

Cousin Island Special Reserve, Carbon Neutral

Cousin Island has become the World's 1st carbon neutral nature reserve. This exciting success story for Seychelles and the conservation and eco-tourism world in general is the result of a rigorous carbon footprint assessment, assurance process and investment in high quality carbon credits to offset the footprint. Nature Seychelles (BirdLife Partner) the national NGO that runs the Reserve will reveal this status at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Tourism Expo to celebrate Tourism and Biodiversity during World Tourism Day and week to be held on Monday 27 September 2010 at the ICCS, Victoria. In attendance will be Mr. Matthew Forbes the British High Commissioner to the Seychelles, the Chief Executive Officer of the Seychelles Tourism Board Mr. Alain St. Ange, who will be opening the Expo, and other invited guests. The British High Commission in Seychelles funded the assessment. The Special Reserve welcomes thousands of eco-tourists each year. In recognition of the environmental impact of these visitors to Cousin, most of whom fly from Europe and reach the island by boat, and after media reports in Europe urging citizens not to travel to long haul destinations like Seychelles, Nature Seychelles took the decision to make the Reserve carbon neutral. "We initiated a process that involved measuring all the emissions associated with the island, reviewing opportunities for on-going reductions and investing in carbon credits from a clean cook stove project in Sudan." Kerstin Henri, Nature Seychelles' Director for Strategic Operations says. "After seeing European media reports and one in particular which was reported on locally and had as title 'Sylt not Seychelles' we wanted our eco-visitors to come to Cousin conscience free, knowing their carbon footprint has been neutralised ." said Nirmal Shah - Nature Seychelles Chief Executive. Carbon Clear - a leading carbon management company - measured the Reserve's carbon footprint by looking at various activities associated with visitors arrival to Cousin and its operations. The calculations of the footprint however also recognized the contribution of the reforestation programme on the island. Since 1968 the island has been restored with the result that 85% is covered by natural tropical vegetation (based on GIS). Based on available scientific information, the amount of annual carbon that the island can absorb was netted off against the footprint. The remainder of the footprint was offset using carbon credits purchased from a carefully selected and independently verified clean cook stove project in Darfur, Sudan thus reducing the island's emissions to net zero. Offsetting by purchasing carbon credits is internationally accepted as a way of reducing carbon footprints "We did not want to purchase credits over the internet or invest in just any generic scheme. The process we initiated lasted about 15 months but provided a verifiable and assured result." Nirmal Shah, says. And although this activity was voluntary, an assurance was undertaken with Nexia, Smith and Williamson, a European assurance and audit firm, to certify that both the measurement and offsetting process had been conducted to the highest standards. Congratulating the organization on the steps it has taken to make Cousin Island Special Reserve carbon neutral, Mark Chadwick, CEO Carbon Clear said,

?Nature Seychelles has taken an unprecedented step in not only taking conservation to the next level by going carbon neutral but also in conducting an independent audit of its footprint by Carbon Clear and then having the process independently assured. This commitment speaks volumes about the integrity and care which the team at Nature Seychelles and Cousin Island goes about protecting and enhancing the environment.? Nature Seychelles is a multiple award winning non-profit environmental organization in the Seychelles involved in a wide range of exciting activities to improve environmental standards. Conservation activities on the Reserve include monitoring of the island?s biodiversity, research, re-introduction of endangered species such as the Seychelles Magpie robin, ecotourism and education. Cousin has received international awards for its conservation and ecotourism efforts.