

# Réunion & Mauritius

February 4-20<sup>th</sup> 2019



Pink Pigeon, Savanne Trail, Black River Gorges National Park, Mauritius

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## General

This report contains the observations from a two-week holiday trip to Réunion and Mauritius together with my non-birding wife. A good part of the time was spent relaxing and sight-seeing but the intention was also to see as many of the endemic bird species as possible.

## Travel and arrangements

The trip was a custom-made package which was compiled together with the travel agency [Navigare Moments](#) in Malmö, including all flights, accommodations as well as the airport transfers on Mauritius.

Flight tickets were bought from Air Mauritius but the long-haul flights were operated by KLM (Copenhagen-Amsterdam-Mauritius) on the outbound leg and Air France (Mauritius-Paris CDG-Copenhagen) on the homebound. Only the flights Mauritius-Réunion-Mauritius were operated by Air Mauritius themselves.

The first week was spent on Réunion, with the first three nights at the [Diana Dea Lodge](#), a hunting style lodge situated about an hour drive south of the airport in Saint-Denis, overlooking the eastern shoreline. This was a very nice place with an excellent restaurant and very friendly staff but also as most of the endemic landbirds were available just around the lodge.

Thereafter four nights were spent at the [Blue Margouillat Seaview Hotel](#) in Saint-Leu on the west coast. A small quite exclusive boutique hotel which however not really managed to live up to our expectations e.g. when it came to service and food in the restaurant.

In Mauritius we stayed in the large beach resort [Le Cannonier](#) situated in Grand Baie in the northernmost part of the island. A very nice and comfortable place with a very high service quality and three high-class restaurants to choose among.

## Car rental

Rental cars are readily available on both islands to decent price levels. On Réunion we rented a VW Golf via [Airport Rentals](#) (car provided by Sixt) for seven days costing 170 EUR including a sat-nav system. In Mauritius we rented a Hyundai i10 from [Tropicar](#) for four days for c.125 EUR. Both cars were in good condition and driving caused no problems in neither of the places.

## Birds

The avifauna of Réunion and Mauritius consists of a limited number of species with a couple of introduced species being the by far most common ones. In Réunion most of the endemics are possible to see quite easily if you visit areas with decent habitat, the exception being Réunion Cuckoo-shrike for which you need to visit the La Roche Ecrite area where the entire remaining population is found. In Mauritius the endemics are much more difficult to see outside the national parks and reserves.

We saw 26 species in Réunion, 34 in Mauritius and only 44 in total during the trip, including all land bird endemics except Mauritius Kestrel and Mauritius Olive White-eye.

## Timing

There are hardly any trip reports available from February, a season when the weather is humid and hot with sometimes quite a lot of rain and also a risk for tropical cyclones. We however experienced generally nice and variable weather, with a lot of sun, some light showers and only a few shorter heavier rains. Birds were still in breeding plumage and active and seabirds like Barau's Petrels were still visiting their nests in the Réunion mountains, so we would say that February is a good time to make a visit.

## Site information

Good information about the different sites can be found in various trip reports on <https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport> and we would like to recommend especially the following:

- Mascarene Islands (Réunion and Mauritius) 18/11 – 25/11 2012 by Hans Matheve et al
- Réunion and Mauritius 1-4 December 2017 by Sander Bot
- Mauritius June 2011 & June 2013 by Oscar Campbell, and
- Bring your scope! An alternative approach to birding on Mauritius & Réunion by Petri Hottola

Below, a map over the sites in the Black River Gorge National Park, showing locations visited.



## Day by day account

### Monday, February 4<sup>th</sup>

Left home just before lunch and flew from Copenhagen Airport via Amsterdam further on to Mauritius. Night in the aircraft.

### Tuesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>

Landed in Mauritius at 07:55 and continued with a connecting flight to Réunion where we arrived at 10:30, slightly ahead of schedule. After rather quick immigration and custom procedures we picked up our rental car, a VW Golf, and headed for the Diana Dea Lodge, located on the eastern side of the island at an elevation of approximately 600 meters.

A number of the common introduced species, such as *Common Myna*, *Zebra Dove*, *Madagascar Turtle-dove* and *Red-whiskered Bulbul* were seen along the road and upon arrival to the lodge the first endemic, a *Réunion Stonechat*, was welcoming us in the parking lot.



