

EXTINCT BIRDS OF THE WORLD

#4 THE BOURBON CRESTED STARLING

Fregilupus varius



BIURBON CRESTED STARLING
Chromolithograph from
EXTINT BIRDS
by Lionel Rothschild

The Bourbon Crested Starling was discovered in 1669 and first described 1783 by Dutch naturalist Pieter Boddaert. It was named for its conspicuous ash grey crest. It reached a length of 30cm. The grey-brown wings had a wingspan of 47cm. The tail was 11.4cm long and was of a rufous hue. It had long yellow legs with tarsi of about 3.9cm. The nails were distinctly curved. The head, neck, and abdomen were white. There were obvious visual variations between male and female. The male had a 4cm long light-yellow coloured bill which was slightly down-curved. The bill of the female was smaller and straight. The crest of the male was directed forwards, the crest of the female backwards. Because of the crest and the form of the bill it was long regarded as relative of

the Hoopoes by scientists, and its French name *Huppe* was derived from that. Boddaert named it *Hupupa varia* when he first described it, but naturalist Rene-Primevere Lesson put it in its own genus *Fregilupus* in 1831. However, after careful analysis of skeletons it was reclassified as a member of the starling family in 1874.

The Bourbon Crested Starling was endemic to the Island of La Reunion (which was named Bourbon until the 1790s); therefore the name "Bourbon" describes the place where the species lived rather than the colour of its crest.

Its habitat consisted of mostly swamp forests and mountainous coastal forests. The diet consisted of insects, grain, and fruits. Nothing is known about its reproduction, courtship, nesting habits, clutch size, or incubation period. The decline of the Bourbon Crested Starling is recorded in letters of 19th century naturalists. The main reason for its extinction was the introduction of rats, but the introduction of the Indian Mynah (*Acridotheres tristis*) for the purpose of combating locusts also caused a dramatic drop in the population. Human hunters then sealed its fate. Because it fed on coffee berries, and was apparently quite tasty, this easily hunted bird became increasingly rare during the 1830s. The last known specimen was shot in 1837.



INDIAN MYNAH
Photo: J. M. Garg

Reference: *Wikipedia*—the free encyclopaedia