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SEYCHELLES FODY LONGEVITY

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The Seychelles Fody *Foudia sechellarum* is a small passerine in the weaver family, Ploceidae, which occurs on three small islands in the Seychelles archipelago: Cousin, Cousine and Frégate, and is introduced on D'Arros in the Amirantes, Aride and Denis (Safford & Hawkins 2013). The status of the bird was recently changed from 'endangered' to 'near threatened' because of successful conservation efforts by Nature Seychelles. At present it is estimated that there are approximately 6000-7000 Seychelles Fodies on all six islands (Vega 2005, Safford & Hawkins 2013).

Previous ringing of Seychelles Fodies on Cousin Island has been conducted, mainly to obtain population estimates for the species, and morphological descriptions and measurements, and these studies were reviewed in Oschadleus et al. (2013), who also provided new longevity data for the species. The maximum longevity was found to be 14 years 2 months 25 days. This paper provides new longevity records for the species.

Methods

A bird ringing course was conducted on Cousin and Cousine Islands, Seychelles, from 11-16 February 2014, during which several Seychelles Fodies were recaptured. Those recaptured on Cousin Island provided new longevity records.

Results

From 12-13 February, 52 Seychelles Fodies were caught on Cousin Island, of which 38 were unringed (new captures), and 14 were

recaptures of 10 individuals (Table 1). One colour ringed fody was resighted.

The two oldest fodies had both been ringed on 2 July 1997 by Gerard Rocamora (Rocamora 1997, G Rocamora pers.).



Fig. 1. Seychelles Fody F97096, feeding on rice on table; this individual is one of the oldest fodies alive.

Male F97096 (originally ringed as SA943955) was recaptured on 9 February 2002, when its ring was replaced (Appendix 1 in Vega 2005), and colour rings "black-black (left) metal/ blue (right)" were added. This bird was resighted on 13 Feb 2014, feeding on rice on the table at the research house, very close to people. The ring could be read from multiple extracts of a video clip of the bird moving on the table, showing different parts of the ring. This individual may well have been the one photographed on the same table in 2011 (Fig. 2), although no digits of the metal ring were read at that time.



Male F97100 (originally ringed as SA943954) was recaptured on 9 Feb 2002, when its ring was replaced (Appendix 1 in Vega 2005), and it was recaptured again on 13 Feb 2014.

The age of these two birds at first ringing is unknown. The elapsed time between ringing and last recapture of the birds was 16 years 7 months (Table 1).

Four birds were recaptured that had been ringed by L Vega (Appendix 1 in Vega 2005), although the data for 3 of these is lost, but they were probably ringed in July or August 2004, near the end of Vega's study period.

Four fodies were recaptured that had been ringed on my previous visit in 2011 (Oschadleus et al. 2013).

Table 1. Seychelles Fodies recaptured (or resighted *) on Cousin Island in February 2014, with date first ringed, and elapsed time.

Ring	Ringed	Reported	Elapsed time
F97096	02-Jul-97	13-Feb-14 *	16y 7m 17d
F97100	02-Jul-97	13-Feb-14	16y 7m 17d
FA26693	18-Jul-04	12-Feb-14	9y 6m 28d
FA26768	[2004]	12-Feb-14	[prob 9y 6m]
FA26776	[2004]	13-Feb-14	[prob 9y 6m]
FA26779	[2004]	12-Feb-14	[prob 9y 6m]
FB29663	20-Sep-11	12-Feb-14	2y 4m 24d
FB29692	22-Sep-11	13-Feb-14	2y 4m 23d
FB29699	23-Sep-11	12-Feb-14	2y 4m 21d
FH66400	20-Sep-11	12-Feb-14	2y 4m 24d

Discussion

The two oldest Seychelles Fodies had been ringed by a team of 12 people who ringed 449 of the fodies between 26 June and 2 July 1997 (Rocamora 1997). 118 of these birds were recaptured by Vega

(2005, Appendix 1) between February 2002 and August 2004, and the rings were replaced with a more suitable size, and in many cases colour rings were added.

One of Rocamora's fodies was recaptured in 2011, providing the longevity record for the species of 14 years 2 months 25 days (Oschadleus et al. 2013). In this study, two different individuals were recaptured from Rocamora's study, providing a new longevity record of 16 years 7 months 17 days.

The Seychelles Fody is now among the oldest known weaver species in the wild. The oldest known weavers are a Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* with an elapsed time of 15 years 4 months 13 days (ring BB75791, SAFRING database), and a Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius* with an elapsed time of 15 years 3 months 8 days (ring BC42438, Covas 2012). The latter two weaver species probably have a longevity of 16 years or more as the birds were adults at the time of ringing.

The oldest weaver in captivity is the Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*, at 24 years (Collias et al. 1986).

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Fig. 2. Seychelles Fody, feeding on a pot on the same table as in 2014, on 18 Sep 2011, possibly being male F97096.