



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Madagascar **Masoala Extension** *27th to 31st October 2018 (5 days)* **Trip Report**



Helmet Vanga by Rob Williams

Trip Report compiled by tour leader: Rob Williams

Top 5 Birds (and a couple of great Mammals)

1. Helmet Vanga
 - Aye-Aye*
 - Red-ruffed Lemur*
 2. Red-breasted Coua
 3. Madagascar Pratincole
 4. Bernier's Vanga
 5. White-throated Oxylabes
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Tour Summary

The Masoala peninsula lies on the north-east coast of Madagascar and shelters the calm tropical waters of Antongil Bay. The Masoala National Park protects some of the last remaining tropical forest at sea-level on the island, and is the best place to see some of the country's most sought-after species, such as the Aye-aye, Helmet Vanga and Bernier's Vanga.

Our tour to this remote area faces logistical issues, but the chance of seeing these fabulous species more than compensates the travel challenges.

Tour in Detail

27 October 2018: Returning from Perinet, part of the group from the Madagascar Comprehensive II Tour headed straight for Maraontsetra and stayed in a local hotel with Guy. The others met in Antananarivo and enjoyed a dinner together and an early night.

28 October 2018: Those in Tana made an early start to the airport for our flight to Maraontsetra. We travelled via the larger town of Sambava, where we had a snack and changed into a smaller plane for the last leg. Arriving, we transferred to the port and the group was finally united. Those who had stayed had seen a Panther Chameleon and a Tomato Frog. We spent nearly 2 hours crossing the delta of the Maraontsetra river, exploring small channels through dwarf mangroves, past sandbars and freshwater marshes. Along the way, we saw a good variety of herons and egrets, waders including Greater Sand Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, and Malagasy Kingfisher. A White-throated Rail was bathing energetically. As we arrived at our destination, a Madagascar Pratincole showed very well on a grassy



Madagascar Pratincole by Rob Williams

beach. A Malagasy Kestrel flew over carrying a small snake. We then walked some 30 minutes along a trail behind the beach to reach Farankaraina Lodge. After a welcome lunch, some took a nap and others tried a speculative and largely unsuccessful sea-watch. Krista and Lyann saw a Ring-tailed Mongoose, or Ring-tailed Vontsira.

After a rest, a late afternoon walk got us familiar with the forest and some of the common birds here. A calling Red-breasted Coua entertained us for a while, gradually coming closer before perching in full view on a

rock for all to enjoy. Just before dusk, we found a group of White-fronted Brown Lemurs and spent some time watching them.

We made a plan to have dinner and then go out and search for the Aye-aye, but just before dinner one of our local guides arrived breathlessly and said they had found an Aye-aye – we dashed just a few minutes through the forest and enjoyed great views of this fabulous and rarely seen creature. We spent some 20 minutes watching it feeding and grooming. After dinner, we took a night-walk and enjoyed several good reptiles, including an immature Lined Leaf-tailed Gecko in hunting mode, a sleeping Panther Chameleon and great looks at a Rainforest Scops Owl.



Aye-aye by Rob Williams

29 October 2018: We travelled back to Maraontsetra and then changed boats to travel some 45 km across Antongil Bay and past the forested island of Nosy Mangabe. En route we saw several large schools of bonito tuna, some of which were attended by various tern species, mostly Roseate and Common. Arriving at our lodge located beside a tropical beach, we relaxed, swam and settled into our new surroundings. The beach and rocks were favoured by several Madagascan Pratincoles that would become familiar favourites over the coming days.

In the afternoon, we walked into the forest behind the lodge finding the local speciality of Bernier's Vanga, with a male and a female appearing above us with a few other birds. A Red-breasted Coua showed quite well but briefly. A large clearing offered good views of the forest edge, where we found Frances's Sparrowhawk, White-headed Vanga and Greater Vasa Parrot, and a couple of spectacular Madagascan Sunset Moths were seen. On the way back, a Madagascar Wood Rail was calling nearby and we had several views as it repeatedly crossed the trail in front of us.



Lined Leaf-tailed Gecko by Krista Oswald

After dinner, Krista, David and Rob went for a night walk and saw Rufous Mouse Lemur, Eastern Woolly Lemur, and a White-tailed Tree Rat. A larger mammal running through the leaf-litter escaped without being seen.

30 October 2018: Early morning, we found a Blue Coua, Madagascar Green Pigeons and a female Bernier's Vanga right by the lodge. After breakfast, we took the boat a couple of minutes north along the coast to visit the Ambodeforaha sector of the Masoala National Park. As we wound our way up the trail into the humid hilly forest, we found a wonderful group of the magnificent Red-ruffed Lemurs and enjoyed watching them for a while. Here, our main target was the magnificent Helmet Vanga, and before long we were enjoying stunning views of a male on a nest. We spent about 30 minutes watching, and

witnessed an exchange as he left as the female came in and fed the chicks that remained hidden from view before settling in for her shift at brooding.

