



# ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## **Madagascar** **Comprehensive II** *9<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> October 2016* **Trip Report**



Long-tailed Ground Roller by Christopher Haney

**Trip report by tour leader Adam Walley**

## Tour Summary

The tour started in the nation's capital of Antananarivo. With half the group arriving the night before, we embarked on a leisurely morning visit to a handicraft market and casually birded the hotel grounds. Highlights here included a roosting Madagascan Nightjar and some delightful Madagascan Mannikins, along with our first views of Malagasy Bulbul and Red Fody, species which we would see almost daily.



**Meller's Ducks by Ronald Majors**

After a lovely poolside lunch, we headed to the city's main birding destination, Lac Alarobia. We were greeted there by throngs of Red-billed Teal and White-faced Whistling Ducks, while the heronry on the island in the middle of the lake was full of activity, with many Dimorphic Egrets and Squacco Herons tending nests. It did not take long to pick out the primary target here, with a couple of endangered Malagasy Pond Herons scoped sitting on their nests. Their mates were in the vegetation nearby, sporting pristine breeding plumage – a lovely sight. Further scrutiny of the lake revealed Hottentot Teals, Common Moorhen, a pair of unexpected Red-knobbed Coots, along with Great and Cattle Egret and many Black Heron and Black-crowned Night Heron. Carrying on a short way, we were thrilled to count a very impressive 16 Meller's Duck, another endangered species and one that has only recently settled into this lake. This was an impressive tally and we even watched a pair copulating, so they are obviously adapting quite well here!

The reeds and scrub surrounding the lake produced excellent views of the rather similar Malagasy Brush Warbler and Malagasy Swamp Warblers, *really nice side by side comparisons!* We then taped out an extremely cooperative White-throated Rail that we enjoyed at leisure. We also added our first of Malagasy Kingfisher, Malagasy Coucal, Common Jery, Malagasy White-eye and Souimanga Sunbird. The second half of the group arrived at the lake in fading light, but had enough time to catch up with the main specialities, plus a Madagascan Nightjar, before we returned to our lovely hotel for a delicious dinner.

After breakfast, we had a quick look at some of the birds on the hotel grounds, which included Madagascan Wagtail and Madagascan Stonechat, and then we ventured into the traffic of Tana, spotting some Little Swifts. We then headed east through a denuded and largely bird-free landscape. A short stop produced Hamerkop near its gigantic nest and our only Brown-throated Martins of the trip. Our next stop at a large river produced the hoped-for Madagascan Pratincole, sat on a rock in the river. Although distant, the scope views were



**Rainforest Scops Owls by Ronald Majors**





reasonable and we were glad for them, as this would be the only sighting of the trip. We also had superb views of Malagasy Kestrel here, one with a freshly caught House Mouse, and then excellent views of a Chabert Vanga that flew in to harass the kestrel. We carried on to our lodgings in Andasibe, set on the edge of the rainforest. We were greeted here by exceptional views of the wonderful Madagascan Blue Pigeon in a fruiting tree, along with both Souimanga and Malagasy Green Sunbird. Our lunch was interrupted by our first lemurs - a troupe of Common Brown Lemurs!



**Two Collared Nightjars by Christopher Haney**

With great excitement, we headed into Analamazoatra Reserve. At the reserve entrance, more Common Brown Lemurs greeted us, along with our first Nelicourvi Weaver, Crested Drongo and Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher. We ventured onto the trail system and within minutes, our local guide had us staring eye to eye with a pair of very cute Rainforest Scops Owl at their tangled day roost – *fantastic!*

We wandered through the forests with the ear-piercing calls of Indri drawing closer and closer. It did not take long for us to track down this, the largest of the extant lemurs,

and enjoy a magical time with them. After this memorable experience, we followed our local guide down a steep gully and were rewarded with excellent views of a pair of roosting Collared Nightjars, one sitting on top of the other. This is a stunningly beautiful and still very poorly known bird, what a treat to have such great views on our first day!

Not long after, we were wandering down another side trail where we were surrounded by a family of stunning Diademed Sifakas. They were fearless and bounding low through the branches around and above us.

Returning to the main trail, we had a close-up view of the bizarre Giraffe-necked Weevil. As we departed the reserve, we bumped into an active mixed flock of birds that provided exceptional looks at Nuthatch Vanga, along with Blue and Red-tailed Vanga and Stripe-throated Jery. Just before leaving the park, we added our first Madagascan Spinetail and Lesser Vasa Parrot and then a delightful male Madagascan Flufftail crossing the trail. A short distance outside the park, our local guide showed us a Madagascan Owl roosting high up in a pine - *yet another tricky nocturnal bird that was a treat to see with such ease during the day.* We returned to the lodge with a staggering number of quality sightings to



**Diademed Sifaka by Ronald Majors**



process and then embarked on a short night walk. We had great looks at three species of nocturnal lemurs: cute Furry-eared Dwarf Lemurs, several tiny Goodman's Mouse Lemur, and an Eastern Avahi clinging to the side of a large tree. We were also thrilled to record our first chameleons: Short-horned Chameleon and Nose-horned Chameleon. A couple of species of *Boophis* tree frogs were also identified. *What a start!*



Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher by Ronald Majors

An early start had us piling into our four-wheel-drives for the bumpy road to the glorious rainforests of Mantadia National Park. We made a brief stop on the way for a wonderful Blue Coua and then did a bit of roadside birding. A pair of Madagascar Pygmy Kingfishers showed exceptionally well and we also scoped up our only Madagascar Starling and Tylas Vangas of the trip.

We had our first looks at Greater Vasa Parrot, Madagascar Cuckooshrike and Rand's Warbler before heading into the trails for a long morning inside the forest. Our first birds

inside the forest included Spectacled Tetraka and Long-billed Berniera. We then had a frustrating encounter with a Crossley's Vanga, followed by excellent views of both White-throated Oxylabes and Red-fronted Coua, two species we would not see again. We bumped into some interesting lemurs: Diademed Sifaka and striking Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs. A mixed species flock had a canopy-loving Ward's Vanga, together with Red-tailed and Blue Vanga. We were hoping for ground rollers, but apart from hearing a couple of distant birds, we were not meeting with success - *but this would soon change*. Late in the morning, our local guide tracked down a Short-legged Ground Roller perched on a liana above our heads, which we could admire at leisure.

Then, just as we were arriving at our lunchtime picnic area, our guide called us back into the forest and we had a very well behaved Scaly Ground Roller which we watched for some time – *just fantastic!!*

Eventually, we did return to the lunch clearing for a picnic, and enjoyed good looks of Green Jery in the clearing as well. We carried on to a small pond set in the forest and here we quickly found our main target: a pair of Madagascar Little Grebe. A pair of Meller's Duck were also utilising the pond and around the fringes were Olive Bee-eater, Madagascar Buzzard and Madagascar Swamp Warbler. We headed back into the forest for a few minutes and quickly found the beautiful Pitta-like Ground Roller – *our third ground roller for the day!*



Short-legged Ground Roller by Ronald Majors





Having achieved a lot, we left the forest and visited a marsh area. Here we enticed a Madagascan Rail to cross a track on three occasions. Some people also saw Barn Owl and Little Bittern flush off from the edge of the marsh. We returned to our lodgings in Andasibe and went on another night walk, seeing more of the same nocturnal lemurs and chameleons as the previous night.



**Cryptic Warbler by Ronald Majors**

Another early start to the day saw us returning to Mantadia National Park for a second full day exploring the forests of this large, protected area. Hearing a Crossley's Vanga from the roadside, we put in some effort and were ultimately rewarded with excellent views of this aberrant vanga. We spent the rest of the morning in the forest interior. Highlights of our morning walk were a stunning male Common Sunbird-Asity, close looks at a Cryptic Warbler, a very obliging Velvet Asity, Forest Rock Thrush, and nice looks at Dark Newtonia.

