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Caspian tern spotted breeding on Seychelles' Cosmoledo Atoll

The world's largest tern, the Caspian tern, has been spotted breeding on Cosmoledo Atoll, making it the second oceanic breeding site in Seychelles after the Aldabra Atoll.

Jake Letori, a conservation officer of the Island Conser-

vation Society (ICS) based on Cosmoledo, said that this important discovery was made in May by the ICS team on the atoll.

"It was an opportunistic sighting. The team went out to explore Menai, the largest island of the atoll, which is an island

that was new to them. We always keep an eye and an ear out for birds, and we were mobbed by both adults, which led us to believe they might be nesting nearby. Upon settling on the ground, we were able to see their nesting location and confirm the presence of an egg.

We took a photo and a GPS location then departed," said Letori.

Mr Letori said that he cannot give an accurate population estimate of the Caspian tern but so far they know of one pair on Grande Ile that potentially raised two young and a pair on Menai. "We've never seen more than four at one time on Cosmoledo, usually sighted in pairs or singular."

Caspian tern eggs are larger than other terns that nest in Seychelles, which include the black-naped tern, the sooty tern, the brown noddie and fairy terns. It is pale in colour with speckled mottled brown and blends in with the ground. Over time they become faded and get an earthy colour from incubation.

Mr Letori also said that there are a couple of reasons why the Caspian tern has chosen to nest on Cosmoledo.

"One is that there is no permanent human habitation here, therefore, very little disturbance. They are able to

nest in peace as they are very sensitive and skittish birds. Also, the Cosmoledo lagoon and outer reefs provide perfect foraging habitat for them to catch small fish as well as plenty of sandy beaches. We've seen them catch turtle hatchlings from the beach and the sea," he explained.

"For the nest on Menai, we were unable to tell whether it fledged or failed as we returned too late to check. Menai has rats which could be a threat, herons also may pose a threat to small chicks," said Mr Letori.

