

# Madagascar

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 October - 13 November 2019



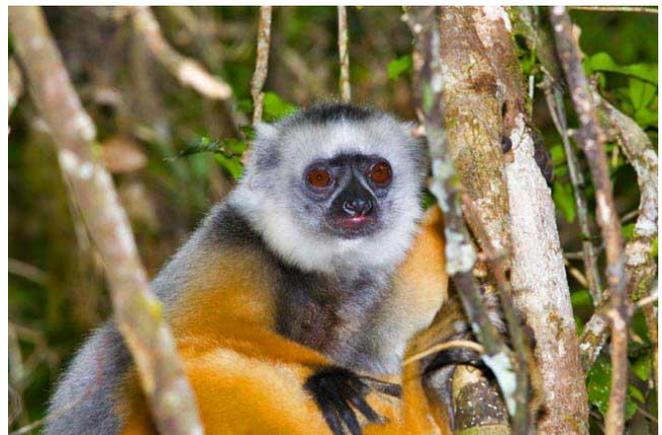
Verreaux's Sifaka



White-browed Owl



Parson's Chameleon



Diademed Sifaka

Report by and images by Quentin Bloxam



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Tour participants: Quentin Bloxam (leader) and Charles Randrianantenaina (local guide)  
With 12 Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Monday 21st October**

The group left London on an overnight flight to Addis Ababa.

## Day 2

**Tuesday 22nd October**

The flight from Addis landed in Tana in the afternoon, where we met with local guide Charles. We transferred to the Hotel Combava and met with the final group member.

## Day 3

**Wednesday 23rd October**

### Lake Tsarasaotra

We left Hotel Combava at 7.30am after seeing our first Malagasy birds in the hotel grounds: the resident Red Fodys, Malagasy Bulbuls, and Madagascan Wagtails and one Malagasy White-eye.

Our first excursion was to this extraordinary lake situated in the outskirts of Antananarivo. Amid the bustling mass of people sits this privately owned oasis of one large lake with two smaller ones adjoining. Large numbers of water birds are resident here as well as other species passing through. After a 45-minute drive arrived at the lake and spent nearly two hours watching Cattle Egrets, Great Egrets, Dimorphic Egrets, White-faced Whistling Duck, Red-billed Teal and Knob-billed Duck, as well as Black-crowned Night Herons, Red Fody, Madagascan Brush Warbler, Malagasy Black Swifts, Brown-throated Martin and a Malagasy Kestrel. One female Oustalet's Chameleon, two species of introduced House Geckos and a Day Gecko were also seen.

We left the lake at 10.45am for the long drive to Ansiribe. On the way we saw more Cattle Egrets and Night Heron as well as Pied Crows, Yellow-billed Kites, Hamerkops and numerous introduced Common (Indian) Mynas.

We arrived at the delightful Cafe Coulear in Ansirabe and were greeted by the sight of a male Oustalet's Chameleon in a small tree by the Reception office.

## Day 4

**Thursday 24th October**

### Reserve D'Ankazdivady and Ranomafana

We departed from the hotel after breakfast after more views of the chameleon and as well as Red Fodys, wagtails and two resident free-ranging domestic rabbits.

We had a brief stop in Ambositra to visit a wood-carving shop before continuing for our lunch stop at Reserve D'Ankazdivady. On the way we passed numbers of rice paddies with the usual sights of Cattle and Great Egrets, Yellow-billed Kites, Common Mynas and a kestrel. In the reserve we saw a Long-billed Sunbird and a single habituated Common Brown Lemur, alongside the picnic area.

After lunch we crossed the road to view a wetland area and a couple of the local guides drove out three or four Madagascar Snipe which travelled at high speed from one side of the marsh to the other. There was also a pair of Red-billed Teal hiding in the corner of the marsh.

We continued our drive and stopped briefly to see a nesting colony of Cattle Egrets by the roadside, which included a Purple Heron and a pair of Dimorphic Egrets. We then drove through the boundary between the Merina tribe from Tana to the Betsilio tribe. Here, paddy fields were replaced with hillsides of the fire-resistant Tapia trees, the food tree of the endemic silkworm. We also had a sight of a Yellow-billed Egret and two Malagasy Kingfishers, Madagascar Stonechats and a Madagascar Lark (formerly known as Madagascar Bush Lark). We also had our first sight of Olive Bee-eaters.