A main target here was Rufous-headed Ground Roller, and we eventually did hear a distant bird. Half of the group decided to descend a very steep valley and head up the other side, to be rewarded

with good views of the bird for their efforts – *the fourth ground roller in just two days!!* We also had our first encounter with the wonderfully unique Cuckoo Roller, several flight views and brief perched views for some. After lunch, we walked some more forest trails, but it was a rather quiet afternoon overall. We returned to Andasibe and were pleased to see that the lodge's fruiting tree had both Madagascan Blue Pigeon and Madagascan Green Pigeon! After dark, we went on another night walk, seeing the usual assortment of lemurs and chameleons, as well as our first Stump-tailed Chameleon, from the genera *Brookesia*.

Our final full day in this area saw us revisiting the nearby Analamazoatra Reserve, with a very small list of targets, all of which are tough birds and all of which we would see today! Shortly after entering the park, we had good looks at a pair of Madagascan Wood Rails quietly walking through the forest. We then spent much of the morning walking up and down hills trying to track down the elusive Red-breasted Coua. Eventually, several people had a bird cross the trail right in front of us, but it was not until we had almost returned to the park entrance that we all caught up with a good look at one. This was followed moments later by a male Forest Fody - *or at least a fody showing all the features of a Forest Fody*. We returned to the lodge for a leisurely walk and were privileged to watch an Indri feeding in the trees as we ate our own lunch!



**Madagascan Green Pigeon by Ronald Majors**





Indri by Mark Oberle

We headed back into the park for one last session and started with nice looks at a male Madagascan Flufftail. After much searching, our local guide finally tracked down our final target – Madagascan Ibis...*what a bird!* With only a bit of time left before park closing hours, we had a look at a remarkably camouflaged Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko. After dark, we headed out for one last night walk and saw some terrific reptiles: Parson's Chameleon and very good looks at another Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko.

and we arrived at the airport with plenty of time, checked in and had an on-time departure and arrival to Toliagnaro in the south-west of the country. We checked into our comfortable hotel and took a short walk to the nearby beach as the sun was dipping on the horizon. It was birdless, but there was a distant Humpback Whale that did a full breach – *an amazing display for those lucky enough to be looking in the right direction!*

Another early morning start saw us on the way to rarely visited Andohahela National Park. We were surprised to encounter rain and that made navigation of the terrible roads even more tricky than usual. Our four-wheel-drive drivers did an excellent job and got us to the lower portion of the rainforest there, and we set out on a forest trail, with the rain continuing to fall. We had come here to look for the enigmatic Red-tailed Newtonia, one of the most rarely-seen of all Madagascan birds. Fortunately, it did not take long to have a pair vigorously responding to playback and showing themselves. For the most part, they stayed overhead, but did descend lower on occasion where we could make out some of the details on the birds in the continuous rain. *Success!* Although the area held promise for other birds, with the rather poor weather, we did not linger in the area. Instead, we undertook the long drive to the main highway. Arriving at the main road to Berenty, we continued, although conditions were only marginally better on this main route! Eventually, we hit the rainshadow belt and entered into arid country, where the likes of Madagascan Lark and Namaqua Dove made their first appearances. We also drove through our first patches of spiny forest, with some good stands of this bizarre forest growing right alongside the highway. Eventually, we made it to the delightful Berenty Lodge, where we were greeted by a late lunch and the reserve's most famous inhabitants: Ring-tailed Lemurs and Verreaux's Sifakas!

Lunch was delicious, and we enjoyed a little siesta and watching the lemurs. We then headed out for a walk in the gallery forest. Here we saw many more lemurs, including plenty of dancing

We now had a long travel day. An early morning start helped us beat the traffic in Tana



Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko by Ronald Majors





Verreaux's Sifakas, several of the introduced Red-fronted Brown Lemurs, and several roosting White-footed Sportive Lemurs. We also saw the impressive roost of Madagascan Flying Foxes, with hundreds of bats on show. In terms of avian highlights, we saw an impressive tally of 5 (!) roosting White-browed Hawk Owls, and also enjoyed some very confiding Giant Couas strolling through the open forest.



Ring-tailed Lemurs by Christopher Haney

Before dinner, we headed out into a nearby patch of spiny forest, our first chance to walk around in this unique habitat which really has no parallel anywhere in the world. Lemurs were prominent in here, and in addition to several White-footed Sportive Lemurs, we also saw several lovely Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs. Madagascan Nightjars offered wonderful views, and we saw Warty Chameleons before we returned to the lodge for a delicious dinner and a good night's sleep.

We headed out pre-breakfast to a mosaic of spiny forest and sisal plantations, where we hoped to track down the tricky Madagascan Sandgrouse. Eventually, we saw a very distant pair, but then moved to another area where a pair gave a really nice flyby – *success!* Other new birds in this area included Frances' Sparrowhawk and we finally had a good look at a Madagascan Cisticola and saw (as opposed to heard) Madagascan Cuckoo. Before we returned to the vehicle, we were fortunate in finding a further seven sandgrouse, which gave really good flight views.

We had breakfast and then returned to the gallery forest to watch more lemurs and birds. Roosting owls were, again, a prominent theme, and a large tree held 2 roosting Barn Owls and also Torotoroka Scops Owl. We saw a second scops owl, and then added the lovely Madagascan Hoopoe and a brief flyover of Sooty Falcon. After lunch and a siesta, we headed out for a diurnal walk in the spiny forest. Here we finally caught up with numerous Grey-headed Lovebirds and then found two of the spiny forest specialities: Subdesert Brush Warbler and Running Coua. The latter bird required some patience, but was eventually seen well. We also saw some interesting iguanids in the spiny forest: a Spiny-tailed Lizard and several Three-eyed Lizards, and also a roosting Grey-brown Mouse Lemur. A night-time walk in the gallery forest yielded good comparisons of both Grey and Grey-brown Mouse Lemur, plus Mocquard's and Painted Big-headed Geckos; while the calls of White-browed Hawk Owls and Torotoroka Scops Owls were all around.



White-browed Hawk Owls by Ronald Majors

We had one final morning in Berenty. A pre-breakfast walk produced an excellent encounter with our first Sickle-billed Vanga; while a post-breakfast walk yielded our first Hook-billed Vangas.



In our previous days here, we had searched hard for the shy Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk, and this would be our last chance at the bird - it seemed a long shot. The morning wore on and it seemed very likely that we would have to leave without seeing the species. Incredibly, our local guide found an active nest



**Madagascar Sandgrouse by Ronald Majors**

and we were treated to some pretty good scope views, first of the tail and then of the head – wow! We enjoyed a final lunch and a final look at some of the lemurs before returning to Toliagnaro in the late afternoon. We checked the sea front one last time and this time were rewarded with several “Madagascar” Kelp Gulls flying past before we retired to our comfortable hotel and a great dinner.

Our morning flight across the south end of the island to Toliara was not only on time, but early. *Air Madagascar was doing us proud so far!* We boarded our vehicles and headed north along the coast towards Ifaty. We visited a

wetland north of town which harboured a few new water birds: Kittlitz’s and Common Ringed Plover, Common Greenshank and many Little Grebes. We carried on our way to Ifaty village and on some salt flats, our local guide was waiting for us with a Madagascar Plover. We could admire this gorgeous and rare plover at leisure! We then checked into our beachside resort, and spent the hottest hours of the day enjoying lunch and shade. An earlier flight rearrangement had left us with precious little time in this region, so we headed out in the midday heat to the amazing spiny forest of Park Mosa. After a brisk walk, we suddenly came to a halt and soon had two Long-tailed Ground Rollers, one of the most unique and special birds in the country. The views of one of the birds were just outrageous, as it stood on the sand practically at our feet. Leaving with walkaway views, we encountered a small feeding flock that produced excellent views of two of our targets: *Thamnornis* and *Archbold’s Newtonia*. After this flock moved on, we were taken to a nest site of Madagascar Sparrowhawk, one of the trickiest birds to see in the country. An immature-plumaged bird showed beautifully, while another bird sat on the nest.

