



Rockjumper Birding Tours

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Madagascar Highlights

31st October to 13th November 2007 (14 days)



Trip Report compiled by Tour Leader Rainer Summers

Tour Summary

Madagascar is a land of great contrasts. It harbours some of the most bizarre fauna and flora on the planet, and is truly a must see destination on the list of any discerning nature lover. However, this country has endured some terrible degradation and abuse, and as a consequence, very little of this, the fourth largest island in the world is still in pristine condition. One is constantly reminded of this sad state of affairs by the ever-present rice paddies and plantations of exotic trees (mainly *Pinus* sp. and *Eucalyptus* sp.) in conjunction with areas undergoing slash and burn (thankfully now banned in the country, although sadly however the ban is difficult to enforce). The most graphic reminder of these activities is the sight of richly



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coloured rivers, bright red and brown as they carry (or bleed) the countries topsoil into the Indian Ocean, and give rise to a commonly used name, the “Red Isle”.

On a lighter note, our tour gave us a chance to sample a few of the incredible sights Madagascar has to offer, and we were treated to great vistas covered in untouched rainforest, endless tropical seas, and stark but haunting spiny forests. These are some of the jewels that Madagascar has to offer, and hopefully, the fruition of the “The Durban Vision” will result in more of this countries unique fauna and flora being saved (The 5th World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa resulted in forward thinking conservationists and politicians planning to triple the number of forests in Madagascar under protection, now known as the “The Durban Vision”).



After arrival in the bustling capital city of Antananarivo (commonly referred to as Tana), we transferred to the eastern rainforest area of Perinet-Mantadia (Andasibe-Mantadia National Park), one of the more popular rainforest destinations in Madagascar. The surrounds of our lodge hosted a number of animals, and day-light hours produced splendid sightings of Lineated Day Gecko, extremely co-operative Common Brown Lemurs, and a great sighting of White-throated Rail alongside the small stream at camp.

adjacent to forested areas in better condition provide an interesting mosaic of habitat, and we were treated to a number of species that call these areas home. The incessant calls of Madagascar Cuckoo rang through the forest, and despite its secretive nature, we were treated to great views of this common island inhabitant. These forests harbour a large array of mouth-watering endemics, and we had great views of the beautiful Blue and Red-fronted Couas, the shy Madagascar Wood Rail, Madagascar Blue Pigeon while the bizarre Crossley’s Babbler taunted and provided brief views. Overhead, the ever present Madagascar Buzzard cruised, while the less numerous Madagascar Harrier Hawk showing on a few occasions. A treat was watching a small flock of Nuthatch Vanga foraging through the forest, while a slight twist of our heads brought the largest extant species of lemur, the charismatic Indri, into view. At nearby wetlands, we scoped Grey Emutail, a notorious skulker, and Madagascar Rail provided brief views while darting in and out of the swampy vegetation. Nocturnal inhabitants seen included the marvellous Collared Nightjar (a bird for which no call is known), Rainforest Scops Owl, Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur and the incredible Sikora Leaf-tailed Gecko! Careful searching brought about a great study of one of the many bizarre insects to be found on the island, namely the Giraffe-necked Weevil.



Our early morning excursions to the famous Mantadia National Park produced all four of the forest Ground Rollers. Truly unforgettable! These forests are scenically spectacular, and while strolling



through the moss and lichen draped trees, we had a great half hour with one of the most beautiful lemurs, Diademed Sifaka. The small family group with a youngster in tow, clambered about the tall trees on the steep slope, all the while peering at the strange humans below. Other jewels seen in the forest included the elusive (and handsome) Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, White-throated Oxylabes, Ward’s Flycatcher, Wedge-tailed Jery, Grey-crowned Greenbul, and the huge, noisy Madagascar Cuckoo Roller. Strolling along the

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winding access road, we saw Mascarene Martin, Madagascar Cuckoo Shrike, Rand's Warbler, Stripe-throated Jery and a recent discovery, Cryptic Warbler. The resident pair of Madagascar Little Grebe, a pretty little bird, provided great sightings, while the huge Henst's Goshawk provided some with excellent views. Another highlight of the area was a male Forest Fody in full breeding plumage! Another worthwhile find was an iridescent Madagascar Tree Boa, one of the most dazzling shiny snakes one could ever hope to find.

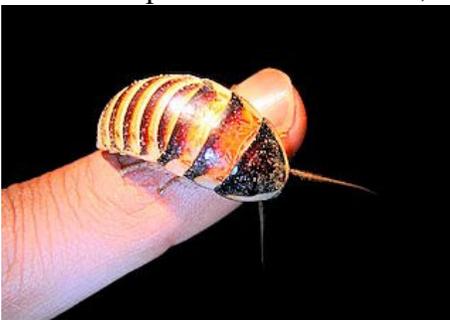
Our next destination was the capital, and the famous bird sanctuary. This private land provides an area of calm in the ensuing chaos of Tana, not to mention some great birds too! The island in the centre of the old lake teems with waterbirds, and we were fortunate enough to witness the spectacle of thousands of birds go about their lives on the lake. Highlights included Malagasy Pond Heron in full breeding plumage, Dimorphic Egret and Black Heron (Egret), Fulvous Whistling and Knob-billed Duck, as well as a real treat, a single African Openbill, all in amongst the thronging masses of White-faced Whistling Duck and Common Squacco Heron!

