

# MAURITIUS & RÉUNION

14<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> December 2024



*Pink Pigeon, Piste Macchabée, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mascarene Islands of Mauritius and Réunion hold an ethereal place in the collective psyche of the West as part of the pinnacle of tropical seaside luxury. Like other places in this niche – Hawaii, Tahiti, the Maldives among others – their ornithological repertoire is often characterised by myriad extinctions, extensive proliferation of non-native species, widespread habitat destruction and overdevelopment among others. As such, they are sometimes overlooked by the birdwatching community as holiday destinations.

However, both Réunion and Mauritius are still home to various endemics, some of which have become fabled legends in conservation circles. Indeed, such alluring endemics combined with the extensive tourist infrastructure and relatively small distances between sites on these islands makes Mauritius and Réunion perfect candidates for a hybrid birding x family holiday. Combining both islands with the nearby Seychelles is a common holiday tactic for birders with enough time and money. However, university terms and the premium prices of the Christmas period meant our window wasn't long enough to attempt such a break. Another time, perhaps...

Our family have been on various holidays of this nature, and this was designed to be another break where conventional tourism and birdwatching madness coexisted as much as humanly possible. This means some logistical information will be of limited use to prospective trip planners; however, hopefully the ornithological information contained herein will provide an up-to-date overview of the birding landscape.

While independent bird trip reports are not as extensive as other destinations, and none have been published in the post-COVID era, we found the trip reports by Bot, Mathéve and Gustavsson to be handy for grid references at points, even though the information for some of these reports is now as much as 12 years out of date. This proved to be a problem for some of the rarer endemics, especially in Mauritius.

Here, eBird proved its worth many times, and is a fantastic resource provided one knows how to use it properly. All records from this trip were inputted into eBird, so hopefully some utility can be gained to would-be Mauritian travellers alongside this report. We'd also like to thank the British birder whom we met at Black River Gorges, whose name we regretfully failed to get, for his insights.

## PRACTICALITIES

### Transport and Navigation

We hired cars on both islands; in Mauritius we used Pingouin Car Rental and on Réunion we used Hertz. In Mauritius we were given an old, slow Suzuki sedan with very limited boot space and which struggled at times to move with a full load of 4 people and luggage, especially up steeper inclines. However, it got us where we needed to go and among the family it developed an aura of *ersatz* endearment by the end of the trip. On Réunion we got a brilliant modern Renault Captur which carried itself with distinction.

On both islands, most roads were navigable with any car, although I would recommend drivers of cars with lower ride heights to take great care with the road into the north side of L'Étang du Gol on Réunion and when entering the car park at the embarkation point for Île aux Aigrettes in Mauritius.

**Google Maps is prone to significant errors on both islands.** On Mauritius especially it mislabelled many derelict farm tracks and private roads as public thoroughfares, while on Réunion it had a worrying tendency to not recognise bus lanes, which caught us out more times than we'd care to admit, especially around Saint-Denis. When used with care, however, Google Maps is more than sufficient for getting where you need to go, and thus many directions in this report include Google Maps directions alongside grid references where appropriate.

Driving quality overall is only marginally worse than in the UK in both areas, although indicators and road markings are prone to being ignored by some local drivers. Finally, on Réunion, the N1 coast road is very prone to traffic jams around Saint-Denis, Port Denis and Saint Paul, even though the awe-inspiring new section between Saint-Denis and La Possession featured on *The Grand Tour* is open. Factor this in when driving either side of Saint-Denis

Flights between Mauritius and Réunion run regularly with both Air Mauritius and Air Austral (and sometimes through partner airlines). However, birders should note the restrictive hand luggage weight restriction of 7kg. Although this was never checked, do bear this in mind when flying between the various islands.

## **Accommodation**

As this was a family holiday, we do not feel that the exact locations of our accommodation will be of any use to readers, as the places we stayed had many services that were entirely superfluous to our needs as birders. However, birders wishing to bring families (or indeed not!) will find ample options in the areas we recommend here.

In Mauritius, we recommend staying in the south-west of the island. The major sites for most of the terrestrial endemics are in that part of the island, with many birders only needing to occasionally travel outside of that (mainly the boat trips to Île aux Aigrettes and Round Island, or sites in the northeast such as Bras d'Eau National Park and La Vallée du Fernay). On Réunion, staying in Saint-Denis will likely be adequate, although there is significant merit to staying down the west coast as well, as we did.

