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## DOMESTIC

### Record numbers for a decade seen in the Aride annual seabird census | 17 October 2023



***In July the seabird census team reported record number of seabirds breeding on Special Nature Reserve Aride. ICS science officer Annie Simons explains why there is a lot to***

***celebrate, and a lot more to be done to keep seabirds safe.***

Every year the Aride conservation team brave wind, rain and sun to spend two weeks trekking round the island finding, mapping and counting breeding seabirds. It is gruelling work – traversing across rocky cliffs that tumble away beneath you, wading through thickets of spiky pandanus and being ambushed by hairy caterpillars that seem to come out especially for the occasion. But the views of soaring Frigate birds that greet you as you emerge onto the hill crest, and the symphony of thousands of terns make you forget all about your sunburn and stubbed toes. The biggest reward of all was recording 201,215 breeding pairs of seabirds on the island which is the highest count since 2012.

Hosting the world's largest breeding populations of Tropical Shearwaters, Lesser Noddies and the West Indian Ocean race of Roseate Tern *Arideensis*, it is easy to see how fluctuations in population on Aride have implications on a global scale. Which is why records like reaching the highest count of Lesser Noddies in over a decade with 185,768 breeding pairs is something worth celebrating. The biggest factor working in the seabirds' favour is the relatively mild South East monsoon this year, with lighter winds causing less damage to nests and providing good feeding conditions at sea. However, there are other factors at play.

Seabirds are a finely tuned indicator of ocean health with population changes reflecting marine pollution, plastic and fish stocks. Growing populations on Aride gives hope that all the passion people have across the Seychelles for protecting nature is paying off. However, there are still worrying long-term declines, especially with the Sooty Tern and Roseate Tern populations struggling more and more each year. There is plenty everyone can do to ensure seabird populations thrive rather than decline. Poaching, disturbance, plastic pollution and ghost fishing gear are the major threats that can be tackled together.

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