After a late lunch and some rest, I took an afternoon walk along the entrance road to the lodge which was very productive with numerous **Réunion Olive White-eyes**, a few **Réunion Gray White-eyes**, **Réunion Bulbul** as well as **Mascarene Swiftlet**, **Mascarene Martin** and **Mascarene Paradise-flycatcher**. In the evening we had an excellent dinner at the lodge. A very nice start!



Réunion Olive White-eye and Réunion Gray White-eye at the Diana Dea Lodge

#### Wednesday, February 6<sup>th</sup>

An early morning walk around the lodge produced more or less the same species as the day before and after breakfast we headed south along the east coast. Stops were made at the lava flows from the 2001, 2004 and 2007 eruptions of the Piton de la Fournaise volcano and along the road we had brief views of two different **Réunion Harriers** as well as a number of **White-tailed Tropicbirds**.

Close to the southeastern corner of the island we tried some roads down to the sea shore and at Puits Arabe – Jardin Volcanique (signposted from the main road) we found good seawatching possibilities. Unfortunately I had left my scope back at the lodge...☺

After lunch in Saint-Philippe we returned to the lodge in the late afternoon when low cloud and light rain prevented us from further birding.

#### Thursday, February 7<sup>th</sup>

Mainly a tourist day. After breakfast we headed inland on the winding N3 and further up to Pas de Bellecombe at 2.354 meters above sea level, just on the verge of the Piton de la Fournaise caldera. Beautiful scenery but few birds. **Réunion Stonechats** were quite common and two **Réunion Harriers** were seen along the road, otherwise rather little of interest.

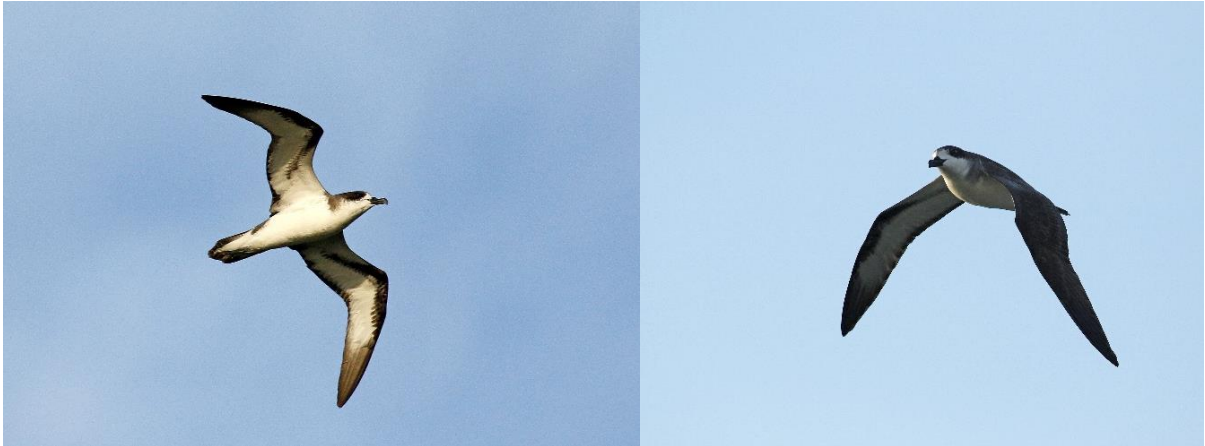
An evening walk along the lodge brought nothing new.

#### Friday, February 8<sup>th</sup>

Left Diana Dea after breakfast and again we took the N2 south in order to follow the coast around the island up to Saint-Leu – our next stay. 45 minutes of seawatching at Puits Arabe gave c.40 **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters**, a few **Tropical Shearwaters** as well as hundreds of **Brown Noddies**. A very frustrating event was however when I suddenly found a lone tern heading south, a few hundred meters out at sea. In the scope, it looked completely white with a large black eye and a black bill and I immediately got the impression that it must be a White Tern. Unfortunately the bird passed too far out to get any pictures and the whole situation, where a potentially rare bird turns up just when you have started birding in a non-familiar area, made me feel a bit uncertain and I decided to let it go. Very frustrating though!

We continued along the coast and arrived to Saint-Leu in the afternoon where we checked in at the Blue Margouillat Seaview Hotel. After a visit to the pool I drove down to the sea and to my big delight there were loads of **Barau's Petrels** moving around along the shore. Eventually several of the birds took height and headed up towards the mountains straight over the city of Saint-Leu. The total

number of birds involved was difficult to assess but on a single count, from north to south, no less than 300 birds were counted. A really nice experience!



