

# Wildlife

## Birds

Your first encounter is likely to be one of the five varieties of birds. You can see these on the drive or walk up the mountain road. The probability of a **Red-necked Francolin** (*Francolinus afer*) (1a) quickly crossing the road in front of you is high. You'll not be able to mistake it due to its partridge-like appearance. It is a compact, grey-brown, game bird with a black and white streaked breast, red bill and legs. As the name suggests, there are areas of red bare skin on the throat and around eyes. Red-necked Francolins were introduced to Ascension in



Red-necked francolin 1a

1851. They feed mainly on seeds, shoots, roots, tubers and occasionally insects and other small animals. Their nest is a scraping in the ground which is lined with dry grass, leaves or feathers. Eggs vary from pinkish buff to light brown, with white speckling. There can be three to nine eggs in each clutch. Incubation by the female lasts about 23 days and chicks can usually fly at 10 days old.

If you follow the road, on the left just past the picnic bench, take a look through the trees and you will undoubtedly spot a **Fairy Tern** (*Gygis alba*) (1b). This is the only seabird on the mountain. It is estimated that 1% of the world's population of Fairy tern is on Ascension. Fairy Terns can also be seen along Middleton's path and around the water catchment area. They have a dove-like

appearance, pure white with a finely pointed black bill, and rings of black feathers round their eyes. They feed on small fish that are fed whole to their chicks. The fish are caught using a dipping method. Nests are in hollow on a bare branch or on a rock ledge. Both parents incubate a single egg which is either pale grey or buff with dark streaking and speckling. Incubation takes about 36 days and chicks fledge at around seven weeks old.



Fairy Tern 1b



Common myna 1c

The very vocal **Common Myna** (*Acridotheres tristis*) (1c) can be seen and heard all around Green Mountain and has been present since 1879. It is a strongly built brown starling that has a black head, bright yellow legs, bill and bare skin round the eyes. Its diet includes seeds, seedlings, fruit, insects, worms, young mice, small geckos and the eggs and nestlings of small birds. Even discarded household scraps are not off the menu. Large untidy nests with two to four pale blue, unmarked eggs can be found in the hole of a tree, a rock crevice or a cavity in a building. Incubation is around 18 days and chicks fledge when around 30 days old.

The **Yellow Canary** (*Serinus flaviventris*) (1d) which can be seen around the lower slopes of Green Mountain was introduced to Ascension around 1890. Its golden yellow breast is unmistakable although the females are paler and more heavily streaked. The male has a green back and wings as opposed to the greyish-green of the female. Canaries feed on small seeds that are foraged in gardens. Nests are generally in a low bush and are made of grass and other fibres. Two to five eggs, which are typically white, are incubated by the female for 12-14 days and chicks fledge around two weeks after hatching.



Yellow canary 1d



Common waxbill 1e

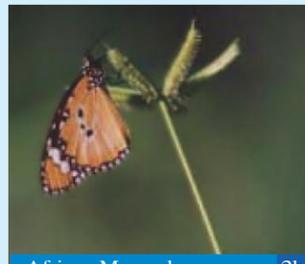
The **Common Waxbill** (*Estrilda astrild*) (1e) can be easily seen in abundance whilst walking up the path to the Dew Pond. It is a tiny, red-billed finch with brown upper-parts, finely barred, a pink-centred breast and a relatively long black tail. It feeds mainly on grass seeds. Nests are closely woven globes of grass and feathers, lined with plant material, down, or animal hair and sometimes have a short, tube-like entrance. Although nests are often in high trees, particularly conifers, they can be found close to the ground under thick cover or in crevices in cliffs. Four to eight white eggs are incubated for around 12 days and chicks fledge at around 16 days old.

## Butterflies



Diadem 2a

The male **Diadem** (*Hypolimnas misippus*) (2a) is a beautiful and easily recognised butterfly with its iridescent velvety black wings. There are two white spots on the forewing and one large one on the hindwing. The female however, is an orange colour with black and white markings with one blackish spot on the upperside of the forewing as well as a second shadow. She has two dark spots on the underside but can easily be mistaken for the African Monarch who has more underneath. This mimicry in colour is to deter potential predators who associate particular colours with bad tastes.

