



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Madagascar Highlights

14th to 28th October 2012 (15 days)



Short-legged Ground Roller by Markus Lilje

Trip report compiled by tour leader Markus Lilje

Top 10 birds and top 5 mammals of the tour as voted for by participants:

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| 1. Long-tailed Ground Roller | 6. Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher |
| 2. Short-legged Ground Roller | 7. Blue Vanga |
| 3. Sub-desert Mesite | 8. Crab-plover |
| 4. Pitta-like Ground Roller | 9. Madagascar Nightjar |
| 5. Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher on nests | 10. Red-tailed Tropicbird |
| 1. Fosa | 4. Verreaux's Sifaka |
| 2. Indri | 5. Diademed Sifaka |
| 3. Ring-tailed Lemur | Special mention: Lowland Streaked Tenrec |
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Tour Summary

Sometimes referred to as the “laboratory of evolution”, Madagascar, the huge Indian Ocean island situated 500km off the coast of east Africa, has long attracted the attention of naturalists and travelling birders alike. Rockjumper’s second of two Madagascar Highlights tours this year kicked off in the capital city of Antananarivo (Tana) where we spent the first night. On the first morning we immediately struck out for the nearby wetland of Lake Alarobia. This small, privately owned piece of land supports a fairly large array of waterbirds, most important of which is the small number of Malagasy Pond Herons that breed here annually. We enjoyed great views of several immaculate adult pond herons in full breeding plumage and also found a host of more widespread species such as Red-billed Teal, White-faced Whistling Duck, a few Knob-billed and some surprising Meller’s Ducks, as well as scores of Dimorphic and Western Cattle Egrets, and Black and Squacco Herons. We also encountered the stunning Malagasy Kingfisher and Olive Bee-eater among a few other species around the edges.



Grey-headed Lovebird by Markus Lilje

for many of the group while we were in this area. A very cooperative Archbold’s Newtania, Thamnornis with its bizarre call, Sickle-billed, Red-tailed, Chabert’s and Lafresnaye’s Vangas, Madagascar Cuckoo, Madagascar Green Pigeon, Grey-headed Lovebird, Running, Red-capped (this form sometimes split as Green-capped) and Crested Couas, Lesser Vasa Parrot and many Sakalava Weavers were all enjoyed during our morning excursion here. We were also extremely fortunate to have a great encounter with a Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec, while a probable Petter’s Sportive Lemur on a day roost was also seen.

From Tana we flew down south to Tulear and proceeded to the coastal town of Ifaty. Here we spent 2 nights, with some time in the very unique and interesting spiny forest; a habitat that supports a feast of mouth-watering endemics of the island. Our morning traversing the maze of trails in this dry woodland was very memorable and enjoyable indeed and we came up with all the major targets, plus a host of other great sightings. Subdesert Mesite was amazing as it just stayed motionless for the duration of the time we spent with it, and we were also fortunate to get a Long-tailed Ground Roller that showed well when it came to the edge of a thicket it was hiding under. These are two of Madagascar’s most localized and sought-after endemics, which understandably



Subdesert Mesite by Markus Lilje

Also in the area are some other great habitats worth exploring and we took some time to search the grasslands and wetlands near Ifaty. These habitats produced a few great birds including the rare Madagascar Plover, Madagascar Lark, the secretive Baillon’s Crake, African Swampphen, Hottentot Teal, Malagasy Kestrel, Subdesert Brush Warbler and the uncommon Red-knobbed Coot. The area also has many of the more common and widespread species such as Little Grebe, Black-winged Stilt, Grey, Common Ringed, Three-banded and Kittlitz’s Plovers, Whimbrel and Curlew Sandpiper.



Red-tailed Tropicbird by Markus Lilje

on foot and the amazing close-up views and photographic opportunities around the island were great! Apart from the tropicbirds we also found a small flock of the monotypic Crab-plover, an extremely striking and very desirable bird that spends its non-breeding season here – Madagascar remains one of the best places on earth to see this species. A short snorkelling session was also enjoyed by some of the group, while the non-snorkelers enjoyed some down-time instead. Humblot’s Heron, White-fronted Plover and Lesser Crested Tern were also seen at various sites during the trip. After a tasty seafood lunch and brilliant views of a pair of Littoral Rock Thrush and Madagascar Buttonquail, we then headed back to Tulear for our final night in the south-west for most of us.

Leaving Ifaty we drove back south past Tulear and then east to the obvious landmark of La Table, where our search for the exceptionally range-restricted Red-shouldered Vanga and Verreaux’s Coua began. It wasn’t long before we located both species and were treated to terrific views of these sought-after endemics. One of the highlights of visiting the south-west of Madagascar is doing a boat trip to the offshore island of Nosy Ve. This small island just off Tulear supports a reasonably sized breeding population of the exquisite Red-tailed Tropicbird. Here we were able to approach these beautiful birds



Crab-plovers by Markus Lilje



Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher by Markus Lilje

endemics. Many of the region’s specialties showed very well during our stay here and these included the fantastic Giant Coua, close Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher on nests, White-browed Hawk-Owl, the recently

After some very testing and interesting travel logistics we all eventually made it to the world-famous Berenty Lemur Reserve, a privately-owned reserve to the north-west of Fort Dauphin. Here we settled into our accommodations for 2 nights before making the most of the time we had in this unique area. Berenty literally teams with lemurs and we were permanently entertained by Ring-tails, Verreaux’s Sifakas and the introduced and hybridised Brown Lemurs. We were also fortunate to have several sifakas doing their dance for us as they crossed the open areas between feeding trees near the lodge. The area also plays host to a large and very rowdy colony of Madagascar Flying-Foxes in the tall gallery forest, which we took time to observe. Bird-wise Berenty is also a must-visit reserve as it supports good populations of several localized and scarce