Barau's Petrels, Saint-Leu, Réunion

In the evening, heavy rain caused by a tropic cyclone passing between Mauritius and Rodriques Island, made us eat our dinner indoors.

#### Saturday, February 9<sup>th</sup>

Mainly a non-birding day, sight-seeing in Saint-Leu. In the evening, I tried again for seabirds. Strong south-easterly wind made the majority of the birds to stay further out at sea than on the previous day. I tried some alternative observation sites and finally found both some shelter and acceptable light conditions at "Le Souffleur" a few km south of Saint-Leu. Fewer petrels than the day before but instead higher numbers of **Tropical Shearwaters**.

#### Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup>

Another non-birding day mainly spent relaxing at the pool.

#### Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup>

Left the hotel at 05:00 and headed north towards La Roche Ecrite. From leaving the highway just before Saint-Denis it took me 40 minutes to get up to the parking lot where the hiking trails start.

Started walking at 06:45 and followed the main trail upwards for three hours before I returned down again. Nice forest habitat and a good variety of birds. Good numbers of both species of **White-eyes**, **Réunion Bulbuls**, **Réunion Stonechats** and **Mascarene Paradise Flycatchers**. Finally I connected with a calling **Réunion Cuckoo-shrike** in an area with nice mature forest c.1 km above the big clearing. The bird called several times but unfortunately never came into view. Still very nice!

Returned to the hotel, rather exhausted, and again spent a few evening hours watching the movement of **Barau's Petrels** and other seabirds at Le Souffleur.

#### Tuesday, February 12<sup>th</sup>

Checked out and left the hotel at 06:00 and headed for the airport in Saint-Denis. Due to heavy traffic and some queues the journey took almost two hours, compared to maybe half the time during normal conditions. Fortunately we had plenty of time and after returning the car and check-in we left Réunion at 12:05 with a short flight to Mauritius. There we were picked up by our pre-booked transfer who brought us to our hotel, Le Cannonier, situated on the western side of the Grand Baie.





Habitat along the trail at La Roche Ecrite

The afternoon was spent on the beach – with the scope at hand – and besides large numbers of **Brown Noddies** also some **Sooty Terns**, a single **Masked Booby** and several **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters** flew by. On top of the introduced species already seen on Réunion, also a **Scaly-breasted Munia** and some **Yellow-eyed Canaries** were added to the list.

In the evening, while having a beer on the balcony of our room, a number of **Mascarene Greater Flying Foxes** flew in to feed in a big fruiting tree just outside. Very nice indeed.

#### Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>

Mainly a non-birding day, spent at the resort and in Grand Baie. Among the passing **Brown Noddies** (c.1000) also a number of **Lesser Noddies** were identified. Further, a small flock of **Mauritius Grey White-eyes** were seen in the hotel garden.

In the evening we got our rental car, a Hyundai A10, delivered to the hotel.

#### Thursday, February 14<sup>th</sup>

Left Grand Baie at 06:00 and headed south towards the Black River Gorges National Park. Found our way without big problems and arrived to the visitors center at Le Petrin at 07:45. From there we walked the Macchabee Trail up to the Macchabee Viewpoint and part of the Loop Forest Trail.

After c.1 km the Macchabee Trail enters nice forest habitat and the target birds started to appear: several noisy **Echo Parakeets** were moving around, a **Pink Pigeon** was seen in a tree top with another one heard calling nearby, at least four parties of **Mauritius Bulbuls** were seen as well as a single male **Mauritius Fody** in nice breeding plumage. A few hundred meters into the Loop Forest Trail finally a male **Mauritius Cuckoo-shrike** was found and seen very well.

Also, a few **Crab-eating Macaques** as well as a single **Small Indian Mongoose** crossed the trail in front of us and there were also a number of interesting butterflies in the area, among other the endemic and very beautiful **Papilio Manlius**.





View at the Black River Gorges National Park

After returning to the entrance at Le Petrin we made short visits to the Bassin Blanc as well as the Savanne Trail without any further additions to the list. Thereafter we had a very nice late lunch at the Bois Cheri tea plantation and we also visited the area of Grand Bassin where the preparations for the yearly pilgrimage in early March when up to 400 000 Hindu devotees visit the holy lake was ongoing. Grand Bassin is a good site for *Mascarene Martin* and we found at least 35 birds sitting on the wires in the temple area.

