

Dubai & Seychelles March/April 2018

If you are looking for a full-on trip report of the Seychelles you would be advised to look elsewhere. This is a holiday/celebration with our passion for birds being indulged a little.

With 2 milestones this year, it gave us the excuse, if we ever needed one, to push the boat out. We both reach the biblical age of 3 score years & 10 and we have reached our golden wedding anniversary.

Jude has always wanted to visit some of the coral islands found in the Indian Ocean, so this was the excuse we were looking for, more a holiday than a full-on bird trip.

We turned to "Cloudbirders", gleaning as much information from the Indian Ocean section as we could, and then decided on the Seychelles. We used the excellent report of [Mike Hunter](#) to plan the logistics. As recommended by Mike we used Seychelles Travel to produce an itinerary and costings. We were sent two excellent itineraries based on the information we gave them and then chose the one we preferred.

Itinerary

Fly from Birmingham on Emirates EK038 on the 19/03/2018 to Dubai where we spend 3 days staying B&B at the JA Palm Tree Court; Garden view Junior Suite.

Fly from Dubai on Emirates EK707 on the 23/03/2018 to Mahé where we spend 7 days half board at the Carana Beach Hotel; Oceanview Chalet.

Fly from Mahé on Seychelles Air HM4340 on the 30/03/2018 to Bird Island where we spend 2 nights full board at Bird Island Lodge.

Fly from Bird Island on Seychelles Air HM4341 to Mahé then onto Praslin on Seychelles Air HM3136 on the 01/04/2018 staying at the Coco de Mer Hotel, Black Parrot Suite where we spend 7 nights half board.

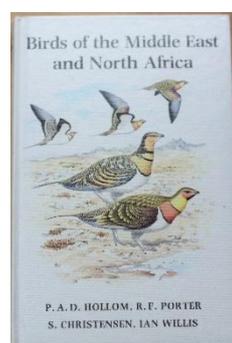
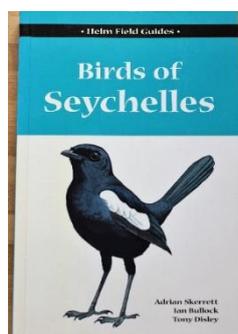
Fly from Praslin to Mahé on Air Seychelles HM3063, then on to Dubai Emirates EK706 on the 08/04/2018 where we spend 2 nights at the J A Palm Tree Court, Garden view Junior Suite on B&B basis.

Fly from Dubai to Birmingham on Emirates EK037 on the 10/04/2018, a total of 21 days.

The total cost for the whole trip excluding spending money was £14,502; with this being a special once in a lifetime trip all our international flights were business class, total cost of our international flights was £5,400.

I assume most birders are the same as us and have a number of marquee bird species. The choice of birds is not always clearly defined in our minds, they just conjure up images that remain constant throughout our lives, these are usually derived for many reasons; rarity, definition and location are definitely factors. Some of ours were, and remain, in no particular order, Wallcreeper, Carmine Bee-eater, Black Woodpecker, Indian Pitta, Nutcracker, Ground Hornbill, Magnificent Frigatebird, Fairy Tern (*Gygis alba* or White Tern) etc. Each and every one fulfilled one of the criteria given above. This holiday gave us the opportunity to see and photograph for the first time one of these species. This is not to say that the Fairy Tern will be our only lifer for the trip, far from it, but it meets the criteria mentioned previously. The Fairy Tern is a species we saw on TV many years ago; Attenborough waxing lyrical on his "Life of birds" series about this bird probably sowed the seeds that categorised this species as marquee. The laying of a single egg in a small depression on a bare branch has lingered long in the memory. Add to this image a dainty bird of pure white plumage interrupted only by its dark eye, beak and feet. Although we were not expecting to amass a large bird list during this trip we hoped that photography opportunities would be unsurpassed as many of the birds are habituated with humans, so close proximity is attainable; we are also visiting a part of the world we haven't visited before so unlike many of our last trips the opportunity to see new birds is guaranteed.

Literature



We decided to take 2 field guides, The "Birds of the Middle East and North Africa" for our stay in Dubai and "Birds of Seychelles" for the rest of the trip.

Day 1 Tuesday 20th March 2018

Once again the Emirates Airline has performed up to their norm, by delaying our flight by 4hrs+. We had to cancel a trip to Sri Lanka a couple of years ago because Emirates kept changing the departure times and dates of their flights this made the trip unviable. We will think very hard before we book with them again. We eventually boarded our flight at 02-30am arriving in Dubai at 13-15 local time. Temperature on arrival was a balmy 28 degrees. Although we were supposedly being "fast tracked" through customs nobody appeared to have told the customs officers. We arrived at the Palm Tree Court hotel a little after 1500hrs. Lunch consisted of a club sandwich, after which, although very weary, we embarked on a walk around the grounds and golf course. We retired a little after 2200hrs after an evening meal consisting of the provided bar nibbles; stuffed Olives for me, a mixture of nuts for Jude: the small bowl of bright green pea like objects were discarded. A very, very welcome sleep concluded our first day.

