

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF WALLIS AND FUTUNA, SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC

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ABSTRACT

During two weeks on the south-west Pacific islands of Wallis and Futuna in September-October 1993 I noted 24 of the 35 species of birds recorded by French ornithologists during a fuller survey in December 1985 and January 1986. A count of boobies on Futuna showed that 5% were adult Brown Boobies. Of the remainder, 27% were adult white morph Red-footed Boobies and 54% were adult Red-footed Boobies of the "white-tailed brown" morph. The continued presence of good numbers of Blue-crowned Lorries on Futuna may indicate a lack of ship rats.

RÉSUMÉ

Un séjour de deux semaines en septembre et octobre 1993 sur les îles Wallis-et-Futuna (Pacifique sud-ouest) a permis de constater la présence de 24 des 35 espèces répertoriées par des ornithologistes français en décembre 1985 et janvier 1986 durant un inventaire plus détaillé. Un décompte des fous de Futuna a montré que 5% d'entre eux étaient des adultes du morphe blanc et 54% des adultes du morphe brun à queue blanche du fou à pieds rouges. La présence persistante et à densité appréciable des loris fringillaires à Futuna est peut-être liée à une absence des rats noirs sur cette île.

KEYWORDS: Pacific, Wallis & Futuna, bird list, *Sula* spp., Blue-crowned Lory

INTRODUCTION

The French Overseas Territory of Wallis and Futuna lies west of Western Samoa and north-east of Fiji. Wallis ('Uvea) is a low island (to 144 m a.s.l.) of 96 km² surrounded by about 20 islets enclosed within a barrier reef. Futuna (80 km²) and its neighbour 'Alofi (c. 35 km²), previously called the Hoorn (or Horne) Islands, are high islands (to c. 500 m a.s.l.) about 230 km south-west of Wallis and they lack a surrounding lagoon. Thibault & Guyot (1988) and Anonymous (1986) give maps of the islands.

I spent seven days on Wallis (22-27 September and 4-6 October 1993) travelling all the roads of 'Uvea by car, covering some central and northern parts on foot, and landing on three islets (Nukulaelae, Nukuloa and Nukuhione) on 23 September. I spent seven days on Futuna (27 September to 4 October 1993) during which time I travelled the circular coast-road by car, walked along the coast between the villages of Fiua and Taoa, and climbed inland from Leava through plantation, secondary forest and "toafa" fernland. Rough seas precluded a visit to 'Alofi.

J.-C. Thibault and I. Guyot studied the birds of Wallis and Futuna during a visit in December 1985 and January 1986 (Thibault & Guyot 1987,

TABLE 1 - Summary of the breeding and non-breeding birds of Wallis, Futuna and 'Alofi. o = seen by me in 1993; x = not seen by me, but reported by Guyot & Thibault (1987) and Thibault & Guyot (1987).

Species	Wallis	Futuna	'Alofi
Red-tailed Tropicbird	x	-	-
White-tailed Tropicbird	0	0	x
Brown Booby	0	0	x
Red-footed Booby	0	0	x
Greater Frigatebird	x	0	x
Lesser Frigatebird	x	0	x
Reef Heron	0	0	x
Grey Duck	0	?	-
Australasian Harrier	x	x	?
Banded Rail	0	0	x
Purple Swamphen	0	t	x
Pacific Golden Plover	0	0	x
Turnstone	0	0	?
Whimbrel	x	-	-
Bristle-thighed Curlew	0	-	-
Bar-tailed Godwit	x	x	?
Wandering Tattler	0	0	x
Crested Tern	x	-	-
Black-naped Tern	0	?	x
Bridled Tern	x	-	-
Common Noddy	x	0	x
Lesser Noddy	x	-	-
White Tern	0	0	x
Shy Ground-dove	-	-	x
Crimson-crowned Fruit-dove	0	0	x
Pacific Pigeon	0	0	x
Blue-crowned Lory	-	0	x
Long-tailed Cuckoo	x	x	x
Barn Owl	x	x	x
White-rumped Swiftlet	-	0	x
Collared Kingfisher	-	0	x
Polynesian Triller	-	0	x
Fiji Shrikebill	-	x	x
Polynesian Starling	0	0	x
Wattled Honeyeater	-	0	x

