



“Turning Possibilities into Realities”

2010 “TOGETHER, READY FOR THE FUTURE”...

Newsletter No. 02 of 2010 by TESS in accordance to Article 7 Section 3 of its Constitution.

The International Year of Biodiversity

Moving into Action



Sweet Escott Wetland today

Where flowers degenerate man cannot live.
'Napoleon Bonaparte'

CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

World Wetland Week 2010, Seychelles 31st January - 5th February 2010

Wetlands support life and culture

The Management Plan for the Sweet Escott Wetlands and Development of an Eco-Trail

Oral presentation by Amb. Marc MRM Marengo, the Secretary General of TESS
Thursday 4th February 2010, at ICCS

The Way Forward

'Doing the right thing'

Mr. Abou Bamba, representative
of RAMSAR

The representative of UNWTO

Dear participants

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning to you all and
welcome.

On behalf of the Ecotourism
Society of Seychelles (TESS), and
on my own personal behalf, we
welcome our distinguished
international partners to
Seychelles, we express a big thank
you for your recognition of our
achievements and for your
expressed support for our future
wetland endeavours. 2010 we are
prepared, ready, and willing to
continue working closely with all
possible partners (both local and
international) in this direction,
and you will agree, there is much
more to be done.

Ladies and gentlemen

I also feel honoured to be the first
speaker for this morning's
session, the focus of which is on
the **Rehabilitation, Management
and Maintenance of the Sweet
Escott Wetlands.**

And now a little History...

Ernest Bickham Sweet Escott was
the British Administrator of
Seychelles from 1899-1903 when

*our Islands were still a dependent
of the Island of Mauritius. From
1903 -1904, he served as the first
governor of the crown colony.*

*Going through the archives, I found
out that he was a very proactive
person, **who implemented many
'sweet decisions' for the benefit
of the local people.** He was so
much respected that on his
departure on 09th May 1904 the
streets of Victoria were crowded by
all classes of society to wish him
God speed and farewell.*

*For example he devoted particular
attention to Agriculture and **in
1901 created the Agricultural
Department.** The Seychelles first
Agricultural Exhibition which took
place in September 1901 was
considered as a remarkable
success.*

*Furthermore in order to allow the
inhabitants to have a voice in local
affairs, he passed an Ordinance in
1900 which established a central
board of health in the districts. **And
as far as I know Sweet Escott is
the only British Governor who
managed to have a street in
Seychelles named after him.***

Ladies and gentlemen

As for myself, I was born and
raised in the Les Canelles County

of the Anse Royale district. During
my primary school years, I had to
walk four kilometres, up and down
the Sweet Escott Road, back and
forth, four times a day, morning,
twice at noon for lunch and
evening, to attend the St Joseph
school, located next to the church,
the symbol of hard work, by the
beach.

The Sweet Escott site is
sandwiched on the east side, by a
sandy plateau, now agricultural
land and on the west side by a
gentle mountain slope, now a
residential area developed over
the past three decades or so.

One river and four streams pass
through the site, with only two
exit channels discharging the
runoff **into the most beautiful
lagoon on Mahé.**

It was then the colonial days,
when the environment of the
Sweet Escott Area was still at its
best, when our sustainable
livelihood was dependent on the
fresh fruits, vegetables, fish, milk,
and meat, all produced
organically, locally. **Life was
simplicity at its best,** for being
almost totally cut off from the
world at large, we had not much
to compare ourselves
with...whereby we had a healthy

lifestyle in complete harmony with nature.

I never felt fatigue to walk, or run whenever late, that four kilometres, five days a week and also on Sundays to attend mass, and other community activities. And most of the time I did so, bare footed, for I had no shoes to wear.

That daily routine was in itself a great pleasure, for the Sweet Escott

Wetlands of approx 800 meters long was full of life, camaraderie, where the community shared and cared for each other, more often than not, through the barter process, which was the order of the day.

Talking about shoes, and by watching children playing in the wetlands, in Ms. Lena Desaubin's production at the opening session, which I must confess is a nice piece of work, memories of my youth came to mind and I now have a little story of my own to share with you.

One day my mum who was bringing up six children by four fathers on her own, bought me a pair of flip-flops, for three rupees for school and church only. The same day I put them on, my school friends and I went scavenging in the wetlands for fruits. The watchmen surprised us and started chasing us, one side of my flip-flops got stuck in the deep mud, there was no way of getting it out and I went home with only half. I got such a beating from my mum, I slept under the house without food that night and I had to wait for another six months before I got a new pair.

And that was a real lesson, from a mother who was earning only fifteen rupees per month, as a washer woman.

