

Records of migrants and amendments to the status of exotics on Mauritius in 1989–93

Roger Safford^a and Rémy Basque^b

Nouvelles données sur des oiseaux migrateurs et révision du statut de certaines espèces exotiques sur l'île Maurice en 1989–93. L'île Maurice, située dans le sud-ouest tropique de l'océan Indien, possédait autrefois une riche communauté autochtone d'oiseaux terrestres et aquatiques nicheurs, dont seulement un petit nombre a survécu. Le reste de l'avifaune mauricienne est composé d'espèces exotiques et de visiteurs non nicheurs, sur lesquels peu de publications ont été faites. Cet article présente succinctement l'ensemble des observations de visiteurs non nicheurs et une sélection des observations d'espèces exotiques constituant des données nouvelles, au cours d'une période de quatre ans sur l'île Maurice en 1989–93. Des données sont fournies sur 38 espèces, dont six (l'Albatros à cape blanche *Thalassarche cauta*, le Puffin à pieds pâles *Puffinus carneipes*, le Canard colvert *Anas platyrhynchos*, le Labbe antarctique *Catharacta antarctica*, la Sterne voyageuse *Sterna bengalensis* et la Guifette leucoptère *Chlidonias leucopterus*) doivent être ajoutées à la liste la plus récente de l'île (Dowsett 1993), et deux (le Labbe de McCormick *Catharacta maccormicki* et le Padda de Java *Padda oryzivora*) supprimées de celle-ci. L'examen détaillé du statut des espèces migratrices et occasionnelles de l'île Maurice, comprenant la compilation et la vérification de toutes les observations faites par les nombreux ornithologues de passage, serait un travail bien utile mais considérable.

Summary. Mauritius, in the tropical south-west Indian Ocean, formerly had a rich native community of breeding land- and waterbirds, of which a small number survive. The remainder of the Mauritian avifauna is composed of exotics and non-breeding visitors, of which little has been published. This note summarises all observations of non-breeding visitors and selected observations of exotics where they add to existing documentation, from a four-year period of residence on Mauritius in 1989–93. Data are provided on 38 species, of which six (Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta*, Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Subantarctic Skua *Catharacta antarctica*, Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* and White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*) are additions to the most recent island checklist by Dowsett (1993), and two (South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki* and Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora*) should be deleted from it. A comprehensive review of the status of migrants and vagrants on Mauritius, compiling and verifying all observations by the many visiting ornithologists, would be a worthwhile but large task.

Mauritius, one of the Mascarene islands in the tropical south-west Indian Ocean, formerly possessed an extraordinarily rich native community of breeding land- and waterbirds (Cheke 1987, Cheke & Hume in press). As on the other Mascarene islands, Réunion and Rodrigues, the native wildlife has been devastated by human activities and their consequences in the last 400 years, leaving but a small number of extant species, several of which are highly endangered.

Two other components of the Mauritian avifauna are exotics and non-breeding visitors. Most are globally abundant and therefore have attracted little attention. Records were summarised, mostly

without detail, by Staub (1973, 1976, 1993) and Temple (1976), and the ecological history of the resident avifauna (native and exotic) was briefly presented by Cheke (1987), with more detail soon to appear (Cheke & Hume in press). Information from these and a few other sources was compiled by Dowsett (1993) into a checklist for Mauritius, which included 89 species. Jones (1996) provided updated information and discussion on the exotics. Sinclair & Langrand (1998) covered Mauritius in their Malagasy region field guide. Rodrigues, politically part of Mauritius, was treated separately by Dowsett; see also Showler & Cheke (2002) for a summary of more recent information.

This paper is an account of all records by RS (the observer in all cases unless otherwise stated) of non-breeding visitors during a four-year residence on Mauritius, in 1989–93, supplemented by observations and photographs from a visit by RB in 1990. It does not pretend to offer a complete update to Dowsett's (1993) checklist or Sinclair & Langrand's (1998) field guide, nor a comprehensive review of the status of migrants and vagrants on Mauritius. The latter, as has been performed for Seychelles (Skerrett 1996, Skerrett & Seychelles Bird Records Committee 2001, Skerrett *et al.* 2006), would be a worthy but much larger task, as many observers have unpublished records to contribute, especially if Réunion and Rodrigues were also to be included, as they should ideally be.

