



Australian Government
Director of National Parks



Christmas Island National Park

Birds

Christmas Island Frigatebird - *Fregata andrewsii*



Description: Large. Length 91–100 cm. Long, narrow wings and deeply forked tail. Plumage varies with age and sex. **Male** mostly black with round white patch on belly; inflatable red throat sac during courtship period; black bill. **Female** black above with prominent pale wing bar; black head and throat; white breast, belly, armpit spurs, and hind collar; light pink bill. **Juveniles** have white or buff head, black breast band, and hexagonal white belly patch; usually has prominent white armpit spurs (originating near front of belly patch); black upperparts with very prominent pale wingbars; slightly longer bill than other frigatebirds. **Voice:** Display call of male sounds like a police siren; a slow *kow-wow-kow-wow...*; male rattles bill during display. All ages give reeling screeches, and snap bill. Juvenile begs with repetitive screeching. **Status & Distribution:** World's rarest frigatebird, listed as vulnerable. Nest only on Christmas Island. About 1,200 breeding pairs. Nest in trees on shore terrace behind Chinese cemetery, Golf Course and Smith Point. Frequently seen flying over Settlement. **Breeding:** Colonial nester in tree canopy, with up to 40 nests in a single tree. Male display begins in late December and continues till May. Nests from late January through September. Single egg. Young fed near nest site until June-August of the following year.

Great Frigatebird - *Fregata minor listeri*

Description: Large. Length 86-93 cm. Long, narrow wings and deeply forked tail. Plumage varies with age and sex. **Male** all black, except for faint pale bar on upperwing and red throat sac during courtship; bill grey-black. **Female** black above with faint pale wingbar; black head with pale brownish throat, white breast and black belly; blue-grey bill, black belly, pale throat and absence of white hind-collar distinguish it from female Christmas I. Frigatebird. Pale throat and absence of white hind-collar and armpit spurs distinguish it from Lesser Frigatebird. **Juvenile** has white or buff head, black breast-band and oval shaped white belly patch; breast-band has curved lower edge; sometimes with small white armpit spurs; black upperparts with moderate pale wingbars; never have scaling on mantle. **Voice:** Display call of male a fast warbling *wow-wow-wow-wow...*, faster and higher than Christmas I. Frigatebird; male rattles bill during display. All ages give reeling screeches, and snap bill. Juvenile begs with repetitive rhythmic screaming. **Status & Distribution:** Wide tropical distribution, breeding on remote islands. This endemic subspecies has perhaps 3300 breeding pairs. Nests in trees on shore terraces (South Point, North West Point, Golf Course and Ethel Beach and some upper terraces (Drumsite). **Breeding:** Colonial nester in tree canopy, with up to 50 nests in a single tree. Male display begins in January and continues until May. Nests from late January through August. Single egg. Young fed near nest site until June-August of following year.



Lesser Frigatebird - *Fregata ariel*



Description: Medium-sized to large (length 76 cm), smaller than both Christmas and Great. Long, narrow wings and deeply forked tail. Plumage varies with age and sex. **Male** all black, except for small triangular spurs in armpit, faint pale bar on upperwing and red throat sac during courtship; bill grey-black. **Female** black above with faint pale wingbar; black head and throat, white hind-collar, white breast and armpit spurs, and black belly; bill blue-grey or pink; black belly, distinguishes it from female Christmas; black throat, white hind-collar and armpit spurs from female Great. **Juvenile** has white or buff head, black breast band and triangular shaped white belly patch, always with white armpit spurs originating from the front (basal) corners of the belly triangle; breast-band straight on lower edge; black upperparts with moderate pale wingbars; never have scaling on mantle. Immatures (2nd, 3rd and 4th years) intermediate between juvenile and adult of respective sex. **Voice:** Display call of male a soft insect-like trilling; male rattles bill during display. All ages give reeling screeches, and snap bill. Juvenile begs with repetitive rhythmic screaming.

Status & Distribution: Wide tropical distribution, breeding on remote islands. A recent colonist to Christmas Island, with 10-20 nests at North West Point in 2003/04; perhaps nesting at Ethel beach or elsewhere. Seen at drinking sites on Phosphate Hill, LB3 and Waterfall Cove. **Breeding:** Colonial nester in tree canopy. On CI, season poorly known, but appears to be later than other frigatebirds, beginning in April or May, and not lasting as long.