Ring-tailed Lemurs by Markus Lilje

split Torotoroka Scops Owl, Madagascar Nightjar on a dayroost, Madagascar Sandgrouse and Frances's Sparrowhawk. Night walks at Berenty are fantastic, and besides the two endemic owls that are seen on many walks, we encountered an array of fabulous night life in the form of White-footed Sportive and Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs, Warty Chameleon, Plain and Painted Big-headed Geckos, Collared Iguanid and Flatid Leaf Bugs. After a bit of rain we were fortunate to encounter both of the uncommon tortoises of the area – the small Spider Tortoise and much larger Radiated Tortoise. Due to changes in flight schedules we had a lot of time in Fort Dauphin before heading back to the capital. Some of this time was spent on a short city tour and at the local Botanical Gardens, where we enjoyed looking at Hamerkop, Malagasy Kingfisher and a few other widespread species in addition to some stunning dragonflies, damselflies and butterflies.

We left Antananarivo with much anticipation as we neared the eastern rainforest sites of Perinet and Mantadia, home to many of the top birds on the island. On the way we had great views of Madagascar Pratincole on the Mangoro River, where they were resting on rocks and allowed a close approach from the bank. A whole host of different species occur in these forests near the town of Andasibe and we had the next four full days as well as an afternoon and morning session to get to grips with the



Madagascar Pratincoles by Markus Lilje

amazing fauna of the area.



Rufous-headed Ground Roller by Markus Lilje



Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher by Markus Lilje

Mantadia is THE place for ground rollers and we found and obtained brilliant views of all 4 rainforest ground rollers during our time here! Our first member of this family was Pitta-like Ground Roller, a stunningly marked bird that allowed us to get really close and provided us with unbeatable views as it fed in the thick undergrowth! Scaly Ground Roller reaches the extreme southern limit of its range here and played hard to get, constantly running through the undergrowth and blending in to the leaf-litter. The often difficult-to-find Short-legged Ground Roller was also seen incredibly well, when we had 2 birds in Mantadia that posed for photographs a few metres above the ground! This though was not achieved without an incredible amount of effort as we headed up and down steep and slippery slopes, donating blood to leeches and thorny vines along the way...but what a reward! Our final ground roller of the area, the skulking Rufous-headed Ground Roller, was finally found soon after the Short-legged, when we heard it call just a little further up the stream we had just crossed – eventually we had this bird calling on a log just meters from us, with everyone enjoying great views! This is always one of the top families of the tour – a group of wonderfully-

coloured and large endemic birds that we managed to complete, getting all 5 of these special species.

Our time spent in the rainforests of Mantadia and Analamazaotra National Parks produced a further array of wonderful and extremely memorable sightings of birds, mammals and reptiles alike. We enjoyed numerous views of the beautiful Velvet Asity, while the shy and secretive Madagascar Wood Rail also showed exceptionally well. Some of the specials of the area, such as Madagascar Rail, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Red-breasted, Red-fronted and stunning Blue Couas, sensationally camouflaged Collared Nightjar on a nest, Cuckoo Roller, Madagascar Starling, White-throated Rail, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher that landed right next to us, and the aberrant terrestrial Crossley's Babbler all showed really well. The Madagascar Flufftail on the other hand kept us waiting for days, before we enjoyed phenomenal views of it calling near the lodge. Flock specialists such as Red-tailed, Hook-billed, White-headed, Blue and Nuthatch Vangas, Dark Newtonia, Ward's Flycatcher, Madagascar Cuckooshrike and Nelicourvi Weaver also showed well on a number of occasions, and we managed to pick up most of the understory skulkers, including White-throated Oxylabes, Long-billed Berniera and Spectacled Tetraka, plus the very scarce Wedge-tailed Jery and both Brown and Grey Emutails. We also found Rainforest Scops Owl on its day roost, while Madagascar Owl presented itself very nicely on 2 days near Andasibe. After watching a Madagascar Drongo repeatedly dismantling a nest-building attempt by a pair of Tylas Vangas we managed to find Forest Rock Thrush following a lot of ridge-topping effort. At a small forest pool we had Madagascar Grebe and Meller's Duck, as well as Madagascar Mannikin and Madagascar Wagtail in more open areas.



Indri by Markus Lilje



Diademed Sifaka by Markus Lilje

The night walks in the reserve's secondary forest generally proved to be very rewarding, although the extremely dry conditions limited the frog encounters to only 2 species, and we found a host of creatures that would otherwise be impossible to see during the day. Goodman's Mouse and Furry-eared Dwarf Lemurs plus Eastern Avahi (which we also had during the day in Mantadia) were all encountered during these nocturnal excursions; while delightful reptiles including Greater Stump-tailed, Short-horned, Parson's and Band-bellied Chameleons and Sikora Leaf-tailed Gecko entertained us too. The Parson's Chameleon deserves a special mention as the huge, bright green male that we saw was such a hit that

many participants spent more time with it than with the nearby feeding Indri family! The reserves of Perinet and Mantadia are brilliant places to see a great diversity of diurnal lemurs as well and we managed to find families of inquisitive Diademed Sifaka, a few Eastern Grey Bamboo and Common Brown Lemurs, and several groups of Indri in both Mantadia and Analamazaotra, with which we had some very special and intimate encounters. Two of the top mammals though were rather unexpected –

both of them seen in Mantadia: first we had a very close view of a male Fosa, the island's top predator that eventually got an earful from the unhappy local Diademed Sifakas. We also got lucky with a sighting of an amazing Lowland Streaked Tenrec, which our local guide held onto, allowing views for everyone. Other interesting species that were encountered in the rainforest included Giraffe-necked Weevil and a beautiful Madagascar Tree Boa, just after shedding its skin.

