



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Madagascar Comprehensive III

3rd to 23rd November 2016

Trip Report



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Scaly Ground Roller by Arthur Grosset/www.arthurgrosset.com

Trip report by tour leader Adam Walley

Tour Summary

Our group gathered in Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar. We headed out for our first birding excursion to Lac Alarobia, a small wetland and RAMSAR site located within the heart of this densely populated city. We were greeted by large numbers of Red-billed Teal and White-faced Whistling Duck; while the heronry on the island in the middle of the lake was teeming with Dimorphic Egrets and Squacco Herons. We quickly scoped up two Malagasy Pond Herons sitting on nests, an endangered species. Other birds we recorded here were Black Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Cattle and Great Egret, Common Moorhen, Malagasy Kingfisher and a rather unexpected Red-knobbed Coot. Moving on to the second lake, we were very pleased to observe 11 Meller's Duck, another endangered species that seems to be doing well on this lake. Also here were Hottentot Teal and a White-throated Rail that showed extremely well. There were Malagasy Brush Warbler and Malagasy Swamp Warbler in the same bush for nice comparisons. We also recorded our first Malagasy Kestrel, Malagasy Coucal, Mascarene Martin, Malagasy Bulbul, Common Jery, Malagasy White-eye and Red Fody. *A very relaxing and productive start to our Madagascar birding!*



Meller's Duck by Arthur Grosset

After breakfast, we loaded into four wheel drive vehicles, headed through the Tana traffic and drove east to the town of Andasibe. We made good time and arrived for lunch. A fruiting tree on the lodge grounds offered up exceptional views of Madagascan Blue Pigeon and Madagascan Green Pigeon; while the evocative wailing of the Indris beckoned in the forest. Shortly after lunch, we headed the short distance to Analamazoatra Reserve. The parking lot was a busy place for birds and we tallied some great species: Malagasy Harrier Hawk, Malagasy Green Sunbird, and best of all, a soaring Cuckoo Roller – a bird so unique that it has been placed in its own order! We then headed into the forest and almost immediately found a Red-fronted Coua walking quietly along on the forest floor. Also here was a rufous-colored Rainforest Scops Owl at an eye-level daytime roost. *Superb!* A Giraffe-necked Weevil here was also much enjoyed.



Giraffe-necked Weevil by Arthur Grosset

Not much further along, our incredible local guide had a special treat for us – a Red-breasted Coua sitting on its nest up in a *Pandanus*. This scarce coua can be very hard to catch up with here, so this really was a treat. After another short walk, our guide beckoned us up a hill where he had uncovered a pair of sensational Collared Nightjar roosting under a *Pandanus* – seeing this so quickly and effortlessly, it is easy to forget that this is one of the most poorly known birds in the country.

We soaked in the unbeatable views of the Collared Nightjars for a long time! We then carried on further up the hill and at the top, we were greeted by the incredible Indris! We

enjoyed seeing the largest extant lemur as much as hearing their amazing vocalisations. But we were soon called away to intercept a group of Diademed Sifakas swooping through the forest. It looked like we would only see them disappearing, fortunately, David spotted one feeding quietly at eye level, and we could all soak in incredible views of this species, which many consider to be the most beautiful of all the lemurs.

Once we were satiated with this, we returned to the Indri for some more viewing. We then departed the reserve, but not before enjoying some terrific views of a stunning little male Madagascan Flufftail! Outside of the reserve proper were a few Common Brown Lemurs and then our guide had one final treat for us – a Madagascan Owl staring down at us from high up in the pines. It took a while before we could find a good angle on the bird, but we were eventually able to get good scope views. *The highlights had certainly come hard and fast this afternoon!* After dark, we headed out for a short night walk, which was very successful in giving us exceptional views of an Eastern Woolly Lemur, good views of Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur, and only a distant view of a Goodman’s Mouse Lemur. We also saw our first chameleon (a Nose-horned Chameleon), and our first bright-eyed frog: *Boophis viridis*.



Collared Nightjar by Arthur Grosset



Diademed Sifaka by Arthur Grosset

We had some rain overnight and it was still raining as we ate our early breakfast. We boarded our four-wheel-drives and drove the bumpy track to Mantadia National Park. The rain wasn’t going anywhere and so we decided to seek shelter at the picnic area. We had to content ourselves with watching common birds like Madagascan Magpie Robin and Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher until we finally got enough of a break in the rain to venture into the forest. We spent some time in the forest with the rain coming through in waves. The birds were active, but viewing conditions were quite difficult. We did see a number of interesting vangas: uncommon species like Nuthatch, Tylas, and Ward’s Vanga in particular. A pair of Wedge-tailed Tetraka were also seen well. One upside of the rain was that some interesting frogs emerged, including a stunning Marbled Rain Frog. There was also a leech or two to be seen!?!

Our main target for the morning was supposed to be ground rollers, but the rain ruined any chance of finding them. Things really were not looking promising at all for these birds as we ate our lunch in the shelter, however, the meal was abruptly interrupted as our guide came running and shouting “Ground Roller!” Indeed, there was a stunning Scaly Ground Roller standing on the ground



in the open, not a minute's walk away, and it was very well behaved, allowing prolonged views for everyone! Finishing our lunch, we scoped up a Green Jery and decided to continue looking for ground rollers. After a long and drawn out search for Short-legged Ground Roller, where the bird would call once every half-hour or so, we eventually pinpointed the tree the bird was in. Thanks to a great spotting by Russ, we had walkaway views of a pair of these arboreal ground rollers sitting beside each other outside their presumed nest entrance in a bird-nests fern. *Wow!*

We returned to the vehicles in heavy rain, a few people even seeing their third ground-roller of the day, a Pitta-like, flying across the road. It was late now and we had a long drive back to the lodge. It had been a challenging, but ultimately very rewarding day, and now it was time to enjoy a hot shower, dry things out and savour a good meal!



Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog by Arthur Grosset

It continued to rain overnight, but eased as we headed out on another early morning drive to the glorious forests of Mantadia National Park. We headed along a different trail this morning. The rain had ended but the forest was still very wet and it was hard work! Our first bird of the morning was a cooperative Dark Newtonia. After a long, quiet stretch walking up a ridge, we eventually connected with a good look at Forest Rock Thrush and then an excellent encounter with a male Common Sunbird-Asity. We also had some good encounters with Indri and Diademed Sifaka again! Dropping back off the ridge, we tried some other forest trails and after a lot of searching, we finally tracked down a beautiful Pitta-like Ground Roller. Now the sun started to show itself and the forest started drying out and waking up as new species came in fast and furious: Blue Coua, Greater and Lesser Vasa Parrot (in the same tree for a rare comparison!), Chabert, Blue and Tylas Vanga, Madagascar Cuckooshrike, stunning White-throated



Short-legged Ground Rollers by Arthur Grosset

Oxylabes, Wedge-tailed, Spectacled and even Grey-crowned Tetraka, and Nelicourvi Weaver! As if that wasn't enough, non-bird sightings in this busy session included Eastern Bamboo Lemur and Red-bellied Lemur, Madagascar Girdled Lizard, bright yellow *Aglyptodactylus* frogs, and best of all, a stunning Baron's Mantella Frog. After lunch, we visited a small pond and had a most productive session. The pond itself had a single Madagascan Grebe, along with a pair of Meller's Duck. Madagascan Spinetails and Mascarene Martins showed very well as they flew overhead. The forest surrounding the pond had Ward's Vanaga and a lovely male



Cuckoo Roller that came in and landed for a time. As we walked back to the vehicle, we had, in quick succession, three great birds: Madagascar Starling, a breeding male Forest Fody - showing very well, and then two super cute Madagascar Pygmy Kingfishers. *Great stuff!*



Forest Fody by Arthur Grosset

On our way out of the park, we tried a couple of spots for Madagascar Rail. We drew a blank but did have some more Madagascar Starling. The third time was the charm for the rail, as the next marshy area we tried gave us great views of this secretive species feeding in a relatively open area. *Fantastic!* With another long and productive day in the books, we headed back to the lodge.

A slightly more relaxed start to our final day in the area had us spending the morning at Analamazoatra Reserve. Actually, birding started in the lodge car park where we scoped up a Rand's Warbler and a Stripe-throated Jery singing to each other from the

top of the same tree. These two birds are in different families, but sound very similar and it is not uncommon for them to do this! Once inside the reserve, we hit the trails for the morning with just a small target list of species to track down. We started off very well, with excellent views of a female Crossley's Vanga, a most unusual yet attractive vanga!

Soon after, we connected with a wonderful pair of Madagascar Wood Rails. We then had our best yet encounter with Indris as their piercing calls penetrated the air. Once again, Diademed Sifakas were nearby and showed very well!