Despite the hustle and bustle of the international airport at Tana, an early morning vigil produced a great sighting of a migrant species, Sooty Falcon hunting insects over the airport building, an excellent sighting before we jetted off south to one of the most famous reserves in all of Madagascar, Berenty.

After the green bounty of the eastern rainforests, the southern end of the island comes as quite a surprise. The double rainfall gradient present on the island results in the southern and particularly south western region of the island being the driest. Berenty Reserve preserves a patch of gallery forest dominated by Tamarind trees *Tamarindus indica*, and small sections of xerophytic spiny forest dominated by *Alluaudia* plants (possessing long, spiny stems reaching towards the sky). Sadly, much of the spiny forest has been removed and replaced by Sisal *Agave sisalana*, a native of the Americas and used to manufacture rope. Scouring the camp produced great sightings of Hook-billed Vanga and Crested Coua. For many visitors, the stars of the show here are comical Ring-tailed Lemurs, incidentally the most terrestrial off all lemurs (and probably the most famous too), and the "dancing sifakas", the handsome Verreaux's Sifaka. The gallery forest provides a home for numerous species and exploration of this area provided sightings of Giant Coua strolling along the wide paths, Madagascar Buttonquail, the scarce Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk, White-browed Owl, as well as Madagascar and Frances Sparrowhawk. Also seen during a nocturnal excursion was a small number of Madagascar Hissing Cockroach, an interesting insect, as despite their innocuous appearance, the males are capable of emitting an off-putting hiss when disturbed or in self-defence.



Despite rain in the area, the Mandrare River still proved to be a focal point for the local Madagascar Sandgrouse, and we were treated to fly-bys by this huge sandgrouse. Another highlight of the area is the colony of Madagascar Flying Fox. Despite these huge bats nocturnal nature, they continuously flap and squabble throughout the day. Smaller, but no less interesting nocturnal lemurs of the area included the delightful Grey Mouse Lemur and White-footed Sportive Lemur. A short trip to the nearby corridors of spiny forest between the endless sisal plantations provided us with great sightings of Green-capped Coua, the tiny Grey-brown Mouse Lemur,



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Torotoroka Scops Owl and Warty Chameleon while nearby, more Vangas awaited us, these being the handsome Lafresnayes Vanga and strange Sickle-billed Vanga!

Our next port of call was Ifaty, located in the dry south-west of the island. The birding in this area is excellent, with a combination of marine, shoreline and spiny forest birding. Our route took us past some wetlands, and a really amazing bird that was present was Bernier's Teal (not a traditional site to see this species!), with other great birds including Baillon's Crake, Hottentot Teal and Subdesert Brush Warbler. The marine habitat yielded specials including Crab Plover, Madagascar Plover and Greater Frigatebird, an avian pirate of the sea. However, the real attraction of this area is the famous spiny forest, an area covered in red sand and dotted in *Didiera* "trees" (the famous octopus trees), baobabs *Adansonia* sp. and flowering *Delonix* sp. (possessing beautiful yellow blooms). An early start was called for in order to beat the heat, and we left at the crack of dawn to track down the specials of the area. Undoubtedly, one of the most sought after birds on the island is the Long-tailed Ground Roller. This bird is certainly one of the highlights of any Malagasy tour, and we were not to be disappointed, with excellent views of this charismatic avian!

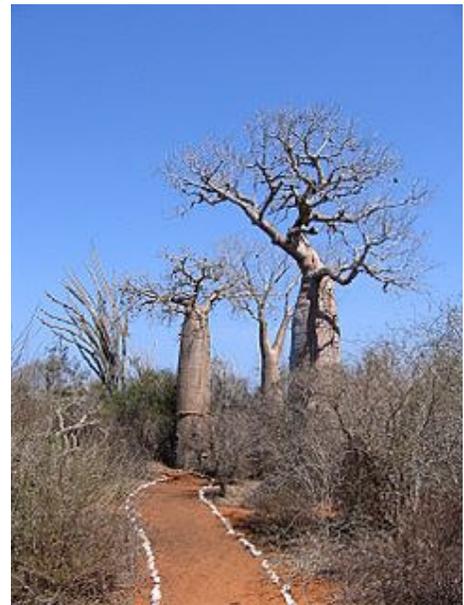
Another mouth-watering species is the Sub-desert Mesite, a strange creation indeed, and another species that we spent a few intimate moments with. Other noteworthy birds we recorded included the range restricted Archbold's *Newtonia*, subtly beautiful *Thamnornis* Warbler, Running Coua and a really tough bird, a Banded Kestrel (the individual in question perched and allowing for stunning scope views). Last but not least, a Madagascar Hoopoe also made an appearance, much to the delight of many!

The area around La Tabla was our next stop and after some dedicated searching in the impenetrable, thorny coral rag scrub, we were treated to excellent views of Red-shouldered Vanga, a highly localised species! A brief view was also obtained of Verreaux's Coua, another restricted inhabitant of the scrubby vegetation.

