

# Christmas & Cocos Keeling Islands Birding Guide



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Your essential guide to birding on the islands

# CHRISTMAS ISLAND MAP



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## BIRD LEGEND



## WITH THANKS...

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## ABOUT ISLAND EXPLORER HOLIDAYS...

Island Explorer Holidays specialises in unique destinations and islands including the Christmas and the Cocos Keeling Islands with whom we have been personally involved with tourism and promotion of the islands for over 15 years. We provide packages for special interest groups, educational school groups and offer individual and tailor made packages to suit client's specific interests and needs, to one or both islands.

On arrival at Christmas Island, to obtain information on the most recent sightings, we recommend birders to view our "Birding Board of Glory" at our Island Explorer Holidays office. Visitors are welcome to submit their sightings to our staff.

**For up to date information on bird sightings, or to submit your details of a great bird sighting, please contact our island office on: [admin@islandexplorer.com.au](mailto:admin@islandexplorer.com.au)**

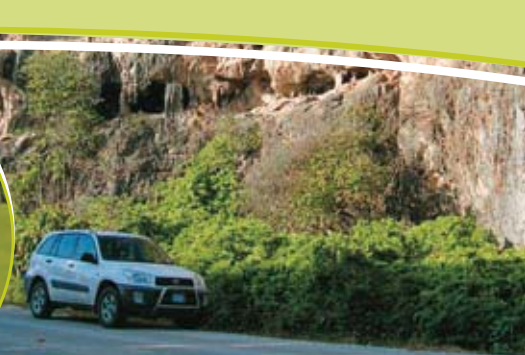
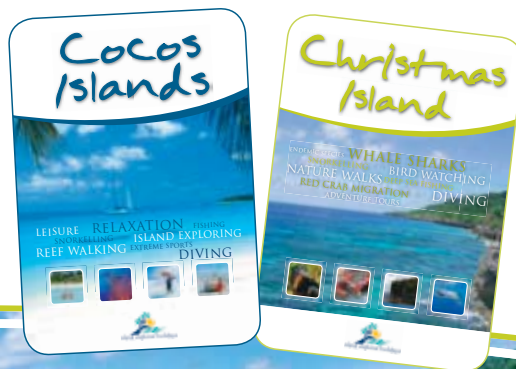
Personalised private tours are available on Christmas Island and our office and Staff are available to assist all Island Explorer Holidays client whilst on the island. Our staff will provide you with up to date knowledge and guide you to places of interest, so that you experience the best possible holiday.

A number of experienced bird watching guides facilitate tours of the islands at various times of year. If you would prefer a more intensive birding experience, please contact us to join these groups tours with experienced Australian guides who are leaders in their fields of expertise.

Christmas Island also boasts an annual "Bird & Nature Week". Researchers and experts with long involvement with the island, share their talents to get close to the flora and fauna on Christmas Island to enhance the experience for all participants... an event not to be missed!

**Enjoy our paradise!**

*Island Explorer Holidays  
Staff and Management*



## INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTMAS ISLAND

There are 23 breeding or resident species of birds on Christmas Island. This includes nine species of seabird (two species and two subspecies are endemic) and 14 land birds (three species and four subspecies are endemic; six are recent arrivals). All of these are illustrated and described in this guide, with the exception of the Feral Chicken *Gallus gallus*. Owing to its proximity to Southeast Asia, Christmas Island attracts a lot of vagrant species never or rarely recorded in other parts of Australia and its Territories. A handful of migrants and vagrants also arrive from Australia. Many of these have only been recorded once or twice but some are recorded regularly. Vagrants have occurred at all times of the year, but the best period is in the Wet Season from September to March. Some of the most regular migrants include Barn Swallow (Aug - Apr), Common Sandpiper (Oct - Mar), Oriental Cuckoo (Oct - Dec), Grey Wagtail (Sept - Jan) and Yellow Wagtail (Sept - Nov). A number of rarities recorded on Christmas Island have never been recorded elsewhere in Australia. These include such cripplers as Cinnamon and Schrenck's Bitterns, Malayan Night Heron, Watercock, Asian Koel, Savannah Nightjar, Common Kingfisher and Brown Shrike, amongst others. Most migrants and vagrants have been recorded in open areas, and few have been recorded inside the forest. The birding map and bird finding notes describe some of the areas where native species can be seen most easily and where vagrants have been recorded most often. The checklist contains 133 confirmed species. The supplementary list contains additional species not confirmed or not genuine.

## DRIVING ON CHRISTMAS ISLAND

- Beware of mining machinery on the roads and mine stockpile areas. Keep out of mine lease area's.
- During wet weather, gravel and sealed roads can be particularly slippery. Sealed roads are mostly made of limestone chalk which is more slippery than typical road seals.
- Christmas Island's crabs often venture onto the roads, particularly in wet weather and during their migration season (generally Oct - Jan). Please avoid crushing crabs by driving around them. Do not straddle the robber crabs, as they jump up and hit the under carriage. Some roads may be closed during the crab migration season. If roads are covered in crabs, please do not proceed.
- 4WD tracks may be blocked by fallen trees, especially during stormy weather.