Much of the rest of the morning was spent crisscrossing trails in search of Madagascar Ibis. We failed in finding this increasingly difficult bird, but for some, a female Velvet Asity was a solid consolation prize. A nice flock gave good looks at Red-tailed, Blue, and Nuthatch Vanga, Spectacled and Long-billed Tetrakas, and Nelicourvi Weaver. Leaving these amazing forests behind, we had lunch and then drove out to Torotorofotsy Marsh, or more realistically, the sad remnant of the once impressive marsh. We had to walk a long way through rice paddies to get to anything resembling a marsh, but once there, we did find several Madagascar Snipe - showing well in flight and very briefly on the ground on one occasion. After some searching, we had great views of a pair of Grey Emutail. Returning to the vehicles, we could only hope that some restraint would be shown here and that the entire marsh wouldn't disappear. During our night walk tonight, we had good success in finding the usual nocturnal lemurs (Eastern Woolly and Furry-eared Dwarf), plus four species of chameleons: Short-horned, Band-bellied, Nose-horned and Parson's, along with a few interesting frogs.



Verreaux's Sifaka by Robin Carle





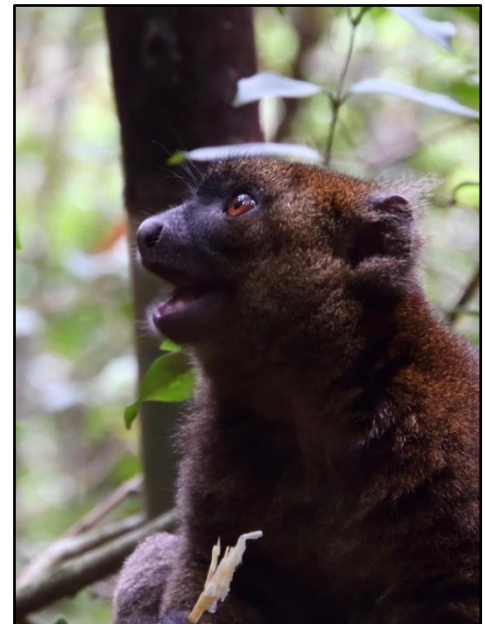
Madagascan Rail by Arthur Grosset

Our next day was a travel day. We had an early start and an uneventful drive to Tana airport. Our flight south to Toliagnaro was on time and upon arrival, we boarded our vehicle and stopped at a scenic overlook along the coast. It was very windy and while enjoying magnificent views of the Indian Ocean, we were pleased to have two “Madagascan” Kelp Gulls come flying past at very close range! We carried on to our pleasant hotel and enjoyed a delicious dinner.

We started out early down the rutted road to the rarely visited Andohahela National Park. We made good time and arrived in very pleasant weather as we entered the southernmost lowland rain forest in Madagascar. Once we arrived at the primary forest, we began searching for our main quarry here, the poorly known Red-tailed Newtonia. It took some time, but we eventually got a response and a pair of these seldom seen birds came in, offering good views! We carried on to a stream crossing and stopped to admire some undescribed *Mantidactylus* frogs before turning around. Pausing again at our Red-tailed Newtonia site, the bird came in silently and at eye level, offering really exceptional viewing! We made our way back to the vehicle and continued on the long drive to Berenty Reserve. After a rest, we set out into the gallery forests for some easy walking and great wildlife watching! The famous Ring-tailed Lemurs were the first to greet us and made a strong impression. However, as the afternoon wore on, it was the Verreaux’s Sifakas that really stole the show; in particular, a group of youngsters that were busy having a most amusing tussle!

Late in the afternoon, we set the scope up on the nest of a Madagascan Cuckoo Hawk, a special opportunity to study this rarely encountered raptor. Shortly after that, we scoped up a White-browed Hawk Owl at its day roost! Other good finds during our walk included Crested Coua, Madagascan Hoopoe, an impressive pair of Hook-billed Vanga, and a couple of nice finds in the parking lot: a very busy colony of Sakalava Weaver and a beautiful Dumeril’s Boa. As the sun set, we headed a short distance into the bizarre spiny forest for a night walk. We encountered many White-footed Sportive Lemurs, a few Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs, and a Warty Chameleon.

We now had a full day to explore the wonderful Berenty Reserve. We started out in the early morning by searching an area of spiny forest and sisal plantation. We were hoping to encounter Madagascan Sandgrouse here, unfortunately, our luck was not in with that species. We did see several Madagascan Buttonquail and had good looks at Frances’ Sparrowhawk, Madagascan Cuckoo, Madagascan Cisticola and the distinctive *pallidior* subspecies of



Greater Bamboo Lemur by Robin Carle





Indri by Arthur Grosset

Brush Warblers, several Grey-headed Lovebirds and a couple of cryptically coloured roosting Madagascan Nightjars. Amongst several interesting reptiles, the noteworthy were Spider Tortoise, Three-eyed Lizard, Sakalava Velvet Gecko and Modest Hog-nosed Snake. Returning to the lodge, we did another night walk, this time in the gallery forest. Highlights of tonight's walk were Painted Big-headed Gecko, White-browed Hawk Owls, Western Big-footed Mouse, White-footed Sportive Lemur and a very brief glimpse at a Grey Mouse Lemur.

After breakfast, we set off back down the potholed national highway towards Toliagnaro. En route, we were very pleased to have good views of a pair of Running Coua - standing around quite happily on a track through the spiny forest. Eventually, we arrived in town, stopping to buy and consume vast quantities of lychees on the way.

We had lunch and headed to the airport. As we were unloading our bags, an unexpected sighting was a Peregrine Falcon swooping down to dive bomb a cat! Our flight was again on time and by mid-afternoon, we were boarding another set of four-wheel-drive vehicles and heading north out of Toliara. We stopped at the wetlands north of town, where we observed Little Grebe, Hottentot Teal, Black-winged Stilt, Kittlitz's and Common Ringed Plover and Curlew Sandpiper. A very pleasant surprise here was seeing a few Greater Painted Snipe, including a very colourful female which flew right past us. We continued on our way north and checked into our beachside hotel, just in time to get settled in and watch the sun set over the Indian Ocean. As we ate dinner, we were joined by a Grey Mouse Lemur pair that were feeding in a bush right beside our table – in fact, they would join us for all our meals. *The best dinner guests ever!*

We now had a highly anticipated day of birding the wonderful spiny forests of Park Mosa, home to a long list of localised birds! We started out early and made our way down the trails. We quickly found Thamnornis

Stripe-throated Jery. We returned to the lodge for a delicious breakfast and a leisurely walk through the gallery forest. Here we again enjoyed the lemurs, and saw a number of roosting owls: a great look at a Torotoroka Scops Owl, a couple of White-browed Hawk Owl and also a pair of Barn Owl. We also enjoyed excellent looks at Giant Couas.

We visited the famous Madagascan Flying Fox roost and had great looks at these large fruit bats. There was also a chance to revisit the Cuckoo Hawk nest, and it again showed well. Following lunch and a siesta, we headed out into some spiny forest. We quickly found Subdesert



Ring-tailed Lemur by Robin Carle



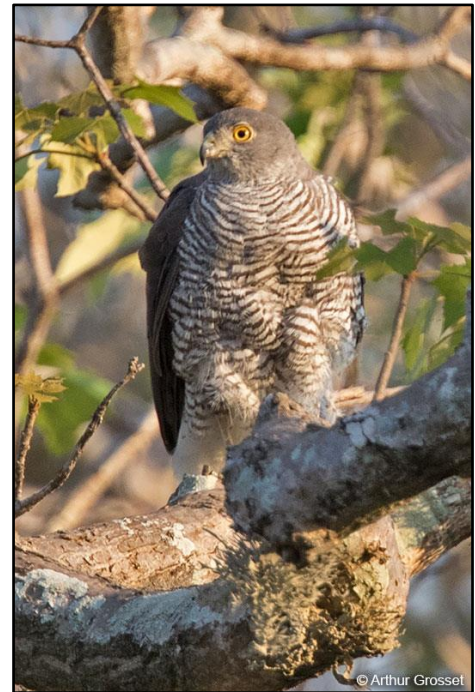
and Archbold's Newtonia, both giving us good views as they sang their hearts out. A little further along, we were thrilled to find an adult Madagascan Sparrowhawk feasting on a freshly killed bird (buttonquail?), giving us superb views!

We then visited the nest of a Madagascan Harrier-Hawk, which permitted great views and then saw a pair of Sickie-billed Vanga, one of the more unique birds in the country. Having already had an excellent morning for raptors, we were slightly shocked to have a Madagascan Cuckoo Hawk come flying low over our heads and then land out on an exposed perch. *Wow!*

Next up, our guides had another treat for us – a female Subdesert Mesite sitting motionless in a bush, glowering down at us and allowing us to gaze for as long as we pleased!