Birds of Day 1 Dubai

Common Sandpiper, Redstart, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Common Myna, White-eared Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, House Sparrow, Indian Silverbill, House Crow, Hoopoe, Grey Francolin, Collared Dove, Palm Dove, Indian Roller, Rose-ringed Parakeet.

Day 2 Wednesday 21st March 2018

Woke up early this morning to the plaintive call of a Peacock, it was a pure white male doing his shimmering display to half a dozen indifferent females, a couple of normal plumaged males looked on.



Breakfast taken at 08-30, a gargantuan feast of every conceivable product associated with breakfast and probably many that aren't. We spent most of the day on our balcony still trying to adjust our body clocks to norm. Lunch was a

modest affair, a small bowl of chicken noodle soup accompanied by a couple of small bread rolls. I don't know how they know but as soon as room-service rings the doorbell the House Crows, Mynas and Bulbuls gather on the balustrade of the balcony, with the House Crows broadcasting loudly "grub up". We ventured out by late afternoon and headed straight for the marina, although substantially larger than we remembered, birding was still as poor, the only birds encountered were 4 Egyptian Geese. We then made our way to the perimeter track of the golf course, a Purple Sunbird, Redstart, Semi-collared Flycatcher, roosting Rose-ringed Parakeets and disappearing Grey Francolin were a few of the birds of note. A welcome evening meal concluded the day.

Day 3 Thursday 22nd March 2018

Woke up this morning to the shocking news that England were all out for 58 in their first innings against New Zealand in the first test match. The sky was cloudless as it has been since our arrival. An email proclaimed that we could now check in on line for our flight to the Seychelles tomorrow. Breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon was had at around 10.00hrs. A brisk walk around the complex taking



photos for the trip report was undertaken immediately after breakfast, temperatures were nudging around the 30 degree mark. The reception printed our boarding cards so we were able to retreat back to the relative comfort of our balcony. A second Peacock decided not to be out done by the white one,



which incidentally was still displaying, and began to display to anything that moved in his vicinity, which included us. A Harris Hawk is flown around the complex to harass the local population of House Crows which can be a pain, especially around meal times. This morning I found where the Mob was meeting, obviously to plan their

evasive action against the Hawk. Our walk around the perimeter track of the golf course in the late afternoon produced just 1 new bird, a Graceful Prinia. Our evening meal was accompanied by a "belly dancer" cavorting to ear

shattering music. A very low profile was maintained as diners were being press-ganged into participating. A fretful night's sleep was endured prior to our early morning departure to Mahé.



Day 4 Friday 23rd March 2018

We were up by 06-00 to be ready for our transport to the airport at 06-45, drawing back the curtains we were greeted by a foggy vista, previously visible distant construction was now just ghostly shadows. The 45 minute drive to the airport was populated with thick patches of fog, a fly-by Cattle Egret was new, the journey culminating in horrendous traffic around the airport. After a 45 minute walk to the lounge at gate C9 we breakfasted on scrambled egg on toast; we were boarded by 09-45 only to be told that we would be delayed due to the back up of fog bound air traffic. 1hr 20 mins later we left the gate only to sit in a plane queue for a further 20 minutes. Our 4hr flight was uneventful and we arrived in Mahé to be told that we had to wait for a tug to tow us to our disembarkation position. Mayhem in the baggage hall ensued with just 1 carousel to cope with a wide-bodied jet full of tourists, "Welcome to Paradise" A vehicle was waiting and we were eventually leaving the heavy traffic that is Victoria rush hour. Our Hotel, the Carana Beach was reached some 35minutes after leaving the airport. The hotel was an oasis of lush manicured gardens studded with exotic flowering shrubs. A white powder private beach terminated at both



extremities by large granite boulders. Bar, restaurant and reception are at one end of the beach, with semi-detached bungalows strung along the cove making up the accommodation. A critique of all accommodation will follow at the end of the report.

Birds seen today were Grey Heron, Madagascar Turtle Dove, and Common Myna.

Day 5 Saturday 24th March 2018

Today dawned without a cloud in the sky, a short walk around the grounds produced Barred Ground Dove, Seychelles Sunbird, Madagascar Fody and a fly over of a couple of White-tailed Tropicbird. A Green-backed Heron was a surprise in the breadfruit tree outside our bungalow. A day of rest and then more rest ensued. I met our local bird guide Steve in the bar to discuss itinerary and costs the late afternoon; a young and very polite guy whose knowledge of the fauna and flora seemed to be excellent. An evening meal was followed by an early night.



