Indian Ocean Islands

Seychelles, Mauritius, Rodrigues and Réunion



Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher by Daniel Danckwerts

We begin our journey on the granitic formation of the Seychelles, which are often thought of as the most beautiful islands in the world. Here we will explore several of the isles to observe some of the planet's rarest birds, as well as some of the world's greatest tropical seabird colonies. The fabulous coal-black Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher, Seychelles Scops Owl, Seychelles Magpie-Robin and Seychelles Blue Pigeon are included in this bounty. Nesting seabird colonies showcase hundreds of thousands of Sooty Terns, lesser numbers of Bridled and White Terns, Wedge-tailed and Tropical Shearwaters, Great and Lesser Frigatebirds, Brown and Lesser Noddies and more than 20,000 White-tailed Tropicbirds!

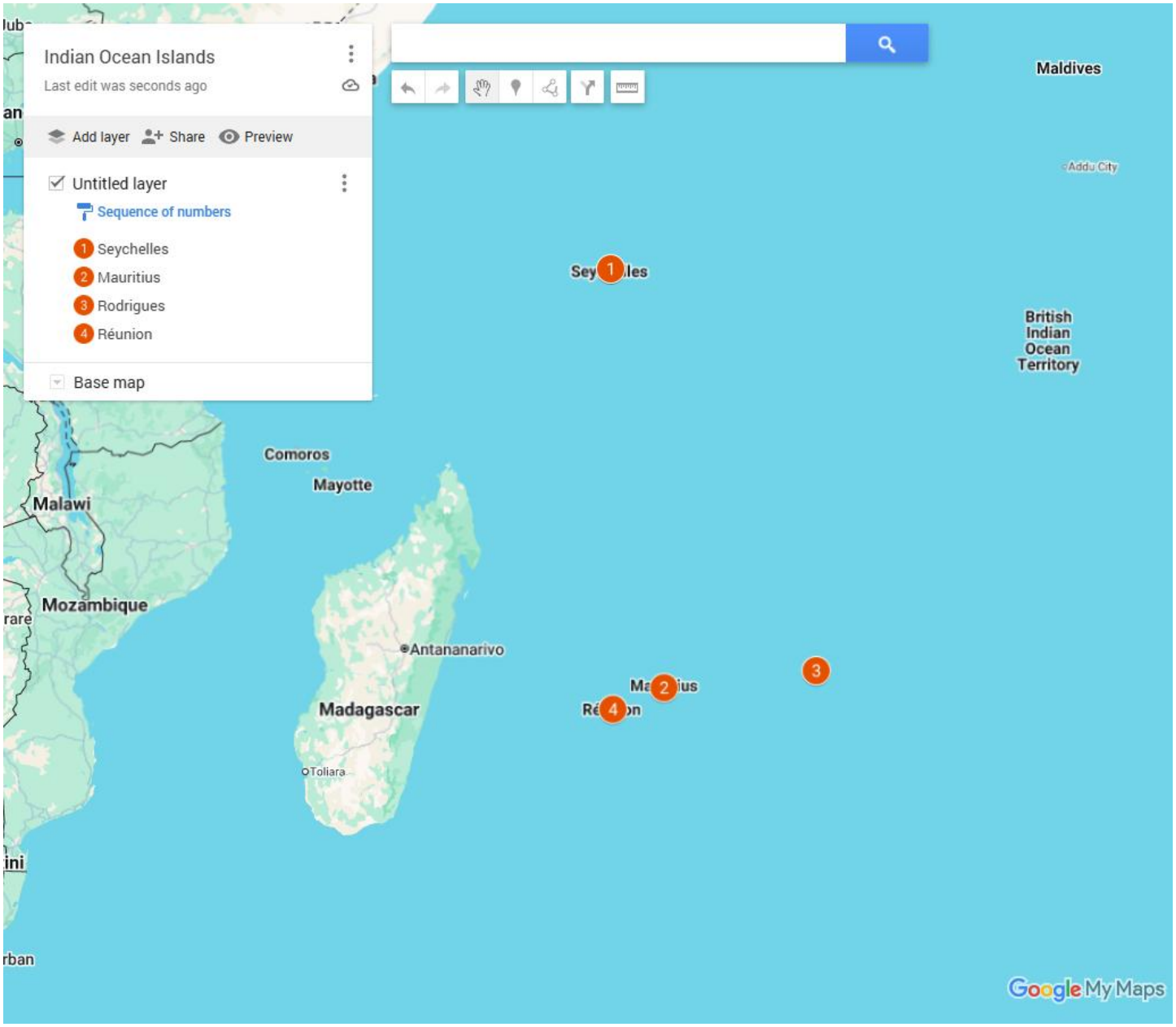
Island wildlife is generally susceptible to extinction and the islands of this area are no exception, with birds like the proverbial and rather unfortunate Dodo serving as stark reminders of humankind's heavy hand in these sensitive environments. During the opening days of our explorations in Mauritius, we target Mauritius Kestrel, Pink Pigeon and Echo Parakeet, all recently snatched back from the jaws of extinction. Highlights include a visit to the dramatic Black River Gorges National Park, and an overnight visit to the far-flung Rodrigues Island for its two endemic landbirds: a warbler and a unique yellow fody.

