

Madagascar

Budget

5th December to 15th December 2024 (11 days)



Hook-billed Vangas by David Hoddinott

Our Budget Madagascar Birding tour provides the budget conscious birder with a fantastic opportunity for observing the highlights of this magical island's incredible birds and wildlife. On this tour we will visit three of Madagascar's core critical habitats; namely the deciduous woodlands of Ankarafantsika, the dry spiny forest around Ifaty and the moist eastern rainforests of Analamazaotra and Mantadia (Perinet), all of which hold an exceptional diversity of endemic birds and lemurs. We stand excellent chances of finding all 5 of the island's endemic bird families, as well as up to 10 different lemur species, including the awesome Indri! Some of the expected highlights of this tour include Long-tailed and Pitta-like Ground Rollers, stunning Schlegel's and Velvet Asities, Blue Coua, Subdesert and White-breasted Mesites, Sickle-billed and Van Dam's Vangas, and the ubiquitous Cuckoo Roller.

Itinerary & Map

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|------------|--|
| Day 1 | Arrival in Antananarivo (Tana), drive to Perinet |
| Days 2 & 3 | Perinet Special Reserve & Mantadia National Park |
| Day 4 | Perinet to Tana |
| Day 5 | Tana, flight to Mahajanga, drive to Ampijoroa Forest Station |
| Day 6 | Ampijoroa Forest Station |
| Day 7 | Ampijoroa to Mahajanga, flight to Tana |
| Day 8 | Tana, flight to Tulear, drive to Ifaty |
| Day 9 | Ifaty |
| Day 10 | Ifaty to Tulear |
| Day 11 | Tulear, flight to Tana & final departure |



Birding sites in detail

This itinerary covers different seasons. Please note the below notations:

- * Summer migrants occurring between late October and early April.
- ^ Species that whilst resident, are most easily found between October and March.



Cuckoo Roller by Glen Valentine

Souimanga Sunbird.

Amongst the most sought-after of Madagascar's birds are those of the five families endemic to the Malagasy region: the peculiar mesites, exquisite ground rollers, Cuckoo Roller, Malagasy warblers and the vangas. Some of these, such as the magnificent Cuckoo Roller, sensational Pitta-like Ground Roller[^] and a number of the Malagasy warblers and vangas are reasonably common and regularly encountered, whilst most of the others remain rare, local or elusive. We will make a special effort to locate as many representatives of these charismatic families as possible, as well as those of the endemic sub-families, the couas and asities.

In the forested hills around Perinet, we hope to find the localised Red-fronted and Blue Couas, Velvet Asity, and flocks of vangas that may include White-headed, Chabert's, Blue, Red-tailed, Hook-billed and the bizarre Nuthatch Vanga.

Whilst in the Perinet area, we will make a special effort to see the reserve's most famous residents: the huge, singing lemurs known as the Indri. A journey in search of these magnificent creatures is an incredible experience, and if we are fortunate we will be treated to a close encounter with a family group; their eerie, whale-like howling echoing through the forest. Other lemurs we hope to see include Common Brown and Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs, while we will also search known roosting sites for the nocturnal but inquisitive Weasel Sportive Lemur. Another 'must



Rufous-headed Ground Roller by Glen Valentine

Perinet Special Reserve (Analamazaotra). The moist rainforest cloaking Madagascar's eastern escarpment protects the richest assemblage of birds on the island, including many that are rare or poorly known. Over 100 of these have been recorded from within the small reserve of Perinet and we will search for such specials as Madagascan Flufftail, the elusive Madagascan Wood Rail, Madagascan Blue Pigeon, scarce Greater Vasa Parrot, vociferous but retiring Madagascan Cuckoo*, Madagascan Spinetail, brilliant Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascan Cuckooshrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascan Starling, Long-billed Bernieria, Spectacled Tetraka, furtive White-throated Oxylabes, Nelicourvi Weaver and

see' member of the island's fauna is the Giraffe-necked Weevil, a tiny red and black insect named for its unusually proportioned neck!



Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur by Daniel Keith Danckwerts

their African cousins the galagos, denizens of the night.