Next up was a real treat, a male Subdesert Mesite perched up in a bush. *Our first mesite of the trip!* As we watched this, a Madagascar Harrier Hawk soared low overhead and then one of the guides had located a Lafresnaye’s Vanga so we followed his shouts and some people got brief views of the skittish bird. While trying to relocate the vanga, we instead found the nest, although it was empty for the moment. We decided to give the bird some space, only to find a Brown-capped Coua sitting on a nest nearby. We then left the area and had brief views of a pair of Madagascar Buttonquails, followed by prolonged views of a male buttonquail! *Wow – what an afternoon it had been, with more or less a clean sweep of the area’s specialities.* Our walk out of the park held one last surprise, a roosting “Black-shouldered” Sportive Lemur – an undescribed species that



**Sickle-billed Vanga by Mark Oberle**





is only known from this one small area.



Lafresnaye's Vanga with baobab fruit by Ronald Majors

We had a full day ahead of us, and only very limited time for a return visit to Park Mosa. Our goal was to track down the Lafresnaye's Vanga for a proper look. It gave us the run around again for a while, but eventually, the female settled down on the nest where we could all have a good look. We headed back to the entrance but were stopped in our tracks by another Lafresnaye's Vanga. This one provided unbeatable views in a large baobab as it used its massive bill to methodically open one baobab fruit after another. But it was not eating the fruit – it was actually eating a large cricket-like insect that was living inside of the fruit – neat!

It really was time to get moving now, so we returned to the vehicles, drove to Toliara and made our way onto a speedboat by way of an ox cart. Sea conditions were pleasant and after some time, we found ourselves at the base of tall seaside cliffs. On the cliff were Peregrine Falcon, Malagasy Black Swift, and several Grey Herons. Best of all, there was an occupied nest of the increasingly rare Humblot's Heron, with a second bird standing on the cliff giving better views. We carried on to Nosy Ve Island and in the calm conditions, had a short but wonderful encounter with a pod of 4 Risso's Dolphins. Landing on the island, we were greeted by a couple of the iconic residents of the island: Red-tailed Tropicbirds. We saw several large chicks at their nests under bushes and a handful of adults in display flight over the island.

Walking along the beach, we were rather startled to find a Northern Wheatear – *apparently one of the first Madagascar records of this vagrant!*

The tide was low and in the distance, there was a small shorebird/tern roost. Fortunately, there was a single Crab Plover there, but it was very distant, so we waded through the shallows and eventually got close enough for a reasonable scope view. There were good numbers of Gray Plover and Lesser Crested Tern roosting out there as well. By now, the mid-day winds had kicked up and it was time to get moving. We had a short but choppy crossing to the mainland and our restaurant. Lunch was interrupted by a Littoral Rock Thrush giving great views. It was then a pleasant-enough boat ride back to Toliara with a following sea. With the afternoon wearing on, we were not yet finished. From here, we headed straight out into the tablelands thorn forest in search of the two localised birds found there. All was very quiet, apart from yet another very



Red-tailed Tropicbird chick by Ronald Majors



cooperative Lafresnaye's Vanga! Suddenly, we had a good response from a Verreaux's Coua, one of our targets here, and the bird showed very well indeed. The other target, Red-shouldered Vanga, was being elusive. After a lot of looking and nearly upon sunset, our local guide finally tracked one down in the dense thorn forest. It was a frustrating experience, as the going was tough through the forest and the bird kept moving further and further away. In the end, some people got a good view, but we simply had to give up on the bird and head to town for dinner. *A very long, but productive day!*



**Vagrant Northern Wheatear by Mark Oberle**

We started out our day by revisiting the tablelands and specifically the site of last night's vanga sighting. The bird was still there and behaved better, so everyone could catch up with great views of this relatively recently described species.

We carried on to Zombitse through spiny forest and then degraded grassland, a Harlequin Quail showing fairly well in flight to those on the left side of the bus! By now, the heat of the day was bearing down on us, but our local guides at Zombitse wasted no time in finding us the key species here: Appert's

Greenbul, one of the most range-restricted and endangered of all Madagascan birds.

We also had great views of our first Coquerel's Coua of the trip and saw several roosting Hubbard's Sportive Lemur, plus a small group of Verreaux's Sifaka. We stopped for a picnic lunch and were accompanied by two exceptionally tame Giant Couas!

We carried on through the grasslands to Isalo National Park, enjoyed some stunning sandstone scenery, and then checked into our excellent hotel in a beautiful setting. After a bit of downtime, we went for a long walk through grasslands. The scenery was fabulous, but the birding a bit disappointing. We flushed a couple of Madagascan Buttonquails but could not find either of our main targets. We enjoyed an excellent dinner and a very comfortable night's sleep here!



**Red-shouldered Vanga by Christopher Haney**

We decided to do an early pre-breakfast birding session and our luck changed. As we assembled at the lobby, a Benson's Rock Thrush serenaded us. Although the species is now lumped within Forest Rock Thrush, it is still good to see! We gave it one more bash through the grasslands, and after several flushed buttonquail, our perseverance was finally rewarded with quite good flight views of two male and one female Madagascan Partridge! From here, it was the long drive through to Ranomafana, which took most of the daylight hours.







**Pitta-like Ground Roller by Ronald Majors**

of Brown Mesites and soon had a pair of these shy forest birds walking around just below us - *excellent stuff!* In this same area, a Henst's Goshawk was calling, but sadly we could not find the bird. Next up was another localised lemur – Greater Bamboo Lemur, which showed exceptionally well as it gnawed on the unappetising-looking giant bamboo. This was soon followed by a mind-blowingly cryptic Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko.

We carried on to our picnic lunch spot with a commanding view and a pair of very tame Ring-tailed Mongoose feeding on our crumbs! From here, we moved to the Vohiparara area for the afternoon. We were not expecting much from the afternoon doldrums, but it proved to be an excellent few hours. Following a lengthy observation of a Velvet Asity, we found a mixed flock that finally produced good views of Wedge-tailed Tetraka, a bird that had been proving surprisingly difficult to track down.

We heard a couple of uncooperative Brown Emutails and had a very brief Forest Fody. We then heard a Rufous-headed Ground Roller close by. As we waited, a female Pollen's Vanga showed very well. Returning our attention back to the ground, the ground rollers were suddenly there - *2 of them!* Over the next ten minutes, we enjoyed prolonged views of this great bird, and it would ultimately be voted "bird of the trip"!

We carried on a little bit further and finally got a perched view of Cuckoo Roller – a stunning female bird. We also had a powerful raptor come racing through the forest, probably a Henst's Goshawk. With the afternoon wearing on, we returned to our lodgings for a short break and then embarked on a night walk. As dusk descended, a pair of Rufous Mouse Lemurs emerged to feed calmly in front of us, giving us our best views of a mouse lemur on this trip. Carrying on along the roadside forest, we saw several more Rufous Mouse Lemurs, a rather confiding Lowland Streaked Tenrec and a plethora of chameleons – striking O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon, a Short-horned Chameleon, a Blue-banded Chameleon and an incredibly minute *Brookesia*.



**Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko by Ronald Majors**



With a second full day in the park, we headed straight up to the higher elevations, following in the footsteps of a Fosa. At the highest part of the trail, we staked out some flowers for our target: Yellow-



**Rufous-headed Ground Roller by Ronald Majors**

bellied Sunbird-Asity. While we waited, our local guide discovered an active nest – *it was remarkable how often our local guides stumbled onto active nests of the birds we were looking for during this tour!* Even with the nest, it was not easy to see the bird, and only the female was visiting, but in the end, we all got quite nice looks at this hyperactive beauty. We then scoured the bamboo thickets for Brown Emutail and as we left the bamboo zone, we had all but given up on seeing it, when suddenly the back of the queue found one walking around in a relatively open area. *Quite remarkable* – and the bird then performed exceptionally well for several minutes, allowing us simply stunning views! Our last target for the morning was Madagascan Yellowbrow, and we worked hard to find it. Alas, this one would get the better of us and we left without seeing or hearing one. A nice consolation during our search was some great views of Red-bellied Lemur. We then left the park and visited some remnant wetlands that had largely been converted to rice paddies. A bit of strategising soon had us enjoying unbeatable views of Grey Emutail, a memorable encounter. Then, with the help of some locals, we had flight views of 2 Madagascan Snipe. We returned to the vehicle with everyone finally catching up with White-headed Vanga, and then our guides had one last surprise for us, showing us 2 Baron's Mantella – *a good candidate for best-looking frog in the world!*

After a very long couple of days, part of the group took it easy for the remainder of the day while the others went on another strenuous hike to try for the Henst's Goshawk one last time. No luck there, but we did enjoy more Golden Bamboo Lemurs, Red-fronted Brown Lemurs and some great looks at Pitta-like Ground Roller. We stayed out until dark, failing to find the hoped-for Fanaloka, but did get good looks at both Eastern and Lowland Red Forest Rats, plus a distant Greater Dwarf Lemur.

