

The Island Biodiversity and Conservation Centre: Connecting research and policymaking, education and implementation

The Island Biodiversity and Conservation Centre (IBC) enjoys the independent status of an NGO combined with a place within the research nexus of the University of Seychelles. With an international standing, it is a jewel in the crown not only of the university but also of the nation. The unique natural environment of Seychelles attracts worldwide interest and, as well as conducting its own research, IBC performs an invaluable role as an acknowledged conduit and forum for scientists.

Led by Dr Gérard Rocamora, the Centre was formed in December 2014, although research in this field was well underway before then. Gérard himself is an ecologist whose main interests include birds and other terrestrial vertebrates, invasive species and, particularly, rodents. He has been working in Seychelles since 1995 on threatened species recovery and island rehabilitation programmes, ecosystem monitoring and seabird studies.

A core team of environmental experts and specialists associated with the Centre includes Dr Elvina Henriette, Dr Bruno Senterre, Dr Jude Bijoux and Gilberte Gendron (MSc.), and the link with environmental science education and research at UniSey is currently managed by Dr Jérôme Harlay. This network is widened through involvement of a dozen research associates, including eminent scientists from a range of other countries, as well as conservationists and Early Career Scientists, also from Seychelles. Wilfrid Fousse (MSc in Agronomy), formerly a French environmental adviser to Seychelles and other countries, provides administrative, financial, and project-management support.

The launch of the Centre at UniSey was boosted by the publication in 2015 of a well-acclaimed technical book, *Invasive Alien Species in Seychelles*, jointly produced through a UNDP-GEF-GoS programme. Published by the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris) and Biotope Editions it remains a primary source of reference for conservation practitioners, scholars and policymakers. <https://unisey.ac.sc/wp-content/uploads/IAS-book-flyer-2.pdf>

To date, IBC members have contributed to 50 scientific publications as authors and co-authors affiliated to the University of Seychelles. About 25 per cent of these are submitted as first authors. These include 44 peer-reviewed articles in journals, one in conference proceedings, one book, two chapters, and two published datasets. <https://unisey.ac.sc/islandbiodiversityconservation-centre/publications/>

IBC is well represented at international conferences, which in the past few years has included a presence in Hawaii, the Azores, La Réunion/Mayotte, Mauritius, Lipari-Italy, Vancouver, Dundee, Barcelona and Montpellier. Additionally, it regularly organizes scientific symposiums at UniSey on various subjects (island ecology, invasive species, amphibians etc.) as well as hosting talks from visiting scientists on subjects such as molluscs, fungi, seabirds, fruit flies, etc.

In a very active programme, the Centre is constantly developing projects with local and foreign partners. It may, for instance, receive donations and undertake contractual work for government departments, private islands or NGOs. Examples of such include:

- biodiversity surveys in remote areas or islands;
- monitoring or guidance on wildlife and plant management or restoration protocols;
- contribution to the recovery of endangered species;
- seabird census and movement tracking at sea;
- rat eradication and impact of invasive species.

IBC provides a local platform to facilitate research for foreign institutions willing to conduct collaborative programmes in Seychelles, providing technical, administrative and logistical support.

The Centre is also very successful in attracting funding for its projects. From 2017 to 2022, it obtained grants to the total value of USD200,000 from a variety of sponsors. These included the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, and an additional USD100,000 from corporate partners such as Chateau-de-Feuilles Hôtel, Ste Anne Beachcomber Resort, Familia Torres wines, Mauritius Commercial Bank, the UNDP-GEF-GoS project, the MACCE, amongst others. This level of funding enabled the team to implement a conservation project on Grande Soeur Island, Central Mahé and Ste Anne Island, focusing on the control and eradication of invasive species and associated biosecurity aspects, habitat improvement through producing and replanting native saplings and island transfers to (re)introduce rare and threatened species such as the Seychelles White-Eye and the Aldabra Giant Tortoise.

Other projects include the control of Myna birds on Grande Soeur and the control of rats on La Misère, in areas where the Seychelles White-Eyes breed. In 2017, we confirmed the eradication of the Crested-Tree Lizard on Ste Anne, and in 2022 the eradication of both Black Rats and Brown Rats on Anonyme Island. Biodiversity protocols have been set up for each of these islands with the island partners and managers, and training sessions are conducted. IBC is also a key collaborator to the SeyWol project, implemented by CYROI institute from La Réunion, and the Seychelles Ministry of Health. This project aims at eradicating (from small islands) or controlling (in large islands) invasive Tiger Mosquitoes,

a severe disease vector and threat to human health, through the industrial production and release of incompatible males.

IBC works closely with the Biodiversity Conservation section of the Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment and regularly conducts consultancies for the monitoring of endangered species and the preparation of Action Plans in consultation with stakeholders and other experts. It also conducts consultancies for the University of Seychelles, dealing with terrestrial ecology and conservation programmes. Most of its core members are, or have been, Associate Lecturers at the University of Seychelles, from the BSc in Environmental Sciences.