

Trait-independent habitat associations explain low co-occurrence in native and exotic birds on a tropical volcanic island

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1	Trait-independent habitat associations explain low co-occurrence
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3	
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ABSTRACT

23	On oceanic islands, strong human impacts on habitats, combined with intro-
24	ductions of exotic species, modify the functional composition of terrestrial
25	bird assemblages and threaten their ecological functions. In La Réunion, an
26	oceanic island located in the Madagascan region, a national park was estab-
27	lished in 2007 to counter the ecosystem-level effects of three centuries of
28	habitat conversion, native species destruction and exotic species introduc-
29	tions. Here, we investigated how bird assemblages were structured in these
30	human-modified landscapes, ten years before the national park set out its
31	first conservation measures. We used a combination of multivariate statistics
32	and generalized additive models to describe variations in the taxonomic and
33	functional composition and diversity of 372 local bird assemblages, encom-
34	passing 20 species, along gradients of habitat composition and configuration.
35	We found that native species were tied to native habitats while exotic species
36	were associated with urban areas and man-modified landscape mosaics, with
37	some overlap at mid-elevations. Species' trophic preferences were segregated
38	along habitat gradients, but ecological traits had an overall weak role in ex-
39	plaining the composition of species assemblages. Hence, at the time of the
40	survey, native and exotic species in La Réunion formed two spatially distinct
41	species assemblages with contrasting ecological trait suites that benefited
42	from antagonistic habitat compositions and dynamics. We conclude that our
43	results support the analysis of historical datasets to establish reference points
44	to monitor human impacts on insular ecosystems.

- 45 Keywords : Insular birds, Ecological traits, Habitat changes, Mascarenes, Oce-
- 46 anic islands, Species introductions
- 47
- 48

49 **INTRODUCTION**

50

51	The Madagascan region is the smallest and the second most distinctive of the
52	world's 11 zoogeographic regions (Holt et al., 2013). Formed exclusively of
53	oceanic islands spread throughout the western Indian Ocean, it is relatively
54	species-poor but displays disproportionately high endemism rates. For in-
55	stance, 41% of the region's 382 native terrestrial bird species are regional en-
56	demics. This percentage even rises to 75% in La Réunion, the second largest
57	island of the region after Madagascar and the largest of the Mascarenes ar-
58	chipelago (Safford et al., 2015). However, assessments of human impacts on
59	insular ecosystems are deficient in the Madagascan region, even on the best-
60	studied islands such as La Réunion, hampering the establishment and evalua-
61	tion of initiatives for the conservation of insular biodiversity.

62

On oceanic islands, long-term isolation favoured the evolution of ecosystems 63 involving a low number of endemic species which support non-substitutable 64 65 ecological functions, notably in birds (Boyer & Jetz, 2014; Kaiser-Bunbury et 66 al., 2010; Sekercioglu et al., 2016). Birds' contributions to insular ecosystems 67 have been particularly well investigated in islands of the Indo-Pacific, such as 68 Hawaii (Barton et al., 2021) or New Zealand (Anderson et al., 2021). Plant-bird interactions likely to support key ecological functions are also documented in 69 70 the Madagascan region, although case studies remain local and scarce. For in-71 stance, in La Réunion, the pollination of the endemic orchid Angraecum brac-

72	teosum by the endemic Reunion olive White-eye Zosterops olivaceus recalls
73	the pollination of <i>Clermontia</i> (Lobelioideae: Campanulaceae) by endemic Ha-
74	waiian birds (Aslan et al., 2014, Micheneau et al., 2008). However, the extent
75	to which these specialized plant-bird interactions still sustain their ecosystem
76	functions in spite of the human-driven depletion of Madagascan avifaunas
77	remains unknown (Albert et al., 2020; Anderson et al., 2021; Schleuning et al.
78	2014; Sekercioglu et al., 2016).

The Madagascan region is sadly famous for its high extinction rates, especially 80 in large frugivorous birds (Heinen et al., 2017). In La Réunion, the first human 81 colonization occurred in the late 17th century, far later than in many other 82 83 tropical archipelagos. It was accompanied by novel and intense pressures 84 which led many terrestrial bird species to severe range reductions or extinction. Since then, approximately two-thirds of the island's native vegetation 85 86 has been converted for agriculture or replaced by exotic vegetation (Lagabri-87 elle et al., 2009; Mourer-Chauvire et al., 1999). Rapid habitat destructions, on top of overhunting and other pressures, were likely the most critical cause for 88 the extinction of all large vertebrates (Albert, Flores, Baider, et al., 2021), in-89 ducing ecosystem-level cascading effects in a few decades or centuries (Mou-90 91 rer-Chauvire et al., 1999; Strasberg et al., 2005; Whittaker & Fernández-92 Palacios, 2007). In particular, many of the common fleshy-fruited tree species 93 on which frugivorous birds fed declined as lowland native forests were nearly 94 eradicated (Albert et al., 2018). In turn, the extinction of frugivores, which sustained seed dispersal, amplified the decline of most fleshy-fruit plant spe-95

96 cies in the 300 years after the first European settlement (Albert et al., 2020;
97 Albert, Flores, Baider, et al., 2021). Conversely, the abundance and diversity
98 of exotic plant species now peaks close to the middle of the elevation gradi99 ent (Tassin & Riviere, 2003), and wide extents of high-altitude landscapes
100 have been converted into pastures (Strasberg et al., 2005).

