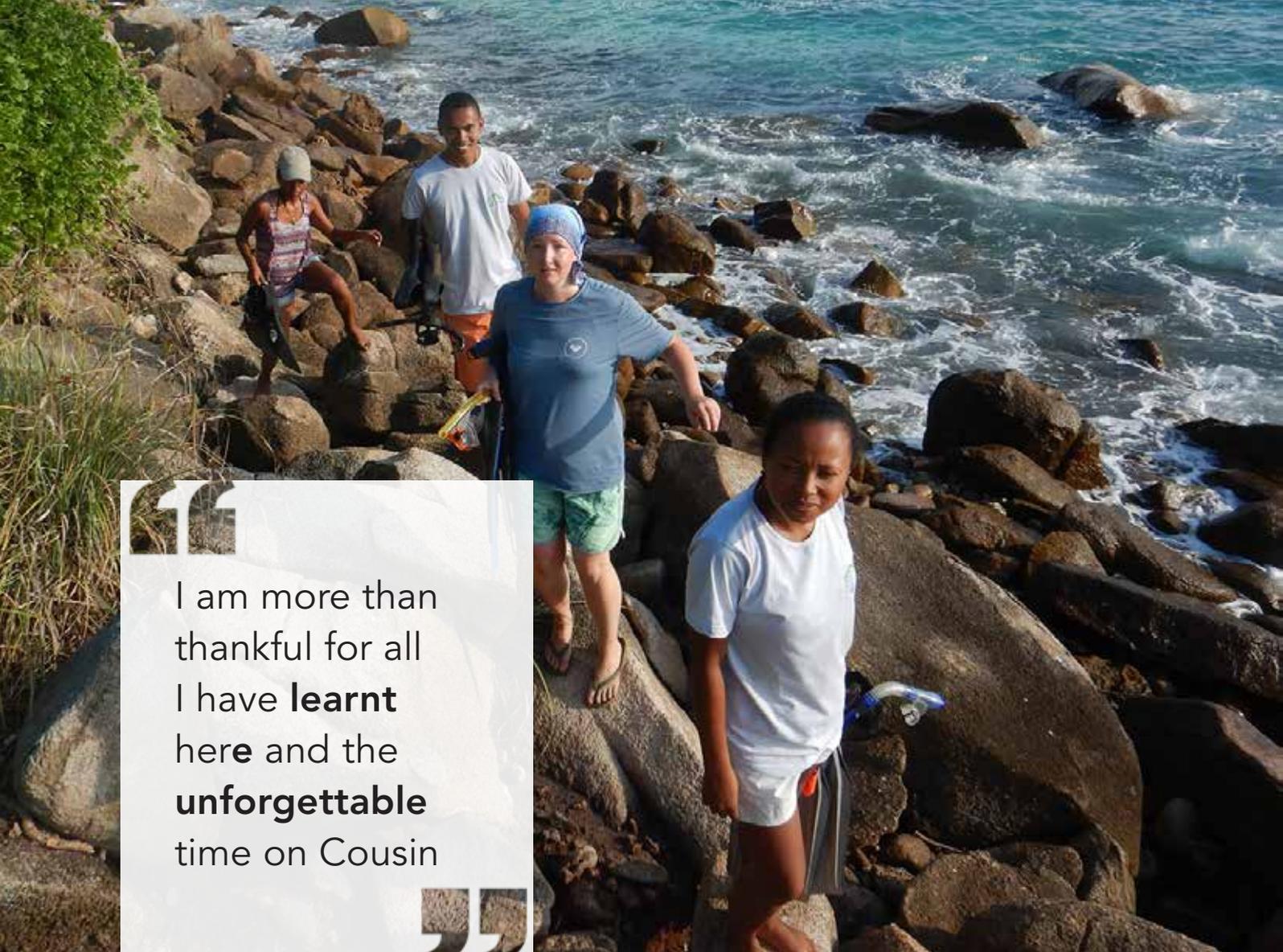
We had already practiced beach profiling in my school before, but with another method so it's also good to discover a different method. I learned a lot about the island, there is no doubt about it. What struck me also was the monitoring of the Seychelles magpie robin, the favourite of the island. The way birds trick us, that's what's fascinating too because it's as if they want to show us their authority, that it's not just man who can control everything. So we followed them around the forest a little bit every day, identifying them and also observing if there is a nesting behaviour or not. It's like going on a treasure hunt. This interaction - we call them by whistling and disturbing the leaves on the ground and they reply to our whistles and come to us - was really incredible to me. The guided tour was also important I think and striking because it's a way to share with others and to demonstrate what I learned during my stay here.