## WHERE TO FIND BIRDS ON CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Locations described here are shown on the map on the front cover.

### NORTH WEST POINT RD

Abbott's Boobies nest in the tree tops along the roadside, especially the far section where the crab crossings are. Nests can be most easily seen in the afternoons (after 4 pm) when the adults return from sea, and the chicks beg from the tree tops. Grey Wagtails often along the road in Aug-Oct. All the native forest birds are present.

### LB4 LOOKOUT

Abbott's Boobies can be seen returning to their nests in the late afternoon.

### PLANTATION

Located along Murray Rd, just west of the Phosphate dryers. A good place for migrants. Grey Wagtails congregate here from about Nov-Jan. A good spot for the Goshawk. Abbott's Boobies nest in tree tops across the road. *Private property so please do not enter without permission.*

### NURSERY LOOKOUT

Perched high above Flying Fish Cove, it provides a spectacular backdrop to Golden Bosunbirds displaying and frigatebirds chasing boobies. In the park most forest birds are easily viewed. Java Sparrow sometimes seen here. Located behind the National Park Office in Drumsite.

### SMITH POINT

The headland at the far end of Flying Fish Cove, a relaxing spot to watch bosunbirds, frigatebirds and boobies flying around. The odd migrant appears in the grounds of Tai Jin House. A few CI Frigatebirds nest above the cannon lookout.

### FLYING FISH COVE

A few waders occur in the Wet Season and occasionally in the Dry. Vagrant terns sometimes appear. Reef Egrets and Great Egrets sometimes patrol the shoreline. An easy place to see Noddies.

### GEORGE FAM CENTRE

A great place to view and photograph Golden Bosunbirds displaying in the middle of the day.

### CHINESE CEMETERY

CI Frigatebirds and Red-footed Boobies nest along the cliff above the Cemetery. Feral chickens roam amongst the graves. Eastern Reef Egret and migrants seen. A reasonable place to find the Hawk - Owl.

### OLD CEMETERY

A spectacular place to view and photograph frigatebirds, boobies and bosunbirds. Access via Quarry Road on Phosphate Hill. Park at the Radio tower, and follow the walking trail to the cemetery, and, keeping right, continue on to the lookout overlooking the golf course.

### GOLF COURSE

CI Frigatebirds and Red-footed Boobies nest in the forest behind the golf course. Eastern Reef Egret and White-faced Heron are regular. Whitebreasted Waterhen sometimes seen on the 2nd fairway (on the coast side of the road). Hawk-Owl sometimes seen in trees behind the car park in the early evening. Migrants present at times.

### RUBBISH DUMP

Perhaps the best spot for migrants: eg Barn Swallows (Sept-March); Yellow Wagtails (Sept-Oct); Oriental Cuckoo (Oct-Dec); Chinese Pond Heron (Jan-Mar); many rarities from time to time. White-breasted Waterhen resident, skulking amongst tyres and debris, early morning and late afternoon. Located off Vagabond Road, on Phosphate Hill. Please exercise caution in this area.

### AIRPORT

Waders and herons often present on the runway. Viewing spots from the car park either side of the terminal building, and from the track along the north-western edge of the runway (accessed off Lily Beach Road).

### WATERFALL COVE

Waders and egrets sometimes present in the cove. Frigatebirds drink in the cove in the day and chase boobies along the cliffs in the late afternoon. White-breasted Waterhens sometimes seen in the grassland outside the entrance to the resort. *Private Property; permission is required from the proprietors to enter the Resort and access the cove through their property.*

### ETHEL BEACH

Red-footed Boobies and Great Frigatebirds nest in the forest along the vehicle track to Ethel Beach. Eastern Reef Egrets and Common Sandpipers sometimes on the beach.

### LILY BEACH & LOW POINT

Large numbers of Red-footed Boobies roost along the Lily Beach Road. Common Noddies nest on the cliffs at the beach. On Low Point, a handful of Brown Boobies nest on the cliff edge off the boardwalk. Waders sometimes roost here too.

### MARGARET KNOLL

Spectacular views. Boobies, Frigatebirds and Golden Bosunbirds often seen. A good place to watch CI Flying Fox emerge from camps on the shore terrace (between 4 and 6pm), often providing close and spectacular views.

### LB3

All three frigatebirds often congregate to drink at rainwater pools on the side of the East-West baseline near the Blowholes turnoff, and are easily viewed and photographed in flight. Beware of mining traffic. Sometimes frigatebirds drink at pools near the corner of Quarry and Lily Beach Roads.



## GOLDEN BOSUNBIRD OR WHITE-TAILED TROPIC-BIRD

(*Phaethon lepturus fulvus*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Medium body size, but obviously smaller than Redtailed Tropic-bird. Length with tail-streamers, 81cm. Body golden-buff or white. Beak yellow. Tailstreamers golden-buff or white. Black wing-bar on upper wing distinguishes both golden and white morphs from Silver Bosunbird. Female Golden Bosunbird may be paler than male, but there is no reliable sex difference in plumage. Juvenile checkered black and white, similar to Silver Bosunbird, but smaller with yellow tinge to base of bill and more finely checkered plumage.