After this across-the-board look at the island's most important habitats, it was sadly time to say goodbye to the very special Madagascar, and so we made our way back to Tana. All in all we had yet another very successful and enjoyable trip to this evolutionary marvel! A total of 155 birds, 20 mammals and 26 reptiles and amphibians were seen during this quick-fire trip around the island, of which a very high proportion of these species are found nowhere else on earth. It's therefore no surprise that Madagascar is an absolute must-visit destination for any serious naturalist or wildlife enthusiast....



Lowland Streaked Tenrec by Markus Lilje

Annotated List of Birds

155 species recorded (of which 1 was heard only)

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC List of Birds of the World Recommended English Names Version 2.9. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. Gill, F. and Wright, M. 2006.

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

e: an endemic subspecies

ne: a near-endemic subspecies

be: a breeding endemic subspecies

CONSERVATION STATUS

C: critical **En:** endangered **V:** vulnerable **NT:** near-threatened

Guineafowl Numididae

Helmeted Guineafowl (I)

Numida meleagris

This introduced species to the island was recorded at Berenty Lemur Reserve.

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

Pheasants, Fowl & allies Phasianidae

Madagascar Partridge

Margaroperdix madagarensis

Some of the group had brief views of a few birds crossing a track in Analamazaotra reserve.

Ducks & Geese Anatidae

- White-faced Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna viduata*
This widespread species was seen in good numbers at Lac Alarobia and at the wetlands south of Ifaty.
- Knob-billed (Comb) Duck** *Sarkidiornis melanotos*
At least 3 birds were seen well at Lac Alarobia in Tana.
- Meller's Duck (E)** *Anas melleri*
A single bird was a surprise in Tana, Lac Alarobia. Later a pair of these scarce ducks was seen at a small pond in Mantadia NP.
- Red-billed Teal (Duck)** *Anas erythrorhyncha*
We recorded this duck in very good numbers at a number of freshwater wetlands on our route.
- Hottentot Teal** *Anas hottentota*
This tiny duck was seen at both Lake Alarobia and in the wetlands south of Ifaty.

Grebes Podicipedidae

- Little Grebe (Dabchick)** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
Fairly good numbers of these very widespread birds were found on the wetlands south of Ifaty.
- Madagascar Grebe (E) (V)** *Tachybaptus pelzelinii*
We had great views of this lovely little species at a little forest pool in Mantadia NP.
NOTE: Globally threatened and declining due to habitat loss, introduction of exotic fish, and competition (and possibly hybridization) with Little Grebe.

Tropicbirds Phaethontidae

- Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda*
We all enjoyed great views of a number of these elegant birds at and around their nesting site on the small island of Nosy Ve.

Hérons & Bitterns Ardeidae

- Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*
This extremely widespread species was encountered in good numbers at Lake Alarobia.
- Striated Heron** *Butorides striatus*
This species is widespread in Madagascar, where we had numerous sightings at various locations.
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*
Great numbers of birds in wonderful breeding plumage were seen at Lake Alarobia, with small numbers elsewhere.
- Malagasy Pond Heron (BE) (V)** *Ardeola idea*
A striking species in breeding plumage, 3 birds were seen during our afternoon visit to Lake Alarobia.
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*
Common throughout the tour and recorded on most days.
NOTE: Clements does not accept this split and lumps this species with Eastern Cattle Egret B. coromandus as Cattle Egret.
- Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*
We found a few of these birds at their nesting site near San Augustine, south of Tulear.
- Humblot's Heron (E) (V)** *Ardea humbloti*
The cliffs near San Augustine yielded great views of 4 of these large and very dark endemic herons.

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

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

A few scattered sightings of this elegant egret were had throughout the tour.

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*

We had large numbers of this species at Lake Alarobia in Tana, before we had a few more at other wetland sites.

Dimorphic Egret *Egretta dimorpha*

Fairly common and widespread throughout Madagascar's rice paddy areas and shoreline, with peak numbers recorded at Lake Alarobia in Tana.

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*

A few sightings of these great birds were enjoyed east of Tana as well as in the far south of the country.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae

Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda madagascariensis*

A single guest was fortunate to get great views of a single bird in the Berenty reserve.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

A fairly common bird in Madagascar that was seen throughout the south of the Island as well as in the Tana area.

NOTE: This species is sometimes lumped with Black Kite *M. migrans*, Clements follows this taxonomy. We observed the Yellow-billed Kite throughout Madagascar.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Fairly good numbers were seen around the Berenty area in southern Madagascar.

Madagascar Harrier-Hawk (E) *Polyboroides radiatus*

This species was seen very in flight in the Ifaty area, before we had wonderful low fly-by views near Mantadia NP.

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

We had fantastic views of this species in the Berenty and Mantadia areas.

Henst's Goshawk (E) *Accipiter henstii*

A large and seldom-seen raptor that was heard and then finally seen very well in Mantadia NP.

Madagascar Buzzard (E) *Buteo brachypterus*

Seen on numerous occasions throughout the tour, typically circling overhead.

Falcons Falconidae

Malagasy Kestrel (NE) *Falco newtoni*

Recorded well on many days, particularly in open habitats, forest edge and urban areas.

Banded Kestrel (E) *Falco zoniventris*

A pair was seen fairly briefly as they flew overhead in the Ifaty area.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

We had an unexpected sighting of this species over the Mantadia NP forest.

