

ARUBA CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Annual Report

2023





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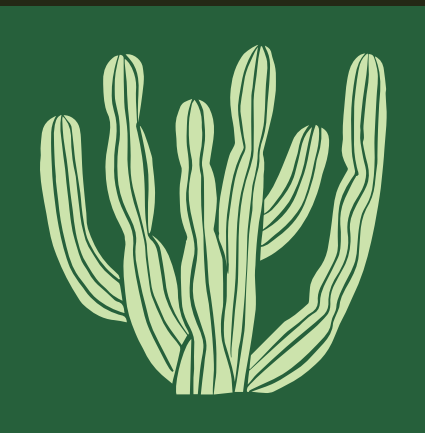


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Our island is telling us something. Let's *listen*.



CHAPTER 1

From the Executive Board



“Sky above us. Earth below us. Nature within us”

2023 was a crucial year for the Aruba Conservation Foundation (ACF). Recovering to pre pandemic levels, we were able to start building back better with a stronger sense of commitment to nature conservation on Aruba. Considering the broadening of the scope of work of the foundation in recent years, we needed to transition to become more strategic and more professional, especially seeing the major challenges our island is undergoing in terms of the impact on nature, that also effects our society and economy.

In 2020, the foundation embarked for the first time on a journey of creating a ten-year vision, reflecting in depth on how we as ACF want to add value to our nature, our environment, our residents, our communities, our visitors, and our economy. A process that started in February 2020, as a result of a joint strategic dialogue that the Management Team conducted in the period of February 2020 through December 2021, followed by necessary preparations in 2022 for an organizational restructuring to accommodate and bring to fruition the ten-year vision set forth. Implementing these strategies and plans became the organizational priority in 2023.

In June 2023, ACF published its first Multi Annual Corporate Strategy (MACS) 2023 – 2032. A plan focused on responding to new ecological, social, and economic challenges, and most importantly, our commitment to conservation of Aruba’s natural and cultural heritage. The Cycle of Business at the core of the MACS, guides our focus and management attention firmly on our primary task of nature conservation, and consequently on value creation for nature and our society. To generate stewardship from our locals and visitors alike and support for sustained conservation of our natural assets. This framework is at the center of all decisions, planning and, decision moving forward. It is our task to guarantee the continuation of the foundation for the benefit of conservation.

The success of our foundation is directly correlated with the successful implementation of our MACS 2023 -2032 in transitioning our foundation from a traditional Park Management Organization to a modern Conservation Management Organization. All while striving to become financially independent, resilient, and sustainable.

In the coming years, as we work in transitioning the foundation to a leading high performance Conservation Management Organization, we need to ensure that the value of nature is brought into the heart of decision making by each and everyone. It is all about collectively understanding and valuing our natural capital (in environmental, social and economic terms) in order to continuously create optimal value for and from nature conservation. In July of 2023 to spearhead the organization’s new direction, filling the position of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was prioritized, and I was appointed by the Supervisory Board as the new CEO of the foundation. A responsibility that I am honored to have, as I realize the importance of the foundation in protecting our natural and cultural heritage for future generations to come.

The success of the ACF has been, and continues to be, the support and encouragement of our employees, volunteers, partners, and stakeholders, who share our sense of purpose and vision. It is with great optimism and ambition that we look forward to being “the voice” for our natural and cultural heritage.

Tyson Lopez
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



“Raising a voice for the land that raised us”

In 2023, ACF kicked off and ended the year with high-profile visits from the Dutch royal family, making international headlines all over the world, showcasing ACF’s transition from a park management organization into a conservation management organization. The Dutch royal family has a long tradition of visiting the islands and requested an audience with ACF, having a keen interest in the pioneering conservation work the Foundation is carrying out together with local and international partners.

In 2023, we were finally able to pick up where we left off prior to the COVID pandemic, and reprioritize projects, hire new staff after the COVID downsizing, and replan for the years ahead while realizing the backlog in our conservation efforts would take years to complete. Since the onset of the pandemic, outdoor recreation, sports, and sports related events are becoming popular and on the increase. With more people out in nature, adequate resources are needed to properly manage and balance human needs with protecting and preserving the integrity of our terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystems and biodiversity in accordance with sustainability and ecological carrying capacities.

Hence in 2023, increasing effort was needed from the team to prevent as well as remediate harm to nature in protected areas, and the first initiatives were undertaken to rehabilitate (improving the ecological value of a degraded site) mangroves and coral reefs with the long-term end goal of restoration (bringing a degraded ecosystem back to an ideal condition). Additionally, a new species recovery program was launched for the Yellow-shouldered Amazon, also known locally as the Lora, with several more native and endemic species recovery programs being developed for execution in the coming years.

Our role as ACF is not only to develop and implement effective conservation initiatives where they are most needed, but also to supplement these with supportive strategies such as advocating on behalf of nature, instilling conservation awareness, and educating both locals and visitors, as this is key to decreasing and alleviating a lot of our conservation challenges and helps grow our base of support.

The conservation of Aruba’s nature cannot be solely dependent on the efforts of ACF but requires the government and our community to value it and participate in halting and reversing biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. Shifting to an ecological mindset and increasing sustainable behaviors, as well as restoring nature, takes decades or even longer to achieve. Hence, effective nature conservation is based on consistent and concerted efforts over time, requiring long-term strategies and planning.

Ultimately, just as we all impact our environment by simply existing, we can also chose to contribute to its conservation by living more respectfully and in harmony with nature. Embracing more sustainable attitudes and behaviors that allow our natural heritage to flourish and thrive for generations to come.

We hope that you will join us in this mission.

Natasha Silva
CHIEF CONSERVATION OFFICER





Where wonder awaits.



CHAPTER 2

Supervisory Board

SUPERVISORY BOARD

Overview

In accordance with ACF's Article of Association and the set of Supervisory Board Regulations, the task of the Supervisory Board is to supervise the Executive Board of the foundation, the general affairs of the foundation, and to assist the Executive Board. When carrying out its duties, the Supervisory Board focuses on the interests of the foundation. To this end, the Supervisory Board weighs the eligible interests of all parties involved in the foundation.

The Supervisory Board held a total of seven meetings during 2023, and had an average attendance of 91%. The Supervisory Board consists of five Board Members, and meetings are attended by the Executive Board Members of the ACF consisting of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Conservation Officer (CCO).

Highlights of topics discussed during the Supervisory Board meetings in 2023

Financials: For the financial oversight of the foundation the Supervisory Board reviewed, advised on, and approved the Annual Budget 2023, monitored the Monthly Financial Reports, and approved the Annual Audit Report 2023. To guarantee the financial sustainability of the foundation and based on the decision of the Supervisory Board, the foundation started with allocating the annual surplus into different reserves, mainly for Business Interruption purposes, Maintenance CAPEX, and Growth CAPEX.

Corporate Strategy: For strategic oversight, the Supervisory Board instructed the Executive Board in 2019 to start the process of creating a MACS. Due to the pandemic, this project was placed on hold. However, in 2022 this project continued and was finalized in 2023, approved by the Supervisory Board, and made public in June 2023.

Organizational Restructuring: For proper execution of the MACS the organization started with the restructuring process, the Supervisory Board provided advice, approved the new organizational structure, and supervised its implementation. During 2023 preparations were made for the restructuring to be executed in 2024. Next to organizational restructuring, different HR Tools were developed in 2023 for the continued professionalization of the organization.

Staffing: During 2023 the Supervisory Board was tasked with the recruitment of a CEO and an external consultant assisted with the recruitment and selection hereof. In addition, the Supervisory Board also monitored and approved new hires within the approved budget. The new hires are based on a staffing plan created by the Executive Board, approved by the Supervisory Board, and executed with the support of the HR Department.

Conservation: The Supervisory Board oversaw the conservation efforts that the foundation executed and maintained up-to-date with ongoing conservation threats and pressures. The Supervisory Board advised the Executive Board on how best to go about the different cases as these presented. The Supervisory Board serves as the eyes and ears for the conservation of nature and keeps the Executive Board informed of any information that can have an impact on conservation.

Continuing Education: During 2023 the Supervisory Board participated in a Good Governance training provided by Professor Frank Kunneman. The training provided practical tips for better Corporate Governance and the implications of the Corporate Governance Code of Conduct that is to be introduced by the Government of Aruba.



Norman Kuiperi
CHAIR

Electrical engineer, experienced HR professional with a strong business and financial acumen, previously served on the Board of Aruba Chamber of Commerce. During his tenure at the Chamber of Commerce, he represented the business community in the “Raads Commissie Onafhankelijkheid voor Aruba” (RCOA) between 1983 and 1985, where the constitution was prepared for Aruba’s Status Aparte in 1986. Furthermore, Mr. Kuiperi served on the board the Aruba Trade & Industry Association, Treasurer to the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, and was an active Board member in the nature NGO StimAruba. He enjoys researching Aruba’s economy and financial status, and has written many articles published in the local newspapers.

APPOINTED IN
END 2ND TERM

FEBRUARY 2019
JANUARY 2027



Hellen van der Wal
VICE CHAIR

Legal and governance expert with a Ph.D. in law from the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (VU). Previously served as Secretary to the State Council of Aruba, formerly member of the National Good Governance Committee, Chair of the Supervisory Board of Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, and Aruban Board member of Financial Supervision (College Aruba financial oversight), owner and CEO of the WABC Advies consultancy firm. Ms. van der Wal is actively engaged in social causes, and was one of the founding members the Aruban Children’s Telephone Foundation, served as the Caribbean Representative at the NGO Advisory Council. She also founded the Society & Crime Foundation, to promote scientific research and the development of educational materials on safety and prevention.

APPOINTED IN
END 2ND TERM

FEBRUARY 2019
JANUARY 2027

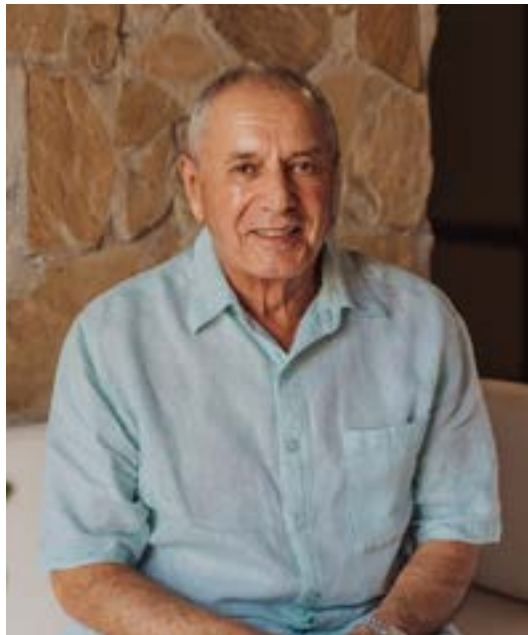


Sanju Luidens-Daryanani
BOARD MEMBER

Aruba Tourism Authority’s (ATA) Chief Marketing Officer, with 25+ years of marketing, finance, and tourism expertise effectively leading Aruba’s local and international destination marketing units. In her previous role as Advisor to Aruba’s Minister of Tourism, Transportation and Labor, Ms. Luidens-Daryanani led the project of privatizing ATA from a government department to an independent entity within the public sphere. This new format has allowed ATA to thrive in a highly competitive market and continue to improve as a tourism product. Outside of work, she is actively involved in the local community, and has served on a number of committees and boards, including the Aruba Airport Authority, the Board of the Rotary Club of Aruba, the Aruba Quality Foundation Board and the School Parent Committee, among others.

APPOINTED IN
END 2ND TERM

FEBRUARY 2019
JANUARY 2027



Ewald Biemans
BOARD MEMBER

Distinguished CEO of the Bucuti and Tara Resort, and a sought-after guest speaker on eco-tourism that has been honored on numerous occasions both locally and internationally for his environmental preservation work. Bucuti holds the most eco-certifications in the Caribbean, and in 2020 Bucuti and Tara was the first hotel to receive the United Nations’ ‘Climate Neutral Now’ award. Mr. Biemans is committed to being involved in the community and taking a leadership role whenever possible, encouraging other resorts on-island to take the initiative to protect Aruba’s natural resources. Biemans is currently on the board of the Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association.

APPOINTED IN
END 1ST TERM

OCTOBER 2020
OCTOBER 2024



Pierre Rafini
BOARD MEMBER

A successful banker with over 27 years of banking experience. Managing Director for RBC Royal Bank (Aruba) N.V. and also the Country Manager for Aruba overlooking the local operations of the bank. In addition, Mr. Rafini serves as the Vice President of Business Banking Dutch Caribbean is responsible for all commercial activities for Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, Sint Maarten and Saba. Throughout his banking career he held key positions in Insurance, Retail Sales, Marketing and Corporate and Commercial Banking.

APPOINTED IN
END 1ST TERM

FEBRUARY 2023
FEBRUARY 2027

SUPERVISORY BOARD

Governance Structure

ACF's purpose is based on its Article of Association and defines the scope and context of activities ACF undertakes to manage nature conservation areas within the sustainable development framework of the nation of Aruba.

The Foundation is committed to the protection, preservation, and restoration of Aruba's heritage, seen from an ecological, environmental, geological, cultural, archaeological, and historical perspective.

While ACF has, from the onset, operated under a one-tier governance structure, a two-tier structure based on principles of good corporate governance was introduced in 2019 so that the Foundation can operate under a professional Executive Board, as well as a Supervisory Board, with increasing commitment to Good Governance for accountability on how ACF conducts its

public affairs and manages public and donor resources in an efficient, effective and transparent way, guarantees an equitable and inclusive work environment and conduct that is essentially free of abuse and corruption, with due regard for the rule of law, responsive to its stakeholders, and consensus-oriented through a participatory approach.

The Executive Board manages the foundation, and the Supervisory Board supervises the policy of the Executive Board and the general course of affairs within the foundation. The Supervisory Board supports the Executive Board with advice and, can also take initiative in providing the Executive Board with advice if it considers this necessary in connection with its supervisory and advisory role. This advice should not hinder the supervisory task of the Supervisory Board.





