

THE DESROCHES TORTOISE ADOPTION PROGRAMME

NEWSLETTER



Island Conservation Society promotes the conservation and restoration of island ecosystems, sustainable development of islands, and awareness of conservation issues.

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The Tortoise Adoption Programme Desroches Island

The Desroches Tortoise Adoption Programme (DTAP) was established in 2012 by the Desroches Foundation to benefit the wellbeing of Aldabra Giant Tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*) on Desroches, a species endemic to Seychelles. The programme is designed to assist the Island Conservation Society (ICS) with the breeding and rearing of tortoises before they are released into the wild. Money raised through the DTAP covers the financial costs to run and maintain the current Tortoise Sanctuary and juvenile rearing units. Hotel guests, Villa owners or other visitors can become tortoise adopters or 'parents', but not owners. They can adopt one or more tortoises for a period of one year or more. The tortoises will remain under the care of ICS until such time when they are ready to be released into the wild. Up to date, the overall management of the tortoise population on Desroches is guided by the Tortoise Management Plan and Protocols, this includes those in the sanctuary, juvenile rearing units, and in the wild.

There are three rearing units located at the east end of the Tortoise Sanctuary, namely,

- The Hatchling Pen, where hatchlings found in the sanctuary or in the wild weighing less than 1 kg (2.2 pounds) are kept in a predator-proof enclosure;
- The Baby Tortoise Pen, where baby tortoises weighing more than 1 kg (2.2 pounds) are kept until they reach 5 kg (11 pounds) in weight;
- The Juvenile Tortoise Pen, where juvenile tortoises weighing more than 5 kg (11 pounds) are kept until they reach 9 kg (22 pounds)....

Welcome Note

Welcome to the first issue of the DTAP Newsletter

As adopters of your little tortoises, you are all part of the big family striving to conserve the Aldabra Giant Tortoises on Desroches Island. This newsletter which will be released every year aims to keep you up to date with what's happening with the conservation programme. You will get to meet the ICS team and their involvement in the conservation work on Desroches. You will also be kept in the loop on the tortoises managed by the ICS on behalf of the Desroches Foundation.

Once again, thank you for your continued support of the breeding programme to populate the Seychelles archipelago and the further research of the Aldabra Giant Tortoises by ICS.



New hatchlings found- this holiday season!!

Say hello to the three new tortoise hatchlings found on Desroches last week!

The new babies are kept safely in an ICS nursery with other tortoises which weigh less than 1 kg. The team has measured, weighed them, and have marked their IDs on their shell (D1A, D1B, D1C).

However, they are each waiting for a proper name, which is possible through our adoption program.

Welcome to Desroches, baby tortoises!





Its lunchtime in the rearing pen

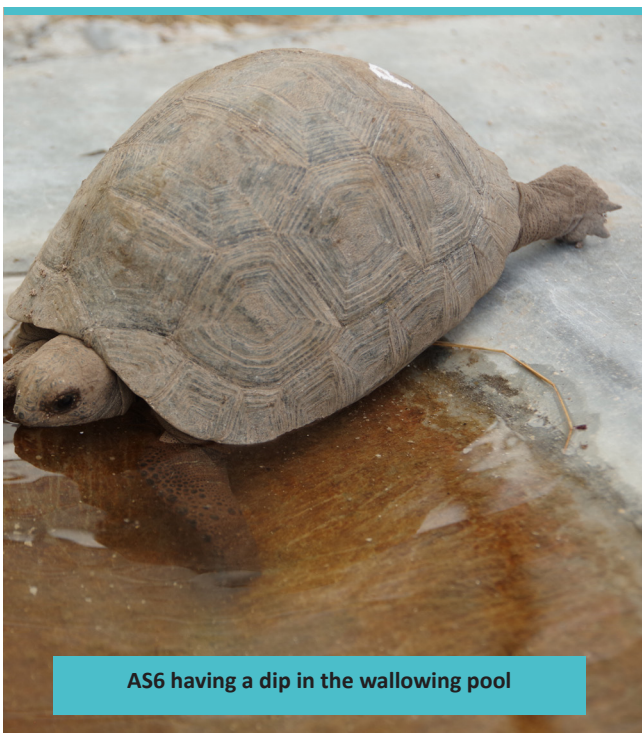
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The Tortoise Adoption Programme Desroches Island

...Once the juvenile tortoises reach 9 kg they are released into the wild to join the other free ranging tortoises under natural conditions. At 9 kg, they are practically immune to predation.

