

Birding

Birding is an activity enjoyed by people from all walks of life from doctors to mechanics, lawyers to housewives, mechanics to receptionists. All one needs is a good bird book, a pair of binoculars and a destination such as Seychelles which can provide you with some of the rarest bird species on earth... Below are some of the species one can enjoy while visiting the islands.

Endemic Bird Species:

Seychelles Kestrel – Mahe Island:

Also known as Katiti by locals, the Seychelles Kestrel can be found on Mahe Island where there are believed to be between 420 – 430 pairs. The low number can be attributed to the killing of these birds by locals due to the belief that the Kestrel brings death with it. (They are now protected by law.) The Kestrel lays its eggs on the ground among rocks and on cliff faces and does not build a nest. It can be found in woodland habitats, coconut plantations, near cliffs and can be identified by its grey head and red-brown back. It is also the only residential small falcon in Seychelles making identification easier. It feeds off of small animals including lizards, geckos, skinks, insects and small birds.

Seychelles Blue Pigeon – Fregate, Mahe, Aride, Cousin and Praslin

These red, white and black pigeons, known locally as Pizon Olande, can be found perched on tree tops on Mahe and other islands. They survive on fruit and nest in trees and shrubs, laying one to two eggs. The exact number of birds is not known but it is estimated that there are at least 5000. When looking for these birds it is good to remember that in bad light they appear completely black, but do have a red face and white neck making them easy to identify in good light. The Blue Pigeon is reputed to be the best looking bird on the islands.

Seychelles Scops Owl – Mahe Island

Found predominantly in the Morne Seychelles National Park on Mahe, Scops Owls total a mere 360 birds. They were long thought to be extinct but were re-discovered by local ornithologist Phillipe Loustau-Lalanne. Their diet is believed to consist of insects, small lizards and spiders and are said to nest in the hollows of trees and among boulder on cliff ledges. They are a nocturnal bird so can only be seen at night. Look for a small brown owl with a cry similar to that of a frog.

Seychelles Cave Swiftlet – Mahe, Praslin and La Digue

This small brown bird, known for its quick flying, spends most of its time in the air. It catches insects by flying with its mouth open and nests on the inside walls of caves. Nests are made using plant fibers and saliva and were first discovered in 1970. The Cave Swiftlet is not often seen but is best looked for in the early morning or afternoon and on cloudy days when they fly closer to the ground. They can be identified by their brown bodies and long, pointed wings.

Seychelles Bulbul – on all larger islands

The Seychelles Bulbul, of which there are at least 20 000 thousand, are noisy, aggressive birds usually seen in small groups. They are able to mimic the calls of other birds and are rather inquisitive. They survive on berries, insects, bird eggs and lizards and make their circular nests in trees and scrubs where they lay 1 – 2 bright pink eggs dotted with brown specks. They can be found in forests, gardens and scrubs and can be easily identified by their orange beaks and legs. One should note that only the adult birds have the orange, the young have grey legs and beaks.

Seychelles Magpie Robin – Fregate Island

This rather ordinary looking black and white bird is the most endangered endemic specie in Seychelles numbering only 154 specimens. It was at one stage almost completely wiped out by rats, cats and by the introduction of other bird species to the islands. The Magpie Robins converge in forest and gardens surviving on insects, baby mice and fish bits dropped by seabirds. It builds its nest from grasses and fibers and lays only one pale blue egg.

It can be identified by its glossy black and white body, long tail and black bill.

Seychelles Warbler – Cousin Island

Numbering 3 500 birds, the Seychelles Warbler has been nursed back to a strong colony after near extinction. They can readily be found on Cousin Island and live in lowland forests and scrub habitats. Their cup shaped nests are made of grass and coco nut fibers and generally house 1-2 eggs - on the very rare occasion up to 4. When identifying them look for a small brown bird, slimmer than, but similar to a fody, with long legs and a narrow beak.