Moving on up the trail, Rob was optimistically playing Dusky Tetraka calls when we heard a perfect response, we tried from several places and got several responses, but never managed to see the bird. A couple of Red-breasted Couas were much more obliging, with fantastic views as they called by the trail and then dashed across. A brooding Spectacled Tetraka by the path gave us a great study of this normally retiring understory species.



Madagascar Magpie-Robin by Rob Williams

Heading back to the beach, we decided to have a good look at the terns congregating on off-shore rocks; most were Roseate Terns with two subspecies apparently being present (see taxonomic note in species list). There were a few Common Terns, both Greater and Lesser Crested Terns and 3 Brown Noddies.

After lunch, we walked into the forest near the lodge and soon picked up both Crested and Blue Couas and a group of Madagascan Spinetails. A bird party gave us good looks at a pair of Rufous Vanga, Tylas Vanga, and Nelicourvi Weaver. A Red-fronted Coua called distantly but refused to come in. In the late afternoon, some local women appeared singing and dancing and then selling various handicrafts, including carved Helmet Vangas, spices including cinnamon, cloves and vanilla, and even the clothes off their backs! At dusk, David found 3 Collared Nightjars hawking insects behind the lodge.

31 October 2018: We made an early start across the calm waters of the Antongil Bay back to Maraontsetra and transferred to the airport, those who had not yet seen Tomato Frog made a slight detour to a rubbish-filled ditch, where one was quickly located in the rank vegetation along the side.

Trevor and Ann left first, straight to Tana, whilst the rest of us had to travel via Sambava again, and we lunched at the beach where speculative sea-watching was rewarded with a single Lesser Crested Tern only. Arriving back in Tana, we enjoyed a final dinner and were joined by 4 others who were joining the next Comprehensive Tour.



Red-breasted Coua by Krista Oswald

The Masoala extension had been a great success – we had had a few days of great birding and wildlife watching, finding all our target species and more in a spectacular place, and had enjoyed great weather. What a great end to the Comprehensive II Tour for some, and a great start to the Comprehensive III tour for others.

Annotated List of Species Recorded

Birds

DUCKS, GEESE, AND WATERFOWL - Anatidae

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

Common, seen in flocks and as individuals each day.

IBISES AND SPOONBILLS - Threskiornithidae

Madagascan Ibis - E - NT *Lophotibis cristata*

David saw 1 at Farankaraina.

HERONS, EGRETS, AND BITTERNES - Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

A couple flying over the river delta.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

Several in the river delta.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Several in the river delta.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Fairly common, with a large colony on Nosy Mangabe island.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

3 seen in flight over the river delta.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Several seen in the river delta and a single on Nosy Mangabe island.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Fairly common.

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*

Several seen in the river delta and 5 on Nosy Mangabe island.

Dimorphic Egret *Egretta dimorpha*

Fairly common in the river delta and several on Nosy Mangabe island.

CORMORANTS AND SHAGS - Phalacrocoracidae

Reed Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus*

2 seen in the river delta.

HAWKS, EAGLES, AND KITES - Accipitridae

Frances's Sparrowhawk - NE *Accipiter francesiae*

3 seen.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

Fairly common around Maroantsetra.

Madagascan Buzzard - E *Buteo brachypterus*

One heard calling over the forest

FLUFFTAILS - Sarothruridae**Madagascar Wood Rail - E***Canirallus kioloides*

2 heard and 1 seen well but briefly several times as it dashed across the trail.

RAILS, GALLINULES, AND COOTS - Rallidae**White-throated Rail***Dryolimnas cuvieri*

1 seen very well bathing at the edge of the marsh in the river delta, another heard.

Common Moorhen*Gallinula chloropus*

1 seen in the river delta.

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS - Charadriidae**Grey Plover***Pluvialis squatarola*

1 seen in the river delta.

Common Ringed Plover*Charadrius hiaticula*

About 8 seen in the river delta.

Greater Sand Plover*Charadrius leschenaultii*

2 seen in the river delta.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES - Scolopacidae**Bar-tailed Godwit***Limosa lapponica*

1 seen in the river delta.

Whimbrel*Numenius phaeopus*

About 35 seen in the river delta.

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos*

Several seen in the river delta and a couple on the shore of Antongil bay.