The wetlands which run the whole length of that back road, the only one of its kind on Mahé Island, were well maintained and full of life. It consisted of natural parallel dykes, running from east to west as far as the eyes could see, covered with coconuts and other palms, fruit trees, elephant ears, mangroves, beach morning glory, sea hibiscus, with cattle grazing, moorhens, with plenty of 'makanbale latet ron' and crab 'c'est ma faute', enjoying themselves in the crystal clear water channels.

With workers picking and husking coconuts, gardening, tending the livestock, with farm animals out running around freely, birds and bees doing their jobs', **it was God given gifts of life in action at their very best.** During that period there was no radio station, no television, very little imported food items, life was simple, healthy, enjoyable, and **nature itself was our only pride and passion.**

1971 Bang. The Seychelles International Airport saw the light of day, and overnight we completely changed focus, 'modern day developments' landed on our shores and it was time to start cashing in big time.

Three years after Independence of 1976, the land reform came into force; the whole Anse Royale plateau which includes the Sweet Escott wetlands was for most part abandoned. All coconut trees were eradicated by the orders of what could be considered by a "crazy" former Principal Secretary and for the past three decades or so the wetlands have been neglected completely causing much damage to the previous ecosystem.

During that period construction of houses and other infrastructure took hold right on the west side of

the road, in the upper Les Canelles and Enfoncement regions, whereby **feeding the rivers and the four streams with red earth, chemicals, debris, and none bio degradable materials**, to be deposited in the wetland a processes which has served to block all the channels in between the existed dykes for with only two relatively small channels to the sea, where else could they go?

With the abundance of soil and other organic matter, new species took hold, with Indian almond, merremia peltata, 'albezia', and philodendron blocking the whole area of its natural processes and causing much flooding during the heavy rainy seasons, and not to forget the dissemination of the previous habitat and species overtime.

As a consequence in March 2009, if I'm not mistaken the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources had to spend over SR one million, the equivalent of US\$ hundred thousand de-silting the water channels and de-clogging the main storm drains due to heavy flooding, which gave rise to the water level both in the wetlands area and the adjoining farm land, which has recently been developed as a result of the ongoing world food crisis.

In 2003, the first Ecotourism Strategy for Seychelles was conceived with the prime objective of implementing pilot projects in the district, in turning Anse Royale into an Eco-trail, of which the Sweet Escott Wetlands (the only natural area of about seven hectares left on the plateau) was identified as is an important possible component.

The multi stakeholders of The Anse Royale Ecotourism Committee (the then TAREC) was formed to undertake such projects, under the auspices of the

District Administrator, but for the five years or so that followed no tangible action was taken, whereby leaving most of the members of the committee disillusioned.

Ladies and gentlemen

For the past three decades or so until the present day whenever I pass by the wetland area, on my way to pay respect to my departed mum and family members and/or to church, fond memories of my youth come to light and my heart bleeds to see that site in such a state of total disregard.

And I could feel some form of energy, emanating from there, saying: - **please help us, we want to be proud again, we want to show our past, please revive our faded beauty, for we are being choked by invasives; do something before it's too late, do something before we are taken over by small minded entrepreneurs for personal gains.** You have the experience, you have proven you can do it, please do it. And deep inside my heart, I feel that I have a duty to do so, **for the local community itself has asked that it be so, over and over again, through our deliberations in Turning Possibilities into Realities through Ecotourism Processes,** in our beloved parish.

Innovation

In December 2007, The Ecotourism Society of Seychelles (TESS) was born and three months later in March 2008, through the visit of **Dr. Anna Spenceley** the UNWTO developed a comprehensive project document for Anse Royale, entitled: **Community Based Tourism and Ecotourism in Anse Royale**, in which the **Sweet Escott Wetlands is featured as having immense ecotourism potential.**

Today TESS wishes to verbally express its sincere thanks to UNWTO for its assistance, which has provided us with a **Blue Print**, for the way forward, for the long term success of our mission.

In 2009, TESS submitted its application for its rehabilitation to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and we were requested to submit an Environmental Impact Assessment Plan (EIA) for the site for their consideration.

In adhering to their requirements, from July to September 2009, **Mr. Manu Ravishankar of Indian origin**, not from the upper class but from a small farm in rural India studying at the **University of St Andrews in Scotland, Department of Geography and Geoscience**, undertook a three months internship with TESS, and did an excellent job in formulating an Environmental Management Plan for the **ecological rehabilitation, development and maintenance of the wetlands.** His undertaking was part of the requirements to fulfil his Masters of Science Degree in Managing Environmental change. His mission was a great success for he has now graduated and his mother, to whom he dedicated his **thesis**, is now a very proud lady and so too is TESS for that matter.

