The islands of the Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion and Rodrigues in the western Indian Ocean are true paradise islands for western tourists and offer exotic holidays on palm-fringed beaches lapping turquoise seas. They are however also one of the world’s main centres for bird extinctions as at least 30 species of birds (and a whole range of reptiles) have gone extinct there since man first visited these wonderful islands just 350 years ago. Everyone knows about the Dodo and maybe the Rodrigues Solitaire, but who has ever heard of Reunion Kestrel, Reunion Swamphen, Broad-billed Parrot, Mauritian Shelduck, Mauritius Night
Heron, Red Rail, Reunion Flightless Ibis, Reunion Owl or Hoopoe starling. Even today, the Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion and Rodrigues are home to an astounding number of endangered birds and luckily major conservation efforts are in place to try to save these. On this tour we saw no fewer than 19 species which BirdLife International considers as being in serious trouble. On our enjoyable circuit of these friendly, welcoming countries we recorded all of the known surviving endemics. Highlights included Seychelles Kestrel, Seychelles Scops Owl, Crab-plover, Seychelles Black Parrot, Seychelles Magpie-Robin, Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher and Seychelles White-eye in the scenic granitic Seychelles, Rodrigues Warbler and Rodrigues Fody on Rodrigues, Mauritius Kestrel, Echo Parakeet, Pink Pigeon and Mauritius Cuckoo-shrike on Mauritius and Barau's Petrel, Mascarene Petrel, Red-tailed Tropicbird, Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher and Reunion Stonechat on Réunion. We also visited magnificent seabird colonies brimming with Wedge-tailed and Tropical Shearwaters, Lesser and Brown Noddies, incredibly elegant White Terns, Sooty and Bridled Terns, White-tailed Tropicbirds and evil-looking Great Frigatebirds. A good selection of reptiles added to the fun, but only a few mammals were seen.

This ‘islands of the Indian Ocean’ tour started with a scrumptious breakfast at our peaceful hotel in central Mahé on the Seychelles. Mahé is the largest island of the only granitic archipelago in the world and offers some stunning coastal and montane scenery. We first visited the nearby forested hills, where we soon found our first Seychelles endemics. Flowering bushes held scores of modestly-clad Seychelles Sunbirds, while cracking Seychelles Blue Pigeons sat sunning themselves in the treetops and raucous Seychelles Bulbuls patrolled the midstorey. We heard the soft, nasal calls of the rare Seychelles White-eye, but it remained hidden in the dense canopy of a pomerak tree. Overhead we admired circling superbly elegant White-tailed Tropicbirds and ethereal White Terns. Malagasy Turtle Dove, Zebra Dove and a single Rose-ringed Parakeet were also noted. Next we explored the mudflats and the mangrove-lined lagoons on the outskirts of the tiny capital of Victoria, where well known and widespread birds like Striated Heron (of the race degens), Western Cattle Egret, Grey Heron, Grey Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Curlew Sandpiper and Greater Crested Tern showed. We munched our picnic lunch on the green surrounding a church which held a smart Seychelles Kestrel. The scope views of this tiny falcon (it is the smallest member of the genus Falco) were much appreciated. Now and then it uttered its distinctive shrill piercing calls. A reservoir in the hills held Common Moorhen, a single White-winged Tern and scores of Seychelles Swiftlets feeding low over the water. Common Mynas, Madagascar Red Fodies and enormous Palm Spiders were constant companions.
on our drives and we soon became accustomed to the distinctive silhouette of impressive Seychelles Flying Foxes. After dinner we drove to the Morne Seychellois National Park, where eventually we heard the gruff call of a Seychelles Scops Owl emanating from high up in the canopy. We hung about for a while, but to no avail.