101

102 Island endemic birds are characterized by low dispersal abilities, failure to cope with the lack of native food resources in human modified habitats, and 103 104 high mortality rates due to introduced mammalian predators such as cats or rats. Conversely, exotic species that establish feral populations on islands un-105 106 surprisingly exhibit ecological traits associated with ecological opportunism, use of human resources and ability to colonize novel environments (Blackburn 107 108 et al., 2009; Cassey, 2002; Duncan et al., 2003). Accordingly, the propensity of exotic bird species to invade islands from their initial introduction locations 109 110 depends on an interaction between the invasibility of non-converted native habitats and species' propensity for colonization, determined by their eco-111 logical traits and the conditions of their introduction (Alpert et al., 2000; 112 113 Blackburn et al., 2009). The introduction of exotic species has in some in-114 stances compensated, or even exceeded in number, the man-mediated extinction of native and endemic species (Sax et al., 2002; Whittaker et al., 115 2014). However, native and exotic bird species exhibit low functional redun-116 dancy, and are segregated among habitats along elevational and anthropo-117 118 genic disturbance gradients (Barnagaud et al., 2014, 2022; Fischer & Lindenmayer, 2007; Whittaker & Fernández-Palacios, 2007). 119

121	Because of their trait and habitat differences, exotic species do not usually
122	replace native species' lost ecological functions (Anderson et al., 2021; Dun-
123	can et al., 2003; Vila et al., 2011), except in idiosyncratic situations such as the
124	replacement of Clermontia's native pollinators by introduced Zosterops in Ha-
125	waii (Aslan et al., 2014, but see Pejchar, 2015 for a contrasting example on
126	seed dispersal also in Hawaii). Hence, although bird introductions increase
127	taxonomic diversity (the diversity of species) and functional diversity (the di-
128	versity of ecological traits) at the island scale (Whittaker et al., 2014), their ef-
129	fect on the composition of local species assemblages and ecosystem functions
130	remains unclear. For instance, among the 20 exotic bird species established in
131	La Réunion since the 19 th century, the Red-whiskered Bulbul (<i>Pycnonotus jo</i> -
132	cosus) is the only one known to enter native forests, thus liable to modify the
133	composition of native plant assemblages through the endozoochorous disper-
134	sal of exotic plants (Clergeau & Mandon-Dalger, 2001; Mandon-Dalger et al.,
135	1999). Although these novel mutualistic interactions are identified, the extent
136	to which they may favour plant invasions and ultimately trigger long-term
137	changes in the composition of plant communities remains unknown.

Unlike many oceanic islands with comparable sizes, the land use patterns in
La Réunion partly disentangle the distribution of native and converted habitats from altitudinal variation, offering the possibility to distinguish their respective influences on the distribution, composition and diversity of species

143 assemblages. Depending on the scale at which species respond to their environment and resources, the island's fine-grained mosaics of man-modified 144 and native vegetation may either inflate contrasts in the functional composi-145 tion of species assemblages within local habitats, or trigger biotic homogeni-146 zation at the landscape scale (Byamungu et al., 2021; Cadotte et al., 2011; 147 148 Diaz & Cabido, 2001; McGill et al., 2006). These features, concentrated on a 149 relatively small study region, makes La Réunion a particularly favourable study area to investigate the determinants of spatial variations in the composition 150 of local bird assemblages. In particular, the weak correlation between altitude 151 152 and human impact, at least up to the upper third of the elevation gradient, allows separating their respective roles on the co-occurrence or separation of 153 154 exotic and native bird species among local assemblages.

155

Building on this specificity, we investigated spatial patterns in the distribution 156 157 of bird species and their ecological traits in La Réunion, aiming to (i) describe native and exotic species' distributions along habitat and elevational gradi-158 ents, (ii) investigate the resulting distributions of ecological traits on these 159 160 gradients and (iii) assess the outcome of these pattenrs in terms of taxonomic 161 and functional diversity patterns. To our knowledge, we thus perform the first comparison of the distributions of native and exotic terrestrial bird spe-162 cies within landscapes on an oceanic island of the Madagascan biome outside 163 Madagascar. From an applied viewpoint, the unpublished data analyzed here 164 were gathered during an extensive bird point count survey conducted in the 165 austral summer 1997-98, 30 years after the last exotic bird introduction and 166

- 167 10 years before the establishment of La Réunion National Park. Our results
- 168 therefore provide a useful point of reference for a future evaluation of con-
- servation measures aimed to reduce human imprint of native ecosystems
- 170 within the national park (McNellie et al., 2020).
- 171

MATERIAL AND METHODS

173

- 174 <u>Study location</u>
- 175

La Réunion Island is a three-million years old volcanic island, part of the Mas-176 carene archipelago (Western Indian Ocean, 55°30' E and 21°05' S, Fig.1). Ad-177 ministratively, it is a french "département d'Outre-Mer", which warrants the 178 feasibility of long-term studies with the support of well-established local re-179 180 search institution and conservation stakeholders, a relatively rare feature in 181 the Madagascan region. In the centre of the island, a plateau (Plaine des Cafres, ca. 1500 m above sea level) is flanked by two volcanoes (Piton de la 182 Fournaise, 2631 m, active, and Piton des Neiges, 3069 m, extinct), descending 183 into the coastal plain with an elevation change of 2000 m in 10-30 km. This 184 topography causes a steep climatic gradient, with an average minimum 185 186 ground temperature below 0°C above 1500 m in August, above 1800 m from June to October, and above 2300 m all year round. At the highest point, the 187 annual temperature variation ranges from -10°C to +26°C (Cadet, 1974; Rau-188 net, 1991). The study area, located on the leeward side of the island, has a 189 190 slope of about 0.15 m per m and an annual rainfall ranging from 500 mm at sea level to 2000 mm on the highest mountain slopes (Raunet, 1991). The 191 192 vegetation is organized in elevational belts arranged from sea level to moun-193 tain tops. Partly orthogonal to this habitat gradient is a gradient of human habitat conversion. The original ecosystems have been modified earlier and 194

195	more intensively at low elevations; patches of native tropical mountain for-
196	ests still remain at mid elevations (NATI in Table 1, the most important re-
197	maining native forest type in terms of surface and conservation). High eleva-
198	tions are still mostly uninvaded and covered by endemic vegetation (HIER and
199	ACFO in Table 1, Albert, Flores, Ah-Peng, et al., 2021; Cadet, 1980). The main
200	habitat belts sampled in this study can roughly be categorised into coastal ur-
201	banised plains (0 - 50 m), savannah (50 - 300 m), sugarcane monoculture (300
202	- 800 m), rural landscapes with crops (800 - 1200 m), primary forest mixed
203	with pastures and planted forests (1200 - 1800 m), heathlands dominated by
204	ericaceous plants (1800 - 2600 m) and bare soils with sparse herbaceous
205	vegetation (2600 - 3069 m).