### VOICE:

High-pitched, harsh squawks and chatters.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

White morph has wide tropical distribution. The Endemic subspecies on Christmas Island has unique golden morph, but about 10% are white morph. Perhaps 6000-12000 breeding pairs. Common over Settlement and is the only tropic-bird seen in plateau forest. Good viewing spots are from the Nursery lookout, Margarets Knoll, Smith Point, and at the cutting near the George Fam Centre.

### BREEDING:

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



## SILVER BOSUNBIRD OR RED-TAILED TROPIC-BIRD

(*Phaethon rubricauda*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Medium body size, but with long central tail-streamers up to 91 cm long. Whitest of tropic-birds, sometimes with pink tinge to feathers. Red beak and tail-streamers. Upperwing white except for black shafts of outer flight feathers. Male and female identical. Distinguished from Golden Bosunbird in flight by larger size, plumper build, red beak and absence of dark bar on upper wing; at distance tail streamers not visible. Juvenile finely checkered black and white, bill dark grey, tail stubby. Juveniles are often found on the ground but rarely seen in flight.

### 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 Christmas Island. Nest under bushes beside sea and in holes in first inland cliff. Commonly seen displaying in groups of two to twenty above Settlement. Good viewing spots at the cutting near the George Fam Centre and in front of the Rumah Tinggi Tavern, especially in the middle of the day, when adults partake in showy display flights.

### BREEDING:

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



## ABBOTT'S BOOBY

(*Papasula Abbotti*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Large. Length 79cm. Body white; black wings above and black tail distinguish it from Red-footed Booby. Identical plumage of male, female and juvenile. Male and juvenile have grey bill, and female has pink bill. Long wings, wine-bottle shaped neck and large conical bill impart a distinctive 'Concord' - like jizz.

### VOICE:

Adults give a deep bellow from their nest trees; males and females duet in short bursts. Juvenile begs monotonously when parent is near, the beg terminating in a rising quaver. Most vocal in the late afternoon. Recall seals bellowing from the tree-tops.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

The rarest booby in the world, and listed as Endangered. Nests only on Christmas Island. Population reduced due to clearing of forest during former mining operations. Most recent island-wide census yielded an estimated population of approx. 3000 mature pairs. Rarely seen in Settlement. Nests can be seen in trees opposite the Plantation, and along the North-West Point Rd near the crab crossings. Late in the afternoon can be seen in flight from Margaret Knoll and LB4 Lookout.

### 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. Most active around nest in late afternoon.



## BROWN BOOBY

(*Sula leucogaster plotus*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Large. Length 75 - 80 cm. Chocolate brown above and on breast, with sharply demarcated white belly and underwings. Male has blue beak and facial skin; female has greenish beak and blue facial skin. Juvenile is drab version of adult with mottled brown and white belly, blue beak and orange-brown feet. Chick white. Often confused with juvenile Redfooted Booby, though latter is grey brown overall without paler belly, and has blackish beak and dark grey feet.

### VOICE:

Female has throaty honk (like a goose). Male has wheezy whistle (like Donald duck).

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Wide tropical distribution. Perhaps 5000 - 7000 breeding pairs on Christmas Island. Nest on ground among pinnacles along sea-cliff and on first inland cliff. Often seen flying over Settlement, nesting at Waterfall, Low Point (Lilly Beach) Margaret Knoll, Golf Course lookout and Nui Nui Temple.

### BREEDING:



Colonial nester on the ground. Nest a simple scrape with a few to many loose sticks. 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.



## RED-FOOTED BOOBY

(*SULA SULA RUBRIPES*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Large. Length 70 cm. Body white; tips and trailing edges of wings black; faint golden tinge to head. Conspicuous red feet. Underwing mostly white with 'comma' mark at base of primary feathers. All white tail and/or mostly white upperwing distinguish it from Abbot's Booby. Sexes are identical in plumage, but during breeding season males develop pale lime-green tinge to base of blue beak and facial skin. Newly fledged juvenile is coffee-brown with blackish bill and greyish-pink feet. Readily confused with juvenile Brown Booby, though latter has drab version of adult Brown Booby underwing and underbody pattern and blue beak. Second year birds develop 'leopard' pattern of admixed brown and white plumage on upperparts and upperwings.

### VOICE:

Grating metallic *kar-uk, karr-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.



## CHRISTMAS ISLAND FRIGATEBIRD

(*Fregata andrewsi*)

### 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 (all male frigatebirds have a throat sac during courtship); black bill. Female black above with prominent pale wing bar; black head and throat; white breast, belly, armpit spurs, and hind-collar; bright pink bill. Juvenile has white or buff head, black breast-band and hexagonal shaped white belly patch; breast-band has angled indentation on lower edge; usually has prominent white armpit spurs (originating near front of belly patch); black upperparts with very prominent pale wingbars; sometimes prominent pale scaling on mantle. Immatures (2nd, 3rd and 4th years) intermediate between juvenile and adult of respective sex. Slightly longer bill than other frigatebirds.

### VOICE:

Display call of male sounds like a police siren: a slow *kowwow-kow-wow...*; male rattles bill during display. All ages give reeling screeches, and snap bill. Juvenile begs with repetitive rhythmic screaming.