Selected observations (or lack of them, in cases where sightings might have been expected based on literature) on exotics in 1989–93 are also presented, including the following:

- Species listed by Dowsett (1993) as resident (native or introduced) for which the status in 1989–93 was or may have been substantially different from that given by Dowsett, and also by Sinclair & Langrand (1998), who generally follow Dowsett regarding the presence of exotics.
- Species listed by Dowsett (1993) as possibly extinct on Mauritius.
- One newly established exotic with an apparently self-sustaining population (Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*), not listed by Dowsett (1993). Other exotics, such as Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, have become established since 1993, or are becoming established (Jones 1996, Cheke 2005), but no attempt has been made to review all such species here.

Following each species' name, the status category given by Dowsett (1993) is shown: R = resident (presumably native, as exotics have a separate category); M = intra-African migrant (African referring to the combined African and Malagasy regions, including subantarctic islands); P = Palearctic migrant; V = vagrant (normally five records or fewer); I = introduced species, now established; E = formerly present but now extinct; § = occurrence requires proof. Species not listed by Dowsett (1993) are indicated thus *. Where appropriate, based on data herein, a revised category is proposed, with the previous category

(Dowsett 1993) mentioned in brackets. Several of the species concerned have recently been subject to taxonomic review, which is not discussed here; nomenclature follows the 2005 African Bird Club checklist.

The key site for waterbird observations was Terre Rouge estuary (Abhaya & Probst 1995), a small, polluted and partly infilled estuary north of Port-Louis, on the north-west coast (20°08'S 057°29'E). Six-monthly waterfowl counts were conducted here between January 1991 and January 1993, as part of the African Waterfowl Census (Perennou 1991, 1992, Taylor 1993), and the site was also visited on a few other occasions. The results of these counts are repeated here (Table 1), giving a reasonable indication of the migrant waterfowl community of Mauritius; for most species, Terre Rouge may hold the majority of the total Mauritian population. Under the name Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary, it was designated as Mauritius' first and only Ramsar site (wetland of international importance), covering 26 ha, in 2001. It is close to, but not the same as Mer Rouge (referred to by Temple 1976); Mer Rouge was a larger and more productive tidal area, now reclaimed and occupied by warehouses, immediately south of Terre Rouge (A. S. Cheke pers. comm. 2005, Cheke & Hume in press). Several other coastal areas hold a few hundred wading birds, in particular salt pans and estuarine areas between Tamarin and Le Morne, in the south-west, although there is undoubtedly interchange between Terre Rouge and the south-western sites.

*Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta* V

First record for Mauritius. In August 1993, an albatross was brought to Mahebourg by fishermen. News of the discovery reached C. G. Jones, and as a result, several observers including CGJ, B. Bell, L. Smart and RS examined it (Fig. 1). The bird died soon after; the specimen was retained by a local man and has unfortunately proven impossible to trace. All agreed that it was an immature of the Shy Albatross complex, which is now frequently treated as comprising multiple species and subspecies (but arrangements vary; see e.g. Dickinson 2003). H. Shirihai and P. Ryan (*in litt.* 2003) examined photographs and confirmed the identification, adding the following comments. Within the complex, Chatham Albatross *T. (c.) eremita* can

Table 1. Waterfowl counts at Terre Rouge estuary, near Port-Louis, Mauritius, undertaken for the African Waterfowl Census, 1991–93. Counts in the left hand five columns were previously published in Perennou (1991, 1992) and Taylor (1993). All counts by the author, except that in July 1992 which was by K. Duffy and those in 1973–74 (included for comparison) which were by A. S. Cheke (pers. comm. 2005).