Nosy Ve is a small island situated off the small coastal village of Anakao. The area is steeped in pirate history, with some of the more infamous that frequented the area including Olivier Le Vasseur ("Le Buse"), a man who supposedly hoarded a huge treasure somewhere on an island in the East Indian Ocean, before being hanged in Reunion for his crimes. After a short ride on a zebu cart out to our awaiting boat (an interesting mission in itself), we sped out to our Nosy Ve, not before picking up Madagascar Green Pigeon and Littoral Rock Thrush during a short stop. A stiff breeze in combination with a low tide resulted in us not being able to explore the entire island (a sacred spot for local tribesman and the reason for the successful and undisturbed tropicbird colony), however, we did spend some time with these dreamlike birds at their nests and also had scope views of the bizarre Crab Plover. Thereafter, we enjoyed a delicious seafood lunch at a nearby mainland resort before heading home through unsettled seas.



A morning trip to the Onilahy River combined excellent scenery and birds, with stunning cliffs and mangroves and a blue sea. Scanning of the mangroves and flats in the bay produced the worlds second largest heron, the slate coloured Humblot's Heron, as well as a surprise in the form of gaudy Greater Flamingo. The low shrubs along the side of the road held Verreaux's Coua, a particularly obliging individual that provided excellent views.



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With the tour coming to a close, we decided on a day trip out of the capital in search of Madagascar Harrier, a scarce inhabitant of grassland areas. The trip involved driving and scanning the extensive grasslands, with intermittent stops to search for the harrier and waterbirds on some of the small wetlands on route. A short stop, and after a bit of scanning, a pair of Madagascar Snipe were located, an unexpected find! After some more searching we were fortunate to locate a single Madagascar Harrier, a brilliant way to end off the trip!

Annotated Checklists of Birds, Mammals and “Herps”

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Morris, P. & Hawkins, F. (1998) *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Madagascar*, with the notable exception of a few of the recent taxonomic changes; Garbutt, N. (1999) *Mammals of Madagascar* with recent changes as adopted by Mittermeier *et al.* (2006) *Lemurs of Madagascar*, and, Glaw, F. & Vences, M. (1994) *A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar*. Invertebrate names were derived from various sources.

BIRDS

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 gamebird was recorded at Berenty Lemur Reserve in good numbers.

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

Ducks & Geese Anatidae

Fulvous Whistling Duck

Dendrocygna bicolor

Five of these elegant ducks were recorded at Lake Alarobia in Tana.

White-faced Whistling Duck

Dendrocygna viduata

We saw large numbers of these noisy birds at Lake Alarobia, with a further sighting at a wetland area near Ifaty.

Knob-billed (Comb) Duck

Sarkidiornis melanotos

Around ten of this large duck were recorded at Lake Alarobia.

Bernier's Teal (E) (En)

Anas bernieri

We were extremely lucky to find a single bird of this rare species at a wetland area near Ifaty.

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.

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Red-billed Teal (Duck) *Anas erythrorhyncha*

Large numbers were recorded at Lake Alarobia.

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*

We recorded good numbers of this dainty bird at a wetland area near Ifaty.

Grebes Podicipedidae

Little Grebe (Dabchick) *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

High numbers were recorded at a wetland area near Ifaty.

Madagascar Grebe (E) (V) *Tachybaptus pelzelinii*

A stunning pair were seen at Mantadia, with a further five recorded at Lake Alarobia.

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

Storks Ciconiidae

African Openbill *Anastomus lamelligerus*

Generally a rare species in Madagascar, we were lucky to see a single bird at Lake Alarobia.

Hérons Ardeidae

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus podiceps*

A single bird was seen in a reedbed at a wetland site near Ifaty.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Good numbers were recorded at Lake Alarobia in Tana.

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus rutenbergi*

Small numbers were recorded at various wetlands throughout the tour.

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).

(Common) Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Large numbers were recorded at Lake Alarobia in Tana, including large numbers of breeding birds.

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

We saw around seven of this lovely bird, including individuals in full breeding regalia.

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

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

A widespread and common species recorded at many localities throughout the tour.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Recorded at in a few localities both north and south of Tulear.

Humblot's (Madagascar) Heron (E) (V) *Ardea humbloti*

Seen in a large bay in the vicinity of the Onilahy River mouth.

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

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

An attractive species first sighted at Perinet alongside a dammed lake within the reserve.

Great (White) Egret *Ardea alba*

Seen at a number of localities throughout the tour.

Black Heron (Egret) *Egretta ardesiaca*

Large numbers were seen at Lake Alarobia in Tana.

Dimorphic Egret (NE) *Egretta [garzetta] dimorpha*

Maximum numbers were seen at Lake Alarobia, with a few birds seen at other wetland areas throughout the trip.

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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.

Tropicbirds Phaethontidae

Red-tailed Tropicbird

Phaethon rubricauda

We were treated to close-ups of this beautiful species on Nosy Ve, where a breeding colony is located.