### 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 over Settlement.

### BREEDING:

Colonial nester in forest 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 following year.



Male



Juvenile



Female

## 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 breastband and oval shaped white belly patch; breast-band has curved lower edge; sometimes with small white armpit spurs, originating off mid sides of belly patch; 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 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 forest 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.



4th Year Female



4th Year Male



Juvenile

## LESSER FRIGATEBIRD

(*Fregata ariel*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Medium-sized to large (length 76cm), 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 forest canopy. Male display begins in late December and continues until June. On CI, season poorly known, but appears to be later than other frigatebirds, beginning in April or May, and not lasting as long.



## WHITE-FACED HERON

(*Egretta novaehollandiae*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Large wading bird, 67cm. Long legs and neck. All grey with white face, pale belly and, in flight, black trailing edge and tips to wings. Bill black. Legs yellowish. Juvenile has less conspicuous white face. May be confused with grey phase of Eastern Reef Egret but latter slightly darker and lacks white face and black trailing edge and wing.

### VOICE:

Occasionally, 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. Usually can be seen at airport and golf course. Good population numbers with up to 100 birds presently on the island.

### BREEDING:

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



## EASTERN REEF EGRET

(*Egretta sacra*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Large wading bird, 67cm. Long legs and neck. Either all white or all grey. Beak yellow, sometimes pinkish-grey (white morph) or brownish grey (grey morph). Face, legs and feet greenish-yellow. Feet sometimes contrasting yellow. Toes, but not tarsus, trail tail in flight. Grey morph may be confused with the White-faced Heron but latter paler grey with white face and black trailing edge to wing. White morph maybe confused with Great Egret (larger with longer neck, black legs and feet); Little Egret (smaller with thinner neck, black beak, yellow face, black legs and black or yellow feet; toes and some of tarsus trail tail in flight) or Intermediate Egret (larger with longer neck; legs and feet black in non-breeding plumage).

### VOICE:

Occasionally a guttural croak.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Widespread throughout Indo-Pacific, including Australasia. Mostly on rocky platforms and beaches anywhere along coast of Christmas Island. Sometimes at golf course, Chinese cemetery or in the Dales.

### BREEDING:

Found on eggs near Dolly and Ethel Beaches. Probably breeds at many spots on Island, but few nests have been found.





## CHRISTMAS ISLAND GOSHAWK

(*Accipiter fasciatus natalis*)

### DESCRIPTION:

About the size of a large pigeon; broad, rounded wings. Grey above with chestnut collar, barred rufous and white below. Female larger than male, with heavier talons. Immature browner with scaly upperparts and streaky underparts. Nankeen Kestrel is much smaller with narrow, pointed wings, light brown and typically perches on power lines and posts over open ground. The Kestrel is the bird of prey commonly seen in settled areas and mining fields.

### VOICE:

Slow, high-pitched and piercing *ki-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, preferring the forest rather than open ground. Numbers unknown, perhaps a few hundred individuals. For a bird of prey, it is quite tame and will follow walkers in forest.

Often seen at roadside edges on the plateau during mid-year. 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.



## NANKEEN KESTREL

(*Falco cenchroides*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Smaller than a pigeon. Narrow, pointed wings; frequently hover. Rufous brown above, white with pale buff wash and fine streaking below. Male has grey or rufous cap, grey rump and tail with black sub-terminal band on tail. Female has rufous cap, rump and tail with black sub-terminal band. Juvenile has rufous cap rump and tail with fine dark barring on tail, and fine streaks on breast. Smaller than Goshawk. Pale plumage, tear-drop mark on face, and lack of barring on underparts distinguish it from the Goshawk.

### VOICE:

Rapid (hurried), 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 trees, on power pylons and buildings around settled areas.



## COMMON NODDY

(*Egretta novaehollandiae*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Smallest of Christmas Island seabirds. Length 42cm. Dark brown body with pale grey cap. Sexes identical. Juvenile like drab adult, usually with dull streaky cap.

### 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. Nest on sea-cliff and in trees on shore terrace. Commonly seen in wharf area resting on buoys, mooring lines and the cantilevers; and at Lily and Greta Beaches.

### 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.



## CHRISTMAS ISLAND IMPERIAL PIGEON

(*Ducula whartoni*)

### DESCRIPTION:

A large pigeon, purple-grey in colour with green and purple metallic sheens; rufous undertail coverts. black beak, vivid orange iris and black pupil. Juveniles have duller eyes than adults. Frequently travel in large flocks in non-breeding season.

### VOICE:

Deep, booming *woo-woo-woo...*, sometimes accelerating slightly; and more rolling *krroo* or *krroo krroo-krroo...*; given as single, double or several notes.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Occurs only on Christmas Island. Abundant in plateau rainforest, coastal terraces and around settled areas. Population size is unknown. Readily seen in the introduced Japanese Cherry Muntingia calabura when the latter is fruiting.

### BREEDING:

Nest in canopy and understorey trees, principally on the plateau. Probably nest mainly in the wet season, November to April, although nests have been seen in September. Usually 2-3 eggs.



