

£1.2 million for Bristol conservation project in the Comoros islands

An innovative conservation and development project in the Comoro Islands led by Bristol Zoo in partnership with Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust has just been awarded over £670,000 from the French Development Agency to expand its vital work.

On top of other sources of funding, including the UK government's Darwin Initiative and Airbus-UK, this takes the total for the three-year project to £1.2 million.

The Union of the Comoros is made up of three islands lying between Madagascar and Mozambique in the Western Indian Ocean. The islands are home to a number of threatened animals and plants found nowhere else in the world, including the Livingstone's fruit bat, identified as endangered on the IUCN's red list.

The population of the islands is poor and growing rapidly, putting pressure on the remaining natural resources. Deforestation continues apace, threatening the endemic species and posing grave problems for the local people through erosion and loss of water sources.

Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation (BCSF) – a part of Bristol Zoo Gardens – has been working to protect forests on the island of Anjouan since 2007.

Neil Maddison, Head of Conservation Programmes for BCSF, based at Bristol Zoo, explains: "Our aim is to help the people living in villages bordering the remaining areas of forest improve their livelihoods and find new ways of making a living without encroaching on the forests, thus protecting the native animals and plants which are unique to these islands."

The funding safeguards the project for another three years allowing the local project team to expand their work from four to 12 villages on Anjouan, and to begin working on the island of Mohéli.

The mayor of the region the project works in, Abdoul Majid, said at an event to mark the funding agreement: "This project has shown us that we can take control of our futures by thinking about the problems we face, in order to find sustainable solutions which improve our livelihoods today, and conserve our natural resources for the future: *Komori ya Leo na Meso* [Comoros for today and tomorrow]."

He added: "This project is supporting us to improve the fertility in our fields and increase crop yields. We're also starting to generate income from organic vegetable gardening and the first poultry farm in the Comoros based on locally-produced feed. Generations to come will benefit from the work we are doing to protect our water sources and water catchment zones".

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Notes to Editors

Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation (BCSF)

- Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation (BCSF), is part of the Bristol Zoological Society and is supported by, and based at, Bristol Zoo Gardens.
- BCSF carries out field conservation programmes in the wild and conservation research programmes, both in the wild and at Bristol Zoo Gardens.
- BCSF was set up in 2007 and now has 12 projects both in the UK and abroad that conserve and protect some of the world's most endangered animal species
- The field projects carried out by BCSF are each linked to major exhibits at Bristol Zoo.
- BCSF is made up of an international team of experts dedicated to mobilising people for wildlife conservation and science.
- BCSF is working to empower communities to tackle their wildlife and conservation challenges and conducts high quality research.

Bristol Zoo Gardens

- Bristol Zoo Gardens is part of the Bristol Zoological Society, and is an education and conservation charity which relies on the income from visitors to support its work.
- Throughout 2010, Bristol Zoo will be running a series of events to highlight the importance of conserving the world's biodiversity, as part of the international Year of Biodiversity. For more information visit the Zoo website at www.bristolzoo.org.uk/about/conservation/campaigns/iyob
- To find out more about the UN's International Year of Biodiversity visit the website at www.biodiversityislife.net
- The Zoo is involved with more than 100 co-ordinated breeding programmes for threatened wildlife species.
- It employs 140 full and part-time staff to care for the animals and run a successful visitor attraction to support its conservation and education work.
- Bristol Zoo Gardens is a member of the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums. BIAZA represents 99 member collections and promotes the values of good zoos and aquariums.
- Bristol Zoo Gardens is also a member of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) as well as the European Associations of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA).

The Comoros Islands Project

- The conservation project in the Comoros Islands is entitled 'Engagement Communautaire pour le Développement Durable' and works through a local team of 15 Comorians supported by four in-country expatriates and a team of international advisors.

- The project will now expand to 12 villages in the Moya region of Anjouan, with a feasibility study for Mohéli starting in May 2010. The project's interventions are based on:
 - Participatory analysis of agricultural and natural resource problems
 - Community implementation of appropriate solutions with the support of the project
 - The reinforcement of the capacity of local beneficiaries towards the communal management of natural resources
 - A long-term engagement through the creation of a Comorian NGO
- The project works in collaboration with the Government of the Union of the Comoros and the Administration of the island of Anjouan, the University of the Comoros, the UNDP-Comoros and many other local organisations.
- At the international level, the project works in partnership with Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, and with consultants from the University of East Anglia and the IUCN.
- The official project signature with the French Ambassador and the Moroni Director of the FDA took place in the village of Nindri earlier this month. More than 1,000 villagers from the region attended, as well as the Governor of Anjouan, representatives from the Union Government and many local partners. Several of the project's international partners were also in attendance, including representatives of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, WWF-Madagascar, CI-Madagascar and Birdlife International-East Africa.
- Financing comes from the French Development Agency, the British Government's Darwin Initiative, the Global Environment Facility, and Airbus-UK.
- The French Development Agency has awarded the project a €750,000 grant for three years from January 2010. The FDA's activities on five continents are aimed at reducing poverty and inequalities, financial sustainable economic growth and protecting "Global Public Goods" of benefit to all humanity. FDA activities fall within the framework of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. For more information see: <http://www.afd.fr/jahia/Jahia/lang/en/home>