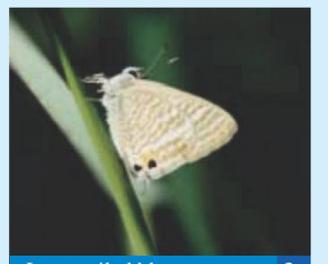


African Monarch 2b

the underside of the hindwing similar to the male.

The **African Monarch** (*Danaus chrysippus*) (2b) Like the Diadem has two short front legs that it does not use for walking. There has however only been one sighting of a vagrant on Ascension so you better make sure you have the camera ready for this one! The male has three small black spots and one larger one behind on the upperside of the hind wing with four white-bordered black spots on the underside. The female has three small ones on the upperside and three on

The **Long-tailed Blue** (*Lampides boeticus*) (2c) belongs to the lycaenidae species which are small, brightly coloured butterflies with blue, coppery or brown wings. Although the Long-tailed Blue is the colour that its name suggests the female (pictured) is brown with the underside being fawn grey with two white bars and two tiny peacock spots at the back. The male has a violet blue upperside, with two black spots and a small tail at the posterior point of the hindwing. As the caterpillar feeds exclusively on legumes (the pea family) it could only have bred on the island after the arrival of humans.



Long-tailed blue 2c

## Gecko



Coconut-palm Gecko 3

Go into any building on Green Mountain and you will no doubt come across the **Coconut-palm Gecko** (*Hemidactylus mercatorius*) (3), which was probably accidentally introduced to the island at Georgetown port. It has a rather spotty appearance and is a light greyish colour.

## Landcrabs

The **landcrab** (*Gecarcinus lagostoma*) (4) is one of the most amazing species of wildlife found on the mountain. One has to appreciate the journey it has made from the sea through the desert conditions of the lowlands to the moister almost tropical conditions of Green Mountain. It is here that the crab digs its burrow and feeds on vegetation, fruits from the prickly pear and even small animals. They are either a reddish purple colour or a yellowy orange and have ten leglike appendages of which the two at the front have large claws. Crabs have been known to catch rabbits or rats and can run quite

fast when they need to! They enjoy the dark and damp so, will be seen on the Ruperts or Middletons walks trying to hide in the undergrowth. They are most obvious at dawn or dusk, or after rain. Eggs can easily be seen on the female, a spongy black mass hangs down under the rounded abdomen, she will most likely travel to North East Bay to release the larvae into seawater. The landcrab was the dominant omnivore at the time the island was discovered so they have been around for a long time.



The landcrab 4

## Feral Animals



Feral cows 5a

If you follow the road up from the Red Lion you will come across Bishops path on the right hand side. On this path you were likely to see the **feral cows** (5a) that have been feral since the state farming ceased in 1978 when Margaret Thatcher dictated that farming be privatized. The farm was then run by a local

inhabitant in the late 80's before

being finally abandoned in the mid 90's due to its insufficient turnover. You were however, more likely to see the cow pats than you are the cows. The cows were always well hidden in this lush side of the mountain - very few lucky walkers have photographic evidence of their existence. Unfortunately there are now no longer feral cows on the mountain. Records show that wild oxen had been on Green Mountain since 1821. The **feral sheep** (5b) are evident all over the island and Green Mountain is no exception. Stand at the top of Breakneck Valley and you will see many close together but they are soon quick to run off when you attempt to approach them. Sheep were recorded on the island



Feral sheep 5b

from as early as the 19th century and it is their descendants that still roam today. A walk on any of the paths will have sheep running for cover once they have spotted you, unlike those wandering around the settlements hoping for food from inhabitants with a soft spot for a cute face.

There are **grey rabbits** that can be seen particularly on the path going towards the Dew Pond. They can however cause significant damage to the protected plants that have been specially propagated and planted on Green Mountain. A fenced off area has been erected in an effort to protect these endangered species.

**Feral chickens** still roam around the Residency and again this is as a result of the farming days that have since ceased.



### Code of Conduct

- 4 Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs
- 4 Leave gates and property as you find them
- 4 Protect plants and animals
- 4 Do not create fire hazards
- 4 Take your litter home
- 4 Keep dogs under close control
- 4 Consider other people
- 4 Only park vehicles in designated areas
- 4 Enjoy and appreciate the environment



For more information contact: Ascension Island Conservation Centre, Georgetown, Ascension Island ASCN 1ZZ

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