## EMERALD DOVE

(*Chalcophaps indica natalis*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Small pigeon with iridescent green wings, rest of body is red-brown. Male has white stripe above eye and grey crown; and grey tail with dark sub terminal band. Female has all chestnut head and tail.

### VOICE:

Low, soft, mournful coos, drawn out and monotonous: *uuuuu*, *uuuuu*.

### 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 HAWK-OWL

(*Ninox natalis*)

### DESCRIPTION:

About the size of a pigeon. Tawny orange above and strongly barred orange and white below. Large, round eyes with vivid yellow iris surrounding black pupil. Female slightly larger than male. The only owl recorded on Christmas Island.

### VOICE:

Very vocal, and frequently duet. Two or three note *boo-book* or *book-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. Sometimes seen at streetlights in Settlement and Drumsite chasing insects. Also known to be found at Territory Day Park and the Golf Course.

### 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.



## CHRISTMAS ISLAND WHITE-EYE

(*Zosterops natalis*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Very small, Olive green above, grey below, distinctive ring of white feathers around eye.

### VOICE:

Thin high song, not often heard. Feeding flocks emit continuous contact chirps and short warbles, and high-itched *tseep*. Alarm call a sharper ticking, which sometimes betray presence of a Goshawk or Hawk-Owl.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Found only on Christmas Island, though related species occur throughout Asia, the Pacific and Australia. Common in all habitats. The island's most abundant bird.



### BREEDING:

Nest mostly in wet season. Nest is small open cup in bushes. Usually 2/3 eggs.



## ISLAND THRUSH

(*Turdus poliocephalus erythropleurus*)

### DESCRIPTION:

The size and shape of a common Blackbird. Dark grey above, pale grey on breast. Orange belly, eye ring and legs. Male has richer orange on the belly. Juvenile more buffy with brown scaling on under-parts.

### VOICE:

Highly varied and Blackbird-like. Variety of chuckling, bubbling and ticking notes. 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. Numerous subspecies in Southeast Asia and Pacific, but this is the only remaining subspecies in Australia. Common on Christmas Island throughout the forest and settled in areas. Feed on ground; often tame and curious.

### BREEDING:

Nest in low shrubs and on ledges on buildings. Nest in the Wet Season. May raise several broods in succession. Usually 2, sometimes 3 eggs. Incubation lasts 10 days and chicks leave nest 10 days after hatching; still fed by parents for a short while but do not return to nest. Territorial.



## JAVA SPARROW

(*Padda oryzivora*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Sparrow-sized. Grey breast and upperparts; pinkish brown belly; white undertail coverts; black tail; black crown, nape and chin with white cheeks. Pink conical bill. Juvenile duller with white chin and grayish crown.

### VOICE:

In flight, give a sweet, bell-like *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. Seen at Rocky Point, Silver City, and Drumsite.

### BREEDING:

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



## TREE SPARROW

(*Passer montanus*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Typical urban sparrow. Streaked brown and black above, dirty-white below. Chestnut fore-head, crown and nape, black face, bib and ear spot with white cheeks. Juvenile duller with trace of adult head pattern.

### 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 nests after dry season, and juveniles join flocks in June-August.



## CHRISTMAS ISLAND GLOSSY SWIFTLET

(*Collocalia linchii natalis*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Very small swallow-like bird, almost only ever seen in flight pursuing insects. Narrow, pointed, recurved wings much longer than body. Glossy black upperparts, greyish white belly.

May be confused with the migrant Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* which is similar in colouration and habits; however, the latter has a rust coloured throat, broader and less curved wings and often perches on powerlines and posts.

### VOICE:

Generally silent. Short, soft *chirr* sometimes given in flight.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Endemic subspecies is common on Christmas Island. Hawks for insect over roads and clearings and over forest canopy.

### BREEDING:

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



## WHITE BREASTED WATERHEN

(*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Medium-sized terrestrial bird about the size and shape of a small bantam (length 28 cm). Blackish (dark grey) above with sharply demarcated white forehead, face, breast and belly. Chestnut undertail coverts. Greenish bill with orange-red frontal shield. Greenish or yellowish legs. Juvenile has less sharp demarcation of black and white, some grey sully on underparts and face, and lacks red frontal shield. Chick (runner) covered in black down. Creep in undergrowth, rarely flying.

### VOICE:

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

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Widely distributed in southern Asia, expanding its range. Colonised Christmas Island in 1991-92. About 20 pairs now present, mostly in the north-east, (Lily Beach to Drumsite) but gradually spreading and present at North West Point. Most often seen at the rubbish tip, outside the Resort entrance and on the clearings at North East Point beside the Golf Course Rd. Normally live in swamps and rank vegetation, but here live in weed thickets.

### BREEDING:

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



## INTRODUCTION TO COCOS ISLANDS

There are 39 breeding or resident species of birds on Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Only the most common are illustrated and described in this guide.

The Cocos Keeling Islands play an important role in the routes that shorebirds take during their annual migrations. During the migration, which may take several weeks, the birds stop at wetlands to feed and replenish their fat reserves. The continued existence of these wetlands along the flyway is crucial to the conservation of migratory birds.

