

Madagascar

Naturetrek Tour Report

18 October - 11 November 2011



Indri



Red-capped Coua and Malagasy Giant Hognose Snake



2011 Naturetrek Group



Ring-tailed Lemur

Report and images compiled by Cathy Harlow



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Day 1

Tuesday 18th October

UK to Paris

Our Madagascar Adventure began at London Heathrow as Chrissie, Claire, Gill and Bob, Susan and Chris met up in the departure lounge before boarding the short flight to Paris. On arrival in Paris, we made our way to the Ibis Hotel, an easy journey on the free shuttle service. There we joined up with Alan and Anita, Stan, Peter and Bob, who had travelled independently. Some of the group met for dinner in the hotel's restaurant, which does rather good food. This was a chance to chat about the holiday and start to get to know those in whose company we'd be spending the next three weeks. Here we were, each with our own travel stories and tales of wondrous wildlife, yet with as varied expectations of the experience of Madagascar as could be imagined. Madagascar amazes, it consistently surprises and it seldom disappoints – the days on the road may be long, the walks sometimes tiring and the heat stifling but knowing that most of what we were about to see is utterly unique to the island, these minor inconveniences would pale...

Day 2

Wednesday 19th October

Paris to Antananarivo

We took the shuttle back to the terminal at Charles de Gaulle where we were early enough to sail through check in and security. The flight was smooth and the service on board efficient. Once inside the terminal building we joined the queue at immigration. It is a pretty standard introduction to Madagascar that you stand in line for over an hour at immigration in an infuriating funnel-shaped queue. Finally everyone made it through and picked up their luggage.

Rivo, our local guide, was waiting for us and once we'd changed money, we were on our way. Both euros and sterling were readily exchanged this time around but you never know what's going to be in fashion! The Orchid Hotel is just a 5 minute drive from the airport and we arrived at 1am ready for bed.

Day 3

Thursday 20th October

Antananarivo to Antsirabe

Weather: hot and sunny in the morning, then rain later

After the long flight and late arrival, we enjoyed a relative lie in and met up at breakfast joined by Brian, the last member of our group, who had flown in from Australia two days before. Rivo and Cathy went over a few practical details for the tour at a short information meeting on the terrace overlooking some rice paddies, where Mascarene Martins darted to and fro and a Madagascar Wagtail flew over.

Once the coach was loaded up, we were on the road by 10 o'clock, heading in towards Antananarivo (Tana). Madagascar's capital is sprawled over several hills, surrounded by rice paddies, so we busied ourselves spotting Squacco Heron, Great Egret, Dimorphic Egret and Black Egret, along with numerous Mascarene Martins. Our first stop was a short visit to Tsimbazaza Zoo and Botanical Gardens, which provide an overview of Madagascar's wildlife and a chance to see Fosa, that are difficult to observe in the wild. It was feeding time for Madagascar's largest carnivore and we watched as it swiftly caught and finished off a live chicken! Other mammals included many of Madagascar's lemur species, both in cages and running free on small islands in the gardens' lake. The trees around the lake were festooned with nesting Cattle Egret and Dimorphic Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron. Squacco Heron, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher and Madagascar Kestrel were also seen, along with a handful of common endemics: Madagascar Bulbul, Madagascar White-eye and Common Jery. A close inspection of some Elephant Ears *Tymphonodorum lindleyanum* on the lake edge revealed a stunning Emerald Day Gecko *Phelsuma lineata*. A sky-blue Radama butterfly (family Nymphalidae) flew by.

After lunch at the Sarimanok Indonesian restaurant by Tsimbazaza, we began the day's drive, heading out of the capital on the RN7, a twisting, traffic-clogged road flanked by vendors selling everything from sausages to phone cards. We passed the presidential palace, an opulent edifice modelled on the nineteenth century Queen Ranaivalona's hill-top residence. We paused by a small lake, where a large flock of White-faced Duck and Red-billed Teal were grouped on the water and a Stonechat was observed perched on a shrub. Soon, we were enjoying the sweeping vistas typical of Madagascar's Hauts Plateaux: smooth granite inselbergs rising from the fertile rice paddies, where women were engaged in the back-breaking planting out of rice seedlings from the nursery paddies. We paused by the road side, where villagers skilfully craft toys from wood. Here, we could hear Common Quail and Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo but they failed to show, though a Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher was just visible perched over the distant river. Hamerkop were foraging in the rice paddies, their huge nest was spotted nearby in the fork of a tree and a Green-backed Heron flew over. We ended this day of travel arriving after sunset at Antsirabe, an industrial town, with a dairy industry and the Three Horses brewery.

Day 4

Friday 21st October

Antsirabe to Ranomafana

Weather: sun and cloud in the morning, storm clouds building in the afternoon

After an early breakfast, we wandered over to the statue of Madagascar's 18 different ethnic groups, where Rivo gave an impressive rendition of the island's National Anthem. Antsirabe's rickshaws, known here as *Pousse-Pousse*, were out in full force, their drivers hustling for our business.

The bus loaded up, today's long but exciting drive along the backbone of Madagascar's mountainous interior was punctuated by changing scenes from village life. Zebus play a pivotal role, both in providing transport and in breaking up the hard-baked clay of the rice paddies, which we stopped to photograph. A Souimanga Sunbird female showed well on a Hibiscus flower, Brown-throated Sand Martins were noted in flight and numerous Madagascar Kestrels perched to allow us a good view.

Whilst Madagascar's highlands have largely been cleared of their forest cover, more inaccessible slopes protect patches of *Tapia Uapaca bojeri*, a species armed with a fire-resistant bark. An endemic silk-worm feeds on the leaves, supporting an important local raw silk cottage industry in some villages. We broke our journey for half an hour, strolling among the *Tapia* trees, which were both in bloom and fruiting. In this native forest, we found Yellow-billed Kite, Chabert's Vanga, Common Jery, Madagascar White-eye, Madagascar Bulbul and a stunning male Madagascar Fody in almost full breeding plumage, spotted by Anita. Brian found a Gravenhorst's Skink among the leaf litter and two Assassin Bugs (Reduviidae) were also observed. A small yellow butterfly was also spotted but didn't stop still to be photographed. Gill and Bob recognised it as a Grass Yellow, presumably *Eurema desjardinsii*.

Next we stopped by a sandy cliff overlooking the road, a spot where Madagascar Bee-eaters had been nesting on previous trips – a few were still around but the nest sites had been poached by Common Mynas. Chrissie found us a stunning Long-billed Green Sunbird, which showed well and a flock of Grey-headed Lovebirds flew over. Brown-throated Sand Martin, Madagascar Bulbul and Madagascar Wagtail also showed. Stopping again shortly after for a Madagascar Little Grebe on the river, two more butterflies were noted, both predominantly white.

Arriving at the attractive historic town of Ambositra, which is known for its skilled wood carvers, several of the group bought souvenirs. Continuing south, we stopped for a picnic lunch by a fragment of native forest, where a small pond and marsh looked promising. Peter found two Jewel Chameleons *Furcifer lateralis*, and we also enjoyed watching a Plated Lizard *Zonosaurus ornatus* scuttle in and out of a patch of coarse dry grass. Over lunch we spotted a Madagascar Cuckoo Roller perched in a tree over the pond. Over lunch we notched up a good selection of the more common endemic birds: Madagascar Brush Warbler, Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Bush Lark, Madagascar Kestrel, Souimanga Sunbird and Madagascar White-eye. Hook-billed Vanga, Yellow-billed Kite and Common Stonechat were also observed. After lunch, Rivo, our expert local guide soon had Madagascar Swamp Warbler for us but Madagascar Snipe proved to be more challenging.

We split into two groups, some walking with Rivo through the rice paddies, which are increasingly encroaching on this pocket of wetland, while others watched from above. Peter, meanwhile walked the other way and flushed the snipe. It flew up again and some of the group got a decent view of it. While all of this was going on, Chrissie and others picked out a Madagascar Flufftail, which showed briefly before skulking back into the grass. Red-billed Teal, Purple Heron, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher and Three-banded Plover also showed at this rewarding stop. Brightly coloured and highly toxic Rainbow Milkweed Locusts *Phymateus saxosus* were also noted, and Caddis Flies (Trichoptera). Red-flowering *Vaccinium madagascariense* were typical of the scrub surrounding the wetland.

Continuing the journey, it was disheartening to see the on-going clear-felling of forest and fragmentation of the remaining pockets, with its attendant limitations on species survival prospects. We passed roadside stalls selling bush honey and wooden chopping boards, which Rivo assured us are made from *Eucalyptus*. A short comfort stop yielded a Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo perched in a distant tree. Past the market town of Ambohimahaso, we turned off the RN7 for the last leg of the journey to Ranomafana. By this time it was already dusk and night had fallen when we arrived at Domaine Nature, our rainforest lodgings. We got our room keys and made our way to the bungalows 100 yards up the road, which all offered panoramic views as a reward for a rather steep climb.

Day 5

Saturday 22nd October

Ranomafana

Weather: sun and cloud in the morning, then heavy rain and a cloudy afternoon

After an early breakfast, we boarded the bus for the short ride to the entrance to the Talatakelly section of Ranomafana National Park. The rainforest reserve protects important tracts of both primary and regrowth forest and was created following the recognition of the Golden Bamboo Lemur *Haplemur aureus*, which was identified as a new species in 1985. While Rivo arranged for park permits, the group were already spotting at the park entrance, where a pair of Rand's Warbler called from a distant tree-top perch. A large-leaved *Dombeya sp* was in bloom, attracting species like Madagascar White-eye, Souimanga Sunbird and Nelicourvi Weaver, while African Palm Swift soared over the car park area.

We crossed the Namorona River, plunging into thicker forest on its opposite bank, where National Park guide Jean-Chrys pointed out a white orchid *Oenia oncidiiiflora*. By the river, a Green-veined Charaxes *Charaxes antamboulou* flitted to and fro in a sunny spot. A pair of Madagascar Magpie Robin perched, and Velvet Asity were also spotted, though the low light made it hard to view and photograph them. Jean-Chrys heard Crossley's Babbler call and determined we should see this rare endemic, spent time finding it for us, but as it was on the nest we did not linger. A second orchid species *Angraecum dendrobiopsis*, adorned a tree trunk, its long nectary suggesting something unusual must be around to pollinate it.

Progress was slow on Ranomafana's steep trails but we took things slowly, taking in the sounds and scents of this luxuriant rainforest. The lemur spotters returned with news of a group of Red-bellied Lemur ahead, and led us to a family group of two females, a male and a baby.

We were as wide-eyed as you can get, not just because these were our first lemurs...let's be honest they are also among the most beautiful with gorgeous chestnut coats and the male easily distinguished by his white tear-drop patches around the eyes. Soon we moved on to two Golden Bamboo Lemurs, Ranomafana's signature species, but a little more demanding to observe as they were resting higher in the canopy. Much time was spent in awe at the Satanic Leaf-tailed Geckos *Uroplatus phantasticus*, another speciality of Ranomafana. It takes a skilled eye to pick them out from the leaves and twigs they mimic, resting head-down during the day. Another master of camouflage was a Broad-browed Chameleon *Brookesia superciliaris*, a species just a few centimetres in length that skulks around in the leaf litter. Susan and Chris paused to photograph an unidentified snail. Pitta-like Ground Roller, Spectacled Greenbul, Green Jery, Chabert's Vanga, Blue Vanga, Greater Vasa Parrot, Lesser Vasa Parrot, Crested Drongo, Common Newtonia and Blue Pigeon were also seen during the morning. Making our way back out of the park, we were treated to another spectacular butterfly, a blue and black Swallowtail *Papilio epiphorbas*.

After lunch back at the hotel, we checked the wall opposite the hotel for Madagascar Tree Boa, which hole up here during the day, finding three of these impressive snakes. There was then time for a short rest, which coincided with a deluge of rain that stopped just as we set off again in the afternoon by coach for Vohiparara and a section of the park that takes in higher altitude montane rainforest. Jean-Chrys pointed out a pair of Madagascar Starlings, fairly dull in plumage but a bird that is nowhere common. Madagascar Buzzard and Forest Rock Thrush were also seen from the road by Rivo, and we stopped to get a better look at them.

Arriving at Namorona Falls, we parked the bus for a closer look at the waterfall, which tumbles over the edge of the escarpment at this point. On the rock-face opposite the falls, *Cynorchis purpurea* orchids were in bloom, along with a purple flowered *Streptocarpus* sp. Several *Boophis madagascariensis* frogs were spotted here, well-camouflaged against the rock. A pink-flowering *Melastoma* is the preferred food for larvae of Giraffe-necked Weevil and our guides found one for us on the large-veined leaves of this shrub overhanging the river. We also took a peek at some Eastern Sucker-footed Bats, roosting in a cave near the waterfall.

Continuing the drive, we passed the village of Vohiparara and stopped again to admire a spectacularly colourful frog, Baron's Painted Mantella *Mantella baroni* that our guides had plunged into the undergrowth to find. Leaving the bus, we walked uphill to a plateau that gave good views to either side as it had lost its forest cover in a fire. The regrowth included various *Erica* and *Vaccinium* sp. The afternoon's birding produced a few treats for us with a pair of Madagascar Flufftail, two Meller's Ducks and a couple of fairly elusive Grey Emutail that were coaxed out the undergrowth to show fleetingly. Blue Coua and Madagascar Nightjar were also seen. It was almost dark as we returned to the coach but the day's wildlife viewing was far from over as we still had the night walk to do.