The Tortoise Sanctuary occupies 12 acres (5 hectares) of land next to the IDC settlement and ICS Conservation Centre. The adult breeding population residing in the sanctuary comprise of 40 individuals. It is an attraction to hotel guests and other island visitors, currently promoted on the Four Seasons Resort website and ICS website. Entrance is free and visitors are allowed to feed approved food items (raw fruit and vegetation) to the adult tortoises. Once on site, visitors can also view the rearing units and are able to learn more about the DTAP.

At present, interested individuals who wish to adopt a tortoise for a year, pay a compulsory donation, currently EUR50. They are required to fill in a form at the ICS Conservation Centre and also make payment in EUR, Seychelles Rupees or other approved foreign currency. Hotel guests can also pay through the hotel. Each tortoise adopter receives a personalised adoption certificate.



AS6 having a dip in the wallowing pool



OT enjoying an afternoon walk in the rearing unit

Meet the ICS team



Elena Levorato
Conservation
Officer

Elena is originally from Switzerland and started working for ICS in July, 2021. She is a qualified biologist specialised in eco-ethology and chemical ecology after completing a post-graduate degree at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. During her studies, Elena had the chance to collect data in the Red Sea, Egypt, and the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, investigating fish behaviour, physiology and cognition. Her first involvement with ICS started in 2019 when she enrolled on the volunteer programme for 3 months on Aride Island. She worked mainly with Aldabra Giant Tortoises, seabirds and Seychelles Magpie Robins.



William McNeely
Assistant
Conservation Officer

William hails from Switzerland and also joined ICS in July, 2021. He is also a qualified biologist specialised in eco-ethology and chemical ecology after completing a post-graduate degree at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. During his studies, William collected data in the Red Sea, Egypt, and the Great Barrier Reef, Australia. The data collected was based on fish behaviour, physiology and cognition. Similarly to Elena, William completed a 3 month volunteer programme with ICS on Aride in 2019.



Jean-Claude Camille
Senior Ranger

Jean Claude is a born and bred Seychellois from Anse Aux Pins. He has had a range of jobs including chef, mason and painter. His interest in conservation, especially with turtles, sparked a career shift towards conservation in 2008. Initially he gained experience in conservation on D'Arros island where he began as a volunteer with Dr Jeanne A. Mortimer. He later joined ICS as a Conservation Ranger and has worked on Farquhar, Aride, Silhouette and now Desroches. He was promoted to the post of Senior Conservation Ranger at the beginning of 2021.



Laurette Asba
General Helper

Laurette was also born in Seychelles. She has a keen interest in nature and enjoys spending time outdoors. She first joined ICS in 2020 and has been working on Desroches as a General helper. Her daily duties include the general upkeep of the Tortoise Sanctuary, plant nursery and Conservation Centre on Desroches.

Commetant, the island's favourite tortoise

Meet Commetant, one of the oldest Aldabra Giant Tortoises on Desroches Island. Commetant, is named after the former Island Manager on Desroches, Alain Commetant. A quite popular tortoise on the island and loved by all. Commetant is amiable, loves attention, and enjoys human company. This is quite noticeable, as he doesn't mind having visitors and staff approach him even when he is busy having a snack or even when he is resting under the trees. He would proudly stretch out his head, stand tall on his legs and slightly shake his head from left to right as if he is happily greeting their presence.



You must have met Jean Claude....

Jean Claude Camille Senior Conservation Ranger on Desroches island was recently interviewed for the online Grand Luxury Hotel - Luxury Hotels and Luxury Travel Magazine. Because of ICS' partnership with Four Seasons Resort Seychelles in the conservation effort on the island, and because of his story and the long-time role he has been playing in conservation on Desroches, Jean Claude was featured as someone worth meeting.

To enjoy the article, click on the link below:

<https://blog.grandluxuryhotels.com/.../meet-jean-claude.../>



COMING SOON-The new welcome pack for the adopters



With the newly revised programme, a welcome pack will be introduced. The adopter will now have something tangible to carry home. The folder made with hard forex durable paper will be one that can be stacked away on the shelf, and ready to pull out to show to the envy of guests, or better still, will sit lovely on the coffee table. The folder comprises of the certificate, a fact sheet with some fun facts about the Aldabra Giant Tortoises that your child can bring for show and tell at school.

And the greatest gift in the pack is the printed artwork of Seychellois artist Mala Rama- A painting of the Aldabra Giant Tortoises that will surely grace the wall of your home or office.





