

**Rediscovery of the Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata*
on Cosmoledo Atoll in the Seychelles**

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The Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata* and the White-throated Rail *Dryolimnas cuvieri* probably at one time occurred on all the islands of the Aldabra group including Aldabra, Assumption, Cosmoledo and Astove. They still thrive on Aldabra (Penny 1974) but are extinct on Assumption (Stoddart *et al.* 1970) and on Astove (Benson 1970b). Because they have not been recorded on Cosmoledo since 1907 and 1908 respectively (Benson 1970a), many believed them to be extirpated there. There were reports from Seychellois labourers, however, that the Turtle Dove might still exist on South Island in the Cosmoledo Atoll, and some people had hoped that the rail might also be found there as well (Benson 1970a). No scientists had been able to land on South Island to verify these reports until my own visit early in 1982.

During the five months that I lived on Cosmoledo (from 1 January to 27 June 1982) while studying sea turtles, I visited South Island regularly. I saw no White-throated Rails, but I did find a small population of Turtle Doves on South Island, apparently of the same subspecies as that occurring on Aldabra, *Streptopelia picturata coppingeri* (Penny 1974). I made a series of photographs of the birds and left one on file at the Florida State Museum in Gainesville, Florida.

South Island is 3.5 km long and 0.2 km wide, but the doves seem to be restricted to an area of approximately 1000 m² at the west end of the island. There the habitat consists of a small clearing near the fishermen's campsite and an adjacent border of trees *Avicennia marina* about 5 m tall. The remainder of South Island is covered by low scrubby vegetation. I always saw Turtle Doves when I visited the campsite, but never more than six at a time. Although I saw no Turtle Doves anywhere else on Cosmoledo Atoll, fishermen claimed that on rare occasions they saw the birds. The Seychellois traditionally eat Turtle Doves, but the people living on Cosmoledo now protect the birds because they are rare.

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