## **Currency**

Réunion, being a département of France, uses the Euro. Mauritius uses the Mauritian rupee, MUR; exchange rate in December 2024 was 1 GBP = roughly 60 MUR.

## Weather

Mostly fine and sunny throughout, with occasional cloud patches. Maximum temperature typically in the range of 27 – 32°C. On both islands, cloud tended to congregate around the highest peaks anywhere from 10am-12pm onwards. We had some rain on our first morning in Mauritius.

## Health & Safety

No major security issues anywhere. On Réunion, swimming outside the very restricted reef area in the west is heavily regulated owing to the infamous heavy shark presence. Tap water was mostly not drinkable in Mauritius, but was drinkable on Réunion, but the universality of this rule is uncertain. No vaccines were necessary before coming, although those wishing to do may wish to immunise against Yellow Fever.

## Rodrigues

If you wish to visit Rodrigues to target the two endemic birds as well as the famous seabird islets, **BOOK YOUR FLIGHTS THERE EARLY**. Though flights depart regularly to the island, they can get booked up very quickly, especially around holiday times. We found this out to our peril, as poor planning and a lack of time caught us out and we never made it over. While you can do Rodrigues from the Seychelles (with a stopover in Mauritius...), it's annoying to have to go back for the two endemics.

## Language

A reasonably basic level of French is useful in both areas, although in Mauritius, English is spoken more widely, and even on Réunion most people speak at least some English.

## BIRDS

### Notes on Selected Endemics

#### Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau*

As expected, these birds were delightfully common on Réunion and were even seen from the car just metres offshore of the capital city! They can gather in their thousands off various points along the coast, especially the north and west, and watching these delightful birds at such close range was a real highlight.

What is more interesting is the situation in Mauritius. Each evening from our accommodation in Bel Ombré, we saw small numbers of birds heading west, even well into the evening, and were often as close as the reef line a mere few hundred metres offshore. This behaviour was extremely similar to the birds we saw off Réunion, which does make you wonder...

We are currently in correspondence with various experts to ascertain the current state of play of Barau's Petrel on Mauritius.



*Barau's Petrel, La Gouffre de l'Étang-Salé, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

**Mascarene Petrel** *Pseudobulweria aterrima*

Our only real miss, but perhaps not a surprising one as only a very select number of Western ornithologists have ever seen one, and none from land. However, following our stay, we want to issue a cursory reminder to birders visiting Réunion during the boreal winter that they may wish to look for this bird. We make this recommendation on the basis of two pieces of important information.

1. **Mascarene Petrel should by rights be gettable from land in southern Réunion.**
2. **It is possible to separate Mascarene Petrel from similar species in certain contexts.**

These pieces of information are derived from a thorough examination of the paper published by Hadoram Shirahai and colleagues, as well as the Réunion Petrel expedition conducted by Bob Flood and Kirk Zufelt among others in 2014. These showed that:

- a) Mascarene Petrels can significantly outnumber all other *Bulweria* and *Pseudobulweria* in waters off Réunion at times.
- b) There is likely a corridor through which birds move between the waters off Réunion and the discovered breeding colonies.
- c) Mascarene Petrel can be separated from Wedge-tailed Shearwater at a range of several hundred metres (though only certainly definitively under 200m).

Given these pieces of information, we have been left to ruminate over at least one, possibly two birds we saw from Le Gouffre de l'Étang-Salé on the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> December. They came in very low from the west along the same line as the vast majority of the Barau's Petrels, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Tropical Shearwaters that were passing. However, compared to the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters they were with, they were noticeably bulkier in stature with larger heads and seemingly thicker bills. They also flew with stiff wings which were broader at the base. Their flight style was also noticeably different, being much more purposeful than the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters with restricted flapping. They were both in view for less than a minute before heading east into the bay and away.

