

# WAKASHIO OIL SPILL



## Protection of terrestrial fauna and flora of South-East Islets

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# The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation

- Registered Charity NGO, established in 1984
- Work closely with the Government of Mauritius and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, under memorandums of understanding.
- MWF is the largest Mauritian NGO to be exclusively concerned with the conservation of terrestrial endemic species and their habitats, and in Rodrigues has a specialization in habitat restoration.



# The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation's mission

- To save threatened Mauritian species through the restoration of entire ecosystems.
- To seek new information through field research, data management, captive studies and scientific collaboration for direct application to restoration methods and management.
- To share knowledge gained through restoration programs with fellow Mauritian and international conservationists.
- To share the joys and benefits of native wilderness and wildlife with the Mauritian people.
- To secure the future of Mauritian species through income generation and sound management of human, fiscal and capital resources.



# The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation's achievements

- Saving of the Mauritian Kestrel
- Brought the Pink Pigeon, the Echo Parakeet and the Mauritius Fody back from the brink of extinction
- Propagating native plants in nurseries and planting them out to restore vegetation communities
- Restore offshore islands, by removing exotic vertebrates and plants and by restoring vegetation and vertebrate communities.
- Working on several islands including Ile aux Aigrettes, Round Island, Ile Cocos and Ile aux Sables
- Raising the profile of conservation through Eco-tourism activities
- Local capacity building and provides employment through its activities



# Ile aux Aigrettes



- 26 ha low coralline island with one of the last remnant of coastal ebony forest.
- Declared a Nature Reserve since 1965 due to its remnant Mauritian dry coastal forest.
- Visitor Programme



# Ile aux Aigrettes



- Ecological restoration started in 1985 with the aim of restoring the coastal vegetation community and to replace the missing components of the flora and fauna.

- Used to conserve suitable lowland species that are critically endangered in the wild.
- Around 30,000-40,000 plants per season/year were planted from 1998 to 2003



# Bird translocations



Reintroduction of Pink Pigeon



Re-introduction of Mauritius Fody



Re-introduction of Mauritius Olive White-eye

# Endemic reptiles' reintroductions and tortoise rewilding



**Aldabra giant tortoise**

*Aldabrachelys gigantea*



**Telfair's Skink**

*Leiolopisma telfairi*



**Guenther's Gecko**

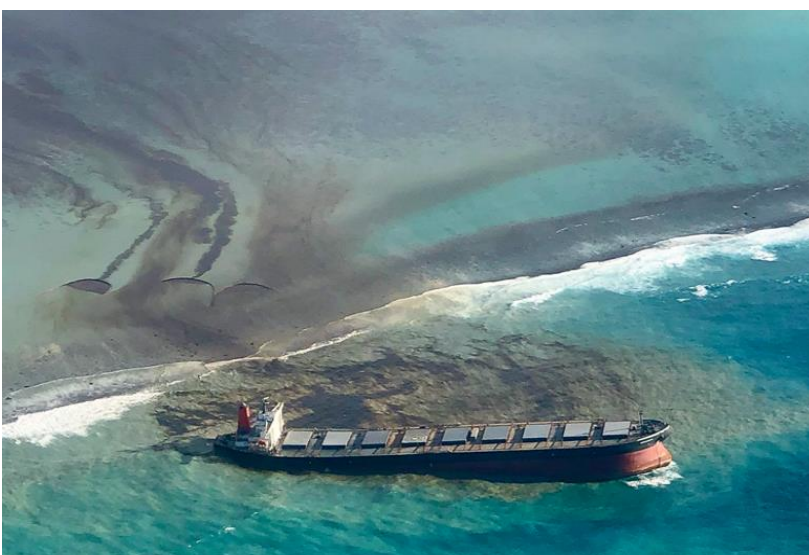
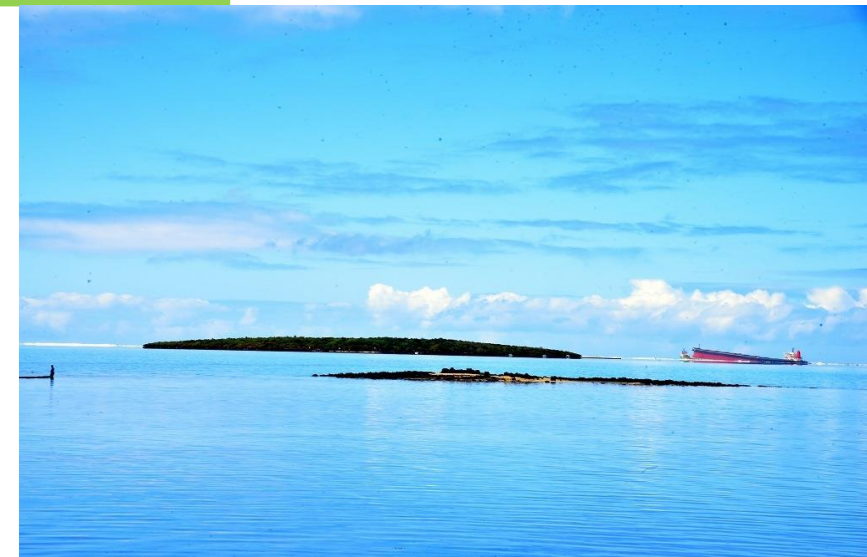
*Phelsuma guentheri*

