

We want more women in conservation

Arriving on Cousin Island Special Reserve, visitors will not fail to notice the enthusiastic group of female wardens who will welcome them to the island. It might be the driver of the boat, one of the people pushing the boat or the person leading a tour of the island. Now numbering four staff members, their presence on Cousin is a result of Nature Seychelles (BirdLife Partner) actively promoting equal opportunity for both men and women. Many of the volunteers who a visitor would meet on the island are also female. "We have a well developed Gender Policy in our Administrative and Staff Handbook. This and other related policies aimed at empowering both men and women have ensured that women receive the same attention, salaries and opportunities as do their male counterparts", says Kerstin Henri, Nature Seychelles' Director for Strategic Operations. "Women now make up 60% of our staff including being in senior positions - a fact that we are very proud of." Among Nature Seychelles female staff is an economist, a science officer based on Cousin, a communications officer, four wardens, a horticulturalist based at the Heritage Garden at Roche Caiman and management staff at the Mahe and Praslin offices. "Opportunities for growth such as training are offered to both men and women. Talents and skills are actively cultivated. A woman who wants to work in areas where men are traditionally preferred such as boat operation is encouraged to utilise and develop their skills. In fact I have always felt that there are certain conservation jobs that women are better at than men", says Nirmal Shah Nature Seychelles' Chief Executive. And for the women, their greatest reward comes from the contribution they make to nature conservation. Women have long played a key role in environmental conservation. Winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Maathai, is a well known environmental advocate who founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya in the 1970s. Her movement brought positive change to women in rural areas through tree planting and inspired countless other women across the globe. The first Seychellois Minister of the Environment was Danielle de Saint Jorre. She is recognised for the significant contributions she made in environment protection programmes in Seychelles. In her memory, since the year 2000 the International Ocean Institute presents a Scholarship every year for one woman from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) involved in marine related research activities to improve their knowledge. Her portrait is among those of other leading environmental figures gracing the walls of the conference room at Nature Seychelles headquarters. Following in the footsteps of these women and knowing that they are making a contribution to environmental conservation in the Seychelles is a huge inspiration for the women at Nature Seychelles.