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Birds seen today were Barred Ground Dove, Seychelles Sunbird, Madagascar Fody, White-tailed Tropicbird, Green-backed Heron and fly-by Fairy Terns

Day 6 Sunday 25th March 2018

As previously stated, this holiday was going to be just that, a holiday and not a trip as we normally refer to our birding sojourns. No crack of dawn starts, no rushing from place to place, no regrets over missed photographic opportunities just a relaxing holiday with a few birding days thrown in, it's difficult to change a habit of a lifetime, so we did allow for a few hours birding on a couple of days, today was our first day out with [Steve Agricole](#) just a few hours trying to pick up a couple of endemics. Our first stop was a small overgrown wetland where several Yellow Bittern are known to



inhabit. Half an hour scanning produced nothing so we moved on looking for our first endemic, the Seychelles White-eye. This was far more obliging with a preening bird in the bush adjacent to where we had parked, another endemic was soon added to the list; a

Seychelles Blue Pigeon flew into a tree about 50metres away. We then spent the rest of our time checking out a tidal mangrove fringe lagoon. Highlights of the birds seen here were Terek Sandpiper and Crab Plover. We returned to the wetland visited earlier but once again the Bitterns remained elusive. We returned to our hotel by late afternoon to rest and prepare for our evening meal, we were told Sunday night is BBQ night.

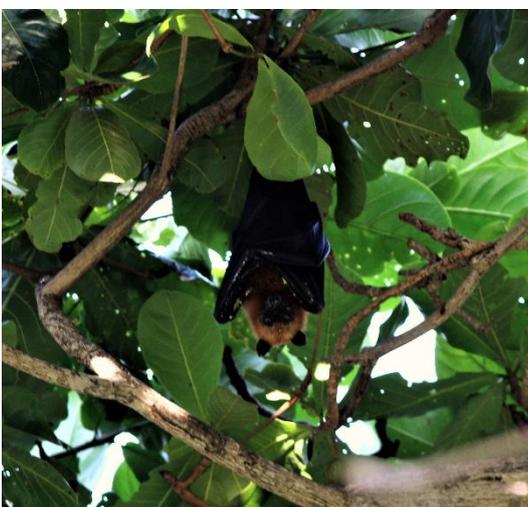


Birds seen today

Seychelles White-eye, Seychelles Blue Pigeon, Madagascar Fody, Seychelles Sunbird, Whimbrel, Crab Plover, Redshank, Terek Sandpiper, Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Grey Plover, Greenshank, Turnstone, Lesser-crested Tern, Roseate Tern, House Crow and Moorhen.

Day 7 Monday 26th March 2018

Another glorious day in paradise beckons. A brief pre-breakfast walk produced nothing new although a Blue Pigeon, much closer than yesterday's bird, was briefly seen, but it flew off before I managed to get a shot. Our neighbour the Giant Fruit Bat, aka Flying Fox remains sentinel in the Breadfruit tree adjacent to our veranda. He seems a bit camera shy, as soon as he sees that I am pointing my camera at him he



shuffles Gibbon like deeper into the foliage, the large amount of pollen on his face and wings suggests he feasted well last night. Another day of rest today; we have to say its hard work doing nothing. For years our birding trips were liberally sprinkled with activity, when not birding we would be compiling a trip list, drafting a trip report or editing photos,

this holiday is our homage to family holidays many years past. Our inertia was finally broken at 15-30, we had realised that the small wetland we visited for Yellow Bittern was within walking distance and so we decided to ignore the 30 degrees heat and the high humidity and sally forth (mad dogs and all that). With no footpath to walk on we were nearly mown down by a lunatic in an old battered bus. Reaching the wetland we were alerted to movement in the margin immediately on our arrival, spirits soared "another lifer" only to be dashed in a millisecond when we identified a Striated/Green-backed Heron. Half an hour later dripping in sweat and as red as Beetroots we decided to strike for home and this time, all up hill. Managing to avoid recalcitrant busses we arrived back at the hotel totally knackered. A "mocktail" with plenty of ice revived us enough to continue to our rooms. A French themed evening meal completed the day.

Day 8 Tuesday 27th March 2018

Today was our second outing with Steve, birding is limited within the Seychelles archipelago so we thought we might be covering old ground today. We were a little disappointed, our guide is the first in very many years of birding who has got in the car and turned the radio on! French station at that!! . The mobile phone got almost as much attention as us, something we have got used to over the last couple of years. Most of the day was, as we surmised, retracing previous footsteps. The Yellow Bittern was located at the third time of asking at the little wetland. The cardinal sin was made, I tried for a better position for a photo only to discover the original vantage point was the only one from where the bird could be clearly seen and of course on my return the bird had moved deeper into the bush making photography obsolete. We were allowed to enter the Kempinski Resort where in a small mangrove inlet we saw our first Little Egret for the trip. We returned to the main mangrove lagoon and again the Crab Plovers were happy to pose for more photos. We returned to our hotel where we spent most of the afternoon in the comfort of our veranda. My attempt to photo Terek Sandpiper again failed miserably.