Next up was strictly a travel day, a long day of driving from Ranomafana to Tana. The countryside rolled slowly past: villages, small cities, and endless grasslands where there once stood forests of unimaginable biodiversity.

Air Madagascar was back to its usual tricks and delayed our morning flight by seven hours. So we enjoyed a lie in, a leisurely breakfast, and revisited Lac Alarobia. A couple people were still missing White-throated Rail and easily caught up with it, as a confiding bird walked around in the open.



**O'Shaugnessy's Chameleon by Ronald Majors**







**Baron's Mantella by Mark Oberle**

The usual assortment of herons and ducks were enjoyed again, including Malagasy Pond Heron and Meller's Duck, though we added nothing new. Eventually, our flight did depart and we arrived late afternoon in hot, hot Mahajunga, boarded our bus and eventually arrived well after dark to our lodgings set within Ampijoroa National Park. We headed straight in for a delicious dinner, which was regularly interrupted by the screeches of Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemurs and we did eventually get a good look at one, along with the infrequently seen Mongoose Lemur.

Thanks to Air Madagascar, we now had limited time in Ampijoroa, and had a big day in front of us.

We started early with a pre-breakfast outing in search of Schlegel's Asity. The bird was worryingly quiet at first, but we eventually heard one, then tracked it down – *a glorious male* – high in a fruiting tree. Better views were soon to come as one fed calmly in a flowering tree where it could be properly enjoyed! We headed back for a quick breakfast and then moved towards the plateau forest. We were quickly stopped in our tracks by a trio of White-breasted Mesite, which showed exceptionally well, our first of several for the morning.

Also here were very cooperative Red-capped Coua. We then heard our other major target, Van Dam's Vanga, but this bird would not cooperate. Climbing onto the low plateau, we were slightly shocked to find a young Banded Kestrel sitting in its nest, it then climbed out of the nest and flew to a high perch, where it was scoped at leisure for walkaway views – *wow!*

We continued searching for the vanga - *the heat of the day getting more and more oppressive!* We did eventually hear another bird fairly closely, but it slipped away unseen. At this stage, part of the group returned to the lodge while the die-hards carried on. Finally, after much perseverance, around midday, we were rewarded with excellent views of a male Van Dam's Vanga. We then had a siesta, during which time the forest camp area provided several interesting reptiles: Oustalet's Chameleon, Cuvier's Madagascar Swift and Giant Hog-nosed Snake. Then we boarded our bus and headed out to Lake Amboromalandy. Walking to the back corner of the lake, we were delighted to scope up a pair of rare Madagascan Jacanas. Mission accomplished, we returned to Ampijoroa and set out for a pleasant late afternoon boat cruise of Lac Ravelobe. We were quite surprised to find another Madagascan Jacana, this one giving really close views, followed up by close looks at Humblot's Heron, and then superb perched views of a pair of Madagascan Fish Eagle – one of the rarest endemics in the country.



**Banded Kestrel by Ronald Majors**





Madagascar Fish Eagle by Ronald Majors

A few Nile Crocodiles and various waterbirds lined the shoreline, including several Madagascan Three-banded Plovers. We returned to camp to enjoy the late afternoon in the company of Coquerel's Sifaka and then headed out for our final night walk of the trip. Here we had some really good views of our final new lemurs: the recently described Golden-brown Mouse Lemur and the wonderful Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur. We celebrated our successes with a traditional Malagasy meal.

An early start saw us driving back up to Mahajunga and boarding our speed boat to explore the Betsiboka estuary. The engines of our boat were labouring and we chugged

across the bay in really nice conditions, when suddenly a speedboat with fully functioning engines appeared and we headed further up the estuary on that one. Minutes later, we spotted one of our targets – Madagascan Sacred Ibis – feeding on the muddy shoreline at the base of the mangroves. Just further on was our final target – Bernier's Teal – in fact, we found an impressive group of 19 of them also feeding in the mud. Having so easily found our main targets, we turned our attention to the numerous waders around, seeing several Terek Sandpiper, many Curlew Sandpiper, Greater Sand Plover, a few Sanderling, a Little Stint, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone and even four Greater Flamingo. A much faster crossing of the estuary followed and we arrived at our hotel in time for an early lunch and then a siesta in an air-conditioned room! We made one last excursion to the Sacred Lake – the lake appeared mostly dry but in fact was full of birdlife. We were greeted by 5 African Openbills and several plovers: Kittlitz's, Common Ringed, Three-banded, and one bird that had us scratching our heads. We eventually realised this was the first ever Caspian/Oriental Plover for Madagascar - *subsequent analysis of photos and consultation with experts suggests it is a Caspian Plover.*

Another small body of water was crammed with herons, egrets, 6 Yellow-billed Storks, and 2 more Madagascan Jacanas. A *very successful outing*. We ended the day with a short visit to the waterfront and the famous baobab tree.

Our final full day would be a long driving day, thanks to Air Madagascar's flight cancellation. The drive did offer the last hope for seeing the increasingly rare Malagasy Harrier, but we scoured the grasslands in vain, arriving in Tana late afternoon. In the evening, we celebrated the conclusion of a memorable trip.



Coquerel's Sifaka by Christopher Haney





Thanks to the group for your enthusiasm, it was a pleasure travelling with you all. Thanks also to our amazing Malagasy guide and, of course, the many outstanding local guides that made this trip the great success it was.

### Top five birds as voted for by participants:

1. Rufous-headed Ground Roller
2. Long-tailed Ground Roller
3. Velvet Asity
4. Giant Coua
5. Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher/Brown Mesite

### Top five other wildlife as voted for by participants:

1. Indri
2. Verreaux's Sifaka
3. Diademed Sifaka
4. Baron's Mantella
5. Ring-tailed Lemur



Caspian Plover – a first for Madagascar – by Ronald Majors

## Annotated List of Birds

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

*Notes are provided where Clements differs.*

### 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 with more around Toliara and Mahajunga.

#### Meller's Duck (E) (EN)

*Anas melleri*

An impressive count of 16 at Lac Alarobia included a copulating pair. Another pair at Mantadia NP.

#### Bernier's Teal (E) (EN)

*Anas bernieri*

We had an impressive count of 19 at the Betsiboka Estuary.

*NOTE: This globally threatened endemic, currently known only from a few inaccessible sites on the west coast of Madagascar, has rarely been recorded until its discovery at this site by Rockjumper Birding Tours in 1999. "Only significant recent counts are 60 on Masama Lake in 1970 and 61 on Bemamba Lake in 1973" Volume 1; HBW.*



**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*

Common around Berenty and another north of Tana.

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

**Pheasant's & Allies Phasianidae****Madagascan Partridge (E)***Margaroperdix madagascarensis*

After much effort, we flushed two males and a female at Isalo for good views.

**Harlequin Quail***Coturnix delegorguei*

Reasonably good views of a female from the left side of the bus near Toliara. A couple other brief sightings may have pertained to this species as well.

**Grebes Podicipedidae****Little Grebe***Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Common at the Toliara wetlands.

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

Good views of a pair at Mantadia NP.

NOTE: Globally threatened and declining due to habitat loss, introduction of exotic fish, and competition (and possibly hybridization) with Little Grebe.

**Flamingos Phoenicopteridae****Greater Flamingo***Phoenicopus roseus*

Four birds at the Betsiboka Estuary.

**Tropicbirds Phaethontidae****Red-tailed Tropicbird***Phaethon rubricauda*

Several adults and at least three large chicks at Nosy Ve.

