

Inter-island movements by Seychelles Magpie-robins *Copsychus sechellarum*: attempts at re-colonisation?

The endemic birds of the granitic Seychelles islands are all forest species with fragmented distributions. Several wide-spread species have become extinct on at least one island as a result of colonisation and human activities that have transformed the natural environment of the islands. These include the introduction of alien species, habitat modification, persecution and pesticide use. The Seychelles Magpie-robin, the most critically threatened of the 11 endemic bird species in the granitic islands is no exception to this general rule. Prior to 1990, it had disappeared from seven of the eight islands where it historically occurred. The BirdLife Seychelles Magpie-robin Recovery Program initiated in 1990 has succeeded in increasing the population from 20 to 80 birds to date. The programme has included translocation of small founder populations to the predator-free islands of Aride, Cousin and Cousine, satellites of the second largest island in the Seychelles, Praslin. Between June 1997 and June 1999, 21 colour-ringed birds disappeared from Frégate, Cousin and Cousine, and most were presumed dead. However, three individuals are known to have dispersed up to 5km over-water to other islands. In November 1997, a young male from Cousin was found on Praslin and survived for at least a week, but subsequently disappeared and presumably died. In November 1998, a young female flew from Cousine to Cousin and successfully established a territory with a young male but has not to date bred successfully. In April 1999 a

young female flew from Cousine to Praslin and was subsequently successfully translocated to Cousin. Magpie-robin have been regularly reported on Praslin in recent years and it may be that birds which have been recorded as 'disappeared' have flown there, presumably to be killed by introduced predators such as cats and rats.

Dispersal movements in modern times by native bird species in Seychelles are not well known. Species such as the Seychelles Kestrel *Falco araea* and Seychelles Black Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvine* have been reported on islands where they had previously been present but had become extinct. In addition, Chinese Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* and Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas pulcherrima* have recently re-colonised Aride, the latter species also Cousin. These re-colonising species tend to have good powers of dispersal and occupy broad habitat niches. All of these events have occurred around Praslin and its satellite islands. Mahé and Silhouette, the two largest islands, are relatively isolated in comparison and colonisation events consequently less frequent. The Praslin island archipelago can thus be thought of as a large but fragmented landscape of small islands of habitat patches. With the populations of Magpie-robins on Cousin and Cousine increasing, it is likely that more colonising attempts will be made by this species (and perhaps others) to the greater Praslin archipelago and plans to manage this need to be instigated. More importantly, current plans to eradicate introduced predators from Seychelles islands and restore islands through BirdLife Seychelles' Avian Ecosystems Restoration Project, should perhaps be focused on islands possessing large

forest habitat areas within the Praslin archipelago. This would increase the chances of inter-island movements, such as has been recently recorded, which in turn might create a more viable long-term population.

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