Mesites Mesitornithidae

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

We enjoyed great views of both male and female birds, both in their frozen posture, perched in the

spiny forest near Ifaty. One of Madagascar's most sought-after endemics and always proves to be a trip favourite.

Flufftails Sarothruridae

Madagascar Flufftail (E) *Sarothrura insularis*

The flufftails are a notoriously difficult and elusive group of birds! This one though proved to be good to us as it took no more than a few minutes for everyone to get great views near our hotel in Andasibe.

Rails & Gallinules Rallidae

Madagascar Wood Rail (E) *Canirallus kioloides*

On the final morning we had in the rainforest habitat of this species we enjoyed great close views of 2 birds as they were feeding and moving through the undergrowth in Analamazaotra.

Madagascar Rail (E) *Rallus madagascariensis*

A very interested bird was seen very well in a small wetland near Mantadia NP.

White-throated Rail (E) *Dryolimnas cuvieri*

This species was seen twice in the small wetland right in front of our accommodations near Andasibe.

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 not accepted by the IOC or Clements taxonomy.

African Swamphen (Purple Gallinule) *Porphyrio madagascariensis*

We enjoyed scope views of this large rallid in the wetlands near Ifaty, where we recorded an adult with a single juvenile.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Lake Alarobia and an Ifaty area wetland produced views of this common bird.

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*

This species is surprisingly scarce throughout Madagascar, a single bird showed in a small flock of ducks south of Ifaty.

Buttonquails Turnicidae

Madagascar Buttonquail (E) *Turnix nigricollis*

Fantastic views of a pair were enjoyed at our lunch site in Anakao, where they were seen in the garden.

Crab-Plover Dromadidae

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola*

9 of these monotypic birds were seen on the island of Nosy Ve, where they provided us with good views.

Avocets & Stilts Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Recorded at a few wetland sites in the south-western part of the island.

Plovers Charadriidae

Grey (Black-bellied) Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

The coastal mudflats around Ifaty and Nosy Vé yielded views of this migrant species.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

The small inland wetlands in the Ifaty area produced sightings of this attractive wader.

Madagascar Plover (E) (NT)*Charadrius thoracicus*

We enjoyed brilliant views of this attractive and scarce endemic in the Ifaty area. This endemic wader is seriously threatened by habitat loss due to development and human encroachment.

Kittlitz's Plover*Charadrius pecuarius*

This beautiful plover was seen in large numbers at wetlands and grasslands south of Ifaty.

Three-banded Plover*Charadrius tricollaris*

2 birds were encountered at a few small pools of fresher water to the south of Ifaty.

White-fronted Plover*Charadrius marginatus*

These attractive shorebirds were seen very well on the beach at Nosy V e.

Painted Snipes Rostratulidae**Greater Painted Snipe***Rostratula benghalensis*

On the final afternoon in the Andasibe area, we managed to flush a pair of these sought-after birds, where they gave us good flight views.

Sandpipers & Snipes Scolopacidae**Whimbrel***Numenius phaeopus*

8 of these widespread, but great birds were recorded over 2 days in the Ifaty and Nosy Ve areas.

Common Greenshank*Tringa nebularia*

Fairly good numbers were recorded in the southern part of the island.

Common Sandpiper*Tringa hypoleucos*

Small numbers of this very widespread shorebird were seen near Ifaty and on the Mangoro River.

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres*

After first birds were seen south of Ifaty we had good views of larger numbers on Nosy Ve.

Sanderling*Calidris alba*

2 birds were seen on a sand spit of the small island of Nosy Ve, associating with other shorebirds.

Curlew Sandpiper*Calidris ferruginea*

The waterbodies to the south of Ifaty produced good numbers of these shorebirds.

Courasers & Pratincoles Glareolidae**Madagascar Pratincole (BE)***Glareola ocularis*

We found 3 birds at the Mangoro River en route from Tana to Perinet; we enjoyed great close views of birds in flight and then resting on mid-river boulders.

Gulls & Terns Laridae**Lesser Crested Tern***Sterna bengalensis*

3 birds were seen near Tulear.

Sandgrouse Pteroclididae**Madagascar Sandgrouse (E)***Pterocles personatus*

Around 9 of these plump endemics were seen on the first morning at Berenty Reserve.

Pigeons & Doves Columbidae**Common (Rock) Pigeon (I)***Columba livia*

This species was widespread and fairly common in the urban areas throughout the island.

Malagasy (Madagascar) Turtle Dove (NE) *Streptopelia picturata*
This species was fairly commonly recorded in various habitats throughout the trip.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*
The arid habitats in the south of the island produced many sightings of this delicate dove.

Madagascar Green Pigeon (E) *Treron australis*
We were fortunate to get great views of 4 birds in Ifaty's spiny forest at the start of the tour.

Madagascar Blue Pigeon (E) *Alectroenas madagascariensis*
The drive to Mantadia National Park yielded around 4 birds sitting up on high open perches in the early morning. A good scope view of this attractive endemic.

Parrots Psittacidae

Grey-headed Lovebird (E) *Agapornis canus*
Most sites in the south of the island yielded sightings of this beautiful bird.

[Greater] Vasa Parrot (NE) *Coracopsis vasa*
We were able to enjoy a few birds feeding and flying over our heads in Mantadia NP.

Lesser Vasa (Black) Parrot (NE) *Coracopsis nigra*
Much more common than the previous species, this raucous parrot species was seen quite regularly throughout our trip.

