

Preface

'I want to know what you're going to *do* for me?', Carl Jones asked me as I sat next to him on his sofa in Wales, with one eye on daytime TV; this was definitely one of my weirdest and most memorable job interviews! I must have done all right, as the next thing I knew I was winging my way to Mauritius, fresh out of university, to volunteer for the Mauritius kestrel recovery team during the 1993–94 breeding season. So began my conservation career and a life to date unconsciously devoted to helping in some small way the recovery of threatened tropical island species. Mauritius taught me many things, the most significant one being that fieldwork was not my passion, but working with people was. Subsequently, I was delighted to realise that conservation requires a cross-disciplinary approach, increasingly recognising the value of anthropological, socio-economic, managerial and leadership skills, as well as those focused on developing our biological understanding of species, threats to their existence and how to support them. Everyone can find a significant role to play within the conservation community.

As a conservation trainer and facilitator, I have the opportunity to work and become friends with an eclectic mix of conservation professionals, each an expert in his or her respective field and some of whom have kindly contributed to the development of this book. My job has been to gather this expertise and direct it where it is most needed to help build capacity for conservation. Fortunately for me, the organisation to which I have dedicated much of my working life – the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust – prioritised tropical islands as their focus for conservation action and capacity building. This has meant that I've had the enviable task of bringing together friends and colleagues from across the conservation community to travel to locations such as Hawaii, the Galapagos Islands, Samoa, Fiji, the Philippines, St Lucia, Seychelles and, of course, Mauritius to work with individuals and organisations to help them save species from extinction. It was during a trip to the Galapagos Islands to run a training course on island species conservation

that I sat down with Carl and my good friend Jim Groombridge, and we hatched a plan to write this book.

It was clear to us that members of the conservation community working to save threatened island species were missing a golden opportunity to learn from each other and avoid 'reinventing wheels'. In our travels, we witnessed fantastic examples of species recovery work, ranging from captive breeding of 'Extinct in the Wild' rails in Guam, to the restoration of multiple species and habitats in the Seychelles and Mauritius and to successful engagement of local communities in St Lucia resulting in the recovery of the island's national bird, the St Lucia parrot *Amazona versicolor*. Much of the knowledge that could be gleaned from these projects was not easily accessible through existing published literature, some of it sitting in internal reports and often just in certain people's heads! At the same time, we could see new projects starting up and long-running projects faltering when they could have been greatly helped by knowing more about what others were doing. The parallels between these projects in terms of biogeographic and socio-economic context were clear. It seemed to us that we could help in some small way by capturing this knowledge and providing some shared insights into how species conservation projects function and what we can learn from others' success as well as failure. Going further, we hoped that by pulling this together we might also provide some 'food for thought' for species conservation projects happening worldwide, creating another point of connection between islands and how they continue to inform our understanding of life on Earth and how to manage it long term.

Since these initial thoughts, we have worked with a broader set of experts with deep knowledge of life on islands to help pen this book. Our aim has been to provide some personal insights, backed up with appropriate theory, and evidence from conservation action to save some of the world's most threatened species, which we hope will inform future conservation efforts on islands and beyond. We have not tried to provide a comprehensive overview of all the elements that could go into a species recovery project. For example, we do not unpick the complexities of climate change and how they are likely to impact island life, nor do we discuss in any detail human-induced habitat destruction, overkill or secondary extinctions. Instead, we take readers on a journey, from an understanding of the past history of life on islands to the present and how we prioritise, plan, manage and lead conservation projects in a way that enables us to learn as we go and improve our practice.

The authors that contribute to this book have been selected based on their interest in and work on islands. I've had the pleasure of getting to know and learn from almost all of them during the various training courses Durrell has delivered over the last ten or so years. Their expertise ranges from understanding small-population biology and genetics, to the development of ecological histories and population monitoring, to invasive species management, to project planning and leadership, to species recovery, habitat restoration and public engagement in conservation action. Where possible, we have developed threads between the chapters, drawing readers' attention to related chapters where we can within the text.

The generation time for this book has been almost as long as that for an Aldabran giant tortoise! However, we hope that it will be received as a useful contribution to our understanding of life on islands and how to conserve it and go some way towards improving our effectiveness in recovering the growing raft of threatened species globally and saving more species from extinction.

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