Now that it's no longer allowed to enter the National Park after dark, the guides walk us along the main road, where a few willing Brown Mouse Lemurs are drawn into the open by smears of banana on the tree trunks. We got decent views of these tiny primates, darting quadrupedally along the branches but capable of impressive leaps in spite of their size.

Our guides found three Chameleon species for us: Blue-legged Chameleon *Calumma crypticum*, White-bellied Chameleon *Calumma gastrotaenia* and O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon *Calumma oshaughnessyi*. The roadside stroll also turned up two snakes: a frog-eating Cat-eyed Snake, *Madagascarophis colubrinus*, and a *Stenophis betsileanus*, to add to the diurnal Boulenger's Forest Snake *Compsophis boulengeri*, we had seen earlier in the day. Another *Boophis madagascariensis* tree frog was spotted during the walk. After dinner, most of the group were ready for an early night.

Day 6

Sunday 23rd October

Ranomafana National Park

Weather: sunny and warm, a little hazy in the afternoon

Some of the group were up early for a short walk before breakfast along the road at Domaine Nature spotting Souimanga Sunbird, Madagascar Fody and Chabert's Vanga. After breakfast the coach took us again to the Talataky entrance to the park, where we split into two groups with Bob Howard, Anita, Peter and Brian going with Rivo and Angelo, while Cathy and Jean-Chrys went with Gill, Allan, Stan, Chrissie, Susan and Chris. Claire made her way along the road with her guide, while Bob Boreham opted for a rest this morning.

Focusing on lemurs, Rivo and Angelo's group encountered two groups of Golden Bamboo Lemur, one of which came down low allowing good photo opportunities. The largest of the bamboo lemurs is the Greater Bamboo Lemur and because it specialises in the inner bamboo pith, is not in competition with the Golden so can share the same territory. It's always a privilege to stand quietly observing one of Madagascar's rarest lemurs, a species even scarcer than the Golden Bamboo Lemur. The group also got great views of a pair of Pitta-like Ground Roller perched on a branch and a shy Madagascar Wood Rail.

Jean-Chrys and Cathy's group were to focus on birds but started with good views of the Golden Bamboo Lemur, feeding in the canopy. On the bird front, Velvet Asity, Blue Pigeon, Forest Fody, White-throated Oxylabes, Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo, Spectacled Greenbul, Long-billed Greenbul, Wedge-tailed Jery and Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher all showed well. Of special note were the excellent views of Pollen's Vanga and the very similar Tylas, whose plumage may mimic that of Pollen's Vanga and who collecting nesting material just above the path.

Jean-Chrys was keen to look for Hensts Goshawk, nesting on a distant ridge. This involved a hike, but the excellent sightings of this rare raptor made it worth the effort. We had also heard Black and White Ruffed Lemur calling but as the calls of these often difficult to see canopy dwellers can be heard from afar, we wisely chose not to attempt to find them. At that point, we were suitably distracted by an Eastern Red Forest Rat, a diurnal endemic rodent foraging in the leaf litter for seeds and fallen fruits.

Making our way back towards the park entrance, news came in that Greater Bamboo Lemur had been located. With up to 60ha of territory, it can be a difficult lemur to find. It was quite an arduous hike on steep and rugged terrain but we were keen to see the species.

Greater Bamboo Lemurs can be easy to photograph as they like to feed on the pith of ground shoots of giant bamboo, descending to do so. In the event these two were mostly resting and partly obscured by the bamboo thicket. This lengthy diversion did bring us good sightings of two other bird species: Ward's Flycatcher and Pygmy Kingfisher. Though difficult to find, the kingfisher is rewarding to observe, as it is neither shy nor very active and perches for long periods. We also came across a Lined Snake *Bibilava lateralis* and a tiny very dark frog *Stumpffia "ranomafana"*.

We reassembled for a very late lunch back at the hotel, admiring the numerous Peacock Day Geckos *Phelsuma quadriocellata* in the Traveller's Palm *Ravenala madagascariensis* outside the hotel. Claire, who had done a walk along the road, had some good sightings to report: Madagascar Cuckoo Shrike, Helmeted Guineafowl, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Forest Rock Thrush, Spectacled Greenbul, a flock of five Blue Vanga, numerous *Nephila* sp. Orb-web Spiders, a Crab Spider *Gasteracanthinae*, and a moth *Cycligrama disturbans*.

After a short rest, we set off by coach to Vohiparara Forest, where our guides hoped to find Milne-Edwards Sifaka, one of the largest of the lemurs. With its striking chocolate brown/black head and upper body, creamy flanks and orange/red eyes, there's little chance of confusion with other species. Luckily for us, this group of four adults and two young were close to the forest entrance. When we approach a group of lemurs, we do so quietly and unobtrusively, but it's clear that our presence can have an impact. This encounter was a case in point – one of the juveniles in the group made sudden leaps into our midst, pausing briefly to stare at us, then in bounding off to another tree trunk before returning to repeat the sequence. Confrontation, youthful bravado, or just curiosity? Suffice to say, the photo opportunities were fantastic.

On the bird front Jean-Chrys picked up the call of Grey-crowned Greenbul, but it did not show. By the river, we got good views of Nelicourvi Weaver, a solitary weaver often nesting over water, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher, Madagascar Fody and Common Sandpiper.

Over dinner, Rivo caught (and subsequently released!) a spectacular Emperor Moth *Antherina suraka*, that had strayed into the restaurant. Its large hind-wing spots mimic an owl's eyes.

Day 7

Monday 24th October

Ranomafana to Isalo

Weather: clear and sunny, getting hotter through the day

After a 6.45 breakfast it was time to move on again and the coach was loaded up for the long journey to Isalo. A Belted Chameleon *Furcifer balteatus* was spotted on a tree opposite the hotel. The re-surfaced road made for a comfortable drive and gave us time for a brief stop in the market town of Ivoamba, where it was market day. Of special interest are the many styles of straw hat and *lamba*, brightly coloured sarongs embellished by Malagasy proverbs. Zebu and pigs were being traded and it was fascinating to watch the transactions unfold. Arriving at the university city of Fianarantsoa, several of the group indulged in patisserie and coffee at the Soafia Hotel, while the bus took on fuel and Rivo went to buy our picnic.

Leaving the city, we stopped to photograph a smoking brick oven. Continuing south through the island's main wine-producing region, we passed vineyards and fields of alfalfa, beans and sweet potatoes. As well as numerous Yellow-billed Kite, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar Kestrel and dark morph Dimorphic Egret, Chabert's Vanga and Madagascar Hoopoe were noted along the way. The scenery became ever more spectacular, with distant views of the jagged Andringitra range on the approach to the cattle-market town of Ambalavao. Here we paused to visit the paper factory, whose flower-impregnated paper is hand-made following a tradition introduced by Arab traders in the Antaimoro region. A large Oustalet's Chameleon *Furcifer oustaleti* and Long-billed Green Sunbird distracted some of the group, while others were keen to buy the paper, which is made into greetings cards and other souvenirs.

South of Ambalavao, we soon reached the community reserve of Anja, where our packed lunch was relished under a shady canopy at the entrance. Here, a surprisingly lush pocket of gallery forest sits at the foot of a granite massif in a very spectacular setting. The forest supports a healthy population of around 1000 Ring-tailed Lemurs. In the company of several enthusiastic local guides, we soon had them in sight and enjoyed a good 30 minutes quietly observing two groups of these very social lemurs going about the all important business of scent marking using wrist and genital glands, to define their territory. Some of the lemurs were feeding on the leaves of an introduced Mahogany (*Meliaceae*). Typically the groups comprise 15 or more adults, headed by the dominant female, but being spring, there were also five very young babies to be seen in this group, still clinging to their mother's belly.

What makes Anja a particularly rewarding place to see the ring-tails is the presence of large granite boulders forming a kind of giant adventure playground for these naturally agile and acrobatic lemurs, who are as comfortable on the ground as they are in trees. Needless to say, the photo opportunities were superb. The guides also produced an Oustalet's Chameleon *Furcifer oustaleti* and pointed out a bush bedecked with both nymphs and adults of Flatid Leaf Bug *Phromnia rosea*. The nymphs excrete a protective, white waxy substance, giving them a feathery appearance. A hundred or so Red-billed Teal were counted on the small lake but because of the time of day and the heat, birds were scarce and only Madagascar Bulbul, Souimanga Sunbird and Common Myna were noted.

All too soon it was time to get back on the bus for the rest of the day's journey. There was hardly a dull moment with a succession of Kestrels, Madagascar Bush Larks, Madagascar Bee-eaters, Yellow-billed Kites and Great White, Cattle and Dimorphic Egrets, not forgetting the Pied Crows, which we soon lost count of. We made a short stop on a granite outcrop to look for endemic flora, where we found a species of Elephant's Foot *Pachypodium rosulatum* and *Euphorbia millii*. Much of this unique flora is threatened by locals torching the grass to stimulate new growth at the end of the dry season. We witnessed several such fires, accompanied by throngs of kites and crows gorging on the disturbed insects. Arriving at the town of Ihosy, we broke the journey briefly. Climbing in a series of hair-pin bends to the Horombe Plateau, we noted a flock of Madagascar Mannikins and were lucky to see three African Marsh Owls fly over the bus. The last hours of the journey passed in quiet contemplation of how impossibly hard it must be to eke out a living in this barren and inhospitable place. The light had all but gone by the time we arrived at very luxurious Relais de la Reine Hotel, on the edge of Isalo National Park, where we settled in to comfortable and spacious rooms. A Madagascar Nightjar was heard around the hotel.

Day 8

Tuesday 25th October

Isalo National Park

Weather: very hot and sunny

Most of the group were up for an early morning bird walk in the savannah surrounding the hotel. Surprisingly Benson's Rock Thrushes were absent from their usual perches. Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Bee-eater, Common Myna, Yellow-billed Kite, Pied Crow, African Palm Swift, Souimanga Sunbird and Madagascar Coucal were noted. White-throated Rail and Madagascar Partridge were heard but did not show. Bob Howard also saw Crested Drongo and Broad-billed Roller.

Following an early breakfast, a short drive brought us to the town of Ranohira (meaning ring-tail lemurs' watering hole!) where we met reserve guide Parson and his assistant and picked up park permits. Today's plan was to focus on the Namaza area of the park, which offers the greatest variety of accessible fauna and flora, with the least effort – which was an important consideration given the expected high temperature. Typical of Isalo's eroded Jurassic sandstone are the many deep and shady canyons.

Walking along the easy and mostly level trail into the Namaza canyon, Parson introduced us to some of Isalo's unusual flora, including the pink-flowered *Pemphis madagascariensis*, *Pandanus*, *Licpodium* Club Moss and tiny rosettes of Sundew *Drosera*. We observed both *Pandanus pulcher* and *Pandanus ambongensis*, which grow along the watercourses, where the palm *Dypsis onilaensis* also thrives. Parson also pointed out the tannin-rich *Acridocarpus excelsus*, which had striking yellow flowers and the emblematic *Delonix regia*, also native to Madagascar. Another interesting shrub was an *Albizia* sp (Mimosaceae), with a pink 'shaving brush' flower. The Blue-flax Lily *Dianella revoluta* with its sky-blue fruits was much admired.

As the heat was already mounting, the bird life was predictably subdued but both Cisticola and Stonechat were noted. Once in the shade of the canyon and pocket of gallery forest we found a Madagascar Magpie Robin female with two chicks, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Wagtail, Namaqua Dove, Broad-billed Roller and the locally abundant Benson's Rock Thrush. Around the campsite, a group of Ring-tailed Lemurs were feeding on *Ficus* sp fruit. At this point some of the group elected to stay around the campsite to enjoy the lemurs and search out chameleons, while others continued deeper into the canyon to visit the waterfall Cascade des Nymphes. The trail crossed the stream and steadily mounted steps cut out of the rock until the canyon narrowed to a slit. Here a deep-turquoise pool fed by a chute of refreshingly cool water proved too much of a temptation to some of the group, who jumped in clothes and all!

Isalo provided some interesting invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians including: Praying Mantis, exquisite pink and blue Dragonflies, a Lined Snake *Bibilava lateralis* in the water adjacent to our swimming pool, a Frog *Heterixalus betsileo* and an Elegant Skink *Trachylepis elegans*. Several Madagascar Giant Swallowtail *Atrophaneura anterior* kept the photographers busy as did a spectacular orchid by the side of the path *Aerangis modesta*.

After an eventful morning in the dramatic sandstone scenery of Isalo we returned to the hotel for a late lunch and time to relax and enjoy the swimming pool. Late in the afternoon, we walked behind the hotel for a sunset view from the sandstone cliffs. Crossing the small stream we climbed through the sandstone to view the sunset and some more unusual flora, including the elephant's foot *Pachypodium rosulatum gracilis*, its fragile yellow blooms and tender rosette of leaves protected by a spiny stem. Here too we found *Aloe isaloensis*, *Kalanchoe synsepala*, Madagascar Rosy Periwinkle *Catharanthus roseus*, and the white-flowered Salotse *Ichnolepsis graminifolia*, after which Isalo is named. We noted large numbers of Plataspid Bugs, both nymphs and adults and several Green Lynx Spider, which are ambush predators and do not spin webs. Madagascar Hoopoes were seen in flight and pecking on the ground, and we finally heard White-throated Rail, though it did not show. An early supper was called for in preparation for a very early rise tomorrow.

