

The Mascarene Islands, April 27th – May 8th 2010 Mauritius – Rodrigues – Réunion



Female Réunion Stonechat *Saxicola tectes*, La Roche Écrite.

Summary

This was a 10 day family trip. We had 6 days on Mauritius and 4 days on Réunion. I did full-on birding one morning in Mauritius and the day-trip to Rodrigues. On Réunion I had one morning and one evening to spare. We also had one day together in Black River Gorges, one morning at La Maïdo, and one evening at Rivière St-Étienne. There are very few, if any, trip-reports from April and May. And I could understand why. The weather was fine most of the time, so April and May isn't really low season for tourists in general. It's between the two dominating rainy seasons. However, since Mauritius is located on the southern hemisphere this is actually winter-time. So birds are in non-breeding plumage, they are quiet, they are shy, they aren't active. I found birding in Black River Gorges and La Roche Écrite very hard. Especially the Black River Gorges. This is also why, I guess, I missed both endemic Cuckoo-Shrikes, as well as the seabirds. On the other hand I was very lucky on my first late morning visit to Bassin Blanc when seeing both the endemic race of Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher as well as the notoriously difficult Mauritius Olive White-eye.

Accommodation and Transports

On Mauritius we stayed at the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort close to Bel Ombre in the south. All transports were with pre-arranged cabs from the hotel. And on Réunion we stayed at Le Boucan Canot in the west close to St-Gilles-les-Baines. We rented a car via the hotel in Réunion for two and a half days. I booked the return flight from Mauritius to Rodrigues on the Air Mauritius homepage.

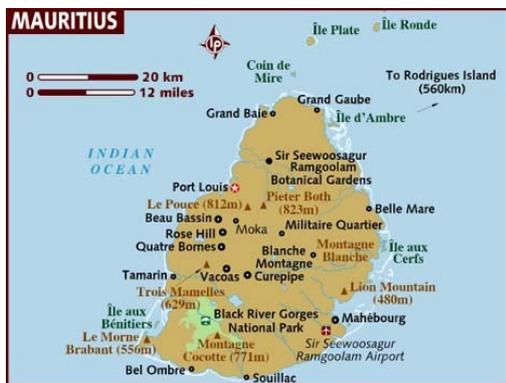
Literature

- * Birds of the Indian Ocean Islands, I Sinclair, O Langrand (1998)
- * Mauritius, Réunion & Seychelles, 6th ed, Lonely Planet (2007)
- * Trip-reports from travellingbirder.com. Many thanks, especially to: Bengtsson (2008), Van der Laan (2004), Van den Schoor (2001), Vermeulen (1995), Westdean (2005)

Site comments

General

An over-view of the sites are found in the beginning of Sinclair & Langrand. To see the endemics basically you only need to visit the sites mentioned below. Some species are also found on other places. This mean that you in theory could see all endemics on one day each on every island, provided you're extremely lucky.



Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Tamarin Bay

Mauritius

Black River Gorges National Park

A decent map over the trail-system can be found here:

<http://www.gov.mu/portal/sites/moasite/nationalpark/images/nparkmap.jpg>

Macchabée Forest Trail

The trail starts at the Park Office at Le Pètrin. You have to walk at least 20-30 minutes before you reach native forest. So start early. After at least 1 km the trail forks. If you go left you start the Macchabée Forest Trail that follows the ridge over-looking the canyon on your left-hand side. After another ~1 km the trail forks again. If you here go left you start to descend into the canyon, this is how far I walked one morning. If you instead going right at the last fork you'll continue the Macchabée Forest Trail along the ridge. This area hold the last remnants of native forest in Mauritius, up to 98% of land is urban or sugar plantations. If you follow the path right at the first fork when going from Le Pètrin you'll reach a fenced area with very nice native forest on your right hand side after another 1 km, this is actually close to the Mare Longue Loop. This area was pointed out to me by staff in the Park Office as being especially good. Indeed I saw 5 Mauritius Bulbuls here.

Savanne Trail

The trail wasn't open for public early morning when I arrived, but later in the morning the gates were open and I walked the path for maybe 1 km and back. The forest didn't look as promising as the Macchabée or around Bassin Blanc but still there were quite a lot of birds. Pink Pigeon and a sole Mauritius Fody being the best.

Bassin Blanc

The best (and only) way to bird this place is to stop at the lay-by and wait for birds to appear. The crater lake is surrounded by primary lush forest and on my first visit, late morning time I had both Mauritius Bulbul, Mauritius Olive White-eye and the rare Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher. On my second visit at early morning time it was fairly quiet and I didn't see anything in particular. A few impressive Greater Mascarene Flying Foxes were seen on both occasions.