Tableau 1. Dénombrements d'oiseaux d'eau dans l'estuaire de Terre Rouge, près de Port-Louis, île Maurice, conduits dans le cadre des recensements internationaux d'oiseaux d'eau en Afrique, 1991–93. Les données des cinq premières colonnes ont été publiées auparavant in Perennou (1991, 1992) et Taylor (1993). Tous les dénombrements ont été faits par l'auteur, sauf celui de juillet 1992 fait par K. Duffy et ceux de 1973–1974 (inclus pour comparaison) faits par A. S. Cheke (comm. pers. 2005).

Species	Dates of counts						1973–74 ²
	12/02/ 1991	06/07/ 1991	17/01/ 1992	01/07/ 1992	16/01/ 1993	Other dates, 1989–93	
Green-backed Heron <i>Butorides striata</i> ¹	8	15	10	9	16		1
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	13	20	57	8	45		25–50
Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			3				0–4
Greater Sand Plover <i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	10	1	21		12		1–20
Greater/Lesser Sand Plover <i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i> mongolus	5	3	20		3	Max. 100 (Jan 90)	
Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	3	2	3			Max. 4 (Mar 92)	0–1
Eurasian Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>						None, Terre Rouge ³	1–30
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	30	10	55	10	36		20–50
Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	12		25		13		15–30
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>						1, 18 Dec 89 ³	0–1
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>	10	4	15		8		0–4
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			1		1		0–1
Grey-tailed Tattler <i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>	1					1, Jan–Mar, Dec 90 ³	
Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i> ⁴	51	25	68		70		30–50+
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>		7	11		5		0–10
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	3	2	3		1	Max. 4 (Mar 92)	0–4
Curlew Sandpiper <i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	603	350	1049	250	514		150–300
Great Knot <i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>						1, 28 Dec 1990	
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	44		15		6	Max. 61 (Mar 90)	7–50
Little/Saunders's Tern <i>Sterna albifrons/saundersi</i>	2		1			1, Dec 89–Jan 90	0–1
Lesser Crested Tern <i>Sterna bengalensis</i>						2, Jan 91	0–1
White-winged Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>					1	2, Jan–Mar 90 ³	

¹Green-backed Heron is a breeding resident, not a migrant, but is included here to present a complete list of waterbirds present.
²Counts from four visits in November 1973–January 1974 to the adjacent Mer Rouge; despite the loss of the much larger Mer Rouge area (see text), in 1989–93 Terre Rouge may have held sufficient habitat for the Mauritian populations of these species. A. S. Cheke also identified one Greater Crested Tern *Sterna bergii* (not seen by us in 1989–93), and a suspected Red Knot *Calidris canutus* which would be a first record for Mauritius but was not confirmed.
³See text for more details.
⁴The only wader ringed in Mauritius to be recovered abroad was a Ruddy Turnstone ringed by A. S. Cheke (pers. comm. 2005) on 14 February 1974 and killed at Ratnagiri in India (between Bombay and Goa) on 18 August 1975; this mirrors recoveries of Seychelles-ringed Ruddy Turnstones in Kazakhstan, Iran and Dagestan (Skerrett *et al.* 2001).

be eliminated by the pale head, but the other key features (amount of black on the tip of the underwing, and amount of grey on the head/neck) are difficult to assess with flash photographs and the primaries partially closed, and the identification is best left as *cauta*, *steadii* or *salvini* until (or if) the specimen can be found. Of these three taxa, based on the photographs, Ryan considers *steadii* (much the most abundant off South Africa: Hockey *et al.* 2005) most likely, and *salvini* least so.

Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* M
 One to two seen offshore from Tamarin and Albion (west coast) between September 1992 and March 1993. Few recent sightings reported (Temple 1976, Merton & Bell 2003), but probably a not uncommon visitor, as it breeds in large numbers on Réunion (race *bailloni*) and formerly did so on Mauritius (Cheke 1987).

***Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes* M**
 First records for Mauritius. Approximately ten off Le Morne on 6 January 1992. During a boat trip

off Le Morne with H. Corbett, most of c.50 large dark shearwaters were Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *P. pacificus*, an abundant breeder in the region. One loose group of Flesh-footed Shearwaters was seen well, showing the deep-based, pinkish-horn bill with a dark tip (the narrower, all-dark bill of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters was easy to see under the same conditions). HC had a few days earlier identified Flesh-footed Shearwaters whilst surveying cetaceans in this area, and was familiar with the species from elsewhere.