We will search for and should find Eastern Woolly, Furry-eared Dwarf^ and the diminutive Goodman's Mouse Lemurs^, and may also encounter some of Madagascar's other evolutionary masterpieces such as the bizarre Lowland Streaked Tenrec^. The island's reptile and amphibian ('herp') fauna is equally fascinating and even the most hardened birder would not fail to be impressed by the plethora of colourful and bizarre frogs, chameleons and geckos to be seen on an evening's stroll through the rainforest. In particular, we will search for the giant Parson's Chameleon and three species of eccentric leaf-tailed geckos: the huge Fimbriated Leaf-tailed Gecko, the aptly named Fantastic Leaf-tailed Gecko and the Sakora Leaf-tailed Gecko, which looks as though its body has been adorned with moss.

Mantadia National Park. Mantadia National Park lies a short distance from Perinet, protecting a larger expanse of primary forest at a somewhat higher altitude. Though it has only recently been opened to the public, Mantadia is now an essential destination on any birding trip to Madagascar, having rapidly gained a reputation as an excellent site for a handful of highly prized forest birds. Not least amongst these are a number of species formerly considered to be restricted to the poorly accessible rainforests of the far north-east, such as Red-breasted Coua^ and Scaly Ground Roller^. We will concentrate on finding these specials, while also watching for more widespread yet no less desirable forest birds including Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Rufous-headed^ and Short-legged Ground Rollers^, Crossley's Vanga, Common and Dark Newtonias, Wedge-tailed, Green, Stripe-throated and Common Jeries, the newly described Cryptic Warbler and Forest Fody. We will also scan across a small forest pond that often holds a pair of Meller's Duck and Madagascan Grebe, two highly threatened and declining endemics. Other attractions in this scenically beautiful park include the vocal Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur, the elusive Diademed Sifaka (considered by many to be the world's most beautiful lemur) and Baron's Mantella, a spectacularly coloured forest frog. Much of the birding in



Schlegel's Asity by David Hoddinott



Crossley's Vanga by David Hoddinott

gaudy Broad-billed Roller, screeching Lesser Vasa Parrot, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascar Hoopoe, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Green Pigeon and Malagasy Turtle Dove.

We'll walk the network of trails through the dry forest surrounding Ampijoroa in search of the many birds restricted to this region. Foremost amongst these are the secretive White-breasted Mesite and the jewel-like Schlegel's Asity, the latter of which recalls a miniature Bird-of-paradise! We will also concentrate on finding the highly localised Van Dam's Vanga and the two species of coua that are restricted to these deciduous forests: Red-capped and Coquerel's. Other birds we will be on the lookout for whilst searching for these specials include Madagascar Ibis[^], Madagascar Buttonquail, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, and Rufous, Hook-billed, White-headed, Chabert and Red-tailed Vangas.

No less than eight species of lemur occur in the near vicinity of the camp and we are likely to be treated to excellent views of the comical Coquerel's Sifaka and Common Brown Lemurs during the day, while at dusk the rare Mongoose Lemur becomes active. Western Avahi (Woolly Lemur), Milne-Edward's Sportive, Fat-tailed Dwarf[^] and Grey Mouse Lemurs[^] are all nocturnal and will be searched for after dark. If we are lucky, we may also find the recently described (1998) Golden-brown Mouse Lemur[^], one of the world's smallest primates and only known from the immediate vicinity around Lake Ravelobe (hence its scientific name *Microcebus ravelobensis*.)

Reptiles are also plentiful along the trails and we hope to see the impressive Giant Hog-nosed Snake, as well as several smaller species of snake (all harmless – amazingly, there are no venomous snakes in Madagascar!), Oustalet's Chameleon (the world's largest species) and the aptly named Rhinoceros Chameleon, with its enlarged nasal

Mantadia National Park can be enjoyed from the wide road that runs up into the reserve, although seeing the skulkers of the forest understory will require that we take to some of the steep and at times slippery trails into the rainforest.

Ampijoroa Forest Station. Ampijoroa Forest Station is a ranger base and research centre that also provides hutted and camping accommodation situated in the extensive deciduous forests of the Ankarafantsika Reserve. It is famous as the home of World Wildlife Fund's Plough-shear Tortoise captive breeding program and is an ideal base from which to search for the numerous endemic birds of the region.