Day 9

Wednesday 26th October

Isalo to Toliara and Ifaty

Weather: very hot and sunny

The restaurant staff arranged for us to take breakfast in our room to allow for a 5.00 departure from the hotel at first light. Leaving Isalo, we crossed open grassland, punctuated with *Medemea nobilis* palms, which are fire resistant. There were rather few birds but Yellow-billed Kite, Pied Crow and African Palm Swift were in evidence. We drove through the sapphire mining town of Ilakaka to Zombitse National Park. This is a transitional forest with elements of both dry deciduous and southern Euphorbia scrub and a rare fragment of native forest in an otherwise denuded landscape. The birding is often very good here and for our group, the dry forest brings with it the possibility of several 'new' species. We combed the undergrowth for Appert's Greenbul without success, which was surprising as this localised endemic is normally easy to find. Greater Vasa Parrot, Madagascar Hoopoe, Stripe-throated Jery, Long-billed Greenbul and France's Sparrowhawk showed well. Some of the group were lucky to see Banded Kestrel briefly, before it flew from its perch. A pair of Madagascar Buttonquail were seen foraging in the leaf litter and there were good views of Blue Vanga, search for grubs in the foliage above the path. A highlight of the morning was a Coquerel's Coua's nest right by the path, just 3ft off the ground and later two of these spectacular endemic birds were seen engaged in a scuffle.

Zombitse is home to several lemur species but they are mostly quite shy as the park receives few visitors. The easiest to observe are Hubbard's Sportive Lemurs and local guide Flaubert found two of these nocturnal lemurs in their daytime roosts in the V of a tree or hole in a trunk. On the reptile front we admired the locally abundant Standing's Emerald Day Gecko *Phelsuma standingi*, around the park office and toilets. We also found, but with some effort, as it is so well camouflaged, a tiny Bark Gecko *Lygodactylus tolampyae*. We also saw Three-eyed Lizard *Chalarodon madagascariensis*, which are very common in the dry areas.

It was a little early in the season to see this deciduous forest in full leaf but several shrubs were in bloom including a yellow flowering *Uncarina* (Pedaliaceae), *Euphorbia integrifolia*, *Euphorbia millii* and *Aloe vahombe*. Flaubert also pointed out a beautiful orchid *Aerangis articulata*.

Continuing the journey we traversed savannah punctuated with *Adansonia za* baobabs to reach the market town of Sakaraha, which like the mining town of Ilakaka we had driven through earlier, has been scarred by sapphire 'fever'. We took a short stroll through the busy main street, for a leg stretch. Then it was back in the bus for the next stretch of the journey, which crosses a coral rag plateau and *Euphorbia* scrub before descending to the coastal plain and town of Toliara. As our time at Ifaty had been cut short due to a change in flight schedules, we continued straight to Ifaty on the RN5. This is the main coast road but often made impassable by drifting sand. Thanks to the skill of our driver we sailed through without a hitch. There was time for a short stop at the mangroves, where we found Grey Heron, Whimbrel, Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher, Terek Sandpiper, Kittlitz Plover and Madagascar Cisticola. Little Grebe were noted on one of the ponds by the road side.

Arriving at the Paradisier Hotel at Ifaty, we had a late lunch and checked into our very comfortable and luxurious beach front chalets. In the afternoon we walked through the spiny forest in the grounds of the hotel to a pond. Here a small flock of Grey-headed Love Birds were perched in a tree and a Crested Drongo mobbing a Pied Crow entertained us for a while. With the scopes out we observed Three-banded Plover, Kittlitz Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt and Greenshank. A Big-eyed Grass Snake *Mimophis mahfalensis* was spotted in the leaf litter by the side of the road.

Late afternoon, we drove a little further north to the Reniala Private Reserve, a protected area of spiny forest, where we hoped to see Long-tailed Ground Roller and Sub-desert Mesite, two local rarities confined to this corner of the island and both under threat. With plenty of dry leaf litter, this is perfect habitat for these ground-dwelling birds. Also typical of this forest are the red-barked *Adansonia fony* baobabs and we noted that several of the larger trees had hand-holds cut into their huge swollen trunks so that locals can climb to pick the fruits. While the spotters went off to look for the Long-tailed Ground Roller, the reserve guide Dabe pointed out other birds, including Sakalava Weaver, White-headed Vanga, Madagascar Spinetail, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Madagascar Magpie Robin, Madagascar Bulbul and Namaqua Dove. We then made our way through the thorny undergrowth (long sleeves and trousers essential!) to catch a glimpse of the Long-tailed Ground Roller, a splendid bird with long blue tail feathers.

Splitting into two groups, the birders had a fantastic afternoon, with a pair of Sub-desert Mesite showing well and six Sickle-billed Vanga engaged in courtship feeding or perhaps feeding young. The guide then led the group to a Banded Kestrel's nest, with the female on the nest and the male flying in to feed her with a lizard. Crested Coua were seen briefly but two further local specialities were observed on the nest: Lafresnaye's Vanga and Archbold's Newtonia.

The rest of the group chose to focus on Reniala's amazing plant life which included *Jatropha mahfalensis* (Euphorbiaceae) used to make bio diesel, *Cedrelopsis grevei* (Rutaceae) whose bark contains an essential oil effective against eczema, cardiovascular disease and used as a decongestant; *Givotia madagascariensis* (Euphorbiaceae) used to make the local dug-out canoes; *Euphorbia laro*, containing a powerful poison used to catch fish; *Aloe divaricata* and the Bottle Tree *Delonix decaryi*. A Spiny-tailed Iguanid *Oplurus cyclurus* was noted on the path.

While the botanists were waiting for the birders to return at dusk, Cathy found Grey Mouse Lemur in a thicket of *Euphorbia stenoclada* on the edge of the car park. These diminutive lemurs are at their most active at dusk, and we observed them running on all fours along the branches, then leaping from tree to tree, searching out nectar and insects. Madagascar Nightjars were also active in the car park and around the hotel. Today was a very long day so most were ready for an early night.

Day 10

Thursday 27th October

Ifaty to Anakao

Weather: hot and sunny; cloudy and windy in the afternoon

After the long day yesterday there were not many takers for the early morning walk but Rivo and Brian went for a wander with sightings of Madagascar Fody, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Coucal, Common Newtonia, Thamnornis Warbler, Madagascar Magpie Robin, Madagascar Bulbul, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Sakalava Weaver and Namaqua Dove. A flock of Turnstone and a few Whimbrel and Common Greenshank, along with numerous Cattle Egrets, were also seen.

After breakfast we loaded the coach and began the drive back towards Toliara. The early morning light was excellent and helped us to pick out Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Kittlitz Plover and White-fronted Plover, Madagascar Bee-eater, Green-backed Heron, Madagascar Cisticola and Madagascar Swamp Warbler during the journey. We made an extended stop at a group of brackish ponds which turned up a few surprises, including 40 Little Grebe, two Hottentot Teal and a stunning female Painted Snipe which showed well as it emerged from a reed bed. We also saw Curlew Sandpiper, Ringed Plover, Madagascar Swamp Warbler and a group of Black-winged Stilt mobbing a Yellow-billed Kite. Closer to Toliara, Hamerkop was added to the list. As we bumped our way along the sandy track, we came across a group of lively musicians with home-made guitars and caravans of zebu loaded with pre-fabricated reed huts, charcoal and bundles of reeds.

Arriving in Toliara, the regional capital and a sprawling city, we made our way straight to the mudflats where low tide meant that a 'flotilla' of zebu carts was lined up to transport us a hundred yards or so out to sea to our boat moored offshore. We left the bulk of our luggage on the bus and took just an overnight bag. High winds were forecast for later in the morning so we made our way directly to Anakao. Already the breeze was picking up and this made for a rather bumpy if exhilarating ride, which took just over an hour. On arrival we checked into the Safari Vezo Hotel, located on a glorious sandy beach overlooking the island of Nosy Ve and barrier reef beyond. Accommodation is in individual bungalows, all with wonderful sea views. Because fresh water has to be pumped from a well, the showers were 'bucket style', though there is running sea water in the loos.

We decided to head straight for Nosy Ve, the coral cay sited a few miles offshore and a nesting ground for several hundred red-tailed tropic birds. After a 20 minute boat ride, the captain moored on the leeward side of the island, and we jumped into the shallows. On the sand spit we picked out Whimbrel, Lesser Crested Tern and Greater Crested Tern but no sign of the Crab Plovers that are often seen there.

Heading up the beach we saw Dimorphic Egret, Kittlitz Plover and a Sand Plover sp. The island was ravaged by a fire some weeks previously and we could see the damage from a viewpoint overlooking the Red-tailed Tropicbird colony. The birds seemed unusually jittery when we walked through the colony, so we did not linger. Anything up to a dozen of these graceful birds were in the air at a time, flying over and around us, but tantalisingly difficult to photograph. A surprise addition was an African Marsh Owl. On the way back along the beach, we saw Madagascar Cisticola, Grey Plover, Common Myna and Grey Heron. By late-morning the heat was intense and for the swimmers it was time for a quick dip in the sea, where some of the group snorkelled out to a degraded coral outcrop. Here, we found Sergeant Major, Clownfish, Squirrelfish, Triggerfish, Butterflyfish, Rainbow Sea Urchin, Sea Star, Spiny Sea Urchin and Sea Anemone.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and a rest. Late in the afternoon some of the group went with Rivo and Cathy to search for birds in the thorn scrub behind the village. We were hopeful of finding Madagascar Plover but to no avail, though some Kittlitz Plovers were on the ground near the Vezo tombs, which were sited behind the village on open grassland. Two specialities of the area, Littoral Rock Thrush and Sub-desert Brush Warbler, were in evidence in spite of the fierce wind and Madagascar Hoopoe and Madagascar Coucal were also noted. Most of the group gathered for a drink in the bar at sunset, watching the dug out canoes, known locally as pirogues, returning to the beach, where they were hauled up onto shore. Not surprisingly, fresh fish was a popular item on the evening menu

Day 11

Friday 28th October

Anakao to Toliara

Weather: very hot and sunny in the morning, windy in the afternoon

This morning some of us got an early morning call from the Rock Thrushes. Most of the group were game for an early morning walk to try for Madagascar Plover again. We split into two groups to cover as much ground as possible, given the limited time at our disposal. A pair of Madagascar Hoopoes showed well on a *Euphorbia stenoclada*, and a male Madagascar Fody was photographed illuminated by the morning sun. There were plenty of Kittlitz Plovers, but alas none of the endemic Madagascar Plover.

After breakfast we loaded up the boat – again our group were split over two boats – for the return journey to Toliara. With the whole day ahead of us we decided to head down the coast towards St. Augustine, one of the areas where Red-shouldered Vanga can be observed. With the heat already building up the bird life was scarce but we noted Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Bee-eater, Namaqua Dove, Crested Drongo and Madagascar Bush Lark. Past a series of beach hotels, we stopped at a viewpoint overlooking mangroves. Here we got distant views of Terek Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Green-backed Heron, Common Greenshank and Dimorphic Egret. A second stop at an elevated viewpoint towards the end of the track was backed by thorn scrub, where we hoped to find the vanga but calling it with the tape yielded nothing. In the event there were plenty of other birds to enjoy including Grey-headed Gull, Mascarene Martin, African Palm Swift, a large flock of Black Swift, Greater Crested Tern, Terek Sandpiper and Dimorphic Egret. Sakalava Weaver and Madagascar Turtle Dove were also noted.

After lunch at the Botanic Gardens just outside Toliara, we set off on a guided walk around the gardens, which hold 900 plant species from the area, of which 10% are Euphorbiaceae and 80% are medicinal plants. Among the plants the guide showed us were *Delonix floribunda*, a yellow-flowered tree used for planks, *Commiphora aprevalii* (Burseraceae) recognised by its peeling bark and referred to as the ‘Vazaha’ (foreigner) Tree; *Folotsia floribunda* (Apocynaceae) a curious vine with no leaves, whose white sap is used as glue; *Azadirachta indica* (Meliaceae) an introduced species from India with highly scented white flowers and *Alluaudia montagnacii* (Didieraceae). The bird life was fairly subdued given the time of day but we saw Madagascar Turtle Dove, Souimanga Sunbird, Long-billed Green Sunbird, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Magpie Robin and Sakalava Weaver. Changeable Emerald Day Gecko, *Phelsuma mutabilis*, Spiny-tailed Iguanid *Oplurus cyclurus* and two Warty Chameleons *Furcifer verrucosus* all obliged the photographers.

Annoyingly, the Hypocampo Hotel was overbooked which meant that some of the group along with Cathy and Rivo stayed at the Victory, a 15 minute drive away. It doesn’t happen often, but overbooking is one of the minor frustrations of travel in Madagascar. There was a little time to relax before we all met up for dinner at the Hypocampo.

Day 12

Saturday 29th October

Toliara to Antananarivo

Hot and hazy, storm clouds at midday

Because there was no direct flight to Fort Dauphin, we had to re-route via Tana. Our early flight from Toliara to Tana gave us most of the day free to visit the Lemur Park, just outside the capital. Brian had already been there as he’d arrived a day earlier than others but he assured everyone it was worth a visit. It’s an hour’s drive from the airport, west of the city. Along the bank of Tana’s many canals, everyone was doing their weekly laundry. Later, we drove past a lively wedding party.

Great Egret, Dimorphic Egret, Hamerkop and Madagascar Kestrel were spotted. Lemur Park showcases Coquerel’s Sifaka, Mongoose Lemur, Common Brown Lemur, Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur, Ring-tailed Lemur, Black and White Ruffed Lemur and two nocturnal species Greater Dwarf Lemur and Grey Mouse Lemur. More than just a tourist attraction, the park plays an important role in introducing Malagasy school children to the island’s wildlife. The lemurs are not caged but they are fed because the habitat and vegetation could not sustain them. During the guided tour of the Lemur Park we spotted Madagascar Bulbul, Souimanga Sunbird and Common Sandpiper and heard Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo and Madagascar Brush Warbler. The photographers were kept busy photographing two obliging Plated Lizards *Zonosaurus ornatus* and *Zonosaurus laticaudatus* and Spiny-tailed Iguanids *Oplurus cyclurus*. A cicada, and an orange-tip butterfly were also noted. In the tortoise enclosure our guide showed us Radiated, Spider and Hingeback Tortoises (the last, an African species not found in Madagascar).