Come together for nature.



CHAPTER 3

Organizational Profile

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Overview

ACF is an independent professional conservation management organization on Aruba, entrusted with the conservation and management of designated Terrestrial and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

ACF is, first and foremost, a nature conservation management organization that focuses on executing species and habitat conservation programs for biodiversity enhancement, ecosystem restoration, and protected area management while educating and raising public awareness and making the protected areas sustainably accessible to visitors for their enjoyment.

The Foundation was established on the 26th of September 2003, and was later registered as a foundation at the Chamber of Commerce. It is an independent foundation with a Service Level Agreement with the Government of Aruba for the conservation of the protected areas. On January 1st, 2005, the Foundation became fully operational and took over management of Parke Nacional Arikok from the Department of Agriculture. In 2017, it received Spaans Lagoen, in 2018/2019 Parke Marino Aruba, and in 2020 the additional Nature Protected Areas around the island. In 2017 the foundation started the process of professionalization and it is an ongoing effort within the organization.

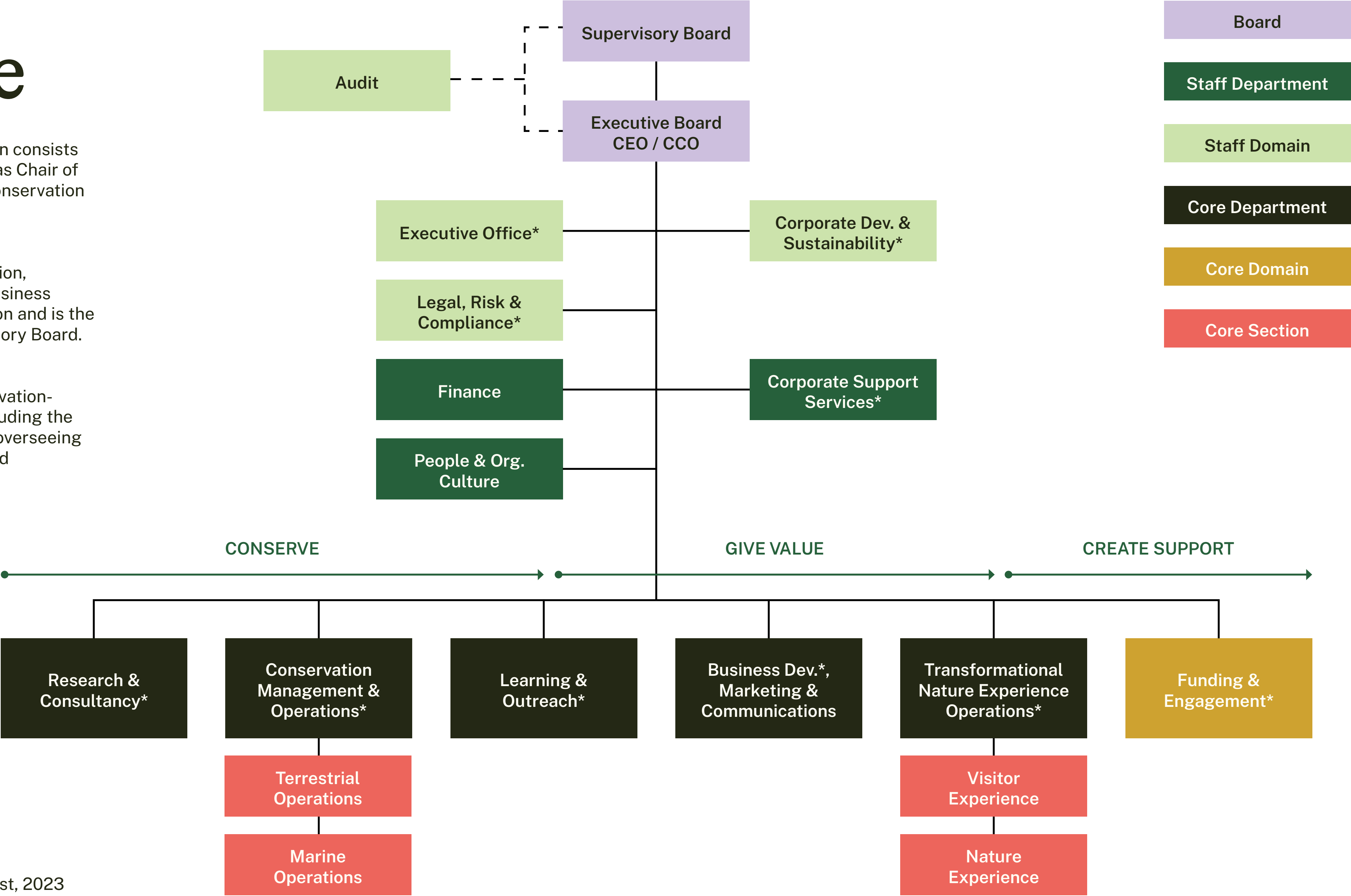
ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Structure

The Executive Board of the Foundation consists of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as Chair of the Executive Board, and the Chief Conservation Officer (CCO).

CEO
The CEO is in charge of the overall vision, leadership, strategic direction, and business management aspects of the foundation and is the main point of contact for the Supervisory Board.

CCO
The CCO is in charge of all the conservation-related matters of the foundation including the conservation strategy, management, overseeing all conservation-related programs, and implementation.



*Vacant as per year-end December 31st, 2023



“ For a Sustainable Future,
We *Act, Inspire*, and *Engage* All
to Value and Conserve Aruba’s
Natural and Cultural Heritage.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Aspiration towards 2032

Core Purpose					Vision			Roles		
For a Sustainable Future, We Act, Inspire, and Engage All to Value and Conserve Aruba's Natural and Cultural Heritage					Through Conservation Leadership Excellence, We lay the Foundation for Thriving Biodiversity, Resilient Ecosystems, and Celebrated Heritage, For a Sustainable Aruba			• Conservation Authority		• Educator
								• Connector		• Facilitator
Core Values					Our Sustainability Ambition					
Passion We Love Nature and We Love What We Do		Integrity We Do The Right Thing. Always	Unity Together We Achieve More.	Commitment We Aim for Excellence in All That We Do.	Innovation We Look for Solutions from Fresh Perspectives.	Sustainable Natural Ecosystems Diverse, Healthy and Resilient Natural Ecosystems		Sustainable Transformational Experiences Connected and Engaged with Nature		Sustainable Operations Exemplary in Sustainability

The Aspiration of the ACF provides a clear picture of what we as a foundation stand for and where we want to go, with sustainability central in everything we do.

As a custodian of protected areas on behalf of Aruba, we promote sustainable practices that integrate environmental, social, cultural, and economic objectives and address long-term concerns in meaningful ways to ensure that our natural and cultural resources remain relevant for present and future generations.

We lead by example and embrace sustainable development goals in everyday decision-making.



ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Strategic Pillars & Goals

The ACF distinguishes four pillars that form the foundation for our strategic choices for the coming ten years. To accomplish our Aspiration 2032, we have committed to a broad strategic approach to focus our attention, energy, and resources on four distinct but interrelated strategic areas.

These four strategic pillars are translated into a set of strategic goals.

I

Leadership in Nature Conservation

Integrated and inclusive care for nature of Aruba and its sustained conservation.

II

Transition To Sustainable Nature Experiences

Create value towards a nature-based experience economy for nature of Aruba, Aruba as a whole and its stakeholders.

III

Excellence In Conservation Co-Creation

Connect and engage people to nature by increasing understanding, stewardship and support for long term conservation.

IV

Sustainable Organizational Development

Transformation to a modern, high performing conservation management organization with future proof capabilities and exemplary leadership in sustainability.

I: Leadership In Nature Conservation	II: Transition to Sustainable Nature Experiences
<div>1.1 Position ACF as Professional Conservation Authority</div> <div>1.2 Optimize Ecosystem-Based Conservation Management</div> <div>1.3 Strengthen Biodiversity-Based Conservation Management</div> <div>1.4 Advocate Optimal Biodiversity Conservation (Including Urban Areas)</div>	<div>2.1 Build Future Proof Infrastructure for Sustainable Nature Experiences</div> <div>2.2 Build Sustainable Nature Experiential and Transformative Visitor Propositions and Experiences</div> <div>2.3 Build Inclusive and Inspiring Sustainable Nature Education and Learning Propositions and Experiences</div>
III: Excellence In Conservation Co-Creation	IV: Sustainable Organizational Development
<div>3.1 Build Inclusive and Engaging Sustainable Nature Education and Learning Propositions and Experiences</div> <div>3.2 Build Inclusive and Sustainable Nature Engagement Propositions and Experience</div> <div>3.3 Build Network of Strategic Partnerships to Mobilize Resources for Sustained Nature & Heritage Conservation</div>	<div>4.1 Cultivate an Agile, High Performance Organization and Thriving Workplace</div> <div>4.2 Safeguard Financial Sustainability and Resilience</div> <div>4.3 Position ACF as Exemplary in Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility</div>



ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Our Cycle of Business (CoB) behind our Aspiration 2032

ACF’s CoB consists of three main flows, which together function to improve the overall performance of ACF, improve the long-term integrity of the entire nature business ecosystem, and prepare for a better tomorrow.

This framework keeps our focus and management attention on our primary task of nature conservation and, consequently, on value creation for nature, our environment, our residents, our communities, our visitors, and our economy to generate their stewardship and support for sustained conservation of our natural assets.

A CoB, in general, describes (visually) a business system. This CoB describes the nature ecosystem of which ACF is the custodian. It provides a deeper contextual understanding of the interrelations and flows between the critical components for sustained long-term conservation of natural assets, including the assurance of financial sustainability of ACF to be able to maintain investing in conservation. We cannot conserve our natural resources without long-term financial commitments.

Our CoB consists of three main flows:

CONSERVE

‘Care for Nature with Resources’.
This flow encompasses the first and foremost task of ACF. It contributes to safeguarding the conservation of nature and cultural values both now and in the long term (Stability and Growth) within a dynamic environment.

CREATE SUPPORT

‘Mobilize Resources for Conservation’.
This flow contributes to making long-term conservation possible and better. It aims at substantially increasing a broad and deep understanding of the value of nature, commitment and support (respect, time, resources), and sustainable revenue streams to fund nature conservation for sustained conservation.



GIVE VALUE

‘Create Value for Nature’.
This flow aims to create value through the protection, preservation, and restoration of biodiversity and habitats, improving the condition and sustainability of ecosystem services, and developing and providing sustainable nature-based propositions and experiences.



Honor the *land* that raised us.



CHAPTER 4

Conservation Management & Operations

Manangement Areas in Size & Profile



Protected areas under management of ACF

Parke Nacional Arikok (2000), the first protected area and only national park in Aruba. Size: 3400 hectares.

Spaans Lagoen (Ramsar site # 198), Rooi Frances, Rooi Bringamosa and Rooi Taki (2017). Size: 70 hectares.

Parke Marino Aruba (PMA) (2018/2019), consisting of 4 MPAs: MPA Oranjestad, MPA Mangel Halto, MPA Sero Colorado and MPA Arikok. Size: 6020 hectares.

Areanan Natural Protegi (2020), consisting of 11 new nature reserves and diverse ecosystems. Size: 880 hectares.

Important bird and biodiversity areas (IBAs) under management of ACF

IBAs are globally important sites for the conservation of bird species, as identified by Birdlife International. They are the sites needed to ensure the survival of viable populations of most of the world’s bird species. The IBA network also holds a large and representative proportion of other biodiversity. IBAs are a subset of the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

Aruba has four (4) IBAs: **Saliña Druif, Saliña Bubali, Oranjestad Reef Islands and San Nicolas Reef Islands**. All four IBAs fall under the management of ACF.

Ramsar sites under management of ACF

A Ramsar site is a wetland area of international importance, designated under the Ramsar Convention, also known as “The Convention on Wetlands”, an intergovernmental environmental treaty established in 1971 by UNESCO.

Aruba currently has five (5) Ramsar sites: **Spaans Lagoen** was designated a Ramsar site #198 on May 23rd, 1980, and **Western Wetlands** #2528, **Westpunt** #2527, **Zuidkust** #2526, **Oostpunt** #2525 was designated on November 10th, 2023. Note that these Ramsar sites either completely or partly overlap with some of the protected areas managed by ACF.

KBAs under management of ACF

KBAs are sites that contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity, in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. They represent the most important sites for biodiversity conservation world-wide and are identified nationally using a Global Standard from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Aruba has five (5) KBAs: **Saliña Druif, Saliña Bubali, Oranjestad Reef Islands, Parke Nacional Arikok and San Nicolas Reef Islands**. All five KBAs fall under the management of ACF.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Terrestrial Conservation Operations

The Terrestrial Conservation Management & Operations department is responsible for the fundamental conservation and day-to-day operations of the terrestrial protected areas. This includes the implementation of protected area management plans, environmental and species monitoring, compliance promotion, and enforcement, as well as for special thematic projects and initiatives focusing on species and habitats, and helping to restore natural values for resilience and adaptability to the evolving environmental dynamics of our impacted island.

Fundamental Conservation of Protected Areas

Managing the protected areas involves specific strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities to conserve and sustainably manage biodiversity, ecosystems, and cultural heritage within designated protected areas. In 2023, the management activities within the protected areas included the following highlights:

Infrastructure & Facilities Maintenance

During 2023, some first-line infrastructure and facilities maintenance was carried out in the protected areas, mainly in the high-use Parke Nacional Arikok. High-use roads, such as the road from the entrance/exit at San Fuego to the entrance/exit at Vader Piet, require annual maintenance, especially after the rainy season. Additionally, the road to the Boca Prins dunes and Dos Playa also requires annual maintenance, which DOW does. The road to Conchi is the highest-use road in the Arikok National Park and requires regular maintenance, which in 2023 was carried out by Clean Vision.

Maintenance of the hiking trails was pending for several years post-COVID, but in 2023, all hiking trails received maintenance, and signage was restored.