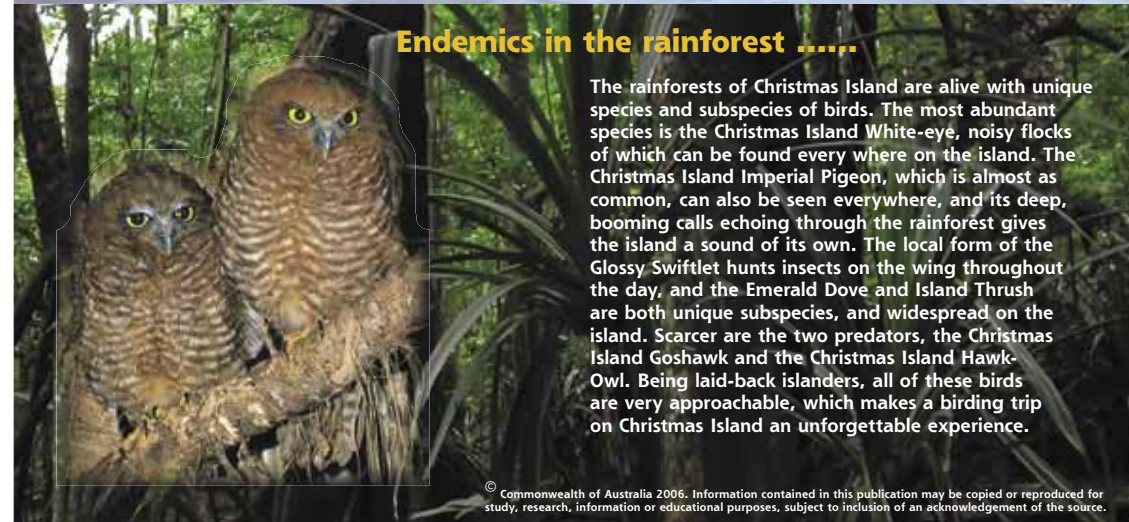


A seabird mecca

Christmas Island is one of the world's truly spectacular tropical seabird breeding stations. It's not just the number and variety of seabirds, or their magnificent splendour that make the island so remarkable, but also their sheer visibility. It is estimated that around 80,000 seabirds nest here annually. Flocks of Red-footed and Brown Boobies stream out to sea every morning and return each evening to their nests in the rainforest canopy and on the limestone cliffs. Silver Bosuns cackle and display along the coasts and cliff lines in the middle of the day, and Golden Bosuns chase each other over the town and forest. Frigates soar lazily about, waiting for opportunities to steal the catch other seabirds. Noddies loiter on cliffs, buoys and railings around the coves and beaches. Seabirds can be seen and heard everywhere on the island, at just about any time of the day. Christmas Island is the only place where eight species of pelecaniformes (the group of birds containing frigates, boobies, tropicbirds, pelicans and cormorants) breed in the one place. It is also the only place where three species of frigate breed, and of course the only place on our planet where Abbott's Booby and Christmas Island Frigatebird breed. The local subspecies of Great Frigatebird is unique and the stunning Golden Bosun (an endemic subspecies of the White-tailed Tropicbird) is a sight seen only at Christmas Island.



Endemics in the rainforest



The rainforests of Christmas Island are alive with unique species and subspecies of birds. The most abundant species is the Christmas Island White-eye, noisy flocks of which can be found every where on the island. The Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon, which is almost as common, can also be seen everywhere, and its deep, booming calls echoing through the rainforest gives the island a sound of its own. The local form of the Glossy Swiftlet hunts insects on the wing throughout the day, and the Emerald Dove and Island Thrush are both unique subspecies, and widespread on the island. Scarcer are the two predators, the Christmas Island Goshawk and the Christmas Island Hawk-Owl. Being laid-back islanders, all of these birds are very approachable, which makes a birding trip on Christmas Island an unforgettable experience.

Silver Bosunbird - *Phaethon rubricauda westralis*

Voice: Sharp, crackling kerek-kerek... with rolling 'Rs' and sharp 'Ks' during aerial display. Also various high-pitched barks and screeches.

Status & Distribution: Wide tropical and sub-tropical distribution. Possibly 1400 breeding pairs on the island.

Breeding: Extended nesting season over most of the year. Nest on ground under ledges or vegetation on coast and first inland cliff. Single pinkish egg laid in shallow scrape on ground. Both parents share parental duties.

Golden Bosunbird - *Phaethon lepturus fulvus*

Voice: High-pitched, harsh squawks and chatters.