Continuing on our way we saw a dead Greater Hedgehog Tenrec for sale by the roadside. This species is a prolific breeder with up to 30 babies at a time and provides a protein source for the local villagers.

We arrived at the Hotel Centrest at Ranomafana early evening.

## Day 5

Friday 25th October

### Ranomafana

We left the hotel for our first morning the the Ranomafa National Park. At the entrance were a pair of Madagascar Starlings and a Madagascar Mannikin. We spent nearly four hours in the rainforest and enjoyed sights of many bird species including the Pitta-like Ground Roller, Cuckoo Roller, Paradise Flycatchers, Charbert Vanga, Rufous Vanga, Madagascar Starling, Malagasy Coucals, Crested Drongo, Malagasy Bulbuls, Malagasy White-eye, Common Newtonia and a Rand's Warbler.

On the mammal side we enjoyed watching a family of Golden Bamboo Lemurs and had a couple of sightings of the Eastern Red Forest Rat. A less-than-usual sight was of a family of Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs. A number of butterflies were recorded including Citrus Swallowtails and a Banded Blue Swallowtail plus Golden Orb-web and Thorn Spiders. A Large Black millipede was seen on the path. We ended the morning with a sight of the enigmatic Giraffe-necked Weevil and a Madagascar Tree Boa. The forest was very dry: we were told that they had had no rain for over two weeks - very unusual for the rainforest of Ranomafana.

After lunch we walked alongside the road until dusk and then extended the time into a night walk.

We saw a Blue Coua and a Forest Rock Thrush, and Sundew plants were growing on the rock face by the roadside. At dusk we watched a Rufous Mouse Lemur, attracted to a tree which had been rubbed with banana. Glaw's Flap-necked, Malthe's, Short-nosed and Blue-legged Chameleons were seen roosting on overhanging branches by the road.

## Day 6

Saturday 26th October

### Ranomafana

This morning we visited the adjoining forest of Vohiparara. This is an interesting block of secondary forest, initially heavily invaded with introduced guava and with areas of cleared marshland but evolving into good

endemic forest. We were treated to lovely views of a family of Milne-Edwards Sifaka including a four-month-old baby. This is one of the loveliest sifaka species and it was a real treat to see them actively foraging and feeding. Two frog species were seen in the stream and a dead Jewel Beetle was found on the trail. We all saw two vanga species: Tylas and a Pollen's Vanga. Blue Coua and Paradise Flycatcher were also recorded. One colubrid snake was seen, an Assassin Bug and lastly, Giraffe-necked Weevils.

We then returned to the Ranomafana National Park and this time saw the two remaining Greater Bamboo Lemurs, father and daughter. It is still intended to reintroduce more of this species to the park, but no time scale could be ascertained. The now critically endangered Golden Bamboo Lemur was discovered in the 1870 and rediscovered in 1972. Both species co-existed in the Ranomafana forest, but the Greater Bamboo Lemur has declined to these two animals in this part of the reserve. Fragmented populations exist further north, but the total population is considered as no more than 160 individuals.

## Day 7

Sunday 27th October

### Anja

At 7am we left Ranomafana to drive to Anja. On the drive we passed the usual plethora of Cattle and Great Egrets, Common Mynas and Pied Crows, and Yellow-billed Kites and also saw Olive Bee-eaters, and a Madagascar Lark. We stopped briefly at a local paper-making factory, although not a factory in our understanding of the word, more of a cottage industry. The local people pound a tree bark into paper then add flower petals to the damp paper which is then hung on racks to dry before being made into notepaper, envelopes and various folders for photographs etc. A large male Oustalet's Chameleon was in a tree by the gift shop.

Continuing on we saw Malagasy Bulbuls, Hamerkops and more Cattle Egrets before arriving at Anja at 12.30. There is a notable change in the scenery as the highland rice paddies are left behind and lowland grass savanna takes over, fringed by massive granitic rock formations called inselbergs. Anja is a small community reserve which protects an increasing number of Ring-tailed Lemurs. The only predator here is the Ground Boa as the Fossa, an efficient lemur predator, does not occur here. As a result, the number of lemurs has increased dramatically.