Birds seen today

Striated Heron, Moorhen, Madagascar Fody, Yellow Bittern, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Crested Tern, Grey Heron, Turnstone, Greenshank, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Crab Plover. A large roost of Cattle Egret has established itself at the lagoon.



Day 9 Wednesday 28th March 2018

Today started with a leisurely breakfast at around 09-00, this was followed by a post breakfast paddle in the sea. A large wave trapped us between boulders

and we were soaked almost to our waists. A soggy trudge back to our chalet ensued where we changed into something a little drier. We did what we haven't done since our daughter was little, spent a day around the pool and the beach, cooling off in both pool and sea. A light



lunch of cheese and pickles dissected the day. Several White-tailed Tropicbirds flew inland presumably feeding young; we had a well formed chick in a nest in a tree next to reception. Frigatebirds were also seen soaring high on thermals, and a pair of possible unidentified Booby's were seen flying low across the waves. Barred Ground Doves scurried between tables mopping up discarded crumbs and Common Mynas beachcomb, Turnstone like.

Day 10 Thursday 29th March 2018

This was our last full day on Mahé, so another day of rest and relaxation prior to packing ready for our departure to Bird Island, a part of our holiday that has been much awaited. Our evening meal consisted of white onion soup, mushroom risotto, and a banana & raisin crumble.

Day 11 Friday 30th March 2018

We breakfasted early ready for our airport pickup which arrived at 08-45, a 45 minute drive at a very sedate pace found us at the [Mason's Travel](#) desk, the company that looked after us since our arrival. The flight was just a few minutes late but we made good time arriving at Bird Island 25 minutes later.



Light rain was falling on our arrival so umbrellas were issued. After the "dos and don'ts" meeting and a cold complementary drink we were pointed to our chalet which was the very end one, a good 300 yards from reception. A small herd of Giant Tortoises welcomed us en-route. A fledgling Fairy Tern was sat on the veranda

waiting to greet us, a Barred Ground Dove scurried around our tiled floor reminiscent of a farmyard hen. Lunch was served at 13-00; we didn't know how tasty chickpeas and veg could be! After lunch we took a short walk onto the beach and then along the landing strip. Both Greater-crested Tern and Little Tern together with Curlew Sandpiper and Sanderling were all loafing by the shore, a Whimbrel called as it flew past, a possible Sand Plover was seen but



flew before it could be identified.

Turnstone, Grey Plover and Whimbrel were all seen on the air strip together with a small flock of Seychelles Fody.



A torch-lit walk to the dining area produced many large scurrying land crabs pincers raised for action. A delicious evening meal completed our 1st day.

Day 12 Saturday 31st March 2018

After a warm humid night when rain was heard falling on the roof, we awoke to banks of cloud dissecting the hitherto blue sky. A pre-breakfast walk along the beach saw me being dive-bombed by about 100 Brown Noddys, these benign birds so approachable around camp had decided to re-enact Hitchcock's "The



Birds". With camera held aloft and steps hastened I reached the airstrip unscathed. Grey Plover were much in evidence, some still in the drabness of their winter garb whilst others were sporting almost full regalia. Whimbrel, the sentinels of the airstrip proclaimed my presence to all, Lesser Sand Plovers

maintained a discreet distance; this was just far enough away for a decent photo. A single Bar-tailed Godwit, the first for the trip, heeded the Whimbrel's warning and flew 50 metres behind me.

Apart from the many Fodys the most numerous bird on the strip was the Turnstone, dozens were encountered. A Giant Aldabra Tortoise was ready for take-off. A walk around the north of the Island post breakfast lead us to discover the Greater Frigatebirds that had



decided to lie-in. Although the Sooty Terns aren't nesting yet, many thousands are hanging around at the top of the island roosting in the tops of some very large trees overnight, before venturing out to sea in very noisy waves at first light.

With so many terns flying in close proximity it is not surprising that there are a few casualties. During our walk on the beach adjacent to the breeding grounds we came across several birds with broken wings. Heaven knows how

many casualties occur during the breeding season when 1.7 million birds cram into an area not much larger than a couple of football pitches. There is no standing water on the Island yet despite this the island holds a good population of Moorhens! This island is spectacular, not in the number of species it holds but in the sheer number of birds on such a small island and how the birds have become habituated to the human form over such a short period of time.

Birds seen during our Stay on Bird Island.

Greater Frigatebird, Lesser Frigatebird, Brown Noddy, Lesser Noddy, Great-crested Tern, Little Tern, Sooty Tern, Fairy Tern, White-tailed Tropicbird, Cattle Egret, Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper, Greenshank, Sanderling, Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Sandplover, Grey Plover, Moorhen, Seychelles Blue Pigeon, Barred Ground Dove, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Madagascar Fody, Common Myna, Seychelles Sunbird.

