

Seychelles, Reunion and Mauritius

2 – 23 May 2018

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Introduction

This trip was designed primarily to see the endemics on each of the islands, together with other species missing from our list. Overall, the trip was extremely successful and enjoyable with almost all the endemics seen. On all the islands there is relatively little pristine habitat left and the sites for finding the endemics are well known.

Logistics

Accommodation: We had pre-booked our accommodation and car hire on each of the islands, and because distances and driving times were relatively short, did not need to move accommodation. We tried to avoid beach resort type accommodation favoured by tourists.

Praslin: Islander Hotel – self-catering. Close to points where boats leave for Cousin and Aride. Owners very helpful arranging car hire and boat hire for Cousin and Aride Islands. Nice garden with some birds.

Mahe: Albizia Lodge, Green Estate. In the foothills. Very helpful owners and great food. Only disadvantage is a very steep driveway.

Reunion: Tulip Inn, St. Clothilde, St. Denis – a good mid-range hotel conveniently situated for exiting to birding sites and to a large supermarket.

Mauritius: Holiday Inn close to the international airport. Very conveniently situated for accessing routes to all the birding sites.

Field guide used: Birds of the Indian Ocean Islands by Sinclair & Langrand. Excellent.

Site guides: The following were very useful:

Seychelles Trip Report October 2012 by Oscar Campbell.

Birding Seychelles – available on African Bird Club website.

Birding Reunion - available on African Bird Club website.

Societe d'etudes ornithologiques de la Reunion (SEOR) website.

Mauritius Trip Report September 2014 by John Kirby.

Birding Mauritius - available on African Bird Club website.

Communications: Our mobile phones worked almost everywhere without any trouble. Free Wifi was available in all of our hotels.

Money: We took Euros with us as they are the most widely used foreign currency on Seychelles and Mauritius and are the currency on Reunion. Prices for hotels and cars were quoted in Euros, but for food shopping at supermarkets in Mauritius and Seychelles it is better to use the local Rupees. Credit cards were also widely accepted.

Itinerary

2 May. Emirates from Dubai to Victoria, Mahe arriving at 1335 – Depart for Praslin at 1600 on Air Seychelles. Islander Hotel.

3 May - 7 May. Islander Hotel, Praslin. Car hire through hotel.

7 May. Air Seychelles flight back to Mahe at 1100. Avis car hire. Albizia Lodge, Green Estate.
8-11 May. Albizia Lodge, Green Estate, Mahe.
11 May. Air Austral flight to Reunion arriving at 1500. Avis car hire. Tulip Inn, St Denis.
12 - 15 May. Tulip Inn, St Denis.
15 May. Air Austral flight to Mauritius arriving at 1000. Holiday Inn, near International Airport. Avis car hire.
16 – 23 May. Holiday Inn, near International Airport.
23 May. Air Mauritius flight to Durban leaving at 1120.

Narrative

2 May – We arrived on Praslin at about 4.30 pm after a short flight from Victoria on the Air Seychelles Twin Otter and took a taxi to the Islander Hotel, only 10 minutes away. After checking in and sorting out arrangements for the next day it was getting dark, but we saw Seychelles Sunbird in the garden outside our bungalow.

3 May – Miette, the manager of the hotel had arranged for Unas to take us to Cousin Island. He collected us at 8.30 and we drove to the boat launching site. Prior to this an early morning walk produced Seychelles Bulbul in the garden and a flock of Seychelles Blue Pigeons feeding in a fig tree at the beginning of the driveway. The boat trip to Cousin was only 30 minutes. Visitation to Cousin is strictly controlled by ‘Birdlife’ and we had to join other visitors in a guided walk, but by hanging back and exploring before the walk began, we easily found Seychelles Magpie Robin, Seychelles Warbler, Seychelles Fody and large numbers of Lesser Noddy. Other species noted were Common Noddy, White-tailed Tropicbird, Fairy Tern and Greater Frigatebird. We returned to Praslin and had lunch at the Islander, after which the car we had arranged to hire was delivered. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in the Valle de Mai reserve where we were successful in finding the Seychelles Black Parrot in the enormous Coco de Mer palm forest. We climbed to the lookout in the reserve and after some scanning saw several Seychelles Swiftlets flying low above the forest.