Nature Protection and the Enforcement of Protection Measures

Ideally, nature is protected, and destruction is proactively prevented in time. Nevertheless, in 2023, some 30 incidents in the protected areas needed immediate attention. These incidents ranged from illegal gold digging and graffiti in the Fontein and Quadirikiri caves in Parke Nacional Arikok to the illegal felling and destruction of mangroves along the southern coast to build boardwalks and piers (for private or commercial purposes), illegal construction at Aruba Ocean Villas in Savaneta, and protected nature area land clearing across from the Boardwalk boutique hotel in Noord, as well as a fire incident across from Saliña Palm Beach. Also, ACF’s conservation specialist intervened and guided the Green Corridor bridge maintenance over the Spaans Lagoen area after paint spillage in the mangroves and waterways.

In 2023, ACF also supported the neighborhood group of Sero Colorado and joined the court case against the Secrets hotel, in conjunction with the anticipated high impacts on both the terrestrial and marine environments and biodiversity, but also because of the low quality and insufficient Environmental Impact Assessment.

Upgrading of Protected Areas

Post-COVID recovery in 2023 entailed numerous pending activities that could be resumed with extra funding for some high-priority issues. As such, in 2023, ACF required extra funding from the ATA for placing a protective border consisting of boulders along the boundary of a large part of the Sasarawichi Dunes to prevent illegal entry with (off-road) vehicles, which were increasingly impacting this sensitive area, which is amongst others, a breeding ground for sea turtles, shocos, and terns.

Also, an additional part of the Spaans Lagoen (Franse Pas area) was further sectioned off with a protective boulder barrier to prevent destructive off-roading on the salinías, which are a refuge to numerous species of invertebrates (including different species of crabs), (reef)fish, resident and migratory birds, and fringing mangroves.

The closing of Aruba’s major landfill, Parkietenbos, in 2023 entailed increasing problems with littering and illegal dumping in nature. A big step forward in protected areas management was the introduction of four ‘cleaning crews’, former Serlimar employees. The crews received training by ACF on ‘responsible maintenance’ and were allocated specific areas under their responsibility for the removal of litter and light pruning. Moreover, these crews were the daily eyes and ears out in the field, also giving ACF a presence within the protected areas.

Numerous areas that were legally protected in 2020 still need signage. However, this was delayed due to funding, and it was also pending the ACF rebranding, which was completed at the end of 2023. The only protected area to receive the ‘old-style’ Rules & Regulations signage in 2023 was the protected area of Sasarawichi – the dunes at the Lighthouse. The ACF could not wait any longer with signage for this area because the dunes and beaches were being heavily impacted by off-road driving.

Environmental and Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation

The intensive PROALAS “Monitoring for Bird Biodiversity Conservation in the Dutch Caribbean” (2023-2028) DCNA project was carried out for Aruba within the Arikok National Park in

both ‘spring’ and ‘autumn’ by the ACF research & conservation specialist with the help of volunteers. Areas monitored were the Jamanota, Rooi Taki, Rooi Prins, Rooi Barbacua, and Butucu areas, the data of which is yet to be processed.

With this project, the DCNA aims to enable all Dutch Caribbean protected area management organizations to actively monitor land bird populations on their islands using a standardized monitoring program that has continuity and be able to analyze and compare the collected data, the reports of which provide crucial information to adapt management actions and evaluate conservation success.

Species monitoring efforts help ensure that species under threat are identified in time to influence their long-term survival. Also, changes — or the absence thereof — in bird population sizes may indicate environmental change or stability. In this way, monitoring bird populations can inform us more about nature’s “health” in general. In the coming years, ACF aims to develop monitoring programs for other species, such as the critically endangered Aruba Island Rattlesnake, known locally as the Cascabel.

Additionally, several flora inventories were made throughout 2023. ACF flora specialists supported Wageningen University & Research (WUR) with vegetation mapping for the protected areas and other locations on the island, and beach flora inventories were made of the area in front of the under-construction Embassy Suites at Palm Beach, and the wilderness area in the development zone of Rodgers Beach and Baby Beach.

Sustainable Visitor Recreation Management

The outdoor posts manned by rangers at the entrances to Parke Nacional Arikok, the Fontein and Quadirikiri caves, and the Conchi natural pool allowed for site surveillance and protection during opening hours, as well as giving visitors the necessary information to conserve nature and enhance their experience in a sustainable way. Rangers and specialists additionally provided numerous guided hikes for a diversity of visitors and groups, including medics and military personnel.



CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Terrestrial Conservation Operations

Thematic Species & Habitat Conservation Projects and Initiatives

ACF’s thematic conservation initiatives encompass broader focal areas that complement and enhance the impact of ACF’s fundamental conservation for ecosystems, species, and their habitats to maintain and restore the health of ecosystems, preserve biodiversity, and ensure the survival of individual species and their habitats.

Western Wetlands

In 2020, an important wetland system consisting of four brackish ‘saliñas’ or salt marsh areas (Druif, Malmok, Cerca, and Palm Beach) and a former salina that was converted into a constructed permanent freshwater marsh commonly known as the Bubaliplas, part of the sewage treatment plant (STP) Bubali, was brought under the active conservation management of ACF. These areas, protected by law (AB 2020 no. 67), have been set aside to protect biodiversity cultural, historical, geological/geomorphic features, allowing for strictly controlled and limited human visitation to ensure the protection of conservation values.

In 2022, a multi-disciplinary steering committee was launched, initiated by the Minister of Transport, Integrity, Nature and Elderly Affairs (MinTINO), to compile a plan not only to develop and enhance the natural values and integrity of the five wetlands but also to include social ‘layers’ into the plan, such as community engagement, creating awareness and developing sustainable nature experiences. In 2023, a team from WUR was contracted with funding from the Tourism Product Enhancement Fund (TPEF) to do an extensive baseline study of the natural values of this wetland system, after which further plans will be developed for the connectivity and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem health, as well as for meaningful visitor experiences. The baseline study will be completed in 2024, followed by a management plan and a development plan.

Invasive Species Mitigation

In 2023, ACF concentrated mainly on the free-of-charge ‘on-demand collection’ of the locally invasive boa constrictor at addresses all over the island, with ‘humane’ euthanization via the cool-freeze method as part of the protocol. In total, 268 live boa constrictors were registered as collected by ACF rangers, not counting the already dead boas on collection. Boa collection is supplemented with developing awareness amongst the local community on the boa constrictor as well as the protected native snakes, as these are regularly mistaken for being a boa and then (illegally) killed.



CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Terrestrial Conservation Operations

Thematic Species & Habitat Conservation Projects and Initiatives

Lora Conservation and Reintroduction

In August of 2022, an illegal transport, including 33 juvenile yellow-shouldered amazon parrots (*Amazona barbadensis*), known as Lora in Aruba, were confiscated by the authorities upon arrival in Aruba and brought under the care of ACF and expert volunteers.

This species was extirpated some 70 years ago and was declared locally extinct. In 2017, the parrot species was included on the list of protected species. Soon after, ACF and the World Parrot Trust began discussing possible reintroduction. Stichting Vogelpark Avifauna (Netherlands) also joined forces, and both Foundations supported ACF with the development of a reintroduction program and standard operating procedures (SOPs) and subsequently with the care of the confiscated parrots. In 2023, the young adult parrots were moved from a private address where they had been taken care of for over a year by ACF staff and expert volunteers to a specially built reintroduction aviary and five feeding stations in Parke Nacional Arikok funded by the Aruba Airport Authority (AAA) where they would remain until their reintroduction into the wild at the beginning of 2024.

AAA also funded the development of a new greenhouse and nursery for the propagation of native trees in the previous year. The collection quickly grew to over 400 trees being prepared for out-planting in the national park when they were two years old and strong enough to survive in the harsh environment (with additional help for another year after out-planting). The collection of trees is based on a special native tree species list compiled by ACF, which includes food sources for both the Lora and the Prikichi (*Eupsittula pertinax arubensis*), the brown-throated parakeet.

The captive care of the group of Lora was intensive work, which required at least two FTEs and additional volunteers for round-the-clock care as the juveniles arrived in a detrimental state. Of the original group of 33, 25 would made it to maturity. This included developing special diets that changed with their age and allowed for an increasing amount of (collected and grown) wild foods. Additionally, the birds needed medication and regular deworming. They were kept as a cohort group and taught to fly and dodge dangers in a specially built flight cage, the materials and construction of which were sponsored by Vogelbescherming Nederland. Superfood donated much of the supplementary fruits and vegetables.

Terrestrial Conservation Operations

Thematic Species & Habitat Conservation Projects and Initiatives

Mangrove restoration

At the end of 2022, the mangrove channel at Mangel Halto suffered from acute mangrove die-off, likely resulting from an influx of polluted water into the system and a change in salinity. The channel had also silted closed at both ends, preventing the necessary water flow that normally keeps such systems healthy. This incident lauded the beginning of ACF’s mangrove restoration initiatives.

At the onset of 2023, a Mangrove Restoration Framework was established, and the Bonaire mangrove expert group ‘Mangrove Maniacs’ was invited to Aruba for a consultation and field survey. This coincided with the start of the multi-partner Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity Programme (RESEMBID) funded ‘Turning the Tide’ project, which included expert guidance from the Wageningen University and Research (WUR) team. ACF also conducted mangrove field visits with the mangrove and mosquito experts from the Department of Public Health and Dutch scientist Anna Rombouts. All these consultations were conducive to developing a restoration plan for the mangrove systems of Isla di Oro and Spaans Lagoen. Silt traps were installed at Rooi Lamunchi, Rooi Taki, and Rooi Bringamosa to control the amount of silt entering the mangrove and drying out the ecosystem, causing die-offs.

Additionally, the mangrove channel at Mangel Halto was restored with the help of the Dutch marines. Unfortunately, a change of currents, together with high tides, closed off the channel shortly after, and ACF sought funding for consultation from a coastal engineer. A new restorative attempt is being planned for 2024, together with new channels for water flow enhancement to be dug at Spaans Lagoen/Franse Pas, across the Rooi Taki silt trap.

The initial biodiversity survey has already revealed some interesting findings, including those in the silt traps. The results will be published at the end of 2024 after completing the monitoring process of the RESEMBID project.

Wildlife conservation and rehabilitation

ACF actively protects wildlife in situ, both within and beyond the protected areas. As such, ACF started a Shoco (*Athene cunicularia arubensis*) conservation program in 2017, together with Aruba Birdlife Conservation and with expert guidance from David Johnson of the Global Owl Project. Some 70 artificial burrows have been installed since, with the ultimate aim of installing 300. Also, numerous threatened owls and their nests were protected, and injured owls (poison and car crash) were rescued and rehabilitated by expert volunteers.

ACF also supports the rehabilitation of injured wildlife, together with veterinarians, avian specialist Ricardo Gogorza, and volunteers. Several injured American kestrels (Kinikini) and Crested Caracara (Warawara) were rehabilitated in 2023, together with numerous Shoco injured by passing cars.

The San Nicolas reef islands, prime Tern habitat, received the annual clean up and vegetation maintenance (a 3–4-day job) in time for breeding season (February – September).

ACF’s conservation team was requested by the Wind Creek team to consult on the juvenile lemon sharks that frequent Renaissance Island and how to protect sharks and tourists.

Supporting Strategies for Terrestrial Conservation

Advisory & Consultancy

In 2023, ACF associates assisted other ACF departments with specific expertise, as well as numerous stakeholders. Four different organizations on the island were provided with consultancy for property landscaping with native plants to enhance local biodiversity. Additionally, ACF provided advisory services to the government-contracted Caribbean Infrastructure Company throughout their refurbishment works at the Spanish Lagoon Bridge.

Moreover, a of manual was developed for the responsible pruning mangroves along the bridge, which were carried out under the guidance of ACF.

Moreover, the government was provided with field data and advised in matters related to additional Ramsar recognition and designation of protected areas, with four new areas designated in November 2023, as well as the expansion of Aruba’s first Ramsar area Spaans Lagoen, to include the entire watershed. The future possibilities and potentials of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere and the UNESCO Geoparks (with the help of expert volunteer Lily Peterson) were explored for Aruba. Feedback was provided on different national SOPs (corals, mangroves, watersports) being developed by the Department of Nature and Environment (DNM), as well as for the development of the legal framework for incorporating the Rights of Nature in Aruba’s constitution.

Communications & Advocacy

ACF rangers and specialists supported the Communications department with information for the ACF’s social media channels, press releases, and press, radio, and television interviews in relation to both fundamental and thematic conservation activities.

Field staff gave ongoing support and advocacy for responsible and sustainable behaviors that support nature conservation and the integrity of the protected areas.



“ Raising a voice for the
land that raised us.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Marine Conservation Operations

In tandem with Terrestrial Conservation Operations, the Marine Conservation Management & Operations department is responsible for the fundamental conservation and day-to-day operations of the marine protected areas, which includes the implementation of protected area management plans, environmental and species monitoring, compliance promotion, and enforcement, as well as for special thematic projects and initiatives focusing on marine species and habitats. Helping to restore natural values for resilience and adaptability to the evolving environmental dynamics of our impacted marine environment.

Fundamental Conservation of the Marine Protected Areas

Managing the MPAs – collectively called Parke Marino Aruba – involves specific strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities aimed at conserving and sustainably managing marine ecosystems, biodiversity, and their specific habitats within the designated MPAs.

In 2023, the marine management activities within the four MPAs managed by ACF included the following highlights:

Parke Marino Aruba Conservation Standards Situation Model

Parke Marino Aruba was designated in December 2018, with ACF being appointed the management organization in mid-2019. A preliminary management plan was written for two years. However, the ensuing COVID pandemic hampered and stunted further development and capacity building of the marine conservation operations department, which remained at two full-time staff.