We then did quite a bit of crisscrossing throughout the intricate trail system here and this paid off as we saw two more specialities, Running Coua and Lafresnaye's Vangas sitting motionless on their respective nests. It had been quite the morning in the spiny forest, but we saved the best for last, as our final birds before leaving the forest were a pair of the outrageous Long-tailed Ground Rollers, one bird showing unbelievably well, almost at our feet!

What a morning, and it wasn't over yet! We headed out to the salt flats and set about searching the vast area. Eventually, we tracked down the now-rare Madagascan Plover for a great view, and were able to study a number of other shorebirds as well: White-fronted and Kittlitz's Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Greenshank and Ruddy Turnstone. With the heat of the day well upon us, it was time to return to our beach hotel for lunch and a siesta. In the afternoon, we returned to the forest for a more leisurely walk and a bit more time to soak in this incredible habitat. We did have a couple more things to see, and we found them: an *olivaceiceps* Red-capped Coua, a fantastic pair of Madagascan Buttonquail on the deck,



**Madagascan Sparrowhawk by
Arthur Grosset**



Giant Coua by Arthur Grosset

and two excellent mammals. The first was a "Black-shouldered" Sportive Lemur, an as yet unnamed lemur that is apparently only known from this small forest; the animal we watched was holding its baby in its mouth. The second was a fabulous Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec, initially rolled up into a tight ball and then eventually walking around on the ground. *It had been a day to remember!*

Another early start saw us heading back to Toliara and boarding our speedboat (via ox-carts!) for the day. We set off southwards along the coast in slightly choppy conditions and paused under the San Augustin cliffs. Here we were very pleased to find a Humblot's Heron standing out on the cliff.





**Torotoroka Scops Owl by
Arthur Grosset**

We carried on to Nosy Ve and located the tern/plover roost from the boat. Landing at a strategic spot, we were soon enjoying great views of 25 Crab-Plover, a monotypic family! Also present here were many Lesser Crested Tern, and a few Great Crested and Roseate Tern. We carried on and enjoyed the island's most famous inhabitants – the Red-tailed Tropicbirds – displaying in the air and nesting under bushes. *Great stuff!* Some of us then headed out snorkelling; while others stayed on the island for some extra time with the tropicbirds. Everyone had a productive time, the snorkellers were pleased with the amount and diversity of coral and with a bit of patience, many species of reef fish revealed themselves!

We then made the short crossing across to Anakao and tracked down a couple of male Littoral Rock Thrushes for really nice views. It was now time for a leisurely lunch at our beachside restaurant, and then the boat ride back to Toliara. After freshening up in our hotel, we headed out to La Tabla for some final birding for the day. It wasn't long after starting that we were called into the thorn scrub and were soon enjoying exceptional views of the fairly recently described Red-shouldered Vanga, basically at our feet. A pair was sitting motionless on or near the ground, the female was actually running on the ground!

Returning to the vehicles, we tracked down the distinctive call notes of Verreaux's Coua, and soon had this subtly beautiful coua showing very well at the top of a bush. *Another very good day in the books!*

We started out early at a watering hole near Toliara in the hopes that some sandgrouse would come in to drink. It was not to be, but we did see many Grey-headed Lovebirds and Namaqua Dove drinking, and watched lots of Malagasy Black Swifts and Mascarene Martins flying overhead. We then set out on the scenic drive eastwards along route 7, where thorn scrub and spiny forest give way to deforested, though scenic, country. Eventually, we arrived at one of the last stands of the once widespread transitional forest – Zombitse National Park. We wasted no time and headed straight into the forest trails and were soon feasting our eyes on Appert's Tetraka, now one of the most range-restricted birds in the world. We carried on for a leisurely walk, getting brief views of Coquerel's and Giant Couas, admiring enormous baobabs, and then watching some Verreaux's Sifaka. Our final sighting was a lovely Hubbard's Sportive Lemur staring at us out of his roosting cavity!



Madagascan Nightjar by Arthur Grosset



We then enjoyed a picnic lunch and continued on down the road to our stunning hotel set amongst the sandstone country of Isalo National Park. We enjoyed some down time here, although we were rather surprised to have it interrupted by a heavy rain storm that passed through rather quickly. We then gathered up and headed out into the grasslands. We had barely started our search when we struck luck and flushed a female Madagascan Partridge! We continued walking but saw little of note, so we headed back towards the lodge. We had just started driving when a male Madagascan Partridge walked casually across the road and spent the next minute or so walking along the road edge. *Wow!* A few more thunderstorms passed through in the evening and we enjoyed a great dinner.

We now had a long travel day, although not before tracking down a *bensoni* Forest Rock Thrush singing from the hotel roof. We had just started down the road when we stopped the bus for a good look at a Sooty Falcon. We also stopped further along for a road-crossing Oustalet's Chameleon. Otherwise, the drive through to Ranomafana National Park was long and fairly unremarkable, but we made good time and arrived at the other end before dark, settling in for our time here.



**Madagascan Cuckoo Hawk by
Arthur Grosset**

A late change to flight schedules left us with only one full day to explore Ranomafana National Park, one of the finest parks in the country. With a lot of challenging birds to find in one day, we had our work cut out for us – happily, we had a very successful day! We started early and headed to Vohiparara and slowly started the gradual climb to the high point of the trail. We quickly encountered a mixed flock which had Madagascan Cuckooshrike, Nelicourvi Weaver, and an all too brief Pollens' Vanga. As the flock wandered off, our attention was drawn to the beautiful song of the elusive Brown Emutail. Fortunately, some playback worked wonders and we soon had the bird circling the tape and climbing up into the bamboo to ward off its would-be intruder. *A delightful bird when seen this well!* Carrying on, we enjoyed some good looks at White-headed and Red-tailed Vanga.



Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher by Arthur Grosset

Then we heard the distant calls of a pair of Brown Mesite. After a mammoth effort from our local guides, one of the pair was seen really well walking parallel to the trail! At the high point of the trail, we enjoyed success as we had great looks at Cryptic Warbler. We then heard the high-pitched calls of Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity and eventually tracked the bird, a female, down for really nice looks. We soon realised she was in the process of nest-building and so from the right vantage point, we could watch her coming and going from her large nest. We watched this for a while, but were then drawn away by the whooping call of a Rufous-headed Ground Roller. We put in



a lot of time on this shy bird and were ultimately rewarded with views for everyone, a good result, although not the last word on this species! Really happy with our successes, we wandered back down the hill and bumped into another mixed flock, this one had a more cooperative Pollen's Vanga, a male that most people got a look at. We also enjoyed some Red-fronted Brown Lemurs and searched all over for the really elusive Madagascan Yellowbrow, but in the end, we only heard a few calls. It was now time to enjoy a picnic lunch and head along to the Belle Vue area. We spent the afternoon slowly walking through this hilly terrain and had some great sightings. First off was a sleeping Golden Bamboo Lemur, high up in the giant bamboo. Next up was a pair of Greater Bamboo Lemur that were initially also way up high, but then came right down to the ground to feast on some large bamboo shoots. It was a memorable experience, although we were shocked to learn that these were apparently the last two of the species left in the national park – this is one of the rarest mammals in the world. As we continued our walk, we saw a few more birds: Crossley's Vanga, Pitta-like Ground Roller and some terrific herps. A large Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko was a notable highlight! Not long before leaving the park, we finally connected with a stunning male Velvet Asity and it eventually gave sensational views – so much so that it was ultimately voted bird of the trip! It had been a very long and successful day, but was not quite over, as we now headed out on a night walk. First off, we admired a Rufous Mouse Lemur at point blank range, licking banana off a roadside tree. We then turned our attention to herps, and found no less than four species of chameleons: Blue-legged, O'Shaugnessy's, Band-bellied and Nose-horned, along with several species of frogs. A Greater Dwarf Lemur also made a brief appearance before we finished up our memorable day.



Running Coua by Arthur Grosset



Long-tailed Ground Roller by Arthur Grosset

We had a long travel day ahead, but decided to squeeze in an early morning visit to Vohiparara. It was a good decision as we had some rewarding sightings. First off, a short but brisk walk brought us to a point where we intercepted a fast-moving Milne-Edwards Sifaka. Watching it quickly swoop through the branches was a terrific experience. Further along, we had a really nice encounter with some attractive Red-bellied Lemurs. And as a final highlight, we found a very cooperative Rufous-headed Ground Roller that offered up some excellent viewing. But now it really was time to get going on the long drive to Tana. We encountered some interesting obstacles

along the way: road-paving, a big truck stuck in the mud leaning precariously, and then some rather unexpected hailstorms with fierce winds! Despite all this, we were still making reasonable time until our



bus engine died on us. Fortunately, it happened near the city of Antsirabe and we were able to find a replacement in fairly short time, but it was still quite late when we made it to Tana.