4 May – Today Unas organised our all day trip to Aride Island, another ‘Birdlife’ reserve. This is longer trip than to Cousin and it took about an hour to get there. We were very ably guided on Aride by Brad Willson, a student from Cardiff University. The species seen were the same as on Cousin, with the addition of Tropical Shearwater. As part of the boat hire package the crew put on a very tasty barbecue on the island.

5 May – After breakfast we drove to the other side of the island to catch the ferry to La Digue. This is a very popular tourist spot and the ferry was very crowded. The key species here is the Seychelles Black Paradise Flycatcher. This occurs in the Veuve Forest Reserve, about a 30 minute walk from the ferry terminal. This is a relatively small forest remnant, and we saw 15 Seychelles Black Paradise Flycatchers, a mixture of males and females, as well as a juvenile being fed. Following this success we found a nice quiet restaurant at the Le Relax Hotel overlooking the sea. Caught an afternoon ferry back to Praslin.

6 May – explored the east and south coasts but no birds of note.

7 May – Caught an 1100 Air Seychelles flight back to Victoria. After picking up a car from Avis we drove to Albizia Lodge in time for lunch. Following information from trip reports, we went to Baie Lazare Church in the afternoon. This is reputed to be a good site for Seychelles Kestrel, which is known to perch on the steeple. After two hours parked in the grounds there was no sign of the kestrel. Lots of Blue Pigeons, Seychelles Bulbuls and Sunbirds. Fortunately just as we were thinking of moving on, a kestrel appeared and gave us great views flying around the church and settling on the steeple and crosses on the roof.

8 May – Today was spent exploring the La Misere road which cuts across the mountains of Mahe to the west coast. The main target was Seychelles Grey White-eye, but despite searching various habitats, especially along Kennedy Road, none were found. Plenty of the other endemics in the highlands, but no white-eyes. We descended to the west coast, stopping at a National Parks nursery area on the left hand side which had some forest and gardens. Good views here of Seychelles Kestrel. We then joined the coast road and drove northwards. Lunch at Del Place Restaurant before returning to the east coast via the Sans Soucis Road over the mountains. We stopped at the Mission Lodge historic site and explored the area for a while. This is known to be a good area for Seychelles Scops Owl so we needed to get the lie of the land for returning at night tomorrow. We then descended to Victoria and returned to our hotel.

9 May – Returned to the Kennedy Road area off La Misere road. After walking the road for a while we were checking the bushes outside the ‘Exotics Garden Centre’ (closed for renovation) when the owner appeared at the gate and asked if we were looking for the white-eyes? He explained that the bush next to his gate was their favourite spot at about 5 am and also they usually appeared there at any time if it rained! Believe it or not – it started to drizzle while we were talking to the owner, and five Seychelles White-eyes appeared in this bush! This was extraordinary, but we weren’t complaining! We had now notched up all the land endemics of the Seychelles with the exception of the Scops Owl. Hence at 6 pm we headed up the Sans Soucis Road to the Mission Lodge area. Here we parked in a cleared area in the forest opposite the entrance to the historic site. At about 7 pm we tried the tape and soon three different Seychelles Scops Owls were calling from quite close in different parts of the forest. Unfortunately despite our best efforts none made themselves visible! The steep nature of the terrain and thick vegetation made it impossible to enter the forest so we were restricted to the road and parking area. The owl remained unticked!

10 May – rest and packing day after late night.

11 May – Caught the Air Austral flight from Mahe to Reunion, arriving at about 3 pm after various delays. Picked up car and drove into Saint Denis to the Tulip Inn. After checking in we visited a nearby ‘Jumbo’ supermarket to stock up on delicious French food for tomorrow’s expedition. Dinner in the hotel.