With St Andrews coming to the rescue of St Joseph, Manu

- (a) *undertook an assessment of the existing ecological health of the wetland and provided sustainable solutions for its rehabilitation.*
- (b) *he provided possible solutions for mitigating erosion and flood risks towards raising the profile of the wetland.*
- (c) *he consolidated previous research and data to form a*

solid scientific background of the site for future reference and research.

- (d) *and not the least important he contributed to making the eco-trail a sustainable community venture.*

Ladies and gentlemen

The rehabilitation, restoration and development of the site will be undertaken in following four phases:-

FIRSTLY there will be an extensive cleaning program, the de-clogging of waterways, removal of stray animals, and the initiation of the monitoring process

SECONDLY an assessment of the invasive dominance will be made, key areas of immediate importance will be to identify, an integrated approach towards management of invasives will be applied and not least an assessment of the feasibility of Terrapin breeding on site will be carried out.

The *THIRD* phase will include an assessment of the state of water channels (sediment load, quality and velocity), areas of erosion and sediment pollution will be identified, sustainable strategies to counteract the above will be utilised, riparian vegetation will be restored.

And the *FOURTH* phase will comprise the creation of a mutual benefit system between the wetland and the Anse Royale community, market research for products from the wetlands, training the local community in processes involved in product delivery and as wetland guides, creating the **'Sweet Escott brand'**, preparing educational material to be used in the eco-trail for visitors/local schools and colleges.

Indeed, the rehabilitation of the wetland will serve as a precursor for the development of the site into **an eco-trail** where tourists and locals can appreciate the importance of wetlands and hence their conservation.

*The key factor that makes this project **highly sustainable** is the perspective of offering community benefit through the eco-trail programme, thereby bringing them closer to the environment and providing an incentive for conservation, all across the land, and there are many wetland areas in the same state (if not worse than) as Sweet Escott today.*

The local community of Anse Royale will be involved right from the initial cleaning operation through all the monitoring programmes conceived for the sustainable management of the wetlands.

This phase of the development which is very much in line with the Ramsar Convention plan of action will aim to utilise fully the wetlands ranging from serving as an excellent ecotourism site, to creating a market for the produce obtained from the wetlands. For example **tropical almonds** which are in abundance on the site are edible and are used in different dessert recipes; it can be prepared into snacks. The almond oil is widely used by massage therapists and for skin care products and can be promoted by masseurs in the five star hotels and resorts. For example in the Maldives Island, the nuts is a commodity much sought after at the international airport duty free shop.

The leaves, shells, and bark of the almond also have medicinal qualities and can be applied to the spine, treat intestinal worms, used with coconut oil to relieve back ache, hypertension, diabetes,

sores, pimples and fungal skin infections.

The site will host an *administrative block* (colonial architecture) consisting of a museum, references on the history of the Anse Royale district and the wetlands in Seychelles, a research centre inclusive of internet facilities, and a rest area hosting a small café.

It will also host a *garden centre*, for the provision of farming / horticultural equipment and accessories, and the local community can also make use of the centre to buy and sell their products.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Sweet Escott site **is a major part of who I am today** for it has been most instrumental in *shaping my career and my productive life, to the point that I can stand before you here today, with proper shoes on in its defence...*

Yes, while it will be virtually impossible to bring it back to its former glory, TESS will leave no stone unturned in repairing the damage that we 'humans' continue to inflict on this 'natural' treasure.

Indeed the Anse Royale district, is fast assuming its role as the second town, whereby *urbanisation* is quickly taking shape. The district now hosts the Seychelles Polytechnic, the University of Seychelles, two small hotels and several guesthouses, a new hospital soon to be completed, intensive farming in increasing human activities and resulting impacts on the environment.

Presently Anse Royale has 54 registered small businesses and a portion of the Sweet Escott site has

been allocated for their further development and refinement.

With all these new activities, in addition to the Public Beach Park already functioning, (not as should be as yet) **the Sweet Escott eco-trail will be a major asset, in providing a green space for relaxation, meditation, knowledge and the sheer joy of its restored beauty, pure and simple urban planning.**

Ladies and gentlemen

The time for all of us **to combat and mitigate the effects of Climate Change** in a big way is long overdue and through TESS, I have no doubt that Anse Royale, **my cradle**, will continue to help lead the way. Indeed TESS is already in the process of implementing a ReCoMap project entitled: **The Anse Royale Coastal Protection Project financed by the European Union, through the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)** at a cost of EURO 77,000 for which we are most grateful.

Today therefore, I take this opportunity to call on **the local and the international community to Unite and to provide joint support for the success of this particular mission. It is after all the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity of our world, whereby we need to reflect on our achievements to safeguard our biodiversity and focus on the urgent challenges ahead. Thus let us all resolve to have our names inscribed on it, in granite... for the benefit of future generations. Now it's the time to act.**

I thank you all for listening and I look forward in sharing this special day with you all.