Reported by Staub (1976) from Rodrigues, by Harrison (1983) in Mascarene waters, and a sighting south-east of Mauritius is mapped by Sinclair & Langrand (1998), but no records are documented; also reported from the waters off Madagascar (Langrand & Sinclair 1994) and Seychelles (Skerrett 1996).

Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* M (V)

Recorded offshore from Albion and Tamarin in February 1992 and January–March 1993, with a maximum of 33 flying north off Albion in 70 minutes on 18 February 1993, when a cyclone was close to the island.

There appear to be no published reports of Barau's Petrels (which regularly breed only at high altitude on Réunion) at sea off Mauritian coasts. However, the species has been recorded at Round Island: a corpse found by Temple (1976), and more recent records of live birds (C. G. Jones pers. comm. 1998). In addition, A. S. Cheke (*in* Jouanin 1987) observed birds over the Mauritian mainland, heading inland at Tamarin Falls, in February 1974.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* E (R)

No records by ourselves or any other observations known to us in 1989–93. The last period when Cattle Egrets were known to be present on the island commenced with the arrival of a flock of c.30 in 1967; by 1978, none remained (A. S. Cheke pers. comm. 2005). Therefore, the species is now extinct but may recolonise, as has happened before (Cheke 1987).

***Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* I

Recorded regularly at Mare Longue Reservoir, Tamarin Falls Reservoir and Piton du Milieu Reservoir. The largest numbers were at Tamarin Falls, with a maximum of 31 birds on 25 February 1991. See also comments under Meller's Duck.

Meller's Duck *Anas melleri* E?

One at Valetta Reservoir on 8 September 1989 (RS, S. Tonge). Searched for unsuccessfully on numerous other occasions at this site, the traditional Mauritian location for this species, and also at nearby Piton du Milieu Reservoir.

Meller's Duck is a globally Endangered species endemic to Madagascar with an introduced population on Mauritius (BirdLife International 2004). Though it was widely believed in 1989–93 to be the only duck species on Mauritius, it was in truth greatly outnumbered by Mallard, and this was already the case in 1985 (A. S. Cheke pers. comm. 2005). The presence of Mallards was noted by Staub (1993), who reported that 37 birds were introduced to Mare Longue, Mare aux Vacoas and Piton du Milieu reservoirs in 1979, and subsequently displaced Meller's Ducks from Tamarin Falls reservoir. Jones (1996) noted that they were expanding their range and estimated the population at c.50 birds.

Most observers, Mauritian and foreign, were in 1989–93 unaware of the presence of Mallards and so automatically identified all feral ducks as Meller's; reports of the latter should be checked and RS was aware of no confirmed records of Meller's during that period, with the exception of the 1989 sighting above. It is possible, indeed likely, that Meller's is extinct on Mauritius (Safford 1993). A few might conceivably survive in rarely visited marshes and rivers on the central plateau. Valetta is seldom visited by birdwatchers but no Meller's was seen there (or elsewhere) by A. S. Cheke (pers. comm. 2005) in 1996 and 1999. A few Meller's Ducks were, at least until recently, kept in captivity and further releases are therefore a possibility.

McKelvey (1977) estimated the Mauritian population at c.30 in the mid-1970s, although on what basis is unclear. The virtual absence of concrete information on the status of Meller's Duck on Mauritius makes it difficult to identify the reasons for the species' decline and to investigate the suggestion that the increase in Mallards has caused or contributed to this decrease.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* P (V)

Two immatures hunting at midday over the main ridge of the Bambous Mountains around Pic Grand Fond (an area also known as l'Étoile), on 20 February 1993. The birds had been present at

this site since December 1992, when they were found by M. Nicoll, who recorded up to four together. They afforded prolonged views, hunting for flying insects, especially dragonflies, over the forested ridge, mostly gliding back and forth, with occasional bursts of fast wingbeats producing extraordinary acceleration to capture insect prey, which was consumed in midair. See also comments under Sooty Falcon.