In between the COVID outbreaks that ensued in 2021 and 2022 several in-person stakeholder engagement sessions and workshops took place for the development of a new management plan for the MPAs, and this process continued in 2023. With the assistance of Alcedo Consulting and following the principles of the Conservation Standards, a Situation Model was developed for Parke Marino Aruba –a schematic overview of all drivers, direct and indirect threats and pressures, conservation targets, ecosystem services, and associated human well-being targets. This included information gathered through stakeholder engagements, research, and field observations. Such information is crucial and forms the basis for developing a comprehensive and effective marine protected area conservation management plan (PACMP), which will be finalized in 2024.

Throughout 2023 daily ‘patrols’ took place as well as continued weekly monitoring of all four MPAs, and additional coastal areas: Sasarawichi dunes, salin as (Western Wetlands) and mangrove areas. Such ‘monitoring’ allowed for daily interactions with tourists and locals and presented opportunities to inform them on the laws, guide compliance, and encourage sustainable behaviors.

The 2023 monitoring activities also resulted in the intervention and reporting of the following unauthorized activities:

- Two pier constructions through protected mangrove areas along the south coast of Aruba were documented and reported to relevant authorities for further enforcement on illegal constructions without permits.
- On three occasions, illegal beach driving was documented and reported. The rock barriers that are in place to prevent beach driving were displaced by violators. This was immediately reported to the Department of Public Works (DOW) to repair the barriers to prevent further beach driving.
- On the beach bordering MPA Oranjestad, beach development with large sandbags and heavy machinery was observed and reported to relevant authorities. In response, ACF was also able to collaborate with Divi and Tamarijn hotels to encourage sustainable beach management and maintenance.
- A seine net (‘reda’) was documented at the seaside of Rooi Manonchi on Aruba’s South coast. The use of seine nets is prohibited along the South coast of Aruba and therefore this net was confiscated with the assistance of the Coast Guard.
- Excessive mangrove trimming and paint spillage was observed during the Green Corridor bridge renovations. ACF has been in contact with the responsible maintenance crew and is collaborating to prevent further risks of maintenance works to the sensitive Spaans Lagoen area.
- Continuous excessive mangrove trimming at Santo Largo was observed and reported to the relevant authorities to reduce impact on the sensitive mangroves and their young propagules that are being hampered in their growth and development by excessive trimming and raking.
- The construction of a sewage tank at Mangel Halto Bar (adjacent to the MPA Mangel Halto and Mangel Halto beach) was observed and reported to relevant authorities to evaluate the legality of this construction, permitting, and whether modern criteria were being followed to prevent further sewage leakage into the surroundings.

In 2023 the Marine Conservation Unit additionally aided in the following:

- Tern island quick scan and clean-up was carried out to prepare the San Nicolas reef islets, a unique tern breeding area for up to 10 species of terns, for the new breeding season.
- ACF hosted a Tern monitoring workshop with the support of Vogelbescherming Nederland during the tern breeding season where Dr. Adrian Del Nevo trained some 20 participants from government organizations and nature NGOs in tern monitoring.
- ACF assisted authorities with access to the coast of Parke Nacional Arikok to recover a floating corpse and assisted with the logistics to retrieve this from the rough seas.
- As part of continued monitoring of the impacts of coastal developments on sensitive coastal areas, data was collected on the state of the protected mangrove and seagrass area managed by ACF and next to Aruba Ocean Villas, to follow up on the Quick Scan executed in 2021 by the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA). The preliminary data of 2023 indicated the need for more extensive monitoring, including water quality parameters, which will be executed in 2024.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Thematic Marine Conservation

As with thematic terrestrial conservation, ACF's thematic marine conservation initiatives encompassed broader focal areas that complemented and enhanced the impact of ACF's fundamental conservation for marine ecosystems, species, and their habitats, with the aim of maintaining and restoring the health of marine ecosystems, preserving marine biodiversity, and ensuring the survival of individual marine species and their habitats.

Restoration Initiatives

One of the main initiatives in 2023 to assist natural recovery of marine habitats through rehabilitation (improving ecological value) with the long-term goal of restoration (bringing a back to the original state) was the "Turning the Tide" pilot project aimed at kick-starting the rehabilitation of Aruba's spatially linked coral reefs and mangroves. Turning the Tide is an EU RESEMBID funded pilot project where ACF, in partnership with WUR, the UA, and ScubbeBubbles Foundation, testing different restorative interventions for coral and mangrove restoration, while carefully monitoring the results and building the local capacity to continue such efforts in the future. This project launched in February 2023 and contributes to ACF's overall ecosystem, biodiversity restoration, and co-creation objectives.

The coral restoration efforts in 2023 included the assessment of different artificial reef models and selecting two systems that seem most suitable for the Aruban marine environment.

The two systems that were selected after careful review and consideration were: The Mars Assisted Reef Restoration System (MARSS) Reefstars inspired by Mars Sustainable Solutions, and the Modular Sealive System (MOSES) reefs by ReefSystems.

Suitable restoration sites were identified through analysis of stakeholder engagement sessions and site assessments for depth, the historical presence of coral to be restored, and the upstream presence of natural coral recruitment sources. Furthermore, the environmental requirements for each system were taken into consideration, as each of them has different requirements for placement.



CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Thematic Marine Conservation

In total, 410 MARRS Reefstars were locally welded and coated with epoxy and white sustainably-harvested sand from the mangrove silt traps. Nearly 200 volunteers participated in the process of coating the Reefstars with epoxy and sand over many volunteering events during August and September. ReefSystems shipped their materials to Aruba and assembled all MOSES reefs on shore before deployment.

Of each reef system, 13 reefs were installed between August and October 2023. Each leeward MPA of Parke Marino Aruba (Sero Colorado, Mangel Halto, and Oranjestad) has four reefs of each system at a selected research site. Additionally, one slightly larger reef of each system was installed in the inner lagoon of Mangel Halto (MPA Mangel Halto) as an easily accessible demonstration site. Together all artificial reef patches were installed in 2023 totaling 26 reefs. Once installed, all reef structures were visited monthly with groups of GCRMN-trained volunteers for maintenance, mainly to mitigate excessive algal growth.

GCRMN Coral Reef Monitoring

To monitor the conservation and restoration efforts of these reefs, a total of 21 divers were trained in coral monitoring following the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) guidelines.

The 21 trained divers included ACF staff members (2), interns from WUR (3), the director of ScubbleBubbles Foundation, UA students and staff (14), and two local volunteers.

Reef monitoring included site assessments to find suitable restoration sites for the respective artificial reef systems, a baseline (T=-1) GCRMN survey at all sites before installing the artificial reefs, and a GCRMN survey on all reefs and control (positive & negative) sites immediately after installation of the reef structures (T=0).

Progress of the Turning the Tide project was presented to the general public in a press conference, two stakeholder information events, volunteering events, press releases, and on social media. The Turning the Tide pilot project will reach completion at the end of 2024.

Moreover, as part of our Fundamental Conservation work, an additional 12 strategically selected coral reef sites along the south-west coast of Aruba were monitored by ACF with volunteers, following the GCRMN guidelines. These 12 sites include seven sites inside the three leeward MPAs and five reference sites outside of the MPAs, of which the data is pending further analysis.

Supportive Strategy for Marine Conservation

Consulting & Advocacy

Based on external requests and urgency of emerging threats to marine ecosystems, in 2023 ACF contributed to marine conservation through different forms of learning and outreach (see separate chapter), advocacy and consulting.

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) response

Since the beginning of 2023, in anticipation of and as a response to the SCTLD outbreak in Aruban waters, ACF has collaborated with the Department of Nature and Environment (DNM), Directorate of Shipping Aruba (DSA), and the Crisis Management Office (CMO) to develop and execute a coral disease outbreak Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

During the outbreak which started in April 2023, as part of the execution of this SOP, ACF hosted two informative evenings on the disease outbreak and two coral disease monitoring workshops,

developed a decontamination video, and monitored the progress and severity of the SCTLD outbreak.

Additionally, ACF lobbied for a Coral Rescue Facility, for which funding was acquired through Blue Marine Foundation, which will be used in 2024 to develop the Program of Requirements and the Architectural Design of the Aruba Marine Conservation Center.





CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Supportive Strategy for Marine Conservation

Consulting & Advocacy

Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Working Group

Throughout the year, consultations were held to determine the procedures for listing SPAW-protected areas. This resulted in the recognition by the SPAW Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) that the process and guidelines for the listing of SPAW-protected areas need to be fully revised.

This important update was approved at the Twelfth Conference of Parties to the Protocol Concerning SPAW held in Aruba in October of 2023 and added to the SPAW Protected Area Working Group tasks for the 2024-2025 biennium, to which ACF will be contributing two experts to participate in the SPAW Protected Area Working Group and the SPAW Species Working Group.

Spearfishing consultation

Throughout 2023, ACF attended consultations with the MinTINO on the new tolerance policy for spearfishing both within protected areas and beyond and provided input to them based on principles and guidelines for sustainable fisheries. Such policies can have positive or negative consequences for the marine ecosystem and biodiversity and need to be carefully considered for all stakeholders involved.

ACF is an advocate for sustainable fisheries to reduce the impacts of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fisheries. The governmental policy process for spearfishing will be completed in 2024.

Embassy Suites Quick Scan

At the request of the MinTINO, ACF’s marine conservation department performed a quick scan of the beach development by Embassy Suites on Aruba’s West coast. This quick scan of the marine environment was a key factor in halting the potential further destruction of an important marine system – including mangroves, seagrasses, and corals – for beach development.



Connection with nature is *never lost*, only forgotten.



CHAPTER 5

Learning & Outreach



LEARNING & OUTREACH

Overview

ACF reaches a diverse audience with its concept of ‘Conservation Education’: the process of influencing people’s attitudes, emotions, knowledge, and behaviors about nature and the environment. It goes beyond simply communicating biological or environmental facts and focuses on: Awareness, Issues, Critical thinking, Problem solving, Decision making, Leadership, Collaboration, and Thinking-Behaving-Acting Responsibly and Sustainably. Conservation Education initiatives aim to foster awareness, instill a sense of stewardship, and promote responsible behaviors within our community and our visitors.

ACF has a responsibility to reach out to and offer engaging learning opportunities to a diversity of audiences about the value of protected areas and the importance of Aruba’s ecosystems and biodiversity. By cultivating an informed and environmentally conscious society, ACF contributes to the long-term sustainability of its conservation efforts. ACF aims to deliver conservation education outcomes through lifelong learning, with programs for formal education, informal education, and corporate education.

Initiatives

Junior Ranger Camp

In April 2023 ACF organized another successful Junior Ranger Camp (JRC) during the school holiday. During the JRC 25 children enjoyed five intensive days of an experiential and educational program focusing on the conservation and preservation of nature and our cultural heritage. The JRC included daily morning hikes in our protected areas, field experiences at Dos Playa where the topic of sea turtles was presented by Turtugaruba Foundation, a sunset visit to Quadirikiri caves to learn about bat conservation, field visits to Bubali, Spaans Lagoen and Mangel Halto to learn about the wetland and mangrove ecosystems, a clean-up at Sasarawichi dunes to contribute to the conservation of our dunes, and an engaging workshop on geology to learn about Aruba’s geological history and different types of rocks and earth. Furthermore the JRC participants received lectures and presentations on marine life, sharks, birds, snakes and climate adaptation. The JRC program included two nights of camping at Cunucu Arikok, surrounded by cultural heritage such as the Cas di Torto (Adobe house) and Indian cave paintings. The Junior Rangers reflected back on their experiences and learnings in daily journals and the program concluded in a final presentation to all parents at the end of the week. This program was a transformational experience for the participants, and our mission is that they become true Nature Ambassadors after an immersive weeklong experience.



LEARNING & OUTREACH

Initiatives

Guest Lectures

Managers and Directors provide Guest Lectures and Presentations to share our conservation and sustainability message with a broad range of audiences. This helps ACF position herself as a conservation authority (expertise). In 2023 a total of 14 such presentations and lectures were given on topics ranging from nature conservation to regenerative tourism and eco-conscious messaging.

School projects support

Upon request, many parents, youths and children are provided with information to support them with their class presentations or practical projects. The requested information covers a wide variety of topics, such as: flora (general or specific species), fauna (Shoco, Warawara, Cascabel, Trupial, snakes, sharks, lizards, etc.), ecosystems, nature conservation, Parke Nacional Arikok, the work of a Ranger, and so forth. Most of these requests are addressed through email or interviews by different staff members within the organization, depending on the topic.

Presentations Educational Institutions

During the year ACF visited various educational institutions and covered topics such as: Flora, Fauna, Marine life, Special topics (e.g., Cas di Torto, Raton di anochi, Warawara, Cascabel)

Schools visited in 2023:

- Aruba Adventist Academy
- Cacique Macuarima School
- Colegio Conrado Coronel
- Colegio Cristo Rey
- Colegio Hilario Angela
- Colegio Laura Wernet Paskel
- Colegio Pastoor Kranwinkel
- Colegio Sagrado Curazon
- Colegio San Jose
- Colegio Santa Filomena Basis School
- Fatima College
- Graf Von Zinzendorf School
- Kudawecha Basis School
- M-Joy Childcare Center
- Mon Plaisir Basis School
- Pius X School
- Rayo di Solo Kleuterschool
- Schakkel College
- Skol Preparatorio Cacique Aterima
- Skol Preparatorio Kukwisa
- Washington Kleuterschool



LEARNING & OUTREACH

Initiatives

Boa dissection class

ACF’s Research and Conservation Manager provided Maria College MAVO with a practical workshop on the anatomy of the boa constrictor. The invasive boa that ACF collects over the island is humanely euthanized and these were used for this demonstration purpose while also recording all relevant data on the specimens.

Internal and external conservation workshops

During 2023 ACF hosted a total of 6 workshops aimed at enhancing both internal and local stakeholder capacity for conservation and monitoring. These workshops were:

- Bird monitoring workshop
- Tern monitoring workshop
- Coral monitoring workshop GCRMN (2x)
- Coral disease monitoring workshop (2x)

DCNA Outreach Working Group (OWG)

ACF participated in monthly meetings with the OWG of the DCNA. In these meetings, representatives of the education staff of each protected area management organization discussed collaborative projects (The Big Live Nature Quiz (BLNQ), BioNews Kids, Education Standards) as well as provided support, or functioned as sounding board for each other for individual programs of the respective islands.