After lunch at the Lemur Park and some souvenir shopping, we had time for a short tour of Antananarivo. From a hill-top viewpoint adjacent to the restored Queen’s Palace, we looked down over the city, which has a chaotic layout and an ever-increasing traffic problem with its narrow winding streets.

A Yellow-billed Kite flew overhead. Back at the airport by dusk, some of the group went to check an area of wetland where we found Squacco Heron, Black Egret, Great White Egret, Mascarene Martin and Madagascar Kestrel. Our flight left on time and on arrival there was a short transfer to the Dauphin Hotel, where most were ready for an early night.

Day 13

Sunday 30th October

Fort Dauphin to Berenty

Weather: sunny, hot, humid and windy at Fort Dauphin, very hot at Berenty

We took breakfast on the garden terrace of the hotel, where we spotted a Warty Chameleon. There was time for a short walk down to the cliff, where a Humpback Whale breached far out on a stormy sea. It was hard to tell a whale spout from a whitecap but there may have been two blows and it is likely to have been a mother and calf pair en route to the Southern Ocean. Kelp Gull, Greater Crested Tern, Yellow-billed Kite and Madagascar Kestrel were also seen. Fort Dauphin, sited on Madagascar's south-east corner, has a superb setting overlooking a turquoise sea and arc of golden sand and backed by rainforest-clad mountains. RTZ have invested in an opencast Ilmenite mine just north of the town, which has brought a superficial air of prosperity, with new hotels and roads in the area and many migrant workers.

Setting off for Berenty with local guide Benoit, we stopped to buy bottled water en route. Susan and Chris were keen to see Pitcher Plants *Nepenthes madagascariensis* and Benoit knew a place just off the main road, where the landowners would allow us to visit for a small payment. Along the roadside a rampant red-flowering toxic vine (Combretaceae) gave bright splashes of colour, as we passed lychee orchards and rice paddies. The local Antanosy villagers were harvesting rice and in this fertile area three crops a year are the norm. We made a short stop at a local fruit stall, to buy bananas, pineapple and jackfruit. Chrissie saw a Madagascar Hoopoe in flight, a Madagascar Buzzard soared overhead, Madagascar Kestrel, Broad-billed Roller, Sakalava Weaver, Hamerkop and numerous Pied Crow and Cattle and Great Egret were recorded during the journey.

The road was in a shocking state, though it is scheduled for resurfacing. The four-hour journey took us from the lush tropical coastal belt through a transitional forest containing the rare and highly localised Triangular Palm *Dyopsis decaryi*, where we broke the journey and took a short stroll along the road. This forest is protected and forms part of Andohahela National Park. Bob Howard saw our first Crested Coua. Madagascar Coucal, Crested Drongo and Souimanga Sunbird showed well and we heard the plaintive whistle of Hook-billed Vanga. A beautiful blue Butterfly Pea vine *Clitoria terneata* (Fabaceae) grew here but is not an endemic species. Benoit also pointed out *Mimosa delicatula*, a thorny shrub known locally as 'Roy' after which the Antandroy people are named. On a rocky embankment by the road, we picked out several *Oplurus quadrimaculatus* Iguanids and we found a Warty Chameleon *Furcifer verrucosus*. Back on the coach, the vegetation changed abruptly to spiny forest, dominated by *Alluaudia procera* (Didieraceae). The tall, straight trunks of this deciduous thorny tree are used for building houses in the region and a reforestation project in this area allows for sustainable harvesting. Some of the group got a brief view of Lafrensaye's Vanga as we continued the drive.

On the approach to the town of Amboasary, we drove through a sea of sisal plantations, then crossed the Mandrare River, all but dry at this time of year, and shortly turned off the main road on a dust track to Berenty. Arriving at Berenty, we checked in and within minutes Ring-tailed Lemurs and Verreaux's Sifaka were to be seen – as exciting a reception as one could wish for, though you need to be careful about not leaving your bungalow windows open as some of the ringtails are unscrupulous in their efforts to secure a fruity treat.

After lunch there was time for a short rest. Once the heat had subsided, we set off with Benoit to explore the Ankoba section of gallery forest, which is shaded by huge stands of *Tamarindus indica*, whose fruits and leaves are an important food source for Berenty's lemurs. It did not take us long to find the first of several Giant Coua, foraging on the forest floor and one of Madagascar's most spectacular endemic birds. Nocturnal White-footed Sportive Lemur are another of Berenty's treats and are easy to find when the guide knows their day time roost in a tree-trunk hole. As things began to cool down diurnal lemurs like Verreaux's Sifaka started feeding again. We passed under a large heronry of Cattle Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron with many casualties on the ground – Chrissie was brushed by a falling chick. We paused to look at a Bark Gecko *Lygodactylus sp* on a tree trunk and observed African Monarch butterflies *Danaus chrysippus* in flight. A Changeable Emerald Day Gecko *Phelsuma mutabilis* was photographed.

Next we were lucky to witness one of Madagascar's most iconic sights, a group of Sifaka 'dancing' across the path ahead of us. Their short forelimbs make it impossible for them to move quadrupedally so when they need to cross open ground they do it by skipping sideways on their hind legs, a movement that is both comical and graceful. Another highlight of the afternoon was a White-browed Owl, which took off and called.

As darkness fell we reassembled in the car park where a second White-browed Owl flew onto a perch. We took the bus to a pocket of spiny forest adjacent to the gallery forest, noting a Madagascar Nightjar in flight across the track. Night walks are often very good at Berenty and this evening we did well, with several White-footed Sportive Lemurs peering down from the spiny Didieraceae boughs. Reddish-grey Mouse Lemurs are also locally abundant here and most active just after dusk - we clocked up nine individuals. We also stumbled on some very sleepy Ring-tailed Lemurs grouped in a huddle on a branch as well as a very drowsy Crested Drongo. We saw several Warty Chameleon *Furcifer verrucosus* typically perched on the end of a thin branch at night to evade predators. A highlight of the evening's viewing (for Cathy at least) was a splendid Giant Hissing Cockroach *Gromphadorhina portentosa* – the hissing is produced by squeezing air through pores in their abdomen to scare off predators. Returning to the bungalows, we went straight into dinner, joined by an Ant Lion who graced the dinner table.

Day 14

Monday 31st October

Berenty

Weather: cool in the early morning, then hot and breezy later

After the heat yesterday, it was surprising to wake to a chill in the air. Most of the group were up at 5.00 am for a walk in the Malaza area of gallery forest.

Waiting for everyone to assemble we noted a Yellow-billed Kite perched in the open. Once in the reserve, Benoit drew us to a Hook-billed Vanga low on a branch, the best view so far of this bird, whose chunky hook-tipped bill is just the tool for spearing chameleons. Next we were delayed by a very playful group of three Verreaux's Sifaka engaged in a rough and tumble on the forest floor and some upside down acrobatics, while two further adults with young looked on. Normally at this hour they are in the canopy warming up in the first rays of sun.

Continuing along Berenty's broad flat trails Benoit led us to a pair of White-browed Owls, getting ready to roost on a dead trunk, which provided excellent photo opportunities. Peeling back a section of bark, Benoit produced four Hissing Cockroaches *Ellithrorhina coquereliana*, a forest-dwelling species. Heading deeper into the forest we enjoyed good views of two male France's Sparrowhawk, and numerous Crested Couas combing the branches for invertebrates. Common Jery, several cackling Broad-billed Rollers, Madagascar Coucal, Madagascar Turtle Dove and Helmeted Guineafowl in flight, Madagascar Kestrel, Crested Drongo and Madagascar Bee-eater were also noted and Common Newtonia heard but not seen.

Arriving at the viewpoint over the river, local women were bathing in the trickle of water that is all that remains of the river at the end of the dry season. Here two flocks of Grey-headed Lovebirds flew in to drink and we were excited to find a Madagascar Pond Heron on the sand bank. Common Greenshank was heard calling. A highlight of the morning was a Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher nest just a few feet off the ground and right by the path. A splendid dark phase male was on the tiny cup-shaped nest, his long tail feathers stuck out at an awkward, almost comical angle.

Back for breakfast at 7, we met up with the rest of the group. The kitchen staff had prepared the jackfruit we'd bought in the market yesterday and most ventured a taste of this large knobbly tropical fruit. After breakfast we returned to the gallery forest as a group of energetic Ring-tailed Lemurs bounded across the car park. A male Namaqua Dove showed well on the spike of a Didieraceae and three Lesser Vasa Parrots and some hybrid Red-fronted Brown Lemurs were feasting in the canopy of a fig tree. Following a brief look at the captive tortoises and crocodiles we picked up a few more bird species including Madagascar Bulbul, Sakalava Weaver with a fleeting glimpse of a Madagascar Sandgrouse in flight en route to the river.

Benoit led us to a stand of giant Tamarind trees, which were festooned with Madagascar Flying Foxes, the largest of the island's three fruit bat species. They were energetically fanning themselves to keep cool and a few were clearly restless and aware of our presence as they took flight. Benoit picked out a twig-mimicking Praying Mantis on a thorny bush and also found us two male Warty Chameleons. Thanks to Allan's good spotting, we got a pair of Madagascar Green Pigeon perched in the open. At this point some headed off to explore on their own, while the rest of the group enjoyed quietly observed Ring-tailed Lemur, Red-fronted Brown Lemur and Verreaux's Sifaka. En route to Berenty's informative ethnographic museum, some of the group were lucky to see Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk, which though widespread in forest habitat, is often difficult to see. With the heat mounting (yesterday's thermometer showed 33 Celsius) some elected to rest up until lunch. The staff produced a wonderful feast of lobster, salad, mixed seafood and noodles, rounded off with crème caramel or mango compote.

After an afternoon rest, we reassembled at 3.30 to drive to the Rapihy spiny forest, where a stiff breeze meant that the heat was bearable. Two Ring-tailed Lemurs were resting in a *Euphorbia*, a Spider Tortoise *Pyxis arachnoides* was coaxed out of its shade beneath a bush. The only ones that seemed to have any energy were the Three-eyed Lizards *Chalarodon madagascariensis*, which scuttled around in the leaf litter. Benoit produced a small scorpion from under a rock. He then found several Reddish-grey Mouse Lemurs, sleepily eyeing us up from their safe hides in an *Alluadia dumosa* thicket. These extraordinary trees, known as the Sausage Tree have no leaves at all, instead photosynthesising on their bare trunks and branches. Some were just coming into bloom. The birds were rather quiet but we did get views of a Green-capped Coua on the forest floor, a Magpie Robin and Long-billed Green Sunbird. A real highlight of the afternoon was a Madagascar Nightjar with two chicks, one tucked under each wing, perfectly camouflaged among the leaf litter. After a circular walk through the spiny forest, we tried again to find Sandgrouse in an open field, where we spotted an enormous yellow caterpillar, which Chris suspected might be a hawk moth. The field was littered with rounded basalt rocks, originating from ancient flood basalts.

Back at the lodge we grabbed torches and headed into the gallery forest where a Torotoroka Scops Owl responded to our call and flew overhead several times. Near the crocodile enclosure we spotted a largish yellow and black patterned snake that Rivo identified as a nocturnal Cat-eyed Snake *Madagascarophis colubrinus*. We picked out several pairs of White-footed Sportive Lemur eyes in our torch beams before finding a Grey Mouse Lemur. A speciality of the Gallery Forest are the two species of Big-headed Gecko *Paroedura picta* and *Paroedura bastardi* both of which revealed their presence with a rustle in the leaf litter. Spiny-backed Chameleon and White-browed Owl also showed well.

Day 15

Tuesday 1st November

Berenty to Fort Dauphin

Weather: hot and windy, then humid and cloudy in the afternoon

We set off at 5am to visit the Anjampolo Spiny Forest, where much of the TV footage of lemurs leaping among the *Didieraceae* is shot. It's a bit of drive and you need a special permit to visit. The bus took us through sisal fields and pockets of forest, where Madagascar Mannikin, Crested Drongo and Madagascar Coucal were noted. We passed several groups of local people walking many kilometres to get to markets, where they have a chance to sell any surplus produce for cash.

Setting out on foot through the spiny forest, a sifaka family was huddled in two bundles, wedged into a spiny tree fork. They stirred briefly as we walked past. Splendid stands of Octopus trees *Alluandia ascendens* and *Alluandia procera* were a feature of this forest, many providing roosts for White-footed Sportive Lemur. The morning's birding produced some good sightings: arboreal Crested Coua and terrestrial Green-capped Coua both foraging; Madagascar Buttonquail stirring up the leaf litter looking for food; a pair of Souimanga Sunbirds beautifully illuminated in the morning sun; tantalising glimpses of Hook-billed Vanga; a Running Coua's nest 5ft above the ground; Torotoroka Scops Owl roosting among the boughs of a *Didieraceae*.

We did rather well on reptiles with our guide finding an impressive Dumeril's Ground Boa *Acrantophis dumerilii* sleeping at the base of an *Alluaudia ascendens*, a Big-eyed Grass Snake *Mimophis mahfalensis* in the leaf litter and a Spider Tortoise *Pyxis arachnoides*.