Pulu Keeling National Park, which is inscribed on the list of "Wetlands of International Importance", and lies on the south western extremity of this popular flyway. The significance of the Pulu Keeling National Park as a staging point for migratory birds is still under assessment and records of species will aid in further establishing its importance.

Cocos Keeling Islands has only 1 endemic sub-species, the Cocos Buff-banded Rail and is generally only found on North Keeling Island. North Keeling supports many of the vagrant species as it is remote to the other 26 islands in the atoll. As it has never been settled, it is free of many of the normal predators that may otherwise harm the bird and breeding populations.

Travel to North Keeling is limited, as there is no regular ferry service. The best possible months are November to July, although there are no guarantees that any planned day trip will actually depart due to weather conditions. Travel is also restricted to permit holders and any landing is only ever possible with a Parks Australia officer.

Whilst we have endeavoured to include all birds in our checklist, the number of new sightings is growing each year and we encourage all visitors to register their rarities with the National Parks department on Cocos Islands. We have removed the number of sightings from the guide, as sightings on the islands are continuously changing.

## DRIVING ON COCOS ISLAND

None of the dangers that would befall you on Christmas Island pose an issue on Cocos Keeling Islands. Vehicles are permitted and can be hired on West Island. A number of tracks, especially around the swamp are not sealed or maintained. Please take caution when entering these areas. Vehicles are not available for hire on Home Island though traversing on foot is quite easy, as are the rest of the islands. The ferry only services West and Home Islands and on certain days, Direction Island. We recommend you check for the latest schedule upon arriving on the islands. Kayak and boat operators may be able to, on request facilitate travel to the outer lying islands subject to weather and tide conditions.



## WHERE TO FIND BIRDS ON COCOS ISLANDS

### WEST ISLAND

West Island is where all the commercial accommodation properties are located. It is also the island that hosts the airport and therefore the first stop on the birding agenda. Just about the length of West Island is suitable for bird watching.

### SOUTH END - WEST ISLAND

The Southern tip, where the Yacht Club and Scout Park are located are ideal for boobies and red-tailed tropic birds. Minor sightings of rare vagrants at Scout Park.

### AIRPORT

Settled area of West Island and around the runway are suitable for Rufous Night Heron, especially on open grassy areas and Green Jungle Fowl, who dart into the scrub along the road heading towards the jetty. The Northern end of the runway has hosted sightings of Guinea Fowl, Yellow Wagtails, Little Black Cormorant and Grey Plover.

### INNER LAKE

West Island has a small inland lake and many vagrants present in this area. This location can be found along the track at the back of the old farm. This area is not maintained so beware of unsealed and boggy roads and falling coconut palm debris.

### WEST ISLAND - NORTH END

Trannies Beach is a good location for the sighting the White Tern. These birds are known to nest in this area.

### HORSBURGH ISLAND

Rare and intermittent sightings of the Cocos Buff-banded Rail. It has been reported that breeding pairs are establishing themselves on this island. This island can generally only be reached by private charter boat.

### DIRECTION ISLAND

Serviced weekly by the ferry, this is the 'postcard' island in the Cocos atoll. Frequenting by visiting yachts using the protective inland bay on the lagoon side.

### HOME ISLAND

Home to the Cocos Malay. Various sightings of White Terns, Asian Koels and Nankeen Night Herons. Please exercise respect when visiting this island. Shirts with sleeves should be worn and no alcohol permitted.

### SOUTH ISLAND

Now the hotspot for birders. This un-habited island is now becoming a well-known hang out for migratory birds in the wet season. New sightings are being registered every year. This island can be accessed in low tide by foot, but we would recommend you access the commercial kayak providers on island for the safest way to get there. Sighting of a Saunders Tern recorded in 2007 - the first for an Australian Territory.



## COCOS BUFF-BANDED RAIL

(*Gallirallus philippensis andrewsi*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Medium-sized rail with stout body, small rounded head, long tail, short to medium dull grey to pinkish-grey legs, and short dark pink bill with varying dusky culmen and tipped wedge-shaped tip. Strikingly marked with diagnostic buff breast-band. Sexes similar; female slightly smaller. No seasonal variation. Gait a slow walk with hunched posture, tail raised and flicked incessantly. Seldom fly, preferring to dash into cover when disturbed; when flushed, fly weakly for short distance just above vegetation on short rounded wings with neck outstretched, legs dangling or trailing.

### VOICE:

Distinctive, best means of detection in breeding season. Commonest call a loud creaky squeak, most often heard in morning and evening.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Restricted to North Keeling Island. Records mention possible introduction in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Considered rare and endangered.

### BREEDING:

Build a cup-shaped nest of short dry lengths of grass stems and herbage. Commence laying January, May and June, and breeding ends August - October. Chicks are all black and leave nest soon after hatching.



## MASKED BOOBY

(*Sula dactylatra*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Largest booby; streamlined body, long narrow wings, longish neck, pointed yellow bill and pointed tail. Body plumage entirely white above and below. Upperwing, white contrasting sharply with black primary and secondary feathers. Breeding birds feed at sea around breeding islands, tending to travel fare to feed in deep waters. Outside breeding season, juveniles and some adults disperse widely at sea. Tend to be solitary when flying and feeding. Forage further out to sea and South than other boobies on the island.