**Storks Ciconiidae****Yellow-billed Stork***Mycteria ibis*

Six birds at the Sacred Lake.

**African Openbill***Anastomus lamelligerus*

A group of five birds at the mostly dry Sacred Lake.

**Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae****Malagasy Sacred Ibis (NE) (EN)***Threskiornis bernieri*

Good views of just one bird at the Betsiboka Estuary, Dale had a very distant second bird.

NOTE: A globally threatened species restricted to largely inaccessible wetlands in western Madagascar and Aldabra Island. This species is often considered merely a race of the widespread Sacred Ibis of the African mainland and is treated as such by Clements.





**Glossy Ibis***Plegadis falcinellus*

Seen at Lac Ravelobe and nearby rice paddies.

**Madagascan Ibis (E)***Lophotibis cristata*

Nice views of a bird walking on the forest floor at Analamazoatra.

**Hérons Ardeidae****Little Bittern***Ixobrychus minutus*

Chris had a brief sighting at Mantadia NP.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron***Nycticorax nycticorax*

This species was plentiful at Lac Alarobia.

**Striated Heron***Butorides striatus*

A few seen along the route, mainly in the Mahajunga area.

NOTE: Represented in Madagascar by the race *B. s. rutenbergi*, which tends to be darker than its African counterpart, with a reddish neck reminiscent of the American *B. s. virens* (Green Heron).

**Squacco Heron***Ardeola ralloides*

Abundant at Lac Alarobia, with a few elsewhere.

**Malagasy Pond Heron (BE) (EN)***Ardeola idea*

We had good sightings at Lac Alarobia of this species in full breeding plumage, including two birds sitting on the nest. Another one at Isalo was more surprising.

NOTE: A regional endemic breeder that is considered vulnerable and declining due to habitat loss and competition with Squacco Heron.

**Western Cattle Egret***Bubulcus ibis*

A widespread and commonly encountered species at wetlands and rice paddies throughout.

**Grey Heron***Ardea cinerea*

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

**Humblot's Heron (E) (EN)***Ardea humbloti*

Two birds at the San Augustin cliffs, one of which was sitting on a nest. Really good views of another at Lac Ravelobe.

NOTE: A globally threatened species essentially restricted to Madagascar but with vagrant records elsewhere.

**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 at least 200 crammed onto the remaining water at Sacred Lake – impressive!

**Dimorphic Egret***Egretta dimorpha*

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

NOTE: This species is sometimes lumped by authorities as a distinct subspecies of the widespread Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*. Clements treats it as a subspecies of Little Egret.

**Hamerkop Scopidae****Hamerkop***Scopus umbretta*

Singletons or pairs were occasionally seen in rice paddies throughout.



**Cormorants    Phalacrocoracidae****Reed Cormorant***Microcarbo africanus*

One at Berenty and another at Lac Ravelobe.

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

Our first was a flyover at Analamazoatra. Really good views at Ifaty of birds both in flight and sitting on the nest. Chris had another near Toliara.

**Madagascan Cuckoo-Hawk (E)***Aviceda madagascariensis*

After much searching and expecting we would not see it, our local guide miraculously found an active nest in our last hour at Berenty!

**Frances's Sparrowhawk (NE)***Accipiter francesii*

Best views at Berenty, also seen at Mantadia and Ranomafana.

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

Excellent views of an immature-plumaged bird at Ifaty, with another sitting on the nearby nest.

**Henst's Goshawk (E)***Accipiter henstii*

Heard loud and clear at Ranomafana, the same afternoon we had a fly by in a different area of the park that was likely this species.

**Yellow-billed Kite***Milvus aegyptius*

Commonly seen in the drier areas of the country.

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

We had excellent views of a pair of these critically endangered birds at Lake Ravelobe.

*NOTE: This is one of the world's rarest raptors, with a total global population of no more than 60 pairs.*

**Madagascan Buzzard (E)***Buteo brachypterus*

Seen at numerous locations with the best views at Mantadia NP and Ampijoroa NP.

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

At least 10 birds seen at Ampijoroa NP, the first group of three incredibly well!

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

We had phenomenal views of a pair at Ranomafana NP.

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

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

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

Great views of a pair at Analamazoatra with a couple others seen briefly there.

**Madagascan Flufftail (E)***Sarothrura insularis*

Good views on two occasions at Mantadia and a very brief view at Ranomafana.

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

Crossed an opening three times at a Mantadia marsh.

**White-throated Rail (E)***Dryolimnas cuvieri*

Excellent views on both visits to Lac Alarobia.





NOTE: Some authorities consider the nominate Madagascar race of this bird as distinctive from the near-flightless Aldabra Island race, making this another endemic rallid to Madagascar. This is accepted by the IOC.

**Common Moorhen***Gallinula chloropus*

Common at Lac Alarobia.

**Red-knobbed Coot***Fulica cristata*

Two on Lac Alarobia.

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

Excellent views at Ifaty, with numerous birds flushed elsewhere, including about 10 at Isalo.

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

Just a single bird at Nosy Ve offered fair scope views.

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

A few sightings in the western part of the country.

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

Seen on Nosy Ve and the Betsiboka Delta.

**Common Ringed Plover***Charadrius hiaticula*

Seen at the Toliara wetlands and Sacred Lake.

**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 the Sacred Lake.

**Three-banded Plover***Charadrius tricollaris*Good views at Lac Ravelobe and the Sacred Lake. This race *bifrontatus* is a good candidate for future splitting.**White-fronted Plover***Charadrius marginatus*

Several on Nosy Ve.

**Greater Sand Plover***Charadrius leschenaultii*

Several at the Betsiboka Estuary.

**Caspian Plover***Charadrius asiaticus*

A single bird at the Sacred Lake represents the first ever for Madagascar. It should be noted that the possibility of Oriental Plover has not been conclusively ruled out!

**Jacanas Jacanidae****Madagascan Jacana (E) (NT)***Actophilornis albinucha*

After making a special effort to see this rare bird at Lake Amboromalandy, we then also had really good views of one on Lac Ravelobe and 2 more on Sacred Lake!

**Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae**

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|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Madagascar Snipe (E) (VU)</b>                                   | <i>Gallinago macrodactyla</i> |
| We had good flight views of a bird at a marsh near Ranomafana NP.  |                               |
| <b>Whimbrel</b>  | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>      |
| Seen at Ifaty, Nosy Ve and the Betsiboka Estuary.                  |                               |
| <b>Common Greenshank</b>   | <i>Tringa nebularia</i>       |
| Just a couple at the Toliara wetlands.                             |                               |
| <b>Terek Sandpiper</b>   | <i>Xenus cinereus</i>         |
| About 10 at the Betsiboka Estuary.                                 |                               |
| <b>Common Sandpiper</b>  | <i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>      |
| A few seen along the route.  |                               |
| <b>Ruddy Turnstone</b>   | <i>Arenaria interpres</i>     |
| About 100 at Nosy Ve and one more on the Betsiboka Estuary.        |                               |
| <b>Sanderling</b>  | <i>Calidris alba</i>          |
| Just a few at the Betsiboka Estuary.                               |                               |
| <b>Little Sint</b>   | <i>Calidris minuta</i>        |
| Chris had one on the Betsiboka Estuary.                            |                               |
| <b>Curlew Sandpiper</b>  | <i>Calidris ferruginea</i>    |
| Good numbers on the Betsiboka Estuary and a few in the Ifaty area. |                               |

### Pratincoles   Glareolidae

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Madagascan Pratincole (BE)</b>         | <i>Glareola ocularis</i> |
| Two birds scoped up at the Mangoro River. |                          |

### Gulls & Terns   Laridae

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Kelp Gull</b>   | <i>Larus dominicanus</i>      |
| Four birds seen along the Toliagnaro seafront. This race, <i>melisandae</i> , is ripe for splitting. |                               |
| <b>Greater Crested Tern</b>  | <i>Thalasseus bergii</i>      |
| A handful on the journey to Nosy Ve and in the Betsiboka Estuary.                                    |                               |
| <b>Lesser Crested Tern</b>   | <i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i> |
| Large numbers roosting at Nosy Ve, but distant.  |                               |
| <b>Common Tern</b>   | <i>Sterna hirundo</i>         |
| A couple at the Betsiboka Estuary.   |                               |

### Sandgrouse   Pteroclididae

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>Madagascan Sandgrouse</b>                  | <i>Pterocles personatus</i> |
| Excellent flight views of 7 birds at Berenty. |                             |

### Pigeons & Doves   Columbidae

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>Rock Dove (I)</b>   | <i>Columba livia</i>     |
| This introduced bird was widespread and fairly common in urban/settlement areas throughout the Island. |                          |
| <b>Malagasy Turtle Dove (NE)</b>   | <i>Columba picturata</i> |
| Recorded at numerous sites during this tour.   |                          |
| <b>Namaqua Dove</b>  | <i>Oena capensis</i>     |
| Common in the drier areas like Berenty, Ifaty, and Ampijoroa.  |                          |





**Madagascar Green Pigeon (NE)***Treron australis*

Our best views were at the fruiting tree of our Andasibe lodge, further sightings at Berenty and Ampijoroa NP.

