

Mauritius and Réunion

July 2019

Martijn Hammers

I visited Réunion for a biology conference and had a brief stopover on Mauritius. I had only one afternoon on Mauritius and went birding for one day on Réunion but was still able to see the majority of the endemic landbirds on Mauritius and all endemic landbirds on Réunion. Having only one full day on each island could be sufficient to see most or all species, but having a bit more birding time would be nice, especially on Mauritius.

As I had only hand luggage with me I was not able to bring a scope, but this would be quite useful to see the seabirds. On Mauritius, I did not go to the best locations for Mauritius Kestrel due to time constraints and missed the Mauritius Fody. On both islands, I visited only one main location: Black Gorges National Park on Mauritius and La Roche Écrite on Réunion.

There are several very good trip reports available of which the ones by Hans Matheve (2012) and Sander Bot (2018) are particularly useful.

Mauritius

Practicalities

I arrived just before noon and after a very quick immigration procedure I picked up my car (Hyundai i10) at First Car Rental, which I had arranged in advance through sunnycars.com. I stayed in a double room at Gite des Acacias, which I booked through booking.com (32 euro). The owners were very friendly, the accommodation was clean and conveniently located only 10 minutes by car from the airport and the creole dinner (450 MUR - ca 11 euro) was very tasty and excellent value – I highly recommend this place!

Birds and locations

At 13:15 I arrived at Black Gorges National Park and had a quick stop at Grand Bassin to have a look at the **Mascarene Martins** that flew around here. Also a **Pink Pigeon** and a **Mascarene Swiftlet** flew over.

Next stop was the layby at Bassin Blanc (-20.45344, 57.47748). Immediately after I got out of the car I heard and saw a group of **Mauritius Bulbuls**. In the middle of the layby there was a kind of path going a few meters into the shrub toward the little lake. I went a couple of meters into the shrub and after some phishing I was quickly surrounded by a very inquisitive female **Mascarene (Mauritius) Paradise Flycatcher** and two **Mauritius Olive White-eyes**. That these two species were so cooperative was great because this gave me a bit more time to find the other species.

Next stop: Savanne Trail. I parked the car at the gate (-20.43948, 57.47696), which was closed but not locked and walked less than a kilometer in the rain until the house at the right side of the road.

Here, several **Pink Pigeons** were foraging between the buildings and on the way back I saw a large flock of **Mauritius Grey White-eye**. In hindsight, I should have walked a bit further as further along the trail should be a good area for Mauritius Fody.

Then I walked the Machabee trail (the start of the trail is at the Petrin visitor centre: -20.40827, 57.47306). I walked to the Machabee viewpoint (-20.39339, 57.44038) as kestrels are sometimes seen here, but no luck (although I spent very little time here). **Echo Parakeet**, **Mauritius Bulbul**, **Mauritius Grey White-eye** and **Mascarene Swiftlet** were frequently encountered along the trail. I saw three **Mauritius Cuckoo-Shrikes** (two males, one female) along the forest loop (two at -20.396766, 57.446806 and one at -20.397755, 57.456731). Only one of them called (when I was already watching it) and all three were in or near a flock of other birds. I saw some fodies near the Petrin visitor centre. Most were Madagascar fodies, but one looked very much like a male Mauritius fody. However, I was not sure about its ID as moulting Madagascar fodies can look quite similar. I drove back in the dark, had a beer and dinner at the guesthouse and flew to Réunion early next morning.

Réunion

After a very short flight I landed on Réunion airport (Rolland Garros – Saint-Denis). Amazingly, when the plane taxied from the runway towards the arrivals hall a nice male **Réunion Harrier** was hunting along the runway.

To see all the endemic landbirds, the La Roche Écrite area is the only place that needs to be visited. Conveniently, the conference had organized a mid-conference excursion to this area. During the bus ride to the start of the trail (-20.95229, 55.43718) we saw a Réunion Harrier just before entering Brûlé and another one in the valley along the La Roche Écrite Track (-20.962208, 55.440188). As the (non-birding) excursion group was rather large and slow and because it was already mid-morning when we started walking the trail, two other birders and I moved away from the group to improve our chances to see the Cuckoo-Shrike. A good section for the Cuckoo-Shrike is between (-20.96574, 55.44029) and (-20.97039, 55.44016). **Réunion Olive White-eye**, **Réunion Gray White-eye**, **Mascarene Swiftlet** and **Réunion Bulbul** were common along the trail. We saw a **Réunion Cuckoo-Shrike** at (-20.97039, 55.44016) and heard one at (-20.967551, 55.440228). The Cuckoo-Shrike that we saw made a call that was quite different from the ones that we had taken from xeno-canto, so good to try to find the bird if you hear an unfamiliar call. We also saw our only **Mascarene (Réunion) Paradise Flycatcher** at (-20.97039, 55.44016).

I saw several harriers (e.g. at -21.220273, 55.806882) when I drove around the Island (to have a look at the volcano and have some nice seafood) on my last day. On my last day I also went to L'Etang-Sale-les-Bains late-afternoon to try to see some seabirds, but the few birds I saw were too far away to identify (best to bring a telescope!). Perhaps staying until dark would have improved my chances, but this was no option as I had to catch my flight back later that evening.