The BioNews Kids is reviewed by the group and once produced and delivered locally, ACF staff distributes them to all elementary schools (grades 4-6).

BLNQ is a live interactive quiz where participating schools from all islands can participate and compete digitally. While this activity is organized fully by DCNA, ACF facilitates communication with the local schools to increase participation.

In July 2023 the OWG also met in person in Saba for an educational workshop as part of a consultation to develop an Education Strategy and Standards program. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the final document of this consultation is to be completed in 2024.

LEARNING & OUTREACH

Initiatives

DCNA Nature-based Solution Symposium

ACF collaborated with the Secretariat of DCNA to organize a Nature-based Solution (NBS) Symposium on Aruba. The symposium on NBS for Ecosystem Restoration and Conservation on the Dutch Caribbean islands. The event, which took place on November 10th, 2023 at the UA, provided a platform for the exchange of knowledge and experiences in integrating innovative solutions to preserve and rejuvenate the diverse ecosystems of the Dutch Caribbean.

The presenters at the symposium were amongst other Charles Karangwa, Global Head of NBS of International Union for Conservation of Nature, Natasha Silva, CCO of ACF, Arxen Alders, Senior consultant at Grant Thornton Bonaire, Lawrence Jones-Walters, Director of the Knowledge Base Programme for Nature Inclusive and Landscape at WUR, Jacintha Ellers, Professor of Evolutionary Ecology at VU, and Ursell Arends, MinTINO of Aruba.

In attendance were distinguished guests of honor, including as Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix, Patroness of the DCNA. The event was attended by stakeholders from Dutch Caribbean

islands, and was open for virtual attendance, attracted a global audience eager to learn more about NBS.

Buki di Pret

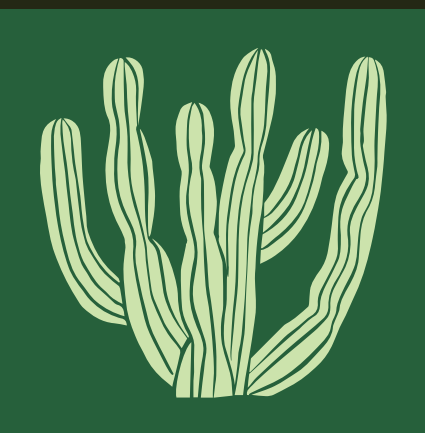
As part of the national ‘Buki di Pret’, a booklet full of activities to engage children during summer holiday, ACF offered four different experiences: Two hikes in Parke Nacional Arikok (Miralamar & Cunucu Arikok), a mangrove experience at Mangel Halto, and a bird watching experience at Saliña Bubali. There was an average of 20 participants at each activity.

Conservation Internships

ACF offers several internship positions throughout the year. The conservation departments supervised a total of eight interns in 2023 with topics related to local flora, biodiversity gardens, Shoco, and Coral reef monitoring (as part of Turning the Tide project).



Raising a voice for the land that raised us.



CHAPTER 6

Transformational Nature Experience Operations

ANNUAL REPORT

2023





TRANSFORMATIONAL NATURE EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS

Overview

The main objective of the Transformational Nature Experience Operations Department is to encourage high-value, low-impact visitor activity by locals and tourists that visit the park to underscore the ACF's conservation efforts and promote sustainable behavior.

The department is tasked with innovating recreational and educational excursions and services while co-creating with stakeholders that include the protected areas in their services to achieve the transition to sustainable and transformational offerings.

Facilitating meaningful, high-quality, and low-impact visitor experiences that, in turn, contribute to increased appreciation and stewardship of our natural and cultural heritage and our protected areas.

The department facilitated different experiences throughout the year for visitors to connect and engage with nature. An overview of the different experiences provided in 2023:

Nature Experiences

Private Guided Hikes

The most prominent experience offered was the Private Guided Hikes for private groups. These experiences were tailored services for specific groups booked through destination management services (DMS), catering to companies, individual tourists, and residents to explore and learn about Aruba's nature guided by the knowledgeable Rangers of ACF. In 2023, a total of 83 Private Guided Hikes were provided to resident groups, and 53 Private Guided Hikes were provided to non-resident groups.

TRANSFORMATIONAL NATURE EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS

Nature Experiences

Programmed Guided Hikes

The Programmed Guided Hikes mostly facilitated the residents’ exploration of Aruba’s nature. In 2023, a total of five (5) Rough Hikes were organized, with an average of **20** participants per hike. The Rough Hikes were developed for participants to explore long-range hiking trails with distances ranging from 6 km up to 12 km during the early morning hours. Furthermore, a total of five (5) Full Moon Hikes were organized, with an average of **20** participants per hike.

The Full Moon Hikes were developed for participants to explore nature at night guided by the light of the full moon.

Thematic Guided Hikes

In February 2023, one Thematic Guided Hike was organized in connection with the launch of the ObsIdentify App – an app created by the the DCNA that assists with the identification of flora and fauna across the six Dutch Caribbean Islands.

ACF organized a complimentary session where the community could sign up to be educated on the use of the app at Parke Nacional Arikok, where approximately **25** participants installed the app. The session was followed by a guided hike by ACF’s Research & Conservation Manager, together with other rangers, to put the app into practice.

Movie Night in Nature

Movie Night in Nature is an event developed for visitors to connect and learn with the natural world. In 2023, one movie night was organized to pilot a new set-up that enhanced the visitor experience.

During the Movie Night in Nature, an average of **50** visitors attended to watch a nature documentary.





TRANSFORMATIONAL NATURE EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS

Nature Experiences

Mountain Bike Events

Mountain bike events were organized throughout the year by various cycling clubs. The popularity of this sport has increased in numbers of participants and number of competitions held. The cycling clubs that organized activities were amongst others: Tri-Bike, Trail Bashers, Gears & Beers Cycling Club, Crash Test Dummies Cycling Club, Cunucu Watapana Organization, Parceros Trail Club, and Duo Xtreme.

Trail Running Events

Trail running events were organized by “Stichting Ultimate Challenge”, which organized four different events in the protected areas of the park.

Educational Excursions

An integral aspect of the services offered by ACF are educational excursions, aimed at fostering a deep sense of stewardship and to educate our community, especially the younger generations, on the importance of our natural and cultural heritage.

During the year, various educational institutions and community groups visited the park. Below is an overview:

- American University School of Medicine Aruba
 - Aruba Adventist Academy
 - Colegio Laura Wernet Paskel
 - Colegio San Antonio
 - Colegio San Jose
 - De Schakkel Groep 3 & 4
 - Educampus Aruba
 - Faith Revival School
 - Fatima College
 - FAVI
 - Flor di Aloe 60+
- Graf Von Zinzendorf School
 - Hospi Bondi Camp
 - Mon Plaisir Basis School
 - Montessori Schoolhouse
 - Prinses Amalia Basis School
 - Respaldo
 - Scol Paso Pa Futuro
 - Skol di Arte Aruba
 - Skol Primaria Kudawecha
 - Stichting Ambiente Feliz
 - YMCA



TRANSFORMATIONAL NATURE EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS

Visitor Experiences

In 2023, adjustments were introduced to the conservation pass structure for Parke Nacional Arikok. The adjustments were related to an increase in the fees and the introduction of new categories. The adjustment in the fee structure was amended after nine years to improve the financial position. The increase was related to the fee of the non-residents, tour operators, and the annual passes. The conservation day pass for residents remained the same, and children under the age of 17 remained free.

Two additional categories were introduced in the conservation pass structure: a special fee for resident visitors over the age of 60 to stimulate active aging, as a request from the MinTINO.

The second category was the introduction of a non-motorized fee for tour operators. This was to incentivize tour operators to develop low-impact (non-motorized) tours.

For inclusion and accessibility of the local community to Parke Nacional Arikok, visitors were allowed to enter the park for free on Flag and Anthem Day by presenting a valid local identification card.



TRANSFORMATIONAL NATURE EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS

Visitor Experiences

F&B Services Operations

To facilitate refreshments for visitors of Parke Nacional Arikok, a coffee shop is conveniently located at the Visitor Center in San Fuego. This coffee shop has a limited variety of beverages and snacks for visitors to purchase as they access the park. In 2023, an inventory adjustment was conducted to remove items that were not selling, and new items were introduced. A revision in cost calculation was conducted to maintain the revenue-to-cost ratio up to par.

Outdoor Nature Venues

The renting of the outdoor venues remained a highlight in 2023. The various spaces that are available for rent for events are the native botanical garden “Hofi Shon Shoco” and the Gold Mill Ruins at Spaans Lagoen. The requests for renting these spaces are increasing in popularity, seeing that they offer a unique experience for visitors to be able to experience an array of different events, such as organized breakfasts, brunches, and/or birthday parties amidst nature.

Visitor Management

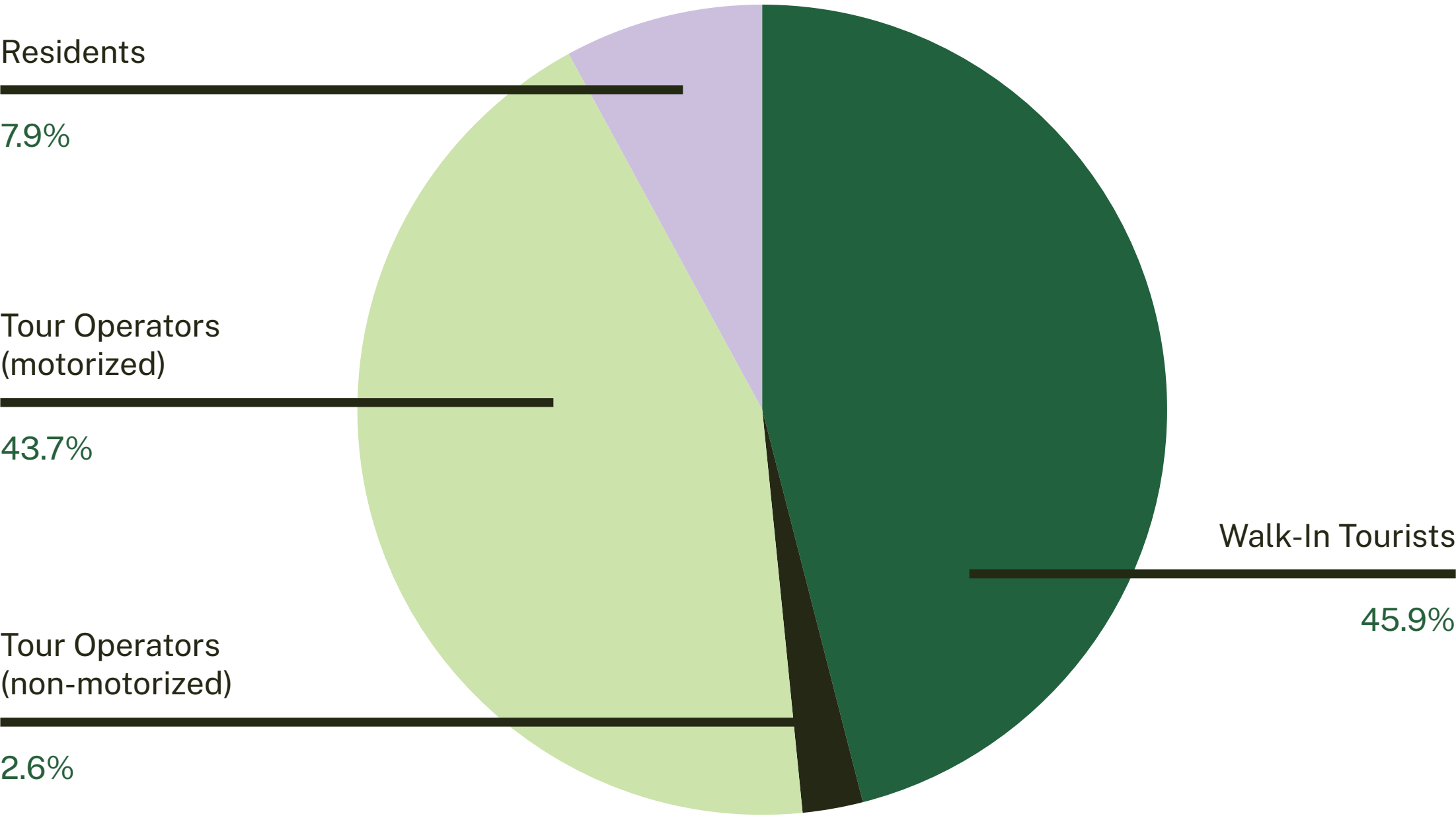
For the conservation of nature, it is important to manage and mitigate the impacts of visitors in protected areas. To accomplish this, different actions were taken, including the physical presence of Rangers at different posts, the installation of rules and regulations signs, and the introduction of borders for the protected areas. During the year, Rangers were present at the five posts inside Parke Nacional Arikok, while regular controlling took place at the protected areas scattered around the island and Parke Marino Aruba.