207 Bird sampling

209	A total of 410 point counts were sampled during the breeding season of aus-
210	tral summer from December 1997 to April 1998. All points were visited once
211	by one of two trained ornithologists (GB and JT), between 5.30 a.m. and 10.30
212	a.m, under favourable weather (no rain or strong wind). On each point, the
213	observer recorded all birds heard or seen in a 150 m radius during 20 min. Fly-
214	ing birds were only recorded if they were obviously related to the point (<i>e.g.</i>
215	an individual hunting within the 150 m radius). Records are expressed in
216	abundance indices following Blondel et al (1970, 1981) : single bird = 1, terri-
217	torial singing male = 2 individuals if the female was not observable.

219	We discarded 38 points due to incomplete or incoherent environmental data
220	measurements, and thus performed our analyses on 372 points, arranged in
221	two geographical clusters for practical reasons (144 on the north-western
222	cluster and 228 on the south-western cluster, Fig.1). Sampling points were
223	evenly distributed all along the elevational gradient, with a mean elevational
224	distance of 8 m between two successive elevations and a horizontal distance
225	of at least 250 m between two successive point counts. All major extant vege-
226	tation types were covered within 100 m elevational bands, with a mean sam-
227	pling effort of 12.7 point counts per band. Wetlands and dry areas such as
228	depressions, ridges and mires were avoided, as well as places too close to
229	feeding troughs in grasslands, because they attract granivorous species.

Habitat data

233	Landscape composition within a 150 m radius around each point count was
234	characterized as the proportion of the total surface covered by 15 habitat
235	categories (Table 1), quantified through the interpretation of georeferenced
236	aerial photographs acquired in November 1996 at a native 1:5000 scale. We
237	summarized habitat and elevational variation by the two first axes of a princi-
238	pal component analysis (Fig. 2, 13 and 10% of total variance for the first and
239	second components, respectively; the third component, which accounted for
240	8% of total variance, was disregarded). The first principal component (PC1)

	was dominated by elevation (higher altitudes in negative values) and ranged
242	from lowland cultivations (sugar cane, SUCA, and mixed crops, CULT) and sa-
243	vannah (SAHE, SASH) to a variety of mixed exotic and native habitats at mid-
244	elevations, replaced by endemic Acacia heterophylla-dominated forests
245	(ACFO), and ericoid shrublands (HIER) at the highest elevations. The second
246	principal component (PC2) reflected the spatial heterogeneity of local habi-
247	tats. It opposed a variety of homogeneous sites including native or exotic
248	habitats (negative values), to sites characterized by mosaic habitats with high
249	within-sites heterogeneity, mostly dominated by exotic vegetation (positive
250	values): fallows (HEFA, SHFA, ACFA), exotic thickets (EXTH), plantations
251	(CRYPT) and urban habitats (URBA).
252	
253	Species' status and ecological traits
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254	
254 255	From the 23 species recorded at least once on the point counts, we discarded
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264 logical traits that represent key phenotypical, behavioural and biogeographical characteristics, and may affect their habitat affinities: species' bio-265 geographic origin (exotic species' zoogeographic region of origin, all native 266 species belong to the Madagascan biome), main diet and dietary specializa-267 tion, main vegetation strata used for foraging and body mass (log-268 269 transformed to limit the influence of a few large values). These traits are clas-270 sical proxies of species' patterns of habitat selection, home range and re-271 source use. Their distributions among species assemblages are therefore expected to change in response to habitat filtering and competitive exclusion 272 processes, allowing to investigate the role of niche-related processes in the 273 274 separation or co-occurrence of native and exotic species in habitats. Similar 275 traits were associated with the distinct habitat preferences of exotic and native birds in a previous study focused on New Zealand (Barnagaud et al., 276 2022). 277

278

279 We used species-level trait averages synthesized from multiple sources and published in the Handbook of the Birds of the World (Del Hoyo et al., 2013, 280 281 see Appendix S1 for trait values, their computation and references therein). 282 Intraspecific trait variance may be high especially in an insular context, even for recently-established species which may diverge phenotypically from their 283 source populations in a few generations (Wiens et al., 2019). However, trait 284 285 data at the scale of local populations are currently lacking for most species in 286 La Réunion as in many other oceanic islands. We tempered this limitation by considering a limited number of traits with rather coarse resolutions, thus en-287

288	suring that they actually reflect ecological differences among species. Given
289	the low size of our species assemblage, using more traits would result in over-
290	splitting ecological variability among species, likely yielding uninterpretable
291	patterns.

Statistical analyses

295	We summarized the variation of these five traits among the 20 species in a
296	Hill & Smith analysis (an ordination method for tables mixing quantitative and
297	qualitative variables, Hill & Smith, 1976) in order to explore the ecological
298	overlaps and separations between native and exotic species. We then ex-
299	plored trait-habitat associations for the 20 species and 372 points in a three-
300	table ordination method known as the RLQ analysis (Doledec et al., 1996),
301	which links a matrix of environmental variation across sampling sites (table L,
302	based on the PCA described in the Environmental variables section) to an eco-
303	logical trait matrix (table Q, based on the Hill & Smith analysis described in
304	the "Species' status and ecological traits" section), through a sites $ imes$ species
305	matrix (table R, here a correspondence analysis on species' indices of abun-
306	dance per point, see "Bird sampling").
307	

We visually explored the RLQ space to search for trait-habitat associations that may distinguish native from exotic species, and tested the robustness of trait-habitat associations through two complementary permutation models

311 (Thioulouse et al., 2018, p.231). The first model tested the association between R and L (observed association vs 999 permutations under the null hy-312 pothesis that species are distributed randomly across sites). The second 313 model tested the association between L and Q (permutations under the null 314 315 hypothesis that traits are randomly distributed across species assemblages). 316 The robustness of the association between R and Q corresponded to the 317 highest p-value between these two tests. We then tested phylogenetic signals 318 on axes scores of the Hill & Smith analysis and RLQ analysis with Pagel's λ and Blomberg's K, as a sensitivity analysis to assess the role of species' evolution-319 ary relatedness in the observed trait-environment associations (phylogenetic 320 321 tree, details on the method and results in Appendix S3).