On the way back to Grand Baie we got a bit lost in the outskirts of Curepipe and spent almost an hour trying to re-find the M2 North. Back at the hotel at 18:00.

#### Friday, February 15<sup>th</sup>

After breakfast we visited the botanical garden in Pamplemousse, one of the oldest botanical gardens of the southern hemisphere. The garden holds a large collection of palms but also several species of water lilies. Birdwise, *Common Moorhen* was new to the trip list.

In the evening a few hours were spent seawatching at Cap Malheureux, close to the famous red roof church. Some movement but unfortunately most birds were very distant. Three *Lesser Crested Terns* flew by close to the shore and in a small lagoon, a few km's further east, *Turnstone*, *Grey Plover* and *Common Sandpiper* were found.

#### Saturday, February 16<sup>th</sup>

Left the hotel at 05:30 and drove straight to Bassin Blanc for a second visit to the Black River Gorges NP. Arrived at 07:05, in pouring rain... Had to stay in the car for most part of the following hours and even when the rain eased for shorter periods, visibility stayed very poor and bird activity was very low. No Olive White-eyes could be found and at 10:30 I decided to try my luck at the Savanne Trail instead. This time the gate at the start of the trail was closed but not locked and I decided to enter. Along the trail I soon met a car from the Mauritian Wildlife Found but to my relief they just passed me waving friendly. Following the trail, a few hundred meters from the main road there are a number of release cages for *Pink Pigeons* and here a number of birds were moving around, both

inside and outside the open cages. I continued the trail up to the radio tower and just after turning back, a nice male **Mauritius Fody** was singing and eventually also showed well.



The Moka Range mountains in Mauritius

Made a final try for the White-eyes at Bassin Blanc 12:00-13:00 but without success. Instead I left the area and drove to the “Kestrel Valley”, on the east coast just north of Bois des Amourettes. Scanned the ridges around the valley for Mauritius Kestrels for an hour and a half, now in bright sunshine, but unfortunately I could not find any. As consolation at least 20 **Greater Mascarene Flying Foxes** were seen flying high above the valley, which felt a bit strange in broad daylight. Finally I had to give up and drive back to Grande Baie, which took me 1,5 hours in light traffic.

#### Sunday, February 17<sup>th</sup>

Mainly a non-birding day, spent in the Grand Baie area. In the afternoon we experienced a heavy thunderstorm and torrential rain for about two hours, causing large flooding of the streets and also, what we heard from locals, big damages to houses and property. Returned the rental car in the evening.

#### Monday, February 18<sup>th</sup>

Started the day by joining a boat trip for snorkeling around the reefs close to the Le Cannonier resort. Nice, but a bit cloudy water and moderate diversity of fish. The rest of the day was mainly spent on the beach.

#### Tuesday, February 19<sup>th</sup>

A final morning seawatch produced the regular species; numerous **Common Noddies** as well as a few **Lesser Noddies**, small parties of **Sooty Terns**, several **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters** and a few **Masked Boobies**.

Got picked up at the hotel at 16:30 and brought to the airport where we left with Air France to Paris CDG at 20:55. Night in the plane.

#### Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>

Landed in Paris at 05:45 and after a quite hectic transfer we continued to Copenhagen at 07:10. Back home in Malmö again at 10:30, tired but very satisfied with the trip.



## List of species

1. **Red Junglefowl** *Gallus gallus*  
1 female with two chicks Diana Dea Lodge 5.2, heard calling at Diana Dea Lodge 8.2. Introduced.
2. **Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia var. domestica*  
Common. Observed during 12 out of 15 days. Introduced.
3. **Pink Pigeon** *Nesoenas mayeri*  
1 seen and 1 heard Macchabee Trail 14.2, 1 Savanne Trail 14.2, 8 Savanne Trail, around the release cages 16.2. Endemic.
4. **Madagascar Turtle-Dove** *Streptopelia picturata picturata*  
Common both on Réunion and on Mauritius. 1-20 birds recorded daily 5-19.2. Introduced.