After the splendours of Mauritius, we visit the French-governed Réunion, a rugged volcanic island, rich in land endemics and well-endowed with a range of special seabirds. We will search the tropical waters here for Barau's Petrel and, whilst ambling forest trails in the footprints of pirates, search for Réunion Cuckooshrike, two endemic white-eyes and Réunion Bulbul.

Our exploration of these tropical islands is a fantastic birding getaway and serves as a perfect companion to our Comoros or Madagascar tours. We welcome you to join us as we island-hop with binoculars in hand in our quest to find the birds of these heavenly Indian Ocean isles.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrive in Mahé, Seychelles**
Day 2	**Mahé to Praslin**
Days 3 & 4	**Praslin (Cousin and La Digue Islands)**
Day 5	**Praslin to Mahé**
Day 6	**Mahé to Mauritius**
Day 7	**Mauritius to Rodrigues**
Day 8	**Rodrigues to Mauritius & Ile aux Aigrettes**
Day 9	**Black River Gorges National Park**
Day 10	**Mauritius to Réunion**
Day 11	**La Roche Ecrite**
Day 12	**Réunion & final departures**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Birding sites in detail

*The **Seychelles** granitic archipelago is made up of 115 islands and the capital, Victoria, is situated on the largest island, Mahé. The friendly Creole people that inhabit these hot and humid islands have adapted to the 'laid back' island atmosphere, which is one of the factors that makes exploring this paradise such a delight. Mahé is better preserved than what we may have come to expect in these parts, and is blessed with extensive forests, mangrove swamps and seemingly endless beaches.*



Seychelles Blue Pigeon by Daniel Danckwerts

Seychelles - Morne Seychellois National Park. We will visit Morne Seychellois National Park to look for two avian specials that only occur on Mahé. These are the Seychelles Scops Owl and the Seychelles White-eye. The Scops Owl is thankfully common, though as with all scops owls can be somewhat elusive. The Seychelles White-eye, however, numbers only 50 birds on Mahé and is critically endangered. In 1998, a good-sized population of the white-eye was also discovered on Conception Island and survival prospects for this species are therefore looking a little more positive.

Seychelles - Vallée de Mai National Park, Praslin. This World Heritage site is the stronghold of Seychelles Black (Lesser Vasa) Parrot. This park is also particularly famous for its stands of Coco de Mer Palms. Male and female flowers are situated on separate plants and its huge 'nut', a pelvis-shaped fruit, is believed to be the fruit of the tree of knowledge, as well as a powerful aphrodisiac. Other birds we will seek here include the beautiful Seychelles Blue Pigeon and Seychelles Sunbird. If we find our targets early, we can enjoy some brilliant snorkelling or just soaking up the sun!



Seychelles Magpie-Robin by Daniel Danckwerts

Seychelles – Cousin and La Digue Islands. We will take two boat trips to nearby islands. The exact islands, and how much time we spend on them will depend on weather conditions, local boat availability and our species targets.