322

323 To investigate variations in assemblage diversity, we computed point-level species richness, Shannon's index, and functional dispersion (FDis : the aver-324 age distance of species to the centroid of each assemblage in a multivariate 325 trait space formed by the five ecological traits described above, Laliberté & 326 Legendre, 2010). We discarded other functional diversity metrics to avoid an 327 inflation of statistical tests, especially because most of them are at least partly 328 redundant. In this respect, FDis is well suited to our study since it provides an 329 intuitive and integrative measure of functional diversity compared to the 330 mean functional assemblage (i.e., the spread of species forming a local as-331 semblage in a multivariate trait space) while being computationally uncorre-332 333 lated to species richness (Laliberté & Legendre, 2010).

335	We analysed diversity indices separately for three species groups: all species,
336	native species only or exotic species only (maps of the indices in Appendix S2).
337	We used generalized additive models (GAM, Wood, 2006) to express diversity
338	indices as a function of thin plate spline smoothers of the two first principal
339	component axes of the environmental PCA (PC1 and PC2), plus a covariate
340	separating the two geographical clusters of points (locations of the two clus-
341	ters in Fig.1 ; estimates of the cluster effect are provided in Appendix S4). We
342	fitted species richness as a Poisson distribution, and Shannon's index and
343	functional dispersion as Gaussian distributions. Residuals of all models were
344	slightly structured in space, but the magnitude of the spatial autocorrelation
345	in the first orders of neighbourhood was so low (Moran's I <0.05 within a few
346	kilometers) that we did not proceed with further correction.
347	
348	We performed all analyses under the R 4.1.2 environment (R Core Team,
349	2021) with packages ade4 (Thioulouse et al., 2018), picante (Kembel et al.,

350 2014) and mgcv (Wood, 2006).

RESULTS

353

354 Trait overlap between native and exotic species

355

The two first axes of the Hill & Smith analysis summarized 23 and 16% of the 356 total trait variation among the 20 species (third axis 14%, disregarded). The 20 357 358 species were evenly dispersed in the multivariate trait space, indicating rela-359 tively low ecological redundancy and few extreme strategies with respect to the traits used (Fig.3). The first axis (HS1) separated relatively large, ground-360 foraging omnivorous species of oriental origin (e.g. Madagascar Buttonguail -361 tuni, Common Myna – actr or Red-whiskered Bulbul - pyjo ; refer to Appendix 362 S1 for scientific names) from dietary specialists (mostly native insectivores or 363 364 nectarivores : Mascarene Swiftlet - aefr, Mascarene Martin - phbo, and Reunion Stonechat - sate, and one ubiquitous exotic granivorous species, Common 365 Waxbill - esas). The second axis (HS2) separated introduced Palearctic and Af-366 rican species with seed-based regimes (Common Waxbill - esas, Common 367 Quail - coco, Village Weaver - plcu) from frugivores and insectivores, such as 368 forest-prone native species (Reunion Bulbul - hybo, and Reunion White-Eye -369 370 zool) or exotic forest species (Red-whiskered Bulbul - pyjo). Most of the over-371 lap between native and exotic species was attributable to two species, Reunion Harrier (cima, 8 occurrences in our data), the only extant endemic bird of 372 373 prey, and Malagasy Turtle Dove (stpi, 38 occurrences in our data). Species

374	scores along HS1 and HS2 did not depart from a Brownian evolution model
375	(tests of phylogenetic signal in Appendix S3).
376	
377	Native and exotic species' distributions along the elevation and habitat gra-
378	<u>dients</u>
379	
380	Native and exotic species were intertwined along the elevation gradient, but
381	natives tended to predominate at higher altitudes and were virtually absent
382	from coastal sites dominated by exotics (native species' mean elevation =
383	1395 m, sd = 478 m, range = 60 – 2880 m, Fig.4a). The Reunion Harrier (cima)
384	and the two aerial feeders (Mascarene Swiflet – aefr, and Mascarene Martin -
385	phbo) were present at lower altitudes than most native passerines. Exotic
386	species had similar elevation ranges, yet their altitudinal distribution was
387	skewed towards coastal plains (exotic species' mean elevation = 962 m, sd =
388	499 m, range = 20 – 2400 m, Fig. 4b).
389	
390	Native species tended to avoid the most human-disturbed and fragmented
391	habitats (higher counts in the negative side of PC2, Fig.4c), with the excep-
392	tions of the Reunion Harrier (cima) and the two aerial feeders that showed a
393	larger habitat range on PC2 (Mascarene Martin - phbo, and Mascarene Swift-
394	let - aefr). Exotic species living in the lowlands (positive PC1 values) also
395	tended to avoid highly fragmented and urbanized areas (<i>i.e.</i> , exotics located
396	in positive PC1 values were more abundant in negative PC2 values).

Trait-environment associations

400	Species-habitat relationships were robust to permutations of tables R and L
401	("Model 2" in Thioulouse et al., 2018, observed sum of eigenvalues = 1.6, p =
402	0.001 after 999 permutations), but not to permutations of Q and L ("Model 4"
403	in Thioulouse et al., 2018, observed sum of eigenvalues = 1.6, p = 0.07 after
404	999 permutations), indicating that ecological traits were overall not strongly
405	segregated along habitat gradients. This lack of power, in spite of clear-cut
406	patterns in Fig.5, may well have resulted from the relatively low species and
407	trait sample sizes, as from a low trait turnover along ecological gradients. For
408	instance, in the RLQ space, fruit- and nectar-eaters were strongly related with
409	native mid-elevation forests (NATI, Fig.5), but these two diets were repre-
410	sented by only one native species each (Reunion Bulbul - hybo, and Reunion
411	Olive White-eye – zool, left top corner of the RLQ space). On the opposite side
412	of the RLQ space, the only two palearctic species introduced on the island
413	(Common Quail – coco, and House Sparrow - pado) and, at higher elevations,
414	aerial feeders (Mascarene Swiftlet – aefr, and Mascarene Martin - phbo),
415	were associated with urbanized areas and Cryptomeria plantations (negative
416	coordinates along RLQ2, Fig.5). As for trait multivariate axes, the distribution
417	of species along RLQ1 and RLQ2 did not depart from a Brownian evolution
418	model (Appendix S3).