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* V, ?P (P)

An adult at Montagne Cocotte, at dusk on 10 March 1991, was seen briefly, flying past at close range, showing the diagnostic all blue-grey plumage of an adult Sooty Falcon.

In addition, single falcons, believed to be Eleonora's or Sooty, were observed on 12 December 1989, 22 December 1990, 6 January 1993 and 27 March 1993. Given the difficulty of identifying large falcons, these briefly seen birds are left unidentified. The only Mauritian specimen known to us of either, an Eleonora's collected at Grand Port (south-east Mauritius) in or around December 1870, was for a century misidentified as a Sooty, whilst the only other large falcon collected on Mauritius (also in or around December 1870) is a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* apparently of the migratory Palearctic race *calidus*. Both specimens are in the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, UK (Benson & Penny 1971, Benson 1971, with dates confirmed from the museum's specimen catalogue).

The Eleonora's above were the only migrant falcons known to have remained in one place for an extended period. The small number of records of any migrant falcons during the intensive and prolonged field work by RS suggests that they are rare but regular in Mauritius; if 1989–93 were typical years, numbers spending the non-breeding season there must be tiny and a fairly insignificant proportion of the global population of 4,500 pairs of Eleonora's and perhaps 40,000 pairs of Sooty estimated in the mid-1990s (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001).

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* E (R)

No records by ourselves, or any other observations known to us in 1989–93. Formerly present, though it is unclear how well established the species became, as it was repeatedly introduced and never known to be native (Cheke 1987). If

present, it would thus have status I (not R, as in Dowsett 1993). Common Quail was already considered possibly extinct on Mauritius by Rountree *et al.* (1952) and this is confirmed by Jones (1996). More recent sightings are considered to be releases or escapes from quail farms (Staub 1976, Cheke 1987).

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* E (E?)

No records by ourselves, despite searches of various freshwater wetlands by RS with K. Duffy *et al.*, including small patches of marsh at Flic-en-Flac, where it was last reported in 1976 (an isolated report *c.* 20 years after any previous sighting; Michel 1981), and on the Plaine des Roches, which seemed the most suitable; no other observations known to us in 1989–93 or since. Formerly resident (probably, but not certainly, introduced: Cheke 1987), but considered possibly extinct by Dowsett (1993); after such a long period without records, it is indeed presumably extinct on Mauritius (Jones 1996).

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* P

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* P § (V)

Among the up to 100 sand plovers we observed at Terre Rouge estuary in 1989–93, many were undoubtedly Greater (Figs. 2–3), but amongst these RS (once with RB and J.-M. Probst) saw at least twice obviously small, delicately built, short-billed and dark-legged birds which appeared like typical Lesser Sand Plovers. However, the diagnostic features of the wing, tail and bill nail (Hirschfeld *et al.* 2000) were not noted.

Greater Sand Plover has long been known to occur in Mauritius, but the status of Lesser Sand Plover is poorly known, with no specimens or well-documented records; the same is true in Madagascar and the Comoros (Morris & Hawkins 1998, Louette 2004). Temple (1976) reported seeing several *mongolus* with *leschenaultii* in 1973–75. P. Hockey *et al.* (pers. comm. 1989), who are very familiar with both species in Africa, were in no doubt that they observed small numbers of Lesser Sand Plovers in Mauritius in 1989 and subsequently (Hockey 1993). Given the well-known presence in eastern and southern Africa of Lesser Sand Plover of the race *pamirensis* (Hirschfeld *et al.* 2000, Hockey *et al.* 2005), its occurrence in the Malagasy region, including Mauritius, is to be expected (C. S. Roselaar *in litt.* 2005).