The local community have turned this reserve into a very successful eco-tourism destination and have a tree planting operation in order to increase the forested area. We enjoyed an hour or so watching the lemurs in the trees as well as seeing Grey-headed Lovebirds, Oustalet's Chameleon, Rainbow Milkweed (Painted) Locusts, Flatid Leaf-bugs and Monarch butterflies.

After a picnic lunch at the edge of the reserve, we set out for the upscale Hotel de Roy passing dramatic domes on to the Horombe Plateau, an extensive dry grassland which is dotted with red earth termite mounds. We saw a Madagascar Lark and as we arrived at the hotel at dusk a Madagascan Nightjar flew overhead.

## Day 8

Monday 28th October

### Isalo

An early morning bird walk was arranged for three of the group in the hotel grounds, but unfortunately there was not much to see other than Crested Drongos, Common Mynas and a distant Yellow-billed Kite.

After breakfast we drove to pick up our guide Nirina and then started our walk to the Canyon des Makis. It turned out to be a very full-on walk, starting with seeing a number of interesting invertebrates on the trail including Snout Bugs, Praying Mantis and a Web-throwing Spider. We arrived at the picnic area which had a large group of Ring-tailed Lemurs. Many females had babies and we were entertained by their antics as they were beginning to venture off their mothers' backs, but not going too far! There were a pair of roosting Torotoroka Scops Owls, Bulbuls and a nesting Paradise Flycatcher, whose nest was full of babies.

In the surrounding scrub were large colonies of Flatid Bugs. Sadly, there is only one Verreaux's Sifaka left in this area and the large numbers of Red-fronted Brown Lemurs that were here two years ago have left and taken up residence elsewhere.

It was intensely hot, so the decision was made for most of the group to walk up to the viewpoint and the waterfall and then return to the hotel. On the way we had good views of the Benson's Rock Thrush (now considered to be the same species as the Forest Rock Thrush). After a demanding hike to the view point we were rewarded with spectacular views over the rugged plateau as well as seeing bizarre Elephant's Foot plants and the Isalo Aloe. Returning to the canyon, we continued to the waterfall where one member of the group had a swim. Returning to the hotel, Madagascan Hoopoe, a Malagasy Kestrel and a Malagasy Harrier were noted in the hotel grounds during the afternoon.

## Day 9

Tuesday 29th October

### Zombitse Forest

We left the Hotel Jardin du Roy early, in order to see the sapphire-mining town Ilakaka and local villagers panning for sapphires in the river. Once a small village but now a shanty town, mounds of earth from excavations straight down into the ground can be seen all along the side of the village - a dangerous and seemingly uncontrolled activity.

After leaving Ilakaka we proceeded to the Zombitse Forest, recording a Madagascan Lark, Common Mynas and Yellow-billed Kites on the way. This forest is a refreshing success story: after many years of exploitation it is now a national park and is monitored by the World Wide Fund for Nature. It is a western transition dry deciduous forest with a wealth of species. We spent a wonderful two hours wandering along small trails and enjoyed the sights of Common Jery, Cuckoo Roller, Paradise Flycatcher, Sickle-billed Vanga, Giant Coua, Crested Coua, Green-capped and Coquerel's Couas, White-browed Owl (also known as White-browed Hawk-Owl), Common Newtonia and a Lesser Vasa Parrot. Unfortunately, we did not see the Alpert's Tetraka, an endemic bird to this forest. However, we did see the Hubbard's Sportive Lemur, another endemic to this forest. This is a nocturnal species and can be seen resting in a tree hole where they tend to sit at the entrance during the heat of the day. Another endemic to this area was the Standing's Day Gecko, nicely sitting between two Baobab tree trunks. We also watched a family of Verreaux's Sifaka feeding up in the trees and saw a very large male Oustalet's

Chameleon; this is the largest chameleon species in Madagascar sometimes reaching a length of 60 centimetres! One snake was recorded a small Bernier's Striped Snake (Colubrid); Ant-lion 'saucers' dotted the ground and an Orange-tipped butterfly fluttered past us. Also, we saw some lovely flowering orchids.