Hamerkop Scopidae

Hamerkop

Scopus umbretta bannermanni

First recorded in roadside paddies *en route* to Perinet from Tana.

Falcons Falconidae

Malagasy Kestrel (NEe)

Falco newtoni

Regularly recorded throughout the tour.

Banded Kestrel

Falco zoniventris

A single bird was seen while returning from our mornings walk at the Ifaty spiny forest.

Sooty Falcon

Falco concolor

We had good views of a single bird at the International Airport in Tana.

Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae

Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk

Aviceda madagascariensis

A single bird was recorded being mobbed by a France's Sparrowhawk in the gallery forest at Berenty.

Black (Yellow-billed) Kite

Milvus (parasitus) migrans

This species was recorded on numerous occasions throughout the trip.

NOTE: All the individuals we recorded were Yellow-billed Kites (split by some as *M. parasitus*), however some authorities do not recognise the Black Kite/Yellow-billed Kite split.

Malagasy Marsh Harrier (NE) (V)

Circus macroscelus

We had distant but good views of this species in a grassland area north-west of Tana.

NOTE: This species, which occurs in Madagascar and the Comoros, differs from the Reunion Harrier (*Circus maillardi*) in its smaller size and darker plumage, and is now considered a separate species.

Madagascar Harrier-Hawk (E)

Polyboroides radiatus

Single birds were seen on three separate occasions, including Perinet-Mantadia and Berenty.

Madagascar Sparrowhawk (E) (NT)

Accipiter madagascariensis

Excellent scope views were had of this species in the gallery forest at Berenty.

Frances's Sparrowhawk (NE)

Accipiter francesii

Great views were had of a pair in Berenty as they mobbed a Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk!

Henst's Goshawk (E) (NT)

Accipiter henstii

An impressive bird, was seen by some members of the party at Mantadia.

NOTE: A scarce endemic that occurs at low densities; usually detected by its far-carrying and distinctive calls.

Madagascar Buzzard (E)

Buteo brachypterus

Seen on a number of occasions in the former half of the tour.

Mesites Mesitornithidae

Subdesert Mesite (E) (V)

Monias benschi

A strange bird, we had excellent views of this species in the Ifaty Spiny forest.

Flufftails Sarothruridae

Madagascar Flufftail

Sarothrura insularis

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A bogey bird, multiple birds were heard calling and tempted with tape but unfortunately none were seen.

Rails & Gallinules Rallidae

Madagascar Wood Rail (E) *Canirallus kiolooides*

We had good views of this skulking forest species at Perinet.

Madagascar Rail (E) *Rallus madagascariensis*

An individual was seen in a wetland near Perinet.

White-throated Rail (NE) *Dryolimnas cuvieri*

Good views of this vivid species were had at Perinet Special Reserve and near Ifaty.

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.

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*

An adult and three youngsters were seen at a wetland near to Ifaty.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Seen at Perinet and Lake Alarobia in Tana.

Buttonquails Turnicidae

Madagascar Buttonquail (E) *Turnix nigricollis*

We recorded this “strange” species with colourful females and drab males at both Berenty and Ifaty.

Avocets & Stilts Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Recorded at wetland sites near Tulear and Ifaty.

Plovers Charadriidae

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Good numbers were seen in the tidal mudflats in and around Tulear and Ifaty.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

We found small numbers of this species in the Ifaty and Tulear areas.

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

A good looking bird, we found a single bird on a sandy shore near Ifaty.

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*

Good numbers were seen around the small wetlands in the vicinity of Ifaty.

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*

A total of three were seen at the coastal wetlands near Ifaty.

White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*

We saw this bird on coastal mudflats near Ifaty, and on Nosy Ve.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

Good numbers were recorded on the mudflats at Tulear harbour.

Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae

Madagascar Snipe (E) (NT) *Gallinago macrodactyla*

We had good views of this large snipe at a small marshy dam north-west of Tana.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Seen at the harbour mudflats at Tulear.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Good numbers were recorded in the vicinity of Tulear and Ifaty.

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Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
First recorded at Berenty, and thereafter at various wetland sites.	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>
First recorded at <i>en route</i> from Perinet to Tana, and at various wetland sites thereafter.	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
We saw good numbers in the in and around Tulear and Ifaty.	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Small numbers were recorded around Tulear and Ifaty.	
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
The rich mudflats around Tulear and Ifaty produced small numbers of this species.	

Terns Sternidae

Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
Seen in small numbers around Ifaty, and then a good flock was recorded on Nosy Ve.	
Swift (Greater Crested) Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>
We recorded this species around Ifaty and Tulear.	
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
A widespread species, we recorded a large flock on a sand spit near Ifaty.	

Sandgrouse Pteroclididae

Madagascar Sandgrouse (E)	<i>Pterocles personatus</i>
We had an excellent fly-by of five of these large birds on the Mandrare River at Berenty.	