Diversity-environment associations

421

422	The GAMs showed that species richness, Shannon's index and functional dis-
423	persion varied non-linearly along PC1 (Fig.6) and to a lesser extent along PC2
424	(Fig.7). Species richness and Shannon's index exhibited hump-shaped rela-
425	tionships with PC1, with a maximum slightly shifted towards low-elevation ar-
426	eas (Fig.6a,d, positive scores), mainly due to the near-absence of native spe-
427	cies in coastal plains (Fig.6b). Inversely, exotic species richness and Shannon's
428	index decreased steadily from lower to higher elevations (Fig.6c,f, <i>i.e.</i> in-
429	creased along PC1). Total and exotic species' functional dispersion decreased
430	slightly from lower to higher elevations (Fig.6g,i), but peaked at mid-
431	elevations for native species (Fig.6h).
432	
433	Total species richness was depleted, and Shannon's index was slightly lower,
434	in homogeneous sites with either native or exotic habitats (negative PC2 val-
435	ues, Fig.7a, d), in contrast to heterogeneous sites composed of interspersed
436	exotic habitats and urban areas (positive PC2 values). Exotic species richness
437	and Shannon's index peaked at intermediate levels of PC2 before plateauing
438	(Fig.7c,f). Inversely, the highest native species richness and diversity occurred
439	in homogeneous native habitats, then declined slightly to a lower plateau
440	with high variation (Fig. 7b,e). FDis varied little along PC2 overall (Fig.7g).
441	However, native species' FDis was slightly higher in homogeneous sites with

442 native habitats (negative PC2 values in Fig.7h). Conversely, it increased slowly

- 443 towards urban areas and exotic thickets up to a plateau for exotic species
- 444 (positive PC2 values in Fig.7i).
- 445
- 446

DISCUSSION

448

449	Most native species were tied to mid-and high altitude habitats dominated by
450	indigenous vegetation, while the abundance distributions of exotic species
451	spread along a wider gradient of habitats and elevations. Although insular avi-
452	faunas tend to be composed of ecologically flexible species (Prodon et al.,
453	2002; Reeve et al., 2018), native species clearly displayed narrow niche width
454	along the two gradients studied, contrasting with the flatter abundance dis-
455	tributions of many exotic species. The discrepancy between species' habitat
456	distributions among the two guilds was therefore not as obvious as expected
457	from other comparable studies on other oceanic islands (Acevedo & Restrepo,
458	2008; Barnagaud et al., 2014; Flaspohler et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2011; van
459	Heezik et al., 2008).

460

In spite of these abundance patterns, field observations show that native spe-461 cies in La Réunion frequent a relatively wide range of native habitats (e.g. Re-462 union Stonechat or Reunion Grey White-eye, which occur from mid-elevation 463 464 forests to open scrubs at mountain tops), while the vast majority of exotic species do not divert from anthropogenic settlements and exotic habitats for 465 more than a few hundred meters, irrespective of altitude (authors' personal 466 observations). These observations conform to patterns observed on other is-467 lands (Acevedo & Restrepo, 2008; Barbaro et al., 2012; Barnagaud et al., 468 469 2014; Hahn et al., 2011; Thibault et al., 2018; van Heezik et al., 2008). Nar-

rower abundance distributions in native species thus likely reflect the reduced
availability of native habitat and resources within landscapes, while the development of agriculture on mid-altitude plateaus have provided exotic species adequate conditions for their expansion along the elevation gradient.

474

475 Converging with this niche-based interpretation, native and exotic species 476 showed distinct ecological trait syndromes and were well separated in the RLQ space. We did not detect any phylogenetic signal contributing to shape 477 478 these trait-environment relationships, which may be due to lack of statistical power, but more likely suggests that native and exotic species' distributions 479 480 along the island environmental gradients do not stem from niche conservatism alone. This pattern aligns with results obtained in New Zealand, where 481 exotic and native species also bear distinct trait syndromes and habitat pref-482 483 erences at a landscape scale (Barnagaud et al., 2022). In the case of La Réun-484 ion, trait-environment relationships were predominantly explained by the distribution of species along environmental gradients rather by than traits them-485 486 selves, suggesting that habitat barriers are independent from the traits we considered. 487

488

489 Still, we found that most frugivorous, insectivorous and nectarivorous native 490 species were associated with high elevation and native forests, and did not 491 come in contact with ground-dwelling omnivorous and granivorous exotic 492 species, which are limited to man-modified habitats. Irrespective to whether

493 or not ecological traits trigger an ecological filter, these results conform to the hypothesis that exotic species opportunistically remained confined to their 494 historical habitats of introduction (Blackburn et al., 2013; Duncan et al., 495 2003), even though successfully introduced species usually exhibit traits ena-496 497 bling them to cope with novel environments (Blackburn et al., 2009). Con-498 versely, native species may not be excluded from modified landscapes be-499 cause their ecological traits prevent them from using man-related resources, 500 but more likely due to other processes such as predation, competitive exclusion by exotic species, fine-grained ecological specialization, or preference for 501 large extents of undisturbed habitats (Parlato et al., 2015). 502 503 Native aerial feeders such as Reunion Harrier, Mascarene Swiflet and Mas-504 carene Martin had wider abundance distributions along the axis of habitat 505 506 heterogeneity and were closer to exotic species than other native species in 507 the RLQ space. These species cover large distances for foraging and thus depend less on the composition of local habitats where they were detected. 508 509 Conversely, the frugivorous Red-Whiskered Bulbul was closer to native forest species than most other exotic species in the RLQ space. This recently-510 introduced bulbul is currently restricted to ecotone areas and infrequently en-511 512 ters native forests, but it has a high propensity to fast colonization after intro-513 duction and naturalisation (Clergeau & Mangon-Dalger, 2001), enabling it to rapidly adapt to novel environments (Amiot et al., 2007). It is also well known 514 for spreading invasive exotic plant species through zoochory (Mandon-Dalger 515 et al., 1999). Hence, its possible expansion into uninvaded habitats needs to 516

be cautiously monitored since it may pose serious conservation issues for native plant assemblages, which can moreover be affected by a reduction of
their dispersal by local functional extinctions of native birds (Anderson et al.,
2021).