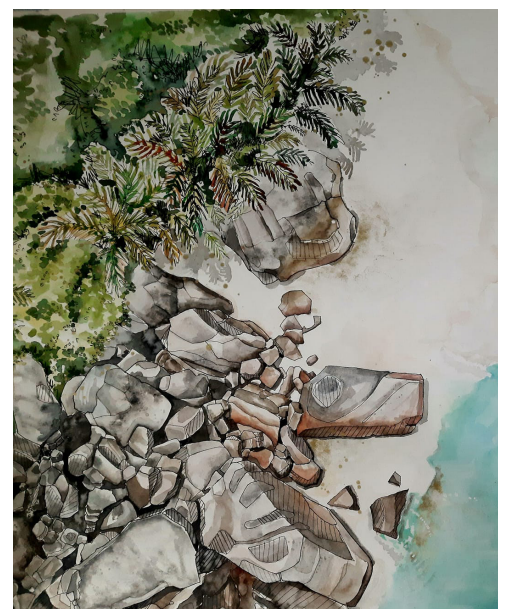
Mala Rama -The artist behind the Welcome Pack-

It is local artist, Mala Rama's fine brush strokes and love for the fluidity of water and pastel nuances that brings you the welcome pack's illustrated cover and this lovely inserted painting that you can hang at a special place in your house or office. The perfect reminder of the beautiful island of Desroches and the old as time Seychelles' Giant Tortoises.

Rama worked at Four Seasons on Desroches island in the past and during her time there she did not let the opportunity to delve into the conservation work managed by ICS right next door, whereby she too learned about the breeding programme. It was an honour, then for her to grace the ICS with her fine and delicate brush strokes for both the welcome pack cover and the painting.

Rama defines herself as a mixed media watercolor artist and being blessed with the picturesque and colourful flora and fauna of Seychelles, she is inspired to use nature as a mineral lattice to paint her watercolours.

For her, each time she dips her paintbrushes in water and colour and playfully dresses her empty canvas, her expression lost in the aurora and embodiment of the blues, the greens, and the kaleidoscope of delicate colours of Seychelles' natural environment, she finds that she exhales a deep quietness and a sense of profound joy. "I feel connected and whole...I guess this is the magic I want to convey and share..." (Mala Rama)



The Desroches Tortoise Breeding Programme

The Aldabra Giant Tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*) is one of the largest tortoises in the world and, as the name suggests, it is native of the Aldabra Atoll and endemic to Seychelles. Unfortunately, this species is listed as vulnerable in the IUCN Red List. For this reason, and its important ecological role such as seed dispersal, grazer and soil fertilisation, it is essential to protect this species. Other population has been established on other islands of Seychelles. We can now find free-living populations of Aldabra Giant Tortoise on several inner and outer islands of Seychelles.

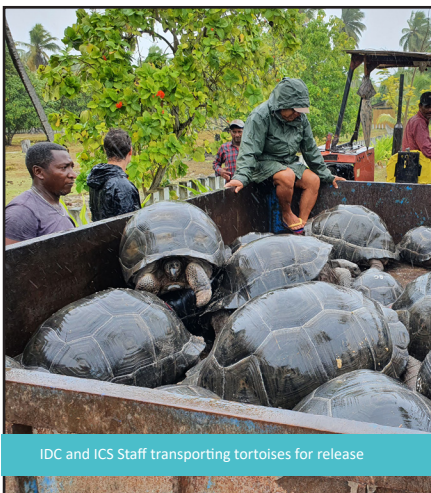
In Seychelles, to ensure the long-term survival of the species, the Island Conservation Society, started a breeding program on Desroches in 2010. Since the program started 134 hatchlings has been bred successfully.

Today, the tortoise nursery hosts 11 hatchlings and 31 juveniles. The hatchlings are kept in a locked nursery to avoid predation by rats, cats, and herons, but also to prevent human theft. Once they reach 1 kg, the tortoises are moved from the hatchling pen into the juvenile enclosure and they are finally released into the wild when they reach 9 kg. This year a total of 13 hatchlings were lucky to be adopted.

After taking the morphometric data of the juveniles (weight, 3rd dorsal scute, natal scute, carapace, and plastron length), the ICS Desroches team recently discovered that several juveniles were ready to be released. With the help of IDC workers, 27 Giant Tortoises were transported in September with a tractor into the wild-est part of the island, the Eastside, where the food such as the Indian Mulberry (*Morinda citrifolia*) or as in Creole –Bwatorti and Beach Gardenia (*Guettarda speciosa*) also known in Creole, Bwakasan Bordmer are in abundance. Those individuals are now happily roaming free in the forest!

Nowadays, the population on the island comprises about 160 individuals and, if the forest habitat is enhanced, Desroches could host more than 1,000 tortoises!

Elena Levorato (CO), William McNeely (ACO) Island Conservation Society



IDC and ICS Staff transporting tortoises for release



A healthy 9kg tortoise eager to roam wild and free on the island





Off into the wild!

Get In Touch

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