**Madagascar Blue Pigeon (E)***Alectroenas madagascariensis*

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

**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, 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 near Toliara, some people had a second bird there.

**Blue Coua (E)***Coua caerulea*

Regularly seen in the eastern rainforests – always impressive!

**Red-capped Coua (E)***Coua ruficeps*

We saw the brown-capped *olivaceiceps* at Ifaty, including a nesting bird. 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*

Great views at Mantadia NP.

**Coquerel's Coua (E)***Coua coquereli*

Good views at Zombitse NP and again at Ampijoroa NP.

**Running Coua (E)***Coua cursor*

Good views in the spiny forest of Berenty, with more at Ifaty and La Tabla.

**Giant Coua (E)***Coua gigas*

This impressive species gave us superlative views at Berenty and Zombitse NP and was much enjoyed.

**Red-breasted Coua***Coua serriana*

This one took some work, we had two birds at Analamazoatra and eventually, everyone saw it!

**Madagascar Cuckoo (BE)***Cuculus rochii*

Heard abundantly throughout the country, our best views came at Berenty.

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

One at Mantadia NP flying in broad daylight, also a roosting pair at Berenty.

**Typical Owls    Strigidae****Torotoroka Scops Owl (E)***Otus madagascariensis*

Three birds seen on day roosts at Berenty.

**Rainforest Scops Owl (NE)***Otus rutilus*

A very close pair roosting in a thicket at Analamazoatra. Remarkably common by voice at night in the Andasibe area.

NOTE: These Scops Owls have recently been split, based on morphological and vocal differences and habitat preferences.

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

An impressive tally of five roosting birds at Berenty.

**Madagascar 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 almost daily with several excellent looks.

### Swifts Apodidae

#### **Madagascan Spinetail (NE)**

*Zoonavena grandidieri*

A few sightings at Mantadia NP, also Andohahela and Ifaty.

#### **African Palm Swift**

*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*

Seen at a few localities, best views at Isalo.

#### **Malagasy Black Swift (NE)**

*Apus balstoni*

Seen at several localities, the best views in the Toliara area.

*NOTE: These Malagasy birds are usually considered a species distinct from the African Black Swift (A. barbatus), however, no dedicated research has been done.*

#### **Little Swift**

*Apus affinis*

A few in Tana.

### Cuckoo-Rollers Leptosomidae

#### **Cuckoo Roller (NE)**

*Leptosomus discolor*

A wonderfully unique family, we heard it commonly, saw it in flight in a few places, but had our best looks at a perched female in Ranomafana.

*NOTE: Some authorities such as Sinclair I. and Langrande O. consider the Comoros form of this bird to be a separate species from that occurring in Madagascar. IOC does not recognize this split and treats it as a sub-species.*

### Rollers Coraciidae

#### **Broad-billed Roller**

*Eurystomus glaucurus*

Regular encounters with the best looks at Amipijoroa NP and Berenty.

### Ground Rollers Brachypteraciidae

#### **Short-legged Ground Roller (E) (VU)**

*Brachypteracias leptosomus*

Excellent views of one at Mantadia NP!

#### **Scaly Ground Roller (E) (VU)**

*Geobiastes squamigera*

We eventually tracked down one for great views at Mantadia NP, followed the next day by a pair in the same area.

#### **Pitta-like Ground Roller (E)**

*Atelornis pittoides*

An extraordinary bird that we saw well at Mantadia NP, then went on to see another five or so well at Ranomafana.

#### **Rufous-headed Ground Roller (E) (NT)**

*Atelornis crossleyi*

Good views for some after a steep climb at Mantadia. Then exceptional views for all of a pair at Ranomafana. Voted bird of the trip!

#### **Long-tailed Ground Roller (E) (VU)**

*Uratelornis chimaera*

Exceptional views in the Ifaty spiny forest, a close second for bird of the trip!





**Kingfishers    Alcedinidae**

- Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher (E)** *Ispidina madagascariensis*  
Really good views of a pair in Mantadia NP, with another at Ranomafana.
- Malagasy Kingfisher (NE)** *Alcedo vintsioides*  
Regularly seen at wetlands and rice paddies.

**Bee-eaters    Meropidae**

- Olive Bee-eater** *Merops superciliosus*  
Seen on many days.

**Hoopoes    Upupidae**

- Madagascan Hoopoe (E)** *Upupa marginata*  
Several good observations – Berenty, Ifaty and Ampijoroa NP.  
*NOTE: This form is usually considered distinct from the African Hoopoe, based on vocal and morphological differences.*

**Falcons    Falconidae**

- Malagasy Kestrel (NE)** *Falco newtoni*  
A common raptor across the country.
- Banded Kestrel (E)** *Falco zoniventris*  
Excellent views of a recently fledged bird at Ampijoroa NP. It was actually sitting in the nest when we first detected it but soon moved to a prominent perch.
- Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor*  
A bird in flight at Berenty.
- Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*  
We found a perched bird along the San Augustin cliffs.

**Parrots    Psittacidae**

- Grey-headed Lovebird (E)** *Agapornis canus*  
These wonderful little parrots were seen at Berenty, Ifaty, and Ampijoroa NP.
- Greater Vasa Parrot (NE)** *Coracopsis vasa*  
Seemingly the less common of the two parrots, but a surprisingly tricky identification. We definitely recorded it at Mantadia, Zombitse, and Ranomafana.
- 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 had several stunning males at both Mantadia and Ranomafana, along with a female at Analamazoatra.
- Schlegel's Asity (E) (NT)** *Philepitta schlegeli*  
A single stunning male was eventually tracked down for good views at Ampijoroa.
- Common Sunbird-Asity (E)** *Neodrepanis coruscans*  
We saw just a single male, at Mantadia. Fortunately, it stayed around for quite a while and gave a great view.



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

Upon finding a nest in the upper reaches of Ranomafana NP, we were treated to repeated, though mostly brief, views of a female.

**Vangas   Vangidae****Red-tailed Vanga (E)***Calicalicus madagascariensis*

Seen well in Mantadia NP, Analamazoatra, Ifaty and Ranomafana NP.

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

A male was seen by some on our first attempt at La Tabla, and the rest of the group caught up with it on the second attempt.

**Hook-billed Vanga (E)***Vanga curvirostris*

We saw it well a couple of times at Berenty, then briefly at Ifaty.

**Lafresnaye's Vanga (E)***Xenopirostris xenopirostris*

After initially causing some frustration, we eventually had excellent views of two different females at Ifaty, and then a third bird at La Tabla.

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

After much persistence, part of the group finally tracked down a fine male at Ampijoroa NP.

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

Great views of a female and much briefer views of a male or two, all at Ranomafana NP.

**Sickle-billed Vanga (E)***Falcula palliata*

A memorable sighting at Berenty, then a few at Ampijoroa.

**White-headed Vanga (E)***Artamella viridis*

After brief views for some at Mantadia and Ifaty, we finally had some good views at Ranomafana and Ampijoroa.