Pigeons & Doves Columbidae

Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) (I)	<i>Columba livia</i>
Commonly recorded in urban areas and near human settlements.	
Madagascar Turtle Dove (NEE)	<i>Columba picturata</i>
Recorded at various localities throughout the trip.	
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>
Regularly recorded in the more arid areas we visited.	
Madagascar Green Pigeon (NE)	<i>Treron australis</i>
Four of these lovely birds were seen atop mangrove trees within the mouth of the Onilahy River.	
Madagascar Blue Pigeon (E)	<i>Alectroenas madagascariensis</i>
Excellent views were had of this vivid species at Perinet-Mantadia.	

Parrots Psittacidae

Gray-headed Lovebird (E)	<i>Agapornis canus</i>
A pretty, delicate little bird, we saw good numbers in drier areas (Berenty, Ifaty).	
Greater Vasa Parrot (NE)	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>
Two birds were seen at Perinet.	
Lesser Vasa Parrot (NE)	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>
A noisy, vocal species, we recorded it regularly in former half of the trip.	

Cuckoos, Couas & Coucals Cuculidae

Madagascar Coucal (NEE)	<i>Centropus toulou</i>
We recorded this good looking bird throughout the tour.	
Crested Coua (E)	<i>Coua cristata</i>
Our first views of this attractive bird were <i>en route</i> to Berenty.	

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Verreaux's Coua (E) (NT)

Coua verreauxi

A very localised, uncommon species, we had brief views in the coral rag scrub, before obtaining excellent views on the cliffs near the Onilahy River mouth.

Blue Coua (E)

Coua caerulea

We had good views of this beautiful species at Perinet-Mantadia.

Green-capped Coua (E)

Coua [ruficeps] olivaceiceps

Excellent views were had of a single bird in the spiny forest at Berenty.

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

We were treated to great views of this species at Perinet-Mantidia.

Running Coua (E)

Coua cursor

This bird was seen in the Spiny Forest at Ifaty.

Giant Coua (E)

Coua gigas

The largest coua, and very vocal, we had a numerous good views of this lovely bird in the gallery forest at Berenty.

Red-breasted Coua (E)

Coua serriana

Despite our best efforts, we were unable to track down a calling bird in Perinet Special Reserve.

Madagascar Cuckoo (BE)

Cuculus rochii

Heard regularly, we also some great views of this skulking cuckoo.

Barn Owls Tytonidae

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

The loud screeching of a single bird was heard at Berenty.

Typical Owls Strigidae

Torotoroka Scops Owl (E)

Otus madagascariensis

We were treated to great views of this dry country Scops Owl at Berenty.

Madagascar (Rainforest) Scops Owl (NE)

Otus rutilus

Heard every night in Perinet, we saw one specimen at Perinet Special Reserve.

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

White-browed Hawk-Owl (E)

Ninox superciliaris

A really good looking bird, we had excellent views of this species at its day roost at Berenty.

Nightjars Caprimulgidae

Madagascar Nightjar (NE)

Caprimulgus madagascariensis

The most common nightjar in Madagascar, we recorded this bird throughout the tour.

Collared Nightjar (E)

Caprimulgus enarratus

A stunning bird, and very uncommon, we had an excellent view of a roosting bird at Perinet Special Reserve.

Swifts Apodidae

Madagascar Spinetail (NE)

Zoonavena grandidieri

We had good views of this species over the forest in Mantadia.

African Palm Swift

Cypsiurus parvus gracilis

Two birds were seen overhead on the entrance road to Mantadia.

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Madagascar Black Swift (NE)

Apus balstoni

We recorded maximum number of this large species on the cliffs near the Onilahy River mouth.

NOTE: These Malagasy birds are usually considered a species distinct from the African Black Swift (A. barbatus), however no dedicated research has been done. There seems to be two distinct sizes of all black swifts in Madagascar, and these may represent two or more species.

Little Swift

Apus affinis

We saw a small flock of around 10 birds in Tana.

Rollers Coraciidae

Broad-billed Roller

Eurystomus glaucurus

Great views were had of this beautiful breeding migrant from Africa in the former half of the trip.

Ground Rollers Brachypteraciidae

Short-legged Ground-Roller (E) (V)

Brachypteracias leptosomus

The largest and most arboreal of the ground-rollers, and usually the most difficult to find, we had great views of birds on two consecutive days in Mantadia.

Scaly Ground-Roller (E) (V)

Brachypteracias squamigera

Seen on two different days at Mantadia, this gorgeous bird is remarkably good at blending in and we were lucky to get such good views.

Pitta-like Ground-Roller (E)

Atelornis pittoides.

A dazzling bird, and generally the most common of the ground-rollers, we were treated to great views of this forest stunner in Mantadia.

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

Atelornis crossleyi

After some hard work, this incredible bird was seen at a short distance in Mantadia

Long-tailed Ground-Roller (E) (V)

Uratelornis chimaera

The bizarre ground-roller “outcast”, we had good views of this special, range-restricted dry country bird in the Spiny Forest at Ifaty.

Cuckoo-Rollers Leptosomidae

Madagascar Cuckoo-Roller (E)

Leptosomus discolor

This huge bird with a characteristic call was sighted at Perinet-Mantadia.

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.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher (E)

Ispidina madagascariensis

An incredible bird, we had excellent views of this jewel of a bird at Mantadia.

Malagasy Kingfisher (NE)

Alcedo vintsioides

Recorded at a number of wetland sites throughout the tour.

