

SEYCHELLES



BIRDING E-GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Seychelles is a remote archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean 800 nautical miles off Africa's Swahili Coast. The islands were uninhabited until their discovery in the 16th Century by European explorers. The island nation declared their independence from Britain in 1976, and today the Seychelles enjoys the highest human development index in Africa.

The Seychelles is an important migration stop over for Eurasian bird species and boasts 12 endemics as well as the world's largest population of giant tortoises. With major strides towards conservation and climate change mitigation, the Seychelles has protected nearly 50% of its land and 30% of the marine territory—equating to a marine area twice the size of Great Britain. In addition, there has been a development moratorium capping the hotel size at no more than 30

+1 720 494 1530

www.GreatExpeditionsTravel.com

travel@grtexp.com

rooms for any new ventures and government initiatives to incentivize sustainable tourism practices that support the UN Development Goals.

HIGHLIGHTS

115 Indian Ocean Islands

12 endemic bird species

50% of the land is protected

2 UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Protected Marine area 2x the size of Great Britain

World's largest population of giant tortoises

282 bird species

Highest quality of life index in Africa

WHEN TO VISIT

The endemic and other resident birds can, of course, be seen all year-round. Some seabirds are also present year-round, although most terns breed during the south-east monsoon. To maximize birdwatching opportunities and the number of species seen, consider planning a trip to coincide with breeding and migration seasons. Migrants and vagrants are most likely at times of passage between Eurasian breeding grounds and wintering grounds mainly in Africa.

October to mid-December

This period includes the end of the main tern-breeding season around October, when visits to colonies on Aride, Cousin and Bird offer the chance to see all the breeding species except for Roseate Tern, which is the first species to leave (around end-August). October also marks the arrival of Eurasian migrants. These include some species rarely encountered by European birdwatchers, common visitors including **Terek Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover, Greater Sandplover, Lesser Sandplover** and, a specialty of the region, **Crab Plover**.

+1 720 494 1530

www.GreatExpeditionsTravel.com

travel@grtexp.com

Mid-December to end-January

Heavy rain can occur at any time of year, but prolonged rain at this time, the height of the rainy season, can be a problem for an outdoor pursuit such as birdwatching. Also, this is a peak period for tourism when seasonal supplements make accommodation more expensive. On the positive side, many of the more unusual vagrants to Seychelles occur around this time and heavy rain or strong winds can sometimes bring these in.

February to April

The regular winter visitors can still be seen during this period. Spring passage in March/April is rarely as dramatic as at the opposite time of year but vagrants are still possible. This period also marks the return of breeding seabirds, **Sooty Terns** noisily announcing their arrival at Aride, Bird and colonies in the outer islands. By April, the north-west winds have died away and humidity is at its highest, which makes walking in the mountains difficult. On the other hand, calm seas make island crossings very easy, the sky is usually deep blue and the visibility of the water is at its best.

May to September

As the south-east monsoon sets in, breeding starts in the **Sooty Tern** and **noddy** colonies. Visits to the seabirds islands can be memorable at this time of year. Sea crossings can be rough and Aride Island, which hosts more breeding species of seabird than any other Seychelles island, is sometimes closed to visitors in challenging weather conditions.

+1 720 494 1530

www.GreatExpeditionsTravel.com

travel@grtexp.com



MAHE

Seven of the Seychelles' twelve endemic bird species are found on Mahé, more than on any other island, including the two most elusive species of all: **Seychelles Scops-owl** and **Seychelles White-eye**. It must be noted that the scops owl has not been recorded for a few years, so a sighting would be extremely special. We strongly recommend a local guide to increase your chances of finding them. The owl is confined to Mahé while the white-eye also occurs on neighbouring Conception and has been translocated to Frégate, North, and Cousine. There are some excellent nature walks in the mountains of Mahé. The stronghold for Seychelles Scops-owl is Morne Seychellois National Park. It is difficult to find without a recording of its call to lure it to close quarters, but it can often be heard around dusk at various locations.

Mahé also holds most of the world population of **Seychelles Kestrel**, found from sea level to the highest hills. The other endemic land birds can all be seen with relative ease including **Seychelles Blue Pigeon**, **Seychelles Bulbul**, **Seychelles Sunbird**, and **Seychelles Swiftlet**. The coastal plateau areas of Mahé include important surviving wetland sites, though most are under considerable pressure from development, which are vital to the survival of **Yellow Bittern** in Seychelles. These marshes have also been focal points for the recent natural colonisation of Seychelles by **Black-crowned Night Heron**.

+1 720 494 1530
www.GreatExpeditionsTravel.com
travel@grtexp.com

Wader sites are very productive, especially during October to April when species will include **Crab Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Greater Sandplover, Saunders' Tern** and a host of other species.



