

Summary of 'Improving habitat for endemic fauna (birds and reptiles) and seabirds on Ile aux Aigrettes' report



This report presents a summary of conservation work carried out on Ile aux Aigrettes over a 12-month period (April 2025 to March 2026), led by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation. The project focuses on restoring native habitat for endemic wildlife, including birds and reptiles, while also encouraging seabirds to return and breed on the island.

Ile aux Aigrettes is a 26 Ha coral islet off the south-east coast of Mauritius and plays an important role in protecting threatened native species. However, like much of Mauritius and its islets, it has been heavily impacted by invasive plants and animals. This project aims to reverse that damage through ecosystems restoration, invasive species control, and education.

Habitat Restoration and Weeding

One of the main activities during the year was the removal of invasive plant species, such as false acacia, that compete with native vegetation. These invasive plants can quickly take over the landscape, preventing endemic species from growing and reducing habitat quality for wildlife.



MWF staff
Removing invasive
species on Ile aux
Aigrettes

Over the reporting period, a total of 8.89 hectares of the island were weeded, including 0.14 hectares that required re-weeding due to regrowth of invasive alien plants. This represents a significant portion (34%) of the islet and reflects consistent effort throughout the year.

Weeding was carried out manually by teams of labourers, targeting species such as small acacia, *prune malgache*, and other aggressive invaders. In some months, previously cleared areas had to be revisited to remove new seedlings, highlighting the ongoing challenge of invasive plant management.

Despite steady progress, one issue remains unresolved: the spread of sandalwood which cannot yet be removed due to legal protection, despite being an invasive alien species. Derogation has been requested from authorities, but no final decision has been received.

Plant Propagation and Restoration Efforts

Alongside weeding, the project focused on restoring native vegetation by propagating and planting endemic species. These plants are essential for rebuilding a functioning ecosystem and supporting wildlife. During the reporting period, the team successfully propagated:

- 120 bois d'ébène de l'île aux Aigrettes
- 73 griffe du diable
- 107 cadoc
- 67 native vetiver grasses (important for seabird nesting habitat)



Bois Cadhoc (on the left) and Griffes du diable are among native species planted to restore the vegetation of the islet

These plants were prepared in the nursery and hardened before planting. By early 2026, over 100 seedlings had already been planted, with more scheduled for future planting depending on rainfall conditions. In early 2026, drought conditions prevailed, despite this being the rainy season.

This work is particularly important for the seabird restoration programme, as suitable vegetation is needed to attract birds back to the island for nesting.

Control of Invasive Animals



Baited cage traps are used to capture tenrecs

Staff processing tenrecs caught, including morphometrics and dissection to check stomach content

Invasive animals are another major threat to native biodiversity. On Ile aux Aigrettes, the main focus is on controlling tenrecs, small mammals that can disturb terrestrial vegetation and animals.

Over the reporting period, 20 tenrecs were captured through a sustained trapping programme involving 12,306 trap-nights. Trapping efforts varied seasonally, as tenrecs enter a dormant state (torpor) during dry, cooler months. Importantly, no evidence of rats was detected throughout the reporting period. This is a critical success, as rats rank amongst the most damaging invasive species for island ecosystems worldwide.

However, Asian House Crows remain present on the island, with up to 100 individuals observed roosting nightly. These birds pose a real risk to native wildlife and continue to be monitored, whilst we request authorities to step-up nationwide control and consider eradication.

Seabird Restoration Efforts

A key objective of the project is to encourage seabirds to return to Ile aux Aigrettes and establish breeding colonies. Seabirds once played an important ecological role on Mauritian islets, but many populations have declined or disappeared.

Pascal
Mucktoom,
horticulturist,
planting native
vetiver grasses



To support their return, the project included:

- Habitat restoration using appropriate plant species replanting
- Seabird attraction such as decoys and call playbacks

Ongoing monitoring

- Installation of visual and educational materials
- awareness activities

Although no seabird nests were recorded during this reporting period, two seabirds were rescued, treated, and successfully released.

The absence of nesting indicates that seabird restoration is a long-term process, requiring continued habitat improvement and patience. However, we acknowledge that until tenrecs and crows are effectively managed, seabird attraction will face great challenges. For example, it is to be noted that challenges to seabird restoration projects from introduced predators is not unique to Mauritius. In Hawaii, the conservation and translocation of seabirds (such as Bonin Petrels and Tristram's Storm-Petrels) faces serious challenges from the Barn Owl, which was introduced to the island in the 1950's.

Wildlife Monitoring

The project also includes regular monitoring of key endemic species to assess the health of the ecosystem.

By March 2026, recorded populations included:

The Pink Pigeon is one of the species visible on Ile aux Aigrettes



- Pink Pigeon: 8
- Mauritius Fody: 163
- Mauritius Olive White-eye: 33
- Telfair's Skink: 32
- Günther's Gecko: 250
- Aldabra Tortoises: 26

These species are important indicators of ecosystem recovery. While some populations remain small, or declining due to the impact of crows, their continued presence suggests that habitat restoration efforts are supporting biodiversity on the island.

Education and Public Engagement

Education is an essential part of the project. Ile aux Aigrettes serves as a living laboratory and classroom where visitors can learn about conservation and the importance of protecting native ecosystems.

Between April 2025 and March 2026, over 4,000 Mauritian visitors participated in guided tours and educational activities: :

- 1,869 Mauritian adults
- 238 children (family visits)
- 1,912 school students, most of whom were complimentary.



Children visiting Ile aux Aigrettes and discovering native ecosystems

In addition around 10,000 visitors from overseas visit Ile aux Aigrettes yearly and are exposed to the project.

Visitors are introduced to topics such as invasive alien species, habitat restoration, and seabird conservation. The seabird restoration project is also showcased through displays and explanations, helping to raise awareness and support for conservation efforts. Other aspects include Installation of visual and educational materials

Challenges and Constraints

Despite strong progress, the project faced several challenges:

- Legal delays preventing the removal of sandalwood
- Seasonal reduced tenrec activity during dry colder months when trapping has to be withheld
- Weather conditions, particularly delayed rainfall affecting planting
- Persistent invasive species, requiring ongoing management and thwarting seabird recolonization

These challenges highlight the complexity of ecosystem restoration and the need for adaptive management.

Conclusion

Over the course of the year, the project made significant progress in restoring habitat, controlling invasive species, and engaging with the public. Nearly nine

hectares of the island were restored, key functional native plants were propagated and planted, and invasive animal populations were managed.

While some objectives, such as seabird recolonisation, have not yet been achieved, the foundations for long-term success are being established. Conservation work on islands is often slow and requires sustained effort, but the results seen so far are encouraging.

Continued restoration, monitoring, and education will be essential to ensure that Ile aux Aigrettes remains a safe and thriving refuge for Mauritius' unique biodiversity.