TRANSFORMATIONAL NATURE EXPERIENCE OPERATIONS

Visitor Results

Conservation *Day* Pass

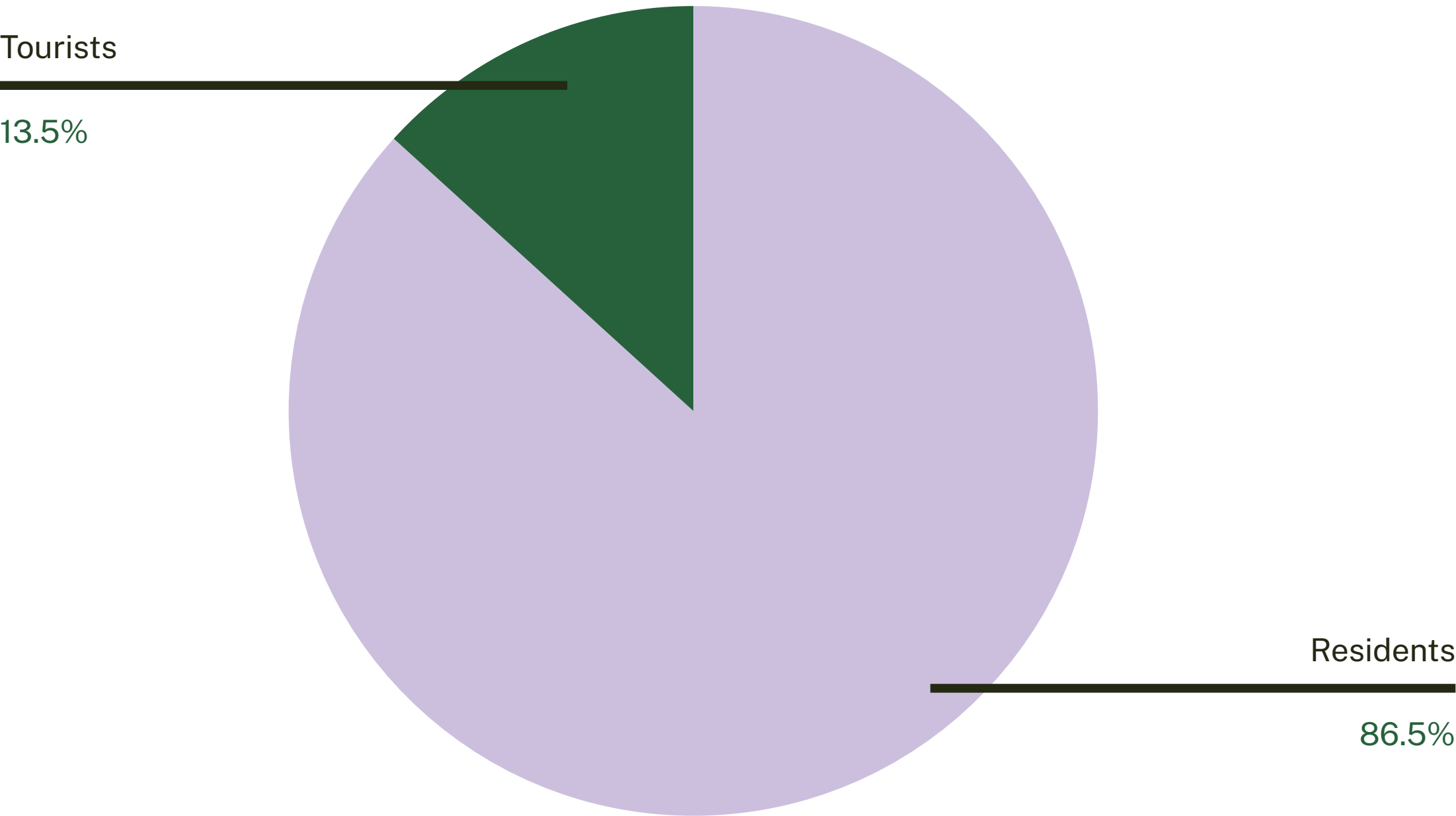
	2023	2022	Increase	%
Walk-In Tourists	76,820	86,111	-9,291	-10.8%
Tour Operators (motorized)	73,107	64,591	12,798	19.8%
Tour Operators (non-motorized)	4,282	-	-	-
Residents	13,149	16,651	-3,502	-21.0%
Total	167,358	167,353	5	0.0%



Graph: Conservation Day Pass 2023

Conservation *Annual* Pass

	2023	2022	Increase	%
Residents	944	1,164	-220	-18.9%
Tourists	147	313	-167	-53.3%
Total	1,091	1,477	-387	-26.2%



Graph: Conservation Annual Pass 2023





Home to *more* than meets the eye.



CHAPTER 7

Business Development, Marketing & Communications

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Overview

The Communications & Marketing department is responsible for ensuring maximum and effective reach across different platforms and to various audiences, raising awareness, educating, engaging, creating, and maintaining a brand image with the ultimate goal of influencing behavioral changes to transform locals and visitors alike into custodians of nature.

In 2023, the goal was to continue positioning ACF as an independent conservation management organization responsible for terrestrial and MPAs on the island following the launch of ACF's MACS 2023–2032 through effective storytelling to both local and international stakeholders.

Throughout the year, curated press announcements, social media content, stakeholder communication, and engagement facilitated a better understanding of how the organization executed conservation projects and programs while simultaneously enabling visitors to engage with nature through transformational experiences.

To support the positioning of ACF as an independent conservation management organization, the department was tasked with rebranding the organization to move away from the traditional park management organization it has been known for over the past 20 years. With that, the department embarked on a rebranding assignment and concluded with a new name, new logo, new visual identity, and new tone of voice in November 2023.



Branding & Marketing

Brand Management

ACF embarked on a rebranding exercise to develop a new brand identity, which included a new name, logo, visual identity, and tone of voice for the organization. The process commenced in April 2023 with RFPs sent out to various agencies in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe, and following a transparent pitching process, ACF decided on working with How&How Studio, based out of London and Los Angeles, to lead the rebranding of the organization. This rebranding process commenced in June 2023 and was finalized in November 2023.

This entailed a new name, logo, brand book, tone of voice guideline, and digital and print asset templates to be implemented once the brand was launched in 2024.

From the initiation of the project to completion, the entire process was inclusive. It was important that all associates were included in the process so as to own the change we were embarking on. The How&How team flew to Aruba to immerse themselves in the organization, connect with the people, and get to know Aruba’s nature up close. The week included workshop sessions with the team survey among the associates to understand their perception of Aruba’s nature and the role of the organization.

Marketing Content Development

From a marketing and content development standpoint, the focus in the past year was on being more active and creating more engaging content on our social channels, specifically on Facebook, which is the platform on which we have the most following and engagement. With that, we developed a monthly content calendar that allowed us to create content that was inspiring and educational to make sure our followers connected with nature.

In total, 84 different posts were published, ranging from ecosystems and biodiversity education, transformational nature experience events, global nature celebrations, participation on panels and symposiums, special visits, restoration work, and volunteering opportunities, to name a few.



Branding & Marketing

Channel Management

Throughout the year, different channels were used to communicate with the community, partners, and stakeholders. It was imperative to maximize communications to ensure people who follow our platforms stayed abreast with what our organization was doing.

The channels used in 2023 included Social Media Platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn), Email (newsletters and promotional emails), Traditional Media (TV and print media), Digital Advertising (Social Media advertising), Public Relations (Press releases, press conferences, media outreach to journalists, Events (workshops, webinars), Community Engagement (workshops, information evenings, stakeholder sessions), Employee Communications (WhatsApp channel, Memo, Information evenings).

In 2023, these were the main channels used to reach and engage with different audiences, both internal and external.

Social Media Performance 2023



Facebook

Start: 16,541
End: 17,355

(Increase of **841** for the year 2023)



LinkedIn

Start: 221
End: 491

(Increase of **270** for the year 2023)



Instagram*

Start: 1,625
End: 1,778

(Increase of **153** for the year 2023)
*not very active, largely due to inaccessibility to the platform.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Communications

Stakeholder Communication

Communicating with our stakeholders is essential in ensuring support for the conservation work we do as an organization. From the communications department, it was imperative to communicate clearly with stakeholders who use Parke Nacional Arikok as a touring ground for their customers.

In 2023, we ensured they stayed abreast with information on ACF's role, Conservation Fee Structure, and any impact on operation hours for events taking place within the protected nature area, such as closure in connection with the visit of King Willem, Queen Maxima and Princess Amalia in early 2023, or any closure due to internal workshops held for associates of ACF.

Additionally, valuable operational information and reminders of rules & regulations were also shared and reiterated with stakeholders.

Internal Communications

In the past year, we honed in on internal communications for associates of ACF. With that, we proactively communicated all events, happenings, news, programs, projects, appointments, and vacancies before these were communicated externally. All associates were kept informed through WhatsApp group chat, memos, emails, and 'Atardi Informativo den Hofi Shon Shoco', which was organized in September of 2023. This session is a collaboration between the Executive Board, HR, and the Communications team.

Community Education

The Communications & Marketing department organized five sessions for the community to learn more about various aspects of conservation work that ACF is engaged in.

In February 2023, the DCNA launched the ObsIdentify App, which assists with the identification of flora and fauna across the six Dutch Caribbean Islands. ACF organized a complimentary session where the community could sign up to be educated on the use of the app. The session was followed by a guided hike by ACF's Research & Conservation Manager, together with other rangers, to put the app into practice.

In May 2023, ACF, in collaboration with Directie Natuur en Milieu (DNM), organized two public information evenings to educate the community of Aruba on the SCTLD that was confirmed in Aruba. These information evenings were followed by two workshops where interested snorkelers and divers could be trained to identify and report any sightings of SCTLD around Aruba.

As part of 'Turning the Tide', an EU RESEMBID-funded coral and mangrove restoration project led by ACF and partners UA, ScubbleBubbles Foundation and WUR, we organized two different information evenings to educate the public on the work needed to restore Aruba's marine ecosystem and keep the community up to date on how the project was going. These information evenings took place in August and October and saw presentations by the local partners, and, in addition, included presentations by the Mars Coral Reef Restoration Team based out of Australia who were on the island in August to assist with the installation of Mars Assisted Reef Restoration System (MARRS), and ReefSystem who were on the island in October from The Netherlands to install the Modular Sealife System (MOSES) as part of this project. Participants in these information evenings included the Aruba community, marine environment enthusiasts, students, and nature NGOs.

MACS 2023 – 2032

In June 2023, ACF officially introduced its MACS 2023–2032 to the public of Aruba by publishing the roadmap and making it accessible to everyone.

To mark this launch, ACF organized a private session with all nature stakeholders on the island so as to introduce the MACS and walk stakeholders through what this entailed for the organization, which has repositioned itself from a park management organization to a conservation management organization.

Crisis Management

Together with DNM, ACF developed a phased communications strategy as part of the national SOP on SCTLD disease in Aruba. This included the hosting of a press conference, press release announcement, interview opportunities, information nights, workshops, and an informative video to inform the community on how to best avoid the further spread of the disease.

Partnerships

As part of ACF's strategy to form strategic partnerships, ACF closely collaborated with the ATA on the newly identified eco-conscious niche market. To further share knowledge and drive awareness on the importance of nature to the tourism economic pillar, the team at ACF delivered a presentation titled "The Path to Eco-Conscious" during a Niche workshop hosted for A.T.A. associates that was followed by a virtual workshop for the A.T.A. team and global PR agencies in how to deliver content that speaks to the eco-conscious traveler. In addition, ACF was invited to participate in a panel at A.T.A.'s conference called 'Let's Talk Niche'.

These participations gave ACF a unique opportunity to again position the organization as an independent foundation and position the foundation as a conservation authority.



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Communications

Corporate Events

In 2023, the winners of the 2023 Nature Photography Competition with the theme of native flowers were announced. Prior to the announcement, all judges were invited to judge the 25 photographs that were submitted as part of the competition. In September 2023, ACF, together with partner Post Aruba N.V., organized an evening to unveil the winners. The guests invited included all photographers, their families, judges, partners at Post Aruba N.V., and the MinTINO, who unveiled the winners.

Corporate Positioning

From a communication perspective, we established just how much more education and awareness is necessary to understand the basics of nature, its services, and why we need to protect, preserve, and restore it. We’ve learned that our communication needs to be simple and explanatory so that people can understand and emotionally connect to nature.

We also learned that we need to be more proactive with communicating if we’re going to position ourselves as the conservation authority. There was so much work going on behind the scenes, and sometimes, we didn’t tell these stories. This was largely due to the department being manned by one person. It is essential that we expand the department to focus more on digital marketing and creatively tell our stories through digital channels.

Corporate Communications

It was important that the department focus on carefully positioning the executive board and expert field managers when it comes to the topic of conservation. With that, we focused on interview opportunities, profiling, and panel participation for Tyson Lopez, CEO; Natasha Silva, CCO; Sietske van der Wal, Interim Marine Park Manager; and Giancarlo Nunes, Research Conservation Manager.

It was important that as the executive team and management team, the experts were positioned externally for credibility, influence, building trust, and managing reputation.

Communications

Media Relations

It was imperative that we further developed our relationship with the local press to speak about the conservation of nature and threats to nature. In 2023, we distributed a total of seven press releases and engaged in 15 different interviews with both local and international media on the topic of nature conservation and transformational nature experiences.

Press release distributed:

- Announcement of the EU’s RESEMBID funded ‘Turning the Tide’ project (March)
- Confirmation of SCTLD in Aruba – Collaboration with DNM (May)
- Big Live Nature Quiz is back announcement (May)
- Launching and publishing of the MACS 2023-2032 (June)
- ACF announces new CEO, Tyson Lopez (July)
- Ranger Appreciation Week Celebration (August)
- Nature Photography Competition Announcement (September)
- Plans to reintroduce the ‘Lora’ into Aruba’s nature (November)

Interviews:

- Interview with Norman Kuiperi during Dutch Royal Family Visit (January)
- Launch of ‘Turning the Tide’ with Sietske van der Wal and Giancarlo Nunes on Nos Mainta, Telearuba (March)
- ‘Turning the Tide’, coral & mangrove restoration with Sietske van der Wal and Giancarlo Nunes on EA News (March)
- Interview on ACF and its conservation work with Natasha Silva and The Telegraph (March)
- Restoration work Mangel Halto with Tyson Lopez on Telearuba (May)
- SCTLD on going in Aruba with Sietske van der Wal on Telearuba (May)
- SCTLD on going in Aruba with Sietske van der Wal on Nos Mainta (May)
- Aruba Burrowing Owl podcast interview on the ABC’s The Science Show with Giancarlo Nunes (June)
- Appointment of Tyson Lopez as new CEO with Telearuba (July)
- Current status of mangroves in Aruba with Giancarlo Nunes on EA News (July)
- Update on ‘Turning the Tide’ with Sietske van der Wal on site at volunteer base with Telearuba (August)
- ‘Turning the Tide’ interview with Sietske van der Wal on Caribisch Netwerk (September)
- Visitor Amenities with Tyson Lopez on 24ora (October)

In addition, it was important that we started with the development of our relationship with the international media. This was done through our close collaboration with the A.T.A., who consistently sent media from different markets and content creators through to the National Park. Where possible, we scheduled welcome and sit-down sessions with the media, conducted tours of the Center of Cultivation, and provided interview opportunities to ensure that nature and the conservation aspects were also included in future coverage of the island.





