



Field Guides Tour Report

Madagascar 2019: Mauritius & Reunion Extension

Nov 2, 2019 to Nov 25, 2019

Phil Gregory & local guide

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



Reunion "Olive" White-eye was one of the more common endemics that we saw on the extension. Participant Mike Walsh got a nice shot of this bird feeding in some flowers.

This year the afternoon departure from Tana on Air Mauritius was delayed for an hour and we got to our hotel at Flic en Flac around 1000 pm, where they had kindly kept a dinner for us, which almost no-one wanted, being happy with fruit and yogurt. The contrast with Madagascar was very striking, with good roads, no heavy lorries and no zebus, plus very different living conditions.

Our day around Mauritius was excellent and in good weather, with Maurituours doing a fantastic job and local guide Jean-Claude being great. We could not go to our usual site at Bel Ombre as construction of a golf course has blocked access, so Jean Claude took us instead to Chamerel where we saw the first Mauritius (Mascarene) Paradise-Flycatcher we had seen in some years. Bassin Blanc gave us Mauritius Bulbul and Mauritius Olive White-eye, two very good pick-ups, though trying for Mauritius Cuckooshrike proved hopeless at what was a good site until recently. This species is now down to around 30 birds and is likely to go extinct, I fear. The short boat trip to Ile aux Aigrettes sanctuary was again good, and we enjoyed great looks at Pink Pigeon, Mauritius Fody, close Mauritius Olive White-eyes and a wonderful 105-year-old 200 kg adult male Aldabra Giant Tortoise. A fine addition to the trip and well worth the effort.

Jean-Claude arranged for us to pay at a site at Ferney where they feed Mauritius Kestrel each day at 1130. Nice to see this species in action for once! We were still missing Echo Parakeet, but a trip to the picnic area at Petrin saw us make a short walk and have good fly-bys of 2 birds, with a single later. Departure next day was straightforward and we went to the French overseas department of Reunion for the final day.

Reunion this year was trouble-free and in good weather, with thankfully no gilets-jaune protest, unlike 2018 where we got disrupted. Our first afternoon saw us visit the amusingly named Cascade Niagara, with several sightings of the rare Reunion Harrier as the highlight, then very calm conditions for a sea-watch late afternoon near St Denis. We had nice looks at many Barau's Petrels and a few Tropical Shearwater, plus pale morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater and both Brown Noddy and Bridled Tern, with suspected Lesser Noddy too far away to be certain! Next day it was a lovely sunny early morning at La Roche Ecrite, ideal conditions for finding Reunion Olive and Reunion Grey White-eyes, Reunion Stonechat, Reunion (Mascarene) Paradise-Flycatcher, Reunion Bulbul and best of all, terrific looks at a male Reunion Cuckooshrike, found right by the track just before it clouded over and we beat a retreat.

Thanks to Mauritours and Vikram and Yadhav, who looked after us very well indeed, and to Fred on Reunion who took us around the sites we wanted and helped facilitate matters. An enjoyable coda to the main trip, seeing almost all the endemics, and in very different first world conditions. Thank you all for coming, it was fun.

Itinerary

Mon Nov 25 Mauritius: Chamerel/ Bassin Blanc/ Ile aux Aigrettes/ Ferney/ Petrin

Tues 26 Departure for St Denis on Reunion: Cascade Niagara and then Le Barachois area for the sea-watch

Wed 27 La Roche Ecrite Trail in the morning, then afternoon and evening departures home

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Seen in the urban area on both islands. [I]

PINK PIGEON (*Nesoenas mayeri*) – The first was on Ile aux Aigrettes, then again at Ferney and Petrin. Once down to about a dozen birds but now totaling around 400 individuals. [E]

MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia picturata picturata*) – None on Mauritius, but some good views at Cascade Niagara on Reunion, ironically the best of the trip as they were very elusive on Madagascar this year. [I]

SPOTTED DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – A few seen on both islands. [I]

ZEBRA DOVE (*Geopelia striata*) – Common on both islands in the lowlands. [I]

Apodidae (Swifts)

MASCARENE SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus francicus*) – Great views at Cascade Niagara on Reunion. They seem darker above than the Mauritius birds and recent work suggests not only a separate subspecies but maybe even a species level split. Seen well at Bassin Blanc and Chamerel on Mauritius too. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorrhoa*) – Some folks saw this at Bassin Blanc.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – One seen from the bus en route to Chamerel.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BROWN NODDY (*Anous stolidus*) – Good views off Le Barachois, some being quite close in as well.

LESSER NODDY (*Anous tenuirostris*) – Some distant lightly-built noddies off Point des Jardin near Le Barachois were likely this species, but sadly, none came close enough to be sure.

BRIDLED TERN (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) – A couple seen from the sea-watch; they are always scarce here.

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD (INDIAN OCEAN) (*Phaethon lepturus lepturus*) – A couple at Ferney on Mauritius and a couple of sightings on Reunion, including one that flew by our hotel at eye level as I was looking out.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

BARAU'S PETREL (*Pterodroma baraui*) – Good numbers off Le Barachois but the calm conditions kept them mostly further out than usual. We saw several hundred birds; the main breeding station is in the mountains inland here.

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Ardenna pacifica*) – A few on the sea-watch, including some pale phase birds which are always initially puzzling.