Day 13 Sunday 1st April 2018

Today we left this tiny idyll in the Indian Ocean and returned firstly to Mahé and then on to Praslin where we were staying at the Coco de Mer, Black Parrot Suite. Our Flight to Mahé took just 30 minutes aboard a Twin Otter. The Trip from Mahe was even shorter a 20 minute flight. The shortest commercial flight we have ever taken by far. The Coco de Mar is a rather grand hotel on the West coast of Praslin. We were staying in their small exclusive wing called The "Black Parrot", exclusive use to our own pool and bar area meant that with just 9 suites and no kids under 14 the place had a very peaceful, tranquil calm about it.



Day 14 Monday 2nd April 2018

We absolutely adored Bird Island and would return in a heartbeat. It doesn't seem right to comment, and I choose my words as not to say criticise as this would be sacrilege, but how we embraced the return to an air-conditioned room. Breakfast



was a leisurely affair followed by a meeting with our travel rep who referred to herself as Tina Turner, not that she bore any resemblance but that it would help us remember her name. She very efficiently organised a boat trip and car hire using nothing more than her smart phone. We had a post breakfast swim before settling down to some serious R & R which we were getting rather good at. Having had a hearty English style breakfast we skipped lunch, preferring to perfect our relaxation skills. Our evening concluded in a spectacular storm out at sea with serious amounts of rain falling where it is needed the least.

Day 15 Tuesday 3rd April 2018

It was an earlier breakfast today, 08-00, we needed to be ready to be picked up at 08-45 for our trip over to Cousin Island. We were picked up by the skipper Unas, of the good boat Pitau 2. We were dropped off on a beach from where we



would board our boat through the surf. The trip to Cousin took about 25 minutes. Here we waited at anchor with several other craft for a small open boat to transfer us and others ashore, again through the surf. We waited as instructed in the designated area for all the passengers to be delivered ashore. This took

about half an hour. 500 Seychelles Rupees about £28-00 p.p. was levied as a landing charge. We were then spit into 2 groups, English & non-English speakers, we were then sub-divided again into small groups of about a dozen and allotted a guide. The guided walk lasted a little over an hour after which we went through the same tedious routine of returning to our craft. Apart from a pleasant trip, we hoped to see all three endemics that make the Island their home. This we did, managing to photograph both Robin and Fody, we dipped on photographing the Warbler. We returned to our hotel by mid-afternoon for a little more relaxology.

Birds seen during our trip to Cousin

White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Noddy, Lesser Noddy, Fairy Tern, Greater Sandplover, Striated Heron, Moorhen, Seychelles Fody, Seychelles Warbler, Seychelles Magpie Robin, Madagascar Turtle Dove.

Day 16 Wednesday 4th April 2018

Our car was delivered this morning its condition would be best described as unloved. It was a small KIA, which required the driver to select 1st gear up any slight incline. We were going to ask Mason's Travel to get it changed, but just couldn't summon up the energy. Our routes would be selected so as not to traverse those bothersome hills in future. Our first outing was a visit to Vallée de Mai, a reserve that contains the Seychelles Black Parrot, a bird endemic to just a couple of the



Seychelles Islands. As with all things Seychellian a price has to be paid for entry which in this case was about £40-00 for the two of us. The reserve is a dense canopy of palm fronds making the reserve extremely humid and with its hilly terrain - energy sapping. An hour's walk produced a single sighting of a Bulbul and a small bright green lizard, dripping of sweat we took the trail that stated exit 15 minutes. Almost back at the entrance we had the great fortune



of spotting a couple of parrots feeding on Palm fruits.

Chuffed that not only had we seen another endemic but we had also managed some half decent shots, we left the reserve reasonably happy and drove the coast road back to the hotel. A Redshank, Greenshank, Sanderling and Whimbrel were all encountered en-route. More relaxation followed with

several dips in the pool. Complimentary mocktails were an unexpected bonus.

Day 17 Thursday 5th April 2018

After an early breakfast we drove to Praslin Jetty to catch our 09-15 ferry to La Digue. We were a little early and noticing a shoal of fish in the clear waters of the jetty, we purchased a small packet of cheese biscuits which we scrunched up and fed to the fish. Dozens of fish of all shapes and sizes were

taking the crumbs off the surface at astonishing speed. A ticket for the 12 minute crossing costing approximately £27-00 pp return was purchased. A school of cuttlefish in tight formation swam just under the surface adjacent to



the hull, swimming in unison first forward and then backwards. Flying fish were encountered skimming over the sea's surface, pectoral fins held at right angles to the body whilst their tails flapped vigorously, some of these fish appeared to travel 50metres or more in the air. As with most things Seychellian boarding the boat was a bit of "suck

it and see" and organised chaos. The ferry was just a couple of minute's late setting off but we still managed to dock by 09-30. La Digue harbour was a bustling chaotic affair with folk arriving and departing through the same cramped space. Touts were offering the hire of hundreds of bicycles which were scattered far & wide. Jude had done her homework and was convinced that the reserve we were to visit was within walking distance. With confidence we left the bustle of the harbour behind making sure not to be mown down by enthusiastic born again cyclists silently and unsteadily manoeuvring past us. We reached the relative calm of the reserve after about 20 sweat soaked minutes.