The information we have gathered from Shirahai's paper means that we have a compelling (but almost entirely circumstantial and unverifiable) case in favour of these birds being Mascarene Petrels. However, knowing the scientific significance of the claim and the fact that we were unable to repeat the observations on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, we are reluctant to ascribe these birds definitively. Before coming here, I had familiarised myself with the competing schools of thought regarding the degree of possible separation of Mascarene Petrel from land, ranging from Mathéve claiming them definitively just west of Le Gouffre, right up to Ross and Melissa Gallardy dismissing the possibility entirely. I previously laid more on the sceptical side myself; however,

following some reading and our first-hand perspective, I believe there is a middle ground.

My advice to birders visiting Réunion in November – December who are unable to organise a dedicated pelagic for Mascarene Petrel is as follows. Make sure to read the paper by Hadoram Shirahai summarising the salient identification points. Over the course of several evenings after 5pm, on days with tangible easterly or south-easterly winds, position yourself with a scope on a south or south-east facing prominent promontory between L'Étang-Salé les Bains and Saint-Pierre, and look out for Wedge-tailed Shearwater-type birds that appear particularly bulky or are flying differently. Watch carefully and make sure to get as good a view of the head and bill of candidates as possible. Anyone wishing to claim it definitively will need to have seen all of the observed characteristics above at a range of only a few hundred metres. Good luck!

### **Reunion Harrier** *Circus maillardi*

This endemic seems to be one that people just “bump into”, especially on drives within the interior and east of the island. They are seen occasionally at a high altitude clearing a long way up the trail at La Roche Écrite, but the reliability of this site has come into question. Not wanting a long hike and following Sander Bot's trip report (alongside some inspired eBird tip-offs), we were able to see between 7 and 11 harriers in the fields west of Saint-André (see Réunion Sites). They were hunting the fields early in the morning, before many circled up very high around mid-morning and headed inland. Given many eBird sightings come in the afternoon, we think the fields are used as hunting or even roosting grounds post-breeding. We also saw one from the south end of L'Étang du Gol.



*Réunion Harrier, Saint-André, 21<sup>st</sup> December 2024*

**Mauritius Kestrel** *Falco punctatus*

Historically, in order to see this species, many visitors visited the organised feeding sessions held at La Vallée du Fernay or nearby areas north of Mahébourg. However, following some very helpful correspondence with one of the reserve rangers, we learned that the female of the regular pair went missing during COVID, with the male disappearing a couple of years later, and habituation efforts since then have yielded mixed results. Consequently, we were exploring other options.

Despite less than helpful messages with some of their staff, we eventually found the Ebony Forest Reserve in Chamarel, to the west of Black River Gorges National Park. While we were eventually told we couldn't see the feeding, eBird did seem to indicate that they had kestrels in the area. Upon arriving, we were told they had up to 4 nearby and were told to stand in the car park and wait and we would see them. And we did!

**Consequently, we now believe that Ebony Forest is the best place on the island to see Mauritius Kestrel.** If you visit, simply ask the rangers what the situation is with the kestrels, and they should be able to help. They will try and sell you an organised tour but don't fall for it as you don't need it – simply take the self-hike option.

You may still be able to bump into a kestrel along the Macchabée Trail, or at one of the sites in the north-east, but in our opinion, Ebony Forest is a much safer bet. You also get the added bonus of seeing one without needing to watch it being fed out of someone's hand...

### **Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone bourbonensis*

This species is present on both Mauritius and Réunion; however, preliminary mitochondrial DNA evidence suggests that the populations on the two islands may well go the same way as the two Grey White-eye populations and get split. While the Réunion birds are readily seen along the trail to La Roche Écrite, the Mauritius birds are an altogether different prospect. While many birders have travelled to Bras d'Eau in the northeast or lucked in on them around the Black River Gorges, happily they are also reliable at Ebony Forest, along the aptly named Flycatcher Trail, a raised walkway through the forest at the upper reaches of the reserve.





*Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher, La Roche Écrite, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

### **Reunion Cuckooshrike *Lalage newtoni***

By far and away the trickiest of the Réunion endemics; it is now critically endangered according to BirdLife International. They require a lot of persistence and/or more than a bit of luck on the trail up to La Roche Écrite. We found that previous directions tended to be a bit unclear, but the grid references were mostly accurate.

