

BIRD ISLAND

The northernmost island in the Seychelles archipelago, Bird Island is a coralline paradise covering barely 0.7km². Just 60 miles from Mahé, or 30 minutes by plane, its striking sandy beaches and surrounding turquoise seas are quintessentially idyllic, yet they are not the reason to visit. Instead, wildlife viewing is its *raison d'être*.

Hundreds of thousands of birds draw serious ornithologists to Bird Island in the nesting season, whilst the birds' lack of fear for humans makes close observation thrilling for even casual observers and children. The skies above the island are filled with circling fishing parties, the trees thick with nests and precariously placed chicks, and the ground and tree trunks home to nesting birds. It is both very striking and quite unlike almost any other wildlife destination that we feature.

BIRD ISLAND LODGE

Bird Island is part-owned and run by husband-and-wife team Jo and Nick Savy. This is very much their home. Nick grew up on his parents' coconut plantation here, and perhaps this is what gives the lodge its 'take-me-as-you-see-me' atmosphere and family-friendly approach.

There are 24 simple but comfortable guest chalets with wide, shady verandas facing the island's western waters. Inside, these are spacious and airy with high-pitched ceilings and wide louvre windows providing access for the cooling breeze. There is a fan over the main four-poster bed, but no

air conditioning, and an open-plan lounge area with two sofas which can double as two children's beds.

Separate rooms at the back of the chalet house the bathroom and a large solar-heated shower, which uses slightly brackish water from the island's borehole. The chalets are surrounded by coconut palms, casuarinas and frangipanis, many filled with incessantly chattering noddies, so pack earplugs if you're a light sleeper! (It is also important to realise that their guano can sometimes make parts of the island a little smelly, particularly when it rains.)



Fairy terns



Up to 1.5 million sooty terns come to Bird Island to breed from about May to October

At the centre of the lodge is a lounge, bar and restaurant – rarely used outside meal times, but perfectly pleasant and a cool daytime retreat. All meals are served in the open-sided restaurant, overlooking the lawn towards the sea, and attracting a host of fire-red Madagascar fodies in search of crumbs. The food is largely seasonal buffets and the atmosphere very casual.

The main activities on Bird Island are birdwatching and beachcombing. Nature tours guided by the resident conservationist are a great introduction to the island's flora and fauna. Gazing at fairy terns feeding their chicks on the tiniest of branches, sitting next to ground-nesting white-tailed tropicbirds, and standing beside a huge field filled with tens of thousands of nesting sooty terns: these are amazing wildlife experiences.

Hawksbill turtles nest on the island from mid-September to March, and green turtles are nocturnal breeders throughout the year but in smaller numbers. The island is also home to 22 giant tortoises, one of whom is known as Esmeralda – unofficially the world's oldest tortoise, she was officially listed in the Guinness Book of Records in the 1980s as the world's heaviest tortoise.

These are the reasons to come to the island. This is not a place for pampering, luxuries or super service; come instead to marvel at the avian spectacle from a comfortable but simple setting, at an affordable rate.