Subdesert Mesite by Arthur Grosset

After a few long days, it was nice to have a lie-in and leisurely breakfast before heading to the airport for our final flight of the trip – on time once again! We arrived in the city of Mahajunga, checked into our pleasant hotel, and then headed out to the Sacred Lake on the outskirts of town. Rather surprisingly, the lake was completely dry, and there were just a handful of herons picking at the dirt. A nice bonus was three African Openbills feeding on snails. We also, finally, had a long overdue good sighting of Madagascan Mannikin! With not much more to see here, we watched the sun set on the city waterfront and called it a day.

We now headed out to the Betsiboka Delta in a speedboat. We arrived at the mangrove area just at high tide, and had to wait an hour or so before the tide started falling. As we waited, we found a roost of 55 Terek Sandpipers, and had brief flight views of a Humblot's Heron. As the tide began to fall, herons, shorebirds and flamingos appeared to feed on the exposed mud. Best of all, a Malagasy Sacred Ibis showed well as it joined the feeding bonanza. The expected Bernier's Teal did not appear, so we spent a couple of hours checking and rechecking all the likely locations. We saw several more Sacred Ibis, but inexplicably, the teals were nowhere to be found and sadly, we had to leave without seeing them. The crossing back was short but fairly lively with the wind having kicked up.

We had lunch back at our hotel and then headed out for the drive to Ampijoroa National Park, with some of the best protected dry forests left in the country. Here we were greeted by a family of delightful Coquerel's Sifaka feeding low in the bushes of the main camp area. We settled into our basic accommodations set within this lovely and wildlife-rich setting and after the sun set, we embarked on a short night walk. It was a productive walk and we scored three species of nocturnal lemur: Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur, Grey Mouse Lemur, and several excellent looks at the recently described Golden-brown Mouse Lemur. We also saw Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bat, Western Tuft-tailed Rat and Oustalet's Chameleon. A most impressive thunder and lightning show accompanied our walk.



Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec by Arthur Grosset





Red-tailed Tropicbird by Arthur Grosset

hyperactive baby. They gave us a great performance.

We soon found a Red-capped Coua that performed well. We then stopped under a nest that was being used by a Banded Kestrel. We could only see the tail and a wing – not exactly the most satisfying sighting. As we pondered what to do, a second kestrel arrived on an open perch, at which point the bird sitting on the nest joined it. The first bird passed a chameleon to the second and the two sat out in the open for as long as we wanted, munching on chameleon. *Wow!* Not long after this, we found a pair of Coquerel's Coua for good looks. As they eventually moved off, we noticed a Rufous Vanga sitting on a nest, allowing great views. As we were watching this, we heard the endangered Van Dam's Vanga calling and were soon admiring a pair of these often tricky birds. *What a flurry of activity!*

We continued to criss-cross various trails and were fortunate to bump into a Madagascan Ibis at very close range, although only about half the group was able to get a visual on it as it wandered the forest floor. We then had lunch and some downtime during the heat of the day, a highlight of this period was admiring a very recently fed Madagascan Ground Boa sunning itself on the ground. Mid-afternoon saw us heading off to Lac Amboromalandy in search of jacanas. After a bit of a walk and a lot of scanning, we came up empty-handed and disappointed. So we returned to Lac Ravelobe and boarded our boat for a late afternoon cruise. A few minutes later, we were thrilled to be watching a Madagascan Jacana. We then carried on our way for a peaceful cruise around the lake, getting good views of a critically endangered Madagascan Fish Eagle. Other highlights of this very pleasant cruise were Malagasy Pond Heron and Nile Crocodile. During dinner that night, we heard the loud screeches of Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemurs, and some of us went out and tracked them down for a look.



Humblot's Heron by Arthur Grosset



We had one more full day in Ampijoroa and started it off early in an attempt to track down our last big target, the White-breasted Mesite. We quickly had success with this and had good looks at a pair. Later in the morning, we had even better looks at a different pair as they walked around on the forest floor and gave us a duet. *Great stuff!* We carried on for a leisurely walk, enjoying some of the more common birds and finding a pair of Western Woolly Lemurs at their day roost. Back at the main camp, we uncovered a few more surprises, including an Oustalet's Chameleon and a pair of roosting Mauritius Tomb Bats. We had a long siesta and lunch, with more Ground Boa watching and plenty of other reptiles as well. After lunch, we embarked on a short walk through the forest around Lake Ravelobe. We had another memorable encounter with White-breasted Mesites. We paused at two gigantic baobab trees, one of which was adorned with a Sickle-billed Vanga nest. We were also stopped in our tracks by a gorgeous Giant Hog-nosed Snake that slowly crossed the trail. We then carried on down to the lakeshore itself, where we finally caught up with a Three-banded Plover and also connected with Allen's Gallinule. We returned to camp and did one last night walk. It was quiet for lemurs, with just a single Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur, but we did have a good look at a Western Tuft-tailed Rat. The main highlight, however, was a massive Common Tenrec that was suddenly standing right at our feet. *Wow!* We also enjoyed several Rhinoceros Chameleons before heading back to camp for the night.



White-headed Vanga by Arthur Grosset



Crossley's Vanga by Arthur Grosset

Our penultimate day was a long driving day from Ampijoroa to Tana. On the first part of the drive, we scoured a couple of rocky rivers for a last chance at Madagascan Pratincole. No luck, but then we were surprised to have one flying right beside the bus as we transited over some grassland. *Success!* We continued on the long drive, scouring the grasslands for a Malagasy Harrier – no dice. We made pretty good time and arrived at our Tana hotel, located in the city centre. We had a very nice final dinner.

The morning saw us enjoy a leisurely breakfast before we headed to the airport and went our separate ways. A massive thanks goes out to all our amazing Malagasy guides who really made this trip special. And thanks to such a great group – lots of great birds in the field and lots of laughs around the dinner table. *Happy Days!!!*



Annotated List of Birds

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). 2016. IOC World Bird List (v 6.1)

Key to abbreviations:

E: an endemic species

NE: a near-endemic species (i.e. occurring in the Malagasy region only)

BE: a breeding endemic species

I: an introduced species

Conservation Status

CR: critical **EN:** endangered **VU:** vulnerable **NT:** near-threatened

Ducks & Geese Anatidae

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

Abundant at Lac Alarobia and a pair at Lac Ravelobe..

Meller's Duck (E) (EN) *Anas melleri*

An impressive count of 11 at Lac Alarobia with another pair at Mantadia.

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha*

Abundant on Lac Alarobia.

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*

Several on Lac Alarobia and also at the wetlands near Toliara.

Guineafowl Numididae

Helmeted Guineafowl (I) *Numida meleagris*

Large flocks in the fields around Berenty.

NOTE: This African species was introduced to Madagascar by early colonists.

Pheasant's & Allies Phasianidae

Madagascan Partridge (E) *Margaroperdix madagascarensis*

We saw two birds at Isalo. First we flushed a female from grassland and then had a male on the road.

Grebes Podicipedidae

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Common at the Toliara wetlands.

Madagascan Grebe (E) (VU) *Tachybaptus pelzelni*

Good views of a single bird at Mantadia NP.

Flamingos Phoenicopteridae

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopus roseus*

Four birds at the Betsiboka Estuary.

Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopus minor*



Guy had one at the Betsiboka Estuary.

Tropicbirds Phaethontidae

Red-tailed Tropicbird

Phaethon rubricauda

Good viewing at Nosy Ve – lots of displaying birds and several adults and chicks sitting on nests under bushes.

Storks Ciconiidae

African Openbill

Anastomus lamelligerus

A group of three birds feeding on snails at the dry Sacred Lake.

Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae

Malagasy Sacred Ibis (NE) (EN)

Threskiornis bernieri

Good views of about six birds at the Betsiboka Estuary..

Glossy Ibis

Plegadis falcinellus

A handful at Lac Ravelobe.

Madagascan Ibis (E)

Lophotibis cristata

A single bird was seen running along the forest floor at Ampijoroa by about half the group. Race *urschi*.

Hérons Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

This species was plentiful at Lac Alarobia.

Striated Heron

Butorides striatus

Scattered sightings along the route. Race *rutenbergi*.

Squacco Heron

Ardeola ralloides

Abundant at Lac Alarobia and Lac Ravelobe.

Malagasy Pond Heron (BE) (EN)

Ardeola idea

Two or three birds sitting on nests at Lac Alarobia and another at Lac Ravelobe.

Western Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

A widespread and commonly encountered species at wetlands and rice paddies throughout. A massive breeding colony behind our accommodations at Ampijoroa was most impressive.

Grey Heron

Ardea cinerea

A few seen, including nesting birds at the San Augustin cliffs

Humblot's Heron (E) (EN)

Ardea humbloti

A single bird at the San Augustin cliffs. Another briefly in flight at the Betsiboka Estuary and a third bird at Lac Ravelobe.