Signed in, we went in search of our quarry, Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher; "look no higher than head high" was the information we were given in the Visitor Centre. This would have been sound advice had we been 30ft tall. A female was located after about half an hour which was very obliging and posed beautifully for the camera. After about a further 20 minutes we spotted the male high up in the



canopy, in fact there were 3 males who seemed to be in some form of territorial dispute. All three were intent in chasing each other through the canopy, and not being half as obliging as the female. Record shots were managed before we had to return to the ferry which left the harbour at 12-15 sharp. Feeling rather proud that we had accomplished our endemic goals over the last 2 days we rested on our laurels for the remainder of the day. Having the hire car I decided to have a concerted effort to locate the Seychelles Kestrel tomorrow,

so strategic planning took place during mocktails around the swimming pool that afternoon. Within 10 minutes of returning from our evening meal a violent electrical storm started, accompanied by torrential rain that lasted at least a couple of hours.

Day 18 Friday 6th April 2018

This was our last day with the hire car so we were determined to make the most use of it. We had noted that reference had been made to an "important wetland" in the north of the island at a place called the [Constance Lemuria Resort](#). We reasoned that the violent storm of last night may have brought some birds in so it was worth our while checking the area out. Within 30 minutes we were at a rather impressive gate house to a well-manicured golf course, the one we flew over on our arrival. We were informed that entrance was by prior invitation only, but the helpful security guy called reception and arranged for us to make our case there. Bemused by our request the receptionist sat us down with a cold bottle of water each and said she had sent for somebody to assist us. A gentleman wearing a shirt with the grand title of "Turtle Manager" arrived only to say that the only birds on the resort were a few Grey Herons and Moorhens. He seemed genuinely sorry that he could not provide more birds. With the morning scuppered we decided to put the birding on hold and drive

across the island to Anse Lazio beach supposedly the seventh best beach in the world. We have to say that in our opinion we have seen many comparable beaches throughout the holiday. We returned to the hotel to



continue practicing relaxing. A Redshank, Greenshank, Whimbrel and Grey Plover were seen from the car along the coast road.

Day 19 7th April 2018

With no transport and heat & humidity at very high levels we were restricted to our hotel today. Another dose of relaxation, although we tried hard, we are not sure we were getting any good at it. Activity keeps the mind supple, we have

already noticed that we are beginning to babble, some may say we have babbled for years! As we have to catch our flight back to Mahé early tomorrow for our transfer to Dubai we won't be able to break the monotony with a swim as the high humidity means our swimwear won't have a chance to dry before being packed later today. We set ourselves up for a day of in and out of the shade and shower.

Day 20 8th April 2018

As our Island Hopper flight was at 06-15, we were wakened by a 04-30 alarm call, the taxi arrived punctually at 05-00 and we were at the airport by 20 past. A small gathering was waiting for the airport to open its doors, which we thought was novel. Our flight back to Mahé left on time, 20 minutes later we were in the International Departure Lounge of Mahé International. As with all our Emirates flights we were late departing, this time by 1 hour. Making the 3 Emirates flights taken thus far to be more than 9hrs late, more in m, g, and m ms. Our 4.5hr flight was uneventful, getting us in Dubai at 13-20. Our "fast track" cards actually worked this time and we were soon being whisked to the Palm Tree Court to finish the holiday in style. What a shock, the hotel was bursting at the seams with screaming, shouting, crying, kids. It was more like a school than a hotel and nothing like the hotel we had left a couple of weeks before. Don't get us wrong, we are not against kids, we had one of our own, what we object to is other people's kids, especially when they are allowed to go feral. We may well spend the rest of the holiday with the curtains closed, and an over-worked room service.



Day 21 9th April 2018

With probably our best night's sleep of the holiday we awoke with the daunting task of how to spend the day avoiding the adolescent throng. Meals would have to be strategically planned so as to reduce the amount of kids running amok around the table whilst their parents sit in total oblivion. All public areas of activity have to be "no go areas". With this in mind we headed for the track that encompasses the golf course, a sandy track where only the golf course maintenance men



occasionally travel. A small plant nursery has been established along the track and it was here we found a female Purple Sunbird building a very scruffy nest. A Black-winged Stilt was seen on the main lake and a Common Swift flew over, both new for the holiday. With temperatures now nudging 30 degrees we retreated to the coolness of our room.