521

522 Diversity patterns were in line with species-level analyses. Native species reveal hump-shaped curves of diversity along the mixed elevation / habitat type 523 gradient (PC1), reflecting the higher availability of native habitats at mid-524 elevations. Meanwhile, monotonous variation in all forms of exotic species' 525 diversity was coherent with their reluctance to enter native habitats and gen-526 erally to disperse out of human settlements (Duncan et al., 2003; Sol et al., 527 2017). Interestingly, the role of habitat heterogeneity (PC2) was low for native 528 species, although they were more diverse in non-fragmented native habitats. 529 By contrast, and as expected, exotic species were clearly more diverse in habi-530 531 tat mosaics, corresponding to former forest areas converted to agriculture and urban settlements. Functional dispersion also matched these patterns, 532 533 suggesting that traits are sampled in local assemblages according to species richness rather than under the influence of strong ecological filters, in coher-534 ence with the permutation tests performed on the RLQ analysis. 535

536

537 These habitat-related patterns of assemblage composition may change in the 538 future due to continuing anthropogenic pressure on habitats, selective habi-539 tat restoration and species protection or control. At a landscape scale, modifi-540 cations of interaction networks and the emergence of new eco-evolutionary

541 processes may arise if individuals of trophically-similar species come increasingly into direct contact in the future (Lugo et al., 2012). Given our results, 542 this threat is however unlikely in the current avifauna of La Réunion, unless 543 recently-introduced species, such as the frugivorous Ring-necked Parakeet 544 Psittacula krameri in 1972 (currently subjected to eradication campaigns, Ca-545 546 ceres et al., 2022) or the Red-billed Leiothrix (Leiothrix lutea, Tassin & Rivière, 547 2001), manage to establish feral populations in native habitats. Once estab-548 lished, these novel colonisers might unpredictably create novel speciesresource interactions through e.g. zoochorous seed dispersal (Anderson et al., 549 2021), as is currently the case for the red-whiskered bulbul in La Réunion. Fur-550 551 thermore, elevational shifts in bird ranges could ultimately cause thermal 552 squeezes in response to climate change (Freeman et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2019). However, historical records on species distributions are still insufficient 553 to document such long-term dynamics and the resulting assemblage-level 554 modifications that would reflect potential thermal squeezes. In the case of La 555 Réunion, our study was based on the oldest protocoled survey of bird com-556 557 munities with sufficient sample size and spatial coverage, making it a potential point of reference for future diachronic studies focused on the effects of 558 559 habitat or climate changes (McNellie et al., 2020).

560

561 *Conclusion*

562

563 As on other islands, the avifauna of La Réunion is not a single "novel" species assemblage (Lugo et al., 2012), but consists of two distinct species assem-564 blages separated by local habitat, which merge together at the landscape 565 scale mostly around mid-elevations where sufficient amounts of native habi-566 tats persist within an otherwise man-modified matrix. Apart from the specific 567 568 case of the Red-whiskered Bulbul, which could still be undergoing a positive 569 colonization dynamic, recent field observations did not suggest substantial 570 changes in this segregation pattern. However, La Réunion habitats and landscapes have changed in the 25 years since our data collection, due to the con-571 flicting effects of increasing anthropogenic pressures and efforts to preserve 572 573 wide expands of native habitats in the National Park. Replicating our field pro-574 tocol may allow a quantitative, landscape-level overview of the consequences of these changes for the composition of bird assemblages. Given the high 575 pace of ecosystem-level changes experienced on oceanic islands and its con-576 sequences for endemic insular biodiversity, we suggest that long-term studies 577 578 and surveys become a priority for local conservationists and stakeholders. We 579 also advocate in favour of further analysis of historical datasets on other islands, including still unpublished data wherever they exist, to increase the 580 581 availability of reference points enabling the evaluation of conservationoriented policies in protected areas, especially when established on insular 582 583 ecosystems.

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TABLES

Table 1. Habitat types used in the study and acronyms. Native habitats were mostly

811 composed of NATI, HIER, ACFA, and to a lesser degree ACMI. The Elevation column indicates

- 812 the elevational barycenter of each habitat, weighted proportionally to the surface covered
- 813 by this habitat on each site. Figures in brackets give the altitudinal range of each habitat.

Label	Variable	Туре	Mean ± sd [range]	Elevation (m)
ELEV	Elevation (m)	Quantitative	1202.3 ± 649.2 [20, 2880]	
ACFA	Acacia mearnsii-dominated fallows		12.4 ± 29.2 [0, 100]	1263 [640, 2070]
ACMI	Degraded native forest mixed with Acacia mearnsii	_	0.4 ± 4.2 [0, 70]	1746 [1510, 2880]
NATI	Native mid-elevation forest (« Bois de couleurs »)	_	12.9 ± 31.9 [0, 100]	1398 [620, 2540]
HIER	High-elevation ericoid thickets	_	9.3 ± 28.9 [0, 100]	2377 [1620, 2880]
SUCA	Sugar cane fields	_	14.7 ± 34.2 [0, 100]	593 [250, 1010]
CRYPT	Plantations of <i>Cryptomeria</i> <i>japonica</i> (conifer)	Proportion in 150 m around	4.9 ± 15.8 [0, 94]	1025 [320, 1680]
CULT	Cultivated land	 each sampling Point 	4.6 ± 20.6 [0, 100]	189 [60, 320]
EXTH	Thicket of exotic species	(expressed in %)	5.8 ± 13.4 [0, 72]	1239 [350, 2010]
HEFA	Herbs-dominated fallow		0.3 ± 2.7 [0, 39]	1415 [770, 2010]
SHFA	Shrubs-dominated fallow	_	10.7 ± 25.1 [0, 100]	1120 [320, 1505]
PAST	Pasture	_	5.9 ± 21.6 [0, 100]	1583 [630, 1960]
SASH	Mixed savanna-shruland	_	3.7 ± 18.6 [0, 100]	125 [20, 230]
SAHE	Savannah (herbs)	_	3.8 ± 19.6 [0, 100]	64 [20, 170]
ACFO	Monodominant forests of Acacia heterophylla	_	9.3 ± 28.4 [0, 100]	1637 [1400, 2560]
URBA	Urbanized area		1.4 ± 5.7 [0, 46]	1118 [320, 1670]