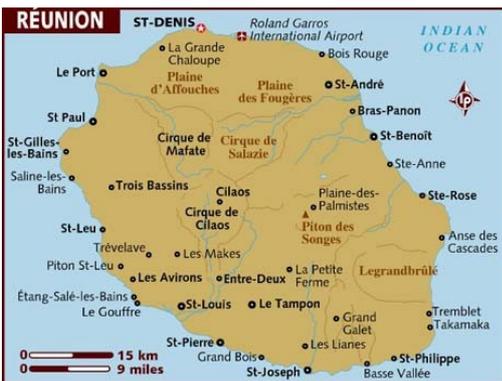
Mascarine Martin Phedina borbonica, Grand Bassin

Rodrigues

Solitude Forest Station

After landing at the airport 1 PM I quickly found a transport to Solitude Forest Station (sometimes referred to as Citronelle) which is located on the northern slopes of Mount Lubin, which is south of Port Mathurin. I arrived in the early afternoon and spent 2-3 hours here. The birding was slow as expected, and it took me at least 2 hours before I was able to pin a Rodrigues Brush-Warbler down. It was in a steep slope a bit uphill from the dried small riverbeds you follow from the Forest Station. I located the bird on its rather *Sylvia*-warbler-like song. It responded good to pishing and I had really nice views. The origin of this species seems strange to me, I didn't get any *Acrocephalus*-associations at all, maybe it will be re-classified in the future. According to a previous trip-report the warbler was down to 17 individuals in the late 70s before conservation actions helped and it recovered. Today there should be around 150 individuals surviving in the few patches of native forest still growing on Rodrigues.

The Fody was easier to locate, in total I had at least 10 birds, among those at least as many Madagascar Fodies. Unfortunately they were all in non-breeding plumage, they had all a yellowish/greenish wash to the feathers lacking in Madagascar Fody (see picture below), also they tend to climb on branches and trees more often. The forest at Solitude is dry, it was really hot and there were plenty of annoying mosquitoes. Later in the afternoon there were many Flying Foxes in the sky. After succeeding seeing both endemics I walk the road down to Port Mathurin where I spent the rest of the evening, since it was Sunday all shops and restaurants but one were closed. I arranged for a cab to take me to the airport for the returning flight to Mauritius at 10 PM.



Réunion Olive White-eye Zosterops olivaceus

Réunion

La Roche Écrite

I started from Boucan Canot very early in the morning in order to get in place at sunrise. Finding the right way from St-Denis wasn't without some problems since I didn't have any decent map. You should head toward Le Brûlé, and if you pass the Centre Hospitalier Bellepierre you're on the right way. The road is extremely steep and it takes almost 1 hour to reach the car park once you've left St-Denis. The path uphill was easy to find and follow, it follows

different ridges and goes uphill more or less the whole time. It's essential to arrive early in order to avoid the mist. I found birding from the trail quite tough since the forest is thick and low, it was a bit easier after you reached some higher grounds. All 'easy' species I was expecting were found within the first hour, after that the searching for Réunion Cuckoo-Shrike was effortless. There was low activity and few calls throughout the morning. I didn't connect with Réunion Harrier either, and was very pleased when I later saw a nice male from the highway between St-Denis and Le Port on the way back to the hotel.

Rivière St-Étienne

Located close to St-Louis in the south of Réunion. I couldn't find any good vantage points or sea access at all on the east side of the river mouth but instead on the west side of the river. It took some time before I found a way through some industrial compounds down to the sea. The coastline is low and I found it hard to sea-watch since waves breaking in impaired vision, and light conditions wasn't the best either since you're looking mostly west into the setting sun. There was very little movements apart from flocks of noddies going back and forth on both evenings. I hadn't anything looking as petrels, not even far out. The Tropical Shearwaters were not too distant and I had some decent views, all birds going from west to east.



Rodrigues Brush-Warbler *Acrocephalus rodericanus*



Rodrigues Fody *Foudia flavicans*

Birdlist: The Mascarenes, April 27th - May 8th 2010

1. **Tropical Shearwater** *Puffinus bailloni bailloni*
5 at the mouth of Rivière St-Étienne 5.5, 50 at the mouth of Rivière St-Étienne 6.5. Previously thought to be a separate species: Mascarene Shearwater *Puffinus atrodorsalis*.
2. **White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus*
Commonly seen on M and Re. E.g. 30 on the west coast of Re.
3. **Striated Heron** *Butorides striatus*
1 at SW M, 2 at Port Mathurin, Ro 2.5.
4. **Réunion Harrier** *Circus maillardi maillardi* [Endemic]
1 beautiful male along the highway between St: Denis and Le Port 6.5.
5. **Grey Francolin** *Francolinus pondicerianus* [Introduced]
1 e.r. Port Louis 28.4.
6. **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*
2 at Bassin Blanc 29.4.
7. **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*
8. **Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*
- Skua sp.** *Catharacta sp.*
1 distant bird at the mouth of Rivière St-Étienne 6.5.
9. **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus*
Commonly seen off M and Re.
10. **Lesser Noddy** *Anous tenuirostris*
5 at Heritage, M 1.5, 100 at the mouth of Rivière St-Étienne 7.5.