Bee-eaters Meropidae

Olive (Madagascar) Bee-eater

Merops superciliosus

A Malagasy breeding endemic, it was sighted at numerous sights throughout the trip.

Hoopoes Upupidae

Madagascar Hoopoe (E)

Upupa marginalis

A bizarre species with a strange call, we were treated to excellent views in the latter half of the tour.

NOTE: This form is usually considered distinct from the African Hoopoe, based on vocal and morphological differences.

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Asities Philepittidae

Common Sunbird-Asity (E)

Neodrepanis coruscans

Unfortunately, we only heard this beautiful species on a high ridge top at Mantadia.

Vangas Vangidae

Red-tailed Vanga (E)

Calicalicus madagascariensis

Good views were had of this species at Perinet-Mantadia. Its characteristic “wolf-whistle” was a constant reminder of its presence.

Red-shouldered Vanga (E) (V)

Calicalicus rufocarpalis

A great bird, we were treated to excellent views of this recently described species at the coral rag scrub near La Tabla.

Hook-billed Vanga (E)

Vanga curvirostris

An excellent sighting of this species was had at Berenty.

Lafresnaye's Vanga (E)

Xenopirostris xenopirostris

A handsome bird, we first recorded this species *en route* from Berenty to Fort Dauphin.

Sickle-billed Vanga (E)

Falcula palliata

Sighted on the road out of Berenty, as well as at the Ifaty spiny forest.

White-headed Vanga (E)

Artamella viridis

Seen in the mid-altitude forest at Perinet-Mantadia.

Chabert's Vanga (E)

Leptopterus chabert

Probably the most commonly recorded Vanga, we sighted birds in a range of habitats.

Blue Vanga ([N]E)

Cyanolanius madagascarensis

A stunning bird, we recorded two birds at Perinet-Mantadia.

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

A good looking and vocal bird, we saw a few individuals in Perinet-Mantadia.

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

Nuthatch Vanga (E)

Hypositta corallirostris

Usually one of the more difficult Vangas, we had stunning views of four birds at the ridge-top at Perinet.

Dark Newtonia (E)

Newtonia amphichroa

We had great views of this secretive species at Mantadia.

Common Newtonia (E)

Newtonia brunneicauda

Recorded frequently in the former half of the tour.

Archbold's Newtonia (E)

Newtonia archboldi

Generally an uncommon species restricted to the south of the Island, we had good views of this species at the Spiny Forest at Ifaty.

Ward's Flycatcher (E)

Pseudobias wardi

A stunning bird, we had great views of this species at Mantadia.

Crossley's Babbler (E)

Mystacornis crossleyi

We recorded this secretive species at Perinet.

Cuckooshrikes Campephagedae

Madagascar Cuckoo-shrike (NE)

Coracina cinerea

A good looking bird, we recorded this species on a number of occasions in Perinet-Mantadia.

Drongos Dicruridae

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Crested Drongo (NE)

Dicrurus forficatus

The Malagasy “King of the birds”, we observed this species throughout the tour.

Monarchs Monarchidae

Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher (NE)

Terpsiphone mutata

This stunning species was recorded on numerous occasions during the tour.

Crows & Jays Corvidae

Pied Crow

Corvus albus

A widespread species, and most frequently recorded in the more open areas during the latter half of the tour.

Swallows & Martins Hirundinidae

Mascarene Martin (NE)

Phedina borbonica

A breeding endemic, we had excellent views of this species at their nest holes at Mantadia.

Brown-throated (Plain Sand) Martin

Riparia paludicola

Seen at a wetland partially converted into a rice paddy between Tana and Perinet.

Larks Alaudidae

Madagascar Lark (E)

Mirafraga hova

Our best views of this species were had near on the sandy roads near Ifaty.

Cisticolas & Allies Cisticolidae

Madagascar Cisticola (NE)

Cisticola cherinus

A drab bird, we recorded it in grassland habitats throughout throughout the tour.

Family Uncertain

Common Jery (E)

Neomixis tenella

Recorded in small numbers throughout the tour.

Green Jery (E)

Neomixis viridis

We had our best views of this species alongside the lake at Perinet.

Stripe-throated Jery (E)

Neomixis striatigula

Possessing a call superficially similar to Rand’s Warbler, we saw a number of these birds in woodland habitats throughout the tour.

Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

Madagascar Bulbul (NE)

Hypsipetes madagascariensis

A ubiquitous species recorded on every day of the tour.

Old World Warblers Sylviidae

Grey Emutail (E)

Dromaeocercus seebohmi

We were treated to great scope views of this skulker at a small wetland outside Perinet.

Malagasy Brush Warbler (NE)

Nesillas typica

More often heard than seen as it calls from dense undergrowth, we had good views of this species at Perinet-Mantadia.

Subdesert Brush Warbler (E)

Nesillas lantzii

Our best views of this species was in the stunted vegetation on sand dunes near Ifaty.

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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

Seen at a small wetland near Perinet.

White-throated Oxylabes (E)

Oxylabes madagascariensis

We had excellent views of this secretive understory skulker at Mantadia.