- = absent; t = see text; ? = status uncertain

1988; Guyot & Thibault 1987). I saw no species of wild birds that they had not already recorded. Furthermore, the following species were seen by Thibault and Guyot but not by me during my short and limited visit: Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*), Australasian Harrier (*Circus approximans*), Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*), Bridled Tern (*S. anaethetus*), Shy Ground-dove (*Gallinolumba stairii*), Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and Fiji Shrikebill (*Clytorhynchus vitiensis*). The islands are poorly studied ornithologically, my visit was at a different time of year from that of Thibault and Guyot, and there are no bird lists for the islands in English, so it seems worthwhile to record my observations in detail. The distribution of colour morphs of the Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) is poorly

known (Nelson 1978), and an opportunity was taken to count the frequency of these morphs on Futuna.

Table 1 summarises what species are known from the three main islands. In addition, bones of an extinct giant pigeon, *Ducula david*, have been found on Wallis (Balouet & Olson 1987).

BIRD OBSERVATIONS

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD *Phaethon lepturus*

Wallis. Many at Lakes Lalolalo and Lanutavake. Five over Mt. Lulufakaenga.

Futuna. One seen near Leava.

BROWN BOOBY *Sula leucogaster*

Wallis. A few at Nukulaelae Islet.

Futuna. For several hours before dusk each evening, hundreds of boobies flew south-east along the coast past the point just south of Leava, presumably to 'Alofi where both species of booby breed and roost (Thibault & Guyot 1987). Of 625 boobies counted over four consecutive days, 5% (30) were adult Brown Boobies, the largest number counted on one evening being 11.

RED-FOOTED BOOBY *Sula sula*

Wallis. Many nesting together in trees on Nukufutu and Nukuloa Islets.

Futuna. Excluding adult Brown Boobies from the above counts the sample becomes 595. Of these, 27% were adult white morph Red-footed Boobies with boldly marked black and white wings (see plate 7 of Pratt *et al.* 1987), 54% were adult "white-tailed brown" morphs with bright whitish tails, and 19% were neither. The latter included all-dark birds, some of which may have been immature Brown Boobies, and birds with various amounts of brown and white. There are intermediate morphs in this species, and it is also unclear whether some mottled individuals are immatures or adults (Nelson 1978).

GREATER FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata minor*

Futuna. A few seen near Leava.

LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata ariel*

Futuna. A few seen near Leava and Fiua.

REEF HERON *Egretta sacra*

Wallis. Common along the shore. Seen at Lake Kikila and on Nukuloa Islet. Of 10 birds seen, seven were dark phase, two white and one intermediate.

Futuna. All 25 birds seen were dark. Eleven of these were counted on 3 October along the shore between Leava and Poi (via Alo).

GREY DUCK *Anas superciliosa*

Wallis. Two at Lake Kikila.

BANDED RAIL *Rallus philippensis*

Wallis. Common, in and near gardens and plantations. Also seen at the edge of a mudflat feeding in the intertidal zone.

Futuna. Seen only once, west of Poi.

PURPLE SWAMPHEN *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Wallis. Three seen at Lake Kikila, and two near Utuleve.

Futuna. Claude Lépert (pers. comm.), biology teacher at Collège de Futuna, saw a pair near Taoa in 1992 and has seen another pair near Poi.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

Wallis. Common, on open grassy areas however small, on mudflats and in taro fields.

Futuna. Common along the shore. About 30 on the grass airstrip at Vele, 29 September and 3 October.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

Wallis. Seen in ones and twos, on grass beside the airport runway, on mudflats near Mata Utu, and on the shore of Lake Kikila and of Nukuhione Islet.

Futuna. Single birds seen on the shore near Leava and near Fiua. Four on the airstrip at Vele.

BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW *Numenius tahitiensis*

Wallis. Two on the shore of Nukuloa Islet.

WANDERING TATTLER *Tringa incana*

Wallis. Common along the shore of 'Uvea. Seen also at Lake Kikila and on Nukuhione Islet.

Futuna. Common along the shore.

BLACK-NAPED TERN *Sterna sumatrana*

Wallis. A few at Lake Kikila and over the lagoon near Mata Utu.

NODDIES *Anous* spp.

Wallis. Several at Lake Lalolalo and over the lagoon near Mata Utu. Many nesting in trees on Nukufutu and Nukuloa Islets. A bird was sitting on one egg in a nest on the ground on the summit of Nukulaelae Islet.

