

ARIDE TEAM

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Aride Island Monthly Report – March 2011

Introduction

March brought on the island new projects, friends and needed rain; interesting sightings have been done and a good amount of tourists enjoyed the wonders of Aride Island!

Seychelles Magpie-Robins (*Copsychus sechellarum*)

On March finally few breeding attempts were recorded for the Aride SMR population.

At the Banyan territory on 9th NgNg and NgS were found building the nest in the nest box n.14, at the end of March an egg was incubated by the couple.

At the Barringtonia territory, on the same date, SS and YY were found building a nest into nest box n. 8, on 17th one egg was found and at the end of the month it was still being incubated.

At the Lodge territory we had two breeding attempts: on 9th YW was seen carrying nesting material and a nest was found in a Bwa blan (*Hernandia nymphaeifolia*) tree, the nest was later abandoned by the couple and a new one was discovered in a Lafous gran fey *Ficus lutea* tree; there is still no egg but the pair was seen several times mating around the lodge. Also, they are trying to chase the previous chick VB from the territory.

At the village territory, on the 9th, a nest was discovered at building stage into the nest box n. 2 . The



dominant couple of the territory (SP and VG) was seen always around the nest box carrying nesting material. On the 22nd an egg was discovered and the behaviour of the couple became very aggressive in the neighbourhood of the nest.

Concerning the others territories, the Memorial one is still fought for by the couple of the banyan territory and BB that used to be the dominant male. At the west side of the hill SpV and RY are seen regularly and the un-ringed chick sometimes continues to come at the feeding station. At the eastern part of the hill, at the end of the month, YBk was seen with RNG (that occasionally chased it from the feeding station). YBk was born at the Memorial territory, exactly at the other side of the hill.



Weather

The average minimum and maximum temperatures for this month were 25.9 and 29.3 degrees Celsius respectively, very similar to the ones of February. In fact the average temperature was the same for the minimum and we had an increment of only 0.1 degree for the maximum temperature. In March we finally had a few days of much needed rain; in fact rainfall was recorded for 14 days, 11 more days compared to February, with a maximum of 49 mm in a day. The total rainfall for the month was only 142.9 mm, significantly more than the previous month. The average wind force was 1.4 (exactly the same than in February and January) and the wind blowing mostly from NW and SW like for the previous month only 1 day from SE. Concerning the visibility, Silhouette could be seen for only 9 days (55 Km) like in February, for the rest of the month the visibility was: 30 Km for 14 days, 45 Km for 4 days, 25 Km for 1 day and 22.5 Km for 3 days. The average depth of the well was 98.7, 3.1 cm more than the previous month.

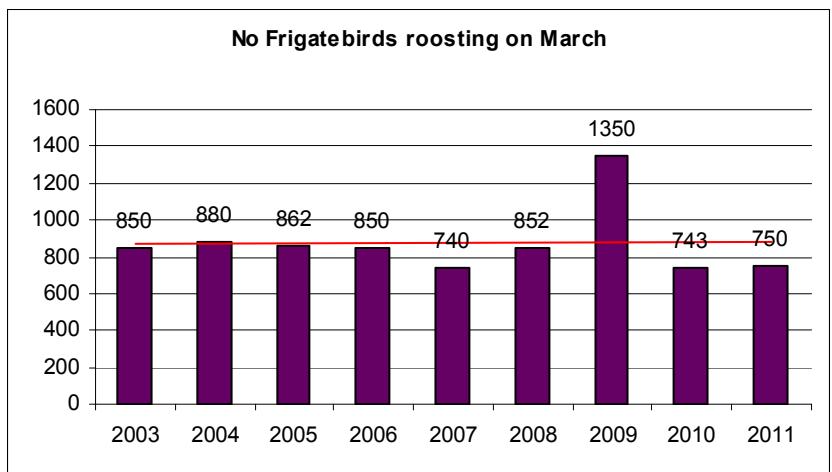
Seabirds

Contrary to what we hoped, March wasn't a good month for the Fairy tern, in fact 29 nesting attempts failed: 12 at the egg stage, 10 at the C1 stage and 7 at the C2 stage. Only 2 birds manage to fledge. Terrible result for the Aride population (the cause could be food shortage)! During this month the number of new nests recorded was 10 and the total number of nests monitored were 43.