Purple Heron

Ardea purpurea

A few at Lac Ravelobe and elsewhere.

Great Egret

Ardea alba

Commonly encountered in rice paddies/wetlands throughout the island.



Black Heron*Egretta ardesiaca*

Common at Lac Alarobia and a few at Lac Amboromalandy.

Dimorphic Egret*Egretta dimorpha*

Commonly seen in some areas, especially Lac Alarobia (white morphs) and the Betsiboka Estuary (dark morphs).

Hamerkop Scopidae**Hamerkop***Scopus umbretta*

Singletons or pairs were occasionally seen in rice paddies throughout.

Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae**Madagascan Harrier-Hawk (E)***Polyboroides radiatus*

We had several sightings. The best was of birds at the nest site at Ifaty. We had further sightings at Analamazoatra, Mantadia, the Betsiboka Estuary and Ampijoroa.

Madagascan Cuckoo-Hawk (E)*Aviceda madagascariensis*

A really good tour for this scarce species. We had an occupied nest at Berenty that we visited on both days offering good viewing and then even better views at Ifaty of a bird flying low overhead and perching out in the open.

Frances's Sparrowhawk (NE)*Accipiter francesii*

We had widespread sightings of this bird, best views came at Berenty.

Madagascan Sparrowhawk (E) (NT)*Accipiter madagascariensis*

Excellent views of an adult feeding on a freshly killed prey item at Ifaty.

Yellow-billed Kite*Milvus aegyptius*

Commonly seen in the open areas of the country.

Madagascan Fish Eagle (E) (CR)*Haliaeetus vociferoides*

We had flight and perched views of this critically endangered bird at Lac Ravelobe.

Madagascan Buzzard (E)*Buteo brachypterus*

Seen at numerous locations with the best views at Ampijoroa and Ranomafana.

Mesites Mesitornithidae**White-breasted Mesite (E) (VU)***Mesitornis variegata*

We encountered three pairs at Ampijoroa, all of which showed very well. A fantastic experience.

Brown Mesite (E) (VU)*Mesitornis unicolor*

Thanks to the efforts of our local guides we had good views of a pair at Ranomafana.

Subdesert Mesite (E) (VU)*Monias benschi*

Memorable views of a female in the spiny forest at Ifaty.

Flufftails Sarothruridae**Madagascan Wood Rail (E)***Canirallus kioloides*

Good views of a pair at Analamazoatra.

Madagascan Flufftail (E)*Sarothrura insularis*

Really excellent views of a male at Mantadia NP.



Rails & Gallinules Rallidae**Madagascan Rail (E) (VU)***Rallus madagascariensis*

Excellent views at a Mantadia marsh where a bird fed out in the open.

White-throated Rail (E)*Dryolimnas cuvieri*

Excellent views at Lac Alarobia with additional birds at Mantadia and Lac Ravelobe.

Allen's Gallinule*Porphyrio alleni*

One bird in tall grass at Lac Alarobia.

Common Moorhen*Gallinula chloropus*

Common at Lac Alarobia and another pair at Mantadia.

Red-knobbed Coot*Fulica cristata*

One on Lac Alarobia.

Buttonquails Turnicidae**Madagascan Buttonquail (E)***Turnix nigricollis*

Excellent views of a pair at Ifaty, with additional sightings at Torotorofotsy Marsh and Berenty.

Crab Plover Dromadidae**Crab-plover***Dromas ardeola*

A very nice encounter with 25 birds roosting on Nosy Ve.

Avocets & Stilts Recurvirostridae**Black-winged Stilt***Himantopus himantopus*

A few sightings in the western part of the country.

Plovers Charadriidae**Grey Plover***Pluvialis squatarola*

Two seen on Nosy Ve.

Common Ringed Plover*Charadrius hiaticula*

Seen at the Toliara wetlands and the Betsiboka Estuary.

Madagascan Plover (E) (VU)*Charadrius thoracicus*

Excellent views on the salt flats near Ifaty.

Kittlitz's Plover*Charadrius pecuarius*

Several at the Toliara wetlands and near Ifaty.

Three-banded Plover*Charadrius tricollaris*Good views on our last afternoon at Lac Ravelobe. This race *bifrontatus* is a good candidate for future splitting.**White-fronted Plover***Charadrius marginatus*

Seen near Ifaty and on Nosy Ve.

Greater Sand Plover*Charadrius leschenaultii*

Several at the Betsiboka Estuary.

Painted Snipe Rostratulidae**Greater Painted-Snipe***Rostratula benghalensis*

We were pleased to see about four birds at the Toliara wetlands, including a good view of the more brightly colored female.

Jacanas Jacanidae

Madagascan Jacana (E) (NT)

Actophilornis albinucha

After striking out on our first two attempts to see this bird we were very pleased to watch one walking on the shoreline of Lac Ravelobe.

Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae

Madagascan Snipe (E) (VU)

Gallinago macrodactyla

We had good flight views of at least five birds at Torotorofotsy Marsh.

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

Seen at Ifaty, Nosy Ve and the Betsiboka Estuary.

Common Greenshank

Tringa nebularia

Just a single bird near Ifaty.

Terek Sandpiper

Xenus cinereus

An impressive high tide roost of 55 at the Betsiboka Estuary.

Common Sandpiper

Tringa hypoleucos

A few seen along the route.

Ruddy Turnstone

Arenaria interpres

A few seen near Ifaty and at Nosy Ve.

Curlew Sandpiper

Calidris ferruginea

Good numbers in the Ifaty area and hundreds at the Betsiboka Estuary.

Pratincoles Glareolidae

Madagascan Pratincole (BE)

Glareola ocularis

Very distant views of a single bird at the Mangoro River was much improved upon by a couple of birds in flight on the long drive to Tana at the end of the trip.

Gulls & Terns Laridae

Kelp Gull

Larus dominicanus

Two birds seen at very close range along the Toliagnaro seafront. This race, *melisandae*, is ripe for splitting.

Greater Crested Tern

Thalasseus bergii

At least four birds roosting out on Nosy Ve.

Lesser Crested Tern

Thalasseus bengalensis

Large numbers roosting at Nosy Ve and a few more seen well at the Betsiboka Estuary.

Roseate Tern

Sterna dougalli

Three birds in a fishing flock of terns offshore from Nosy Ve. Few records from this part of the country.

Pigeons & Doves Columbidae

Rock Dove (I)

Columba livia



Malagasy Turtle Dove (NE)*Nesoenas picturata*

Recorded at numerous sites during this tour.

Namaqua Dove*Oena capensis*

Common in the drier areas like Berenty, Ifaty, and Ampijoroa.

Madagascan Green Pigeon (NE)*Treron australis*

Our best views were the single bird in the fruiting tree of our Andasibe lodge upon arrival. Our only others were at Ampijoroa NP.

Madagascan Blue Pigeon (E)*Alectroenas madagascariensis*

Several excellent views at our Andasibe lodge, also seen at Mantadia and Ranomafana.

Cuckoos, Couas & Coucals Cuculidae**Malagasy Coucal (E)***Centropus toulou*

Seen or heard almost every day.

Crested Coua (E)*Coua cristata*Many were seen at Berenty and Ifaty, where the local race *pyropyga* is quite distinctive and split off by some. We also saw the more widespread race *dumonti* at Ampijoroa NP.**Verreaux's Coua (E) (NT)***Coua verreauxi*

We had a really nice encounter with one in the thorn forest near Toliara.

Blue Coua (E)*Coua caerulea*

Regularly seen in the eastern rainforests.

Red-capped Coua (E)*Coua ruficeps*We saw the brown-capped *olivaceiceps* at Ifaty, prominently perched on an octopus tree. We had several good views of the nominate *ruficeps* race at Ampijoroa NP. Quite possibly two species involved here.**Red-fronted Coua (E)***Coua reynaudii*

One of our first birds seen at Analamazoatra. We went on to have another excellent sighting at Ranomafana.

Coquerel's Coua (E)*Coua coquereli*

Brief views at Zombitse were much improved upon by the views at Ampijoroa.

Running Coua (E)*Coua cursor*

Good views of a pair after leaving Berenty, with another on the nest at Ifaty.

Giant Coua (E)*Coua gigas*

This impressive species gave us excellent views at Berenty, with another brief view at Zombitse.

Red-breasted Coua*Coua serriana*A single bird sat on its nest at Analamazoatra in a *Pandanus*.**Madagascan Cuckoo (BE)***Cuculus rochii*

Heard almost daily throughout the tour, we only had a single sighting at Berenty!

Barn Owls Tytonidae**Western Barn Owl***Tyto alba*

A roosting pair at Berenty and a couple in flight at night around Ampijoroa.

Typical Owls Strigidae

Torotoroka Scops Owl (E)*Otus madagascariensis*

Great views of a day roosting bird at Berenty. Another at night at Ampijoroa.