816 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

817

818 **Figure 1.** Location of La Réunion island (a) and sampling design (b). The 38 red crosses depict

points removed from the analysis due to missing data. Background layer: elevation raster

820 (Jarvis et al., 2008)

821

822 **Figure 2.** Projection of the 372 bird point counts on the first two axes of a principal

823 component summarizing habitat and elevational variation on the study area (a) ; maps of

principal components values : PC1 (b), PC2 (c). See acronyms for habitat types in Table 1.

825 Background layer: elevation raster (Jarvis et al., 2008)

826

827 **Figure 3.** The ecological trait space of 22 bird species based on five ecological traits

828 (biogeographic origin, main diet, dietary specialization, foraging vegetation strata and log-

transformed body mass), with convex hulls separating native (N) and exotic (E) species.

830 Species' acronyms are defined in Appendix S1.

831

Figure 4. Count density of the 22 native and exotic species recorded in the survey along the elevation gradient (a) and the two first axes of the principal component analysis on habitat variables (b,c) (no density curve for Blue-breasted Quail *Synoicus chinensis* since it occurred only once in the dataset).

836

Figure 5. Trait-environment associations in a RLQ space (projection of habitat variables in (a),
traits in (b), with exotic and native species' convex hulls). See acronyms for habitat types in
Table 1.

Figure 6. Variation of species richness (SR), Shannon's index (Shannon) and functional
dispersion (FDis) along a principal component axis synthesizing an elevational gradient
associated with spatial turnover in vegetation types (PC1, native vegetation at higher
elevations in negative values, exotic vegetation in lowlands in positive values). From left to
right: all species, native species, exotic species.

846

Figure 7. Variation of species richness (SR), Shannon's index (Shannon) and functional
dispersion (FDis) along a principal component axis synthesizing habitat heterogeneity within
sampling sites (PC2, homogeneous sites in negative values, heteregeneous sites showing
mosaics of native and anthropogenic habitats in positive values). From left to right: all
species, native species, exotic species.

852 853

854 **Plate 1.** The diversity and spatial structure of habitats in La Réunion island. (a) Background: 855 exotic savannas, and sugar cane crops at low elevation, middle ground: mosaics of exotic 856 thickets, woodlands along cliffs, foreground: mid-evelation mosaics of pastures and fallows. 857 Sub-urban and urban habitats are present at all elevation levels. (b) Background: slopes of the Piton des Neiges massif (3070 masl) covered with high elevation ericoid thickets, mid-858 859 ground: pastures in the central mid-elevation plain and mosaic of exotic plantations and native forests on higher ancient craters, foreground: native ericoid thickets on the lower 860 slopes of the Piton de la Fournaise massif (2646 masl). (c) View of a steep high cliff in the 861 862 center of the island with native forest of variable stature depending on local slope. All photographic credits (c) Jean-Yves Barnagaud 863

864

865	Plate 2. Some common native and exotic species represented in our data: (a) Reunion
866	Harrier (cima, native), (b) Reunion Bulbul (hybo, native), (c) Reunion White-Eye (zool,
867	native), (d) Reunion Stonechat (sate, native), (e) Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher (tebo,
868	native), (f) Common Myna (actr, exotic), (g) Zebra Dove (gest, exotic), (h) Red-whiskered
869	Bulbul (pyjo, exotic), (i) Village Weaver (plcu, exotic). All photographic credits (c) Paul-
870	Alexandre Leclerc.
871	
872	DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT
873	
874	The data and R scripts related to this study are archived on Recherche Data Gouv
875	(<u>https://entrepot.recherche.data.gouv.fr/</u>) : doi:10.57745/BFEXCE
876	
877	COMPETING INTERESTS STATEMENT
878	
879	The authors declare no competing interests.
880	
881	AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS
882	
883	JYB* : contributed to the conceptual development, designed the methodological framework,
884	performed the analyses, co-led the writing.
885	OF* : contributed to the conceptual development, compiled the data and performed data
886	exploration and initial analyses, co-led the writing.
887	GB – YI : conceived the original idea, designed the protocol and performed the fieldwork, led
888	exploratory analyses, contributed to the writing.
889	LB [*] : compiled the data, contributed to the conceptual and methodological development, co-led the
890	writing.

** contributions considered as equal.*

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901	information systems. A linguistic proofreading was performed by Gayle & Ralph Padgett.
902	Photographic credits: Jean-Yves Barnagaud (Plate 1) and Paul-Alexandre Leclerc (Plate 2).
002	





907 Figure 1.

















918 Figure 4.



920 Figure 5.



923 Figure 6.











934 SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

- 936 APPENDIX S1 : Species list and ecological traits
- 937 APPENDIX S2 : Maps of bird diversity
- 938 APPENDIX S3 : phylogenetic tree and tests of phylogenetic signal
- 939 APPENDIX S4 : Complements to models

