



Conservation Programs



Background . . .

Chance colonisations of islands by plants and animals and their subsequent isolation have created unique biological communities. Should conditions change, species unable to adapt or disperse elsewhere naturally are doomed. Some changes are natural but most are man induced. Oceanic islands throughout the world have had their fair share of environmental impacts at the hand of man. Cousine Island (26 hectares) was no exception; it was ravaged through the cultivation of various crops and stocked with cattle, pigs and poultry. It also supported a large population of cats. Over utilization of both the habitat and the natural wildlife resulted in declining populations with some species disappearing. Marine turtles also suffered through avarice and were drastically reduced in numbers.

Conservation Program . . .

Due to the concerns of dwindling life forms, *the loss of bio-diversity*, in the granitic archipelago of the Seychelles, Cousine Island was purchased in 1992 and set aside as a nature reserve for primarily the existing populations of endemic land birds and to provide protection for breeding populations of sea birds. Giant Tortoises living in poor captive conditions within the Seychelles are purchased and released on the island giving them their freedom they so rightly deserved.

The island has undergone an extensive vegetation rehabilitation program with the planting of indigenous plants and the removal of both alien plant and animal species. This operation forms an integral part of the island's recovery program and will continue for future years.

Cousine Island is of biological importance both nationally and internationally. It is a rarity in global terms, in that it is one of the only islands in the Seychelles and possibly the world that are free of *alien* mammals, except for the presence of man. Every effort is made to ensure its survival as a nature reserve and to allow visitors to become an integral part of this unique place on Earth.

Preserving Seychelles Heritage

The conservation principles applied to the project are dedicated to the Seychelles natural heritage. Every effort is made to improve and safeguard the natural beauty of the island to return it to the state in which it was originally created.

All buildings in natural areas are considered obtrusive but inevitably have to be there to care for the needs of man and ultimately nature. The Old French Colonial style architecture used recognizes the early French Occupation of the Seychelles, 1742 - 1811. Traditional building materials were not used due to the continuing environmental demands in obtaining natural materials and the possible threat of reintroducing alien species to the island.



Objectives...

A mission statement was initiated in December 1994 to give the island direction and perpetuity and to safeguard the vision for future generations.

The mission is:

"To promote and practice nature conservation and the wise use of natural resources of the island and its surroundings"

Nature conservation - the conservation of natural biodiversity, the promotion of public environmental awareness and the promotion of nature orientated outdoor recreation and responsible travel

Wise use - use that will maintain ecological processes, preserve genetic diversity and ensure sustainable utilization of all resources

To achieve this mission, the following actions must be taken:

- All natural ecosystems on and around the island must be protected, and the man induced extinction of any species indigenous to the island and its immediate surroundings must be prevented
- Environmental awareness of the biosphere as a whole must be promoted and the active support of the broad public, especially user groups and communities in neighbouring areas should be promoted through, *inter alia*, consultation and involvement where possible
- The utilization of renewable wildlife resources on and immediately around the island must be controlled to ensure sustainability of resources

Cousine meets these requirements simply by doing what it does on a day to day basis.

An island logo, that epitomizes the mission, was created in July 1995 and registered in the Seychelles in November 1995 (No 268/95 Class 42).

Financing the program

From 1992 to April 2000 the island was totally supported through private / personal funding. It was envisaged that through the development of a small up-market lodge, which opened to visitors in April 2000, the conservation program would be maintained and enhanced through the formation of a Cousine Island Conservation Trust. A trust has been setup and receives donations dedicated to the conservation from past guests and other conservation supporting companies, donation details can be obtained from the General Manager.

All tourism generated funds are allocated through the trust to prioritized conservation projects.



Facility and visitors

Cousine is unique, remote, secretive, offering a maximum of 10 guests an exclusive island experience combined with complete privacy.

Air-conditioned guest rooms comprise four secluded individual villas built in Old French Colonial style nestling amongst rich natural vegetation commanding views over Cousin, Praslin and Aride islands. Each has a spacious bedroom, separate lounge, large bathroom and front and rear verandas.

Overlooking the freshwater swimming pool, the Pavillion, also in Old French Colonial style, houses the lounge, bar, restaurant and air-conditioned library.



Visitor communications

Potential visitors on enquiry are given full details pertaining to the island and its conservation program together with the current environmental activities.

Thereafter follows guided walks and talks, should guests so wish, by our conservation officer. Participation in the ongoing research / monitoring programs is encouraged.

Scientific papers from the island research and monitoring projects have been published and are available upon request. Guests after their visit are kept up to date on project progress, island and conservation progress with quarterly newsletters.



Sustainable tourism

It is believed that the integration of both the natural and financial world, where one is totally supported by the other, is innovative and environmentally unique.

Cousine Island offers you a different experience; an escape from the global rat race; one of peace and tranquility far removed from the pressures of the business world. There are no vehicles, water sports and the hidden everyday pressures one generally encounters on vacation. Cousine Island is where you have the rare opportunity of finding yourself. This opportunity of living amongst nature is a 'life changing' experience!





Environmental objectives

Cousine Island is 1) a committed and 2) a unique concept in maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the region as well as demonstrating these advantages to the local communities. Of prime importance are the Conservation Awareness Program and the uplifting of the community in not only the value of conservation and responsible tourism but perhaps more importantly, the high standards required to cater for the rapidly expanding, global high profile tourism industry.

Job opportunity with pride and understanding in the work place is of paramount importance; we hope that these standards will be transferred to hearth and home.

Serious consideration was given to the impacts of humans when taking into account the preservation of peace and tranquility and maintaining a policy of minimal interference with the natural creatures. With this in mind and couple in mission, the number of visitors has been restricted to 10. All biodegradable waste is composted on the island and non-biodegradable waste is transported by boat for disposal at state run reclamation schemes on Praslin and Mahe. Energy is through generated power that is designated to meet emissions and immunity standards. Solar power is extensively used for water heating. All buildings feature rainwater catchments with extensive storage facilities.

Research and monitoring

64 research / monitoring projects have been identified in terms of fulfilling the Cousine Island Mission statement with particular reference to the following:

- All ecosystems on and around the island must be protected, and the man induced extinction of any species indigenous to the island, of important Seychelles endemic species which have been introduced to the island for conservation reasons, must be prevented

As time, knowledge and understanding progresses there are a multitude of additions to the project list. Projects range from the basics of history, geology, soils, sea characteristics and climate to fungi, effects of alien invaders, parasites and disease, coral reefs, forests, giant millipedes, various birds species, skinks and sea turtles.

From 1995 to 2001 various documents pertaining to the islands biota have been produced and some further documents are currently in preparation.