Long-billed Bernieria (E)

Bernieria madagascariensis

We saw this forest species at Perinet-Mantadia.

Cryptic Warbler (E)

Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi

Scope views of this recently described species (1995) were had at Mantadia.

Wedge-tailed Jery (E) (NT)

Hartertula flavoviridis

An uncommon bird, we were treated to good views in the rainforest at Mantadia.

Thamnornis (Warbler) (E)

Thamnornis chloropetoides

Restricted to southern Madagascar, we saw this bird well while birding in the Spiny Forest near Ifaty.

Spectacled Greenbul (E)

Phyllastrephus zosterops

Seen in the rainforests at Mantadia.

Grey-crowned Greenbul (E) (NT)

Phyllastrephus cinereiceps

A total of four of this difficult to see species were seen at Mantadia.

Rand's Warbler (E)

Randia pseudozosterops

We had good scope views of this species at Mantadia.

White-eyes Zosteropidae

Madagascar White-eye (NE)

Zosterops maderaspatana

Regularly recorded during the tour.

Starlings Sturnidae

Madagascar Starling (E)

Hartlaubius aurata

We had good sightings of these forest starlings at Mantadia.

Common Myna (I)

Acridotheres tristis tristis

Seen frequently throughout the tour, particularly in urban areas and near human settlements.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

Madagascar Magpie-Robin (E)

Copsychus albospecularis

A delightful songster, this common species provided good entertainment in many wooded localities throughout the tour.

Eurasian Stonechat

Saxicola torquata

A widespread bird first seen in the vicinity of Tana.

Littoral Rock Thrush (E)

Pseudocossyphus imerinus

A few of these localised birds were observed south of Tulear.

Forest Rock Thrush (E)

Pseudocossyphus sharpei

A single specimen was seen in the ridge top forest at Mantadia.

Sunbirds Nectariniidae

Souimanga Sunbird (NE)

Nectarinia souimanga

The most common sunbird on the island, we recorded good numbers throughout the tour.

Long-billed Green (Madagascar) Sunbird (NE)

Nectarinia notata

Generally uncommon (certainly no where near as common as Souimanga Sunbird), we had our best views at Mantadia.

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Weavers Ploceidae

Nelicourvi Weaver (E)

Ploceus nelicourvi

A beautiful bird, we were treated to great views at Perinet-Mantadia.

Sakalava Weaver (E)

Ploceus sakalava

A dry country weaver, we first came across this bird en route to Berenty Lemur Reserve.

Madagascar Red Fody (E)

Foudia madagascariensis

Although a good portion of the birds we recorded were in non-breeding or transitional dress, we were fortunate enough to spot a few beautifully bright and colourfully dressed males.

Forest Fody (E)

Foudia omissa

An uncommon forest bird, our best view was of an outstanding male in breeding dress at Mantadia.

Waxbills Estrildidae

Madagascar Mannikin (E)

Lonchura nana

Recorded in small numbers at Mantadia.

Wagtails Motacillidae

Madagascar Wagtail (E)

Motacilla flaviventris

A lovely looking bird, we had excellent views of this species in and around Tana.

MAMMALS

Old World Fruit Bats Pteropodidae

Madagascar Flying Fox

Pteropus rufus

We had scope views of these huge bats in their day roost in the gallery forest at Berenty.

Old World Rats and Mice Muridae

Black Rat

Rattus norvegicus

This species was unfortunately recorded in accommodations at Berenty.

Mouse and Dwarf Lemurs Cheirogaleidae

Grey Mouse Lemur

Microcebus murinus

We had a brief view of this tiny denizen of the gallery forest along the Mandrare River at Berenty.

Grey-brown Mouse Lemur

Microcebus griseorufus

Recorded at its day roost in the spiny forest at Berenty. In Berenty, this species is separated by habitat preference from Grey Mouse Lemur (Grey Mouse in gallery forest, Grey-brown Mouse in spiny forest).

Brown Mouse Lemur

Microcebus rufus

A night walk at Perinet provided a sighting of two individuals of this delightful rainforest species.

Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur

Cheirogaleus crossleyi

The nocturnal exploits of this species at Feo Ny Alala at Perinet are famous, and we were treated to some superb sightings of this lovely creature in the Travellers Palm *Ravenala madagascarensis* outside the restaurant.

NOTE: The taxonomy of the genus Cheirogaleus has recently undergone a lot of revision, with seven species now accepted in place of the previous two, and as such, the "famous" Greater Dwarf Lemurs *C. major* of Feo Ny ala have been re-identified as Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur *C. crossleyi*.

Sportive Lemurs Megaladapidae

Small-toothed Sportive Lemur

Lepilemur microdonta

Some were witness to an adult and juvenile in their day roost in the rainforest at Mantadia.

White-footed Sportive Lemur

Lepilemur leucopus

Great views were had of a roosting individual in the gallery forest at Berenty, as well as a few more in the nearby spiny forest.

“True” Lemurs Lemuridae

Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur

Hapalemur griseus griseus

An endearing creature, we recorded this species at Perinet-Mantadia, enjoying amazing close-ups.