Cuckoos, Couas & Coucals Cuculidae

Malagasy (Madagascar) Coucal (NE) *Centropus toulou*
Common and widespread, this bird was recorded in small numbers on many days of the tour.

Crested Coua (E) *Coua cristata*
The Spiny Forest near Ifaty and the Berenty Reserve and gave us good sightings of this arboreal coua.

Verreaux's Coua (E) (NT) *Coua verreauxi*
We were quickly rewarded with excellent views of this extremely localized endemic in the coral rag scrub near Tulear.

Blue Coua (E) *Coua caerulea*
A lovely bird that gave us some great and close-up views in the rainforests at Perinet and Mantadia – their habits of running and hopping along horizontal branches/trunks was very entertaining.

Red-capped (Green-capped) Coua (E) *Coua [ruficeps] olivaceiceps*
This species was seen very well at the spiny forest near Ifaty.

NOTE: This southern, khaki-capped form of Red-capped Coua is considered to be a full species in Sinclair I. and Langrande O. Birds of the Indian Ocean Islands however many other authorities consider this form to be a subspecies of Red-capped Coua.

Red-fronted Coua *Coua reynaudii*
Best views of this rainforest special were had on a morning walk in Analamazaotra, where all participants enjoyed great open views of 2 birds.

Running Coua (E) *Coua cursor*
Single birds were seen in the spiny forests in Ifaty and Berenty.

Giant Coua (E) *Coua gigas*
We all enjoyed fabulous views of this large, attractive endemic at Berenty, a total of 8.

Red-breasted Coua (E) *Coua serriana*
This is a very shy and difficult species was seen well, scurrying along the ground in Mantadia NP.

Madagascar Cuckoo (BE) *Cuculus rochii*
One of the most common background calls on the island in summer, we obtained good views of this species on a number of occasions.

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

A single bird was seen on its day roost in Berenty.

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

We had fantastic views of this dry-country species at Berenty Lemur Reserve, many were heard.

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

Close views of this species were had at Analamazaotra, where a single bird was recorded on a day roost during our first afternoon walk in the area.

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

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

Berenty produced really good views of this attractive species during day and night walks.

Madagascar (Long-eared) Owl (E)*Asio madagascariensis*

We were really lucky with this species: first we had 2 white and woolly juveniles before we had a day roost view of a lovely adult.

Nightjars Caprimulgidae**Madagascar Nightjar (NE)***Caprimulgus madagascariensis*

Commonly heard at night, we had a number of birds on day roosts in the Berenty area.

Collared Nightjar (E)*Caprimulgus enarratus*

What a great bird! We had a wonderfully camouflaged bird on its nest in Mantadia NP.

Swifts Apodidae**Madagascar (Malagasy) Spinetail (NE)***Zoonavena grandidieri*

Great views of good numbers of these birds were enjoyed on 4 days of the tour, with first views in Berenty and more over the rainforests.

African Palm Swift (e)*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*

This elegant swift was recorded at various sites with suitable habitat on the island.

Alpine Swift*Tachymarptis melba*

2 birds were seen feeding over the Mangoro River with other swifts.

Malagasy [Black] Swift (NE)*Apus balstoni*

Recorded at scattered localities in Tana, the San Augustine Cliffs south of Tulear and over the Mangoro River.

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

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

Good views were had of this bizarre and extremely vocal endemic in the Perinet/Mantadia area, where we had great extended scope views of a few birds after earlier flight views.

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.

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

Numerous good views were had of this common bird on the island, first views in Berenty.

Ground Rollers Brachypteraciidae

Short-legged Ground Roller (E) (V) *Brachypteracias leptosomus*

After a huge amount of effort, we finally managed to get fantastic views of this very sought-after species in the forest of Mantadia NP, where we found a pair of birds. A memorable outing!

Scaly Ground Roller (E) *Geobiastes squamiger*

This shy ground dweller finally surrendered good views in the thick undergrowth of Mantadia NP.

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

We had a few excellent encounters of this gorgeous species in Mantadia NP, where they posed nicely.

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

Everyone on the walk was rewarded with very close views of this, possibly the skulkiest of the Ground Rollers after a scramble up a slope in the Mantadia area, just after we had our Short-legged Ground Rollers.

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

The Spiny Forest near Ifaty yielded great views of this extremely range-restricted endemic, it was the first of all five species of this endemic family for us.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher (E) *Ispidina madagascariensis*

We found a pair on the roadside on the way into Mantadia NP, where one bird gave us wonderful close views. Because this tiny bird is not tied to rivers, it can very tough to find in its rainforest habitat.

Malagasy Kingfisher (NE) *Alcedo vintsioides*

Recorded at a good number of freshwater wetlands throughout the tour, first views at Lac Alarobia.

Bee-eaters Meropidae

Olive (Madagascar) Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*

Scattered sightings of good numbers of this beautiful bird were enjoyed throughout the tour.

Hoopoes Upupidae

Madagascar Hoopoe (E) *Upupa marginalis*

This species was first noted at Lake Alarobia in Tana with further sightings throughout the south of the island. An especially memorable encounter was had at Berenty!

Asities Philepittidae

Velvet Asity (E) *Philepitta castanea*

After getting a first fantastic male bird in non-breeding plumage we found another 2 females – all in the Andasibe area.

[Common] Sunbird-Asity (E) *Neodrepanis coruscans*

Unfortunately this species was only heard in Mantadia NP.

Vangas Vangidae

Red-tailed Vanga (E) *Calicalicus madagascariensis*

Several birds were seen very well, sightings in various locations on 4 days of the tour.

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

After an intensive search we managed to locate a pair of birds in the coral rag scrub near Tulear. This

species was only fairly recently discovered and described in this remote part of the island and its global distribution remains tiny.