Futuna. Several seen near Leava; at least some were confirmed as Common Noddies *A. stolidus*. The Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris* is believed to be absent (Thibault & Guyot 1988).

WHITE TERN *Gygis alba*

Wallis. A few seen in pandanus scrub and plantations near the airport, at Matala'a Point and on Nukuloa Islet.

Futuna. Seen in twos and fours near Leava and over the hills inland from Leava.

CRIMSON-CROWNED FRUIT-DOVE *Ptilinopus porphyraceus*

Common, on both 'Uvea and Futuna, in gardens, plantations and forest.

PACIFIC PIGEON *Ducula pacifica*

Wallis. Several seen in forest near Utuleve and flying in the vicinity of Mt. Lulufakaenga and the airport.

Futuna. Two seen in the hills inland from Leava.

BLUE-CROWNED LORY *Vini australis*

Futuna. Common both at the coast and inland. One seen feeding at the flowers of a thatching palm (*Metroxylon* sp.).

WHITE-RUMPED SWIFTLET *Collocalia spodiopygia*

Futuna. Common, both at the coast and inland over "toafa" fernland.

COLLARED KINGFISHER *Halcyon chloris*

Futuna. Common. Through binoculars most seemed white below, but a few had rufous underparts, or a little rufous at the vent. Because of this rufous colouring, Pratt *et al.* (1987) suggested that the kingfisher on *Futuna* is the Sacred Kingfisher (*H. sancta*) a matter that remains to be resolved.

POLYNESIAN TRILLER *Lalage maculosa*

Futuna. Uncommon. Two seen in the hills inland from Leava, one over dry, open fernland ("toafa") and one lower down at the edge of cultivation.

POLYNESIAN STARLING *Aplonis tabuensis*

Common on both 'Uvea and *Futuna*.

WATTLED HONEYEATER *Foulehaio carunculata*

Futuna. Common. Several seen feeding at the flowers of a thatching palm (*Metroxylon* sp.).

DISCUSSION

There are fewer species of land birds on Wallis than on *Futuna*, presumably because the latter is more rugged, less modified, and has retained more forest. The populations of the kingfisher, triller and shrikebill on *Futuna* (and 'Alofi) are endemic subspecies. The Polynesian Starlings on Wallis and *Futuna* are an endemic subspecies. A complete account of the birds of Wallis and *Futuna* will not be possible until much more field work has been done. This contribution is merely a piece of the jig-saw puzzle, and I hope it may encourage other English-speaking ornithologists to visit the islands. The presence of procellariiforms has yet to be established. Any regular seasonal changes in the numbers of pelecyaniforms, waders and terns remain to be studied.

Nelson (1978) stated that "... the proportions of the morphs [of Red-footed Boobies] in areas holding more than one type, are rarely known..." but that the western Pacific has mainly white morphs. This is clearly not so on *Futuna* where the "white-tailed brown" form scored more than half in my counts. More data from the south-west Pacific are needed.

Both Wallis and *Futuna* have Polynesian rats (*Rattus exulans*) and Norway rats (*R. norvegicus*), but only Wallis is known to have ship rats (*R. rattus*) (Thibault & Guyot 1988). The presence of good numbers of Blue-crowned Lories on *Futuna* could be due to an absence of ship rats. Elsewhere in their range the lories have disappeared from many small islands with ship rats. However, it would be surprising if *Futuna* was indeed free of this rat, or remained so for much longer, since a large supply boat regularly ties up at the wharf at Leava. The abundance of Blue-crowned Lories shows that their numbers were not permanently reduced by the cyclone that crossed *Futuna* in 1987 damaging much vegetation (J.-C. Thibault, pers. comm.).

There are no introduced wild birds on Wallis and *Futuna*. Thibault & Guyot (1988) cited Domestic Chickens (*Gallus gallus*) as the only introduced birds, and discussed the desirability of banning the introduction of further

birds that might bring avian diseases to the islands. It was disappointing, therefore, to see at Leava two Muscovy Ducks (*Cairina moschata*) in captivity and five Domestic Pigeons (*Columba livia*) flying free. Hunting pressure on certain birds (Thibault & Guyot 1988) continues. In the "toafa" scrubland on the hills behind Leava, I encountered an expatriate hunting Pacific Pigeons by shotgun.

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