Status & Distribution: White morph has wide tropical distribution. The endemic subspecies on CI has unique golden morph, but about 10% are white morph. Perhaps 6000-12000 breeding pairs. Seen in plateau forest and along coast.

Breeding: Nest in holes in sea cliff, inland cliff and holes in trees. Nest at any time of the year. Single egg.

White-faced Heron - *Egretta novaehollandiae*

Voice: A guttural croak when flushed.

Status & Distribution: Australasia and eastern Indonesia. Self introduced to Christmas Island in about 1960's. Can be found anywhere along coast or in open areas. Previously up to 100 birds on island but less than 20 now.

Breeding: Breeding not confirmed on Christmas Island. Birds have been seen carrying nesting material and newly fledged juveniles appear at times. Elsewhere, nests inconspicuously in dense foliage of trees.

Eastern Reef Egret - *Egretta sacra*

Voice: Occasionally a guttural croak.

Status & Distribution: Widespread throughout Indo-Pacific, including Australasia. Mostly on rocky platforms and beaches anywhere along the coast. Sometimes at golf course, Chinese cemetery or in the Dales. Dark grey morph also present.

Breeding: Nests found near Dolly and Ethel Beaches. Probably breeds at many spots along coast, but few nests have been found.

Brown Booby - *Sula leucogaster plotus*

Voice: Female - a throaty honk. Male - a wheezy whistle.

Status & Distribution: Wide tropical distribution. Perhaps 5000-7000 breeding pairs on Christmas Island. Nest on ground among pinnacles along sea-cliff and on edge of first inland cliff.

Breeding: Colonial ground nester. Lay one or two eggs but only rear one chick. Occupy nest site year round and may breed in any month. Adults and chicks at nest should not be approached more closely than 5-10m.

Abbott's Booby - *Papadusa abbotti*

Voice: Adults - deep bellow; males and females duet in short bursts. Juveniles beg when parent near. More vocal in the late afternoon.

Status & Distribution: Listed as Endangered. Nest only on Christmas Island. Population reduced due to clearing of forest for mining. Estimated population of approx. 3000 mature pairs.

Breeding: Nest in tall rainforest trees on central plateau, May to November. Single egg. Young fed at nest site until July-September of following year.

Christmas Island Goshawk - *Accipiter fasciatus natalis*

Voice: Slow, high-pitched and piercing ki-ki-ki...

Status & Distribution: Distinctive sub species or (probably) species only in Christmas Island. Listed as endangered. In both plateau and terrace forest. Not usually seen near settled areas. Often seen at roadside edges on the plateau. Numbers unknown, perhaps a few hundred individuals. Mostly eat other birds but also take grasshoppers from road sides.

Breeding: Build a large and untidy nest platform of sticks in forest trees. Season spread. Raise one or sometimes two chicks.

Christmas Island Hawk-Owl - *Ninox natalis*

Voice: Very vocal, and frequently duet. Two or three note boo-book or book-book. Short growling notes repeated monotonously. Male's voice slightly higher than female's, and he tends to lead duets.

Status & Distribution: Endemic to Christmas Island. Listed as vulnerable. Approximately 500 pairs. Hold territories in both plateau and terrace forest.

Breeding: Nest in hollows high in rainforest trees. Only a handful of nests located, all in *Syzygium* trees, but they also hold territories where these trees are absent.

Red-footed Booby - *Sula sula rubripes*

Voice: Grating metallic kar-uk, kar-uk, when landing. Noisy at nest, omitting hoarse growls. Chicks on nest sometimes click incessantly.

Status & Distribution: Wide tropical distribution. Nest mostly on shore terraces. Possibly 12000 breeding pairs. Commonly seen flying over Settlement. Nesting birds may be seen in the trees behind the Chinese cemetery and at Ethel Beach.

Breeding: Colonial. Nest in trees, from March to September. Single egg. Bulky nest of sticks and leaves.

Common Noddy - *Anous stolidus*

Voice: Low-pitched, guttural croaks and harsh croaks. Chicks beg with soft rising whistle.

Status & Distribution: Wide tropical distribution. Possibly 5000 breeding pairs on island.

Breeding: Nest in crevices on the sea cliff, and in trees on the coastal terrace at some places. Most members of the population are migratory and nest from April to September. Small numbers appear to be sedentary and nest on the north coast from November to March. Single egg.

Nankeen Kestrel - *Falco cenchroides*

Voice: Rapid, shrill ki-ki-ki-ki... and slower tek-tek-tek.... More frenzied than goshawk.