We eventually found a female in the traditionally good area after around 30-45 minutes (seemingly quite a short time in the grand scheme of things, many people have needed >4 hours or even multiple visits to see them). This area was highlighted by both Sander Bot and Hans Mathéve in their Cloudbirders trip reports as well as a smattering of eBird co-ordinates. To find it, summit the first ridge after the car park (around 2-2.5km **horizontal distance** away) and you will see a relatively flat area of short trees to the right of the trail, just after the start of a section of wooden boardwalk. Follow the trail to the end of the boardwalk and then up the trail a few hundred metres through a fairly steep section until you reach c. **-20.9709, 55.4406**. The section of the trail in this area is a traditional hotspot for them.

Perhaps more surprisingly, we then found at least two singing males along the switchback section of the trail just below the start of the boardwalk/first ridge summit at c. **20.9621, 55.4402** on our way back down. One was very close to the trail and seemed to respond to playback, whilst the other(s?) were much further away. Both sightings occurred in areas of woodland which were reasonably open (but still contained some

mature native trees), with an especially high extent of the tree heath-like plant that is dotted around the trail.



*Réunion Cuckooshrike, La Roche Écrite, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

**Mauritius Olive White-eye** *Zosterops chloronothos*

This species has become fiendishly difficult on the mainland of Mauritius owing to recent declines and is now Critically Endangered. They are almost never seen in Black River Gorges or other traditional areas, with the birds at one of the most reliable sites (Bassin Blanc) now becoming much more elusive and many people taking multiple visits there to see them. **We now recommend going to the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation's reserve on Île aux Aigrettes**, where they are still relatively common.

### **Mauritius Fody *Foudia rubra***

We couldn't quite make sense of this one. We missed it on the Macchabée Trail and presumed we must have just got unlucky, until we did some research and discovered that they aren't seen very regularly up there, instead being seen at Bassin Blanc and the nearby Piton Savanne hiking trail. Having drawn a blank at the former and with time running out, we followed the gen from eBird and the birder we met at Le Pétrin and targeted them at Île aux Aigrettes. Based on latter research, **either here or Piton Savanne are the last areas where they can be seen reliably.**

What probably didn't help is that we discovered that our recordings of Mauritius Fody from Xeno-Canto probably related to Red Fody and the differences in song are not as obvious as we previously believed. In our experience, the best separation is actually the call, which is much wheezier (like Greenfinch song) compared to that of Red Fody. We also spoke to our Mauritian Wildlife Foundation guide on Île aux Aigrettes, who also said that it is becoming increasingly apparent that the non-native Red Fody is outcompeting the Mauritius Fody in some areas, so this endemic may well get harder in some areas on the mainland.



*Mauritius Fody, Île aux Aigrettes, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

## Strategy

Based on our experience, **it is no longer feasible to see all the Mauritius endemics in one full day**, based on the deteriorating reliability of the kestrel, the olive white-eye and the fody at traditional sites. We recommend at least three days to cover Mauritius. Réunion, on the other hand, can be done in one day if no effort is made to track down Mascarene Petrel, so two days (one as backup, that cuckooshrike is very tricky!) is plenty.

## Annotated Species List

For a full breakdown of the species list, please see the link to the eBird trip report:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/308522?welcome=true>



*Echo Parakeet, Piste Macchabée, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

## MAURITIUS SITES

### Plage de Bel Ombre

Since our accommodation was based in this area and fortuitously overlooked the sea, we seawatched from here regularly. This is where we had our best seabird sightings on Mauritius as birds often came in within distance of the reef only a few hundred metres offshore. Finding a public space with good views of the reef between Bel Ombre and Choisy should yield good results, including **Barau's Petrel**; those staying in resorts in Bel Ombre will probably have private sections of beach from which to watch.

### Piste Macchabée – Black River Gorges National Park

**Access:** The trail can be tackled either from Le Pétrin Information Centre or the Black River Visitors Centre on the other side, both available on Google Maps. While long, the trail is mostly flat from the Pétrin end; the Black River Gorges end seems a bit steeper but should still be doable for those who are reasonably fit and have decent mobility.