Hook-billed Vanga (E) *Vanga curvirostris*

A single bird was seen well near Ifaty, before we had other good views in Berenty. More were heard in the Andasibe area's rainforest.

Lafresnaye's Vanga (E) *Xenopirostris xenopirostris*

This large, noisy and uncommon vanga was seen very well in the Spiny Forest near Ifaty.

Sickle-billed Vanga (E) *Falcula palliata*

This can be a tricky one on this tour – we did well to get great views of this special bird in Ifaty's spiny forest.

White-headed Vanga (E) *Artamella viridis*

A pair of these birds was seen in a large mixed flock in Analamazaotra Special Reserve.

Chabert[']s Vanga (E) *Leptopterus chabert*

This species was commonly seen in the Andasibe area after first birds were seen around Ifaty.

Blue Vanga (NE) *Cyanolanius madagascarensis*

This stunning bird was seen on 2 days in Analamazaotra, where it gave some great close views in a fantastic mixed flock.

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.

Tylas Vanga (E) *Tylas eduardi*

This species was encountered in Analamazaotra, where we had some really great sightings.

Nuthatch Vanga (E) *Hypositta corallirostris*

We enjoyed a few good views of this often tricky-to-find vanga in the eastern rainforest in Analamazaotra Special Reserve.

Dark Newtonia (E) *Newtonia amphichroa*

This ridge specialist was seen very well but briefly as always in forests around the Andasibe area.

Common Newtonia (E) *Newtonia brunneicauda*

This species was recorded regularly in small numbers during the tour.

Archbold's Newtonia (E) *Newtonia archboldi*

We had some great views of this southern endemic in the Spiny Forest near Ifaty.

Ward's Flycatcher (E) *Pseudobias wardi*

This small, flycatcher-like vanga was viewed in the near the town of Andasibe.

Crossley's Babbler (E) *Mystacornis crossleyi*

This is always one of the favourite species if good views are achieved on a tour – we had wonderful views in the end as we left the Analamazaotra Special Reserve for the last time.

Cuckooshrikes Campephagedae

Madagascar (Ashy) Cuckooshrike (E) *Coracina cinerea*

Small numbers were recorded at Mantadia NP and Perinet Special Reserves, where we saw them well.

Drongos Dicruridae

Crested Drongo (NE) *Dicrurus forficatus*

This charismatic bird with its spiky hairdo was observed on most days of the tour.

Monarchs Monarchidae

Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher (NE) *Terpsiphone mutata*

We enjoyed multiple sightings of all the various colour morphs of this beautiful species during the trip, often on and around its nest, which allowed for great views and really close approaches.

Crows & Jays Corvidae

Pied Crow

Corvus albus

Common and widespread, it was recorded daily during the southern leg of the tour.

Larks Alaudidae

Madagascar Lark (E)

Mirafr hova

Good numbers were observed in arid areas in the south of Madagascar.

Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

Malagasy (Madagascar) Bulbul (NE)

Hypsipetes madagascariensis

Fairly common and widespread, we found these birds on almost every day of the tour.

Swallows & Martins Hirundinidae

Mascarene Martin (BE)

Phedina borbonica

Madagascar's most common hirundine and a regional breeding endemic, it was recorded at a number of sites, although numbers were quite low.

Brown-throated (Plain) Martin

Riparia paludicola

A single bird was seen in flight on the drive to Andasibe, before we had 2 more birds later near Mantadia NP.

Reed Warblers & Allies Megaluridae

Malagasy Brush Warbler (NE)

Nesillas typica

Seen around Tsarasaoatra/ Lake Alarobia, before it was common in the denser areas around the Andasibe area.

[Subdesert Brush Warbler] (E)

Nesillas lantzii

A single bird showed very well in the Spiny forest near Ifaty.

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

Madagascar Swamp Warbler (E)

Acrocephalus newtoni

This common endemic was first recorded at Lake Alarobia, before we had good numbers in wetlands north of Tulear and again in Mantadia NP.

Grassbirds & Allies Megaluridae

Brown Emutail (E)

Dromaeocercus brunneus

A very difficult species to see well. We had good if brief views on a ridge-top in the Mantadia NP, where they skulk through very dense undergrowth.

Grey Emutail (E)

Amphilais seebohmi

After just hearing the bird for some time, we finally enticed it out of its very dense undergrowth to get some great views of this skulker.

Malagasy Warblers Bernieridae

White-throated Oxylabes (E)*Oxylabes madagascariensis*

This species was seen well in a less well-known portion of Mantadia NP, after our successful Ground Roller effort, where we had around 3 birds. A very difficult bird to see well!

Long-billed Bernieria (E)*Bernieria madagascariensis*

We had several sightings of this under- and mid-storey species.

Cryptic Warbler (E)*Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*

This fairly recently described species was seen well on a ridge-top in Mantadia NP.

Wedge-tailed Jery (E)*Hartertula flavoviridis*

After initially just hearing the bird, we got very nice views of a pair of birds in Mantadia NP.

Thamnornis (E)*Thamnornis chloropetoides*

A very charismatic endemic that is restricted to spiny forest in the south. We enjoyed great views of a single bird that briefly showed well near Ifaty.

Spectacled Tetraka (E)*Xanthomixis zosterops*

The rainforests sites of near Andasibe and at Mantadia held views of this understory dweller, which included a pair on the nest in Mantadia NP.

Rand's Warbler (E)*Randia pseudozosterops*

We had good scope views of calling birds in Mantadia National Park, where we also found a few feeding individuals in mixed flocks.

