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# Introduction to natural history of the Mascarene islands

Dominique Strasberg\*†<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Peuplements végétaux et bioagresseurs en milieu tropical (UMR PVBMT) – Université de la Réunion :  
UMRC53 – Université de La Réunion 15 avenue René Cassin CS92003 97744 Saint-Denis Cédex 9,  
France

## Abstract

Situated in the South West Indian Ocean, Mauritius, Rodrigues and Reunion are the main islands of the Mascarene archipelago. The Mascarene islands are often cited in textbooks as the home of the Dodo and as a place where human activities have resulted in mass extinctions and ecological disasters. Nevertheless, the archipelago still retains twenty-percent of its original habitats. The Mascarene biota is extremely diverse and most taxa have a high degree of endemism. Recent research studies in the Mascarenes allow a better understanding of the processes underlying evolutionary history and ecological patterns. Physical settings and biogeographical features make the archipelago similar to the Hawaiian Islands. A comparative analysis of the Mascarene biota with their analog on "Darwinian" islands is a promising avenue for detecting general rules and patterns and for exploring new and emergent questions in island biology.

**Keywords:** biodiversity, hotspot, remote archipelago, natural laboratory, endemism

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\*Speaker

†Corresponding author: dominique.strasberg@univ-reunion.fr