The total number of White tailed tropic birds (*Phaethon lepturus*) nests monitored this month was 63, including 27 new ones. Seven chicks fledged and unfortunately 9 breeding attempts failed. On the 4th Clifford Bresson found another individual with a metal ring (he found a ringed bird the previous month as well), the alphanumeric code was: J013324.

Concerning the Lesser Noddies (*Anous tenuirostris*), on the 10th of March a small census to assess the number of breeding pairs was carried out by Italian friends in visit on the island. The results are the following: in the first small colony close to the helipad 35 nests were recorded of which 20 with *pullus* and 15 with incubating adults. In the other colony close to the visitors shelter 14 nests were recorded of which 6 with *pullus* and 8 with adult incubating. The situation will be monitored to assess the number of chicks able to fledge.

The number of Frigatebirds at the monthly count increased compared with February; in fact 750 birds were recorded, about 100 more than the previous month. The graphic shows the trend of Frigate bird number in March for the past 8 years compared with the 2011. The number of the birds found this month is under the average (showed by the red line) of the past six years (average = 875).



The numbers of Bridled terns roosting recorded in the weekly counts were 4, 12, 11 and 10 birds respectively (in average 9 birds, 2 more than the previous month). Few breeding pairs were also recorded on the rocks at the eastern part of the beach.

Concerning the Sooty terns, on the 20th, 47 of them were recorded roosting at the north-east side of the island. In the same side, several chicks of Brown noddies were also observed.

Land birds

In March no vagrant land birds were sighted. The Barn owl was sighted on the 19th in the garden and on the 20th around the lodge, and a Fairy tern chick was found predated by it. Still we were not able to shoot it. A juvenile of Blue Pigeon was seen few times around the lodge. March has seen also the start of a very interesting survey with the aim to ring almost most of the Seychelles warblers present in the plateau. This action will enable us to determine the number of warbler's territories in the plateau area and furthermore the number of the birds; this in turn can be used to calibrate point counts and reassess the species population size on Aride. At the end of the month, about 40 birds were caught and at least 7 territories delimited. The start of this project was possible thanks to three Italian ringers from Parma and we will continue it until the census will be completed.



Sightings of Note

As usual, Crab plover (*Dromas ardeola*) and Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) were sighted many times along the beach for the whole month.

Unfortunately the single Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) is still on the island and it was sighted three times nearby the lodge and a few times around the helipad. The staff members are trying to catch and kill it. A special trap may have to be used.

Two Whip scorpions (*Phryníchus scaber*) were sighted several times, one in the lodge and another one in the manager's house.

The most important sight for this month was the Red-tailed tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*)! One individual was sighted on the 19th by Renato Carini and Glenn Mc Kinlay at the west view point and on the 30th another one was seen flying on La Cour by Steve Agricole. It was the first time for 2011 that this rare species has been sighted!

On the 30th a Greater crested tern (*Thalasseus bergii*) was sighted by the Conservation Officer on Lemuria rocks along the way to Praslin.

Management

Infrastructure

On the 18th of March the third house block was completed and the day after the Indian workers started to destroy the last old house on La Cour to build the fourth one.

The supply boat came on the island to deliver building supply only once (out of the three trips planned) due to mechanical problems and rough seas.



Personnel

On the 14th and the 15th of March the Conservation Officer Licia Calabrese attended the Training Course organised by the Plant Conservation Action Group/ SGP through a UNDP project, it was held on Mahé and the first day was about field exploration on the mountain Trois frère, the second day was at the national herbarium in Victoria. Licia started also to dive with the Silhouette cruise Sea Bird to improve her skills on marine field for further reef monitoring. The Island Manager attended the Mahé staff meeting on the 4th and the management meeting on the 10th.

Volunteers

Myriam Rollon was our only volunteer for the whole month. She had settled well and she is working hard in all the jobs on the island.