### VOICE:

Males make high-pitched whistle, female gives louder and lower honk or trumpet.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Resident throughout the year on North Keeling Island with a small nesting population. Found in North and South America and Pacific region.



### BREEDING:

Breed in simple territorial pairs, colonially on flat open ground exposed to wind enabling easier take-off. Eggs are laid January - July, peaking in June, young April - December on North Keeling Island. Both parents incubate and tend young until 4-8 weeks after fledging. Young fledge at about 120 days, once independent juveniles disappear to sea.



## WHITE TERN

(*Gygis Alba*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Adults, all white except for narrow black eye-ring and patch in front of eye which combine with large black eye, giving a big-eyed appearance. Bill mostly black with varying blue-black base. Legs & feet, slate blue to violet with buff webs.

### VOICE:

Repeated guttural *hee ch hee ch*. Adult and young are quiet at nest site.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Pelagic and although non-breeding range is unknown, the species generally thought to disperse into oceanic areas relatively close to breeding islands. Approx 2000 breeding pairs with recordings of nests on North Keeling, Horsborough, South Island and Trannies Beach end of West Island.



### BREEDING:

Occurs in coastal tall open forest. Breeding seems to occur in all months. Egg is laid on thin branch or palm fronds for protection. Fledglings are adapted to cling on branch, even when upside down.



## GREEN JUNGLEFOWL

(*Gallus varius*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Smaller than domestic fowl. Males are easily distinguished with black/green metallic body feathers, with patterns on nape of neck or lighter green and blue, the wing coverts are covered with bronze hackles. The comb is light blue close to head and lending to purplish red an outer edge. Wattle is reverse in colouring to comb. The tail is held low. Females are pheasant-like in appearance and no visible comb. Dark brown plumage with dark green mottled feathers. Light brown mottled on under belly.

### VOICE:

Clucking along same lines as domestic fowl, clucking and clucking-screeching whilst dashing for cover when disturbed.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Originally from Java & Bali. Introduced to Cocos. Found mainly on West Island, variance and cross breeding on Direction Island and Home Island. Healthy breeding numbers. Cocos said to have quite 'pure' species as not much cross breeding has occurred with domestic fowl.



### BREEDING:

Sexually mature at about 2 years of age. Male performs dance to court female by dropping one wing. Nest in tree stumps and low vegetation. Breeding is April - July and clutch is generally 3-5 eggs. Eggs incubate for 21 days.



## NANKEEN NIGHT HERON

(*Nycticorax caledonicus*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Sometimes known as the Rufous Night Heron, 55-65 cm tall with distinctive cinnamon feathers in the upper body & grey-black head with 2-3 white nape plumes present all year round on mature birds. Black bill with yellow legs which turn a pinkish-red when courting. Juveniles are orangey brown with white spots in the plumage.

### VOICE:

A loud croak, some deep clicking sounds also.

### STATUS & DISTRIBUTION:

Found throughout most of the Australian Mainland. Found on Christmas Island. Good numbers on West Island in the Cocos Keeling Islands. Found around the coastline and the cleared park areas on Cocos. Can be seen both day & night quite easily.



### BREEDING:

Year round. Breeding takes place in colonies and nest generally constructed from loose sticks over water. Clutch size generally 2-5 eggs and both parents incubate. Incubation generally takes 3 weeks and hatchlings stay in the nest for up to a further 45 days.



## CHECK LIST OF COCOS ISLAND BIRDS

English Name	Status	Sighting/Comments	English Name	Status	Sighting/Comments
Green Junglefowl	I		White-breasted Waterhen	BR	
White-tailed Tropicbird	BR		Pacific Golden Plover	V	
Red-tailed Tropicbird	BR		Grey Plover	V	
Greater Flamingo	V		Oriental Plover	V	
Nightjar sp	V		Greater Sand-Plover	V	
White-throated Needletail	V		Pin-tailed Snipe	V	
Yellow-nosed Albatross	V		Whimbrel	V	
Herald Petrel	V		Little Curlew	V	
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	BM		Ruddy Turnstone	V	
Christmas Island Frigatebird	V		Common Sandpiper	V	
Great Frigatebird	BR		Sanderling	V	
Lesser Frigatebird	BR		Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	V	
Masked Booby	BR		Common Greenshank	V	
Brown Booby	BR		Common Redshank	V	
Red-footed Booby	BR		Oriental Pratincole	V	
White-faced Heron	V		Common Noddy	BR	
Little Egret	V		Lesser Noddy	BR	
Cattle Egret	C		White Tern	BR	
Eastern Reef Egret	B		Bridled Tern	V	
Western Reef Egret	V		Sooty Tern	BR	
Nankeen Night Heron	BR		Common Tern	V	
Black-crowned Night Heron	V		White-winged Black Tern	V	
Chinese Pond Heron	V		Buffy Fish Owl	V	
Glossy Ibis	V		Barn Swallow	V	
Swamp Harrier	V		Asian House Martin	V	
Australian Kestrel	V		Eastern Yellow Wagtail	V	
Cocos Buff-banded Rail	IE		Grey Wagtail	V	