On our return drive we stopped to photograph a baobab *Adansonia rubrostipa* festooned with Sakalava Weaver nests. We also saw Madagascar Sandgrouse in flight and a Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher nest with a chick. Sifakas and Ring-tailed Lemurs were out in force to greet us on our return. Over breakfast, the Ring-tail group known as the 'Breakfast Bandits' were up to their usual tricks, stealing bread, jam and fruit off the tables.

There was time for a walk into the gallery forest after breakfast though some of the group elected to take time out for photography. One of the great things about Berenty is that you are allowed to wander on your own. We started with some close encounters with Red-fronted Brown Lemurs (introduced by the De Heulme family in the 1930s). Like the ringtails, these lemurs had this season's babies with them, some still clinging to their mother's belly, while older babies rode on their mother's back. White-browed Owl, Madagascar Sandgrouse and Common Newtonia were seen. We had fantastic views of a Paradise Flycatcher couple feeding their two young.

All too soon it was time to pack up and load up the bus for the return journey to Fort Dauphin. When we stopped en route to photograph a sisal plantation a large group of 25 Madagascar Sandgrouse flew overhead. Madagascar Coucal, Hamerkop, African Palm Swift, Green-backed Heron, Black Egret as well as a succession of Pied Crows and Yellow-billed Kites helped pass the time during the journey. We stopped to buy woodcarvings at a roadside stall, where the locals are regenerating the spiny forest. We saw women carrying fish and eel traps from the rice paddies and men and boys on bicycles, returning from Fort Dauphin after selling fresh milk. There were even people digging up sand from the river bed to sell to passing trucks – anything to get hard cash. Arriving at the Dauphin Hotel in Fort Dauphin for a second night, there was some time to relax before dinner and bed.

Day 16

Wednesday 2nd November

Fort Dauphin to Antananarivo

Weather: cool and overcast in Fort Dauphin, cooler in Antananarivo

Our flight had been rescheduled to depart at 13.00, which left us with a spare morning in Fort Dauphin. Some had already been down to the cliff with Cathy and spotted a distance group of Bottlenose Dolphins coming into the bay.

Some of the group were interested in visiting the Saïidi Botanic Gardens with Benoit where two species of Pitcher Plant *Nepenthes* sp grow in a semi-wild setting. The gardens also showcase many palm species, among them Raffia Palm *Raphia finifera*. Long-billed Green Sunbird, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher, Hook-billed Vanga, Madagascar Coucal, Madagascar Bulbul and Yellow-billed Kite were observed, along with a frog *Heterixalus boettgeri* in the leaf axil of an Elephant's Ear and a Jewel Chameleon *Furcifer lateralis*.

Three lemur species were seen – all have recently been introduced into the garden but roam freely – Ring-tailed Lemur, Red-fronted Brown Lemur and Collared Lemur.

The rest of the group went with Rivo and Cathy on a walk around the coast to look for sea birds and whales. At least six different Humpback Whales were blowing and one breach was observed. From the peninsula viewpoint we could see locals collecting oysters on the rocks and the sea was dotted with the white sails of pirogues, some very far out to sea. Kelp Gull, Greater Crested Tern and Dimorphic Egret were recorded. We then visited the Ecology Centre where we learned of their work in training local people as guides and ecologists. We found a Lined Snake *Bibilava lateralis*, a common species, on the path.

We had sandwiches and fruit at the Dauphin Hotel before the transfer to the airport. By the time we got to Antananarivo it was too late to visit the Lake Alarobia Reserve, so we checked into the Orchid Hotel and arranged for an early dinner.

Day 17

Thursday 3rd November

Tana to Mahajanga and Ankarafantsika

Weather: very hot and sunny

With a 5am flight we barely had time to enjoy the comfort of the well-appointed rooms at the hotel. The flight gave those with window seats sweeping views of Madagascar's denuded landscapes, scarred by the erosion gullies known locally as 'lavaka'. As we neared Mahajanga, we flew over the broad Betsiboka floodplain and estuary, an important area for wildlife.

At Mahajanga's Piscine Hotel, a substantial breakfast was laid on to set us up for the journey ahead. Sooty Falcon, Common Sandpiper and a flock of six Whimbrels in flight were seen over breakfast. We stopped to photograph a huge 1000 year old baobab with a 15m girth, straddling a roundabout in the city. Then we set off on the well-surfaced RN4 for the two and a half hour journey to Ampijoroa Forestry Station, part of the Ankarafantsika National Park. En route, we paused for a view over the Betsiboka estuary and mangroves. The fire-scorched pasture here was dotted with endemic *medemea* palms. At the village of Berivotra, interpretive panels by the side of the road described the dinosaur fossils recently found in the area, which included a herbivorous crocodile! African Palm Swifts flew overhead and Sakalava Weaver, Yellow-billed Kite, Namaqua Dove, Madagascar Cisticola and Madagascar Kestrel were recorded. We stopped to buy water and stroll through a bustling market town where Flame Tree *Delonix regia* were in bloom. Our final stop was at Lake Ankazomborona, meaning 'tree with many birds', where Little Grebe were seen on the water. On the other side of the road from the lake, the rice paddies were teeming with Squacco Heron, Glossy Ibis, Black-winged Stilt, Great White Egret, Cattle Egret and Black Egret in typical posture of wings outspread when feeding. Broad-billed Roller was also recorded here.

Arriving at Ampijoroa, we were allocated bungalows and reassembled for lunch shortly after. Ampijoroa Forestry Station forms part of the much larger Ankarafantsika National Park and is one of the largest tracts of dry deciduous forest remaining in Madagascar.

At the time of year, the forest is starting to come into leaf but many trees were still bare. You don't even have to leave the car park such is the concentration of wildlife here. Madagascar Green Pigeon were spotted nesting overhead, Broad-billed Rollers cackled from their perches, Grey-headed Love Birds flitted from tree to tree and Sickle-billed Vanga mewed plaintively. Collared iguanids *Oplurus cuvieri* and Lined Plated Lizards *Zonosaurus laticaudatus* were darting to and fro in territorial disputes, in spite of the midday heat. From the restaurant's terrace we watched Paradise Flycatchers gather spider silk as nesting material. Crested Drongo were nesting in view and a Crested Coua posed for the photographers.

After lunch there was time for a siesta to sleep off the heat of the day. Reassembling in the car park, we divided into two groups for the leisurely boat trip on Lake Ravelobe. Nile Crocodiles *Crocodilus niloticus* inhabit the water, so it makes sense to enjoy the bird life from the safety of a boat. The crocodiles are not hunted in this area as they are 'fady' (taboo) to the local people. The lake is fished from the shore and fringed by reeds and other aquatic plants, mostly Water Hyacinth.

Cathy's group took the first boat and we clocked up an impressive list: Humblot's Heron, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Green-backed Heron, Glossy Ibis, Common Sandpiper, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher and White-faced Duck. We were especially pleased to find Allen's Gallinule and Madagascar Jacana, neither common and both under threat because of loss of habitat. The real scoop for a visit to the area is the chance to see Madagascar Fish Eagle, often observed on the lake shore or perched over it. We could see the nest site in a tree top but breeding was already over for this year, according to our reserve guides Amadé and Andrema. On the far shore of the lake we finally fixed on a White-throated Rail, a bird that had so far eluded us. Though very vocal, it doesn't show readily.

Back on land, with the heat subsiding, the lemurs began to come back to life. Coquerel's Sifakas had been spread-eagled over a branch in the car park in a posture suggestive of total lethargy – this seems to make sense when the thermometer hits 34 Celsius! A group of Common Brown Lemurs also began to stir, making their way across the boughs overhanging the campsite. While we were waiting for the others to arrive back off the boat, we noticed two other birds nesting in the car park: White-headed Vanga and Madagascar (Ashy) Cuckoo Shrike. Rivo's group also added Little Bittern to the list, seeing pretty much the same species as the first group, though not White-throated Rail.

Collecting torches, we now set off for a night walk, starting at dusk by locating a group of six Mongoose Lemurs, whose territory overlaps the campsite, restaurant and tortoise enclosure. During the dry season, Mongoose Lemurs are semi-nocturnal, while in the wet season they are more active during the day. In the fading light they were hard to photograph but most of us got a decent view. For the night walk, we strolled through the forest between the lake and main road, returning along the road. Rivo was excellent at spotting geckos finding us both Sakalava Velvet Gecko *Blaesodactylus sakalana* and a Bark Gecko *Lygodactylus tolampyae*. Two Oustalet's Chameleons *Furcifer oustaleti*, the male red throated and the female green-throated, were seen at rest on separate branches. A large *Arum* was identified by our guide as *Amorphophallus hildebrandii*. Lemur sightings were excellent this evening with eye-shine beaming back from every other tree. Grey Mouse Lemurs were very active and we saw six individuals, plus three of the local endemic Golden-brown Mouse Lemur, only found in this area.

Five Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemurs and a single Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur just out of aestivation, rounded off the evening's entertainment and by now most were ready for a drink, followed by dinner and bed.

Day 18

Friday 4th November

Ankarafantsika National Park

Weather: very hot and humid after heavy rainfall during the night

After a hot and sticky night, the temperature finally dropped just as it was time to get up again! The birders Bob and Gill, Stan, Chrissie and Allan were up first and went with Cathy and Andrema to the Retendrika Forest by the dam, which is the best place to look for the endemic Schlegel's Asity that is only found here and in a few other locations on the island. We had to work pretty hard to find it, but this is where local expertise is essential. Our first sighting was fleeting but later we got excellent views of the male collecting spider silk as nesting material. Coquerel's Coua showed well on the path ahead of us and White-breasted Mesite were very vocal, their excited call accelerating to a frenzied climax before the bird appeared on the path. The birding group also saw Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Sakalava Weaver, Souimanga Sunbird, Madagascar Buttonquail, Common Jery, Common Newtonia, Crested Coua, Chabert's Vanga, Rufous Vanga and Madagascar Hoopoe. A tree whose red blooms emerged from the trunk was identified as *Sorindeia madagascariensis* (Anacardiaceae). Lined Plated Lizard *Zonosaurus laticaudatus* and Common Brown Lemur were also observed.

After breakfast we made for the forested ridge behind the restaurant. Red-capped Coua showed several times on the path in front of the group, one almost ignoring our presence as it preened itself. We got excellent views of both male and female Cuckoo Roller in flight. However it was to be the Vangas that stole most of the limelight this morning providing superb observation and photo opportunities. First a female Van Dam's Vanga and a Hook-billed Vanga, then a pair of Sickle-billed Vanga collecting nesting material. Next up was a fabulous pair of Rufous Vanga perched above the path and finally three more Van Dam's Vanga cavorting. There were also good views of a Torotoroka Scops Owl roosting in a tree hole just a few feet off the ground. Long-billed Greenbul and Madagascar Magpie Robin were also noted. Three Common Brown Lemurs presented themselves early on in the walk but for most the mammal highlight of the morning were four Western Woolly Lemurs at rest, wrapped around a tree trunk one on top of another. A female Oustalet's Chameleon *Furcifer oustaleti* and mating Dragonflies were also seen.

Rivo and Amadé's group with Claire, Bob Howard, Peter, Chris, Susan, Anita and Brian started with a Zebu Killing Snake *Ithycyphus miniatus* getting mobbed by Van Dam's Vanga and Long-billed Greenbul. Also seen were Torotoroka Scops Owl, Common Newtonia, Madagascar Bulbul, Madagascar (Ashy) Cuckoo Shrike, Red-capped Coua, two white morph Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher males, Pygmy Kingfisher and a Long-billed Greenbul tucking into an Emperor Moth. What an undignified end - it had just finished mating when it was seized. On the lemur front a group of Coquerel's Sifaka were up and about and a Milne Edwards Sportive Lemur was trying to dry off after the night's deluge, its head crowned by enormous ears, eyes staring down at us nonchalantly, with a slightly frowning expression.

Two Bark Gecko *Blaesodactylus antongilensis*, a Rhinoceros Chameleon *Furcifer rhinoceratus* were also identified together with a splendid Koch's Giant Emerald Day Gecko *Phelsuma madagascariensis kochi* a species usually found clinging to tree trunks. Madagascar Silk Worm caterpillars, Flatid Leaf Bugs *Phromnia rosea*, Sweat Bees (Halictidae) and a Land Caddis in its case were seen, and an *Anrygaegum* sp orchid was also admired. Bob Howard found a snake by the viewing tower, which turned out to be a Brown Hog-nosed Snake *Leiobheterodon modestus*.

After lunch and a rest, we reassembled in the afternoon for a walk around the lake which yielded Koch's Giant Emerald Day Gecko *Phelsuma madagascariensis kochi*, and two snakes: Malagasy Hog-nosed Snake *Leiobheterodon madagascariensis* and Big-eyed Grass Snake *Mimophis mahfalensis* plus a young Nile Crocodile. Purple Heron, Green-backed Heron, Madagascar Pond Heron, Squacco Heron, Humblot's Heron, Glossy Ibis and an African Darter in flight and a second one perched, were all seen at stages during the circular walk around the lake. White-faced Duck, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher and Crested Coua also showed and we were pleased to get a further look at Madagascar Fish Eagle, perched in a tree. We tried calling White-throated Rail, but it failed to show.