Furthermore, there is also this incredible camaraderie between my team and the leaders as well as the other wardens. There was a feeling of being comfortable in everything that we do, thanks to them. Especially to our Yan and Charlotte, it was like we never left home. So now, to summarize: learning, leisure, passion and will, combined. That sums up what I lived here on the island, and I find it hard to part with it, I will miss it.

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





I am more than thankful for all I have **learnt** here and the **unforgettable** time on Cousin

# Becoming more than a tourist

By Annika PERL

Sometimes I find myself longing for change, for new adventures and a time away from everyday life. So when I was asked if I wanted to renew my contract at the school I was working at, I said no and decided to swap my teaching job for chasing rainbows somewhere far from home.

As I am a keen organic gardener and interested in plants and wildlife, I wanted to discover a place with soil conditions, plants and animals different from the ones I am used to in Germany. Learning about the CBC program, while searching for a suitable volunteer program on the internet, put me in a state of flustered excitement as I really wanted to get involved in conservation work on a tropical

island and thus also be able to meet my favourite animals - turtles and tortoises – in their natural habitat. The evening I got the confirmation mail from the CBC program coordinator, Yan Coquet, confirming my placement I really freaked out and danced through my living room (...which made my cats freak out as well...)

I decided to treat myself to a holiday before joining the project to discover the Seychelles a bit and get acclimatized. I am really glad that I did, as I underestimated the time my body needed to get used to the humid and hot weather conditions. Unfortunately I was still struggling with the heat during my first week on Cousin Island, but the lovely team, the amazing wildlife and the Robinson Crusoe feeling made up for it. I simply fell in love



with the conservation work and enjoyed the variety of tasks we had the chance to get involved in so much. Again and again I was impressed by the beauty of the island and its gorgeous inhabitants. After enjoying the Seychelles from the perspective of a tourist, I was more than glad to be able to give something back to this paradise and to get to know what it takes to protect it.

Cousin Island is really a special place to be and to work at. It is such a great opportunity to gain experiences in conservation work, to live next door to amazing animals and to step back from commercial life for a while and enjoy a simpler life. Yan, Charlotte, Kara and all the other staff members provided us with interesting information about the conservation work on the island and were always there when we had questions or needed help. So it felt good to help them and to take over responsibility for a few tasks, for example finding and identifying the magpie robins in their territories or checking the breeding success of the White-tailed tropicbird and the White tern. I learnt how to





use a compass and how to orientate myself on the island with the help of the grid poles. I think when I go on the next hiking trip back home, I will take a compass with me as it is really practical and also fun to check where you are and in which direction you are heading.

One of my biggest dreams came true straight away in the first week on the Island: I met the giant tortoises and, during a snorkelling trip, also encountered a hawksbill turtle. I felt so free and happy while drifting with the turtle through the crystal clear turquoise water of the Indian Ocean. This and sitting next to a giant tortoise while she is enjoying the *Ochrasia* tree fruits will be moments I will never forget in my life. I stayed on Cousin just for two weeks, but I got involved in so many interesting things that it feels like I have spent several weeks here. We did turtle nest excavation, counted the land birds for the census, removed invasive plants, recorded the status of the chicks of the lovely White terns and the beautiful White-tailed tropicbirds, survived the mosquitos, cleaned



up the beach (quite alarming how much trash is washed to the shore), checked nest boxes (and found a lot of geckos in and around them) and joined the guided tours. I even had the chance to translate the information from the guide to some fellow Germans and was asked many questions about the island and the life here on the CBC. I am amazed by how much I have already learnt in just two weeks and would love to stay to learn more and to get more experienced in the conservation work. I will definitely give conversation work a place in my future life.

In our free time I enjoyed the snorkelling trips (we also visited the coral nursery! Such a gorgeous project!), climbing up the island hill and being rewarded with a spectacular view, joining the communal dinners and the shared cooking, the conversations with the other participants and the staff members and the relaxed atmosphere in the field station and on the whole island. After a long work day we also enjoyed having a nap in the hammocks or just sitting and staring at the ocean

and watching the crabs from our terrace. One evening we watched a movie about the incredible journey of a loggerhead turtle. It was really touching as we learnt so much about turtles during the week and had just encountered a hawksbill while snorkelling.