**Chabert Vanga (E)***Leptopterus chabert*

Regularly seen in singles or pairs, our first one at the Mangoro bridge harassing a kestrel was especially good!

**Blue Vanga (NE)***Cyanolanius madagascarensis*

Pairs seen regularly at Analamazoatra, Mantadia, Andohahela, Ranomafana and Ampijoroa.

*NOTE: Sinclair I. and Langrande O., consider the Comoros race of this species to be distinct, resulting in the Madagascar Blue Vanga being another Madagascar endemic. This stance is not widely accepted.*

**Rufous Vanga (E)***Schetba rufa*

Nice views of a female at Ranomafana and then a pair at Ampijoroa.

**Tylas Vanga (E)***Tylas eduardi*

Just a single bird early on at Mantadia, giving good views.

*NOTE: Recent DNA evidence suggests that this "vanga" is more closely related to the cuckoo-shrikes.*

**Nuthatch Vanga (E)***Hypositta corallirostris*

We had excellent views of a pair at Analamazoatra.

**Dark Newtonia (E)***Newtonia amphichroa*

Good views at Mantadia, with another heard at Ranomafana.

**Common Newtonia (E)***Newtonia brunneicauda*

A widespread species that was recorded in most woodland habitats.

**Archbold's Newtonia (E)***Newtonia archboldi*

Great views of a couple birds 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 in the rain at Andohahela NP.





**Ward's Flycatcher (E)** *Pseudobias wardi*

Good views at Mantadia NP and another at Ranomafana.

**Crossley's Vanga (E)** *Mystacornis crossleyi*

We eventually tracked down one for good views at Mantadia, then saw it with ease in Analamazoatra the following morning.

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

Just a handful of encounters – Mantadia, Ranomafana and Ampijoroa.

**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 various colour morphs at most woodland and forested sites.

**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 every day of the tour.

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

Just a handful of sightings, surprisingly few in fact. Our best views came in the Ranomafana area.

**Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola*

A few en route to Andasibe.

**Reed Warblers & Allies Acrocephalidae****Malagasy Brush Warbler (NE)** *Nesillas typical*

Regular sightings and a common voice of thickets throughout much of the country.

**Subdesert Brush Warbler (E)** *Nesillas lantzii*

Good views at Berenty and La Tabla.

*NOTE: Formerly considered conspecific with Madagascar Brush Warbler but vocally distinct and sympatric with that species near Fort Dauphin.*

**Madagascan Swamp Warbler (E)** *Acrocephalus newtoni*

Seen at Lac Alarobia, Mantadia and near Ranomafana.



**Grassbirds & Allies Locustellidae****Brown Emutail (E)***Bradypterus (Dromaeocercus) brunneus*

Having pretty much given up on seeing it, we were delighted to have an extended observation of a very cooperative bird at Ranomafana.

**Grey Emutail (E)***Amphiliastur (Dromaeocercus) seebohmii*

A memorable sighting of a pair at a wetland near Ranomafana NP.

**Malagasy Warblers Bernieridae****White-throated Oxylabes (E)***Oxylabes madagascariensis*

We had excellent views at Mantadia.

**Long-billed Bernieria (E)***Bernieria madagascariensis*

Seen well in Mantadia NP, Andohahela NP, Zombitse NP, Ranomafana NP and Ampijoroa NP.

**Cryptic Warbler (E)***Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*

Exceptional views at Mantadia and another at Ranomafana.

**Wedge-tailed Jery (E) (NT)***Hartertula flavoviridis*

Surprisingly difficult this tour, with brief views at Mantadia. We finally nailed good views at Ranomafana.

**Thamnornis (E)***Thamnornis chloropetoides*

A group of three birds showed well in the spiny forest near Ifaty.

**Spectacled Tetraka (E)***Xanthomixis zosterops*

The common rainforest tetraka, we saw it numerous times at Mantadia NP and Ranomafana NP.

**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*

Good views of a pair in Ranomafana NP.

**Rand's Warbler (E)***Randia pseudozosterops*

We scoped a couple of birds at Mantadia NP and heard more there and at Ranomafana.

**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*

Good views at Mantadia and at Berenty and Ifaty. These two forms, *sclateri* and *pallidior*, seem highly distinct in terms of habitat preference, vocalisations 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 almost daily.

**Starlings Sturnidae**

**Common Myna (I)***Acridotheres tristis tristis*

This introduced species was common and widespread in disturbed, open habitats throughout the Island.

**Madagascan Starling (E)***Hartlaubius aurata*

We had good scope views of two birds 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*

We eventually tracked down a nice male in our limited time at Anakao.

**Forest Rock Thrush (E)***Monticola sharpei*

We saw the nominate form at Mantadia NP and Ranomafana NP and the *bensoni* subspecies at Isalo NP.

**Madagascan Stonechat (E)***Saxicola sibilla*

Regular sightings, mostly during our drives.

**Northern Wheatear***Oenanthe oenanthe*

A single bird at Nosy Ve. A vagrant to Madagascar!

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

A common species recorded almost daily.

**Malagasy Green Sunbird (NE)***Cinnyris notatus*

This much larger sunbird was seen at Andasibe, Mantadia NP and Ranomafana NP.

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

Just a couple of good sightings at Analamazoatra.

**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*

A male seen well at Analamazoatra and a brief sighting at Ranomafana. There is extensive hybridization with the previous species.

**Waxbills, Munias & Allies Estrildidae****Madagascar Mannikin (E)***Lemuresthes (Lonchura) nana*

Just a few sightings of this widespread bird, with our best coming right at our hotel in Tana.

**Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae****Madagascar Wagtail (E)***Motacilla flaviventris*

This attractive wagtail was seen well in Andasibe and Ranomafana NP, 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

#### **Lowland Streaked Tenrec**

*Hemicentetes semispinosus*

Two seen well at Mantadia NP, including one in the hand. Another at night at Ranomafana. A fantastic creature!

### Old World Leaf-nosed Bats Hipposideridae

#### **Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bat (NF)**

*Hipposideros commersoni*

A single bat seen at Ampijoroa.

### 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, the following day we could see hundreds of them in the sky, having obviously been disturbed by something or somebody.

### Malagasy Carnivores Eupleridae

#### **Malagasy Ring-tailed Mongoose**

*Galidia elegans*

Several views of this beautiful creature at Ranomafana NP, best at the picnic site.

### Mouse and Dwarf Lemurs Cheirogaleidae

#### **Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur**

*Cheirogaleus crossleyi*

Seen nightly during our walks around Andasibe.

#### **Greater Dwarf Lemur**

*Cheirogaleus major*

A distant one at night near Ranomafana NP.

#### **Western Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur**

*Cheirogaleus medius*

We saw a few of these during a night walk near Ampijoroa NP.

#### **Grey-Brown Mouse Lemur**

*Microcebus griseorufus*

Several seen in the spiny forest of Berenty, including one at a day roost.

#### **Goodman's Mouse Lemur (VU)**

*Microcebus lehilahytsara*

Several of these tiny lemurs were seen on our night walks at Andasibe.

#### **Grey Mouse Lemur**

*Microcebus murinus*

We encountered these lemurs on night walks at Berenty and Ampijoroa NP.

#### **Golden-brown Mouse Lemur**

*Microcebus ravelobensis*

Several on our night walk near Ampijoroa NP.

#### **Rufous Mouse Lemur (VU)**

*Microcebus rufus*

We saw this tiny lemur very well at Ranomafana NP.

### Sportive Lemurs Lepilemuridae

#### **Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur (EN)**

*Lepilemur edwardsi*

Their screeches were a common sound during our dinners at Ampijoroa, we had a good look at one.



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

Three day-roosting animals in Zombitse NP.

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

We saw many of these at Berenty, both by day and by night

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

We were privileged to see one of these recently discovered, and undescribed, lemurs. Apparently currently known from a total world population of 4 individuals in Park Mosa!

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

Seen at Andasibe and Analamazotra

**Mongoose Lemur***Eulemur mongaz*

One outside the dining room at Ampijoroa NP.