Cousin Island. Approximately 2km north of Praslin, this tiny, uninhabited isle is a BirdLife International reserve and holds critically important populations of the endangered Seychelles Magpie-Robin and Seychelles Warbler. The robin used to occur on the larger islands but was

heavily predated by rats and monkeys, causing the population to crash. The tiny remaining population was then captured and moved to the uninhabited Cousin Island. The magpie-robin's population stands at roughly 190 individuals today, which is still critically low and is subject to an intense conservation management plan by BirdLife International to secure its future. The warbler has increased from 30 birds in the 1960s to an estimated 3,000 individuals at present and it has been removed from the critically endangered list. Easier to see than the magpie-robin are Seychelles Fody and Malagasy Turtle Dove, while the seabirds we will be looking for include the elegant White-tailed Tropicbird and the delightfully beautiful White Tern. The latter species lays a single egg, precariously balanced on a palm branch and, on hatching, the chick simply clings on until it can fly.



White Tern by Daniel Danckwerts

La Digue Island. This island is surrounded by a coral reef, providing superb snorkelling opportunities. La Digue is also home to the striking Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher, and we will visit the Veuve Reserve to observe this species. The males are completely glossy-black, sporting impressively long tail plumes that stream behind as it darts through the forest. Seychelles Swiftlets breed here as well, and we may visit a cave where their nests grip precariously to the granite rock-face. Yellow Bitterns are inexplicably resident here, representing the only known population of this species outside Asia. Further exploration of La Digue should reveal Seychelles Sunbird and Common Waxbill. Flocks of the bizarre Crab-plover can be found resting on the shoreline. This highly sought-after species forms its own monotypic family.



Seychelles Scops Owl by Daniel Danckwerts

Seychelles – Mahé Botanical Gardens. The gardens are a good site to search for any species we may not yet have seen to date. They also house a colony of the Seychelles Flying Fox that are, aside from man, the only mammal occurring on these islands. We'll have another chance of seeing both Seychelles Scops Owl and Seychelles White-eye should we not have connected with these species so far.

Discovered by the Portuguese in 1505, ***Mauritius*** *has enjoyed a colourful history of occupation by the Dutch, French and British, all having made their mark on this tropical island before independence was attained in 1968.*



Rodrigues Warbler by Daniel Danckwerts

For birder and layman alike, the name of this island conjures images of the flightless and, of course, extinct Dodo; but fortunately for us there are still 8 extant endemics that we will endeavour to find. These species are by no means secure, as the introduction of alien fauna onto the islands and deforestation for sugar has left some of them with an uncertain future. Captive breeding and release programmes have been integral to the conservation of some of these species and today they can once again be seen flying free in their natural surroundings.

Rodrigues – Grande Montagne. From Mauritius, we'll take a short flight to the tropical island of Rodrigues. Rodrigues belongs to Mauritius and lies 560km north-east of the main island. After arrival, we will drive to the Grande Montagne Nature Reserve to look for Rodrigues' two endemic birds. Most of the island's natural vegetation has sadly been cleared by people and by cyclones, and the little natural vegetation that still occurs is found well off the coastal plain in the higher-lying river valleys. Here we will search for these endemics; the Rodrigues Warbler and Rodrigues Fody. Both species are dependent on ongoing conservation efforts for their survival. We will also search for the rare Rodrigues Flying Fox. Snorkelling and swimming may be an afternoon option once we have found our target birds.

Mauritius – Ebony Forest. We begin with some initial exploration of the Ebony Forest where we hope to find our first endemics. This reserve has become a stronghold for several of Mauritius's toughest endemics and an active reintroduction programme is attempting to propagate populations of all the key species within this safehold. This is now regarded as the best site on the island for the Endangered Mauritius Kestrel and Pink Pigeon.



Pink Pigeon by Daniel Danckwerts

In recent times the kestrel numbered as few as four birds in the wild, mainly due to the destruction of the indigenous forests. Several birds were held in a captive breeding programme and were then released at different sites on the island. Today, thanks to this pioneering conservation work, two hundred pairs of Mauritius Kestrel now breed in the wild. The Pink Pigeon suffered a similar fate with the introduction of cats, rats and monkeys playing an even larger

role. The pigeon's population dropped to as low as 20 birds in the wild, but now due to intense conservation work at least 400 birds occur in the forests of south-western Mauritius.



Mauritius Kestrel pair by Daniel Danckwerts

Mauritius - Black River Gorges National Park. We will explore the southern corner of Mauritius, where the best remaining forest tract remains at the Black River Gorges National Park. Here we will bird for the remaining targets we may still require such as Mauritius Kestrel, the lovely Pink Pigeon, the scarce Echo Parakeet, and Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher. We will also make time to visit a nearby volcanic crater where, if we are lucky, we may see truly 'wild' Mauritius Olive White-eyes along with a host of other endemics.