Seychelles Black Paradise Flycatcher – La Digue

Found no where else on earth, the Black Paradise Flycatcher makes its home on only one of the 115 islands of the Seychelles, La Digue. Living in tall forests and surviving on winged insects and spiders they total only 230 birds and lay only one egg. They can be identified by their glossy black feathers and long tails. (Females and young have shorter tails than the males.)

Seychelles Sunbird – all larger islands

The Seychelles Sunbird, a small bird with a thin, down turned curved bill, is one of the few birds that managed to thrive on the islands after humans inhabited them. They number over 20 000 today and can be found on almost all of the granite islands. They live in forested areas, gardens and in scrubs feasting on the sugary nectar in flowers and small insects. Look for a tiny bird with a thin down-curved beak.

Seychelles Grey White-eye – Mahe, Fregate and Conception

Once a highly endangered bird, the Grey White-eye is now just less than 400 strong. Living in forests, scrubs and gardens these birds live on insects and small fruits. They build cup-shaped nests using grass, moss and spider webs and lay only two eggs. They are grey and pale beneath and can be identified by the narrow white ring that encircles their eyes.

Seychelles Fody (Tok-Tok) – Cousin, Cousine , Aride, Denis and Fregate

Good parents and faithful partners, the Fody or Tok-Tok stay faithful to one partner for life and both the male and female care of their young. Their diet consists of the eggs of Fairy Terns and other birds as well as insects, fruit and seeds. They number approximately 3 500 and live in forests and scrubs in untidy domed nests. They more often than not lay two eggs but it is not unusual to find only one. Their distinguishing mark is their olive-brown colour. During breeding seasons males exhibit patches of yellow feathers on their crown and chin.

Black Parrot – Praslin Island

The Black Parrot, of which there are only 300, are not black as its name would suggest but are in fact a brown- grey colour. They were killed by humans in earlier years due to their fetish for cultivated fruits such as mangoes and papaya, but are today protected by law. The Black Parrot nests in the hollows of trees in woodland areas and gardens and lays two to three eggs. One of the best places to look for this bird is at Villa Flamboyant on Praslin Island as the fruit trees on the property seem to act as magnets for these birds. They can be identified by their brown-grey colour and their distinct whistling call.

* Other endemic birds to look out for include the White-throated Rail, Aldabra Brush Warbler, Aldabra Drongo and the Green Parakeet.

Sea Birds Species

White-tailed Tropic Bird – almost all islands

There are at least 8 500 specimens of White-tailed tropic bird in Seychelles nesting at the base of trees on almost all the islands. They survive on fish and squid caught while flying over the sea. When the hatchlings reach a certain size, the adults abandon them in the nests to starve. This may seem cruel but they do this to force the hatchlings to fly out to sea themselves. The young birds are grey and fluffy but as they grow they develop white and grey feathers and can be identified by the black patches on their wings and the black stripe across their eyes, their long white tails and large yellow beak.

Red-tailed Tropic Birds – Aride Island

Similar to the White-tail, the Red-tail Tropic bird is larger in size and has a long red tail and red beak. They are found only on Aride Island and nest on cliffs under granite overhangs. They lay only one egg and survive on flying fish. Their wing span is between 104- 119cm, a good 10 – 20cm longer than that of the White-tail. There are only 3-5 pairs of these birds in the granitic islands but over 2000 pairs can be found on Aldabra. The Red-tails can be identified by their red tails and beaks.

Wedge-tailed Tropic Birds – Aride, Bird, Cousin, Cousine Islands

Wedge-tailed Tropic Birds are dark seabirds of which there are about 60 000 pairs in the granitic islands. They feed on fish and invertebrates which they catch either at the waters surface or by diving below it. (They use their wings and feet to propel themselves underwater.) These birds nest under rocks or in burrows in the earth and lay a single egg. To identify them look for a dark seabird skimming over the waves.