Cisticolas & Allies Cisticolidae**Common Jery (E)***Neomixis tenella*

This species was seen on a number of occasions during the tour.

Green Jery (E)*Neomixis viridis*

We had great views of this species on one day, heading towards Mantadia NP.

Stripe-throated Jery (E)*Neomixis striatigula*

We found good numbers of this common songster in the east and south of Madagascar.

Madagascar Cisticola (NE)*Cisticola cherinus*

Commonly recorded in suitable habitat during the tour.

White-eyes Zosteropidae**Madagascar White-eye (NE)***Zosterops maderaspatana*

A tiny species that was mainly recorded during the second half of our trip.

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

This introduced species was common in open habitats throughout the island.

Madagascar Starling (E)*Hartlaubius aurata*

An uncommon endemic that was finally seen once on the final morning in Analamazaotra.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae**Madagascar Magpie-Robin (E)***Copsychus albospecularis*

This bold and confiding species was observed on most days during the tour.

[Madagascar] Stonechat (E)*Saxicola sibilla*

This species has been recently split from African Stonechat and is now endemic to Madagascar. It was fairly commonly encountered in open habitats of the eastern highlands.

Littoral Rock Thrush (E)*Pseudocossyphus imerinus*

After a lot of searching we finally found a very confiding pair very near our lunch site near Nosy Ve, south of Tulear.

Forest Rock Thrush (E)*Monticola sharpie*

A single male, female and juvenile were seen together very well in Mantadia NP, very often an unobtrusive species.

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

One of Madagascar's most common species, this sunbird was seen almost daily.

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

This attractive sunbird is usually much scarcer than the previous species, although we had a number of good sightings around Andasibe and Mantadia.

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

This very attractive weaver was regularly encountered during our forays into the forests of Analamazaotra and Mantadia, as well as near our accommodations in that area

Sakalava Weaver (E)*Ploceus sakalava*

Seen almost daily in the arid southern region of the island.

Red Fody (E)*Foudia madagascariensis*

This species was commonly recorded throughout the southern portion of the trip, with a few further sightings in the north.

Forest Fody (E)*Foudia omissa*

We were very lucky to find this elusive species on at least 3 occasions in Mantadia, which allowed everyone good views of this stunner.

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

We had this bird at a few scattered locations, including just south of Ifaty, along the Mandoro River and then drinking in Mantadia NP.

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

An attractive endemic, it was found at most highland sites, being first seen at our lodgings in Tana.

Annotated list of Mammals**21 species seen**

Garbutt, N. (1999) *Mammals of Madagascar* with recent changes as adopted by Mittermeier *et al* (2006) *Lemurs of Madagascar*.

Old World Fruit Bats Pteropodidae**Madagascar Flying Fox***Pteropus rufus*

Some of these large, handsome creatures were observed and heard at their day roost in the Gallery Forest at Berenty.

Tenrecs & Otter Shrews Tenrecidae

Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec *Echinops telfairi*

We were incredibly lucky to have seen this species in the spiny forest near Ifaty, where one of the local guides found it for us.

Lowland Streaked Tenrec *Hemicentetes semispinosus*

During a walk in Mantadia NP we saw a flash as this animal disappeared in the undergrowth on the edge of the path. Our local guide managed to catch it, giving us great views of this amazing little animal.

Civets & allies Viverridae

Fosa *Cryptoprocta ferox*

Wow, what amazing luck to find this very uncommon apex predator in rainforest in mantadia, where we were able to watch it for an extended period before it lay down in a bird-nest fern, where it was getting mobbed by some very cautious Diademed Sifakas.

Mouse and Dwarf Lemurs Cheirogaleidae

Grey Mouse Lemur *Microcebus murinus*

This is the widespread species in the drier south, seen well at Berenty.

Grey-Brown Mouse Lemur *Microcebus griseorufus*

Seen in small numbers in the spiny forest at Berenty.

Goodman's Mouse Lemur *Microcebus lehilahytsara*

Most encounters with this species were rather brief, although we did manage a few great close-up views of this lively species on night walks near Andasibe.

Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur *Cheirogaleus crossleyi*

We spotted a few of these creatures on 3 different night walks near Analamazaotra.

Sportive Lemurs Megaladapidae

Petter's Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur petteri*

A sportive lemur was seen during the day near Ifaty and is most likely to represent this species. However, according to Mammals of Madagascar by Garbutt, neither *petteri* nor *leucopus* should occur there. More work obviously needs to be done on Madagascar's lemurs.

White-footed Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur leucopus*

We recorded this sportive lemur in the gallery and Spiny Forest at Berenty Lemur Reserve, where they were seen on night walks and during the day; they can be fairly common in good habitats.

"True" Lemurs Lemuridae

Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur *Haplemur griseus griseus*

We had disappointingly brief views of this species – seen in both reserves around Andasibe.

Ring-tailed Lemur *Lemur catta*

We encountered many families of these very different-looking and mischievous lemurs at Berenty.

Red-bellied Lemur *Eulemur rubriventer*

A pair of these sexually dimorphic diurnal lemurs was seen well in Mantadia NP.

Common Brown Lemur *Eulemur fulvus*

We encountered this species on a number of occasions in the Analamazaotra area.

‘Red-fronted’ Brown Lemur

Eulemur rufus

Brown Lemurs made up of hybrid Collared and Red-fronted Brown Lemurs were commonly seen in Berenty Lemur Reserve. These species were introduced there some time ago and are not native to the area.

Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur

Varecia variegata

This stunning and very sought-after animals were seen on the last day we had in Mantadia, where 4 animals were seen in the tree tops high overhead.