We departed the Zombitse Forest at 10.45am, to continue to the D'Antsokay Arboretum where we had lunch by the pool while watching Olive Bee-eaters swooping across the pool for a drink, Red Fodys fluttering around in the trees, and Souimanga Sunbirds, with Magpie-Robins in attendance. We then enjoyed a conducted tour around the collection. This unique collection of spiny forest plants was set in 1980 by a Swiss botanist Herman Petignat; it encompasses 40 hectares with some 900 plants, many of them endangered. Today it works in collaboration with Kew Gardens, the Missouri Botanical Gardens and the World Wide Fund for Nature. During our informative tour we saw a nesting Green-capped Coua carrying nesting material as well as Magpie-Robins, Day Geckos, Spiny-backed Chameleons and captive Radiated and Spider Tortoises.

After leaving the arboretum we drove for another two hours to Toliara and then on to the beachfront Paradisier Hotel, passing a pair of Black-winged Stilts in a marshy area at the side of the road. That evening we had a night walk at the back of the hotel where there are easily seen Grey Mouse Lemurs. We spent an enjoyable hour watching their antics in scrub bush.

## Day 10

Wednesday 30th October

### Ifaty and Reniala

We left the hotel at 5am (after watching a Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bat return to roost in the reception-area roof) to visit the Reniala Reserve. This area of 0.57 square kilometres is comprised of native spiny forest and home to very interesting birds and plants. Top of the list is the Subdesert Mesite and the Long-tailed Ground Roller, both of which gave us excellent views during our excursion. A sub desert brush warbler was seen close by. We also saw a nesting Harrier, plus Sickle-billed Vanga and Hook-billed Vanga on nests. Other birds included Archbold's Newtonia, Running Coua, Magpie-Robins, Stripe-throated Jery, Namaqua Doves and of course Common Mynas, Yellow-billed Kites, Pied Crow, Crested Drongos and Paradise Flycatcher. There are also some spectacular baobab trees in the reserve, both Za Baobabs and Bottle Baobabs, some of them festooned in Sakalava Weaver nests. Both vanga nests were in the forks of baobab trees. There are also fine examples of Aloes, Kalanchoes and Elephant's Foot trees. We saw a number of reptiles including Three-eyed Lizards, Madagascar Girdled (also known as Plated) Lizards and two Big-eyed Snakes, and a Madagascar Giant Swallowtail.

There is also a project for rescued Ring-tailed Lemurs, some of which have now been released in the park; one that I saw last year which had a leg missing, this year had a baby which was good to see.

By 8.30am it was beginning to become seriously hot and we returned to the hotel for a late breakfast and were treated to watching bee-eaters swooping across the swimming pool for their breakfast drink of water from the pool. Whimbrels were seen at the water's edge on the beach.

At 4pm, after it had cooled down, we drove to nearby salt pans fringed by marshland. During the next two hours we recorded Kittlitz's and White-fronted Plovers, Common Sandpipers, White-fronted Rails, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Madagascar Coucal and Pied Crows and Common Mynas.

## Day 11

Thursday 31st October

### Anakoa and Nosy Ve

In the morning we left the hotel to drive to the jetty in Toliara. On the way we saw Lesser Flamingos and a single Great Frigatebird. We transferred to the boat by a series of zebu carts before departing for the island of Nosy Ve where we disembarked and walked across the island, seeing three Red-tailed Tropicbird nests on the way. We also saw a Madagascan Cisticola, Dimorphic Egrets and a Grey Heron.

This uninhabited island is sacred to the Vezo, the local fishing tribe so is an important breeding area for this tropicbird species which breeds nowhere else in Madagascar. Although there is now construction occurring, we were informed that it will be an interpretation centre and ticket office for visitors.

After leaving the island we transferred to the Safari Vezo resort. This resort is right on the beach and backed by sand dunes and scrub. A Littoral Rock Thrush was seen in this area. That evening, during our evening meal, a Grey Mouse Lemur was watched as it explored the wood beam ceiling looking for insects to eat.

## Day 12

Friday 1st November

### Travel to Tana

We left Safari Vezo on the boat at 10am to catch the plane to Tana; on the way we had day rooms at the Hotel Le Victory in Toliara, where we had lunch. After this we checked in for our flight which left 20 minutes ahead of the scheduled departure time! Couldn't see that happening in the UK!

We had a change of hotel for our night in Tana and stayed at the Relais des Plateaux. This is a nice hotel very close to the airport, although unfortunately, four of our rooms were being occupied by airline staff as 'day rooms' so some of us had to wait until 8pm before we could move in.