12 May – According to published information, all the land endemics of Reunion could be found at La Roche Ecrin. This is about a one hour drive from St Denis up a good tar road. This road ascends rapidly by means of an incredible number of hairpin bends and essentially ends at a parking and picnic area for the Forest Reserve de la Roche Ecrin. From here a walking trail ascends to the high mountains. We arrived at about 7

am and set off up this forest trail. The first km or so gave us Reunion Stonechat, Reunion Paradise Flycatcher, Reunion Bulbul, Reunion Olive White-eye and Reunion Grey White-eye. Flushed with success we then returned to the picnic area for breakfast. The information we had, suggested that we needed to go higher for the cuckoo shrike and harrier, so we climbed to about 3 km. At a point overlooking a cleared area we had great views of a Reunion Harrier as well as Mascarene Swiftlets, but no cuckoo shrikes.

13 May – Took the N1 down the west coast to Etang de Sale les Bains and found the road going to the rocky promontory known to be a good seabird watching site. Despite many hours of watching, the only species seen were Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. No sign of any petrels. Returned to St Denis late afternoon, two Reunion Harriers seen flying alongside the N1.

14 May – Returned to La Roche Ecrivain for the cuckoo shrike. Taking a packed lunch we climbed much higher this time – at least 4 km. After the cleared area the path ascends steeply until it reaches taller forest. Here we had good views of a male Reunion Cuckoo Shrike. The walk also produced all the other land endemics once more.

15 May – Caught the Air Austral 0910 flight to Mauritius. Picked up the car and checked in at the Holiday Inn. We then drove to the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation centre just south of Mahebourg to enquire about visiting Isle des Aigrettes. This island is a major conservation and restoration site and access is restricted to guided tours. They were happy to arrange a guide and trip for us at 2 pm. After lunch at a nearby restaurant we returned to the centre and with a guide took the short boat trip across to Isle des Aigrettes. A very interesting two hour walk around the island produced our three target species, although it was a very hot afternoon: Mauritius Olive White-eye, Mauritius Fody and Pink Pigeon.

16 May – Today we visited Bras d'Eau National Park in the north-east of the island. We tried several forest trails in the park, including the Orchard Trail, reputedly good for Mauritius Paradise Flycatcher. We found plenty of Mauritius Grey White-eye, but no other endemics. Heavy rain in the afternoon did not help and walking on the lava rock trails was sometimes tricky.

17 May – Vallee de Ferney, a sugar estate and conservation area, just north of Mahebourg is well known for conservation of the Mauritius Kestrel. We arrived at 8.30 am and arranged for a walk in the forest starting about 9.30 am. While we waited the staff suggested we explore their palm garden for Echo Parakeets. We were lucky and had good views of this sought for endemic in the garden! We were extremely fortunate to meet up with Carl Jones, who has been largely responsible for saving the Mauritian Kestrel and running the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation recovery programme for this small raptor. We went with him to visit the site for the re-introduction of the Mauritius Cuckoo Shrike – here we met up with a student from the UK working on the species. She found us a male Mauritian Cuckoo Shrike. This forest area also produced our first views of Mauritius Kestrel. Following the walk we attended the kestrel feeding time. A male and a female kestrel appeared in the trees and were fed on dead mice thrown into the air for them to catch.

During the afternoon we explored the Black River Gorge area, although wind and rain made conditions somewhat unfavourable. At Bassin Blanc we were successful with Mauritius Bulbul and also saw Mascarene Swiftlets and Mascarene Martins.

18 May – Returned to Bras d’Eau National park to look for the paradise flycatcher. Another long walk along the orchard trail only produced Mauritius Grey White-eyes. We then decided to try the Coq du Bois (local name for the flycatcher) loop trail, recommended by the park staff, but not by any trip reports or the Wildlife Foundation staff we spoke to at Vallee de Ferney. After about 200 m along this trail the tape produced an immediate response and we had great views of Mauritius Paradise Flycatcher – the last land endemic in the bag!

19 May – rest day

20 May – Walked the Macchabee Trail at Black River Gorges National Park, much of it is easy walking. Several good views of Echo Parakeets flying past, Mauritius Bulbul (at the Park entrance picnic ground), lots of Grey White-eyes and Mascarene Swiftlets. Spectacular scenery with White-tailed Tropicbirds soaring over the forested valley.

21 May – Seabird watching at La Roche qui Pleure. After a couple of hours of nothing we drove up to Black River Gorges N.P. and walked part of the Macchabee Trail again – with the same mixture of species.

