

## Restoring Redonda

By Salina Janzan November 2017

At the beginning of 2017, I set off on an adventure quite unlike any other. I was to join the team working on the Redonda Restoration Programme and spend the majority of my time between January to May on an uninhabited, barren, often-crumbling, 1.6km long island in the middle of the Caribbean Sea. Redonda is the



third island comprising the nation of Antigua and Barbuda, but its terrain could not be more different. Rising up dramatically from the sea with severe cliffs on all sides, even Redonda's top "plateau" is treacherous: invasive alien species have transformed this once-

forested island, leaving the ground unstable and loose. The press release I read before applying for the role, described the island as a "moonscape" and the role description emphasised the need for experience camping in basic conditions. It was a challenge I was eager to take on.





My career route has not been typical. This time last year, I was working in the fashion industry, as I had been doing since graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Textiles and Surface Design, in 2013. During that time, I had realised

that the cause I wished to be working for was outside the creative sector; I wanted to be working with wildlife and trying to make a difference to a cause that mattered to me: saving some of the wonderful species we share this planet with.

And so, in 2015, I completed a postgraduate diploma in Endangered Species Recovery with the Durrell Conservation Academy, accredited by the University of Kent. I was (very)



new to many of the topics but I was keen to learn and not afraid to work hard to catch up. The course was exactly what I was looking for and what I needed to make the (seemingly) vast leap from fashion to conservation: a qualification, academic knowledge, and field experience. I spent six months in the field with the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF) field teams, to fulfil the practical elements



of the course. I gained valuable experience during this time, without which I would have been unlikely to even make the shortlist to interview for the Redonda team.



Our task on Redonda was – as the programme name suggests – to restore the island. Redonda is home to a unique array of plants and animals, including several critically endangered species found nowhere else in the world. The uninhabited island is also formally recognised as an Important Bird Area, supporting globally significant numbers of seabirds. Unfortunately, these unique populations were disappearing at a rapid pace, largely due to the invasive alien species and their detrimental impacts on the ecosystem.

With the aim to remove these damaging invasives and halt (and hopefully, in



time, reverse) this decline of biodiversity, the restoration programme was officially launched in 2016 by the Government of Antigua & Barbuda and the Environmental Awareness Group in collaboration with Fauna & Flora International and other partners from the UK (British Mountaineering Council), USA (Island Conservation) and New Zealand (Wildlife Management International Ltd).

I was able to put quite a variety of skills to the test in my daily duties: whether it was corralling goats to be transferred to Antigua (via helicopter no less) where the rare breed



could be properly cared for and studied; to walking transects daily to check bait stations at 30m intervals, recording poison uptake by rats; to monitoring the effects of this work on the wildlife and ecology of Redonda – conducting lizard counts, seabird transects, analysing soil samples and more. I also drew upon my previous skills and experience (albeit gained in a different sector) to support the team in developing communications strategies for the wide variety of stakeholders that the project involved.



I learnt an incredible amount. Perhaps most importantly, I was reminded once again – as I had learnt during my time with Durrell in Mauritius – that conservation projects are complex systems encompassing a number of interlinking aims and activities that often cannot be approached in isolation. Conservation needs a variety of skills for such an endeavour. I felt gratified to have made that fateful ‘leap’, to have embarked on the adventure, and accepted the challenge. Hopefully

we have set Redonda onto the path of recovery and saved several unique species in the process. On recent visits, the project team have found themselves in knee-high vegetation, surrounded by butterflies, beetles, and other invertebrates, and able to observe more juvenile lizards. Through this work I began to make the difference I set out to achieve.