

Local experts contribute to mammoth new work on birds of the Malagasy region

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Plate 46. Madagascar Fody *Foudia madagascariensis* (p. 892): 1 ad ♂ br, 2 ad ♀, 3 ad ♂ part-red, 4 flavistic ad; Comoro Fody *F. eminentissima* (p. 886): *F. e. algondae* 5 ad ♂ br, *F. e. eminentissima* 6 ad ♂ br, *F. e. consobrina* 7 ad ♂ br, 8 ad ♀, *F. e. anjuanensis* 9 ad ♂ br; Aldabra Fody *F. aldabrana* (p. 889): 10 ad ♀, 11 ad ♂ br; Rodrigues Fody *F. flavicans* (p. 879): 12 ad ♂ br, 13 ad ♀; Mauritius Fody *F. rubra* (p. 882): 14 ad ♂ br, 15 ad ♀; Seychelles Fody *F. sechellarum* (p. 876): 16 ad ♂ br, 17 ad ♀; Forest Fody *F. omissa* (p. 896): 18 ad ♂ br, 19 ad ♀. (Brian Small)

For many years, The Birds of Africa has stood as the most authoritative source of information on the birds of Africa. In seven colossal volumes published between 1982 and 2003, every species recorded on the continent is described in detail together with summaries of behaviour and ecology.

However, one thing has been missing: a similar work for the islands of the western Indian Ocean. This gap has now been filled with the launch of the eighth and final volume of the series covering the birds of Madagascar, Comoros, the Mascarenes and of course Seychelles.

Each of the 352 residents and regular migrants recorded in the region are described in unprecedented detail. Distribution, description, key identification points, behaviour, feeding and breeding habits are all comprehensively covered by a roll call of the leading experts on the birds of the western Indian Ocean.

A fine series of detailed maps show their distribution across the region. Vagrant species are also covered though in lesser detail. Every species is illustrated in colour with original artwork by John Gale and Brian Small, including all the main different plumages according to factors such as sex, age or geographical area. Seychelles Creole names are given for all species.

Birds of Africa Volume VIII has been compiled by Roger Safford and Frank Hawkins, with contributions from around 60 authors, comprising many of the top experts in the region. For Seychelles, the main contributors include Gérard Rocamora, author of the accounts for most of the endemics including Seychelles White-eye, Seychelles Blue Pigeon, Seychelles Bulbul, Seychelles Aldabra Drongo and Seychelles Sunbird.

Gérard also co-authors the account of Seychelles Black Parrot together with Praslin's top ecologist, Victorin Laboudallon. The 135 vagrant species are authored by Adrian Skerrett, who also authors all except one of the accounts covering different species of tern. That one exception is Sooty Tern, authored by world expert Chris Feare, a regular visitor to Seychelles for more than four decades. A detailed analysis of the geography, climate and vegetation is also presented in the introductory chapters, with Seychelles sections authored by Adrian Skerrett.

Weighing in at nearly 5 kilos and stretching to more than 1,000 pages in length this is no ordinary bedtime reading book. But it is undoubtedly destined to be the number one scientific book on the avifauna of the region for many years to come.

It is an essential reference work for anyone with a serious interest in the subject, containing an unrivalled wealth of information, much of it original or never previously published outside of specialist scientific journals. The Malagasy region contains one of the most extraordinary assemblages of birds in the world and now there is an equally extraordinary book to do justice to the subject.