

Guy Savy: *Bird's island boy*

Guy Savy is an island boy, pure and simple, who knows and understands islands probably better than anyone in the country. His custodianship of Bird Island, Seychelles' most northerly outpost, began in 1967 upon his return to Seychelles from New Zealand where he spent several years studying accountancy.

He and a partner, Delorie, acquired Bird at a time when the island was much the worse for wear from years of human disturbance of the island's famous colony of sooty terns whose population during the 1950s plummeted from somewhere near a million birds to scarcely 65,000. And so began the long process of clawing back the island from the brink of ecological disaster through sensitive conservation and eco-friendly tourism, of which Guy Savy is most definitely a Seychelles pioneer.

The old lodge on Bird which opened in 1973 consisted of 18 rustic chalets with plaited, coconut leaf

finishings and a wonderful philosophy that placed the island first and which continues down to this very day. Bird Island is one of Seychelles' outstandingly beautiful islands with arguably the most beautiful beach of the entire archipelago. Encircled by a ring of golden sands and with a verdant interior, it stands on the very edge of a drop-off nearly 100 km north of Mahé as the very caricature of what the perfect tropical island should look like.

Rich in history, it has witnessed some spectacular shipwrecks and maroonings down the centuries but its chief claim to fame is undoubtedly its standing as one of the most important sooty tern colonies on the planet, visited today by more than a million birds between the months of May and October. The island is also home to wedge-tailed shearwaters, lesser noddy terns, sooty terns and frigates - an ornithologist's treasure trove. It is the ecological appeal of the island, which also boasts the largest



and one of the oldest giant land tortoises in the world that Guy Savy has marketed to great effect while ensuring that conservation of the island's ecosystems comes first. At a time when many island owners have surrendered their conservationist principles to make money, Guy has stuck to his guns and his priorities, as per his favourite saying: "...and, by the way, there's also a hotel on Bird." In his marketing campaigns he has been ably assisted by a young Seychelloise, Melanie Felix, who has taken over the day-to-day running of the island's marketing initiatives to great effect.

He must be doing something right because Bird Island attracts a high number of repeat clients at its 24-chalet lodge which, while providing a high degree of comfort at the very heart of raw nature, has resisted installing in-room television and even air-conditioning. What immediately hits home is the authenticity of the island with its entirely Creole workforce and the old world atmosphere of a traditional outer island which is becoming increasingly difficult to find in Seychelles.

Just before handing over management of the island to his sons, Nick and Alex in January 2016, Guy spent much time streamlining and refining the way the island functions and, together with his partner, Erika, they put the final touches to the excellent island-style cuisine which is a guest favourite. He has also worked on installing a live webcam in the bird colony which will allow viewers a bird's eye view of goings-on there.



Guy Savy son's Nick and Alex



Aerial view of Bird Island



The bird colony