Day 22 10th April 2018

Today was our last in Dubai, to be more accurate, our last half day. We breakfasted earlyish, and then did our tried and tested walk of the golf course perimeter track, this has proved to be the best area for any migrants. On the main golf course lake was a juvenile Greater Flamingo, the first for the holiday, and a solitary Redshank. A fly-over Swift was the second for the holiday. With no standout markings we once again marked it down as "common". One of the myriad of golf type buggies that ply the complex picked us and our luggage up and deposited us where our private transfer was waiting. Release the balloons, break out the party poppers our Emirates flight was reasonably on time and we were actually back in Birmingham early. However that is where the good news ends because one of our brand new cases was severely damaged. It looked like it had been put in a car crusher; how can they do that much damage? With jetlag prevalent I attempted to contact Emirates at 06-00 using their 24hour live chat feed, only to be informed that I was in a queue, 20 minutes later I gave up. What a bloody useless airline; "all frills and no drawers"

Accommodation

[The Carana Beach Hotel](#) is a wonderfully located hotel set on a lush hillside with a large white sandy beach and its own coral reef for snorkelling. The rooms are very well appointed with all the amenities you would expect from a 5 star hotel. The pool and beach side bar has plenty of sunbeds and King-size mattresses. The Dining room is a little spartan when compared with the rest of the hotel. The array and colour of all the flowering shrubs compliments the natural fauna and flora. Attention to detail like so many hotels needs to improve to lift this hotel from very, very good to excellent.

[Coco de Mer, Black Parrot Suites](#) This hotel has just been extensively renovated, and it shows. Opening to the public in January this hotel has everything you would associate with 5 stars. Water is ever present in the hotel with an ornamental boulder strewn stream running through the reception area, polished floor tiles are dissected by water-filled joints. The Black Parrot Suites are a self-contained annex of the main hotel with its own private pool and bar. The suites are large and very well furnished. The annual occupancy of this hotel is 90% and it is easy to see why. With many rooms facing due west the sunsets are spectacular.

Bird Island Lodge

Although this lodge does not compare with the amenities the previous two have, it has things money cannot buy, Spectacular night skies, birds so habituated with humans that they are happy to share your accommodation with you. The accommodation although rustic is spacious and detached, a large fan directly over the bed together with wide open shutters and cooling sea breezes makes the nights bearable. The food is plentiful and of a good standard. White powdery beaches almost encompass the whole island. And you have the knowledge, not the feeling, the knowledge that you really are on a desert island. The tens of thousands of birds on such a small island is a major feature.



Jebel Ali Palm Tree Court

Palm Tree Court is a hotel we have visited previously. It forms part of the Jebel Ali complex which comprises of both hotels which are set in vast landscaped gardens, an oasis of flowering shrubs, well-trimmed lawns all interspersed with ornamental streams, pools and waterfalls. A nine-hole championship style golf course and a marina complete the complex. The Palm Tree Court is made up of 10 blocks, 3 storeys high each containing about 24 suites. Most have good views over manicured lawns and gardens to the adjacent beach, a couple don't. Peacocks have free range and their dazzling displays augment the floral display within the gardens. Even at night the impact of the grounds is not diminished as strategically placed coloured lights illuminate plants, paths and water features. Star spangled palm tree trunks are especially impressive. Again the suites are very large with all the luxuries you would expect from this grade of hotel. Activities for children at this hotel are unsurpassed

Birds seen during the trip

Common Myna, Indian Silverbill, White-eared Bulbul, Indian Roller, Hoopoe, Red-vented Bulbul, House Crow, Redstart (Ehrenberg's), Semi-collared Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher, House Sparrow, Common Sandpiper, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Grey Francolin, Collared Dove, Palm Dove, Purple Sunbird, Egyptian Goose, Graceful Prinia, Cattle Egret, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Barred Ground Dove, Seychelles Sunbird, Madagascar Fody, White-tailed Tropicbird, Green-backed Heron, Fairy Tern, Seychelles White-eye, Seychelles Blue Pigeon, Whimbrel, Redshank, Terek Sandpiper, Crab Plover, Lesser-crested Tern, Grey Plover, Greenshank, Turnstone, Moorhen, Yellow Bittern, Little Tern, Brown Noddy, Lesser Noddy, Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Roseate Tern, Greater-crested Tern, Greater Frigatebird, Lesser Frigatebird, Sooty Tern, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Sandplover, Greater Sandplover, Seychelles Fody, Seychelles Magpie Robin, Seychelles Warbler, Seychelles Bulbul, Black Parrot, Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher, Black-winged Stilt, Common Swift, and Greater Flamingo.

A modest number of 63 species was seen, this was never a full-on birding trip: we saw what we saw with minimal effort. It would have been daft in our opinion not to visit some of the nearby islands and just as daft not to expend a little effort to see the endemics they contained. 18 were lifers, 22 new photos were added to the bird library.

