



The Seychelles are quite unique. Like no other oceanic islands, they are formed from the granite of two splitting continents, a geology that gives them some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. Their long isolation in the Indian Ocean has given them a number of plants and animals that have evolved from their original African ancestors into quite separate endemic species that are found nowhere else. And the fact that these are the only islands for a thousand miles has made them a magnet for literally millions of breeding seabirds.

We arrive on Mahé, and take a domestic flight straight to Praslin, where we stay at a wonderfully-situated hotel. Laws in the Seychelles prohibit any buildings over treetop height, and so all hotels blend superbly with their surroundings.

Birds seen around the hotel include Seychelles Black Parrot, Seychelles Bulbul and Seychelles Sunbird, and the ever-present Seychelles Fruit Bats appear during the late afternoon.

Only half a mile or so across, the tiny island of Cousin supports half the world's population of the Seychelles Brush Warbler. We can also see the Seychelles Fody, or Toq-toq here, as well as Seychelles Turtle Doves. Many seabirds nest here too, and we can expect to see White-tailed Tropicbird tails protruding from their nests in the bases of trees and to see Fairy Terns with eggs and young precariously balanced on the forks of branches. This is the start of the egg-laying season for the threatened Hawksbill Turtle. These turtles come ashore during the daytime, so if we are very lucky we may get a privileged view of one of these magnificent reptiles.

Aride is one of the best seabird islands in the archipelago, and is home to vast numbers of Sooty Terns, White-tailed Tropicbirds, Lesser Noddies, and several hundred pairs of Roseate Terns, the largest Indian Ocean colony. Both Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds also roost on the island, altogether forming one of the world's most impressive seabird gatherings.

On La Digue we hope to see the Seychelles Black Paradise Flycatcher. This dream of an endemic bird with its splendid long tail is still highly endangered and sometimes not easy to find on its special reserve. However, our leader was involved in a conservation project for this bird, so he knows some of the best places to find them.

On Praslin we visit the atmospheric Vallée de



Seychelles sunset and, inset, Fairy Terns (Photos: Keith Grant)

Seychelles

Island-hopping in Paradise

Friday 4 – Sunday 13 November 2011 (10 days)
Independent Bird Island extension to Thursday 17 November 2011 (4 days)
Friday 2 – Sunday 11 November 2012 (10 days)
Independent Bird Island extension to Thursday 15 November 2012 (4 days)

A breeze sways the trees behind the white sandy beach where warm turquoise waters lap the shoreline. Tropicbirds float gently in the sky, while beautiful and absurdly tame white Fairy Terns return to their nests finely balanced on thin branches. Meanwhile, Brown and Lesser Noddy terns return to their scruffy nests as the Seychelles Magpie Robin looks for insects in the leaf litter. A Hawksbill Turtle climbs up the beach to lay perhaps 150 eggs; she may make this journey six times during the coming weeks. All of this could be happening on Cousin, one of the amazing islands that make up the ocean jewels known as the Seychelles.

Mai, with its unique population of Coco de Mer trees. This palm tree with huge leaves bears weirdly shaped fruit, with the largest seeds in the world.

The lowland areas of Mahé offer some really beautiful places for birds and tropical wildlife. Here we may see Seychelles Kestrel and the rather more elusive Seychelles White-eye, as well as a second chance to see Seychelles Bulbul and Seychelles Blue Pigeon. Waders may include the striking Crab Plover.

Independent Bird Island Extension

A three-night stay on this remarkable speck in the Indian Ocean should provide some wonderful wildlife experiences. Bird Island is a flat coral cay of less than a square mile. White sand beaches backed with tall swaying palm trees – everyone's idea of a desert island in fact! You stay in palm-thatched chalets. The lodge is renowned for its friendly welcome and informal creole-style cooking.

You will share the island with a million (or two!) birds. No less than eight species of tern breed here, mostly Sooty Tern, and migrant waders can often be found on the beaches. But it is the sight and sound of innumerable seabirds that, together with the spectacular sunsets, will provide you with the most lasting memories of this wonderful place.

Outline Itinerary

Day 1: Depart London in the evening to arrive Mahé the next day.

Day 2: Arrive on Mahé, and take a domestic flight straight to Praslin, where we stay at a wonderfully-situated hotel.

Overnight Praslin

Day 3: Morning boat trip to island of Cousin. Return for lunch and a relaxing afternoon.

Overnight Praslin

Day 4: During one of the next two days we plan to visit Aride.

Overnight Praslin

Day 5: Boat trip to La Digue.

Overnight Praslin

TRIP DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION will be as outlined above with all rooms en suite.

LEADERS: Barrie Cooper & local guides
 Please note that the extension is not guided.

NUMBERS: Max. 14 clients

PRICES: **Main tour - 2011: £ 3,495**
2012: £ 3,795
Extension - 2011: £ 1,095
2012: £ 1,195

Single supps.:

Main tour - 2011: £ 695
2012: £ 745
Extension - 2011: £ 445
2012: £ 495

Deposit: £ 500 per person

The price includes scheduled return flights London/Mahé, internal flights as detailed above, ground and boat transportation, accommodation, all meals, local taxes, incidental tips, and the services of the leader.

The price excludes holiday insurance, the services of the leader on the extension, optional tips to local guides, drinks and other items of a personal nature.

SPECIAL NOTE

While we shall do our utmost to keep to the above itinerary, local weather conditions may make it impossible to land on Aride or Cousin.

Day 6: We visit the atmospheric Vallée de Mai on Praslin.

Overnight Praslin

Day 7: Fly back to Mahé, and transfer to our hotel for a relaxing afternoon.

Overnight Mahé

Day 8: Today we explore Mahé itself. In the evening we'll make a special trip up Morne Blanc to try and find the endemic Seychelles Scops Owl.

Overnight Mahé

Day 9: Catch a return evening flight, arriving London on **Day 10**.

Independent Extension

Day 9: *Overnight Mahé*

Days 10 - 12: You make an early start to catch the inter-island flight to Bird Island. A three-night stay on this remarkable speck in the Indian Ocean should provide some wonderful wildlife experiences.

Three nights Bird Island Lodge

Day 13: Return flight to Mahé, where you have the whole day for relaxation and perhaps some final shopping.

Overnight Mahé

Day 14: Morning return flight to London arriving later the same day.