

Improving habitat for endemic fauna (birds and reptiles) and seabirds on Ile aux Aigrettes report summary 2024/2025



Ile aux aigrettes

Ile aux Aigrettes is a 26-hectare low coralline island and has been declared a Nature Reserve since 1965 due to its remnant Mauritian dry coastal forest. Ecological restoration started in 1985 with the aim of reinstating the coastal vegetation community and to replace the missing components of the flora and fauna. Through weeding of introduced species and planting of native species, including rare and Critically Endangered plants that have been propagated and reintroduced on the island, we are restoring the ecosystem. Around 30,000-40,000 plants per season/year were planted from 1998 to 2003, although the forest is now regenerating well naturally, specialised planting still continues to enhance the species diversity, to provide food for the native species reintroduced on

the island and to provide habitat for seabirds and reptiles. The island is also used to conserve suitable lowland species that are Critically Endangered. Maintenance weeding continues through employment of a team of labourers living in the vicinity. As part of a sustainable conservation programme, the island is open to visitors through our ecotourism and environmental education programmes. Students, tourists and the general public learn about the habitat restoration project, in order to raise their awareness of the conservation of the threatened Mauritian flora and fauna.

Summary of activities 2024/2025

The restoration of forest is a long-term process which requires dedication and sustained resources. It involves the removal of invasive alien plant species and planting of native plants. On Ile aux Aigrettes, the forest restoration is supporting the whole ecosystem restoration work where exotic mammalian predators were eradicated and endemic animals and ecological analogues were re-introduced, reviving lost ecosystem functions.

1874 Mauritian adults with 319 children, and 1106 school children on educational tours visited Ile aux Aigrettes.

Populations at end December 2024: Pink Pigeon 11. Mauritius Fody 183. Mauritius Olive White-eye 39, Telfair's Skink 50, Gunther's Geckos 250 and Aldabra Tortoises 26. No seabirds detected, but > 15 seabirds rescued and released from Ile aux Aigrettes.

Removal of exotic plants



Removal of invasive species by a labourer on Ile aux aigrettes

- 3.5 Ha intensively weeded and 0.8 Ha weeded of small weeds, totaling 4.3 Ha by December 2024.
- 2.26 Ha of the island were weeded from January to March 2025.

Control of Tenrecs & Control of Crows (Decoy ladder trap)

The tenrec trapping, the monitoring to detect the presence of rats and removal of crow nests continued. The number of tenrecs trapped from January to March 2025 is dramatically lower than in the same period in 2024 with a higher number of trap nights, and indicates a potential impact of trapping on lowering the number of tenrecs on the island. 14 tenrecs were caught in 2452 trap-nights from January to March 2025 whereas 92 tenrecs were caught in 1752 trap-nights during the same period in 2024.



Picture of a trap used on Ile aux Aigrettes

Period	Trap-nights deployed	Tenrecs caught
January 2024	104	3
February 2024	251	44
March 2024	1397	45
January 2025	496	6
February 2025	790	2
March 2025	1166	6

Seabirds

We continue to rescue seabird chicks and adults, which we rehabilitate and release off the island. Some of the chicks may return to Ile aux Aigrettes in future to nest. We will construct the fence to exclude Aldabra tortoises from the seabird nesting area (now fully planted) and put out decoys in 2025.



Seabirds rescued and released off Ile aux aigrettes

Planting of suitable endemic plants for seabird breeding areas

250 seabird-friendly grasses were planted and 168 other native/endemic plants during the 2024 planting season (January to June). 88 of these were planted during April to June 2024.

The planting season from January to April 2025, has been affected by drought and if no rains are forthcoming, the plants will be kept in the nursery until 2026.



The evolution of the seabirds breeding area