Next day we returned to the foothills and at the edge of a village found a couple of unobtrusive Seychelles White-eyes. Just a handful (c60) survive on the island of Mahé and most of the population (c300) is now concentrated on the offshore islet of Conception. We obtained good views of this little critter while Seychelles Blue Pigeons and Seychelles Bulbuls also showed off. We checked the mudflats again and had great studies of a single Crab Plover. This unusual looking wader (in its own family) performed very nicely. We also found a Saunders’s Little Tern, an Eurasian Curlew and had good looks at a good selection of already seen waders. A very active Terek Sandpiper really showed very well. At the Bird Sanctuary we found a couple of Yellow Bitterns and soon after a Twin Otter took us to the nearby island of Praslin, where in the afternoon we explored the very atmospheric palm forest of the Vallée de Mai. The amazing Coco de Mer Palms (Lodoicea maldivica), which boast the largest seed in the world, together with several other palm species create an almost surreal forest. On our lovely walk we found several Seychelles Skinks, Seychelles Day and Bronze-eyed Geckos, a Seychelles Wolf Snake, a Tail-less Tenrec (introduced from Madagascar) and a Seychelles Black Parrot feeding quietly on some palm fruit. Later we saw several Seychelles Black Parrots fly overhead together with scores of Seychelles Flying Foxes.
Our early morning walk on the relaxed island of Praslin produced several showy Seychelles Blue Pigeons displaying in the kapok trees and a couple of Seychelles Black Parrots. Several Seychelles Swiftlets were flitting about and the nearby shoreline yielded a good selection of waders including Common Greenshank, Greater Sand Plover, a rare Common Ringed Plover and a flock of Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstones. We also located a nest of a Seychelles Sunbird. After breakfast we were taken by boat to the nearby island of Cousin, which was bought by the Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts in 1968 to protect the dwindling population of Seychelles Warblers. Ownership transferred to BirdLife International in 2002 and it is now managed by the local NGO Nature Seychelles. The 29 hectares of woodland are inhabited by thousands of seabirds offering an unforgettable spectacle. We strolled around guided by a local naturalist and soon had great looks at our three landbird targets: Seychelles Warbler, Seychelles Fody and the attractive Seychelles Magpie Robin. The warbler and the fody are rather drably attired and foraged quietly in the lower storey. The more obvious Magpie Robins often followed the lumbering Aldabra Giant Tortoises about and allowed eye-ball to eye-ball studies. Thousands of Lesser Noddies and dozens of ever so beautiful White Terns hovered overhead or sat quietly within the canopy. We found a White Tern brooding her single egg on a horizontal bough. Hundreds of White-tailed Tropicbirds including many downy young sat amongst treeroots or in natural cavities and allowed close approach. We walked up the hill where Wedge-tailed Shearwaters tried to hide in their shallow burrows and adult Bridled Terns were displaying. There were obviously at the start of their unusual eight month breeding cycle. A female and an immature Great Frigatebird sailed overhead and we also noted several Brown Noddies. Skinks and geckos were everywhere and especially the large Wright’s Skinks and the smart Seychelles Bronze Geckos made an impression.
It was truly heartwarming to be able to witness a seabird island in all its glory! The day ended with fabulous views of four Seychelles Black Parrots feeding on carambola (star fruit) just metres away near our hotel.

Another prebreakfast walk along the beach of Praslin gave us the same selection of waders and a Black-crowned Night Heron. The fabulous island of Aride was our destination today and on the boat trip we already saw a dozen Sooty Terns and a few Bridled Terns. Upon arrival near the island we transferred to a zodiac manned by an expert sailor as the landing can be rather difficult at times. We walked around this seabird paradise of 73 hectares, which holds more seabirds than all the other granitic islands in the Seychelles combined! The island was purchased by Christopher Cadbury (of chocolate fame) in 1973 and is now managed by the Island Conservation Society. We again had splendid looks at the three landbirds, Seychelles Warbler, Seychelles Fody and Seychelles Magpie Robin and saw lots and lots and lots of Lesser Noddies. Small numbers of White Terns played about and several Malagasy Turtle Doves looked as if they belonged to the local ‘rostrata’ race. We walked up the rather steep hill where Sooty Terns were trying to protect their beautifully marked young and where burrows held Tropical and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. From the top we had a nice overview of north side of the island which harboured a large roost of Great Frigatebirds. Males, females and immature birds were sitting about or hovering menacingly overhead. Several males sported partly inflated pouches and a couple of Hawksbill Turtles and a Manta Ray were playing in the turquoise waters. During our tasty BBQ lunch we were surrounded by Seychelles Warblers, Seychelles Fodies, and Seychelles Magpie Robins and portly Wright’s Skinks were trying to steal the food from our plates. Before returning to base we made a detour and admired a small raft of Tropical Shearwaters at fairly close range. Here we also identified a single Lesser Frigatebird amongst the many Great Frigatebirds. It had been a spectacular day!!
The following morning we took the rather bumpy ferry to La Digue island and were entertained by several Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. La Digue lives at a very relaxed pace - a lot of the transport is still handled by ox carts – and we walked the short distance to the La Veuve Reserve (local name of the Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher). On the walk we already saw a glorious male in a patch of woodland. In the small reserve containing mainly takamaka and Indian Almond trees we stood about and observed the antics of several males and females of this very handsome species. Historically it was known from five islands, but it only survived the modern times on La Digue and was recently reintroduced to Saint Denis. A bathing male was particularly cooperative and a couple of tiny nests were also found. After have gorged ourselves on this gem, we walked along the quiet lanes to the famous Plantation and admired the unique, rocky coastal scenery, which is a famous place for weddings. After a tasty lunch we returned by ferry to Praslin and later flew to Mahé, where we had another try for the owl in the highlands. It took a while but eventually we heard a response and soon obtained excellent looks at this diminutive species. The Seychelles Scops Owl, the final endemic, was in the pocket!