PRASLIN

A visit to the World Heritage Site of the Vallée de Mai is not to be missed for the atmosphere of its unique Coco de Mer forest and also for the birding highlight of Praslin, the **Seychelles Black Parrot** and **Seychelles Swiftlets**. The best time to visit is Early morning or late afternoon when it is also cooler and less crowded (this is the number one tourist attraction in Seychelles and gets very busy when the bus tours start to arrive).

Yellow Bittern and **Black-crowned Night Heron** may be seen at the nearby golf course. During the northern winter, **Garganey**, the only species of duck recorded annually in Seychelles, are often to be seen on the pools, while the open grass of the golf course attracts waders such as **Whimbrel, Greenshank, Grey Plover and Common Sandpiper**. There is also a chance of rarities at times of passage particularly October to December.



LA DIGUE

The symbol of La Digue is the **Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher**, which was known to breed only here until birds were translocated to Denis in 2008 (also a few have been reported from neighbouring Félicité, where it may breed). Veuve Reserve was set up to preserve habitat for the flycatcher, called Veuve in local Creole, and protects some of the last remaining Takamaka and Indian Almond trees in which it feeds and nests. This habitat is under tremendous pressure from the expansion of tourism and housing developments. Historically, this is an island dominated by bicycles and a slower paced lifestyle.

The marshes of the plateau also hold an important population of **Yellow Bittern**, while on the hillside overlooking the plateau is located one of the few known nesting caves of **Seychelles Swiftlet**. Three other Seychelles endemics, **Seychelles Blue Pigeon**, **Seychelles Bulbul** and **Seychelles Sunbird** also breed. It is worth checking the open grassy areas for **Common Waxbill**, found only on la Digue, Mahé and Alphonse.



ARIDE

With no human settlement other than research stations, Aride Island is the best nature reserve in the granitic islands, and a day visit is essential for anyone who wishes to enjoy the wild side of Seychelles. It hosts more seabirds of more species than the other 40 granitic islands combined, making it one of the most important seabird colonies in the Indian Ocean.

At 73 hectares, Aride is the largest granitic island never to have been invaded by rats. Breeding seabirds include the world's largest populations of **Tropical Shearwater** and **Lesser Noddy**. Two other species, **Red-tailed Tropicbird** and **Roseate Tern** are not to be found on any other island in the granitics. The strong emphasis on conservation and science have made Aride possibly the most natural of all the granitic islands with very little non-native vegetation and the only granitic island with no Common Mynas.

On the plateau, all five endemics of Aride can be seen: **Seychelles Magpie-robin**, the world's largest population of **Seychelles Warbler**, **Seychelles Fody**, **Seychelles Sunbird** and **Seychelles Blue Pigeon**. Aride is also home to the world's only self-sustaining and naturally-occurring population of Wright's Gardenia.

Ground nesting **White-tailed Tropicbirds** will be seen year-round both on the plateau and on the hillside as will tree-nesting **Fairy Terns**. Other species are seasonal, with the build-up in numbers for most species commencing around March and lasting until October. The shortest season is that of **Roseate Terns** which do not arrive until the last week in April and depart at the end of August.

The walk uphill is fairly steep but not difficult. It passes through Pisonia woodland to emerge at a spectacular viewing point from where hundreds, sometimes thousands, of roosting frigatebirds

+1 720 494 1530

www.GreatExpeditionsTravel.com

travel@grtexp.com

can be seen. The majority are **Greater Frigatebird**, with around 10 percent **Lesser Frigatebird** usually present. The viewing point is also the best place to see **Red-tailed Tropicbird**. The few pairs breeding on Aride are the only breeding birds of the granitic islands.



COUSIN

Cousin is a small granitic island of 29 hectares. It was purchased to be run as a nature reserve by Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts in 1968 and ownership transferred to Bird Life International in 2002. It is managed by the local NGO, Nature Seychelles. Due to its proximity to Praslin, Cousin receives more day visitors than any other small island in Seychelles.

The large number of visitors with little or no ornithological interest, waiting times to land and the rather short duration of guided tours can be frustrations for the keen birder. However, tours are well organised, wardens are very well informed, and sightings of **Seychelles Magpie-robin**, **Seychelles Warbler** and **Seychelles Fody** are pretty well guaranteed. Also, whereas Aride offers more time and space without the crowds, it is relatively easy to land at Cousin year-round, unlike Aride. Two other endemics, more common elsewhere, also occur as do a few **Madagascar Turtle doves** with reddish heads, resembling the endemic race *rostrata*, which has disappeared from most islands, allegedly due to interbreeding with the nominate race (possibly introduced).