**Details:** Of the above two parking areas, I recommend the former, as it is close to the release site for **Pink Pigeon**, where we had many individuals showing well; by comparison, we only saw one away from the release site over the course of 4.5 hours. **Echo Parakeet** is fairly common along the trail in good weather, while we encountered **Mascarene Swiftlet** and **Mauritius Bulbul** sporadically along the trail. **Mauritius Grey White-eye** was also seen routinely, although this species is also present at much lower altitudes (even outside our accommodation in Bel Ombre!). Of course, the big attraction of the trail is the **Mauritius Cuckooshrike**; while many sources suggest that this can be found along the “forest loop” section (signed on the trail), we struggled there. Our first sighting was of a pair in the tall trees on the slope down to the Macchabée Viewpoint (referred to on the trail as the Macchabée Kiosk) from the Pétrin end. Later on, on the hike back, we had a male singing (heard only) in some tall trees just after the track to the kiosk forks off the main Macchabée trail. Interestingly, they started singing more conspicuously later on in the morning, and always from tall trees. People have also seen Mauritius Kestrel here, but due to their eclectically arboreal behaviour, they are a needle in a haystack and seeing them here requires an immense amount of luck.



*Mauritius Cuckooshrike, Piste Macchabée, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

### **Bassin Blanc**

**Access:** Simply input [Bassin Blanc view](#) into Google Maps and view the lake to the west.

**Details:** A quite unpleasant locality to bird from owing to omnipresent rubbish and lots of noise from the busy road. **Mascarene Swiftlet** was seen easily here, as they hunt for insects over the lake, while we also lucked in on a very skittish pair of **Mauritius Olive White-eyes** after a few minutes in the trees below the layby, but they vanished immediately after, not to be seen again. We had no luck with the fody; people have seen them walking up and down the adjacent road, but this is quite treacherous, and views have often been brief. The **Piton Savanne trail** is not much further up the road, and you may have more luck there; we never managed to try for the fody there.

### **La Roche qui Pleure**

**Access:** While Google Maps does direct you to the right spot, you have to park a bit earlier at **-20.5526, 57.5333**. Walk down the track to the east, fork through the pines down the obvious track to the rocks and set up where comfortable.

**Details:** A good seawatching site for those not able to access the reef in the south-west. We had **Barau's Petrel** from here, although they were more distant than at Bel Ombre, as well as good numbers of **Wedge-tailed Shearwater**, **Brown** and **Lesser Noddies**, **Sooty Terns** and a few **Masked Boobies**. We failed to see any **Round Island Petrels** which have been reported from here in the past.

### **Petite Rivière Noir Estuary**

**Access:** Park either at **-20.9329, 57.3768** or **-20.3939, 57.3754** and view the estuary from the parking.

**Details:** A great way to kill an hour before waiting for Ebony Forest to open at 9am or after leaving it. We had three **Terek Sandpipers** as well as good numbers of **Greater Sand Plover**, **Striated Heron** and a variety of common Palearctic waders.



*Greater Sand Plover, Petite Rivière Noir, Mauritius, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

## **Ebony Forest Reserve, Chamarel**

**Access:** As directed on Google Maps to [Ebony Forest Reserve Chamarel](#); when entering the access road, simply tell the guard on duty that you're heading to Ebony Forest, and they will wave you through. There is a small entry fee of ~120 MUR per person, and the reserve doesn't open until 9am.

**Details:** In December 2024, four **Mauritius Kestrels** were reported by staff as being in the area and they advised us to stand around the visitor centre and wait. Sure enough, after a relatively trivial amount of time, we had one come from the trees in the visitor centre car park, circle up in front of us and head up the ridge where it was joined by a second! Even more astonishingly, just after seeing a pair of **Mascarene Paradise Flycatchers** along the raised walkway, two (others?) flew *through the trees* mere metres away from us! We also had **Echo Parakeet**, **Pink Pigeon** and **Mauritius Grey White-eye** around the reserve, and another highlight was the immense number of butterflies, several very cool endemic geckos and of course the resident **Aldabra Giant Tortoises**!



*Mauritius Kestrel, Ebony Forest Reserve, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024*



## Ile aux Aigrettes

**Access:** The embarkation point for the trips to the island run from a quay in Pointe Jerome, at **-20.4248, 57.7236**. Alternatively, typing Île aux Aigrettes Booking Desk and Visitors Centre into Google Maps should get you there. Non-private tours are 480 MUR per person.