Status & Distribution: Australia to New Guinea. Colonised Christmas Island between 1940-1950. Very common in settled areas, mining fields and beside roads. Perch on high vantage points dropping onto grasshoppers and lizards.

Breeding: Nest in coconut palms, on power pylons and buildings around settled areas.

Christmas Island Glossy Swiftlet - *Collocalia linchii natalis*

Voice: Generally silent. Short, soft chirr sometimes given in flight.

Status & Distribution: Endemic subspecies is common on Christmas Island. Hawk for insects over roads and clearings and over forest canopy.

Breeding: Nest in caves e.g. in inland cliff opposite Seaview Lodge. Nest a half cup of mosses and saliva cemented to cave wall. Two eggs.

White-breasted Waterhen - *Amauornis phoenicurus*

Voice: Loud kor-wak-wak kor-wak-wak...; slow, loud wok, wok, wok..., often in duets and repeated incessantly, especially at dusk and early evening.

Status & Distribution: Widely distributed in southern Asia. Colonised Christmas Island in 1991-92. About 20 pairs now present, gradually spreading. Live here in weed thickets.

Breeding: Nest in dense vegetation on the ground or in pandanus crowns. Chicks leave the nest on hatching.

Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon - *Ducula whartoni*

Voice: Booming woo-woo-woo... sometimes accelerating slightly; and rolling krrroo or krrroo-krrroo-krrroo...; as single, double or several notes.

Status & Distribution: Occurs only on Christmas Island in rainforest, coastal terraces and in settled areas. Population is unknown, but common.

Breeding: Nest in canopy and understorey trees, mainly in the wet season, November to April. Usually 2-3 eggs.

Island thrush - *Turdus poliocephalus erythropleurus*

Voice: Highly varied. Thin, nasal, drawn-out whistle: tseeeeeet. Song (at dawn and dusk) reedy, reeling, musical jingle.

Status & Distribution: Endemic subspecies on Christmas Island, listed as vulnerable. Common throughout the forest and settled areas. Feed on ground; often tame and curious.

Breeding: Nest in wet season in low shrubs and on ledges of buildings. May raise several broods in succession. Usually 2, sometimes 3 eggs. Territorial.

Java Sparrow - *Padda oryzivora*

Voice: In flight, give a sweet, tinkling chup or twit contact call.

Status & Distribution: Introduced between 1908 and 1923 from Java. Restricted to settled areas and roadsides, principally where grass seeds available. Probably 200-300 birds. Travel in large flocks.

Breeding: Nests have been found in May-July and August. Sites vary: hollows in trees, cavities in buildings, in dense creepers and bushes, 2-5 m high. Nests in vegetation globular with side entrance but those in cavities lack a roof. Newly fledged juveniles join flocks in June to August.

Feral Chicken - *Gallus gallus*

Voice: Crowing and clucking

Status & Distribution: Descended from Red Jungle Fowl. Introduced by man worldwide. Cockerels are territorial and maintain a harem of 3-5 females. Including juveniles, the group can be as many as 20. Widespread on the island.

Breeding: Nest on ground year round. Clutch size varies, multiple hens laying in same nest.

Emerald Dove - *Chalcophaps indica natalis*

Voice: Low, soft, mournful coo, drawn out and monotonous: uuuu, uuuu.

Status & Distribution: Widely distributed species in Southeast Asia and along the northern and eastern coasts of Australia. The endemic subspecies on Christmas Island is listed as vulnerable. On Christmas Island, frequently seen foraging on lawns and forest tracks. Population size unknown but quite common.

Breeding: Probably nest mainly in the wet season, November to March. Lay two eggs.

Christmas Island White-eye - *Zosterops natalis*

Voice: Thin high song, not often heard. Flocking flocks emit continuous contact chirps and short warbles, and high-pitched tseep. Alarm call a sharper ticking, which sometimes betrays presence of a Goshawk or Hawk-Owl.

Status & Distribution: Found only on Christmas Island. Related species occur in Asia, the Pacific and Australia. Common in all habitats.

Breeding: Nest mostly in wet season. Nest is small open cup in bushes. Usually 2-3 eggs.

Tree Sparrow - *Passer montanus*

Voice: A great variety of simple, dry chirping and chattering sounds.

Status & Distribution: A ship assisted introduction in the early 1980's. Has spread to all main settled areas of the island. Native to Europe and Asia.

Breeding: Nest in cavities in roof spaces, poles, buildings etc. Apparently nest after dry season, and juveniles join flocks in June-August.