By far the most common seabird, breeding during the south-east monsoon, is **Lesser Noddy**, this being the world's second largest colony (after Aride Island). A large colony of **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** breeds at the opposite time of year, the north-west monsoon, though almost all except young birds will be at sea during your daytime visit. **Fairy Tern**, **White-tailed Tropicbird** and **Tropical Shearwater** breed all year-round, with large numbers of **Bridled Tern**

+1 720 494 1530

www.GreatExpeditionsTravel.com

travel@grtexp.com

breeding at intervals of eight months. A few non-breeding waders are to be seen, some remaining year-round, others present only during the north-west monsoon. Most common are **Ruddy Turnstone** with **Crab Plover** also frequently to be seen. Other species include **Common Moorhen, Cattle Egret and Striated Heron**. Endemics are **Seychelles Kestrel, Seychelles Blue Pigeon, Seychelles Sunbird and Seychelles Bulbul**.

BIRD ISLAND

The sand cay of Bird Island takes its name from the huge colony of **Sooty Terns** that breed on the island present March to October. It also holds the largest population of **Brown Noddy** in Seychelles. There are two endemic land birds, **Seychelles Sunbird**, translocated from Mahé and **Seychelles Blue Pigeon**, a natural coloniser first recorded 2006 and breeding since 2009. The resident population of **Madagascar Turtle Dove** is interesting in showing characteristics of the Seychelles race *rostrata*. Due to its location at the northern edge of the Seychelles Bank, Bird is the first land fall for many migratory birds and has a long list of vagrants, some of which have been recorded nowhere else in Seychelles.

ALPHONSE ISLAND

This is an important feeding ground for migrant waders, specifically large numbers of **Crab Plovers, Ruddy Turnstone, Saunder's Terns, and black-naped terns**, which classifies Alphonse as an Important Bird Area. Migrant and vagrant birds are frequently recorded, including several species recorded nowhere else in Seychelles.

Alphonse is also a sanctuary for high densities of crustaceans, sea cucumbers, giant clams, and lemon and black tip reef sharks, which are scarce elsewhere due to over fishing. Manta and stingrays are regulars, and this is one of the most important foraging areas for immature sea turtles in the western Indian Ocean.

Alphonse is also a world class fly fishing and world-famous diving on the outer wall. Offshore waters provide good populations of pelagics and reef wall predators. There are also healthy nesting populations of Green and Hawksbill turtles.

ENDEMICS

Scops Owl (Creole Name "Syer") – Endangered
– Mahé

Returning from the brink of extinction, this owl is only found on the island of Mahe. Heard more than seen, the distinctive call is most

noticeable during the breeding season from October to April .

Seychelles Fody (Creole Name “Tok-tok”) –
Vulnerable – Cousin, Cousine, Fregate, Aride,
D’Arros, Denis

Breeds between May and September

Seychelles Swiftlet (Creole Name “Zirondel”) –
Vulnerable - Praslin, Mahé, La Digue

Breeds only on Praslin, Mahé, and La Digue. It has been recorded as a non-breeding visitor to Aride. Breeding is year-round inside caves.

Seychelles Black Parrot (“Kato Nwanr”) –
Vulnerable - Praslin

Found only on the island of Praslin, where its main breeding area is limited by the availability of the mature palm forest in the Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve and Praslin National Park.

Seychelles Blue Pigeon (“Pizon Olande”) –
Least Concern - Mahé, Praslin, Denis, Bird,
Aride

AKA Seychelles blue fruit dove. Found on all the larger granitic islands plus Denis and Bird, Aride. Breeding is year-round but concentrated from October to April.

Seychelles Bulbul (“Merl”) – Least Concern –
Mahé, Praslin, La Digue, Silhouette

Commonly sighted

Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher (“Vev”) –
Vulnerable – La Digue and Denis

Historically only found on La Digue, the flycatcher was successfully translocated to Denis Island, and both islands have self-sustaining breeding populations.

Seychelles Sunbird (“Kolibri”) – Least Concern
– most of the larger islands

The sunbird breeds the entire year, but the best time is September and October

Seychelles Kestrel (“katiti”) – Vulnerable –
Mahé, Silhouette, North, Praslin

The only breeding bird of prey in the Seychelles. Breeds from August to October.

Seychelles magpie robin (“Pisantez”) –
Endangered – Fregate, Cousine, Aride, Denis

Woodlands, plantations, and gardens. Historically existed on most of the islands, but are now only on Fregate, Cousine, Aride, and Denis.

Seychelles warbler (“Pti Merl Dezil”) – Near
threatened – Denis, Fregate, Cousine, Aride

Primarily found in forested areas. Cooperative breeders, meaning monogamous pairs are assisted by nonbreeding females. Largest population is on Aride.

Seychelles white-eye (“Zwazo Linet”) –
Endangered - Mahé, Concepcion, Frégate,
North, Cousine

Breeding season is from September to April. The only species of white-eyes to be cooperative breeders.