

**FIRST INDIAN OCEAN SEABIRD CONFERENCE
CHRISTMAS ISLAND, AUSTRALIA, APRIL 2008**

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Indian Ocean Seabird Group

PREFACE

During the 11th Pan African Ornithological Congress held at Djerba (Tunisia), 20–25 November 2004, a group of researchers and conservationists working on seabirds of the western Indian Ocean decided to come together as an international interest group focusing on the ecology and conservation of the seabird species of the Indian Ocean. This was the genesis of the Indian Ocean Seabird Group (IOSG).

The goals of the group were

- to increase knowledge concerning the status and ecology of, and threats to, the seabird species that breed in the inter-tropical region of the Indian Ocean.
- to facilitate exchanges of information between researchers, conservationists and managers involved in seabird ecology or management.
- to conduct joint projects at the scale of the Indian Ocean.
- to engage and liaise with national seabird groups and to assist in their work.

At that stage, the IOSG included people from South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, Djibouti, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius and Réunion and expatriates from the United States, Portugal, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Canada and France involved in seabird studies or conservation projects in the Indian Ocean.

Although the main focus of the Group is the tropical zone of the Indian Ocean, members were aware that the temperate and sub-Antarctic parts of the Indian Ocean are also of major interest with respect to seabirds. Thus, membership and participation was invited from anyone involved in research or conservation programs throughout the Indian Ocean basin.

A visit to Western Australia by Chris Feare in October 2006 facilitated the connection of seabird researchers working in the Eastern Indian Ocean with the fledgling organisation on the western side of the basin. A small eastern branch consisting of researchers with projects along the coast of Western Australia and on the Indian Ocean Territories (Christmas and Cocos-Keeling islands)

joined the IOSG. Nic Dunlop became convenor of an eastern branch working with Matthieu Le Corre in the west. The first IOSG Newsletter was circulated in January 2007 and planning began for the inaugural meeting of IOSG on Christmas Island, Indian Ocean, in April 2008.

As news of the IOSG and the conference spread across the Internet, researchers and natural resource managers from parts of the Northern Indian Ocean joined (although, unfortunately, none of the new members of the network from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives was able to make the inaugural meeting). However IOSG is well on the way to having a network of participants that are representative of a region that includes many developing countries.

Christmas Island is one of the most important islands for tropical seabirds in the Indian Ocean. Abbott's Booby *Papasula abbotti* and the Christmas Island Frigatebird *Fregata andrewsi* breed nowhere else in world. Abbott's Booby used to also nest on Assumption Island in the Western Indian Ocean until its forest habitat was wiped out by phosphate mining. The Christmas Island Frigatebird is an endemic. Christmas Island is the only location in the world where you can find three breeding frigatebird species. The island populations of Red-footed *Sula sula* and Brown Boobies *S. leucogaster*, Great Frigatebirds *F. minor*, Red-tailed *Phaethon rubricauda* and White-tailed Tropicbirds *Ph. lepturus* (Golden Bosunbirds) are amongst the largest in the Indian Ocean. However, unlike seabirds at other colonies, Christmas Island seabirds must cope with an ecosystem ruled by land crabs.

This special Indian Ocean edition of *Marine Ornithology* presents papers submitted by delegates at the inaugural IOSG conference held on Christmas Island in April 2008.

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