



## **Mascarenes and Seychelles**

**22 Aug – 02 Sep 2024**

**22 Sept – 01 Oct 2025**

12 days / 11 nights

Option: Guided





Please note that the itinerary is subject to availability and no reservations have been made yet. Availability will determine the final itinerary and the costs will be adjusted accordingly. Prices are subject to foreign exchange fluctuations.

## Overview

This tour takes in the 2 island groups of the Mascarenes and Seychelles respectively, and we plan to spend roughly an equal amount of time on each island group looking to find all the endemic bird species, other special birds as well as an array of fantastic seabirds. All this while enjoying the tranquillity and scenic splendour so unique to island life in this part of the world. We included ample time to find all the target birds so there might even be some extra time to just soak in the island life.

**Mascarenes:** The Mascarene Islands, with three main islands; Reunion, Mauritius and Rodrigues, are a volcanic archipelago, completely isolated from other land masses by large distances. They once hosted one of the richest flora and faunas of any oceanic archipelago. However, these islands have seen some of the highest rates of human-caused extinction in the world, including more than 50 percent of the bird fauna. There are about 16 remaining endemic species distributed across the 3 islands.

**Seychelles:** Comprising about 115 islands is made up of two distinct island groups; the Mahé group of more than 40 central, mountainous granitic islands and a second group of more than 70 outer, flat, coralline islands. Our focus will be on the first group as this is where most of the endemic bird species can be found and we will



visit the islands of Mahé, Praslin, Cousin, La Digue and Aride, each with their own special birds. With roughly a dozen endemic species we'll spend some time hopping between islands in search of them all.

**Accommodation:** The hotels are of a good standard throughout.

**Road Transport:** Road transport is by suv or minivan and roads are generally good.

**Walking:** The walking effort during our Seychelles, Mauritius birding tour is mostly easy, Reunion is occasionally moderate.

**Climate:** It will be generally hot and sunny, although overcast weather can occur at times. At higher altitudes, the temperature ranges from cool to warm. There is likely to be some rain and it will be fairly humid.

**Bird Photography:** Good

## Detailed Itinerary

### **Day 1 - Arrival on Reunion**

Our flight from Mayotte should arrive in St. Denis around mid-day, all being well. This should allow us some time in the afternoon to start initial exploring of this beautiful volcanic island in search of our target birds. Reunion is a French Foreign Territory the same as Mayotte and once again the French style of live will be very evident on Reunion. Reunion Bulbul, arguably the better looking of the Indian Ocean Island Bulbuls, should be a rather easy find. Not that it looks much different from any of the other bulbuls of the region but the pale eye is certainly distinct and adds some flavour to this otherwise rather dull bulbul. **O/N L'Escapade BellePierre guest house or similar, St.Denis, Reunion**



### **Day 2 – Full day Reunion**

We'll spend several hours this morning walking the forested areas in Réserve Naturelle de la Roche Écrite, on well laid out trails where we hope to find just about all the local endemic land birds. Reunion Cuckooshrike is more often than not first detected by hearing it, we'll follow up and locate the bird after hearing the distinctive tuit-tuit call. Both white-eyes, Reunion Grey and Reunion Olive, are normally easily located as they work their way through the canopy in noisy flocks. In more open areas we'll be hoping to find Reunion Stonechat, all the while being on the lookout for the sometimes-tricky Reunion Harrier. Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher are often conspicuous, and we shouldn't have too much trouble locating this one, sometimes split as a full species Reunion Paradise Flycatcher. Reunion is also host to not one but two breeding endemic Petrels, Barau's and Mascarene. The former should be an easy find on our mini pelagic in the afternoon whilst any sighting of Mascarene will be regarded as the birding gods having smiled upon us. Other good birds to look out for are Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy, Tropical and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and White-tailed Tropicbird.