Day 19

Saturday 5th November

Ankarafantsika National Park

Weather: cloudy early on, then hot, humid and sunny

Today we were up at 5 again. Andrema with Susan, Chris and Claire headed for the Jardin Botanic section of forest to look for Schlegel's Asity, with close sightings of both male and female, perched low. White-breasted Mesite also showed well on the path. Paradise Flycatcher, Cuckoo Roller, and good views of Common Jery were had with further excitement provided by Forest Ibis, though only Chris was lucky to see this 'difficult' bird. Our guides remarked that it had not been seen during the previous three weeks. Rivo accompanied Allan and Stan to look for birds in the forest behind the National Park HQ finding Van Dams Vanga, Rufous Vanga, Sickle-billed Vanga and White-headed Vanga, Long-billed Greenbul, Red-capped Coua and a group of seven Common Brown Lemurs. Both birding groups then joined for a second walk, which produced France's Sparrowhawk on the nest, mobbed by a Vanga, Coquerel's Coua, Blue Vanga. Madagascar Fish Eagle and Three-banded Plover were seen by the lake.

Amadé went with Bob H, Gill, Brian, Chrissie, Peter and Cathy on a longer walk to the 'Canyon'. We sweated our way up the ridge, where several Red-capped Couas posed for the cameras on the path. A Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher pair was silently flitting from branch to branch, never quite stopping long enough for the photographers. We also enjoyed a view of an ever-elusive Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo, a Green Pigeon and Crested Drongo on the nest. This bird is such a poser, just asking to be admired. We paused to examine a huge 2cm long Ant!

After an hour, we emerged from the forest onto savannah, where Madagascar Cisticolas were plentiful. At this point we began seeing large red Velvet Mites on the trail, emerging in large numbers from the sandy soil in response to the recent heavy rain. Palm Swifts were seen in flight overhead and a second Lesser Cuckoo was noted perched on a bare tree.

Amadé pointed out Common Tenrec tracks in the sand and a Fosa scat containing what looked likely to be Sportive Lemur. The Canyon is actually a 'lavaka', a huge erosion gully appearing as a gaping gash in the landscape. It was a beautiful site in many ways, with huge buttresses revealing sediment layers in myriad shades of pink, beige, yellow and red. After viewing the canyon from several points we found a Greater Vasa Parrot perched in the distance, and also noted Madagascar Kestrel and Madagascar Bee-eater.

On the way back we enjoyed a Hoopoe on the path in front of us probing in the sand, and both Long-billed Green Sunbird and Souimanga Sunbird. Once back in the shelter of the forest, the sun came and we were thankful that it had stayed cloudy up until then. The recent rain had brought out snakes and we saw five Malagasy Hog-nosed Snakes in close succession and a young *Dromicodryas bernieri* snake. One of the Hog-nosed snakes was digging for iguana eggs, while another being vigorously harassed by an agitated Red-capped Coua. A Sickie-billed Vanga pair was also noted.

Back at the bungalows by 10.30, the heat was already intense and after a drink, most retired for a rest before lunch. Some of the group spent time enjoying the birdlife from the two watchtowers overlooking the heronry and lake. Later that afternoon we tried calling out White-throated Rail from the edge of the marsh but without success. At this point we were distracted by falling leaves from the canopy and a group of four Coquerel's Sifaka emerged from their middle of the day torpor to feed, moving from bough to bough in a series of acrobatic leaps.

Our guides suggested heading back to Jardin Botanique to look for Tenrec, which start to emerge from aestivation after rain. The forest was pretty quiet and apart from Red-capped Coua, the only wildlife was the plagues of Zebu Flies, particularly attracted to black and navy blue clothing and rucksacks. Chris had the record, with 34! Back in the car park, we had good views of three Mongoose Lemurs making their way at speed through the canopy.

Setting off with torches, we split into two groups for the night walk through the forest bordering the road, where we saw a large Oustalet's Chameleon, two Bark Geckos *Lygodactylus tolampyae* and a Koch's Giant Day Gecko. We got good views of Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemurs, which were very vocal around the bungalow complex. There were many different moths and spiders around, including net-throwing spiders *Deinopis* sp and huntsman spiders *Rhitymna* sp. A Forest Night-snake *Stenophis variabilis* and Cat-eyed Snake *Madagascarophis colubrinus* were also spotted. Golden-brown Mouse Lemurs were very active and we all got good views of one feeding on fruit in a shrub.

Day 20

Sunday 6th November

Ankarafantsika to Mahajanga, Tana and Andasibe

Weather: overcast and rainy, then clearing; cool and fine in Antananarivo and

It was another very hot and sticky night. After a 5.30 breakfast, the bags were loaded onto the bus and we departed. After 30 minutes we left the main road and wound around the shore of Lake Ambondrona on a dirt track, heading off on foot.

Some of the group were keen to try for Pygmy Goose but most of the wildfowl were frustratingly located on the less accessible side of the lake. Red-billed Teal and Little Grebe were identified through the scope. Two Madagascar Coucals and a Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher also showed and Rivo thought a distant raptor in flight might be a Madagascar Harrier Hawk, a bird that had so far eluded us. Continuing the journey towards Mahajanga, we stopped overlooking the Betsiboka River estuary where Madagascar Cisticola and a flock of Migratory Locusts in flight were noted. Stopping again by the mangroves, Eleanora's Falcon flew overhead and Common Jery was seen.

Arriving at the airport, we had lunch in the cafeteria and then boarded the flight for Tana. There our new drivers and guide Maurice were waiting for us and once the luggage was loaded up, we were on our way east to Andasibe. At this point we had to say goodbye to Rivo, who had been our local guide and whose knowledge and enthusiasm for the country and wildlife had enhanced our trip in so many ways. We were extremely fortunate to have had Rivo with us for most of our trip. Leaving the capital we made our way east on a winding but scenic road that snaked through rice paddies and hills before plunging in a dramatic series of hairpin bends to the plain of Moramanga. Here we paused by the Mangoro River in the hope of spotting Madagascar Pratincole but the light was not good. Arriving at Vakona Lodge, we checked into comfortable bungalows, had dinner and an early night.

Day 21

Monday 7th November

Analamazaotra Reserve, Andasibe

Weather: cool and sunny in the morning, cloudy in the afternoon

Local guide Maurice lives in Andasibe Village and has for many years worked with Naturetrek groups, so we were lucky to have him with us, joined by co-guide Victor. After an early breakfast, we made our way by bus to the entrance to Analamazaotra, an 810ha tract of mid-altitude montane rainforest created as a reserve for the Indri. While Maurice arranged our permits, we photographed several chameleons: a tiny Nose-horned Chameleon *Calumma nasuta*, Short-horned Chameleon *Calumma brevicorne*, and a large brightly coloured Parson's Chameleon, subspecies *Calumma parsonii cristifer*. A small frog *Guibemantis pulcher* was observed on a *Pandanus sp.*

Setting off into the reserve on foot, Cathy and Victor's group with Anita, Claire, Susan, Chris, Bob Howard and Peter crossed the river, where a Nelicourvi Weaver's nest was suspended over the water. A female Velvet Asity sat perched on a low branch, just 6ft from the path. We hung around, hoping the very handsome male might appear but though we heard him call, he wasn't willing to show himself. Madagascar Mannikins were flitting about on the banks of the old fish farm while a pair of Lesser Vasa Parrots was spotted perched high on a dead tree. A Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher male sat awkwardly with its long tail feather projecting from a tiny nest woven from spider silk. Madagascar (Ashy) Cuckoo Shrike and Tylas also showed well. Passing another birding group, their leader told us of a Wood Rail up ahead and we spent some time waiting for this stunning ground-dweller to appear which it obligingly did, followed by Madagascar Magpie Robin and Long-billed Greenbul. Meanwhile Chris found us four Eastern Woolly Lemurs sheltering under an *Asplenium*, a preferred daytime roost site for these the largest of the nocturnal lemurs, which seem to get everyone's vote for being cute and cuddly!

Climbing to the ridge, we came across our first group of Indri, who were resting. As this reserve is the closest to the capital, it attracts a lot of visitors and it's important not to crowd the lemurs out and allow them time to rest. After a while the Indri stirred and began to feed again, showing us that the female had a baby on her back – this would be this year's youngster from May/June when the young are born. Indri's are found in small family groups of a monogamous pair and their offspring. After observing this group for a while we continued on, descending to another bridge over the river, where we fell in with a mixed feeding flock of Long-billed Greenbul, Common Newtonia, Madagascar White-eye, Paradise Flycatcher, Blue Vanga and Madagascar (Ashy) Cuckoo Shrike. Overhanging the bridge was a beautiful pink-flowered *Diancanthathera* sp (Melastomaceae). While a Madagascar Buzzard flew overhead, a second flock passed us with Nelicourvi Weaver, Blue Coua, Long-billed Greenbul, Crested Drongo, and two new species for us – a splendid Nuthatch Vanga (which does exactly what it says on the packet!) and a Red-tailed Vanga, the bird with the pronounced wolf whistle call. At this point we were distracted by a second group of four Indri's crossing the path ahead of us, which we watched from close up for a good ten minutes, before they moved off. Last up on this morning's sightings, our guide Victor found us a fabulous Parson's Chameleon *Calumma parsoni cristifer* on a tree fern *Cyathea* sp.

Meeting up with Maurice's group and Allan, Gill, Bob, Chrissie, Brian and Stan, we exchanged news. In addition to many of the species Victor's group had seen Maurice's group had observed Red-fronted Coua, Common Sunbird Asity and Spectacled Greenbul, and also heard Rufous-headed Ground Roller. A highlight of the morning was the scramble up a steep slope to find Short-legged Ground Roller, a rarity that surely merits the effort involved. Two Swallowtail butterflies were also on their list. On our way back to the hotel, Maurice came up trumps again taking us into a pine forest, bordering the track to Vakona, where two young Madagascar Long-eared Owls were perched near the top of a tree.

After lunch, there was time for a short rest before Maurice had us down in the rice paddies and wetlands near the hotel. With some effort and the aid of a tape, we all got good views of a very shy Madagascar Rail and Madagascar Flufftail, which he coaxed out of the undergrowth. A pair of Madagascar Swamp Warbler and Stonechat also showed well. Around the hotel, we noted nesting Mascarene Martins under the eaves, a Ward's Flycatcher and numerous Madagascar Wagtails. We also found a Thorn Spider *Gasteracantha* sp and a small frog *Guibemantis pulcher*.

Day 22

Tuesday 8th November

Mantadia

Weather: heavy rain at first, brighter later, then rain again in the evening

After a 5.30 breakfast, we set off by coach for Mantadia, a larger tract of mostly primary rainforest, which became accessible when a graphite mining operation was given permission to forge a track through it. Either side of the road, we could see recent tree-planting, part of a reforestation project that aims to establish a corridor, linking Mantadia and Analamazaotra. We looked for Grey Bamboo Lemurs in the stands of bamboo along the road and Maurice pointed out a widespread yellow-flowered shrub *Psidium alitissima* (Asteraceae) that quickly colonises recently cleared ground. We admired some impressive examples of *Pandanus vandani* after which Vakona Lodge takes its name.

Once through the National Park boundary, Maurice stopped the bus abruptly and we piled out to watch the acrobatic antics of a group of six Diademed Sifakas, bounding across a gully. Like some other lemurs the species has different alarm calls for ground and aerial predators. Lemurs, though protected throughout the island, are still hunted for bush meat so where they are not habituated, they are often very shy of people.

After an hour on this bumpy road, we parked the coach and set off into the forest. The birders with Maurice were hoping to find a rare Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity. The best chance of this is to climb the ridge to where the canopy is lower and the bird can sometimes be seen feeding. Before we split up, Maurice was keen to show us all Scaly Ground Roller, another rarity nesting in the area. After a short wait, the bird emerged from its tunnel nest but it was a little camera-shy and did not hang around for long. Next up was a Pitta-like Ground Roller, a bird of fabulously showy plumage that bobs its head when it launches into a 'whoop' call. On the ground we found egg packets intricately rolled up in a leaf of *Melastoma sp* by a female Giraffe-necked Weevil.

The birders spent the morning with Maurice and managed to find Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity, Pygmy Kingfisher, Blue Coua, Common Newtonia, Forest Fody, Spectacled Greenbul and Greater Vasa Parrot. The tiny Baron's Painted Mantella frog and a close encounter with Common Brown Lemur rounded off the morning. The generalists with guides Victor and Tina also found Baron's Painted Mantella, plus an orange Giant Millipede and a Giant Snail. We were keen to see more lemurs with Black and White Ruffed Lemur top of the wish list – but being a canopy feeder, this is a challenging species to find and we were not lucky this time round. We were more than pleased to be able to quietly observe Eastern Woolly Lemurs roosting under an *Asplenium sp* and later a family of Diademed Sifaka feeding in the canopy. We enjoyed watching a playful baby bounding on and off its mother's back, taking the first perilous leaps towards independence. At this stage they are most vulnerable to predation.

Leaving the forest, both groups met up for a picnic lunch by a small lake, where a pair of Meller's Duck showed well and we also felt privileged to quietly observe a family of Madagascar Little Grebe with chicks. A Madagascar Swamp Warbler repeatedly swooped down to grab food off the surface of the water.

After lunch, we began the drive back along the dirt road. Claire, Brian, Susan, Chris and Bob Howard went with Cathy and Victor along a short trail to a waterfall and natural swimming pool surrounded by lush *Pandanus* and tree ferns, where some took a quick swim to cool off. A beautiful *Eulophiella roempleriana* orchid hung over the pool, adding to the beauty of this tranquil spot. On the way back to join the others we stopped to photograph a frog *Guibemantis pulcher*.

Back at Vakona Lodge by 3.30 some of the group took a rest, while Chrissie, Stan and Claire headed down to Lemur Island for an entertaining afternoon with the tame lemurs that have been rescued from the pet trade. On this 'in your face' lemur experience, cheeky banana-seeking Black and White Ruffed Lemurs, Red-fronted Brown Lemurs and Diademed Sifaka willingly feed from your hand!

