



Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

The introduced birds of the British Indian Ocean Territory

As the British Indian Ocean Territory is geologically young and extremely isolated in the central Indian Ocean, it is likely never to have had a large endemic or even native land-bird community. Man changed this situation since first colonising the area by introducing a number of bird species for food, perceived pest control or as a reminder of home. Not all the introductions were successful, as some species, such as the Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*, appear to have died out. Those that prospered and have self-sustaining populations now form the bulk of the recorded land-birds throughout the Territory and most can be viewed without difficulty on Diego Garcia¹.

The distinctive and very obvious Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* was introduced in the 1950s in an attempt to control insects and other pests¹. Other very evident introductions on Diego Garcia are the colourful Madagascar Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*, the ubiquitous Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis*, the Madagascar Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata*, that records suggest has been on Diego Garcia for at least 100 years, and the Barred Dove *Geopelia striata*, that first appeared in 1960. The House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* introduced by Europeans is the exception to the rule in that it is not found on Diego Garcia, only occurring in the now uninhabited northern atolls.

¹ Carr, P. 2000. *Expedition Report Diego Survey 97: Part Two - The Landbirds*. Sea Swallow 49: 30-35.

² Lever, Sir, C. 1987. *Naturalised Birds of the World*. Langman Scientific & Technical, Harlow, Essex.

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