Rainforest Scops Owl (NE)*Otus rutilus*

A very close look at a roosting bird at Analamazoatra.

White-browed Hawk-Owl (E)*Ninox superciliaris*

We saw three roosting birds at Berenty and had another two at night there.

Madagascan Owl*Asio madagascariensis*

A roosting bird high up in a pine at Andasibe.

Nightjars Caprimulgidae**Collared Nightjar (E)***Caprimulgus enarratus*

Excellent views of a pair roosting in Analamazoatra.

Madagascan Nightjar (NE)*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*

Seen or heard regularly with our best looks coming at Berenty.

Swifts Apodidae**Madagascan Spinetail (NE)***Zoonavena grandidieri*

Several seen at Mantadia.

African Palm Swift*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*

A few sightings at Isalo, Ranomafana and Mahajunga. A bird at Ranomafana was observed on the nest.

Alpine Swift*Tachymarptis melba*

Robin had some in flight near Tana.

Malagasy Black Swift (NE)*Apus balstoni*

Birds seen in flight near Toliara, Zombitse and Ranomafana.

Little Swift*Apus affinis*

A few in Tana.

Cuckoo-Rollers Leptosomidae**Cuckoo Roller (NE)***Leptosomus discolor*

A wonderfully unique order, we heard it commonly, saw it in display flight regularly and had a perched male at Mantadia.

Rollers Coraciidae**Broad-billed Roller***Eurystomus glaucurus*

Regular encounters with the best looks at Ampijoroa and Berenty.

Ground Rollers Brachypteraciidae**Short-legged Ground Roller (E) (VU)***Brachypteracias leptosomus*

Excellent views of a pair near their nest at Mantadia!

Scaly Ground Roller (E) (VU)*Geobiastes squamigera*

Great views at Mantadia, also near its nest!



Pitta-like Ground Roller (E)*Atelornis pittoides*

We saw this stunning bird at both Mantadia and Ranomafana.

Rufous-headed Ground Roller (E) (NT)*Atelornis crossleyi*

We saw this bird on both days at Vohiparara. Brief views on the first try and then exceptional close range views on the second morning.

Long-tailed Ground Roller (E) (VU)*Uratelornis chimaera*

Exceptional views in the Ifaty spiny forest!

Kingfishers Alcedinidae**Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher (E)***Ispidina madagascariensis*

Really good views of a pair in Mantadia, with another at Analamazoatra.

Malagasy Kingfisher (NE)*Alcedo vintsioides*

Regularly seen at wetlands and rice paddies.

Bee-eaters Meropidae**Olive Bee-eater***Merops superciliosus*

Seen in small numbers on several days.

Hoopoes Upupidae**Madagascan Hoopoe (E)***Upupa marginata*

Several good observations – Berenty, Ifaty and Ampijoroa NP.

Falcons Falconidae**Malagasy Kestrel (NE)***Falco newtoni*

A common raptor across the country.

Banded Kestrel (E)*Falco zoniventris*

Excellent views of this tricky species at Ampijoroa. A bird was mostly obscured on its nest, but then flew off to join a second bird that landed nearby and fed it a chameleon. The two birds then sat around in the open for some time.

Sooty Falcon*Falco concolor*

Good views of a bird in flight at Isalo NP and perched views of an immature bird at Ampijoroa.

Peregrine Falcon*Falco peregrinus*

One attacking a cat at Toliagnaro airport and two at the San Augustin cliffs.

Parrots Psittacidae**Grey-headed Lovebird (E)***Agapornis canus*

These wonderful little parrots were seen at Berenty, Ifaty, Toliara, and Ampijoroa.

Greater Vasa Parrot (NE)*Coracopsis vasa*

We recorded this heavyweight parrot at Mantadia, Ranomafana, and Ampijoroa.

Lesser Vasa Parrot (NE)*Coracopsis nigra*

Recorded at several sites, and seemingly more common than the previous species.

Broadbills Eurylaimidae

Velvet Asity (E)*Philepitta castanea*

We struggled with this one getting only brief views of females at Mantadia and Analamazoatra. Finally we scored a cooperative male in the late afternoon at Ranomafana and it was ultimately voted bird of the trip!

Schlegel's Asity (E) (NT)*Philepitta schlegeli*

We had some great viewing of these at Ampijoroa. A male and female showed very well in the vicinity of their nest and two more males also arrived on scene. The facial coloration of these is just amazing!

Common Sunbird-Asity (E)*Neodrepanis coruscans*

We saw just a single male, at Mantadia. Fortunately it was well behaved and gave us some great viewing.

Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity (E) (VU)*Neodrepanis hypoxanthus*

We found a female at the upper reaches of Vohiparara and watched her building a nest!

Vangas Vangidae

Red-tailed Vanga (E)*Calicalicus madagascariensis*

Seen in Mantadia, Analamazoatra, and Ranomafana.

Red-shouldered Vanga (E) (VU)*Calicalicus rufocarpalis*

We had exceptional views of a pair at La Tabla, very low to the ground.

Hook-billed Vanga (E)*Vanga curvirostris*

We saw this a few times at Berenty and again at Ampijoroa.

Lafresnaye's Vanga (E)*Xenopirostris xenopirostris*

A female sat on the nest at Ifaty and a very brief bird at La Tabla.

Van Dam's Vanga (E) (EN)*Xenopirostris damii*

A pair showed very well at Ampijoroa.

Pollen's Vanga (E) (NT)*Xenopirostris polleni*

Two sightings at Ranomafana.

Sickle-billed Vanga (E)*Falculea palliata*

Excellent views at Ifaty and Ampijoroa.

White-headed Vanga (E)*Artamella viridis*

Best views came at Ranomafana, with further sightings at Analamazoatra and Ampijoroa.

Chabert Vanga (E)*Leptopterus chabert*

Regularly sightings of this widespread vanga.

Blue Vanga (NE)*Cyanolanius madagascarensis*

We saw this lovely vanga at Analamazoatra, Ranomafana and Ampijoroa.

Rufous Vanga (E)*Schetba rufa*

Excellent views of a male sitting on the nest at Ampijoroa.

Tylas Vanga (E)*Tylas eduardi*

We saw this at Mantadia and Ranomafana.

Nuthatch Vanga (E)*Hypositta corallirostris*

A pair high up at Mantadia, and then better views at Analamazoatra.

Dark Newtonia (E)*Newtonia amphichroa*

Good views at Mantadia, with another more briefly at Ranomafana.

Common Newtonia (E)*Newtonia brunneicauda*

A widespread species that was recorded in most woodland habitats.



Archbold's Newtonia (E)*Newtonia archboldi*

Good views of a single bird in the spiny forest at Ifaty.

Red-tailed Newtonia (E) (VU)*Newtonia fanovanae*

A pair of this highly localised and rarely seen species was watched for some time at eye level at Andohahela NP.

Ward's Flycatcher (E)*Pseudobias wardi*

Several birds seen at Mantadia.

Crossley's Vanga (E)*Mystacornis crossleyi*

Good views of a female at Analamazoatra and another at Ranomafana.

Cuckooshrikes Campephagedae**Madagascan Cuckooshrike (NE)***Coracina cinerea*

We saw this at Mantadia, Analamazoatra and Ranomafana.

Drongos Dicruridae**Crested Drongo (NE)***Dicrurus forficatus*

This widespread species was seen almost every day.

Monarchs Monarchidae**Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher***Terpsiphone mutata*

A common and stunning species, we recorded both colour morphs at most woodland and forested sites, including multiple birds sitting on nests at Ampijoroa.

Crows & Jays Corvidae**Pied Crow***Corvus albus*

Common over dry woodland and grassland habitats, seen often on our travel days.

Larks Alaudidae**Madagascan Lark (E)***Mirafra hova*

This species was common in dry open or grassy habitat.

Bulbuls Pycnonotidae**Malagasy Bulbul (NE)***Hypsipetes madagascariensis*

Recorded almost every day of the tour.

Swallows & Martins Hirundinidae**Mascarene Martin (BE)***Phedina borbonica*

Regular sightings in open country.

Brown-throated Martin*Riparia paludicola*

A few in the Andasibe area.

Barn Swallow*Hirundo rustica*

A few in the Ifaty area.



Reed Warblers & Allies Acrocephalidae

- Malagasy Brush Warbler (NE)** *Nesillas typical*
Regular sightings and a common voice of thickets in the rainforest and plateau areas.
- Subdesert Brush Warbler (E)** *Nesillas lantzii*
Good views at Berenty and Ifaty.
- Madagascan Swamp Warbler (E)** *Acrocephalus newtoni*
Seen at Lac Alarobia, Mantadia and near Toliara.