**Red-bellied Lemur (VU)***Eulemur rubiventer*

We had superb looks at three of these lemurs in Ranomafana NP.

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

Seen at Berenty, where it has been introduced, then again at Ranomafana where it is truly wild.

**Golden Bamboo Lemur (CR)***Haplemur aureus*

We spent quite a bit of time with a couple of groups of this critically endangered species in Ranomafana NP.

**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.

**Greater Bamboo Lemur***Prolemur simus*

Prolonged views of two at Ranomafana NP.

**Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur (CR)***Varecia variegata*

Two of these absolutely stunning lemurs were seen well in Mantadia NP, another five at Ranomafana.

**Avahis, Sifakas and Indri Indriidae****Eastern Woolly Lemur (VU)***Avahi laniger*

This nocturnal lemur was seen well on three different nights at Andasibe.

**Indri (CR)***Indri indri*

Seeing and hearing these iconic mammals at such close range on our first afternoon of Analamazoatra was one of the definitive moments of the trip. We saw them a couple more times and heard them regularly!

**Coquerel's Sifaka (EN)***Propithecus coquereli*

These colourful sifakas were enjoyed at length at Ampijoroa NP.

**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*

Two animals at Ranomafana NP, bounding low through the trees towards us, just over our heads, and carrying on into the valley. Magical!

**Verreaux's Sifaka (EN)***Propithecus verreauxi*

Abundantly seen at Berenty, including many dancing animals. Another small group at Zombitse NP



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

|                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Western Tuft-tailed Rat</b> | <i>Eliurus myoxinus</i>  |
| One at Ampijoroa NP.           |                          |
| <b>Eastern Red Forest Rat</b>  | <i>Nesomys rufus</i>     |
| One at Ranomafana NP.          |                          |
| <b>Lowland Red Forest Rat</b>  | <i>Nesomys audeberti</i> |
| Two at Ranomafana NP.          |                          |

**Whales and Dolphins    *Cetacea***

|  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| <b>Humpback Whale</b>                                  | <i>Megaptera noveangliae</i> |
| One distant breaching animal offshore from Toliagnaro. |                              |
| <b>Risso's Dolphin</b>                                 | <i>Grampus griseus</i>       |
| Excellent views of four en route to Nosy Ve.           |                              |

**Annotated list of Reptiles**

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

**Tortoises    *Testudinae***

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Spider Tortoise</b>  | <i>Pyxis arachnoides</i> |
| Two individuals of this rare species seen in the spiny forest at Berenty. |                          |

**Crocodiles    *Crocodylidae***

|                        |                             |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Nile Crocodile</b>  | <i>Crocodylus niloticus</i> |
| Seen at Lake Ravelobe. |                             |

**Chameleons    *Chamaeleonidae***

|   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <b>Elongate Leaf Chameleon</b>                            | <i>Brookesia nasus</i>         |
| One of these incredibly tiny chameleons at Ranomafana.    |                                |
| <b>Brown Leaf Chameleon</b>                               | <i>Brookesia superciliaris</i> |
| One of these small chameleons at Andasibe.                |                                |
| <b>Short-horned Chameleon</b>                             | <i>Calumma brevicornis</i>     |
| Several seen at night at Andasibe and Ranomafana.         |                                |
| <b>Blue-legged Chameleon</b>                              | <i>Calumma crypticum</i>       |
| A single at Ranomafana.                                   |                                |
| <b>Nose-horned Chameleon</b>                              | <i>Calumma nasutum</i>         |
| Seen near Andasibe.                                       |                                |
| <b>O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon</b>                          | <i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>   |
| Three on our Ranomafana night walk.                       |                                |
| <b>Parson's Chameleon</b>                                 | <i>Calumma parsonii</i>        |
| Three seen on a night walk near Andasibe.                 |                                |
| <b>Oustalet's Chameleon</b>                               | <i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>      |
| Great views of a couple at Ampijoroa – lots of character! |                                |
| <b>Spiny-backed/Warty Chameleon</b>                       | <i>Furcifer verrucosus</i>     |





Several at Berenty.

### **Geckos Gekkonidae**

#### **Antongil Velvet Gecko**

*Blaesodactylus antongilensis*

At least one at Ampijoroa.

#### **House Gecko**

*Hemidactylus mabouia*

Present in some of our accommodations.

#### **Mercatorial Tropical House Gecko**

*Hemidactylus mercatorius*

Present in some of our accommodations.

#### **Mocquard's Big-headed Gecko**

*Paroedura bastardi*

A beautiful gecko seen on a night walk at Berenty.

#### **Painted Big-headed Gecko**

*Paroedura picta*

Another beautiful gecko also seen on a night walk at Berenty, in fact side by side with the previous species.

#### **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 NP.

#### **Thick-tailed Day Gecko**

*Phelsuma mutabilis*

Seen at Berenty.

#### **Peacock Day Gecko**

*Phelsuma quadriocellata*

We found this stunning lizard at our picnic stop at Ranomafana.

#### **Standing's Day Gecko**

*Phelsuma standingi*

A drab day gecko that we saw at Ifaty and Zombitse NP.

#### **Mossy Flat-tail Gecko**

*Uroplatus sikorae*

A great reptile – we saw one by day at Analamazoatra then memorable views at night.

#### **Satanic Flat-tail Gecko**

*Uroplatus phantasticus*

We were privileged to see two at Ranomafana. Fantastic indeed!

### **Plated Lizards Gerrhosauridae**

#### **Western Girdled Lizard**

*Zonosaurus laticaudatus*

This large lizard was seen regularly in Ampijoroa NP.

#### **Madagascar Girdled Lizard**

*Zonosaurus madagascarensis*

We saw this species at Ranomafana and Mantadia NPs.

### **Skinks Scincidae**

#### **Gravenhorst's Skink**

*Trachylepis gravenhorstii*

We saw this at Berenty, and perhaps elsewhere.

### **Iguanas Iguanidae**

#### **Three-eyed Lizard**

*Chalarodon madagascariensis*

This species was common at Berenty and Ifaty.

#### **Cuvier's Madagascar Swift**

*Oplurus cuvieri*

These lizards were conspicuous at Ampijoroa NP.

#### **Merrem's Madagascar Swift**

*Oplurus cyclurus*

A very good look in the Berenty spiny forest.



**Dumeril's Madagascar Swift***Oplurus quadrimaculatus*

Common at our hotel grounds at Isalo NP.

**Typical Snakes    Lamprophiidae****Giant Hog-nosed Snake***Leioheterodon madagascariensis*

Ron and Carol had one outside their cabin at Ampijoroa NP.

**White-lipped Smooth Snake***Liophidium torquatum*

Seen on both days in Ranomafana NP.

**Gold-collared Snake***Liophidium rhodogaster*

Lovely views of one in Ranomafana NP.

**Mahafaly Sand Snake***Mimophis mahfalensis*

One at the Berenty spiny forest and another at Ampijoroa NP.

**Lateral Water Snake***Bibilava lateralis*

One at Mantadia.

**Annotated list of Amphibians**

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**Madagascar Frogs    Mantellidae****Bohme's Bright-eyed Frog***Boophis boehmei*One of several *Boophis* frogs we saw on our Andasibe night walks**Green Bright-eyed Frog***Boophis viridis*The most common of the *Boophis* frogs seen during our Andasibe night walks**Andasibe Bright-eyed Frog***Boophis pyrrhus*

Seen on a night walk near, appropriately enough, Andasibe!

**Ankafana Bright-eyed Frog***Boophis luteus*

Heard only with its distinctive "vingte-huite" call.

**Sculpted Grainy Frog***Gephyromantis sculpturatus*

One of these large leaf-litter frogs at Ranomafana NP.

**Tschenk's Grainy Frog***Gephyromantis tschenki*

One of these at Ranomafana.

**Ambatolahy Grainy Frog***Gephyromantis enki*

Another well-camouflaged leaf-litter frog that was seen at Ranomafana NP.

**Baron's Mantella***Mantella baroni*

Emile and Chantelle found us two of these exquisite frogs near Ranomafana NP.



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