On arrival at the forestry station, we should encounter numerous 'camp residents' such as the



Archbold's Newtonia by Keith Valentine



Red-shouldered Vanga by Glen Valentine

protuberance. Impressively spiky Cuvier's Iguanids scurry around the campsite along with Wide-tailed Plated Lizards. We will also spend some of the afternoon birding along the edge of the adjacent Lake Ravelobe, where we hope to find the critically endangered Madagascan Fish Eagle, a pair of which is resident here. Wintering Sooty* and Eleonora's Falcons* are sometimes seen hunting overhead, while White-throated Rail, Humblot's Heron, Madagascan Jacana and Allen's Gallinule favour the waterside vegetation. We may also encounter noisy groups of Sickle-billed and Blue Vangas

moving along the forest fringe.

Mahajanga area. A seasonal pan near to Mahajanga often harbours a variety of shorebirds that usually include Black-winged Stilt and Kittlitz's Plover and, if we are very fortunate, the rare, endemic Madagascan Plover may also be in attendance. Depending on water levels, the far end of the pan may be blanketed in water lilies and if this is the case we will almost definitely be rewarded with rafts of beautiful African Pygmy Goose and perhaps the odd Greater Painted-snipe. The adjacent scrub and thickets also usually support good numbers of Madagascan Cisticola, Olive Bee-eater, Madagascan Mannikin and Red Fody.

Ifaty. Much has been written about the strange Didierea woodland, or 'Spiny Forest' around Ifaty, but this in no way lessens the feeling of awe that overcomes one as we set foot in this botanical wonderland. Venturing out at dawn, before the day's heat, we will stroll amongst the myriad of multi-stemmed succulents, squat baobab trees and thorny scrub in search of such spectacular endemics as Banded Kestrel, the ultra-low-density Madagascan Sparrowhawk, Running and Red-capped Couas (represented here by the distinctive green-capped race), Archbold's Newtonia, unique and melodious Thamnornis, Subdesert Brush Warbler and Lafresnaye's Vanga.

Two very special birds that occur here are the strange Subdesert Mesite, which we may find adopting its cryptic posture on a thorny branch, and Long-tailed Ground Roller, an elusive ground dweller best located by its low, hooting call. Flocks of noisy Sickle-billed Vanga are another feature of this bizarre, Tolkienesque landscape. We should also see the numerous Three-eyed Lizards as the day heats up in the mid-morning, while we may be lucky enough to find a beautiful Spider Tortoise or rare Dumeril's Boa.

In addition, the tropical ocean off Ifaty is alive with marine life and we will have some time to don masks and snorkels and appreciate the multiple colours of a coral reef or relax in the warm shallows in front of our hotel.










Long-tailed Ground Roller by Daniel Keith Danckwerts

We'll also spend a little time birding the surrounding fields for the uncommon and range-restricted Madagascan Plover, while wetlands and salt pans may hold numbers of Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Kittlitz's Plover, assorted migratory waders, and Malagasy Harrier if we are very fortunate. White-throated Rail and Baillon's Crake also occur here on occasion and are worth looking out for in the vast wetlands.

La Table. Named after the flat-topped mountain at the edge of town - the habitat of La Table is desolate, commonly known as coral rag scrub, and consists of dense thorny scrubs, Euphorbias and twisted Baobabs. Our target birds here include two species with highly restricted ranges: Verreaux's Coua and the recently discovered Red-shouldered Vanga. Reptile life is also particularly rich and we should find large, sleek Zonosaurus plated lizards as well as more Three-eyed Lizards and, if very lucky, the stunning Dumeril's Boa and/or endangered Radiated Tortoise.

Tour Grading & Key

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| Overall Ease |  | Moderate to brisk paced tours suited for those in good health with reasonable level of fitness. Not suited for anyone with mobility challenges or serious medical conditions |
| Birding Ease |  | Mostly unchallenging, several difficult rainforest skulkers |
| Accommodation |  | Generally decent standard of hotels and resorts. Some more basic lodges are clean and comfortable. |
| Walking / Trails |  | Some trails in the rainforest can be steep and slippery, especially after rain. Some longer walks necessary for more localised species. Iaroka hike for Helmet Vanga is tough, but optional. |
| Vehicles / Roads |  | Road conditions are challenging, and could involve very long drives if flights are delayed/cancelled. Seas during the boat trip to Nosy Ve Island can be rough. |
| Photography |  | Excellent to incredible. |
| Annoyances |  | Can be hot to very hot at some sites. Some long and demanding days. |

It is critical to be aware that Madagascar has been on a long path of ecological and environmental destruction, but that this regression has increased dramatically on many fronts since late 2019. Many primary arterial roads are beyond the point of repair, either through a lack of any maintenance, or destruction caused by increasingly powerful and more frequent cyclones. Typical drives that used to take 6 hours are now taking double that or more.