Ring-tailed Lemur

Lemur catta

This species is most likely to be the most famous Malagasy mammal, and we enjoyed numerous close-up encounters with these lovely creatures.

Common Brown Lemur

Eulemur fulvus fulvus

Our best views were of individuals that perched in low trees at Feo Ny Ala, allowing for excellent views.

Red-fronted Brown Lemur

Eulemur fulvus rufus

Many individuals were seen at Berenty.

NOTE: The animals we saw at Berenty are introduced individuals, with its natural range being much further north than Berenty.

Black-and-White Ruffed Lemur

Varecia variegata

We were very fortunate to see a pair of these striking lemurs while at Mantadia National Park. These creatures are unfortunately very endangered.

Avahis, Sifakas and Indri Indriidae

Verreaux's Sifaka

Propithecus verreaux verreauxi

These lemurs are famous as the “dancing” sifakas, and we had numerous encounters including some of their trademarks sideways skipping.

Indri

Indri indri

The largest extant species of lemur, we enjoyed wonderful close-ups including some of their characteristic ear shattering howling.

Amphibians and Reptiles

Reed Frogs Hyperoliidae

Betsileo Reed Frog

Heterixalus betsileo

A single individual was found at Relaix de Plateaux in Tana.

Rain Frogs Scaphiophrynidae

Marbled Rain Frog

Scaphiophryne marmorata

A single specimen of this cryptic species was found in the rain forest at Mantadia.

Land Tortoises Testudinidae

Spider Tortoise

Pyxis arachnoids

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Our group was very fortunate to locate two individuals at Berenty and a further specimen in the La Tabla coral rag scrub.

Chameleons Chamaeleonidae

Short-horned Chameleon *Calumma brevicornis*

A few specimens were found in and around Perinet.

Nose-horned Chameleon *Calumma nasuta*

The smallest “typical” chameleon, we found a single specimen in secondary growth while at Perinet.

Band-bellied Chameleon *Calumma gastrotaenia*

A small species, possessing a distinctive white belly contrasting with bright green flanks and upperparts, we found a few of these chameleons at Perinet.

Parson’s Chameleon *Calumma parsonii*

One of the largest chameleon species in the world, we recorded a particularly colourful specimen on the ridge top at Perinet.

Warty Chameleon *Furcifer verrucosus*

A total of two of this large chameleon species were recorded in the spiny forest at Berenty.

Iguanas Iguanidae

Three-eyed Lizard *Chalarodon madagascariensis*

Seen at Berenty and at Ifaty. The “third eye” is a pineal gland situated atop its head.

Geckos Gekkonidae

Sikora Leaf-tailed Gecko *Uroplatus sikorae*

An incredible creature, we found one specimen on a night walk at Perinet.

Lineated Day Gecko *Phelsuma lineata*

A stunning reptile, we recorded this species Perinet and on the buildings at Feon’ Ny Ala.

Southern Dwarf Gecko *Lygodactylus tuberosus*

This small gecko was seen on the walls of buildings at Berenty.

Plated Lizards Gerrhosauridae

Madagascar Plated Lizard *Zonosaurus madagascarensis*

We saw a few of these lizards while at Perinet-Mantadia.

Boas Boidae

Madagascar Tree Boa *Sanzinia madagascarensis*

A single specimen was found at Mantadia, with this particular specimen possessing incredible colouration!

Typical Snakes Colubridae

Mahafaly Sand Snake *Mimophis mahfalensis*

A widespread Malagasy snake, we found a specimen on a sandy foot path in the Spiny Forest at Berenty.

List of Notable Insects and other Invertebrates

Class Insecta

Giraffe-necked Weevil *Trachelophorus giraffa*

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A bizarre insect, we were treated to great views of this species at Perinet.

Flatid Leaf Bug

Phromnia rosea

Seen clustering on branches in the spiny forest at Berenty.

Madagascar Hissing Cockroach

Elliptorhina javanica

An amazing insect, we found these at Berenty. Only the males hiss, and this is achieved by forcing air through spiracles on the abdomen (supposedly the only insect capable of making a noise through this process).

Class Arachnida

Golden Orb-web Spider

Nephila madagascariensis

This colourful arachnid was seen in a number of localities on the island.

Class Diplopoda

Emerald Pill Millipede

Sphaerotherium sp.

This is the presumed species of pill millipede that was seen in vast numbers at Perinet.

Photo Credits (in order of appearance): Scaly Ground Roller, Red-shouldered Vanga by James Wakelin; Sikora Leaf-tailed Gecko, Giraffe-necked Weevil by Rainer Summers; Indri by James Wakelin; Madagascar Tree Boa, Ring-tailed Lemur, Hissing Cockroach (female), Ifaty scenery by Rainer Summers; Sub-desert Mesite by Dave Chantler.

Rockjumper Birding Tours
Worldwide Birding Adventures
PO Box 13972, Cascades, 3202, South Africa
Tel: +27 33 394 0225
Fax: +27 88 033 394 0225
Email: info@rockjumper.co.za
Alternative Email: rockjumperbirding@yahoo.com
Website: www.rockjumper.co.za