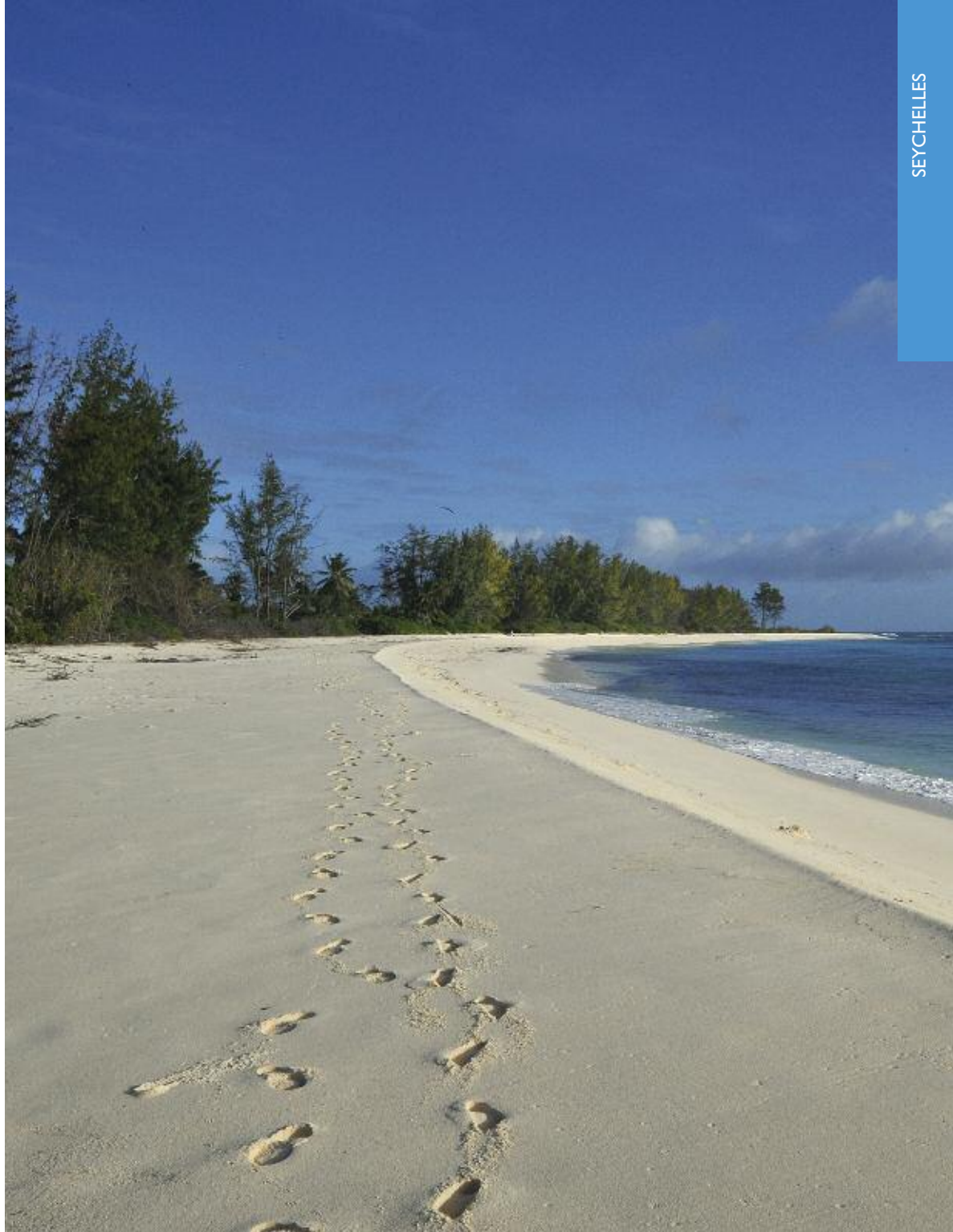
The Birds

Since the mid-1960s, conservation initiatives have protected Bird Island's avian inhabitants, starting with the eradication of rats and rabbits. Ground-nesting birds like the wedge-tailed shearwater and white-tailed tropicbird have thrived since then.

At the northern end of the island, the island's most spectacular sight is the vast colony of sooty terns, which usually nest here from May to October. There are currently about 750,000 pairs, so with chicks there can be close to two million individuals at the height of the season!

Many of Bird Island's other resident species nest year round. Migrants from Alaska and Siberia appear from end-August to end-May, often displaying spectacular breeding plumage.

Frequent migrants that breed here in much smaller numbers include common and lesser noddies, white-tailed tropicbirds, the pure white fairy terns, Madagascar and Seychelles turtle doves, barred ground doves, Madagascar fodies and common mynah birds. In addition, turnstones, grey plovers, whimbrels and frigatebirds are habitually sighted.



You can walk around the whole of Bird Island