Moans Groans & Memorable Moments

Moan

As an airline we think Emirates has become farcical. Over 9hrs delayed over our four international flights. A brand new case almost destroyed, a 24 hour chat line that is not contactable. No apologies or compensation. When we last visited Dubai in 2007 chefs were stood behind joints of meat ready to carve, what you have today is stainless steel cloches which hold such delights as warm sticky rice, tepid noodles, and an array of spicy/mild curry type dishes, and this is what Emirates pronounced as "Fine Dining". The extra you pay for upgrading your flight has never been good value, but now it's been turned into a joke. It was only 2 years ago we had to cancel a trip to Sri Lanka because of changed flight times and delays. The "fast track" ticket outbound, was meaningless. The new lounge in Dubai is drab, unwelcoming, and already showing signs of decay.

Groan

Buffet style meals: at every hotel we visited during this holiday the main style of meal was "serve yourself", where mains containing meat, a person in chef whites was there to carve, but the vast amount of consumables were under stainless steel cloches. These are designed to keep food warm, and not hot. With the constant opening of the lids the food very soon becomes cold. We can now venture to the far corners of our known universe, stem cells can make the blind see, we can instantly see and talk to people anywhere around the world but we can't keep food hot!!

Moan

Every room we had was at least 200metres from the bar/dining area. The Carana Beach and Black Parrot were built on the side of a cliff so both required negotiating some steep inclines. At the Jebel Ali they offered to pick us up in one of their electric buggies at meal times. We rejected the offer, we are not quite that decrepit just yet.

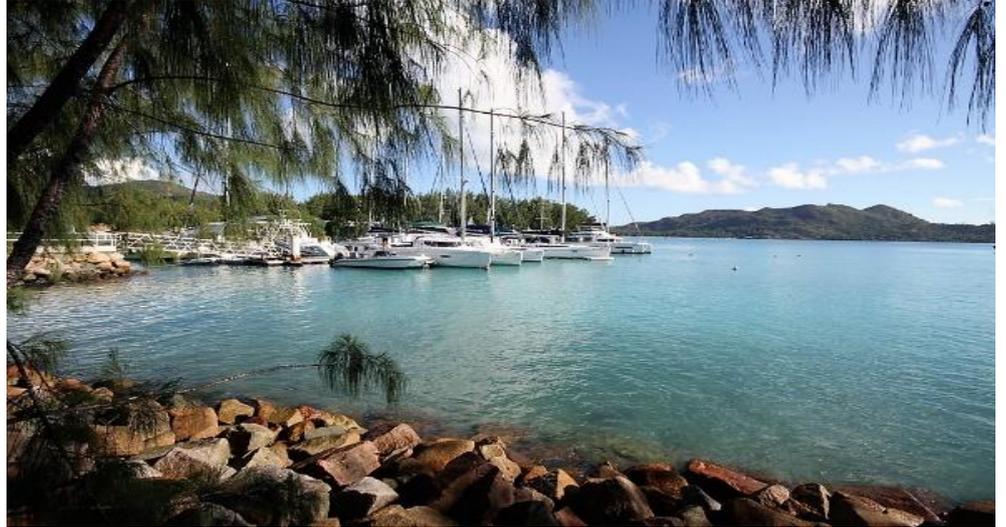
Groan

The missing out on photographing both Yellow Bittern and Terek Sandpiper, the opportunity was there to get a file shot but in both cases I made the cardinal sin of rejecting that option in order to try for a better one.

Wonderful Moments

The assault on the senses is at times overpowering, nowhere in the world have we visited with so many picture postcard views, the whitest of white sands, the bluest of skies and the myriad of blues & greens that make up the sea.

Fish of all shapes, colours and sizes seen through the crystal clear waters. It sounds daft, but the cars, especially on Mahé are the cleanest cars in the world, it seems that it is



an obsession to have a very clean car, most sparkle in the brilliant light.

The people are genuinely happy to help, and everybody you talk to asks, "Are you enjoying your holiday and what do you think of paradise".

Our visit to Bird Island will last long in the memory and was the highlight of the holiday.

The welcoming way we were treated when we reached the Constance Hotels Group exclusive resort of the "Lemuria Reserve". Dressed in birding togs and a little sweaty from our 15 minute walk from the gatehouse to reception our treatment was exemplary. We were sat down in the shade of the reception, both given a very welcome bottle of cold water and then attended to by the Turtle Manager who had been summoned to assist us. An old fashioned kindness was shown to us, from the gatehouse staff to the staff at reception: that was humbling.

This was a truly wonderful holiday and worthy of celebrating our 2 milestones. The accommodation was exceptional, the weather was as expected, wall to wall sunshine. 18 lifers and 22 new photos for the bird library was more than expected, although species numbers were a little disappointing.

Pat & Judy Hayes