5. **Spotted Dove** *Streptopelia chinensis*  
Not observed on Réunion but rather common on Mauritius where 27 birds were recorded 14-19.2. Introduced.
6. **Zebra Dove** *Geopelia striata*  
Common both on Réunion and on Mauritius. 2-40 birds recorded daily 5-19.2. Introduced.
7. **Mascarene Swiftlet** *Aerodramus francicus*  
Rather common both on Réunion (*A. f. saffordi*) and on Mauritius (*A. f. francicus*). Totally 163 birds recorded during nine days 5-16.2.
8. **Eurasian Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorrhoa*  
3 Pamplémousse Botanical Garden, Mauritius 15.2.
9. **Black-bellied Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*  
1 Cap Malhereux, Mauritius 15.2.
10. **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris*  
1 Saint-Leu, Réunion 8.2, totally 11 birds on Mauritius 12-19.2.
11. **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*  
2 Cap Malhereux, Mauritius 15.2.
12. **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*  
1 Cap Malheureux, Mauritius 15.2.

**13. Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus pileatus*

c.300 Puits Arabe, Réunion 8.2, 5 Saint-Leu, Réunion 9.2, 2 Saint-Leu, Réunion 11.2, c.500 heading northeast Grand Baie, Mauritius 12.2, c.1000 feeding Grand Baie, Mauritius 13.2, 95 Cap Malheureux, Mauritius 15.2, c.200 Grand Baie, Mauritius 18.2, c.200 Grand Baie, Mauritius 19.2.

**14. Lesser Noddy** *Anous tenuirostris*

c.50 Grand Baie 13.2, 1 Cap Malheureux 15.2, 4 Grand Baie, Mauritius 18.2, c.20 Grand Baie, Mauritius 19.2. A bit tricky to identify when distant but quicker wingbeats, a bit reminiscent of Little Tern, and a darker general appearance than Brown Noddy, where especially the underwings appear uniform dark, are good characters.

**15. Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscatus nubilosus*

c.200 Grand Baie, Mauritius 13.2, 30 Grand Baie, Mauritius 18.2, 40 Grand Baie, Mauritius 19.2.

**16. Lesser Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bengalensis bengalensis*

3 Cap Malheureux, Mauritius 15.2.



**17. White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus lepturus*

10 Saint-Philippe, Réunion 6.2, 5 Rivière de l'est, Réunion 6.2, 5 Saint-Leu, Réunion 8.2, 1 Saint-Leu, Réunion 9.2, c.20 Saint-Leu, Réunion 10.2, 5 Saint Denis, Réunion 12.2, 1 Grand Baie, Mauritius 13.2, 5 Black River Gorges NP 14.2, 2 Cap Malheureux, Mauritius 15.2, 5 Kestrel Valley, Mauritius 16.2.



**18. Barau's Petrel** *Pterodroma baraui*

Up to 800 birds daily at Saint-Leu, Réunion 8-11.2, gathering offshore in the afternoon (from 16:00 hrs.) and eventually heading inland towards their nesting sites in the mountains, giving fantastic views.

**19. Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Ardenna pacifica*

c.40 Puits Arabe, Réunion 8.2, 10 Saint-Leu, Réunion 8.2, c.25 Saint-Leu, Réunion 9.2, 1 Saint Leu, Réunion 10.2, 2 Saint-Leu, Réunion 11.2, c.70 Grand Baie, Mauritius 12.2, c.100 Grand Baie, Mauritius 13.2, c.60 Cap Malheureux, Mauritius 14.2, 8 Grand Baie, Mauritius 18.2, 15 Grand Baie, Mauritius 19.2.

**20. Tropical Shearwater** *Puffinus bailloni bailloni*

2 Puits Arabe, Réunion 8.2, c.75 Saint-Leu, Réunion 9.2, 1 Saint-Leu, Réunion 11.2.

**21. Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra melanops*

Totally 21 birds recorded at Grand Baie and Cape Malheureux, Mauritius 12-19.2.

**22. Striated Heron** *Butorides striata*

2 Saint-Leu, Réunion 8-9.2, rather common on Mauritius where totally 27 birds were recorded 12-19.2.



**23. Réunion Harrier** *Circus maillardi maillardi*

Roadside observations on Réunion along the N2 and the N3 as follows: 1 male and 1 female Bois Blanc 6.2, 1 female Bourg-Murat 7.2, 1 male La Plaine des Palmistes 7.2, 2 females Cambourg 8.2.

**24. Echo Parakeet** *Psittacula eques echo*

At least 9 along the Macchabee Trail, Black River Gorges NP 14.2. Endemic.





