



# Cousin Island Special Reserve

A Showcase of Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism

## Island History

Cousin is a small 27 hectare Granitic island, situated 2 km from Praslin Island. Until the late 1960s Cousin was a plantation of coconuts and other crops with domestic animals running loose. Wildlife was exploited for food and for sale. By 1959, the status of wildlife on Cousin was seriously depleted. The revelation that the last surviving population of the Seychelles warbler, numbering only 26 birds, was confined to the island, rallied conservation efforts. In an attempt to save the Seychelles warbler, the International Council for Bird Preservation (now Birdlife International) purchased Cousin for conservation in 1968 by funds raised from an international campaign.



Seychelles Warbler

## Local Management

Cousin was designated a 'Special Reserve' under Seychelles National Law in 1973 with the main goal to conserve biodiversity. The Special Reserve is a land-and-sea reserve extending 400 metres offshore thereby protecting the surrounding fringing reefs. Cousin was managed internationally until 1998, when the management was transferred to **Nature Seychelles**. Cousin is successfully run and protected by a local team, self-funded through eco-tourism.



Seychelles Magpie-robin

## Habitat Restoration

Cousin has been successfully restored to a natural state by removing coconut seedlings, controlling of invasive species allowing native flora to recover. The island's vegetation now serve as a sanctuary for many endemic species of land birds, and an important breeding site for seabirds.

## Success Story of the Warbler

From only 26 birds confined on Cousin in 1959, the population rapidly increased to 320 by 1982 as the habitat reverted to a natural state. Seychelles Warblers were then transferred from Cousin to Aride, Cousine and Denis islands, to secure its long-term survival. The species is no longer considered critically endangered with a population of 3,500 birds thriving on four islands.

## Biodiversity

Despite its small size, Cousin boasts a number of species and habitats. Five Seychelles endemic land birds are found on Cousin. Seven seabird species breed in numbers exceeding 200,000 individuals. Five endemic lizard species thrive on Cousin achieving one of the highest lizard densities per hectare in the world. Other species include: two species of sea turtle nesting on Cousin beach Aldabra giant tortoise, ghost crabs, hermit crabs, giant millipede. Cousin's waters also host many species of fish and other marine animals.

## Conservation

Cousin has been running a sea turtle monitoring programme for more than 30 years and a number of monitoring programmes on seabirds, Seychelles Magpie-robin, Seychelles warbler, coral reef and invasive species. These monitoring programmes inform conservation management of the island as well as contributing to conservation science in Seychelles.

## Ecotourism

Since opening to tourism in 1972, Cousin has been a model for ecotourism in protected areas. The island has become one of the Seychelles most visited eco-tourism destinations, providing a unique experience to visitors through a guided tour. Income from ecotourism is used for conservation and protection of the island.

## International Awards

In 2003, Cousin was **Highly Commended** by the **British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award** for being a role model in responsible tourism with its positive contribution towards Seychelles' local natural and cultural environment.

In 2004, Cousin won the **Best Destination Award** by **Conde Nast Traveler Magazine**. The award is international recognition for Cousin's success in marrying conservation of wildlife with responsible tourism.

## The Future

Cousin Island will continue to be protected and totally reserved for conservation. Cousin's long term vision to be widely acclaimed as the best-managed small island protected area in the world and one of the best destinations for eco-tourists.



Seychelles Warbler



Fairy Tern Chick



Hawksbill Turtle

## Wildlife and conservation action on Cousin



Shearwater chick



Giant tortoise



Seychelles sunbird



Brown noddies



Tagging sea turtle



Eco-tour guiding



Magpie-robin research



Bird ringing



Wright's skink



White-tailed tropic bird



Hermit crabs



Bridled Tern



Bronze Gecko



Returning tourists



Marine turtle monitoring



Seabird studying

**We need your support to keep this island pristine for all generations to come!**

For more information, please visit: [www.natureseychelles.org](http://www.natureseychelles.org) Nature Seychelles, Centre for Environment and Education, Roche Caiman, Mahe, Seychelles. Tel: 601100; Fax: 601102; Email: [nature@seychelles.net](mailto:nature@seychelles.net)

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**Designed by** Dao Nguyen. **Photo credits:** Tropicbird – background photo, Cousin Island, Seychelles Fody; Hawksbill Turtle, Giant Tortoise, Brown Noddies, Tropic bird and chick by Martin Harvey; Seychelles Magpie-robin, Fairy Tern Chick, Shearwater chick and Hermit Crabs by Steve Hazell; Tagging sea turtle, Wright's Skink and Bridled Tern by James Harcastle; Ecotour guiding by Helen Keeble; Seychelles Warbler by Will Meinderts; Returning tourist to their boat by Glen Jackway; Magpie-robin research, Seabird studying and Marine turtle monitoring by Henna Tanskanen; Seychelles Sunbird by Jeff Watson.