# Wakashio grounding and oil spill



**Grounding**  
*25 July 2020*

**Oil spill**  
*06 August 2020*



# Impact on Ile aux Aigrettes



# The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation's actions

- Active member in the National Oil Spill Coordination Committee;
- A three tier protocol was prepared by MWF in order to be prepared to respond to different levels of threat;
- The MWF contingency plan was put into action based on the fear that Ile aux Aigrettes would become inaccessible and the impact of the oil spill was unknown;
- All Mauritian Wildlife Foundation senior staff involved with the island travelled to Ile aux Aigrettes to begin emergency measures to safeguard the native and endemic species on the island;
- Field station closed and all visitors and non-essential staff evacuated from island.
- The measures taken to protect the native and endemic biodiversity on the island were put into action.



# Plants



**4000 nursery grown plants rescued from the island, kept at Forestry Service, Mahebourg**

# Birds



**12 Mauritius Olive White-eyes + 6 Mauritius Fodies rescued.  
Housed at Black River aviaries**

# Captive Mauritius Fruit bats



*(Pteropus niger)*, Endangered,

- Four rehabilitated Mauritius Fruit Bats on Ile aux Aigrettes for education and awareness raising.
- Bats removed from island on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August to ensure continuous care.
- Housed at Ferney Valley.

# Rescuing juvenile Aldabra Tortoises



*Aldabrachelys gigantea*

- Juvenile Aldabra Giant Tortoises (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*) removed from the island.
- The free roaming adult individuals left on island.

# Rescue of reptiles from Southeast islets (Mauritius) to Jersey Zoo (UK)



- Removed a small number of reptiles from each island to capture genetic diversity and to establish captive assurance populations
- Biosecure captive holding facility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the reptiles. Collected animals on 13th August 2020, day and night.
- 30 Bojer's skinks, 6 Bouton's skinks and 30 lesser night geckos.

Reptiles left Mauritius early on the 14<sup>th</sup> September and all arrived safely at Jersey Zoo (UK) the following evening, after an overnight stop at the border inspection post at Heathrow, UK.  
No mortalities!!

# Clean-up operations - 1



- By 7<sup>th</sup> of September, extensive cleaning of the oil from the lagoon, and the oil deposits around the island declined from wave action.
- Smell of oil fumes on island decreased substantially
- No longer consider a significant direct threat to the birds on Ile aux Aigrettes
- Cleaning of the Ile aux Aigrettes coastline by the 'Polyeco' contractors, with absorbent pads and low pressure water flushing, began on 7th of September 2020.

# Clean-up operations - 2



- The oil needed to be flushed out from underground tunnels.
- Vegetation on the edge of the island was oiled and some needed to be trimmed.
- The cleaning methodology was agreed by all concerned and the cleaning of Ile aux Aigrettes was completed and signed off on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.



# Other actions

## 1. Oil removal

- Supported the oil pumping effort working with the National Coast Guard.
- Two tanks were installed on the boat and the thick oil was pumped into the tanks.
- The boat then returned to the mainland to be emptied, and the process repeated.
- Having removed the oil near Ile aux Aigrettes, the team moved to Mahebourg water front and then Riviere des Creoles.
- MWF also assisted to remove contaminated booms.

## 2. Surveys for oil pollution

- Staff have participated in the surveys for oil spill damage in the lagoon
- Ensure all the small Mahebourg Bay islets were also cleaned.



# Other actions – (ctd)

## 3. Volunteers

- MWF was overwhelmed with offers to help both from individuals and corporates for their staff.
- Corporate volunteers enlisted when and where needed, eg transfer of plants, to help carry and help transport.

## 4. Oiled animals

- Worked with NPCCS, PAWS, local vets to communicate a procedure to the general public if oiled animals found.
- Contacted by overseas organisations who offered assistance to clean animals.
- No records of seabirds affected
- One Green Heron died before treatment and a hawksbill turtle.

# Return to Ile aux Aigrettes

- Following decrease in oil fumes, extensive cleaning of the oil from the lagoon and the cleaning of the Ile aux Aigrettes coastline: island staff resume normal work on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020.
- Rescued passerines were re-released on the island on the 15th of September.
- Tortoises, bats and plants have been brought back in stages in September and early October 2020
- Ecotour activities re-opened on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020