- 25. Mauritius Cuckooshrike** *Lalage typica*  
1 male Macchabee Trail, Black River Gorges NP 14.2. Endemic.
- 26. Réunion Cuckooshrike** *Lalage newtoni*  
1 male calling La Roche Ecrite 11.2. Endemic.
- 27. Mascarene Paradise-Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone bourbonensis bourbonensis*  
On Réunion: 1-2 Diana Dea Lodge 5-7.2, 1 along the N2 just north of Saint-Philippe, 8 La Roche Ecrite 11.2.



- 28. House Crow** *Corvus splendens*  
On Mauritius: 5 Grand Baie 13.2, c.10 Black River Gorges NP 14.2, 10 Cap Malheureux 15.2. Not present on Réunion.
- 29. Mascarene Martin** *Phedina borbonica borbonica*  
1-2 Diana Dea Lodge, Réunion 5-8.2, 3 en-route Diana Dea Lodge – Saint-Leu, Réunion 8.2, 2 Saint-Leu, Réunion 11.2, 2 en-route Saint-Leu – Saint-Denis 12.2, c.35 Grand Bassin, Mauritius 14.2.
- 30. Red-whiskered Bulbul** *Pycnonotus jocosus*  
Common both on Réunion and on Mauritius. 5-40 birds recorded daily 5-19.2. Introduced.
- 31. Mauritius Bulbul** *Hypsipetes olivaceus*  
At least 8 along the Macchabee Trail, Black River Gorges NP 14.2. Endemic.



**32. Réunion Bulbul *Hypsipetes borbonicus***

Up to 5 Diana Dea Lodge 5-8.2, 2 Col de Bellevue 7.2, c.10 La Roche Ecrite 11.2. Endemic.

**33. Réunion White-eye *Zosterops olivaceus***

Rather common. Totally c.70 birds recorded 5-11.2. Endemic.



**34. Mauritius Gray White-eye *Zosterops mauritanus***

Rather common. Totally c.80 birds recorded 13-19.7. Endemic.



**35. Réunion Gray White-eye *Zosterops borbonicus***

1-4 Diana Dea Lodge 5-8.2, c.20 La Roche Ecrite 11.2. Endemic.



**36. Réunion Stonechat** *Saxicola tectes*

Common above the elevation of c.500 meters. Totally c.75 birds recorded 5-11.2. Endemic.



**37. Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis tristis*

Common both on Réunion and on Mauritius. 20-50 birds recorded daily 5-19.2. Introduced.

**38. Yellow-fronted Canary** *Crithagra mozambica*

Rather common on Mauritius. Totally 24 birds recorded 12-19.2. Not recorded on Réunion. Introduced.

**39. House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus domesticus*

Common both on Réunion and on Mauritius. Recorded daily.

**40. Village Weaver** *Ploceus cucullatus*

Common both on Réunion and on Mauritius. Totally 105 birds recorded daily 6-17.2. Introduced.

**41. Red Fody** *Foudia madagascariensis*

Common both on Réunion and on Mauritius. 3-5 birds recorded daily 5-19. Introduced.

**42. Mauritius Fody** *Foudia rubra*

1 male Macchabee Trail, Black River Gorges NP 14.2, 1 male Savanne Trail, Black River Gorges NP 16.2. Endemic.





**43. Common Waxbill** *Estrilda astrild cavendishi*

c.10 daily Diana Dea Lodge, Réunion 5-8.2, c.15 Black River Gorges NP, Mauritius 14.2 and 16.2.  
Introduced.

**44. Scaly-breasted Munia** *Lonchura punctulata*

1 Grand Baie, Mauritius 12.2. Introduced.

## **Mammals**

**Crab-eating Macaque** *Macaca fascicularis*

3 Macchabee Trail, Black River Gorges NP, Mauritius 14.2, 4 Bassin Blanc, Mauritius 14.2.

**Small Indian Mongoose** *Herpestes aurupunctatus*

3 Macchabee Trail, Black River Gorges NP, Mauritius 14.2

**Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus*

1 swimming in the pool of the five star Blue Margouillat Hotel, Saint-Leu, Réunion 9.2.

**Greater Mascarene Flying Fox** *Pteropus niger*

c.5 each evening at the Le Cannonier Hotel, Grand Baie, Mauritius 12-18.2, 20 Kestrel Valley, Mauritius 16.2.

**Unidentified small bat (Lesser Yellow Bat?)**

3 Saint-Leu, Réunion 7.2, c.10 Saint-Leu, Réunion 10.2.

## **Amphibians**

**Guttural Toad** *Amietophrynus gutturalis*

1 Pamplousse Botanical Garden, Mauritius 15.2.