**Details:** You can only get to this island on a guided tour run by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation. **Book this well in advance on their website;** their email response rate is very sparse, and they don't seem to answer WhatsApp or phone calls at all. They say you have to book in advance, but in our experience, it may be possible to turn up and book outside busy periods, although this is not a strategy we recommend. Same in theory goes for the Round Island boat trips, but they weren't running when we went (they are now running again after Christmas 2024, check availability on their website). That being said, it was a pleasant and interesting tour, and our guide Steven made sure to point us in the right direction of **Mauritius Fody** and **Mauritius Olive White-eye**. The fody we found drinking from a small pool outside the greenhouse, while a few olive white-eyes were seen along the road leading up to the island gift shop. We also saw **Pink Pigeons** and **Aldabra Giant Tortoises** here.

## RÉUNION SITES

### Chemin de Camp Mamode à la Roche Écrite

**Access:** Parking for the trailhead is from Camp Mamode on Google Maps. While the hike is perfectly doable for those with even a moderate degree of physical fitness, please note that there are lots of steps up the trail and thus may not be suitable for those with limited mobility. Note that cloud may occlude visibility (and activity) any time after 10am, although on our morning there was no cloud even by 12:30pm.

**Details:** Aside from the Cuckooshrike (see its section under Notes on Selected Endemics), you can in theory find all five of the other landbird endemics. The morning we were there we saw four: the **Reunion Grey White-eye** was everywhere, while **Reunion Olive White-eyes** were also regular in smaller numbers. **Reunion Stonechat** was delightfully common, while we also saw quite a few **Mascarene Paradise Flycatchers** and **Reunion Bulbuls** along the trail.



*Réunion Stonechat, La Roche Écrite, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024*

### **Le Gouffre de L'Étang-Salé des Bains**

**Access:** Parking is at [Le Gouffre de l'Étang-Salé](#) on Google Maps. You can either seawatch from the picnic area or clamber down the rocks to view. Tackle the latter option at your own risk – the walk down to the rocks is virtually bouldering so watch your step as you head down.

**Details:** Mascarene Petrel aside, this site is worth visiting for the sheer number of other seabirds alone. In the evenings, **Barau's Petrels** gather here in their thousands before heading inland, a phenomenon you can sometimes witness for yourself either here or along the N1 motorway on the way out! They often pass the rocks at very close range and it's a brilliant experience. In amongst them, you also have hundreds of both **Tropical** and **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters**, as well as **Sooty Terns** and noddies. The lava formations, lagoons and sunsets are quite cool too!

### **Saint-André Fields**

**Access:** In the area we explored, we identified four suitable viewpoints to scan fields for harriers; [Viewpoint 1 \(-20.9646, 55.6386\)](#) and [Viewpoint 2 \(-20.9646, 55.6344\)](#) which look on fields just west of Saint-André, and then [Viewpoint 3 \(-20.9635, 55.6205\)](#) and

Viewpoint 4 (-20.9676, 55.6123) which look along fields along the Chemin Bras Mousseline after the next town along the D46 out of Saint-André. Park carefully at Viewpoints 1 and 4, which are very small laybys off the main road; Viewpoint 2 is down a reasonably smooth dirt track.

**Details:** Over the course of just one morning here, we saw at least 7 **Reunion Harriers** (though it may possibly have been as high as 11). Two ringtails were hunting the fields from Viewpoints 1 and 2 early doors, before we then had another ringtail at Viewpoint 3 and another very close to the road around Viewpoint 4. Later in the morning, we had 3 distant birds (including our only male) to the north of Viewpoint 1 head very high inland, before we headed back up to Viewpoint 4 and had four birds all circle up high: two over the ridge to the west and two circling up to the south. There were no other birds of note here except the odd **White-tailed Tropicbird** towards the coast.

## **L'Étang du Gol**

**Access:** The south side is accessed by inputting Aire de l'étang du Gol into Google Maps; the north side parking area is down a dirt track at **-21.2858, 55.3941**, accessed just before the N2001 passes under the N1 south of the sugar factory.

**Details:** Apart from the odd Reunion Harrier or wintering wader (we had one of the former and none of the latter), the main attraction of this site is the native population of **Madagascar Buttonquail** which can be found on the north side of the lake. We found four very quickly after arriving as they ran around under the trees at the start of the trail towards the lake on the north side.



*Madagascar Buttonquail, L'Étang du Gol, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024*