## Day 13

Saturday 2nd November

### Tolanga and Berenty

We had an early flight to Tolanga (Fort Dauphin), and the hotel arranged a full breakfast before we departed for the airport. On arrival we were met with a 4x4 and a minibus for the journey to Berenty. I think we all agreed that the road/track to Berenty was amongst the worse that we had been on! Nevertheless, we all arrived safely at Berenty at 1.30pm after seeing a Striated Heron and the usual Pied Crow, mynas and kites on the way. This privately owned reserve was saved from the extensive sisal operation which devastated an enormous amount of spiny forest. It is rich in wildlife and within the hour of arrival we were all treated to the sight of 'dancing' Verreaux's Sifakas on the red earth trails, followed by watching a group of Red-fronted Brown Lemurs which, sadly, were introduced into the forest by the owner's father in the 1980's. Now there is conflict between the more aggressive brown lemurs and the naturally occurring Ring-tailed Lemurs.

We also saw a sleeping White-footed Sportive Lemur as well as Broad-billed Rollers, Madagascar Turtle Doves, Namaqua Doves, Coucal, a Crested Drongo, a Thamnornis (also known as Subdesert Tetraka), a Common Jery

and, of course, kites! There were pens of confiscated endemic Radiated and Spider Tortoises and the critically endangered Madagascan Big-headed Turtle (a freshwater terrapin) and an indigenous Nile Crocodile.

That evening we had a night walk and watched Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs, a White-footed Sportive Lemur, a Spiny-backed Chameleon, roosting Paradise Flycatcher and Magpie-Robin and a White-browed Owl.

## Day 14

## Sunday 3rd November

### Berenty

After the rigours of the Canyon hike, Berenty was a delight, with wide flat easy walking trails and an abundance of wildlife. We enjoyed close encounters with Ring-tailed Lemurs, Red-fronted Brown Lemurs, Verreaux's Sifaka and a snoozing Sportive Lemur. On the bird front we saw Crested Coua, Paradise Flycatcher, Frances's Sparrowhawk, kites, Crested Drongo, Sakalava Weavers, Broad-billed Rollers and a resting White-browed Owl. Also, we saw a number of reptiles including two Dumeril's (Ground) Boas, Thick-tailed Day Geckos and Spiny-backed (Warty) Chameleons. Flatid Leaf-bugs, Huntsman Spider and a Forest Nymph butterfly were also seen. Then the highlight was to see a colony of Madagascar Flying Foxes (Fruit Bats). This colony has been here for many years but a few years ago abandoned their roosting site due to too much disturbance. However, the park authorities placed a ban on anybody going closer to their roosting trees than 100 metres. It worked, and the bats returned. Finally, we walked around a plant nursery where a whole number of species are propagated for replanting in new areas. By 12.30 it was becoming extremely hot, so we broke for lunch.

At 3pm we drove to an area of spiny forest, some 15 minutes drive away from the main reserve. It was a lovely piece of spiny forest with baobab trees decorated with weaver nests, and spectacular Octopus Trees. Starting with a roosting Scops Owl, we saw a sleeping Sportive Lemur and Grey Mouse Lemur as well as Crested Drongos, Grey-headed Lovebirds, two Madagascan Nightjars and a kestrel. We also noted a scorpion, centipede, Thick-tailed Day Geckos and of special interest (to me!) a Spider Tortoise; this species is an endemic to spiny forest and active early in the morning and when there is rain. This individual was found by following its tracks in the sand.

## Day 15

## Monday 4th November

### Berenty to Tana

At 5.15am some of the group went for an early bird walk and had a good view of a Frances's Sparrowhawk, two White-browed Owls, a colony of nesting Black-crowned Night Herons, Helmeted Guineafowl, Paradise Flycatchers, Malagasy Bulbuls, Namaqua Doves, Lesser Vasa Parrot and a sleeping White-footed Sportive Lemur.

After breakfast we left for the bone-jarring return to Toloarnaro, stopping at the Hotel Dauphin before departing for the airport for our flight back to Tana and then to the Hotel Combava.

During the drives we saw the usual Cattle Egrets, Hamerkops, Yellow-billed Kites, Common Mynas and Pied Crows.

## Day 16

Tuesday 5th November

### Mahajanga

We had a very early start as Air Madagascar changed the flight time to Mahajanga and to their credit the hotel provided us with a full breakfast at 4.45am, which was very good of them. Needless to say, by the time we checked in, the flight was delayed!