There is an extensive network of trails, and we will spend a great deal of time searching for these special birds, as well as other endemics that include the attractive Mauritius Cuckooshrike, Mauritius Bulbul, Mascarene Swiftlet, Mauritius Grey White-eye and Mauritius Fody. Other birds that we may see include introduced species such as Grey Francolin, Madagascar Partridge, Madagascar Buttonquail, Spotted Dove, Zebra Dove, Scaly-breasted Munia and House Sparrow.

Mauritius - Ile aux Aigrettes. Time permitting, we might visit Ile aux Aigrettes. The small islet (26 hectares) of Ile aux Aigrettes was proclaimed a Nature Reserve in 1965. Over the last few decades most alien mammal and plant species have been eradicated from this island, and Pink Pigeons were then re-introduced; these birds have been successful in establishing a wild breeding population of around 75 birds. Feeding stations draw wild birds to certain areas and we are bound to get incredible views of Mauritius Olive White-eye and Mauritius Fody. In addition, we will take time out to enjoy the ungainly Aldabran Giant Tortoises that were introduced to fill the role of the two endemic tortoise species that became extinct after Mauritius was inhabited around 400 years ago.



Barau's Petrel by Daniel Danckwerts

Réunion *is a mountainous volcanic island covered in extensive natural vegetation. Discovered by the Portuguese navigator Tristan da Cunha in 1507, Réunion was later occupied by the French and is still to this day a French-governed territory; the bustling pavement cafes and cuisine serve as pleasant reminders of this influence.*

Réunion - pelagic. An afternoon pelagic should turn up a host of interesting species. We can expect Wedge-tailed and Tropical Shearwaters, Sooty Tern, both Lesser and Brown Noddies, and White-tailed Tropicbirds, but we will have to wait until the late in the afternoon for the

appearance of Barau's Petrels, which only return at this time of the day after feeding far out to sea, to roost high up on the volcanic ridges, their favoured nesting grounds.

Réunion - La Roche Ecrite. There are six endemic birds on Réunion, and we have a good amount of time to search the extensive forested slopes at La Roche Ecrite for them. The forest here, rich in tree ferns and orchids, is home to small flocks of endemic Réunion Grey and Réunion Olive White-eyes, as well as the sought-after Réunion Cuckooshrike that is often located by tracking its distinctive contact call as is creeps about on moss-encrusted branches.

Réunion Bulbuls are noticeable and common residents, and we should see the delightful Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher as it searches for insects in the verdant boughs of the forest. In the more open areas, we will look for the smart Réunion Stonechat, often seen perched atop a bush. In this habitat we will also be looking for the endemic and good-looking Réunion Harrier, often seen hunting low over open areas. This spectacular bird will be high on our wanted list. Introduced species that occur include Cape Canary, Red Avadavat and Common Waxbill.



Réunion Cuckooshrike
by Daniel Danckwerts

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Undemanding. Suitable for most birding interest levels and mobility capabilities.
Birding Ease		Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. Some rare / low density species that may require repeat efforts.
Accommodation		Comfortable to very comfortable
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks on flat ground, a few moderate trails that can be slippery after rain. La Roche Ecrite trail is moderate to hard.
Vehicles / Roads		Good quality roads, but driving is rather limited.
Photography		Good. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances		Pelagic boat trips are unpredictable, weather dependent.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 12;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All boat and pelagic trips as per itinerary;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 5kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot.
- Please note that the seas during the boat & pelagic trips can be unpredictable, and guests who opt for this activity, must bear this in mind. It is suggested that you bring along some motion sickness medication if you suspect that you could be prone to seasickness. We suggest that you contact your travel doctor for information regarding the various medication options.

- If you have any medical conditions or physical limitations relating to balance and mobility, please do let the Rockjumper office know.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will depart from the Seychelles International Airport, Mahé Island (IATA: SEZ) by midday on day 1. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 12 at Roland Garros Airport, Réunion (IATA: RUN).

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Seychelles International Airport, Mahé Island (IATA: SEZ) and Roland Garros Airport, Réunion (IATA: RUN) are the main ports of entry and departure for international flights.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.