BirdLife's History in Objects: #2 "Your own private tropical island?"

Title

Have you ever fantasised about owning your own private tropical island?

Back in the 1960s this ideal was not only confined to celebrity billionaires. In one of the world's great conservation success stories, Cousin Island in Seychelles was actually purchased by BirdLife International (then known as ICBP) in order to save the remaining 26 individuals of a Critically Endangered bird. Through the involvement of local people in this project, a brand new indigenous conservation organisation was established – Nature Seychelles – who today care for several species that they have brought back from the edge of extinction.

The unobtrusive but melodious Seychelles Warbler *(Acrocephalus sechellensis)* was barely clinging to existence on this lone 0.3km2 island, with much of its original habitat converted to coconut plantations. Following the purchase, biologists – consisting of local Seychellois people supported by the wider BirdLife Partnership especially the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) – implemented a habitat restoration programme. The species flourished and by 1982 the maximum possible population of the island was reached, so 320 birds could be heard whistling in the recovered forest.

In the 1960s there were no conservation organisations in the country. But this project, including the subsequent establishment of new bird populations on neighbouring islands, really helped develop the skills and recruitment of local people. This catalysed a conservation movement in Seychelles, culminating with the formation of Nature Seychelles – now a BirdLife Partner – who took over responsibility of Cousin Island.

The island restoration and protected area management of Cousin Island Special Reserve provided a model that was followed by other conservation programmes in the Seychelles, meaning that from the initial protection of one bird, countless other animal species have been protected. The now pristine beach of Cousin Island is the most important breeding site for the Hawksbill turtle *(Erechmotelys imbricate)* in the Indian Ocean.

Image type unknown

Seychelles Warbler, photo by Martijn Hammers from Nature Seychelles

http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Seychelles-Warbler-Seychelles-one-of-the-world?s-rarest-birds-by-Martijn-Hammers1-300x264.jpg

Proudly celebrated by Nature Seychelles as the world's first carbon neutral nature reserve, Cousin Island now receives 10,000 visitors a year. They generate a far greater income than the original destructive coconut and cinnamon plantations ever did. The global population of the Seychelles Warbler – though still confined to a total of 5km2 – has recently been estimated to be 2,500-3,000 individuals.

Imagine what could be achieved if the BirdLife International Partnership was a celebrity billionaire.

BirdLife International has grown into a global Partnership, now working with 117 Partners worldwide (including Nature Seychelles) for nature and people. This article is part of a series celebrating the 90th Anniversary of BirdLife International.

Image not found

BirdLife in Objects, #2: The Coconut

http://www.birdlife.org/Documents/Part-5.jpg

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