We were met at Mahajanga by a somewhat dilapidated bus and transferred to the Karibu Lodge. As we had arrived early, we had a free afternoon. So, after sorting out rooms we had a fast turn around and left for a boat trip to a coastal protected area called the Parc Phares on two boats. I had never been here before and was intrigued to see what we might see. We walked up to the beach restaurant, climbed a steep gravel slope and climbed aboard an old bus that looked as if it had come off the production line a couple of centuries ago! However, it chugged its way across some very nice palm savanna until we arrived at a degraded piece of coastal forest and there, we had a most enjoyable hour watching and photographing a family of Crowned Sifakas in a mango tree. Apparently, there is better forest further along the coast and I presume there is a corridor of forest to allow this group to move out of this degraded scrub when they wish to. We were also treated to a very close view of a nesting Paradise Flycatcher.

Returning to the beach-front restaurant in our 'chariot', we enjoyed a fresh grilled-fish lunch before retuning to our boats for a 'boat ride'! This ended up being a one-hour trip across the bay to the small mangrove island of Amprehilaba, another first for me.

We were able to see Lesser Flamingos, Common Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Striated Heron, Dimorphic Egrets, Glossy Ibis, Sacred Ibis and two endangered Bernier's Teal; after the Madagascan Pochard, this the second most endangered duck species in Madagascar. On the return journey Caspian Terns flew over our boats.

After this long adventure we all retired to the hotel for a well-earned dinner, preceded by a swim for some!

## Day 17

Wednesday 6th November

### Ampijoroa

We left the hotel at 7.30am to go to the Ampijoroa Forestry Station in the Akarafantsika National Park, a dry deciduous forest. On arrival at the station there was a group of Coquerel's Sifaka in the mango tree on the car park. As we had to split the group into two sets of accommodation, it necessitated shuttling of the group so we could eat together and enjoy the forest walks together; although a little frustrating, the system worked well.

After lunch we had a trip on the nearby Lake Ravelobe on a small flat-bottomed boat that potted around the lake. This is a great way to see the waterbirds on the lake, in particular the very rare Madagascan Fish Eagle which we all saw as well as kingfisher, a white morph of the Dimorphic Egret, Squacco Herons, Striated and Purple Heron, Broad-billed Rollers, Crested Drongos and Crocodiles. Lastly a White-throated Rail made an appearance on the shore where the boat moored.

During 1990's fishermen from outside the local community started fishing in the lake using nets, this resulted in a dramatic reduction of fish numbers and the crocodiles became extremely dangerous as their natural food

resource was significantly reduced. There were a number of horrific records of people being taken by crocodiles. However, the local community banded together and drove off these fishermen and now the situation has stabilized. On our return to the forestry station we saw Madagascar Hoopoe, White-headed and Sickle-billed Vangas, and a Madagascan Cuckooshrike. A most enjoyable afternoon.

At 6pm we left for a night walk at an area of scrubby forest outside the national park. It started well, with a view of a female Mongoose Lemur, a cathemeral species (seasonally nocturnal or diurnal) endemic to western dry forests. We were also fortunate to see a Golden-brown Mouse Lemur, an endemic to this forest. At least, I thought we had been fortunate until I noticed a piece of mango fruit next to the lemur and realised that it had been tempted in by the fruit! Nevertheless, it was good to see this rare animal. We also saw a Gunther's Leaf-tailed Gecko, another rarity but unfortunately it had lost its tail, so we didn't really see its leaf tail for which it is named. Many lizards and geckos can discard their tails as a defence method to avoid predation by such predators as snakes and birds. In addition to these sights we saw Brown Lemurs and a Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur and a sleeping Souimanga Sunbird.

## Day 18

Thursday 7th November

### Akarafantsika

The next day two of the group left for an early walk to find the Schlegel's Asity and were rewarded with a lovely view of this pretty bird. At 7.30am the group left for a morning walk in the forest and were very lucky to see a pair of active Mongoose Lemurs with a baby. In the many years that I have been to this forest, I have only once seen Mongoose Lemurs so active at this time of the day. During the walk we watched Brown Lemurs, Coquerel's Sifaka, sleeping Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemurs and Western Woolly (Avahi) Lemurs.