Audubon's Shearwater

Audubon's Shearwater is similar to the Wedge-tail but is smaller and has a white belly and throat. It also nests in burrows and under rocks and lays one egg. It survives on small fish and squid which it dives below the sea's surface to catch. To identify this bird look for a dark seabird with a white under belly and short wings.

Fairy Tern – all islands

Usually seen in pairs around trees, Fairy Terns are beautiful birds found on all islands in Seychelles. They survive on fish, squid and crustaceans. Fairy Terns do not make nests but lay their single egg on a branch – usually where there is a knot or a fork in the branch. Just twenty one days after the egg has been laid, the chick hatches and clings onto the branch for dear life. There are 14 000 pairs of Fairy Terns in Seychelles and they can be identified by the fact that they are the only completely white tern. Also look for the cobalt blue at the base of their beaks.

Bridled Tern – Aride, Cousin and Cousine

This grey, black and white bird, found on Aride, Cousin and Cousine is similar to the Sooty Tern but is smaller in size and is not uniformly black. It nests on the ground camouflaged by rocks and vegetation and lays a single egg. It feasts on small fish and can be identified by the grey patch on its back, its black wing feathers and black cap and eye strip.

Greater Crested Tern – Aldabra and Amirantes

The Greater Crested Tern is a large white tern with a black cap and tail feathers. They live on Aldabra and Amirantes but do not breed in Seychelles. Their diet consists of fish, squid and newly hatched turtles. Greater Crested Terns lay one to two eggs on the ground and are identifiable by their size as well as their forked tail and greenish-yellow beak. There are between 300 and 700 breeding pairs in Seychelles.



Lesser Noddy Tern – on all granite islands

The Lesser Noddy Tern population on the granite islands is at least 300 000 pairs strong. It is smaller and slimmer than the Brown Noddy and has a coat that gradually fades from light to dark. It builds a platform type nest in Pisonis trees and lays one egg. Their diets consist of small fish and squid. To identify them look for a small noddy with a slender beak.

Brown/Common Noddy

The Brown or Common Noddy, of which there are at least 15 000 pairs, is a medium sized bird found on the granite islands. It survives on small fish and squid caught close to the oceans surface. The Noddy builds its nest in the top of coconut palms using sticks and seaweed and lays a single egg. To identify the Brown Noddy look for a brown tern that is larger than the lesser Noddy with a pale patch on his head.

Roseate Tern – Aride Island

This elegant looking grey bird, the Roseate Tern, has a black cap and a long slender beak. The only colony of Roseate Tern's is found on Arid Island and is 1 600 breeding pairs strong. They survive on fish and nest on the ground in big colonies laying one to two eggs. Their diet consists of fish and they are identifiable by their red beak and black cap. It is worth noting that in breeding season the underside of this bird will appear pink or white.

Sooty Tern – Aride, Bird Island, Cousine

Found on Aride, Bird Island and Cousine, the Sooty Tern flourishes with a minimum of 3 million breeding pairs on the granite islands. Sooty Terns are large, black terns with a white face and underbelly and black cap. They nest in large colonies on the ground and lay only one egg. Eggs used to be collected and exported, but today is controlled by the Ministry of Environment. Sooty Terns survive on small fish and squid. To identify them look for a large black tern which has a white underbelly.

Great Frigate Bird

With large black wings stretching for 205 – 230cm, one can easily believe that this bird is a long distance flier who glides through the air. Their wings are not waterproof making it impossible for these giant birds to land on water but they still survive on fish - flying fish that is and fish they steal from other seabirds. Great Frigates lay a single egg and nest in mangroves. Look for a huge black seabird with long wings.

Lesser Frigate Bird - Aldabra

Similar to the Greater Frigate bird but smaller in size, the Lesser Frigate Birds breed only on Aldabra and number 6 000 breeding pairs. They too survive on flying and stolen fish as well as baby turtles. They lay one egg in shrubs or trees and have a wingspan of 175 – 195cm.

They can be identified by a narrow white marking on their under wing.