A relaxed morning in the hotel area gave us another lovely Seychelles Kestrel and soon we were flying south to our next port of call, the island of Mauritius, which exuded a very different atmosphere compared to the Seychelles. It took most of the day to finally reach our seafront hotel in the southeast of the island. A bout of birdwatching at dawn in the hotel garden added several introduced species to our list: Village Weaver, Red-
whiskered Bulbul and Common Waxbill. Soon we were on our way again to the airport to take the 1.5 hour flight to the small island of Rodrigues, situated 563km to the east. Upon arrival we transferred to our comfortable hotel. Rodrigues is quite an arid island covered mainly in scrub in the lowlands, but forest patches survive on the slopes of the hills. In the afternoon we visited a stretch of nice forest where we soon connected with both Rodrigues endemics: the Rodrigues Warbler and the Rodrigues Fody. The colourful Fody could be admired displaying at close range and the olive-coloured Warbler showed well on several occasions in the mid storey. The populations of both species are now in their thousands and both are doing well after a stretch of disastrous years in the seventies, when their numbers were critically low. We also saw good numbers of the smart Rodrigues or Golden Flying Fox.

The next morning we returned to the forest to admire the endemics again and later we flew to the island of Mauritius, where we first visited a private reserve surrounding a large sugarcane plantation. Our knowledgeable local guide took us to a territory of a Mauritius Kestrel and the scope views of this lovely falcon were out of this world. We were able to study this cute bird of prey in detail and listened to the story of their amazing rescue. In 1974 only four birds were left and thanks to a major captive breeding effort there are now again c400 kestrels hunting geckos in Mauritius. Attractive Traveller’s Trees (Ravenala), introduced from Madagascar covered major parts of the forest and we also saw introduced Java Deer and Indian Grey Mongoose. Next we explored a part of the famous Black River Gorges National Park, where several Pink Pigeons and Echo Parakeets allowed close approach. These well-groomed species were until recently also severely threatened and were saved from extinction at the last minute. Another Mauritius Kestrel showed well and a Mauritius Grey White-eye was seen. On our drive and walk we also noted a series of introduced species like Mallard, Egyptian Goose, Common Pheasant, Grey Francolin, Red-legged Partridge, Yellow-fronted Canary and Crab-eating Macaque. As the evening fell several Greater Mascarene Flying Foxes plied the skies.

The following day started with a drive through the hilly heart of Mauritius to get to the extreme north where we boarded a diving boat that took us out to sea. At the 163m high stack of the Coin de Mire (Gunner’s Quoin) dozens of superbly graceful Red-tailed Tropicbirds circled in front of the imposing cliffs offering a splendid sight. We sailed further to distant Round Island across a fairly smooth sea and waited patiently in the lee of this strict nature reserve for things to happen. Round Island is home to a whole range of seabirds, an endemic skink, an endemic gecko, an endemic boa and two endemic species of palm. Lots of White-tailed Tropicbirds were sailing and cavorting over the steep slopes of this 261m high island and soon we also saw several Trinidad (or Round Island) Petrels cruising high overhead. A few times birds came lower and offered fair looks while swooping past in swift flight. Both dark and pale morphs were seen, but the views
from a moving boat were obviously not ideal. Several Sooty Terns flew past on the return trip and the BBQ on Flat Island tasted great.