**O/N L'Escapade BellePierre guest house or similar, St.Denis, Reunion**

### **Day 3 – Morning on Reunion, afternoon flight to Mauritius**

A slightly more relaxed morning as we make our way up one of the windy roads to some of the higher lying areas from where we'll have spectacular views over the island as well as to look for any specials we might still be missing including the Reunion Harrier which should be easier here. Mascarene Swiftlets are also often seen along here and definitely easier seen on Reunion than on Mauritius. After lunch we'll make our way to the airport for our 45 minute flight to Mauritius. **O/N**

**Domaine L'Arbre du Voyageur or similar, Mauritius**

### **Day 4 – Full day Mauritius**

We have a full day to find the endemics of Mauritius, several of them endangered and declining. The Mauritius White-eye in particular is now Critically endangered and still declining, it has certainly become one of the more difficult endemics to find and we might have to work a bit for this one. Most of the birding on Mauritius will be done in the south-west where most of the intact forest remain in the Black River Gorges National Park. The scenery in the park is nothing short of dramatic and we hope to have a good return on our efforts to locate the remaining endemics here. The Pink Pigeon is usually not too difficult a bird to locate considering how remarkably



low the total population numbers are. Mauritius Kestrel should also not pose too much of a problem but even their numbers seem to be on a decline again. Mauritius Grey White-eye is thankfully far more common than its critically endangered cousin so should be an easy one to lay eyes on. The *desolata* race of Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher is not quite as easy as the nominate on Reunion but we hope to find it alongside the likes of Mauritius Fody, Mauritius Bulbul and Mauritius Cuckooshrike. A very reliable site for the Paradise Flycatcher is at Sublime Ebony Forest in the Chamarel Park, time permitting we might pop over to the north of the island to grab this one if we fail in the south. Another of our targets is the endemic Echo Parakeet, once considered a sub-species of the much more common, introduced Ring-neck Parakeet which competes with the Echo Parakeet for nesting holes and has therefore caused quite a decline in the numbers of the Echo Parakeet. **O/N Domaine L'Arbre du Voyageur or similar, Mauritius**

#### **Day 5 – Morning and a bit in Mauritius, late afternoon flight to Rodrigues**

Another nearly full day to find whichever species we might have missed the previous day, special focus will be on Madagascar Kestrel should we still need that, these birds that were once down to a mere four individuals have made a remarkable comeback thanks to an intensive captive breeding and release program but even then this can be one tough little raptor to find. We'll spend some time in the Vallee des Ferney area which often produces the Kestrel and Bassin Blanc for Mauritius Olive White-eye. Late afternoon will see us head to the airport for our flight to the island of Rodrigues where we will target 2 endemic landbirds. **O/N Bakwa Lodge or similar, Rodrigues**

#### **Day 6 – Morning on Rodrigues, afternoon flight back to Mauritius**

The island of Rodrigues, smallest of the 3 islands we'll be visiting in the Mascarenes, holds a certain yesteryear charm to it with far less development than the other two islands but at the same time the natural vegetation here has not escaped man and large parts of the island have only small remnant patches of natural forest clinging on in the higher valleys. We'll have a fair amount of time to search for our two targets, first up the Rodrigues Fody, quite a different bird from the other Fodys we've seen thus far. The Rodrigues Warbler might need a bit more effort to see well but they are not rare here but typical of the *Acrocephalus* warblers, they can be a tad skulky. Afternoon flight back to Mauritius. **O/N Domaine L'Arbre du Voyageur or similar, Mauritius**



### **Day 7 – Morning on Mauritius, mid-day flight to Seychelles**

Morning visit to Ile Aux Aigrettes (depended on the time of our flight to Seychelles) and also, at the time of writing, the island is closed to the public but re-opening seems imminent. The island has been totally rehabilitated through an eradication program to get rid of all non-native predators such as cats, pigs and rats and has subsequently seen the reintroduction of Pink Pigeon that seems to be flourishing here. The island is of course also a very good spot for Mauritius Fody and Mauritius Olive White-eye. Shortly after our return we'll depart for the airport for our flight to the Seychelles. **O/N Blue Hill Guest House or similar, Mahe, Seychelles.**

### **Day 8 – Full day Mahe Island, Seychelles**

Described by many as the most beautiful islands in the world, the Seychelles will not disappoint, with a typical laid-back lifestyle of the Creole people one will be forgiven for falling into the relaxed rhythm of life here. Mahé is the largest island in the Seychelles and boasts the world's smallest capital city, Victoria. Mahé is home to the majority of the Seychelles endemics but the trophy bird certainly has to be the endangered Seychelles Scops Owl, a bird we certainly will put a lot of effort in to see. One of the rarest species on Mahé is certainly the Seychelles White-eye, thought to number as few as 30-50 individuals, fortunately a healthy population still exist on the uninhabited islet of Conception. A visit to Morne Seychellois National Park should hopefully put us in a good position to net both these species alongside the likes of Seychelles Kestrel, Seychelles Blue Pigeon and Seychelles Bulbul. Other non-endemic birds that we might encounter include Yellow Bittern, Red Fody, Malagasy Turtle Dove, and the delightful Zebra Dove. **O/N Blue Hill Guest House or similar, Mahe, Seychelles.**