APPENDIX S1 : Species list and ecological traits

				Biogeographic		Foraging		Dietary
Acronym	Species	Common names	Status	origin	Main diet	vegetation	Body mass (g)	specializatio
				ong		strata		n
actr	Acridotheres tristis	Common Myna	Exotic	Oriental	Omnivore	ground	117.9	1.581
aefr	Aerodramus francicus	Mascarene Swiftlet	Native	Madagascan	Invertebrat e	aerial	9.7	3.536
cima	Circus maillardi	Reunion Harrier	Native	Madagascan	Vertebrate	ground	638.5	3.151
сосо	Coturnix coturnix	Common Quail	Exotic	Palearctic	Seed	ground	104.4	2.816
esas	Estrilda astrild	Common Waxbill	Exotic	Afrotropical	Seed	understory	7.8	3.536
foma	Foudia madagascarien	Red Fody	Exotic	Madagascan	Seed	canopy	16.3	2.550

	sis							
frpo	Francolinus pondicerianus * removed from analyses (only 2 occurrences)	Grey Francolin	Exotic	Oriental	Omnivore	ground	291.4	1.389
gest	Geopelia striata	Zebra Dove	Exotic	Oriental	Seed	ground	55.8	3.536
hybo	Hypsipetes borbonicus	Reunion Bulbul	Native	Madagascan	Fruit	canopy	54.4	2.375
lopu	Hypsipetes borbonicus * removed from analyses (only one occurrence)	Scaly-breasted Munia	Exotic	Oriental	Seed	understory	14.2	2.816

mama	Margaroperdix madagarensis	Madagascar Partridge	Exotic	Madagascan	Seed	ground	235.0	2.375
	Passer							
pado	domesticus	House Sparrow	Exotic	Palearctic	Seed	ground	28.6	2.816
	Perdicula							
peas	asiatica	Jungle Bush Quail	Exotic	Oriental	Seed	ground	69.5	2.816
	Phedina				Invertebrat			
phbo	borbonica	Mascarene Martin	Native	Madagascan	e	aerial	21.0	3.536
	Dia anna							
	Ploceus							
plcu	cucullatus	Village Weaver	Exotic	Afrotropical	Seed	understory	37.7	2.816
	Pycnonotus							
рујо	jocosus	Red-whiskered Bulbul	Exotic	Oriental	Omnivore	canopy	28.3	1.581
sate	Saxicola tectes	Reunion Stonechat	Native	Madagascan	Invertebrat e	understory	12.7	3.536

stpi	Nesoenas picturatus	Malagasy Turtle Dove	Native	Madagascan	Seed	ground	173.5	2.816
sych	Synoicus chinensis * removed from analyses (only one occurrence)	Blue-breasted Quail	Exotic	Oriental	Omnivore	ground	39.6	1.753
tebo	Terpsiphone bourbonnensis	Mascarene Paradise Flycatcher	Native	Madagascan	Invertebrat e	canopy	11.1	3.536
tuni	Turnix nigricollis	Madagascar Buttonquail	Exotic	Madagascan	Omnivore	ground	68.8	2.315
zobo	Zosterops borbonicus	Reunion Grey White-Eye	Native	Madagascan	Invertebrat e	understory	8.1	2.121
zool	Zosterops olivaceus	Reunion White-Eye	Native	Madagascan	Nectar	understory	9.4	2.375

941 **Sources:** Status, biogeographic origin : Safford et al., 2015 ; Main diet and dietary specialization : Barnagaud et al., 2019 (main diet based on the maximum

942 score over 10 dietary items scored from 0 to 10; specialization is the standard deviation of these scores; raw scores from Del Hoyo et al. 2013, available

943 upon request ; not displayed by the data owner's request); Foraging vegetation strata and body mass from Del Hoyo et al. 2013.

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See main text for the traits underlying functional dispersion. Total species pool : eight native
species, 14 exotic species (22 species). Background layer : elevation raster (Jarvis et al., 2008).

APPENDIX S3 : Phylogenetic tree and tests of phylogenetic signal

958 Methods

- 959 We constructed a phylogeny of the 20 species with a composite of bird phylogeny established by
- 960 Prum et al. (2015) and a maximum clade credibility tree computed from 10,000 iterations of the
- 961 Hackett backbone (Jetz et al., 2012, downloadable at www.birdt ree.org, "Stage 2 Hackett
- 962 Backbone"), following the method of Cooney et al. (2017) also used in Barnagaud et al. (2022). We
- 963 then tested for phylogenetic signal on species' scores on the axes of the Hill & Smith and RLQ
- 964 analyses using Pagel's λ and Blomberg's K, assuming a Brownian evolution model (Phylocom R
- 965 package, Revell 2012).

966

967 <u>Results</u>

Table S3.1. Phylogenetic signals on the axes of the Hill & Smith analysis (HS1, HS2) and RLQ analysis(RLQ1, RLQ2).

	Pagel's λ			Blomberg's K		
Variable	λ	$LR(\lambda = 0)$	p-value	К	p-value	
HS1	0.28	0.35	0.55	0.68	0.03	
HS2	0.64	1.84	0.17	0.62	0.04	
RLQ1	0.97	3.73	0.05	0.71	0.01	
RLQ2	6.77x10 ⁻⁵	-0.0006	1	0.23	0.07	

970 Phylogenetic indices are computed with the function phylosig in the phylocom R package

971 (Revell 2012). We assumed a Brownian motion evolutionary model. LR = likelihood ratio test.

972 The p-value associated with Blomberg's K is based on 1000 permutations.

973



- 974
- 975 Figure S3.1. Phylogenetic tree of the 20 species.
- 976
- 977
- 978

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APPENDIX S4 : Complements to generalized additive models

- 996 Table S4.1. Estimated differences in bird diversity between the two geographical clusters (see Fig.1 in the main text for the locations and spread of the two
- 997 clusters). The table displays estimated marginal species richness for the two clusters with 95% confidence intervals for the three response variables (SR =
- 998 species richness, H' = Shannon's Index, FDis = functional dispersion) and the three species guilds. Model details are provided in the main text.

	Guild	North-Western cluster			South-Eastern cluster			
Response		Estimate	lower bound	upper bound	Estimate	lower bound	upper bound	
SR	All species	4.09	3.44	4.87	3.64	3.1	4.28	
SR	Native species	1.52	1.13	2.05	1.32	0.99	1.76	
SR	Exotic species	2.36	1.9	2.95	2.07	1.69	2.54	
H'	All species	1.08	0.92	1.23	0.97	0.82	1.12	
H'	Native species	0.32	0.18	0.46	0.23	0.1	0.37	
H'	Exotic species	0.54	0.4	0.68	0.5	0.37	0.63	
FDis	All species	0.26	0.23	0.3	0.24	0.21	0.27	
FDis	Native species	0.07	0.04	0.11	0.05	0.02	0.08	
FDis	Exotic species	0.17	0.13	0.21	0.15	0.11	0.18	

999