An endearing Mauritius Kestrel (Mark Van Beirs) and playful Red-tailed Tropicbirds (Simon Cox)

On our final morning on Mauritius we visited several venues in the Black River Gorges National Park. We checked flowering Bottlebrush bushes which attracted scores of dainty Mauritius Grey White-eyes. Most of the forest consisted of introduced species like Slash Pine (from the southern USA), Paperbark (from Australia) and Traveller's Trees (from Madagascar). A Mauritius Bulbul offered really nice looks and a Pink Pigeon walked sedately on the forest floor. The Bassin Blanc is a scenic lake nestled in a volcanic cone surrounded by upland forest and a good natured wait eventually gave us good looks at a couple of threatened Mauritius Olive White-eyes. A male Mauritius Cuckoooshrike posed for extended periods in the treetops and this was the final Mauritian endemic to fall. In the afternoon we took the short flight to nearby Réunion, drove to our hotel in downtown Saint Denis and spent the last hour of the day admiring Barau’s Petrels and Tropical Shearwaters at fairly close range from the seafront near the statue of Roland Garros. It felt as if we had arrived on the Côte d'Azur, with its bistros and gendarmes.

A showy male Mauritius Cuckoooshrike (Rainer Ertel) and a rare Pink Pigeon (Mark Van Beirs)

The following morning we drove up along an endless winding road to the hamlet of Le Brûlé and started to walk along a famous trail towards the landmark of La Roche Écrite. The highlands of Réunion are covered in plantations of introduced Japanese Red Cedar and in good stretches of native forest. Well laid out trails cover large portions of these otherwise hard of access mountains. The highest top reaches 3,070 m and Réunion harbours the famous Piton de la Fournaise, one of the most active volcanoes in the world. Sadly it rained continuously throughout the morning and we got wet throughout. Very little bird sound and bird activity
was noticeable. It was lovely to see Mascarene Swiftlets collect lichens from isolated trees for nest building. Several very smart Mascarene Paradise Flycatchers gave good and lengthy looks and we even saw a pair building their neat nest. Reunion Bulbuls were regularly heard, and in due course two were seen. We heard the distinctive calls of a male Reunion Cuckooshrike once in the distance, but this critically threatened species didn’t want to cooperate. Reunion Grey and Reunion Olive White-eyes were often encountered in flowering Hypericum bushes. The endearing and very approachable Reunion Stonechat was a regular escort on our very wet walk. After a scrumptious lunch in Saint Denis we said goodbye to Pat and drove along a well-built highway to the southwest of the island, where from a carefully selected vantage point we did a bout of seawatching that produced hundreds of Barau’s Petrels, often a close range. We had many great looks at this only in 1964 described species. A very well behaved Pterodroma for once! While admiring the Barau’s, we also saw Common and Greater Crested Terns, Brown Noddies, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and spotted a very rare Mascarene Petrel (Reunion Black Petrel) on two occasions, at a rather great distance. The total population of this virtually unknown species is tiny and only a few photos have ever been taken. We felt privileged!

On the final morning of the tour it looked as if the weather in the highlands of the north was even worse than the day before, so we decided to drive up to the famous viewpoint of the Piton Maïdo. At the inspiring altitude of 2,200m one gets an amazing view of an enormous crater (Cirque de Mafate) where the tiny villages of the escaped slaves nest deep in the caldera. These are still only reachable on foot (or by helicopter). In the surrounding maquis vegetation we saw lots of Reunion Stonechats and two lucky people glimpsed a Reunion Harrier.
The charming Seychelles Kestrel (Mark Van Beirs)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). IOC World Bird Names. This list is updated several times annually and is available at http://www.worldbirdnames.org.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).
Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).
Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered ‘special’ birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from Threatened Birds of the World, BirdLife International’s magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world’s avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home
C = Critically Endangered, E = Endangered, V = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* A couple were noted on a lake in Mauritius. Introduced!
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Several were seen on Mauritius and on Reunion. Introduced.
Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* Two were observed on Mauritius. Introduced for hunting.
Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* A single observation on Mauritius. Introduced for hunting.
Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* Several were recorded on Mauritius. Introduced for hunting.
Trindade Petrel ♀ (Round Island P) *Pterodroma arminjoniana* Several were seen swooping over Round Island.
Barau’s Petrel ◊ Pterodroma baraui (E) Hundreds showed very well off Reunion. What a spectacle!
Mascarene Petrel ◊ (Reunion P, Reunion Black P) Pseudobulweria aterrima (C) Two fair sightings off Reunion.
Wedge-tailed Shearwater Puffinus pacificus Regular encounters with dark morphs.
Tropical Shearwater ◊ Puffinus bailloni Great looks at sea and on the nesting grounds.
Red-tailed Tropicbird ◊ Phaethon rubricauda Fantastic looks at dozens off Mauritius.
White-tailed Tropicbird Phaethon lepturus Commonly encountered and always so smart.