Late afternoon, we returned to Andasibe village for a night walk along the road. There's always an element of surprise on night walks and as you scan the trees and undergrowth with your torch, you never know what is going to show up. We were lucky this time to get very good views of a Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur, easily recognised by its broad fat-storing tail. Most of the group also got a view of a Goodman's Mouse Lemur in among a tangle of *Rubus moluccanus* and we yet again benefited from Maurice's keen eyes, which picked up three chameleons: Short-horned Chameleon, Parson's Chameleon and Nose-horned Chameleon. We were also pretty impressed by the Olympic-speed web-spinning of a large spider.

Day 23

Wednesday 9th November

Analamazaotra

Weather: cool and changeable

With the change in flight schedules we had an extra day to spend in the rainforest at Andasibe and we also had to change hotel. Some were keen to try and pick up a few more bird species, including the elusive Crested Ibis, while others were happy to spend time with the lemurs. Just yards from the trail we were entertained by a very obliging group of Diademed Sifaka, one of whom had with a baby clinging to its back. Swinging down to our eye level, they paused on a trunk just long enough for us to snap a shot or two, before bounding away. Next we found a very handsome male Parson's Chameleon, almost invisible against a background of *Pandanus* leaves and just as well – a pair of predatory Blue Coua were out and about combing the foliage for chameleons.

A splendid pair of Giraffe-necked Weevils was busily demolishing a *Melastomaceae* shrub when we got our next call for lemurs – a family of Indri with a very restless baby bouncing from one parent to the other. Pausing by the bridge over Lac Vert, we got excellent views of Ward's Flycatcher and a pair of Madagascar (Ashy) Cuckoo Shrike gathering nesting material. Madagascar Wood Rail came out nicely and shortly afterwards we crossed a mixed flock of Blue Vanga, Tylas, Red-tailed Vanga and Long-billed Greenbul. With patience we got an excellent first view of Dark Newtonia, altogether a much more tuneful songster than the more usual Common Newtonia. Nuthatch Vanga also showed well as we made our way back past some Common Brown Lemurs to the park entrance. Here too, we finally got to see Grey Bamboo Lemur, tucking into a stand of bamboo.

We checked in to Feony Ala Lodge, which has a brilliant location on the edge of the reserve by a small lake, though not quite as ritzy as Vakona. After lunch, there was time for a rest and several of the group admired some very flashy Jewel Beetles on some palms around the bungalows.

Late in the afternoon we set off for a night walk in the Mitsinjo Reserve at Andasibe. This is a private reserve run by an association of guides and it's especially rewarding at night. The challenge was to find leaf-tailed geckos – we'd seen them during the day at Ranomafana, but they're nocturnal and it's infinitely more exciting to see them in action. We were lucky – our guide picked out both Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko *Uroplatus phantasticus* and the much larger Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko *Uroplatus sikoriae*. He was pretty adept at finding chameleons too, adding White-bellied Chameleon and Broad-browed Chameleon to the list – the latter is a leaf-litter species that is notoriously hard to spot.

We did pretty well with frogs too with first a tiny *Mantidactylus betsileanus*, followed by a tree Frog *Boophis madagascariensis* and a Brook Frog *Mantidactylus grandidieri*.

Day 24

Thursday 10th November

Andasibe to Antananarivo

Weather: cloudy and damp, clearing later

For our last morning in the reserve we split into two groups, those who were keen to search out birds and those who wanted to focus on indri. The birders again drew no luck with Crested Ibis but got good views of Rand's Warbler, Chabert's Vanga, a brilliantly scarlet male Madagascar Fody, Cisticola and Stonechat. A flock of Madagascar Mannikins also showed well as did Blue Pigeon and Long-eared Owl.

Everyone got fantastic views of Indri leaping from trunk to trunk, and the lemur group also had a memorable encounter with a family of Diademed Sifakas and another chance at the Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs. They also found Red-fronted Coua, Nuthatch Vanga and a very engaging Spectacled Greenbul with its chicks. Last up were a pair of Madagascar Tree Boas but all too soon it was time to make our way to the exit to the reserve to begin the journey back to Tana.

En route we stopped for a picnic lunch by the river at Mandraka Forest, where we found a pair of Forest Rock Thrush, a Velvet Asity female chick, Nelicourvi Weaver and Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher. Over lunch a splendid Malthe's Chameleon climbed up Anita's back. Continuing the journey, we stopped to photograph some charcoal ovens. Arriving in Tana we just had time for a brief visit to Lake Alarobia, a wildfowl reserve where we found Hottentot and Red-billed Teal, White-faced Duck, Knob-billed Duck, Common Moorhen, Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Green-backed Heron, Dimorphic Egret and Madagascar Coucal.

After a short rest at the Orchid Hotel it was time to say our farewells over dinner to Brian, who was staying an extra night before his flight. This was an opportunity to recap all the amazing experiences we'd had in Madagascar. Each of us had come with our own agenda: some focused on birds; others spellbound by the diversity of plants, enthralled by lemurs or bowled over by the reptiles, the invertebrates and all the other creatures that make Madagascar what it is: unique. Brian we so enjoyed your poem. Poet extraordinaire – your ode to Madagascar said more than any trip log or species list could ever hope to.

Continuing to the airport with Maurice, check-in went without a hitch and then it was just a question of waiting to board the flight for Paris.

Day 25

Friday 11th November

Paris and onward flights home

Arriving in Paris it was time to say goodbye as we made our way to our respective flights onwards to the UK.

Species Lists

Lemurs (✓ recorded but not counted); H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
1		Cheirogaleidae																								
2	Reddish-grey Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus griseorufus</i>										9	4													
3	Grey Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>							3	1			10			6										
4	Golden-brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus ravelobensis</i>														3		5								
5	Rufous (Brown) Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>			5																					
6	Goodman's Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>																				1				
7	Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>																				4				
8	Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus medius</i>														1		1								
		Lepilemuridae																								
9	White-footed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur leucopus</i>										4	2	8												
10	Hubbard's Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur hubbardi</i>							2																	
11	Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur edwardsi</i>														5	1	5								
		Lemuridae																								
12	Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur griseus</i>																					2	2		
13	Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur aureus</i>			2	6																				
14	Greater Bamboo Lemur	<i>Prolemur simus</i>				2																				
15	Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>					20+	10				✓	✓	✓												
16	Common Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus fulvus</i>														12	3	3				8	6	10		
17	Red-fronted Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus rufus</i>										✓	✓	✓												
18	Red-bellied Lemur	<i>Eulemur rubriventer</i>			3+1	3+2																				
19	Mongoose Lemur	<i>Eulemur mongoz</i>														6		3								
20	Black and White Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata variegata</i>				H																				
		Indridae																								
21	Eastern Woolly Lemur	<i>Avahi laniger</i>																			7	6				
22	Western Woolly Lemur	<i>Avahi occidentalis</i>															4									
23	Verreaux's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>										✓	✓	✓												
24	Coquerel's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus coquereli</i>														5	12	12	1							
25	Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>																				9+1	3+1	3		

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
26	Milne-Edward's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>				4+1																				
27	Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>																			10	H	8+2	3		

Other Mammals

1	Eastern Red Forest Rat	<i>Nesomys rufus</i>				4																		
2	Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Hipposideros commersoni</i>															1	1						
3	Madagascar Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus rufus</i>										2000						2		8				
4	Eastern Sucker-footed Bat	<i>Myzopoda aurita</i>			30																			
5	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>									1+1				6+2									
6	Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>													10									

Reptiles

1	White-bellied Chameleon	<i>Calumma gastrotaenia</i>			1																		1	
2	Short-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma brevicorn</i>				1														1	1	1		
3	Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii cristifer</i>																		2	1	2	1	
4	Nose-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma nasuta</i>		1	1																1			
5	O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>			1																			
6	Blue-legged Chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>			2																			
7	Malthe's Chameleon	<i>Calumma malthe</i>																						1
8	Belted Chameleon	<i>Furcifer balteatus</i>				1	1																	
9	Oustalet's Chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>					2					6				6	2	2						
10	Rhinoceros Chameleon	<i>Furcifer rhinoceratus</i>															1							
11	Spiny-backed (Warty) Chameleon	<i>Furcifer verrucosus</i>									2		4	3	2									
12	Jewel (Carpet) Chameleon	<i>Furcifer lateralis</i>			2											1								
13	Elongate Leaf Chameleon	<i>Brookesia nasus</i>				1																		
14	Broad-browed Leaf Chameleon	<i>Brookesia superciliaris</i>			1																		1	
15	Big-headed Gecko	<i>Paroedura picta</i>												3										
16	Large-headed Gecko	<i>Paroedura bastardii</i>												1										
17	Day Gecko	<i>Lygodactylus tuberosa</i>												1										
18	Gradidier's Dwarf Gecko	<i>Lygodactylus tolampyae</i>								2			2	2	1		1		2					
19	Sakalava Velvet Gecko	<i>Blaesodactylus sakalava</i>										2					2							

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
20	Bark Gecko	<i>Blaesodactylus antongilensis</i>															2									
21	Gray's Leaf-toed Gecko (House Gecko)	<i>Hemidactylus mercatorius</i>																		1		1				
22	Lined Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata bifasciata</i>	1		2	10														10	2	8				
23	Koch's Giant Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma madagascariensis kochi</i>															2	2	1							
24	Four-spotted Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>			6	5										1										
25	Changeable Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma mutabilis</i>									1	1														
26	Standing's Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>								2																
27	Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikoriae</i>																					3			
28	Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>			2	1																	1			
29	Collared Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cuvieri</i>															✓	✓	✓							
30	Spiny-tailed Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cyclurus</i>								2		2	4													
31	Dumeril's Madagascar Swift	<i>Oplurus quadrimaculatus</i>		4					3				1													
32	Three-eyed Lizard	<i>Chalarodon madagascariensis</i>					6			1	6			✓	1											
33	Lined Plated Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus laticaudata</i>										2				✓	✓	✓								
34	Ornate Plated Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus ornata</i>		2								1						2								
35	Elegant Skink	<i>Trachylepis elegans</i>		4					1												1					
36	Gravenhorst's skink	<i>Trachylepis gravenhorstii</i>		1																	1					
37	Madagascar Ground Boa	<i>Acrantophis madagascariensis</i>																					1			
38	Dumeril's Ground Boa	<i>Acrantophis dumerili</i>													1											
39	Madagascar tree Boa	<i>Sanzinia madagascariensis</i>			3	2															1			2		
40	Cat-eyed snake	<i>Madagascarophis colubrinus</i>			1									3				1	1							
41	Tiny Night Snake	<i>Ithyocyphus miniatus</i>																1	1							
42	Boulenger's Forest Snake	<i>Compsophis boulengeri</i>			1																					
43	Malagasy Giant Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon madagascariensis</i>																2	8							
44	Brown Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon modestus</i>																2								
45	Lined Snake	<i>Bibilava lateralis</i>				1		1								1					1					
46	A snake	<i>Stenophis betsileanus</i>			1																					
47	Tree Night Snake	<i>Stenophis variabilis</i>																		1						
48	Bernier's Striped Snake	<i>Dromicodryas bernieri</i>																		1						
49	Big-eyed Grass Snake	<i>Mimophis mahfalensis</i>						1	1	2					1			1				1	1			
50	Nile Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>															10	1								

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
51	Spider Tortoise	<i>Pyxys arachnoides</i>												1	1											

Amphibians

1	Mascarene Grass Frog	<i>Ptychadena mascareniensis</i>		1																			
2	Madagascar Bright-eyed frog	<i>Boophis madagascariensis</i>			3																	1	
3	Green Bright-eyed frog	<i>Mantidactylus grandidieri</i>																				1	
4	Dark-sided stream frog	<i>Mantidactylus betsileanus</i>																				1	1
5	Madagascar glass frog	<i>Guibemantis pulcher</i>																		2	1	1	
6	Baron's Painted Mantella	<i>Mantella baroni</i>			1																1		
7	A frog	<i>Heterixalus boettgeri</i>														1							
8	A frog	<i>Heterixalus betsileo</i>						1															
9	A frog	<i>Stumffia 'ranomafana'</i>				1																	

Various invertebrates

1	Golden Orb Spider	<i>Nephila madagascariensis</i>											✓			✓						✓	
2	Crab (Kite) Spider	<i>Gasteracanthinae sp.</i>		✓								✓					✓						
3	Bird-dropping Spider	<i>Phrynarachne sp.</i>															✓						
4	Net casting Spider	<i>Deinopidae sp.</i>																✓					
5	Huntsman Spider	<i>Rhitymna sp.</i>																					
6	Green Lynx Spider	<i>Peucetia madagascariensis</i>						✓	✓														
7	Scorpion	<i>Grosphus sp.</i>												✓									
8	Giant Velvet Mite	<i>Trombidium sp.</i>																✓					
9	Bush Cricket	<i>Tettigoniidae</i>											✓										
10	Cricket	<i>Anostostomatidae</i>		✓	✓	✓																✓	
11	Mole Cricket	<i>Gryllotalpidae</i>												✓									
12	Malagasy Migratory Locust	<i>Locusta migratoria capito</i>																	✓				
13	Rainbow Milkweed Locust	<i>Phymateus saxosus</i>		✓				✓															
14	Stick Insect	<i>order Phasmatodea</i>		✓	✓	✓																	
15	Praying Mantis	<i>order Mantodea</i>							✓					✓									
16	Assassin Bug	<i>Reduviidae</i>							✓														
17	Plataspid (Lady) Bug	<i>Libyaspis coccinelloides</i>				✓		✓										✓					