Grassbirds & Allies Locustellidae

- Brown Emutail (E)** *Bradypterus (Dromaeocercus) brunneus*
Good views of this skulker at Vohiparara.
- Grey Emutail (E)** *Amphilius (Dromaeocercus) seebohmi*
Great views of a pair at Torotorofotsy Marsh.

Malagasy Warblers Bernieridae

- White-throated Oxylabes (E)** *Oxylabes madagascariensis*
We had excellent views at Mantadia.
- Long-billed Bernieria (E)** *Bernieria madagascariensis*
Seen in Mantadia, Zombitse, Ranomafana and Ampijoroa.
- Cryptic Warbler (E)** *Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*
Good views of a couple birds at Vohiparara.
- Wedge-tailed Jery (E) (NT)** *Hartertula flavoviridis*
Several nice sightings at Mantadia and Ranomafana.
- Thamnornis (E)** *Thamnornis chloropetoides*
A couple birds showed well in the spiny forest near Ifaty and sang their hearts out.
- Spectacled Tetraka (E)** *Xanthomixis zosterops*
The common rainforest tetraka, we saw it numerous times at Mantadia, Andohahela and Ranomafana.
- Appert's Tetraka (E) (VU)** *Xanthomixis apperti*
This delightful and highly range-restricted species was seen well in Zombitse NP.
- Grey-crowned Tetraka (E)** *Xanthomixis cinereiceps*
A young bird seen well at Mantadia and then briefer views of adults at Ranomafana.
- Madagascan Yellowbrow (E)** *Crossleyia xanthophrys*
A tricky species, we only heard some brief calls at Ranomafana.
- Rand's Warbler (E)** *Randia pseudozosterops*
A couple birds at Andasibe, including one counter singing with a Stripe-throated Jery. A good look at another one at Andohahela.

Cisticolas & Allies Cisticolidae

- Common Jery (E)** *Neomixis tenella*
Widespread and common throughout the tour at most sites. Some of these forms look and sound pretty unique, especially the southern *debilis* race.



Green Jery (E)*Neomixis viridis*

Good views at Mantadia, with others heard there and at Ranomafana.

Stripe-throated Jery (E)*Neomixis striatigula*

Seen at Mantadia and at Berenty and Ifaty. These two forms, *sclateri* and *pallidior*, seem highly distinct in terms of habitat preference, vocalizations and appearance.

Madagascan Cisticola (NE)*Cisticola cherinus*

A common species in open grassland and scrubby habitats throughout the tour.

White-eyes Zosteropidae**Malagasy White-eye (NE)***Zosterops maderaspatanus*

A widespread species encountered on several days.

Starlings Sturnidae**Common Myna (I)***Acridotheres tristis tristis***Madagascan Starling (E)***Hartlaubius aurata*

We had a few birds in edge habitat at Mantadia NP.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae**Madagascan Magpie-Robin (E)***Copsychus albospectularis*

Seen regularly in various habitats.

Littoral Rock Thrush (E)*Monticola imerina*

A couple of nice males at Anakao.

Forest Rock Thrush (E)*Monticola sharpei*

We saw the nominate form at Mantadia and the *bensoni* subspecies at Isalo. They were recently lumped although the birds we saw certainly look and sound very different from each other!

Madagascan Stonechat (E)*Saxicola sibilla*

Regular sightings, mostly during our drives.

Sunbirds Nectariniidae**Souimanga Sunbird (NE)***Cinnyris sovimanga*

A common species recorded almost daily.

Malagasy Green Sunbird (NE)*Cinnyris notatus*

This large sunbird was seen at Andasibe.

Weavers Ploceidae**Nelicourvi Weaver (E)***Ploceus nelicourvi*

Several sightings at Mantadia, Analamazoatra and Ranomafana.

Sakalava Weaver (E)*Ploceus sakalava*

This species was common in dry areas, particularly around Berenty and Ifaty.

Red Fody (E)*Foudia madagascariensis*

Recorded often throughout the tour in various habitats.

Forest Fody (E)*Foudia omissa*

Excellent views of a breeding male at Mantadia – no doubt that this was a pure bird which is nowadays hard to find!

Waxbills, Munias & Allies Estrildidae

Madagascan Mannikin (E) *Lemuresthes (Lonchura) nana*

Surprisingly we didn't get a good look at this bird until the end of our tour at Mahajunga.

Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae

Madagascan Wagtail (E) *Motacilla flaviventris*

This attractive wagtail was seen well in Andasibe and Ranomafana, also nesting at our hotel in Tana.

Annotated list of Mammals

Garbutt, N. (2007) *Mammals of Madagascar, A Complete Guide*.

IUCN 2015. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2015-4*. <<http://www.iucnredlist.org>>.

Downloaded on 19 November 2015.

Tenrecs Tenrecidae

Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec *Echinops telfairi*

A wonderful encounter with this, curled up in a ball and then walking along on the sand.

Common Tenrec *Tenrec ecaudatus*

On our final night walk at Ampijoroa we had a great look at one of these massive tenrecs right at our feet!

Sac-winged Bats Emballonuridae

Mauritian Tomb Bat *Taphozous mauritanicus*

Two roosting on the trunk of a large tree at Ampijoroa.

Old World Leaf-nosed Bats Hipposideridae

Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bat (NF) *Hipposideros commersoni*

Seen in flight at Ampijoroa a few times.

Old World Fruit Bats Pteropodidae

Madagascar Flying Fox (VU) *Pteropus rufus*

We observed these huge bats at their day roost in the gallery forest at Berenty. Impressive!

Mouse and Dwarf Lemurs Cheirogaleidae

Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur *Cheirogaleus crossleyi*

Seen during our night walks around Andasibe. Up to 10 fearless animals were feeding in the fruiting tree on the lodge ground.

Greater Dwarf Lemur *Cheirogaleus major*

One rather brief sighting at Ranomafana.



Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur*Cheirogaleus medius*

Singles seen on both of our night walks near Ampijoroa.

Grey-Brown Mouse Lemur*Microcebus griseorufus*

Several seen in the spiny forest of Berenty, including two at a day roost. Cute!

Goodman's Mouse Lemur (VU)*Microcebus lehilahytsara*

Just a couple brief sightings of these tiny lemurs on our night walks at Andasibe.

Grey Mouse Lemur*Microcebus murinus*

We encountered these widespread mouse lemurs on night walks at Berenty and Ampijoroa, but had by far our best looks from the dinner table at our Ifaty hotel!

Golden-brown Mouse Lemur*Microcebus ravelobensis*

Several on our first night walk near Ampijoroa.

Rufous Mouse Lemur (VU)*Microcebus rufus*

We saw this tiny lemur very well at Ranomafana.

Sportive Lemurs Lepilemuridae**Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur (EN)***Lepilemur edwardsi*

Their screeches were a common sound during our dinners at Ampijoroa, some of us went out and had a good look at them.

Hubbard's Sportive Lemur (EN)*Lepilemur hubbardi*

A single day-roosting animal staring at us from its cavity in Zombitse NP.

White-footed Sportive Lemur (EN)*Lepilemur leucopus*

We saw many of these at Berenty, both by day and by night. Their density here is amazingly high.

"Black-shouldered" Sportive Lemur*Lepilemur sp nov*

We were privileged to see this undescribed lemur, at a day roost and holding its baby in its mouth. Apparently currently known from a total world population of 4 individuals in Park Mosa!

Lemurs Lemuridae**(Common) Brown Lemur (NT)***Eulemur fulvus*

Good numbers at Andasibe and Ampijoroa.

Mongoose Lemur*Eulemur mongaz*

A group of five mid morning at Ampijoroa was a highlight. The group included 2 brightly colored males and a hyperactive baby. This species is mainly nocturnal but the heavy rain had caused it to switch to diurnal feeding!

Red-bellied Lemur (VU)*Eulemur rubiventer*

Good views at Mantadia and excellent views at Ranomafana.

Red-fronted Brown Lemur (NT)*Eulemur rufifrons*

Abundant at Berenty, where it has been introduced, then a sighting at Ranomafana where it is truly wild.

Eastern Bamboo Lemur*Hapalemur griseus*

We saw a few groups of these in the bamboo at Mantadia and Analamazoatra.

Golden Bamboo Lemur (CR)*Hapalemur aureus*

A single animal sleeping high up in the giant bamboo.

Ring-tailed Lemur (EN)*Lemur catta*

Always one of the major highlights of any Madagascar trip we were treated to wonderful views of these lemurs in Berenty. We also saw tracks at Ifaty where a tiny population ekes out an existence.

Greater Bamboo Lemur (CR)

Prolemur simus

An unforgettable encounter with two at Ranomafana NP. Apparently they are the last two in the park – this species is in serious trouble.

Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur (CR)

Varecia variegata

Unfortunately we only heard this loud but shy species at Mantadia and Ranomafana.