### **Day 9 – Seychelles – Mahe to Praslin**

We'll fly to the island of Praslin today where we'll visit the Vallee de Mai National Park to look for the Seychelles Black Parrot, formerly considered a sub-species of Lesser Vasa Parrot, which has its stronghold here on Praslin. We'll also be on the lookout for Seychelles Sunbird and any other birds we might have missed on Mahe. **O/N Colibri Guest House or similar, Praslin, Seychelles.**



### **Day 10 – Seychelles: Praslin to La Digue**

This morning we'll take a short boat ride to the island of Cousin. This tiny uninhabited isle less than a kilometre across is a BirdLife International reserve that safeguards one of only four populations of the Seychelles Warbler. Once considered to be critically endangered with a world population of only 30 individuals, the species has now increased to a stable population of around 2500 birds. We'll also be looking for Seychelles Magpie-Robin, Seychelles Warbler and Seychelles Fody here, all three birds should hopefully be quite easy to find. Cousin is also home to White-tailed Tropicbirds as well the ever so elegant Fairy Tern. Heading back to Praslin for lunch and then over to La Digue, with a small overnight bag each, on another short boat ride. We should have time in the afternoon to look for Seychelles Swiftlet and Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher, arguably the most beautiful of all the Paradise Flycatchers. **O/N La Digoise or similar, La Digue, Seychelles.**

### **Day 11 – La Digue to Praslin, Seychelles**

After breakfast we'll head back to Praslin and waste no time to get to our boat for a trip to Aride island. Lying 10km north of Praslin, Aride is a seabird paradise with a quarter million nesting Sooty Tern at one of the world's largest colonies, as well as up to 20 000 nesting White-tailed Tropicbird! Smaller numbers of breeding Lesser and Brown Noddy, and Roseate, Bridled and Fairy Tern also occur. Great and Lesser Frigatebird are often seen overhead as well. Both Seychelles Magpie-Robin and Seychelles Warbler have also been introduced. The warbler has done particularly well and today 80% of the population occurs here, whereas the magpie-robin has had a slow but steady population increase. **O/N Colibri Guest House or similar, Praslin, Seychelles.**

**Please note that all boating trips mentioned are weather dependant and as such we might have to alter the timing of said trips from what is mentioned above and on rare occasions even forfeit on a particular trip.**

### **Day 12 – End of Tour**

Early flight back to Mahe to connect with international flights out.



Cost for the 12-day Mascarenes trip amounts to –

Based on 6 pax -

- **2024** – USD 7,200 per person sharing
- **2025** – USD 7,500 per person sharing
- Single supplement of USD 1,000

#### **THE ABOVE QUOTE INCLUDES**

1. Ground Transportation
2. Fuel
3. All lodging
4. All meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11
3. Full time bird guide/ tour leader
3. Meals and accommodation for tour leader/ guide
4. Mineral water
5. All entrance fees
6. All boat rides mentioned (weather dependant)

#### **THE QUOTE EXCLUDES**

1. Items of a personal nature
2. Any drinks besides mineral water
3. All optional activities not mentioned in the itinerary
4. All Flights
5. Travel and/or personal Insurance





6. Telephone calls
7. Laundry
8. Special gratuities

### **Important Notice**

Please be aware that some of the birding areas mentioned in this itinerary are remote and can become inaccessible due to bad weather, bush fires or poor road conditions and in these cases the guide will change, substitute or omit a particular spot at his/her discretion.

Inter-island flights are notorious for last minute changes, keep this in mind as the tour leaders might have to come up with last minute alternatives, fortunately we have the option of boat transfers if flights are cancelled.

Boat rides are of course weather dependant so we might have to shift and shuffle our boat rides a bit where needed. We'll try our utmost to make every boat ride but this can not be guaranteed for the reasons above.

A moderate level of fitness is required for some of the hikes, most trails are uneven, narrow and can be slippery after rain. Walking sticks are highly recommended as are good sturdy shoes.

Please bring protective gear for your camera equipment and other electronics you plan to take with you on hikes, both island groups lie in the tropics so rain can be unpredictable.

The accommodation in both the Seychelles and the Mascarenes are generally of a very good quality, with the accommodation on Rodrigues slightly less so but still good. Food is good especially the seafood. Vehicles we use are generally good, fortunately driving distances are short with little traffic.