

# Field report: Visiting Reunion National Park in 2022

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## SANPARKS STAFF HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE ISLAND OF REUNION AS PART OF A COLLABORATION WITH PARC NATIONALE DE LA REUNION.

In 2021 SANParks embarked on an exciting collaboration between Table Mountain National Park and the Parc Nationale de la Reunion (PNR). It has long been recognised that these protected areas share similar challenges related to the conservation and management of biodiverse world heritage sites embedded in urban settings. The cooperation programme, funded by the French Development Agency (AFD) over three years, allows for sharing of expertise and experience. While there were some pandemic-related hold-ups in getting the project underway, 2022 saw several in-person engagements and the first funding was transferred in 2023. The Cape Research Centre and Table Mountain Park staff have worked together to identify around 15 key projects for implementation as part of this collaboration, which also includes the appointment of contract staff and studentships.

At the end of November 2022, Nicola van Wilgen-Bredenkamp, Mike Slayen and Debbi Winterton (SANParks), along with a collaborator from the Centre for Invasion Biology (Tammy Robinson), undertook the first exchange to Reunion. This trip served several purposes, including identifying collaborators for particular projects, assessing field sites to learn methods being applied in Reunion, presenting background and progress on projects and aligning reporting and project management.



Staff and students from Parc Nationale de la Reunion and CIRAD, along with collaborators from SANParks and Stellenbosch University. Mathieu Rouget, CIRAD, is holding a topography map of Reunion Island.



Aside from knowledge exchange, the trip provided for several novel experiences, including learning to navigate driving on the right-hand side of very narrow, winding roads, and trying (rather unsuccessfully), to order food in French. These novelties, combined with the rediscovery of travel and in-person engagement post-COVID made for a wonderful experience and many opportunities for a good laugh. We were most fortunate to have a host, Dr. Mathieu Rouget, who has worked in South Africa and who went out of his way to drive and translate for us, while making sure we got to experience the best the island has to offer.

Our major focus topics for collaboration on this trip included learning about PNR's alien species mapping process, which focuses on identifying emerging species; assessing how we can better understand invasions in the context of climate change and how to better leverage our World Heritage Site status. A major difference between the two Parks is that PNR is entirely state funded and not at all reliant on drawing funds from tourism. We are in the process of identifying additional thematic areas where SANParks and PNR can share and learn together, including invasive species, fire, tourism, governance, climate change, and World Heritage Site management. We look forward to continuing these exchanges over the duration of the project and beyond.



SANParks and Parc Nationale de la Reunion are sharing and learning together, including about invasive species, fire, tourism, governance, climate change, and World Heritage Site management. Here shown, some of the amazing biodiversity on the island of la Reunion.

