# Wildlife and Fauna of Seychelles

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# Introduction

Stretching like a string of jewels across the turquoise canvas of the western Indian Ocean, the Seychelles archipelago is among the world's most extraordinary biodiversity hotspots. Composed of 115 islands—some granite, some coral—the Seychelles owes its ecological uniqueness to its ancient isolation and the evolutionary forces that have shaped its landscapes and living things for millions of years. Today, the islands stand as a living laboratory, home to species found nowhere else on Earth, and their remarkable natural heritage draws scientists, nature enthusiasts, and conservationists from around the globe.

The story of Seychelles is woven from contrasts: rugged mountain rainforests rise above bright, sandy shores; lush palm groves give way to wind-swept coral flats; fragile amphibians thrive within mossy glades while giant tortoises lumber across open clearings. Scattered across its islands are living relics of evolutionary history—endemic birds bearing the archipelago's name, reptiles that once faced near extinction, insects and invertebrates as curious as they are essential. In its azure waters, spectacular coral reefs, teeming with colorful fish and marine giants, form a vital part of the Indian Ocean's tapestry.

But the Seychelles' natural riches are not merely a collection of curiosities or scenic wonders—they are also a symbol of hope and perseverance. Decades of dedicated conservation initiatives, often led by local visionaries and supported by international partners, have reversed the fortunes of several critically endangered species. Nearly 60% of the archipelago's land area and vast stretches of its coastal waters are now designated as protected, making Seychelles an exemplar in the global effort to conserve nature for future generations.

Yet, this paradise remains vulnerable. Historical human impacts reshaped many habitats, and introduced species continue to threaten fragile balances. The ongoing challenges of climate change, coral bleaching, pollution, and invasive flora and fauna pose new questions for conservationists and policymakers. The future of the Seychelles' wildlife and flora will depend on the strength of partnerships, the vigilance of local communities, and the vision to balance economic growth—particularly tourism—with ecological integrity.

This book sets out to guide the reader through the wonder and intricacies of Seychelles' wildlife and fauna. It provides a comprehensive account of the islands' native animals and plants, highlights both triumphs and trials in the sphere of conservation, and explores the habitats and personalities that make these islands unique. Whether you are a scientist, traveler, or armchair explorer, you will find in the

Seychelles a source of endless fascination and a testament to the enduring power of nature.

By delving into each facet of the archipelago’s terrestrial, marine, and botanical wealth, this guide hopes not only to inform but also to inspire a deeper appreciation for the delicate treasures of the Seychelles—and a renewed resolve to protect them for generations yet to come.

# CHAPTER ONE: The Seychelles Archipelago: Geography and Origins

The Seychelles archipelago, a collection of 115 islands scattered across a vast swathe of the western Indian Ocean, is a place of remarkable contrasts and deep geological history. While the total landmass is a mere 455 square kilometers (176 sq mi), the islands are spread across an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of over 1.3 million square kilometers (500,000 sq mi) of ocean, highlighting the significant marine territory that falls under Seychelles' purview. This considerable oceanic realm is as important to the archipelago's biodiversity as the islands themselves.

At first glance, the islands might seem like typical tropical outposts, but a closer look reveals a unique geological story. Unlike many oceanic islands that owe their existence to volcanic activity, a significant portion of the Seychelles islands, particularly the Inner Islands, are granitic in origin. This makes them ancient fragments of a supercontinent, a rarity in the middle of an ocean basin.

The archipelago is broadly divided into two distinct groups: the Inner Islands and the Outer Islands. The Inner Islands, clustered within a radius of about 50-90 kilometers (30-56 mi) from the main island of Mahé, are predominantly granitic. There are about 41 to 42 granitic islands, along with two coral islands (Bird and Denis) that are geographically close and often grouped with the Inner Islands. These islands are the older siblings, with the granite bedrock dating back hundreds of millions of years.

The formation of these granitic islands is a tale of continental drift and the breakup of the ancient supercontinent Gondwana. Around 200 million years ago, Gondwana began to fragment. Madagascar, India, and the Seychelles were once joined as a single landmass that split from Africa. Later, about 85 million years ago, Seychelles and India separated from Madagascar as the Mascarene basin formed. The granitic islands of the Seychelles are essentially the exposed parts of a submerged microcontinent that was left behind as India drifted northward, eventually colliding with Asia to form the Himalayas. This makes the Seychelles granite islands the only mid-oceanic islands in the world formed from a continental mass.

These granitic islands are characterized by their dramatic topography, with steep, often boulder-covered hills and mountains rising abruptly from the sea. The highest point in the Seychelles is Morne Seychellois, located on Mahé, reaching an elevation of 905 meters (2,969 ft). Narrow coastal plains often fringe these rugged interiors, and some islands are also encircled by extensive coral reefs.

Mahé is the largest island, covering an area of 156.7 square kilometers (61 sq mi), and is home to the capital city, Victoria, and the majority of the population. Other significant granitic islands in the Inner group include Praslin, the second largest at 38.5 square kilometers (14.8 sq mi), and La Digue, known for its iconic granite boulders and stunning beaches, with an area of 10.08 square kilometers (3.89 sq mi). Silhouette is the third largest granitic island at 20.1 square kilometers (7.76 sq mi) and boasts Mont Dauban, the second highest peak. These Inner Islands are where the vast majority of the Seychellois population resides, with about 90% on Mahé and around 9% on Praslin and La Digue.

In contrast to the ancient, rocky Inner Islands, the Outer Islands are primarily coralline and are generally much younger and flatter. There are about 73 to 74 coralline islands, spread out over a much larger area, stretching southwest from the Inner Islands. These islands have formed from the accumulation of coral over time, often creating low-lying atolls with central lagoons. They rise only a few meters above sea level and are largely waterless, making them less hospitable for human habitation compared to the granitic islands.

The coral islands include groups such as the Amirantes, the Farquhar group, and the Aldabra group, which features the world's largest raised coral atoll, Aldabra. While the Outer Islands make up a significant portion of the Seychelles' land area (about 46%), they are home to less than 1% of the population. Their isolation and lack of fresh water have meant they have remained relatively undisturbed by human activity, making many of them vital nature reserves.

The geology of the Seychelles is a story of immense geological timescales and the powerful forces that shape our planet. The stark contrast between the ancient, mountainous granite islands and the younger, flat coral islands provides a diverse range of habitats, laying the foundation for the unique and rich biodiversity that this book will explore in detail. It is a landscape sculpted by the slow dance of tectonic plates and the persistent work of marine organisms, a testament to the dynamic nature of Earth.

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