22 May - rest and packing

23 May – Depart on Air Mauritius at 9.00 am for Durban.

A checklist of species recorded is provided below.

SEYCHELLES

Wedge-tailed Shearwater – Cousin, Aride

Tropical Shearwater - Aride

White-tailed Tropicbird – Cousin, Aride, Baie Lazare Church Mahe

Great Frigatebird – Cousin, Aride

Black-crowned Night Heron – rocky shore at Islander Hotel Praslin

Cattle Egret - Victoria

Grey Heron - Victoria

Seychelles Kestrel - Baie Lazare Church Mahe, La Misere Rd Mahe

Common Moorhen - Aride

Whimbrel - Victoria

Roseate Tern - Aride

Bridled Tern – Cousin, Aride

Sooty Tern – Cousin, Aride

Lesser Noddy – Cousin, Aride

Brown Noddy – Cousin, Aride

White Tern – Cousin, Aride

Seychelles Blue Pigeon – Islander Hotel Praslin, Baie Lazare Church Mahe, La Misere Rd Mahe

Zebra Dove - WIDESPREAD

Rock/Feral Pigeon - WIDESPREAD

Madagascar Turtle Dove WIDESPREAD
Seychelles Black Parrot – Vallee de Mai Praslin
Seychelles Scops Owl – three birds calling, but not seen, at Mission Lodge Sans Soucis Rd
Mahe
Seychelles Swiftlet – La Misere Rd Mahe, Vallee de Mai Praslin
Seychelles Bulbul – Islander Hotel Praslin, Baie Lazare Church Mahe, La Digue
Seychelles Magpie-Robin – Cousin, Aride
Seychelles Warbler - Cousin, Aride
Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher – Veuve Forest Reserve La Digue
Seychelles Sunbird - WIDESPREAD
Seychelles Grey White-eye – Kennedy Rd La Misere Mahe
Common Myna - WIDESPREAD
Madagascar Fody - WIDESPREAD
Seychelles Fody – Cousin, Aride

REUNION

Wedge-tailed Shearwater - Etang de Sale les Bains
Reunion Harrier– La Roche Ecrivit, on RN1 between St Denis & Etang de Sale les Bains
Zebra Dove - WIDESPREAD
Madagascar Turtle Dove - WIDESPREAD
Mascarene Swiftlet– La Roche Ecrivit
Reunion Cuckoo Shrike– La Roche Ecrivit
Reunion Bulbul– La Roche Ecrivit
Red-whiskered Bulbul - WIDESPREAD
Reunion Stonechat– La Roche Ecrivit
Reunion Paradise Flycatcher– La Roche Ecrivit
Reunion Olive White-eye– La Roche Ecrivit
Reunion Grey White-eye – La Roche Ecrivit
Common Myna - WIDESPREAD
House Sparrow - WIDESPREAD
Madagascar Fody - WIDESPREAD

MAURITIUS

White-tailed Tropicbird - Black River Gorges NP
Mauritius Kestrel - Vallee de Ferney
Zebra Dove - WIDESPREAD
Rock/Feral Pigeon - WIDESPREAD
Pink Pigeon - Isle aux Aigrettes, Vallee de Ferney
Madagascar Turtle Dove - WIDESPREAD
Rose-ringed Parakeet – groups flying nr Holiday Inn
Echo Parakeet - Vallee de Ferney, Black River Gorges NP
Mascarene Swiftlet - Black River Gorges NP
Mascarene Martin - Black River Gorges NP
Mauritius Cuckoo Shrike – Vallee de Ferney
Mauritius Bulbul - Black River Gorges NP
Red-whiskered Bulbul - WIDESPREAD
Mauritius Paradise Flycatcher – Bras d'Eau NP
Mauritius Olive White-eye - Isle aux Aigrettes
Mauritius Grey White-eye - Black River Gorges NP, Bras d'Eau NP
Common Myna - WIDESPREAD
House Sparrow - WIDESPREAD
Village Weaver - WIDESPREAD
Madagascar Fody - WIDESPREAD
Mauritius Fody - Isle aux Aigrettes

Common Waxbill - La Roche qui Pleure
Yellow-fronted Canary - Black River Gorges NP