Avahis, Sifakas and Indri Indriidae

Eastern Avahi (Woolly Lemur)

Avahi laniger

Seen on three days in the Andasibe area, including views during night walks as well as on day roosts.

Diademed Sifaka

Propithecus diadema diadema

This large and wonderfully marked lemur was seen on several occasions in Mantadia NP, including a sighting where 6 animals were alarm calling towards a Fosa in a nearby tree.

Verreaux's Sifaka

Propithecus verreaux verreauxi

The comical, bipedal locomotion of this lemur is undoubtedly one of the mammalian highlights of any trip to Madagascar. It was seen often and at very close quarters at Berenty Lemur Reserve.

Indri

Indri indri

We were treated to many views of these, the largest extant lemurs. We kept bumping into them, getting views in Analamazaotra as well as some great sightings in Mantadia NP, where they used to be much more afraid of people but are beginning to relax. Always a very memorable highlight to have these large primates calling just metres away!

Annotated list of Amphibians and Reptiles

Glaw, F. & Vences, M. (1994) *A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar*. Insect names were derived from various sources.

“True” Frogs Ranidae

Green Tree Frog

Boophis viridis

In Andasibe it was still very dry, so we had very few frog species, including 2 of these semi-translucent green tree frogs.

Mantidactylus pulcher

A species that spends much of its life in a pandanus plant, which is where we saw it a few times in the Analamazaotra area.

Land Tortoises Testudinidae

Spider Tortoise

Pyxis arachnoides

After a small shower at Berenty we were fortunate to find 3 of these uncommon animals in a small patch of spiny forest – getting less and less common.

Radiated Tortoise

Geochelone radiata

A single one of these very uncommon reptiles was seen in a similar area as the above species, this species is targeted as food in many areas that it occurs in.

Chameleons Chamaeleonidae

Greater Stump-tailed Chameleon *Brookesia superciliaris*

This tiny chameleon was seen well on a night walk near Andasibe.

Short-horned Chameleon *Calumma brevicornis*

4 of these fairly small chameleons were seen in the Andasibe area.

Nose-horned Chameleon *Calumma nasuta*

A very small species – 4 were seen over the course of the night walks we did in the Andasibe area.

Band-bellied Chameleon *Calumma gastrotaenia*

Another small chameleon – we recorded a single female in the Andasibe area.

Parson's Chameleon *Calumma crypticum*

This, one of the largest two chameleon species, gave an amazing show. A very brightly coloured animal was seen at below eye level in Analamazaotra, where it kept us away from the nearby Indris.

Warty Chameleon *Furcifer verrucosus*

Another fairly large chameleon that was seen near Ifaty and in the spiny forest at Berenty.

Furcifer antimena

2 animals were seen well on our night walk in the Ifaty spiny forest.

Iguanas Iguanidae

Three-eyed Lizard *Chalarodon madagascariensis*

This attractive reptile was seen in the arid, sandy areas of Berenty and the spiny forest near Ifaty.

Double-banded Iguanid *Oplurus cyclurus*

A few of these attractive reptiles were seen in the spiny forest at Berenty, where they allowed a very close approach.

Four-striped Iguanid *Oplurus quadrimaculatus*

On the drive from Berenty to Fort Dauphin we found one of these large lizards on the rocky roadside.

Geckos Gekkonidae

Plain Big-headed Gecko *Paroedura bastardi*

This fabulous reptile was seen really well in Berenty's Spiny Forest.

Painted Big-headed Gecko *Paroedura pictus*

Another stunning lizard – seen well in the gallery forest along the river at Berenty.

Sikora Leaf-tailed Gecko *Uroplatus sikorae*

This fabulous reptile was seen fantastically well in the forest near Andasibe – one of the best examples of great camouflage in the animal kingdom.

Southern Bark Gecko *Lygodactylus tuberosus*

Sighted at Berenty in the south of the country.

Brown Day Gecko *Phelsuma mutabilis*

Less stunning than the next 2 species...seen well in the Ifaty area.

Lineated Day Gecko *Phelsuma lineata*

These beautiful day geckos were found in the eastern rainforest, one in Ifaty.

Four-spotted Day Gecko *Phelsuma quadriocellata*

Much less common and widespread than the previous species – this one was only seen once near the entrance to Mantadia NP.

Plated Lizards Gerrhosauridae

Lesser Plated Lizard *Tracheloptychus madagascariensis*

A fairly common lizard of the spiny forest in the island's southern parts.

Madagascar Plated Lizard *Zonosaurus madagascariensis*

A fairly common and large reptile, mainly seen around the Andasibe area.

Gravenhorst's Skink *Mabuya gravenhorstii*

We found this species at Analamazaotra on the last day of the tour.

Elegant Skink *Mabuya elegans*

A single animal was seen in Berenty, sporting a small red spot on its neck.

Boas Boidae

Madagascar Tree Boa *Sanzinia madagascariensis*

This huge snake was seen high up in the trees in Berenty, before we had a second one in

Analamazaotra on at know basking site.

Typical Snakes Colubridae

Madagascarophis meridionalis

We encountered this species on 2 occasions in the Berenty area.

Liopholidophis sp.

On the final morning in Analamazaotra we had this snake, we saw less than expected due to the dry conditions.

A few of the other animals that deserve special mention

Giraffe-necked Weevil *Trachelophorus giraffa*

Flatid Leaf Bug *Phromnia rosea*

Madagascar Hissing Cockroach *Elliptorhina javanica*

Golden Orb Spider *Nephila madagascariensis*

Emerald Pill Millipede *Sphaerotherium sp.*

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