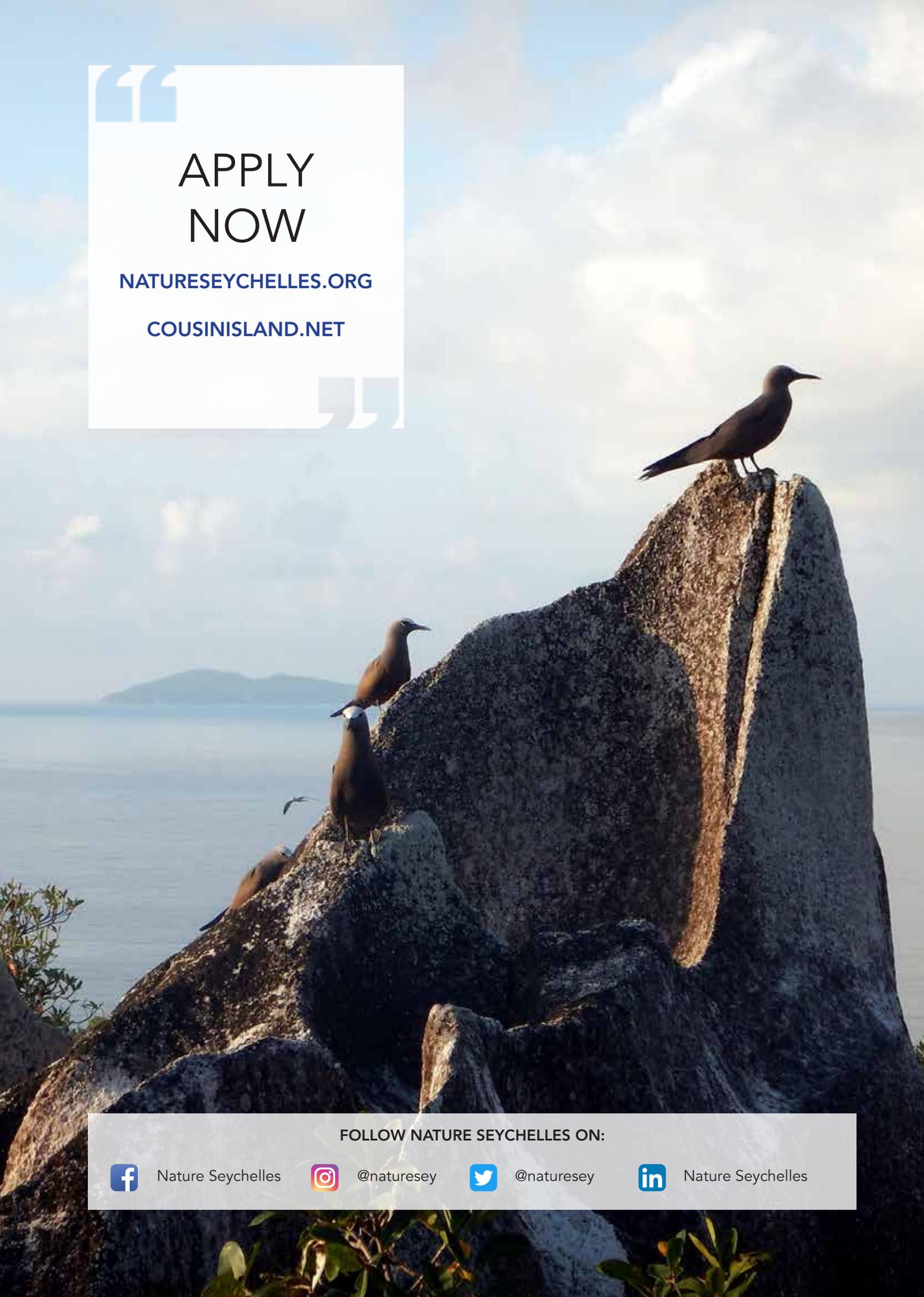
I am more than thankful for all I have learnt here; the encounters with the animals and people living on the island and simply the unforgettable time on Cousin Island. Even though it was not easy for me at first it is even harder for me to leave. I will miss the Cousin family and the work with the animals so much as well as the sound of the waves and all the bird calls. The rustling noise of the skinks in the forest, the salty smell of the ocean and the way the sun falls through the leaves in the mornings will stay in my heart. It seems I fell in love with Cousin and thus I really hope to be back one day. Thanks to all human beings and animals involved in the great time I had on this beautiful tropical island!



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