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* P

One at the Black River estuary on 10 March 1990 was the only record. The bird had an exceptionally long bill, compared to that of Eurasian Curlews in Europe, making it easy to distinguish from the abundant Whimbrel. As noted by Staub (1976) and Temple (1976), Eurasian Curlews are much rarer than Whimbrels in Mauritius, and the same applies elsewhere in the Malagasy region (Benson 1971). However, influxes apparently occur, accounting for the exceptional 25–30 seen by A. S. Cheke (pers. comm. 2005) at Mer Rouge in November 1973.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* V

One at Terre Rouge estuary on 18 December 1989 was the only record.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes* V

One at Terre Rouge from at least 15 January to 9 March 1990 (Fig. 4) and (perhaps the same individual) on 28 December 1990 and 12 February 1991. The whistling calls, quite distinct from those of the otherwise very similar Wandering Tattler *H. incanus*, were heard several times. This bird was found in late 1989 by P. Hockey *et al.*, and referred to in passing by Safford (1991) and Perennou (1991). As the site was not visited in March–December 1990, it is unknown whether the bird remained throughout the period.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* V

A first-winter at Terre Rouge estuary on 28 December 1990. This record was described earlier (Safford 1991); a photograph is provided here (Fig. 5).

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* P (V)

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* P (V)

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* P (V)

These three species are listed by Dowsett (1993) as vagrants, but several were recorded annually at Terre Rouge; Terek Sandpiper was also regularly found elsewhere, e.g. at Petite Rivière Noire. All three are therefore probably better treated as regular migrants. Most stints were in winter plumage, making elimination of the potential vagrant Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* very difficult; however, one in breeding plumage in March 1992 was definitely a Little Stint.

***Subantarctic Skua** *Catharacta antarctica* M §

South Polar Skua *C. maccormicki* (V): delete from list

Three *Catharacta* off the north and north-west coast, between Port-Louis and Flat Island, on 26 August 1989. None seen on other boat trips in September–January. These birds closely resembled Great Skuas *C. skua*, with which RS is familiar from the North Atlantic, and thus also resembled the very similar Subantarctic Skua. However, some dark-morph South Polar Skuas are very similar, and these birds pose such identification problems that photographic or specimen evidence would be preferable to confirm the identity of skuas in Mauritian waters.

Both species are known from Seychelles and southern Africa. In southern Africa, Subantarctic is much the commoner (Hockey *et al.* 2005), and the same applies in Seychelles, where Subantarctic is an annual visitor (Skerrett *et al.* 2001), whereas there are just four records of South Polar (Skerrett *et al.* 2006). *Catharacta* appear to be regular in small numbers in Mauritian waters. Rountree *et al.* (1952) refer to a specimen in the Mauritius Institute, Port-Louis (MIPL), identified as *C. antarctica*, from (or perhaps offshore of) Le Morne. Staub (1976) and Temple (1976) include Great Skua *C. skua*, which was formerly usually lumped with Subantarctic, so these should presumably be considered as reports of Subantarctic; Temple referred to specimens (*sic*) in MIPL and sightings in July–November. A. S. Cheke (pers. comm. 2005) saw several such birds in 1973–75, as has C. G. Jones (pers. comm. 1989) since then. Dowsett (1993: 309) points to uncertainties over *Catharacta* occurring in Malagasy waters, but treats reports of *C. skua* as referring to what is now *C. maccormicki* rather than *C. antarctica*; for this reason, the previous records (cited above) led him to list only *maccormicki* for Mauritius, as a vagrant. However, since the reports of *C. skua* appear to refer to *C. antarctica*, this leaves no published claims of *maccormicki* from Mauritius.

***Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis* V

Two adults, at Terre Rouge estuary on 18 January 1991, were seen well with Common Terns *S. hirundo*; the clearly orange (not greenish-yellow) bill easily eliminated Greater Crested Tern *S. bergii*.

Not listed by Dowsett (1993), but previously recorded: Staub (1976) included it, based at least



on a sighting by A. S. Cheke (pers. comm. 2005) and A. W. Diamond at Fort William in January 1975. Staub (1993) includes a photograph of a Lesser Crested Tern with Common Terns, taken at Terre Rouge on an unknown date.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* §

It was impossible to determine whether the small terns in Table 1 were this species or Saunders's Tern *S. saundersi*. The latter is not listed for Mauritius by Dowsett (1993) and the relative abundance of these two species in the Malagasy region is poorly known. Most identified records elsewhere in the region are of Saunders's, which at least on Seychelles does seem to be the commoner (Skerrett *et al.* 2001).