TROPICAL SHEARWATER (MASCARENE) (*Puffinus bailloni bailloni*) – Half a dozen on the sea-watch; the small size and different, more rapid flight help to pick up this black and white species.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

STRIATED HERON (OLD WORLD) (*Butorides striata rutenbergi*) – One at Bassin Blanc on Mauritius and another by Ile aux Aigrettes.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

REUNION HARRIER (REUNION) (*Circus maillardi maillardi*) – Our trip to Cascade Niagara was very successful, as we saw one harrier from the main motorway, then some 3 birds near the waterfall. Usually split from the Madagascar version these days, too. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MAURITIUS KESTREL (*Falco punctatus*) – We timed our visit to coincide with a feeding time at Ferney, saw a female perched as we arrived, then it was fed a dead bird by the ranger, so we got flight views which was nice. Also seen as we drove out; quite short winged for a falcon and more of a woodland than open country bird, it seems. This species was down to about 4 individuals at one time but has recovered well due to captive breeding and predator control measures, though it is still very rare overall, with about 600 individuals. [E]

Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*) – Two seen at Bassin Blanc on Mauritius; not the one we wanted there! [I]

ECHO PARAKEET (*Psittacula eues*) – We worked hard and eventually got nice flight views of this quite large parakeet at Petrin, with 2 birds, then a single later. This one was down to about a dozen birds at one stage but has recovered quite well to around 450 birds these days. [E]

Campephagidae (Cuckooshrikes).

REUNION CUCKOOSHRIKE (*Lalage newtoni*) – We were very lucky with this, finding a young male beside the track and getting good views of it foraging. Two researchers were monitoring it, and we learned that rat control is essential and the total population is now about 40 birds; better than the Mauritius Cuckooshrike which is believed to be <30. [E]

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers).

MASCARENE PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone bourbonensis bourbonensis*) – Good views along the trail at La Roche Ecrite, with one feeding on the track at one stage; a much easier bird to see than the Mauritius equivalent. Should be split too; expect this to happen in due course. [E]

MASCARENE PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone bourbonensis desolata*) – One of my birds of the extension was seeing this rare species at Chamerel; we had not seen it on the tour for some years and numbers are very low. Expect a split in due course. [E]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

HOUSE CROW (*Corvus splendens*) – Two by the jetty at Port Louis on Mauritius. [I]

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

MASCARENE MARTIN (*Phedina borbonica borbonica*) – Just 2 on Mauritius and 4 at Cascade Niagara on Reunion; it seems quite uncommon.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls).

RED-WHISKERED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) – Regrettably common on Mauritius and in the lowlands on Reunion. [I]

REUNION BULBUL (*Hypsipetes borbonicus*) – Good looks at La Roche Ecrite, but I missed getting photos and video; more often heard than seen. [E]

MAURITIUS BULBUL (*Hypsipetes olivaceus*) – One of the more difficult Mauritius endemics; we got a couple at Bassin Blanc which showed very well. [E]

Zosteropidae (White-eyes, Yuhinas, and Allies).

REUNION WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops olivaceus*) – Quite common at La Roche Ecrite and very vocal. [E]

MAURITIUS WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops chloronothos*) – A rare species; we saw it at Bassin Blanc and then the introduced birds on Ile aux Aigrettes, Critically Endangered due to predation and habitat damage/loss. [E]

REUNION GRAY WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops borbonicus*) – Quite common in the highlands, with family groups being very vocal along the trail. [E]

MAURITIUS GRAY WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops mauritanus*) – Still fairly common on Mauritius, the only endemic that survives quite well. [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers).

REUNION STONECHAT (*Saxicola tectes*) – Great views at La Roche Ecrite, and a lovely small nest with two sky-blue dark mottled eggs in a cup in a mossy bank by the trail. [E]

Sturnidae (Starlings).

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – A common invasive on both islands. [I]

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

YELLOW-FRONTED CANARY (*Crithagra mozambica*) – Just one at Ferney on Mauritius. [I]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Quite common on both islands. [I]

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies).

VILLAGE WEAVER (*Ploceus cucullatus*) – Seems to be increasing and was quite widespread on both islands in the lowlands. This is one of the southern African taxa, long overdue to be split from the very different northern birds. [I]

RED FODY (*Foudia madagascariensis*) – Common on both islands, and with remarkably brightly colored males, far more so than on Madagascar. [I]

MAURITIUS FODY (*Foudia rubra*) – A rare endemic; we got a couple of fine males on Ile aux Aigrettes, one singing well. Also a couple of females. They suffer from predation and maybe competition from introduced species. [E]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies).

COMMON WAXBILL (*Estrilda astrild*) – A few in the lowlands on Reunion. [I]

MAMMALS

CRAB-EATING MACAQUE (*Macaca fascicularis*) – Mike saw one of these noxious pests on Mauritius, one of the main contributors to the loss of endemic birds. [I]

Herps

MAURITIUS DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma cepediana*) – Nice looks on Ile aux Aigrettes. [E]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Other critters were several sightings of Mauritius Flying-fox, a dolphin sp for Mike off Le Barachois, and Phil also saw what looked like a whale spout, presumably Humpback.

An agama sp. was also here; I think Agama agama and non-native of course.

Totals for the tour: 40 bird taxa and 1 mammal taxa