The *mouthpiece* of mother nature.



CHAPTER 8

People & Organizational Culture



PEOPLE & ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Overview

With the evolution of the organization toward its 2032 Aspirations, the Human Resources (HR) department must also transition its human capital to develop a high-performing conservation management-focused organization, reflecting an organization that is capable, resilient, agile, and collaborative in sustainable organizational performance. The HR department is responsible for high employee empowerment and is led by aligned leadership.

With the introduction of the MACS in 2023, the HR department was tasked with commencing the transitioning of its human capital to a modern conservation management organization based on good governance principles and creating a workplace with proud, committed, passionate employees who are inspired to excel in conservation management.

Activities & Trainings

Overview 2023

January 2023

Protocol & Etiquette Training

In connection with the royal visit of King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima to the ACF, employees that were part of the program and interacted with the royals received a special training on protocol and etiquette.

February 2023

Safety Inspection Checklist

With the addition of two vehicles to the inventory of the organization, with the purpose of creating more visibility in the different areas overseen by ACF, the HR department launched a “Safety Inspection Checklist” to ensure the safe operation of the vehicles and proper maintenance.

March 2023

Launch of ObsIdentify App

An educational hike was organized for all ACF employees to provide information on the 16 protected areas managed by the park, and the ObsIdentify App was launched amongst employees to teach them how to use the app and the importance thereof.

June 2023

Introduction of MACS to employees

An introduction and participatory session of the MACS was organized for the employees to receive their feedback on the mission, vision, and aspirations for the coming years.

July 2023

Customer Service Training

As part of the organization’s goal to offer authentic, unique, and hassle-free sustainable nature experiences to visitors, the experiential services must be properly prepared and delivered. Therefore, employees were enrolled in a customer training course to elevate their skills.

World Ranger Day Celebration

In connection with “World Ranger Day” Celebration, the HR unit organized a “Ranger Appreciation Week”, which included different activities such as a hike, bowling competition, scavenger hunt, and a dinner.

September 2023

Launch “Atardi Informativo” sessions

‘Atardi Informativo’, or Associate Engagement Session, is a newly launched session that occurs on a quarterly basis to keep associates informed on all happenings within the organization, including business and conservation updates.

October 2023

CPR & First Aid

The safety of our employees and visitors is very important to the organization. Therefore, employees completed their Biannual CPR & First Aid recertification training.

December 2023

20th Year Anniversary of ACF & End of the Year Celebration

December marked the ACF’s 20th anniversary of the organization, and this was celebrated in combination with the Year End employee celebration. On this occasion, 14 employees were recognized for their 20th year of service.



PEOPLE & ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Hiring & Recruitment

During COVID, the organization had to downsize, and therefore, the CEO position had been vacant since November 2020. With the finalization and introduction of the MACS, which provided a clear path as to the organization’s ten-year plan, the hiring of a CEO became crucial.

The recruiting and hiring process for the CEO position was guided by a third party in close consultation with the Supervisory Board, who together with the Human Resources Unit were tasked with filling this position. After an extensive and rigorous recruiting process, and careful review of the applications, the position which was open to both internal and external candidates, resulted in an internal promotion of Tyson Lopez to CEO of the ACF.

As the foundation continues to evolve, more employees are required to staff the organization properly. In order to keep the 16 areas overseen by the organization maintained, the Government of Aruba assigned four contractors, each of whom consists of three employees, to help keep the areas clean.

During the month of August, with the approval of the new organizational structure by the Supervisory Board, ACF opened four positions, which consisted of three Nature Experience Rangers and one Visitor Experience Ranger. Furthermore, to assist with the introduction of the new branding of the organization, in December, a vacancy was opened for a Marketing & Communications Specialist, and the position was filled.

As the organization continues to grow and evolve to achieve the aspirations set forth, the HR department will play a crucial role in hiring and recruiting top-talent employees.



Employee Snapshot 2023

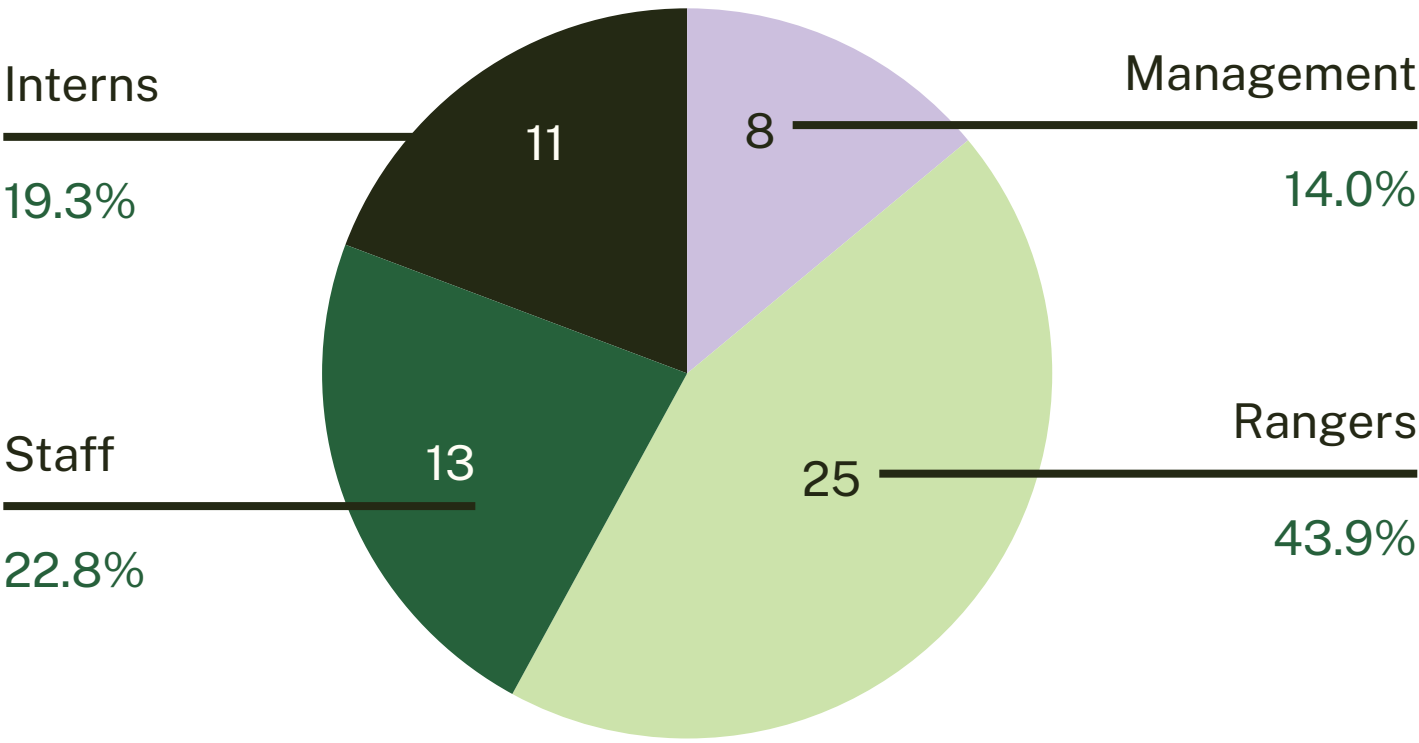
Management Team

Person	Position
Tyson Lopez	Chief Executive Officer
Natasha Silva	Chief Conservation Officer
Avonda Powell	People & Organizational Culture
Randolph Ponson	Finance
Edeline Berg	Business Development*, Marketing & Communications
Giancarlo Nunes	Research & Consultancy
Sietske van der Wal	Marine Conservation Management & Operations
-	Transformational Nature Experience Operations*
Pedro Gomes	Operations

*Vacant as per year-end December 31st, 2023

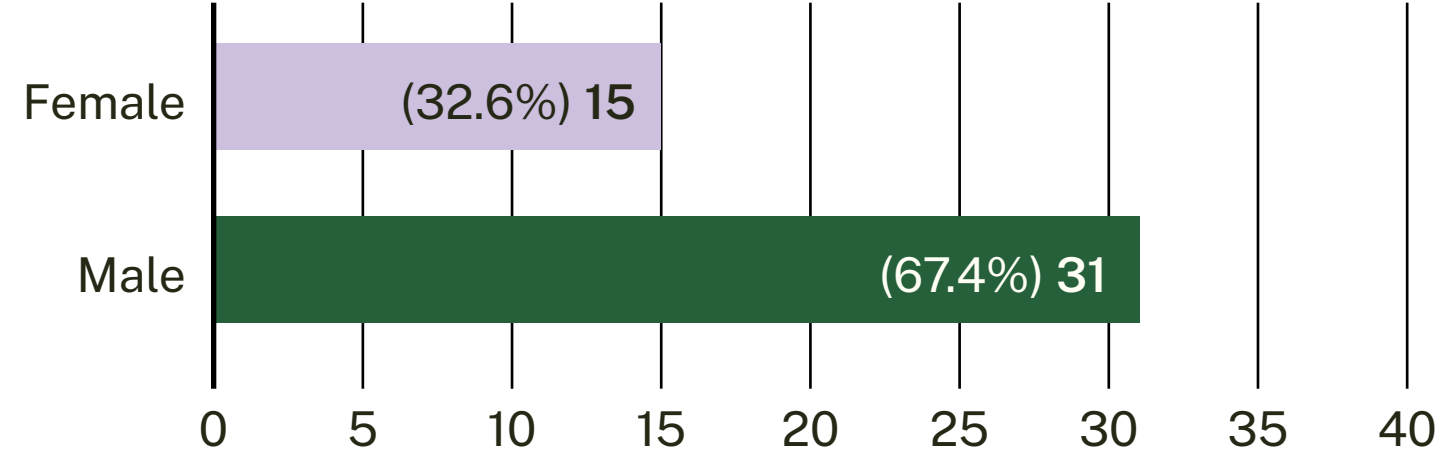
Types of Employees

	2022	2023*	+/-
Management	9	8	-1
Staff	12	13	+1
Rangers	20	25	+5
Interns	4	11	+7

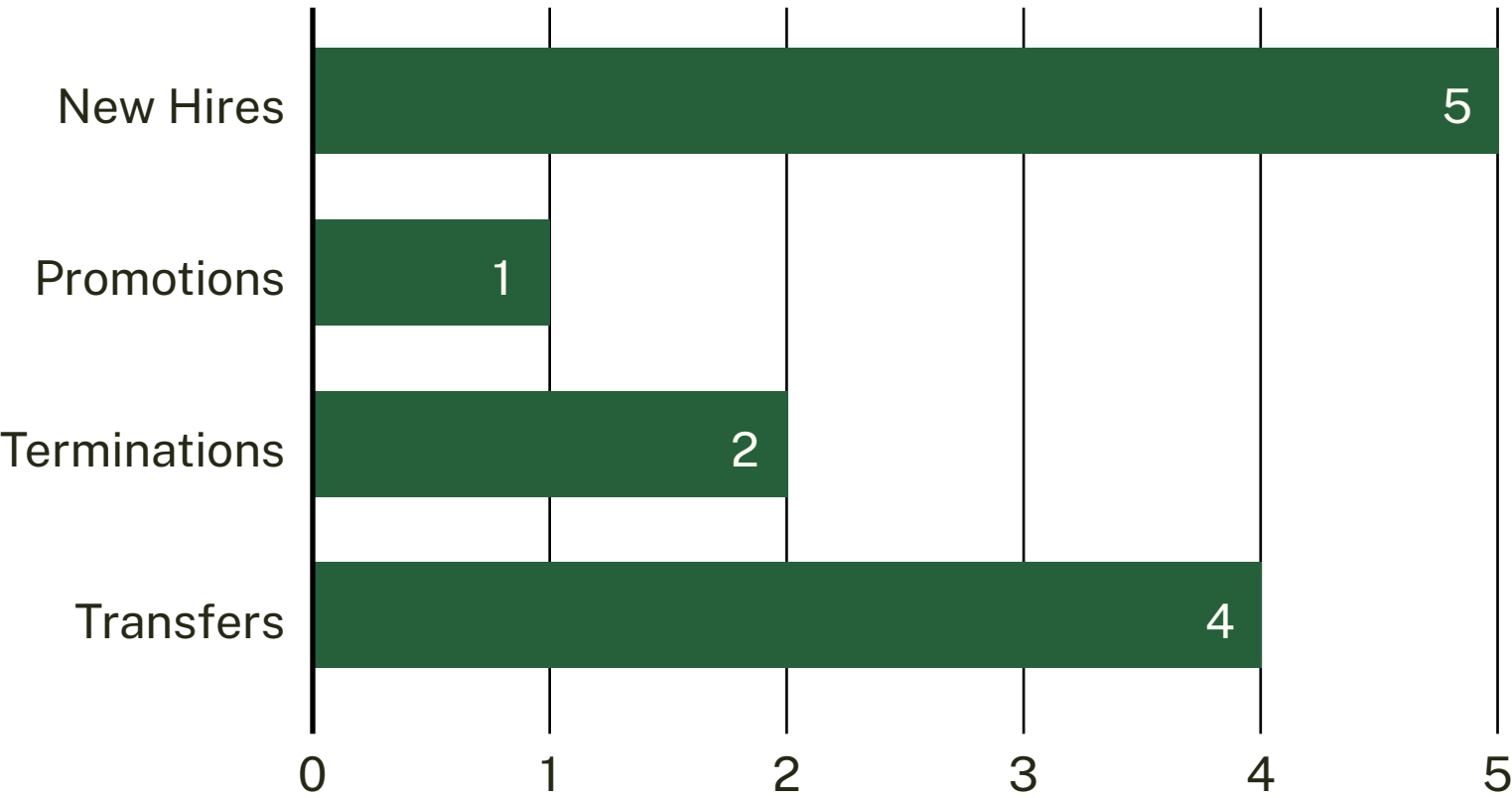


*Graph: Type of Employees in 2023

Gender of Employees



Personal Actions





Biodiversity loss is difficult to see, but *impossible to miss*.