***White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* V**

First records for Mauritius. Two first-winters at Terre Rouge estuary from 15 January to 9 March 1990 (Figs. 6–7), and one on 16 January 1993. Identified by, amongst other features, the short bill, white breast-sides and limited amount of black on the head.

Madagascar Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata* R (I)

Included here as Dowsett (1993), in accordance with nearly all other authors, treated it as an exotic. It was common in 1989–93, as described by Staub (1976) and Cheke (1987), but subfossil remains reveal it to be native (Mourer-Chauviré *et al.* 1999). It is possible that the native birds were 'subject to supplementary introduction from Madagascar' (Cheke 2005).

Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica* R (M)

Included here as Dowsett (1993) treated it as a migrant breeder, but no evidence of migration was witnessed in 1989–93, nor has any ever been reported. The population on Madagascar (*P. b. madagascariensis*) is at least partially migratory (Langrand 1990); Turner & Rose (1989) reported that *madagascariensis* has been recorded in Mauritius (and Réunion), but no documentation is available. The nominate race present in the Mascarenes is resident and has never been recorded elsewhere.

Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora* E, or delete from list (I)

No records by ourselves, or any other observations known to us in 1989–93. Java Sparrows were last reported in Mauritius in 1892 (Cheke 1987, Jones 1996), apart from occasional escapes which have not led to a population becoming re-established (Jones 1996). This is, therefore, a long-extinct exotic, and it no longer occurs anywhere in the Malagasy region. Having disappeared so long ago, it probably should not have been included in the checklist, even as Extinct; no cut-off date is given, but exotics that died out more recently (such as Grey-headed Lovebird *Agapornis cana* and Cape Canary *Serinus canicollis*; Cheke 1987) were not included.

Acknowledgements

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Captions to plate on opposite page

Figure 1. Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta*, Mahebourg, Mauritius, August 1993 (Roger Safford)

Albatros à cape blanche *Thalassarche cauta*, Mahebourg, île Maurice, août 1993 (Roger Safford)

Figure 2. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* in non-breeding plumage, Terre Rouge estuary, March 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Pluvier de Leschenault *Charadrius leschenaultii* en plumage internuptial, estuaire de Terre Rouge, mars 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Figure 3. Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* in breeding plumage, Terre Rouge estuary, March 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Pluvier de Leschenault *Charadrius leschenaultii* en plumage nuptial, estuaire de Terre Rouge, mars 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Figure 4. Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*, Terre Rouge estuary, March 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Chevalier de Sibérie *Heteroscelus brevipes*, estuaire de Terre Rouge, mars 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Figure 5. Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Terre Rouge estuary, December 1990 (Roger Safford)

Becasseau de l'Anadyr *Calidris tenuirostris*, estuaire de Terre Rouge, mars 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Figures 6–7. White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Terre Rouge estuary, March 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Guifette leucoptère *Chlidonias leucopterus*, estuaire de Terre Rouge, mars 1990 (Rémy Basque)

Figure 8. Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Terre Rouge estuary, March 1990 (Photos: Rémy Basque)

Sterne pierregarin *Sterna hirundo*, estuaire de Terre Rouge, mars 1990 (Rémy Basque)

hope, named above. Special thanks go to Carl Jones, Anthony Cheke and Philip Hockey for much interesting discussion and additional information, and Kevin Duffy and Jean-Michel Probst, companions on several birding ventures. Anthony Cheke also provided detailed comments and information which greatly improved the manuscript. Adrian Skerrett also kindly reviewed the manuscript and clarified the status of certain species in Seychelles.

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- ^ac/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. E-mail: roger.safford@birdlife.org
- ^b2bis rue du Verger, 56860 Séné, France. E-mail: remy.basque@gmail.com
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