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
18	Flatid Leaf Bug	<i>Phromnia rosea</i>					✓	✓					✓	✓			✓	✓	✓							
19	Giraffe-necked Weevil	<i>Trachelophorus giraffa</i>			✓																		✓			
20	Firefly	<i>Lampyridae sp</i>																					✓			
21	Spotted Beetle	order <i>Coleoptera</i>										✓														
22	Rhinoceros Beetle	<i>Dynastinae</i>								✓																
23	Jewel Beetle	? <i>Buprestidae</i>																					✓			
24	Giant Hissing Cockroach	<i>Gromphadorhina portentosa</i>											✓													
25	Hissing Cockroach	<i>Elliptorhina coquerliana</i>												✓						✓						
26	Madagascar Giant Fire Millipede	<i>Aphistogoniulus sp.</i>																					✓			
27	Pill Millipede	<i>Spaerotherium sp.</i>																		✓						
28	Ant Lion	<i>Myrmeleontidae</i>											✓													

Crustaceans

1	Hermit Crab	<i>Paguroidea</i>							✓															
2	Sand Crab	<i>Hyppodea</i>								✓														

Dragonflies

1	Blue Dragonfly	<i>Odonata</i>						✓																
2	Pink Dragonfly	<i>Odonata</i>						✓																

Moths

1	Emperon Moth	<i>Antherina suraka</i>				✓												✓						
2	A moth (Claire's moth)	<i>Cycligrama disturbans</i>				✓																		
3	Madagascar Silk Worm	<i>Borocera madagascariensis</i>																✓						

Butterflies

1	Green-veined Charaxes	<i>Charaxes antamboulou</i>		✓																				
2	African Monarch	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>		✓			✓			✓			✓				✓	✓						
3	Brilliant Blue	<i>Junonia thadama</i>	✓																					
4	A pansy	<i>Junonia sp.</i>																						

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
5	Orange tip	<i>Colotis sp.</i>										✓	✓		✓											
6	Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema desjardinsii</i>																								
7	Blue black Swallowtail	<i>Papilio epiphorbas</i>		✓																						
8	Madagascar Giant Swallowtail	<i>Atrophaneura anterior</i>					✓	✓		✓	✓															

Birds

1	Madagascar Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus pelzelni</i>		1																			2+3	
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>							40	40							4				8			
3	Red-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>									25													
4	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>															1	1	1					
5	Common Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	10									7				2	200	80	100	100				40
6	Madagascar Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola idae</i>												1			1	1						
7	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>															2							
8	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	25										2											20
9	Green-backed Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>	1							1	30	1			1		10	6		3			1	2
10	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	50	20			1	1				30	20		5	2	20+	20+	20+	20+				2
11	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	200+	100	20		30	20	3	5	3	100	1500	100+	100+		2000	100+	100+	100+				10
12	Black Egret	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>	4											1		2	1	100	5	5	20			
13	Dimorphic Egret	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>	50	50			2				6	15			1	3	1	1		2	100+			200
14	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		1													10	6	6	1	1		1	
15	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>								1	1	1												
16	Humboldt's Heron	<i>Ardea humbloti</i>															1	1	1	2				
17	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	1	1							2		1	2		3	1					2		2
18	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>															100	20+	20+	20				
19	Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>	12	1	6		95														100			50
20	Hottentot Teal	<i>Anas hottentota</i>									2													2
21	Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>																						2
22	White-faced Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>	4														40	5	20	20				100
23	Meller's Duck	<i>Anas melleri</i>			2																		2	
24	Madagascar Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vociferoides</i>															2	1	2					
25	Henst's Goshawk	<i>Accipiter henstii</i>				1																		

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
26	Madagascar Buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>		2	1	1		1	1				1		1		1	1	1		2	2	1			
27	Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk	<i>Aviceda madagascariensis</i>											1													
28	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptus</i>		3	1	1	20	20	20	6	6	2	30	30	18	2	6	1		4						
29	Banded Kestrel	<i>Falco zoniventris</i>							3																	
30	France's Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter francesiae</i>							1				2					1					1			
31	Madagascar Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>	3	5	1		3	15	10	1	1	2	4	2	3	1	2		1	1			1	1		
32	Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>																		1						
33	Sooty Falcon	<i>Falco concolor</i>														1										
34	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	6H	2H																						
35	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>				3		2				1	60	1				1								
36	Madagascar Wood Rail	<i>Canirallus kioloides</i>				1															2		1			
37	White-breasted Mesite	<i>Mesitornis variegatus</i>															3	2								
38	Subdesert Mesite	<i>Monias benschi</i>							2																	
39	Madagascar Buttonquail	<i>Tumix nigricollis</i>							2	1	1		2	5			1	1								
40	White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>						H								1	2				H	H	1			
41	Madagascar Rail	<i>Rallus madagascariensis</i>																			2					
42	Lesser Gallinule	<i>Porphyryla alleni</i>														2										
43	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>															1	1						3		
44	Greater Painted Snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>								1																
45	Madagascar Snipe	<i>Gallinago macrodactyla</i>		1																						
46	Madagascar Jacana	<i>Actophilornis albinucha</i>														2										
47	Madagascar Pratincole	<i>Glareola ocularis</i>																		1				1		
48	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>							1	12	2															
49	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>							30	12						2										
50	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>								4	1															
51	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>								1																
52	Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>							6	12	15															
53	White-fronted Plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus</i>							1	2																
54	Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollata</i>		1					1									1								
55	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>							8	20	50					6										
56	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>							2	2	1			H	1											

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
57	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>							1		2															
58	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			1	1						1				2			8							
59	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>							1																	
60	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>							6	7																
61	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>							2	2	1															
62	Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>										1			3											
63	Grey-headed Gull	<i>Larus cirrocephalus</i>									1	1														
64	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>									2	10	1		1											
65	Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>									6	10														
66	Madagascar Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles personatus</i>											2	26												
67	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columbalivia</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓		
68	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>						2	20	6	20	1	2	3	6		2		2	1						
69	Madagascar Blue Pigeon	<i>Alectroenas madagascariensis</i>			1	2																1		2		
70	Madagascar Green Pigeon	<i>Treron australis</i>											2			1	1	1	2		1	3				
71	Madagascar Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia picturata</i>	5		2				4	1	2		4	20	6	2	6	4		2	H	1				
72	Grey-headed Lovebird	<i>Agapornis canus</i>		10					7					60	2	2	9	2								
73	Greater Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>			2				2								1	2				4		1		
74	Lesser Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>			1	1			H				1	3	H		3	2	1		4	4	1			
75	Madagascar Coucal	<i>Centropus toulou</i>		H	2	1	H	2	3	1	3		1	2	5	1	1	H	2	2	3	1	2	1		
76	Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>	H	2	1	1			H						H		H	H	2	H	H	H				
77	Green-capped Coua	<i>Coua olivaceiceps</i>							1		1			1	1											
78	Red-capped Coua	<i>Coua ruficeps</i>																	6	8						
79	Running Coua	<i>Coua cursor</i>							1		2		1		1											
80	Giant Coua	<i>Coua gigas</i>											5	4	3											
81	Coquerel's Coua	<i>Coua coquereli</i>							3								1	1								
82	Red-fronted Coua	<i>Coua reynaudii</i>				1															1	H		1		
83	Blue Coua	<i>Coua caerulea</i>			3	1															2	1	4			
84	Crested Coua	<i>Coua cristata</i>							1				3	10	2		1	4	4							
85	Madagascar Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio madagascariensis</i>																			2 young			1		
86	White-browed Owl	<i>Ninox supercilialis</i>											2	4	1											
87	Marsh Owl	<i>Asio capensis</i>					3				1											1				

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
88	Rainforest Scops Owl	<i>Otus rutilus</i>																					1			
89	Torotoroka Scops Owl	<i>Otus madagascariensis</i>											1	1			1									
90	Madagascar Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>	1	H	10		H		2				1	1+2		H		2	1							
91	Madagascar Black Swift	<i>Apus balstoni</i>									50	10								1						
92	Madagascar Spine-tailed Swift	<i>Zoonavena grandidieri</i>							2												2	2	2			
93	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>			6		6	10	4	2					4		5		1	6						
94	Brown-throated Sand Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>		5																						
95	Mascarene Martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>	6	10	25	6		1	6		6	30				4	2		1	10	20	15	10			
96	Madagascar Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo vintsioides</i>	3	1					1						1	2	4	1	1	5	6	3				
97	Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx madagascariensis</i>				1											1					1				
98	Madagascar Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>		12			10	25	25	25	25		1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2		4				
99	Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>						4					4	10	1		6	6	6	2	H	1				
100	Madagascar Cuckoo-Roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>		1	H				2									2	2		4	2	1			
101	Short-legged Ground Roller	<i>Brachypteracias leptosomus</i>																			1					
102	Scaly Ground Roller	<i>Brachypteracias squamigera</i>																				1				
103	Pitta-like Ground Roller	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>			1	2																1				
104	Rufous-headed Ground Roller	<i>Atelornis crossleyi</i>																			H	H				
105	Long-tailed Ground Roller	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>							1																	
106	Velvet Asity	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>			1	1															1			1 young		
107	Schlegel's Asity	<i>Philepitta schlegeli</i>																2	4							
108	Common Sunbird-Asity	<i>Neodrepanis coruscans</i>				1															2					
109	Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity	<i>Neodrepanis hypoxantha</i>																					2			
110	Madagascar Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	1	6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	2	1	1	6	2	1	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
111	Grey-crowned Greenbul	<i>Bernieria cinereiceps</i>				H																				
112	Long-billed Greenbul	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>				2			1								6	2			6		2			
113	Spectacled Greenbul	<i>Bernieria zosterops</i>			1	4															2	1	1			
114	White-throated Oxylabes	<i>Oxylabes madagascariensis</i>				2																				
115	Crossley's Babbler	<i>Mystacornis crossleyi</i>			2																					
116	Madagascar Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus albospectularis</i>		2	5	3	1	1+2	8	1	6	1	2	3	4	H	2	4	2	1	10	1	1			
117	Madagascar Hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>	1	1			1	6	4		3		1	4	1	H		8	2							
118	Littoral Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola imerinus</i>								3	3															

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			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
119	Forest Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>				2	1																2			
120	Benson's Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola sharpei bensoni</i>						6																		
121	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	4	6	2	1		1													2	1				
122	Madagascar Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>	1	2	6	4	8	2			1				2				2	2	1	1				
123	Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Tersiphone mutata</i>				1		4				2	3	6		2	8	8	1	8	6	6	1			
124	Ward's Flycatcher / Vanga	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>				1														1	2	2				
125	Common Newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>		H	3	10			1	1			H	1		10	4		2	1	H					
126	Dark Newtonia	<i>Newtonia ampichroa</i>																				2				
127	Archbold's Newtonia	<i>Newtonia archboldi</i>							1																	
128	Madagascar Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>		1				4	4		20			1	1	H	2	20+					1			
129	Madagascar Bush Lark	<i>Mirafra hova</i>		1			10		30	20	30		10	4		2			1							
130	Madagascar Swamp Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>		3					1	2										2			H			
131	Madagascar Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>	2	3	1	2		H										H		1	2	1				
132	Thamnomis Warbler	<i>Thamnomis chloropetoides</i>								1																
133	Subdesert Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas lantzii</i>								6	1															
134	Grey Emu-tail	<i>Amphispiza bilineata</i>			2																					
135	Common Jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>	6	6	1	20		1	4		1		6	2	3		2	2	5	4	1	8				
136	Green Jery	<i>Neomixis viridis</i>			1																1					
137	Stripe-throated Jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>							1												1					
138	Wedge-tailed Jery	<i>Neomixis flavoviridis</i>				1																				
139	Rand's Warbler	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>			3	2														1	H	H	1			
140	Madagascar White-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>	4	2	3	10	1		2			4				3				40	20	10				
141	Madagascar Green Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia notata</i>		1		1	1	1	1		1		1		3	1	1	2			1	1				
142	Souimanga Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia souimanga</i>		2	2	8	1	1	5		4	2	2		2	2		4	2	2	2	1	1			
143	Nuthatch Vanga	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>																		1	2	1	1			
144	White-headed Vanga	<i>Artamella viridis</i>							1							2	2	2								
145	Chabert's Vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>		1	5	2	2									2	1	1					1			
146	Madagascar Blue Vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>			2	5										2	1	1		4	1	1				
147	Sickle-billed Vanga	<i>Falco pectoralis</i>							6							6	6	8								
148	Rufous Vanga	<i>Schetba rufa</i>															2	2								
149	Red-tailed Vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>			H	H														2	H	1				

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			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
150	Lafresnaye's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris xenopirostris</i>							1				1													
151	Hook-billed Vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>		1	H							H	1	1	1		1				H		H			
152	Pollen's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris polleni</i>				1																				
153	Van Dam's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris damii</i>															8	8								
154	Tylas	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>			H	3															1	1	1			
155	Madagascar (Ashy) Cuckoo Shrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>			1	1										2	2			1	1	2				
156	Madagascar Starling	<i>Saroglossa aurata</i>			2	1																				
157	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
158	Crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>			2				5	6	1	12	1	8	6	8		6	8	8	2	6	8			
159	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	3	4			✓	✓	✓	✓	6	1	✓	✓	✓	1	✓		1	6			2			
160	Madagascar Fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	6	4	1	1			1	6	1	1				1	10						1			
161	Forest Fody	<i>Foudia eminentissima</i>				1																	20			
162	Sakalava Weaver	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>								15	1	10		8	25	25		10	1			6				
163	Nelicourvi Weaver	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>			1																9	4	2	1		
164	Madagascar Mannikin	<i>Lonchura nana</i>		1				8	25							4					2		6			

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