CHAPTER 9

Corporate Support Services



CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

Overview

The core duties of the Corporate Services Unit are servicing and maintaining the current Foundation’s assets and infrastructure to ensure optimal maintenance and asset utilization.

The many challenges faced by the unit are that the infrastructure in the protected areas is outdated and lacks maintenance, which in turn leads to safety and accessibility issues and overall does not fit the enhanced sustainable experiential visitor services and nature conservation programs.

As the organization works toward its aspirations, the modernization of critical infrastructure assets in the managed protected areas will be required, and emphasis will be placed on visitor services, facilities, and trails to meet the needs of park visitors.



CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

Management

Infrastructure Management

In 2023, comprehensive first-line maintenance was performed across our buildings. This included applying a fresh coat of paint to most offices, pressure washing building decks, and thoroughly cleaning roofs to eliminate mold. Additionally, minor tile repairs were carried out on both the visitor center and administration building to ensure their upkeep. Furthermore, at the beginning of the year, new vehicles were also acquired to support the foundation’s diverse operational needs.

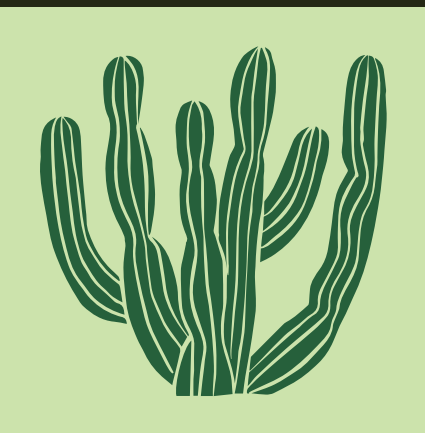
Asset Management

The dirt roads within Parke Nacional Arikok were maintained on a regular schedule, specifically the routes from Boca Prins to Vader Piet, Boca Prins Dunes to Dos Playa, and Arikok to Conchi. To address illegal entry points into the park from Daimari, borders were reinforced. Additionally, boulders were strategically placed at Rooi Taki, Rooi Bringamosa, and Rooi Lamunchi to restrict vehicle access to the salinas.

At Hofi Fontein, fencing and signage were installed to ensure visitor safety due to the hazardous condition of the abandoned house. For visitor convenience, portable toilets were installed at Conchi, Quadirikiri, and Fontein within Parke Nacional Arikok. In collaboration with ATA, the palapas and gazebo at Mangel Halto were refurbished to provide shade for visitors.



The *mouthpiece* of mother nature.



CHAPTER 10

Financial Overview



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Overview

The main objective of our Finance Department is to maintain a healthy, sustainable financial position now and in the future by preparing a realistic OpEx and CapEx budget and ensuring these are followed accordingly. Even though profit is not the main objective of the ACF, it is imperative for the Financial Department to promote positive financial results to build reserves for the future.

An integral part of the responsibilities of the Finance Department is to keep proper track of and reporting of the financial records of the foundation. Furthermore, financial records and reports of the earmarked projects should be kept, as per the donator’s requirements and reporting format.

Financial Reporting

In 2022 and continuing in 2023, management’s financial report was revamped.

This change was necessary to make the financial information and results more comprehensive and transparent. Furthermore, the changes were necessary to differentiate as much as possible the expenses related to conservation, research, and outreach activities from the administrative and other operational expenses. On the management financial reporting side, in addition to the revenues, costs, and expenses, other useful information was incorporated in the same report.

Such changes included mentioning expenditures on projects in progress and projects capitalized, the balance of the several special purpose funds, and showing the restricted and non-restricted cash.

Budgeting

The budgeting process was inclusive, with the involvement and input of each department manager, and more detailed information was provided. This is to ensure a more realistic budget and create awareness amongst the managers on proper spending. The budget assumptions also assist in guiding the operational activities that need to be fulfilled throughout the year.

Financial Results 2023

Financial Statement (x Afl. 1000)								
	2023	% of Rev		2022	% of Rev		VAR	% incr/-decr
3rd parties contribution	3,725	49.7%		2,975	52.2%		750	25.2%
In-house	3,774	50.3%		2,723	47.8%		1,052	38.6%
Total Revenue	7,499	100.0%		5,698	100.0%		1,801	31.6%
Payroll & personnel	3,267	43.6%		3,236	56.8%		32	1.0%
Administration & Operating	1,423	19.0%		1,368	24.0%		56	4.1%
Total Operating Expenses	4,691	62.5%		4,603	80.8%		87	1.9%
Control & Management Conservation Areas	119	1.6%		16	0.3%		103	641.1%
Conservation & Research	722	9.6%		41	0.7%		682	1681.9%
Learning & Outreach	8	0.1%		29	0.5%		-21	-72.5%
TTL CONSERVATION RELATED	849	11.3%		85	1.5%		939	1102.2%
EBITDA	1,959	26.1%		1,009	17.7%		1,791	177.4%
Total Non-Operating Expenses	-7	-0.1%		660	11.6%		-667	-101.1%
Results Before Tax	1,966	26.2%		334	5.9%		1,632	489.1%

In 2023, there was a positive net result of Afl. 1.97M, while the result for 2022 was Afl. 333.8K.

The main reason for the positive result in 2023 was the increase of the overall revenue, which consisted of 3rd parties’ contribution (Subsidy and Donations) and self-generated revenue (Entrance, Food & Beverage, and other activities).

Third parties’ contribution

A donation of Afl. 508K was obtained for the start of the earmarked project ‘Turning the Tide’ (part of the EU RESEMBID) restoration of coral reefs and mangroves.

This project will be completed at the end of 2024 and will cost approximately Afl. 1.4M when concluded.





FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Self-Generated Revenues

In 2023 compared to 2022, the revenue generated by the entrance fee increased with Afl 1,017K. The biggest contributing factor to the increase in 2023 was the change in the day pass conservation fee. After several years of maintaining the same conservation pass fee, the price for tourist was increased in 2023. The price for walk-in tourists was changed from Afl. 19.25 to Afl. 26.25 and, for tour operators from an average price of Afl. 14.80 to Afl. 19.25. This price increase generated an additional income of Afl. 845K.

When comparing the 2023 numbers to 2022, the local visitors decreased by 3,502 visitors, and annual passes decreased by 2,339, however, tourists visiting the park increased by 3,507. Nevertheless, the change in the number of visitors in 2023, still resulted in an increase of Afl 172K due to price increase implemented.

Conservation *Day* Pass

Visitors	2023	2022	Increase	%’s
Tour Operators	1,464,847	1,151,910	312,937	27.2%
Walk-in’s	2,006,839	1,284,081	722,758	56.3%
TTL Tourist	3,471,685	2,435,991	1,035,695	42.5%
Local	65,690	81,580	-15,890	-19.5%
Total Visitors	3,537,375	2,517,571	1,019,805	40.5%

Conservation *Annual* Pass

Visitors	2023	2022	Increase	%’s
Tourist	12,775	16,409	-3,634	-22.1%
Locals	39,047	37,752	1,295	3.4%
Total Visitors	51,822	54,160	-2,339	-4.3%



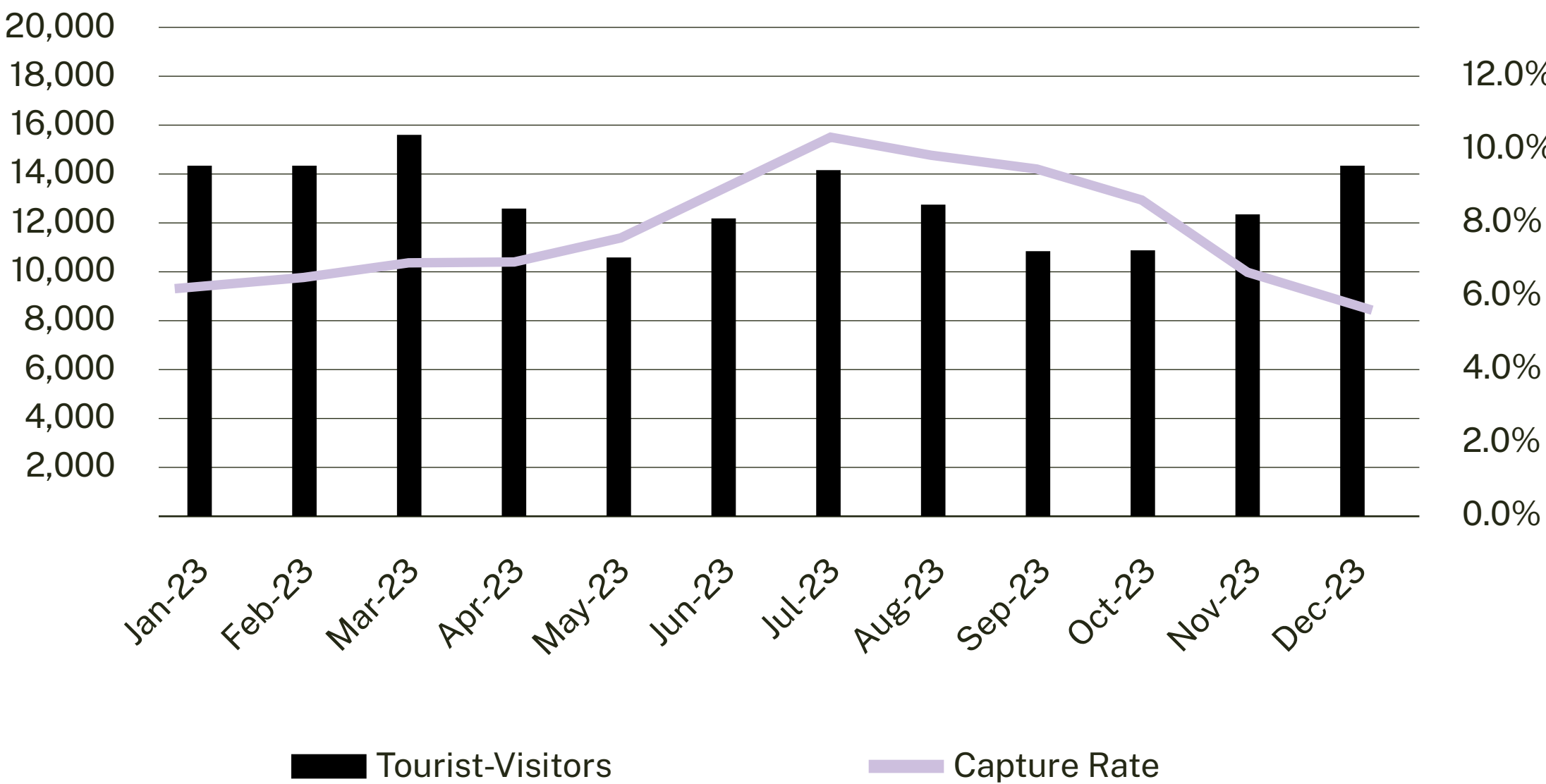
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Self-Generated Revenues

The average capture rate in 2023 was 7.5%, whereby the highest-performing month was July at 10.4%, and the lowest-performing month was December with a capture rate of 5.7%. Furthermore, the data revealed that non-local visitors showed a lower capture rate during the high-season months.

The target for the coming years is to spread out the number of visitors per month throughout the year, keeping in mind the carrying capacity of the different areas.

Visitors & Capture Rate 2023



Expenses and Reserves

Operational Expenses

The direct payroll expenses, taxes, and benefits had an increase of Afl. 160K due to an increase in Full-time Employees from 38.4 in 2022 to 42.2 in 2023. Additionally, an overall cost of living adjustment was made on the wages. This was compensated by payroll costs allocated to the ‘Turning the Tide’ project and savings in personnel expenses.

Control & Maintenance of Conservation Areas

This expense went up with Afl. 103K. Maintenance was done on the road to Conchi, the Security boom at Spaans Lagoen was fixed, and boulders were placed at Rooi Lamoenchi and Spaans Lagoen.

Conservation and Research

Expenditure on the Corals and Mangroves restoration program was Afl. 645K, the Lora conservation program Afl. 44K, and Afl. 28K was spent on other smaller conservation programs.





FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Expense and Reserves

Capital Expense

In 2022, Fontein was purchased for Afl. 4.28M, 41.5% was paid by the foundation, and 58.5% was financed through an interest-free mortgage loan agreement payable in three years.

Other capital investments made in 2022 were the purchase of a vehicle and new computers.

In 2023, an additional two vehicles were purchased, and the first phase of rebranding took place.

Any excess income is Reserved

Building specific reserves is essential for the continuance of the foundation to fulfill its objectives and to invest in new assets and human resources to enhance its conservation and research efforts.

Maintenance CapEx Reserve

This is a reserve for the renovation and replacement of fixed assets. This will ensure that the ACF can continue operating and investing in its current state by extending the lifetime of the fixed assets. In 2022, Afl. 125K was reserved, and in 2023, the reserve was increased to Afl. 596K.

Calamity Reserve

This reserve is to cover the essential operating activities in the event that the income of the Foundation is interrupted. In 2022, Afl. 486K was reserved for calamity, and in 2023, this was increased to Afl. 1,191K.

Growth CapEx Reserve

There are plenty of necessary CapEx projects that need to be executed for the conservation activities to reach the next level and to increase income; therefore, a Growth CapEx reserve has been implemented. In 2022, an amount of Afl. 825K was reserved, and in 2023, this reserve was trued-up to Afl. 1,293K.



**Aruba
Conservation
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