Yellow Bittern Ixobrychus sinensis A couple showed well on Mahé.
Black-crowned Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax A few encounters with this widespread species.
Striated Heron (Green-backed H) Butorides striata Regular encounters. See Note.
Western Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis Commonly seen on Mahé.
Grey Heron Ardea cinerea Regular on Mahé.
Great Frigatebird Fregata minor Hundreds were roosting and flying at Aride.
Lesser Frigatebird Fregata ariel A single bird was identified near Aride.
Reunion Harrier ◊ Circus maillardi (NL) (E) One showed briefly to some at Piton de Maido.
Mauritius Kestrel ◊ Falco punctatus (E) Fantastic looks at this lovely species.
Seychelles Kestrel ◊ Falco araus (V) Several nice observations on Mahé.
Common Moorhen Gallinula chloropus Regular encounters.
Crab-Plover Dromas ardeola A single bird could be admired on a mudflat on Mahé.
Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) Pluvialis squatarola Regular.
Common Ringed Plover Charadrius hiaticula A single bird showed nicely on a beach on Praslin.
Greater Sand Plover Charadrius leschenaultia Regular encounters with this northern migrant.
Bar-tailed Godwit Limosa lapponica Several excellent sightings on Mahé.
Whimbrel Numenius phaeopus Fairly common on all the visited islands.
Eurasian Curlew Numenius arquata (NT) A single bird was seen on Mahé.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Several lovely sightings.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* Great looks at several in the Seychelles.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Regularly seen.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* One of the more common waders.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* Good looks at a flock on Praslin. One or two were seen elsewhere.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* A few were seen in the Seychelles.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* Marvellous encounters on the breeding islands in the Seychelles.

Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* Thousands upon thousands at close range in the Seychelles.

White Tern *Gygis alba* THE BIRD OF THE TRIP. Many encounters with this enchanting species.

Greater Crested Tern (Swift T) *Thalasseus bergii* A few showed well.

Saunders's Tern *Sternula sandersi* Good looks at one on Mahé.

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* Good views of several on the breeding islands in the Seychelles.

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* Good views of adults and distinctive young in the Seychelles.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Two were noted on our seawatch off Reunion.

White-winged Tern (W-w Black T) *Chlidonias leucopterus* A single bird showed well on Mahé.

Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia*

Malagasy Turtle Dove *Nesoenas picturata* Many encounters.

Pink Pigeon *Nesoenas mayeri* (E) Several great close up views on Mauritius.

The unique Echo Parakeet and the magnificent coastal scenery of La Digue (Mark Van Beirs)
Spotted Dove *Spilopelia chinensis* A few were seen on Mauritius and Reunion. Introduced.

Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata* Very common on all the islands.

Seychelles Blue Pigeon ♦ *Alectroenas pulcherrimus* Regular and attractive on all the islands in the Seychelles.

Rose-ringed Parakeet (Ring-necked P) *Psittacula krameri* A single bird was seen on Mahé.

Echo Parakeet ♦ (Mauritius P) *Psittacula eques* (E) Good looks at several in the Black River Gorges NP.

Seychelles Black Parrot ♦ *Coracopsis barklyi* (V) Fantastic looks at feeding birds near our hotel on Praslin.

Seychelles Scops Owl ♦ *Otus insularis* (E) Exquisite looks at this cutie in the highlands of Mahé.

Seychelles Swiftlet ♦ *Aerodramus elaphrus* (V) Regular in northern Mahé and on Praslin.

Mascarene Swiftlet ♦ *Aerodramus franciscus* (NT) Small numbers were seen on Mauritius and on Reunion.

Mauritius Cuckoo-shrike ♦ *Coracina typica* (V) Great looks at a male in the Black River Gorges NP.

Reunion Cuckoo-shrike ♦ *Coracina newtoni* (H) (C) We were unlucky with the weather. Only heard in the distance.

Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher ♦ (S Black P F) *Terpsiphone corvina* (C) Superb views of males and females.

Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher ♦ *Terpsiphone bourbonnensis* Excellent encounters in the Reunion highlands.

House Crow *Corvus splendens* A few were seen on Mauritius.

Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* Very common on Mauritius and less so on Reunion.

Seychelles Bulbul ♦ *Hypsipetes crassirostris* Regular and vociferous on Mahé and Praslin.

