

Cousin Island in Seychelles is a perfect marriage between tourism and conservation

Title

"The island that belongs to birds, humans are welcome" is the slogan for the world's first internationally-owned reserve known as **Cousin Island**. The reason for this is because eco-tourism is being used as a vehicle for conservation. This creates a perfect marriage that brings people and nature together.



Cousin Island is a special reserve run by **Nature Seychelles**, the BirdLife partner in Seychelles. Once a coconut plantation, Cousin Island has now been transformed into a vibrant habitat and natural breeding site for endemic species and seabirds. In addition to this conservation effort, eco-tourism is being used to generate revenue as a means to further the preservation of the special reserve. "It is only through a high quality of tourism that Cousin Island can maintain its reputation as one of the prime eco-tourism destinations in the western Indian Ocean region," says Dr. Nirmal Shah, the Chief Executive Officer of Nature Seychelles.

On the 24th of March, the Minister of Tourism and Culture, Mr. Alain St Ange visited Cousin Island in the company of the Chief Executive, and Director of Nature Seychelles Ms. Kerstin Henri. The Minister congratulated Nature Seychelles for having "developed the art of

managing a reserve that belongs to birds where humans can visit as guests." The Minister made the point that Cousin Island was an important tourism asset and as such his Ministry would support it in any way it could. Conservation activities on Cousin Island include monitoring of the island's biodiversity, research, re-introduction of endangered species such as the Seychelles Magpie Robin, ecotourism and education.



Years of careful conservation has led to an astounding increase in endemic bird populations, the restoration of the island's native vegetation, and an increase in the island's overall biodiversity. About 10,000 tourists visit Cousin Island each year. A survey in 2000 revealed that 98% of visitors found the eco-tourism service of a very high standard, and 99% found the guided tour interesting, informative and well organised. No matter what time of the year you visit, you are sure to be amazed by the vast variety of birds, reptiles, invertebrates and vegetation. Each year, thousands of people take advantage of the opportunity to visit this unique island reserve to discover its beauty and diversity.



Five of Seychelles eleven endemic land birds are found on Cousin Island. They include the **Seychelles magpie robin** *Copsychus sechellarum*, **Seychelles sunbird** *Nectarinia dussumieri*, **Seychelles fody** *Foudia sechellarum*, **Seychelles Blue-pigeon** *Alectroenas pulcherrima* in addition to the **Seychelles warbler** *Acrocephalus sechellensis*.

Dr. Nirmal Shah expressed his organization's satisfaction with the visit of Cousin Island by Minister St.Ange. In addition Minister Alain St.Ange states that "Dr Shah suggested that I be better acquainted with the conservation work Nature Seychelles was doing. Because of his persistence I visited Cousin Island and today I can say that I was over impressed with what I saw on Cousin Island. The management and staff are all conscious of their responsibilities and they deliver for Seychelles a sanctuary for our flora and fauna and they remain an example to the world in how they are managing a nature reserve that remains the perfect marriage between tourism and conservation".