Vegetation

The staff finished removing all the bamboo plants in the marsh and we managed also to cut a dead Takamaka tree that was affected by the wilt disease. Some of the ferns present behind the water pump were also removed to keep the area open.

This month we had a massive and wonderful Wright's Gardinia flowering!

We would like to attach at this news letter the first results of the study conducted by Beaud Marine and Christoph Küffer on Aride. See following page.



Written by Marine Beaud

On the 22nd of November 2010, Marine Beaud, a Master student at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich visited Aride to collect leaf material from Bwa sitron (*Rothmannia annae*) and Bwa mapou (*Pisonia grandis*). Her research is part of a project led by Dr. Christoph Kueffer on the ecology of the Seychelles woody flora. Through the project leaves and other plant characteristics of all native and invasive shrubs and trees of the granitic Seychelles will be collected. Some leaf characteristics, so called functional traits, such as the thickness (called ‘specific leaf area’) or the chemical composition can tell much about the ecological preferences of a species. Among others the project will help to understand which native species are fast growing species and thus particularly suitable for habitat restoration of degraded sites, which species are adapted to very nutrient-poor soils, and which species have particularly high contents of plant defence chemicals that plants use against herbivores. It may be expected that specialised rather than generalist native herbivores feed and depend on these well-defended plant species. First results indicate that Bwa sitron is one of the fastest growing and probably most light demanding species of the endemic woody Seychelles flora, comparable to many of the indigenous but non-endemic species. As expected nutrient leaf contents of species collected on Aride indicate that both nitrogen and phosphorus availabilities are markedly higher on the seabird island Aride compared to the main Seychelles islands. We would like to thank ICS, the Aride team, and in particular Licia Calabrese, Lauren Wood and Steve Agricole for their spontaneous and great assistance with our fieldwork on Aride.



Others

On the 1st we had the visit of Pierre-Andrè Adam, the Projects & Science Manager of ICS, he stayed overnight and left the island on the 2nd. His visit was aimed to meet the staff and discuss about several issue concerning the monitoring work on the island. The 2nd three Italians ornithologists (Renato Carini, the bird ringer, Luca Stefani and Alessandro Mucciolo from LIPU-BirdLife Italy) came on the island to start a project about ringing the Seychelles Warblers on the plateau and on the 3rd Gerard Rocamora came on Aride to show us how to do it and how to sample the blood from them. He left the day after and the Italian bird ringer left on the 25th after a very good job!



Visitors

March was a quite good month for the tourists; in fact there were 246 visitors that landed on Aride of which 231 were paying ones. The number of clients is higher compared to the month of February when the number of guests was 205. The highest number of guests, 101 in total, came to Aride by Silhouette cruises, followed by 71 clients who came by self sail. We also had 31 clients from La Reserve, 24 by other hire and 4 from the Lemuria Resort.

As the graph shows, we had an increment in the number of guests in comparison with the previous year. Unfortunately it is still lower compared to the average of the previous years (average=296).



Marine Life

Concerning the Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), we had very few emergences this month and no Green turtles have been recorded, only one track could belong to a green turtle by its dimension (104 cm) but the pattern was like the Hawksbill ones. We noticed a big erosion along the whole beach with high erosion cliff and rocks exposed, not suitable conditions for a turtle to come ashore!



Visit to Booby island



A subsequent visit on Booby Island (Ile aux Fous) was done (after the 12th February one) to assess if the birds breeding there were Sooty terns or Bridled terns. The Conservation Officer stepped on the island on the 31st and produced video material that confirmed the ones breeding on Booby were Bridled terns and not Sooty terns as supposed in the previous monthly report. She found also a few chicks but less than the number of eggs found during the first excursion. Unfortunately there were also signs of poaching like ropes and torches.

Other News & Snap Shots

The small office in the warden house was repainted and cleaned. Now it is in a favourable state to work in.

We received the two small Honda and the Mitsuki generators. Currently only one of the Honda is operational and the other two were sent to an electrician on Praslin to sort out a faulty wiring problem.



At La Cour a Pisonia tree and an Indian almond were cut to prevent branches to fall on the ranger's block roof.