PRATINCOLES AND COURSERS - Glareolidae**Madagascar Pratincole - VU***Glareola ocularis*

Common along the shore of Antongil bay with 6 very obliging birds at Tampolodge.

GULLS, TERNS, AND SKIMMERS - Laridae**Brown Noddy***Anous stolidus*

Several in Antongil bay.

Greater Crested Tern*Thalasseus bergii*

Several in Antongil bay.

Lesser Crested Tern*Thalasseus bengalensis*

Several in Antongil bay.

Roseate Tern*Sterna dougallii*

The most common tern in Antongil bay, with at least two different bill types being seen, several fitting the Seychelles subspecies of *arideensis*, though recent genetic studies have shown that this taxon is invalid and should be considered part of *S. d. gracilis*.

Common Tern*Sterna hirundo*

A few seen in with the Roseate Terns in Antongil bay.

PIGEONS AND DOVES - Columbidae**Rock Dove - I***Columba livia*

Common around Maroantsetra.

Malagasy Turtle Dove*Nesoenas picturatus*

Common by voice and several seen.

Madagascan Green Pigeon - E*Treron australis*

4 seen near Tampolodge.

Madagascan Blue Pigeon - E*Alectroenas madagascariensis*

1 seen in the river delta.

CUCKOOS - Cuculidae**Malagasy Coucal***Centropus toulou*

Common.

Blue Coua - E*Coua caerulea*

Heard and 2 seen at Tampolodge.

Crested Coua

1 seen along coast trail north of Tampolodge.

Red-fronted Coua - E*Coua reynaudii*

1 heard.

Red-breasted Coua - E*Coua serriana*

4 seen, including great looks at one very confiding individual, others heard.

OWLS - Strigidae**Rainforest Scops Owl - E***Otus rutilus*

Common around both lodges and several good sightings.

NIGHTJARS AND ALLIES - Caprimulgidae**Collared Nightjar - E***Gactornis enarratus*

3 found by David at dusk behind Tampolodge.

SWIFTS - Apodidae**Madagascan Spinetail***Zoonavena grandidieri*

A group of about 7 seen.

African Palm Swift*Cypsiurus parvus*

Fairly common around Maroantsetra.

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

1 seen.

GROUND ROLLERS - Brachypteraciidae**Short-legged Ground Roller - E - VU***Brachypteracias leptosomus*

Heard only.

KINGFISHERS - Alcedinidae**Malagasy Kingfisher***Corythornis vintsioides*

Fairly common in the river delta and a couple seen along the coast.

BEE-EATERS - Meropidae**Olive Bee-eater***Merops superciliosus*

A few seen over open habitats.

FALCONS AND CARACARAS - Falconidae**Malagasy Kestrel***Falco newtoni*

3 seen at airports.

OLD WORLD PARROTS - Psittaculidae**Greater Vasa Parrot***Coracopsis vasa*

Fairly common around Tampolodge.

VANGAS - Vangidae**Red-tailed Vanga - E***Calicalicus madagascariensis*

A few heard and 1 seen briefly.

Bernier's Vanga - E - VU*Oriolia bernieri*

Good looks at a pair in the forest and then a female near Tampolodge.

White-headed Vanga - E*Artamella viridis*

Several seen.

Chabert Vanga - E*Leptopterus chabert*

Several seen.

Blue Vanga - NE*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*

1 seen.

Rufous Vanga - E*Schetba rufa*

4 seen, including great looks at a pair.

Helmet Vanga - E - VU*Euryceros prevostii*

Fantastic views of both adults attending a nest with small chicks.

Tylas Vanga - E*Tylas eduardi*

Several seen.

Common Newtonia - E*Newtonia brunneicauda*

Common by voice and several seen.

CUCKOOSHRIKES - Campephagidae**Madagascan Cuckooshrike - E***Coracina cinerea*

Several seen.

DRONGOS - Dicruridae**Crested Drongo***Dicrurus forficatus*

Common, a couple of nests found.

MONARCH FLYCATCHERS - Monarchidae**Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher***Terpsiphone mutata*

Fairly common.

CROWS, JAYS, AND MAGPIES - Corvidae**Pied Crow***Corvus albus*

Common around Maroantsetra.

LARKS - Alaudidae**Madagascan Lark - E***Eremopterix hova*

1 in Sambava airport en route.

BULBULS - Pycnonotidae**Malagasy Bulbul***Hypsipetes madagascariensis*

Common.

SWALLOWS - Hirundinidae**Mascarene Martin***Phedina borbonica*

Fairly common.

MALAGASY WARBLERS - Bernieridae**White-throated Oxylabes - E***Oxylabes madagascariensis*

Great looks at 2 adults and 2 juveniles.