## CHECK LIST OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND BIRDS

English Name	Status	Sighting/Comments	English Name	Status	Sighting/Comments
Feral Chicken	I		Eastern Great Egret	RV	
Garganey	V		Intermediate Egret	V	
Hardhead	V		Cattle Egret	V	
Red-tailed Tropicbird	B		Striated Heron	RV	
White Tailed Tropicbird	ES		Chinese Pond Heron	V	
Savanna Nightjar	V		Nankeen Night Heron	RV	
Glossy Swiftlet	ES		Malayan Night Heron	V	
Edible/Black-nest Swiftlet	N/A		Glossy Ibis	V	
White-throated Needletail	V		White-bellied Sea-Eagle	V	
House Swift	V		Oriental Honey-buzzard	V	
Fork-tailed Swift	RV		Christmas Island Goshawk	ES	
Red Collared Dove	V		Peregrine Falcon	V	
Emerald Dove	ES		Nankeen Kestrel	B	
Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon	ES		Baillon's Crake	V	
Pied Imperial Pigeon	V		Ruddy-breasted Crake	V	
Matsudaria's Storm-Petrel	V		White-breasted Waterhen	B	
White-faced Storm Petrel	V		Watercock	V	
Barau's Petrel	V		Black-tailed Native-hen	V	
Bulwer's Petrel	V		Eurasian Coot	V	
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	V		Sooty Oystercatcher	V	
Antarctic Prion	V		Black-winged Stilt	V	
Great Frigatebird	ES		Grey Plover	V	
Lesser Frigatebird	B		Pacific Golden Plover	RV	
Christmas Island Frigatebird	ES		Kentish Plover	V	
Abbott's Booby	ES		Little Ringed Plover	V	
Red-footed Booby	B		Lesser Sand Plover	RV	
Brown Booby	B		Greater Sand Plover	RV	
Little Black Cormorant	RV		Oriental Plover	V	
Great Cormorant	V		Masked Lapwing	V	
Australian Pelican	V		Pin-tailed Snipe	RV	
Cinnamon Bittern	V		Swinhoe's Snipe	V	
Schrenck's Bittern	V		Bar-tailed Godwit	V	
Black Bittern	V		Little Curlew	V	
Yellow Bittern	V		Whimbrel	RV	
White-faced Heron	B		Common Redshank	V	
Pied Heron	V		Marsh Sandpiper	V	
Little Egret	V		Common Greenshank	RV	
Eastern Reef Egret	B		Wood Sandpiper	RV	
			Terek Sandpiper	V	
			Common Sandpiper	RV	

## CHECK LIST OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND BIRDS

English Name	Status	Sighting/Comments	English Name	Status	Sighting/Comments
Grey-tailed Tattler	V		Tiger Shrike	V	
Ruddy Turnstone	RV		Oriental Reed Warbler	V	
Red-necked Stint	V		Christmas Island White-eye	ES	
Long-toed Stint	V		Red-rumped Swallow	V	
Great Knot	V		Barn Swallow	RV	
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	V		Tree Martin	V	
Curlew Sandpiper	V		Asian House Martin	V	
Sanderling	V		Blue & White Flycatcher	V	
Red-necked Phalarope	V		Island Thrush	ES	
Grey Phalarope	V		Purple-backed Starling	V	
Oriental Pratincole	RV		Java Sparrow	I	
Australian Pratincole	RV		Eurasian Tree Sparrow	I	
Brown Skua	V		White Wagtail	V	
Artic Jaeger	V		Eastern Yellow Wagtail	RV	
Common Noddy	B		Green-headed Yellow Wagtail	NA	
Lesser Noddy	V		Grey Wagtail	RV	
White Tern	V		<b>Supplementary List</b>		
Sooty Tern	V		Sunda Teal	NA	
Asian Gull-billed Tern	V		Brown-backed Needletail	NA	
Greater Crested Tern	V		Silver-backed Needletail	NA	
Lesser Crested Tern	V		Dark-rumped Swift	NA	
Common Tern	V		Japanese Night Heron	RV	
Little Tern	V		Purple Heron	NA	
Whiskered Tern	RV		Chinese Sparrowhawk	NA	
White-winged Black Tern	V		Japanese Sparrowhawk	NA	
Mew Gull	V		Swamp Harrier	NA	
Asian Koel	V		Oriental Hobby	RV	
Oriental Cuckoo	RV		Lesser Crested Tern	V	
Pallid Cuckoo	V		Rose-ringed Parakeet	E	
Large Hawk Cuckoo	IN		Drongo Cuckoo	NA	
Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo	V		Northern Wheatear	NA	
Christmas Island Hawk Owl	ES		Javan Myna	E	
Common Kingfisher	V		Hill Myna	NA	
Sacred Kingfisher	V		Flowerpecker sp	IN	
Collared Kingfisher	V		Tawny Pipit	NA	
Dollarbird	V		Red-throated Pipit	NA	
Blue-winged Pitta	V		Australasian Pipit	NA	
White bellied Cuckoo-shrike	V				
Brown Shrike	V				

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# COCOS ISLAND MAP

