



Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*—first recorded in BIOT in 1996

New bird records on Diego Garcia

The number of bird species recorded in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) increases with virtually every visit by an ornithologist, which is not really surprising as Chagos is extremely under recorded and there are still opportunities in the early 21st Century to find new records for bird species, particularly overshooting migrants and vagrant seabirds.

Bourne¹, in possibly the first complete description of the avian life of BIOT, lists less than 40 species as definitely occurring there. Since 1971 no known breeding bird has become extinct in the territory. One, or possibly two, species (white-breasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* and common moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*) have naturally established populations and at least a further 40 new species have been recorded.

As expected, the shorebirds form a large proportion of the new species recorded, with the pan-global pectoral sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* being found and photographed in November 2007. More surprising has been the regular recording of members of the family *Ardeidae* (herons and egrets). A glossy ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (or two) has graced the freshwater wetlands of Diego Garcia since at least 1996. Little egret *Egretta garzetta* and great egret *Casmerodius albus* were first recorded in 1996, whilst 2007 saw the arrival of three black-crowned night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and two Indian pond-heron *Ardeola grayii*. 2007 also saw three new species of *Apodidae* (swifts) with the white-throated needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*, the common swift *Apus apus* and the fork-tailed swift *Apus pacificus* being found in a two-week period in November².

As our knowledge of the birds of BIOT increases, the question of which species are regular migrants and which species are vagrants will be answered, as will the important question on all island systems—what has stayed to breed. Further research will be the key to answering these important questions.

¹ Bourne, W.R.P. (1971). The Birds of the Chagos Group, Indian Ocean. Atoll Research Bulletin 149: 175-207.

² Carr, P. (2008). Expedition Report - Diego Survey III. Sea Swallow 56. In press.

The **Chagos Conservation Trust** is a charity (Registered in the UK No. 1031561), whose aims are to promote conservation, scientific and historical research, and to advance education concerning the archipelago. The Trust is a non political association.

If you would like more information on the publications or membership, please contact the Secretary (simonhughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk) or visit www.chagos-trust.org.