We spent a hot challenging hour trying to get good views and photographs of the rare Van Dam's Vanga, some more successful than others! We also saw Red-capped and Crested Couas, Paradise Flycatchers, Bulbuls, Cuckoo Roller, Souimanga Sunbird, Sakalava Weavers, Sickle-billed Vanga and Magpie-Robins. Reptiles included Spiny-tailed Iguanids, Girdled Lizards, Koch's Giant Day Gecko, and a Madagascar Hog-nosed (also called Menarana) Snake.

Hot and thirsty we returned for lunch at the park restaurant. Towards the end of lunch one of our group (you know who you are!) became almost delirious with excitement when a Cuckoo Roller was spied roosting in a tree just next to the restaurant. It was excellent to see this bird species so close and we all shared the excitement.

After lunch we had an afternoon walk to the well-known baobab trees the other side of the lake where, as well as the baobabs, we saw another species of menerana snake, a kestrel and Cattle Egrets. On our return two of the group went back into the forest for a successful view of White-breasted Mesites. A pair were seen; this is not an easy species to see as it lives on the ground and is somewhat secretive.

We were to have another morning in the forest but received a message that Air Madagascar had changed the flight time again, which necessitated an early morning departure, 4.30am!

## Day 19

Friday 8th November

### Antananarivo

We were to have another morning in the forest but received a message that Air Madagascar had changed the flight time again, which necessitated an early morning departure, 4.30am! We arrived in Tana at 12.30 after a flight delay, dropped off our bags and left for a visit to the nearby craft market. After which we returned to the hotel for our evening meal.

## Day 20

Saturday 9th November

### Andasibe/Mantadia/Voimma

After a gruelling five-and-a-half hour drive, due to the condition of the road and heavy lorry traffic, we arrived at Andasibe. Needless to say we saw Cattle Egrets, mynas, Hamerkop, Kestrel, Madagascar Kingfisher, a Yellow-billed Egret, Madagascar Stonechat and a Madagascar Buzzard. We arrived at the reserve entrance and went straight to lunch at the Feon y Ala restaurant. This restaurant is situated right adjacent to the National Park forest and often has interesting birds to see around the restaurant, and it proved to be the case today as we saw a stunning Blue Vanga, Malagasy White-eye, Oxylabes, Malagasy Bulbul, Malagasy Coucal, Madagascar Starling and a Chabert Vanga. Brown-throated Martins flew around the lake

After finishing our lunch, we met up with our guide Maurice who took us into the community managed forest of Voimma. A good start was to see a Tylas Vanga by its nest hole in a tree with a brood of at least two young, and a Madagascar Green Pigeon. We found a family of Indri but fairly high in the trees as they were settling down for the night. However, it was our first sight of this Madagascar flagship lemur species. After leaving the Indri, we had a wonderful sight of a Madagascar Ibis (also known as Crested Ibis) and well as two nests. Also seen was a Parson's Chameleon female, Common Brown Lemurs and a White-throated Rail.

## Day 21

Sunday 10th November

### Mantadia

Today we visited the Mantadia forest. We left early in the morning in two 4x4's and one extraordinary Russian pick-up. Two sofa armchairs had been placed in the back of the vehicle, arguably making it the most comfortable of the three vehicles that we had. After an hour and a half bumping along an earth 'road', we arrived at this lovely pristine forest. Within minutes we were treated to seeing a Paradise Flycatcher on her nest at a little bridge that crossed the river, quickly followed by watching a Blue Coua hunting insects and small reptiles through the trees. As at Ranomafana, I was stuck on how dry the forest was – again, no rain for a couple of weeks.

We then had a very nice 30 minutes watching a family of Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs, the parents and a small young one. Of interest is that Ruffed Lemur mothers make a nest of twigs rather than carrying her babies as other lemur species do; the infant will spend up to three weeks in the nest before the mother moves the baby out to accompany her in foraging for food. After this encounter we came across two Diademed Sifakas, arguably one of the prettiest of the sifaka species. We spent an enjoyable 45 minutes watching and photographing the sifakas before making our way to a nearby lake. This is an interesting lake as it used to be a large mine for graphite extraction but was abandoned in the 1990's; it has been reclaimed by nature, filling up with rainwater,

and is now an attractive lake with waterlilies and waterbirds. We saw Common Moorhens, a kingfisher, a pair of Madagascan Grebes, a Lesser Vasa Parrot, and two Red-billed Teal. At the lakeside we saw a Madagascan Spinetail, Mascarene Martins, a kestrel, Malagasy Brush Warbler and a Madagascan Mannikin. At lunchtime we watched Olive Bee-eaters, a Chabert Vanga, Crested Drongo, Coucal, a brush warbler and a Spectacled Tetraka, Madagascan Starling and Souimanga Sunbird.