11. **Sooty Tern** *Sterna fuscata*
2 at Tamarin Bay, M 3.5.
12. **Spotted Dove** *Streptopelia chinensis* [Introduced]
13. **Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia* [Introduced]
14. **Zebra Dove** *Geopelia striata* [Introduced]
15. **Madagascar Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia picturata* [Introduced]
Seen M and Re.
16. **Pink Pigeon** *Nesoenas mayeri* [Endemic]
2 at Macchabée Forest Trail 2.5, 2 at Savanne Trail 2.5.
17. **Echo Parakeet** *Psittacula echo* [Endemic]
2 at Macchabée Forest Trail 29.4, 1 female + 5 at Macchabée Forest Trail 2.5.
18. **Ring-necked Parakeet** *Psittacula krameri* [Introduced]
19. **Mascarene Swiftlet** *Collocalia francica* [Endemic]
Commonly seen Black River Gorges, M and at La Roche Écrite and Le Maïdo, Re.
20. **Mascarene Martin** *Phedina borbonica*
40 at Grand Bassin, M 29.4.
21. **Réunion Bulbul** *Hypsipetes borbonicus* [Endemic]
8 at La Roche Écrite 6.5.
22. **Mauritius Bulbul** *Hypsipetes olivaceus* [Endemic]
2 at Bassin Blanc 29.4, 5 at Macchabée Forest Trail 29.4.
23. **Red-whiskered Bulbul** *Pycnonotus jocosus* [Introduced]
24. **Réunion Stonechat** *Saxicola tectes* [Endemic]
10 at La Roche Écrite 6.5, 8 at Le Maïdo 8.5.
25. **Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone bourbonnensis* [Endemic]
1 ssp. *desolata* at Bassin Blanc 29.4, 10 ssp. *bourbonnensis* at La Roche Écrite 6.5.
26. **Rodrigues Brush-Warbler** *Acrocephalus rodericanus* [Endemic]
1 at Solitude Forest Station, Ro 2.5.
27. **Mauritius Olive White-eye** *Zosterops chloronothus* [Endemic]
2 at Bassin Blanc 29.4.
28. **Réunion Olive White-eye** *Zosterops olivaceus* [Endemic]
20 at La Roche Écrite 6.5, 5 at La Maïdo 8.5.
29. **Mauritius Grey White-eye** *Zosterops mauritianus* [Endemic]
The only commonly seen endemic on M.
30. **Réunion Grey White-eye** *Zosterops borbonicus* [Endemic]
The only commonly seen endemic on Re.
31. **Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* [Introduced]
32. **Madagascar Fody** *Foudia madagascariensis* [Introduced]
Seen on all three islands including Solitude Forest Station, Ro.
33. **Mauritius Fody** *Foudia rubra* [Endemic]
1 at Savanne Trail. ID based on bill shape and color and ground color. Non-breeding plumage.
34. **Rodrigues Fody** *Foudia flavicans* [Endemic]
10 at Solitude Forest Station, Ro, tend to climb branches in a Nuthatch-like manner.
35. **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* [Introduced]
36. **Village Weaver** *Ploceus cucullatus* [Introduced]
37. **Yellow-eyed Canary** *Serinus mozambicus* [Introduced]
38. **Spice Finch (Scaly-breasted Munia, Nutmeg Mannikin)** *Lonchura punctulata* [Introduced]
39. **Common Waxbill** *Estrilda astrild* [Introduced]

Summary: 39 species (14 introduced, 15 endemics)

Endemic and rare species NOT seen

Barau's Petrel – Apparently easy before sunset outside the mouth of Rivière St-Étienne on Réunion, at least during breeding season, seem to spread during winter...

Round Island Petrel – Only seen on boat trips going to Round Island, north of Mauritius.

Réunion Black Petrel – Seldomly seen, a few claims from the mouth of Rivière St-Étienne during breeding season.

Mauritius Kestrel – On verge of extinction, now survives thanks to a successful reintroduction program. Most often seen along Macchabée Forest Trail in Black River Gorges. Habits seem unpredictable. Ask the staff at the different park offices for detailed information. It doesn't seem to be any clear stake-outs.

White Tern – There is a colony on Île aux Cocos just west of Rodrigues. Day trips could be arranged from Port Mathurin.

Mauritius Cuckoo Shrike – Should be possible around the Macchabée Forest Trail, or any other of the trails in the park, or at Bassin Blanc.

Réunion Cuckoo Shrike – Best place seem to be La Roche Écrite, often located when calling.

Additional shots



Echo Parakeet Psittacula echo, Macchabée Forest Trail



Pink Pigeon Nesoenas mayeri, Macchabée Forest Trail



Mauritius Bulbul Hypsipetes olivaceus



Réunion Bulbul Hypsipetes borbonicus, La Roche Écrite

Contact

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