The southern third of the country is experiencing a severe famine due to drought, exacerbated by the total obliteration of any vegetation cover due to slash and burn agriculture, charcoal production, and logging. The area amounts to little more than a heavily eroded desert with many abandoned rice paddies and ghost towns.

Areas such as Ifaty have seen significant human encroachment into the remnant spiny forest patches, causing an evident decrease in species density and diversity.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All breakfasts from day 2 to day 11;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- All lunches and dinners on the tour;
- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions & activities;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tiping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**
- This tour requires a reasonable level of fitness, and guests should be in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot, and may require walking for several hours at a time. Some trails in the rainforest can be quite steep and slippery, especially after rain, and a few longer walks will be made in an attempt to locate some of the more localised species.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a generally good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of are clean and comfortable. Some of the accommodations, are basic and less comfortable from what you have come to expect in the developed world; we will, however, make efforts to make this tour as comfortable as possible. There is no camping on this trip.

- If you have any medical conditions or physical limitations relating to balance and mobility, please do let the Rockjumper office know.
- In some areas, it can be hot to very hot, especially at midday. We will thus make a number of early starts to maximise the most pleasurable time in the field. Some days are long and fairly demanding.
- If you are a more relaxed birder preferring an even-tempered tour, then our Highlights tour has been designed as a suitable alternative to this tour.

Seasonal Considerations

Madagascar is well-known as being one of the tougher birding tours due to its very hot summer temperatures. Most days of the tour are long, and cover fairly difficult terrain at the rainforest sites. The addition of numerous night walks and lengthy travel means this tour is very tiring.

Summer - Temperatures often reach high 30°C's (>100°F) on a daily basis in late October through March, particularly in the southern and western parts.

Winter – Temperatures average around 10°C cooler. Days are shorter, which also means that night walks start and end earlier. We don't lose birding time in winter because the cooler temperatures allow both ourselves and birds to remain active for longer in the mornings. The cooler temperatures and shorter days make the winter tours far less tiring.

As noted in the text above, there are seasonal variations to the bird list. The Palaearctic and Intra-African migrants that we would normally find in spring are not around during the winter (most shorebirds, including Crab-plover and Madagascar Pratincole. Raptors, Sooty and Eleonora's Falcon). Ground Rollers are particularly tricky in winter - of the 5 species endemic to the island, only Long-tailed Ground Roller in the dry south-west would be likely; any of the rainforest species would be highly unexpected.

Larger mammals are all active throughout the year and can be found with the same likelihood during either time period. Some of the smaller mammals, however, are totally inactive in the dry winter, when they estivate and are highly unlikely to be found - these include Tenrecs, Dwarf and Mouse Lemur species - which are never easy to find even under optimal conditions. Reptiles and frogs are better represented in the spring, when it warms up and is more likely to rain. Chameleons are around throughout the year, as are the amazing Leaf-tailed Geckos, while a few snakes and other lizards can be seen in winter.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour sees us departing Antananarivo for Perinet. Please arrive in Antananarivo the day before the tour starts. The tour will conclude mid-to late morning of day 11 after a flight from Tulear to Antananarivo international airport.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Internal flight delays and last-minute schedule alterations are an inherent risk on any tour to Madagascar, and we may have to re-arrange the tour itinerary due flight schedule changes. We will take all reasonable action to ensure the tour follows the advertised itinerary as closely as possible. Where flights get cancelled or rescheduled, we may need to embark on long road journeys, or use charter flights if available (these are very expensive). Chartered flights present possible extra costs to the tour, so it is imperative that you consult with your travel insurance company to ascertain what amount they may cover should the situation arise.

For international flights the main port of entry is Ivato International Airport, Antananarivo (IATA: TNR).

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important

that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: [Visa HQ for Travel](#)

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.