Long-billed Bernieria - E*Bernieria madagascariensis*

A few seen.

Spectacled Tetraka - E*Xanthomixis zosterops*

A couple heard and 1 seen very well incubating on a nest by the trail.

Dusky Tetraka - E*Xanthomixis tenebrosa*

Calls identical to recordings of this species were heard and responded to but no bird was seen.

CISTICOLAS AND ALLIES - Cisticolidae**Common Jery - E***Neomixis tenella*

1 heard.

Green Jery - E*Neomixis viridis*

2 heard.

Madagascan Cisticola*Cisticola cherina*

Fairly common in the river delta.

YUHNAS, WHITE-EYES, AND ALLIES - Zosteropidae**Malagasy White-eye***Zosterops maderaspatanus*

Fairly common.

STARLINGS - Sturnidae**Common Myna - I***Acridotheres tristis*

Common in open areas and towns.

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS - Muscicapidae**Madagascan Magpie-Robin - E***Copsychus albospecularis*

Several seen of the black-bellied *albospecularis* subspecies - this is considered to be a distinct species from the white-bellied birds seen on the main tours by HBW/BirdLife, the latter being called Pelzeln's Magpie-Robin *C. pica*.

SUNBIRDS AND SPIDERHUNTERS - Nectariniidae**Souimanga Sunbird - NE***Cinnyris sovimanga*

Fairly common.

Malagasy Green Sunbird - NE*Cinnyris notatus*

1 male seen in the clearing behind Tampolodge.

WEAVERS AND ALLIES - Ploceidae**Nelicourvi Weaver - E***Ploceus nelicourvi*

Several seen.

Red Fody*Foudia madagascariensis*

Common in open areas, especially the river delta.

Forest Fody - E*Foudia omissa*

A couple heard and glimpsed.

WAXBILLS AND ALLIES - Estrildidae**Madagascan Mannikin - E***Lepidopygia nana*

Fairly common in open areas.

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS - Motacillidae**Madagascan Wagtail - E***Motacilla flaviventris*

2 on arrival back to Hotel Relais des Plateaux in Tana.

Mammals**LEMURS - Lemuridae****White-fronted Lemur - NE***Eulemur albifrons*

Good views of about 6 at Farankaraina Lodge.

Red Ruffed Lemur - E*Varecia rubra*

Good views of a group of 6 at Masoala National Park.

DWARF AND MOUSE LEMURS - Cheirogaleidae**Rufous Mouse Lemur - E***Microcebus rufus*

Krista and Lyann saw two at Farankaraina Lodge.

INDRID LEMURS, SIFAKAS - Indriidae**Eastern Woolly Lemur - E***Avahi laniger*

Krista and Lyann saw one at Farankaraina Lodge.

AYE-AYE - Daubentoniidae**Aye-aye - E***Daubentonia madagascariensis*

Great prolonged views of one high in the canopy at Farankaraina Lodge.

**CLIMBING MICE, ROCK MICE, WHITE-TAILED RAT, MALAGASY RATS AND MICE -
Nesomyidae****White-tailed Tree Rat***Brachytarsomys albicauda*

Krista, David and Rob found one on a night walk at Tampolodge.

MALAGASY CARNIVORES - Eupleridae**Malagasy Ring-tailed Mongoose - E***Galidia elegans*

Krista and Lyann saw one at Farankaraina Lodge.

Reptiles

CHAMELEONS - Chamaeleonidae**Panther Chameleon***Furcifer pardalis*

3 seen.

GECKOS - Gekkonidae**Striped Day Gecko - E***Phelsuma lineata*

2 seen.

Lined Flat-tail Gecko*Uroplatus lineatus*

1 seen at Farankaraina Lodge on the night walk.

PLATED LIZARDS - Gerrhosauridae**Madagascar Plated Lizard***Zonosaurus madagascarensis*

2 seen.

SKINKS - Scincidae**Common Madagascar Skink - E***Madascincus melanopleura*

Fairly common in forest.

LAMPROPHIIDAE - Lamprophiidae**Gold-collared Snake***Liophidium rhodogaster*

1 seen at Farankaraina Lodge by Rob.

Unidentified Snake

1 seen at Farankaraina Lodge in the roof of the dining room.

Amphibians

Tomato Frog

A female seen by all on 2 visits in Maraontsetra.

Dyscophus antongilii

Brown Leaf frog (Unidentified species)

1 seen at Masoala National Park.

Tree Frog (Unidentified species)

2 at Tampolodge.

Folohy Madagascar Frog

1 seen at Masoala National Park.

Mantidactylus argenteus

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