Reunion Bulbul ♦ (R Black B) *Hypsipetes borbonicus* Good looks at a few in the rainy highlands.

Mauritius Bulbul ♦ (M Black B) *Hypsipetes olivaceus* (V) Great looks at several in the Black River Gorges NP.

Mascarene Martin ♦ *Phedina borbonica* Several parties were noted on Mauritius. Just a few on Reunion.

Seychelles Warbler ♦ (S Brush W) *Acrocephalus sechellensis* (V) Many great looks on Cousin and Aride.

Rodrigues Warbler ♦ (R Brush W) *Acrocephalus rodericanus* (NT) Eye-ball to eye-ball looks on Rodrigues.

Reunion Grey White-eye ♦ *Zosterops borbonicus* Common and approachable on Reunion.

Mauritius Grey White-eye ♦ *Zosterops mauritianus* Common and cute on Mauritius.

Seychelles White-eye ♦ *Zosterops modestus* (E) Good looks, eventually, at two in the hills of Mahé.

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A cute Reunion Olive White-eye (Rainer Ertel) and the enchanting Reunion Stonechat (Mark Van Beirs)

Reunion Olive White-eye ♦ *Zosterops olivaceus* Common in the hills of Reunion.

Mauritius Olive White-eye ♦ *Zosterops chloronothos* (C) It took a while, but then we had good views of two birds.

Common Myna (Indian M) *Acridotheres tristis* Too common!

Seychelles Magpie-Robin ♦ *Copsychus sechellarum* (E) Great encounters on Cousin and on Aride.

Reunion Stonechat ♦ (Tek-Tek) *Saxicola tectes* Common and so lovely in the Reunion hills.

Seychelles Sunbird ♦ *Cinnyris dussumieri* Regular in flowering bushes on all the Seychelles islands.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common on Mauritius and Reunion.

Village Weaver (Black-headed W) *Ploceus cucullatus* Regular on Mauritius and Reunion.

Red Fody ♦ (Madagascar F) *Foudia madagascariensis* Very common in the Seychelles and regular elsewhere.

Mauritius Fody ♦ *Foudia rubra* (E) A single bird showed well in the Black River Gorges NP.

Seychelles Fody ♦ *Foudia sechellarum* (NT) Many encounters on Cousin and Aride.

Rodrigues Fody ♦ *Foudia flavicans* (NT) Regular and very approachable on Rodrigues.
Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* Small numbers were noted on Rodrigues and Mauritius.

Yellow-fronted Canary (Yellow-eyed C) *Crithagra mozambica* A few were noted on Rodrigues and Mauritius.

A gaudy Red Fody and the more subtle Seychelles Fody (Mark Van Beirs)

**MAMMALS**

**Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus* One was seen on Mahé.

**Indian Grey Mongoose** *Herpestes edwardsii* One showed well on Mauritius. Introduced.

**Tailless Tenrec** *Tenrec ecaudatus* Seen on Praslin and on Mahé. Introduced.

**Greater Mascarene Flying Fox** *Pteropus niger* Many on Mauritius and a few on Reunion.

**Rodrigues Flying Fox** *Pteropus rodricensis* Lovely looks at several on Rodrigues.

**Seychelles Flying Fox** *Pteropus seychellensis* Regular and noisy on Mahé and Praslin.

**Long-tailed Macaque (Crab-eating M)** *Macaca fascicularis* Regular on Mauritius. An introduced pest.

**Rusa (Javan Deer)** *Cervus timorensis* A dozen were noted on Mauritius. Introduced for hunting.

The Rodrigues Flying Fox is doing well again (Simon Cox). Mountain scenery in Mauritius (Mark Van Beirs)
**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS**

**Seychelles Day Gecko** *Phelsuma astriata* We found several on Praslin (Seychelles).

**Bronze-eyed Gecko** *Ailuronyx tachyscopaeus* Good looks in the Vallée de Mai on Praslin.

**Seychelles Bronze Gecko** *Ailuronyx seychellensis* We found singles on both Cousin and on Aride.

**Wright's Skink** *Mabuya wrightii* Very common on Cousin and Aride. A seabird island specialist.

**Seychelles Skink** *Mabuya seychellensis* Fairly common on Cousin and Aride.

**Seychelles Wolf Snake** *Lycognathophis seychellensis* One showed briefly in the Vallée de Mai on Praslin.

**Aldabra Giant Tortoise** *Aldabrachelys gigantea* Introduced animals were seen on Cousin.

**Hawksbill Turtle** *Eretmochelys imbricata* Two were seen off Aride.

**Seychelles Tree Frog** *Tachycnemis seychellensis* One was found in the Vallée de Mai on Praslin.

Arrival on Aride (Pat Cox) and a Brilliant Blue butterfly (Mark Van Beirs)

**NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST**

**Trinidad Petrel** *Pterodroma arminjoniana*

We saw c10 of these shearing in fast flight over Round Island, a small chunk of land situated just off the northwest of Mauritius. Both pale and dark morphs showed. The taxonomic situation of this taxon is far from clear. Sinclair & Langrand (Birds of the Indian Ocean Islands) consider it as a form of Trinidad Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana*, which elsewhere, only breeds on tiny Trinidad island off northeast Brazil and call it Round Island Petrel. Onley & Scofield (Albatrosses, Petrels & Shearwaters of the World) also consider it to belong with Trinidad Petrel, but mention that the Indian Ocean form may warrant specific status. The Handbook of the Birds of the World (HBW) considers it to belong with Herald Petrel *Pterodroma heraldica*, as does the IOC. The Clements checklist does not even mention this form (forgotten...).

**Barau’s Petrel** *Pterodroma baraui*

At least 300 were seen from the shore of southwest Réunion, to which island it is endemic. We obtained superb views of several dozen wheeling past at close range, offering a splendid spectacle. Armand Barau (1921-1989) was a French naturalist and landowner on Réunion. He was one of the authors of ‘Oiseaux de la Réunion’ (1982). It is estimated that 3,000-4,000 pairs (9,000 – 12,000 individuals) inhabit the higher reaches of Réunion.

**Mauritius Kestrel** *Falco punctatus*

We obtained excellent views of this once severely threatened bird. This species has undergone a spectacular recovery from just four wild birds (including one breeding pair) in 1974, thanks to the amazing efforts of Carl Jones, a Welshman who played a pivotal role in helping to save the Mauritius Kestrel, Pink Pigeon and Echo Parakeet from almost certain extinction. The latest population estimate is c400 individuals only! It preys mainly on endemic arboreal *Phelsuma* day-geckos.
Seychelles Kestrel *Falco araea*
We obtained nice scope studies of these attractive, tiny falcons on Mahé, the main island of the Seychelles. The population is c800 birds and it feeds mainly on endemic arboreal *Phelsuma* day-geckos. It is the smallest member of the genus *Falco*.

Pink Pigeon *Nesoenas mayeri*
Excellent views in the Black River Gorges National Park. This Mauritian endemic declined to just 10 wild individuals in 1990, and major conservation efforts have brought it back from the brink. The population now stands at 360-390 birds in five subpopulations. It is the only member of its genus.

Madagascar Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata*
Many excellent observations in the Seychelles and on Mauritius and Réunion. Most of the birds observed belong with the grey-headed nominate race, but some of the birds on Cousin and Aride (Seychelles) showed characteristics of the smaller, darker, reddish-headed Seychelles race *rostrata*. But it seems that the nominate race has now probably totally swamped the original *rostrata* race in the Seychelles.

Echo Parakeet (Mauritius Parakeet) *Psittacula echo*
Excellent scope studies of perched birds in the forests of the Black River Gorges National Park. In the 1970s the population had declined to just ten birds and intensive conservation efforts have seen a gradual increase in numbers. The population now stands at c580 birds. Echo Parakeets only use c 40 km² of remnant native upland forest. Echo refers to the Greek wood nymph who could only imitate the last words she had heard. The Echo Parakeet was regarded as a “copy” of the extinct Réunion Parakeet.

Réunion Cuckooshrike *Coracina newtoni*
We only heard this Critically Endangered species in the montane forest of northern Réunion. The population could be as low as 25 breeding pairs! Nest predation by Black Rats appears to be the main threat. Another problem is that two thirds of the remaining individuals are male, and this ratio has worsened owing to unknown reasons. In 2010, predator control measures by the Société d’Etudes Ornithologiques de La Réunion (SEOR), with some support from the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme, were on-going and have shown positive results.

Seychelles Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvina*
Fabulous views of males and females on the island of La Digue (Seychelles). The male truly is a cracking species. In 2008 it was translocated to nearby Denis Island and the species is doing well there. The population is now estimated at 210 – 278 individuals.