Avahis, Sifakas and Indri Indriidae

Eastern Woolly Lemur (VU)

Avahi laniger

Seen on both night walks at Andasibe, exceptionally well on the first night.

Western Woolly Lemur (VU)

Avahi occidentalis

A good look at two of these roosting in the forests of Ampijoroa.

Indri (CR)

Indri indri

We were privileged to see and hear these amazing primates at close range on a daily basis at Mantadia and Analamazoatra.

Coquerel's Sifaka (EN)

Propithecus coquereli

These colourful sifakas were enjoyed at length at Ampijoroa.

Diademed Sifaka (CR)

Propithecus diadema

We were fortunate to spend some quality time with this species at Analamazotroa and had further sightings at Mantadia.

Milne-Edward's Sifaka (EN)

Propithecus edwardsi

After a fast walk we were able to intercept one of these fantastic primates swooping through the branches!

Verreaux's Sifaka (EN)

Propithecus verreauxi

Some magical encounters at Berenty, including many dancing animals. Another small group at Zombitse NP

Climbing Mice, White-tailed Rat, Malagasy Rats and Mice Nesomyidae

Tanala Tuft-tailed Rat

Eliurus tanalae

We had one of these at night around the accommodations at Andasibe.

Western Tuft-tailed Rat

Eliurus myoxinus

Seen on both night walks at Ampijoroa.

Lowland Red Forest Rat

Nesomys audeberti

Numerous sightings at Mantadia and Ranomafana.

Western Big-footed Mouse

Macrotarsomys bastardi

One of these with a long skinny tail scurried into a hole at Berenty and then peered out at us.

Brown Rat (I)

Rattus norvegicus

Annotated list of Reptiles



Glaw, F. & Vences, M. *A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar*; Third Edition (2007).

Tortoises Testudinae

Spider Tortoise

Pyxis arachnoides

One sighting of this rare species in the spiny forest at Berenty.

Crocodiles Crocodylidae

Nile Crocodile

Crocodylus niloticus

Seen at Lac Ravelobe.

Chameleons Chamaeleonidae

Short-horned Chameleon

Calumma brevicornis

Seen on night walks at Andasibe.

Blue-legged Chameleon

Calumma crypticum

Several seen at Ranomafana. Only one had blue legs, and that one only on one side of its body!

Band-bellied Chameleon

Calumma gastrotaenia

An emerald colored chameleon that we saw on night walks at Andasibe and Ranomafana.

Nose-horned Chameleon

Calumma nasutum

Several seen near Andasibe and Ranomafana.

O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon

Calumma oshaughnessyi

Three on our Ranomafana night walk.

Parson's Chameleon

Calumma parsonii

Two seen on a night walk near Andasibe.

Oustalet's Chameleon

Furcifer oustaleti

Great views of several at Ampijoroa – lots of character! Others seen crossing the road near there and at Isalo.

Rhinoceros Chameleon

Furcifer rhinocerotus

Four seen on our second night walk at Ampijoroa.

Warty Chameleon

Furcifer verrucosus

Two seen at Berenty.

Geckos Gekkonidae

Antongil Velvet Gecko

Blaesodactylus antongilensis

Seen at Ampijoroa.

Sakalava Velvet Gecko

Blaesodactylus sakalava

We saw these wedged into large cracks in big baobabs at both Berenty and Ifaty.

House Gecko

Hemidactylus mabouia

Seen at Ampijoroa.

Mercatorial Tropical House Gecko

Hemidactylus mercatorius

Seen at Berenty and Ifaty.

Grandidier's Bark Gecko

Lygodactylus tolampyae

A tiny gecko seen at Ampijoroa.

Southern Bark Gecko

Lygodactylus tuberosus



A tiny gecko on the side of a baobab at Berenty.

Painted Big-headed Gecko

Paroedura picta

A beautiful gecko seen on a night walk at Berenty.

Stumpf's Big-headed Gecko

Paroedura stumpfi

A lovely gecko, one joined the termite feeding frenzy in our Ampijoroa restaurant.

Striped Day Gecko

Phelsuma lineata

Seen at our accommodation at Andasibe and also in Mantadia.

Madagascar Day Gecko

Phelsuma madagascariensis

We encountered this large day gecko at Ampijoroa, where it was a welcome presence in our rooms!

Modest Day Gecko

Phelsuma modesta

A drab colored day gecko that we saw at the Toliara airport and our hotel at Ifaty.

Thicktail Day Gecko

Phelsuma mutabilis

A couple of these in the Berenty spiny forest.

Peacock Day Gecko

Phelsuma quadriocellata

We found this stunning lizard at Ranomafana.

Standing's Day Gecko

Phelsuma standingi

One at Zombitse.

Satanic Flat-tail Gecko

Uroplatus phantasticus

A great encounter with this master of camouflage at Ranomafana.

Plated Lizards Gerrhosauridae

Western Girdled Lizard

Zonosaurus laticaudatus

This large lizard was seen regularly in Ampijoroa.

Madagascar Girdled Lizard

Zonosaurus madagascarensis

We saw this species at Ranomafana and Mantadia.

Skinks Scincidae

Elegant Skink

Trachylepis elegans

We saw this at Andohahela and La Tabla.

Iguanas Iguanidae

Three-eyed Lizard

Chalarodon madagascariensis

This unique species was common in spiny forest at Berenty and Ifaty.

Cuvier's Madagascar Swift

Oplurus cuvieri

These lizards were very conspicuous at Ampijoroa.

Merrem's Madagascar Swift

Oplurus cyclurus

Just the tail of one in the Berenty spiny forest.

Dumeril's Madagascar Swift

Oplurus quadrimaculatus

Seen well at Andohahela and again at our accommodations at Isalo.

Typical Snakes Lamprophiidae

Giant Hog-nosed Snake

Leioheterodon madagascariensis

A big beautiful one on the trail at Ampijoroa.

Modest Hog-nosed Snake

Leioheterodon modestus



Good views of one at Berenty.

Tiny Night Snake

Ithycyphus miniatus

Seen twice at Ampijoroa – once on a wall and the other time on the ground. Very smelly!

White-lipped Smooth Snake

Liophidium torquatum

Seen at Ampijoroa.

Lateral Water Snake

Bibilava lateralis

Guy had one at our lodge at Andasibe.

Boas Boidae

Dumeril's Boa

Acrantophis dumerilli

One of these large and beautiful snakes in the parking lot at Berenty.

Madagascar Ground Boa

Acrantophis madagascariensis

A six-foot long specimen was living under my cabin and emerged to soak up the sun on both days. By the size of its belly it looks like it was digesting a large lemur.

Annotated list of Amphibians

Glaw, F. & Vences, M. *A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar*; Third Edition (2007).

Truge Frogs Ranidae

Mascarene Grass Frog

Ptychadena mascariensis

We saw many of these in the short grass at Andohahela.

Narrow-mouthed Frogs Microhylidae

Marbled Rain Frog

Scaphiophryne marmota

A real beauty – one came out during the rain at Mantadia.

Madagascar Frogs Mantellidae

Madagascar Jumping Frog

Aglyptodactylus madagascariensis

We saw two at Mantadia. They are normally drab brown but after the heavy rain had turned bright yellow in anticipation of breeding!

Green Bright-eyed Frog

Boophis viridis

Good look at one during an Andasibe night walk.

Ankafana Bright-eyed Frog

Boophis luteus

Heard only with its distinctive “vingte-huite” call at Andasibe and Ranomafana.

Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog

Boophis madagascariensis

A large bright-eyed frog that we saw several times on the forest floor at Andasibe and Ranomafana.

Red-spotted Bright-eyed Frog

Boophis tasymena

Robin took a photograph of this polka-dotted bright-eyed frog.

Douliot's Bright-eyed Frog

Boophis doulioti

We had these around the accommodations at Ampijoroa.



Sculptured Madagascar Frog

Gephyromantis sculpturatus

We saw one of these perfectly camouflaged leaf litter frogs at Analamazoatra.

Undescribed Madagascar Frog

Gephyromantis sp nov

We saw a number of this undescribed frog at Andohahela.

Baron's Mantella

Mantella baroni

Luc showed us one of these stunners in Mantadia, arguably the best looking frog in a country that is noted for its frogs!

Tsarafidy Pandanus Frog

Guibemantis pulcher

We saw one of these on a *Pandanus* frond in Ranomafana.

Betsileo Madagascar Frog

Mantidactylus betsileanus

Many of these seen and heard in the ditch during our Ranomafana night walk.

Grandidier's Madagascar Frog

Mantidactylus grandidieri

One of these hiding behind a little waterfall at Ranomafana.

Ivohimanita Madagascar Frog

Mantidactylus majori

One at Ranomafana.

Undescribed Madagascar Frog

Mantidactylus sp nov

These undescribed frogs were abundant in the streams at Andohahela.

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