That evening we had night walk along the road where the highlight was seeing a Crossley's Dwarf Lemur. We also recorded a Short-nosed Chameleon and a stick insect. It was so disappointing not to see any frogs which are usually abundant; it must have been because it was so dry.

## Day 22

Monday 11th November

### Andasibe

Today was our last day in Ankarafantsika and we spent it in the main reserve of Andasibe. The highlight of the morning was watching a family of Indri while listening to other groups calling in the distance. After enjoying the Indri for about an hour we continued our walk and saw more Diademed Sifaka, Common Brown Lemurs, a pair of Collared Nightjars roosting in the leaf litter, Madagascar Wood Rails, Tylas Vanga, Lined Day Geckos, Broad-tailed Girdled lizards, a Tree Boa and finally Grey Bamboo Lemurs and a roosting Rainforest Scops Owl.

## Day 23

Tuesday 12th November

We had an early departure to return to Tana, in preparation for our afternoon flight back to Addis Ababa and onwards to London, where we landed on the Wednesday morning.

## Day 24

Wednesday 13th November

And so that ends the trip back in London. It was an excellent tour and we really did see the Best of Madagascar, although of course there is always more to see!

We recorded a total of:

30 Mammal species;

5 Amphibian species (less than I would have hoped, almost certainly due to the dry conditions in the rainforests);

44 Reptile species;

122 Bird species;

38 Invertebrate species.

## Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Charles Randrianantenaina our co leader from Eco Tours, his constant good humour and great knowledge on all aspects of Madagascar was a most stimulating part of the tour.

To all the many guides within Madagascar and to all the many drivers and their assistance, my sincere thanks.

Finally to all the participants of the tour whose constant good humour and deep interest in not just the wildlife but the people of Madagascar was hugely uplifting.

## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																		
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Cheirogaleidae</b>																					
1	Grey Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>								✓	✓	✓		✓							
2	Grey-brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus griseorufus</i>											✓								
3	Golden-brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus ravelobensis</i>															✓				
4	Rufous Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>			✓	✓															
5	Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogalus medius</i>															✓				
6	Crossley's Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>																			✓
<b>Lepilemuridae</b>																					
7	Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur edwardsi</i>															✓				
8	Zombitse Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur hubbardorum</i>							✓												
9	White-footed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur leucopus</i>											✓	✓	✓						
10	Red Tailed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur ruficaudatus</i>																	✓		
11	Grey Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur griseus griseus</i>																			✓
12	Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur aureus</i>			✓																
13	Greater Bamboo Lemur	<i>Prolemur simus</i>				✓															
14	Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>					✓			✓											
15	Common Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>															✓	✓		✓	✓
16	Red-fronted Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur rufifrons</i>											✓	✓	✓						
17	Mongoose Lemur	<i>Eulemer mongoz</i>															✓	✓			
18	Southern Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata editorum</i>			✓																✓
<b>Indridae</b>																					
19	Western Woolly Lemur	<i>Avahi occidentalis</i>													✓			✓			
20	Verreaux's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>						✓					✓	✓	✓						
21	Crowned Sifaka	<i>Propithecus coronatus</i>														✓					
22	Coquerel's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus coquereli</i>															✓	✓			
23	Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>																		✓	✓
24	Milne-Edwards' Sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>				✓															
25	Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>																		✓	✓



	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																			
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
21	Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>																✓				
22	Lined Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata bifasciata</i>	✓		✓																	✓
23	Lined Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata lineata</i>			✓														✓			
24	Koch's Giant Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma madagascariensis kochi</i>														✓	✓					
25	Thick-tail Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma mutabilis</i>							✓				✓									
26	Standing's Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>							✓													
27	Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>	✓															✓				
28	a House Gecko	<i>Gehyra mutilata</i>	✓																			
29	Gold-spotted Mabuya	<i>Trachylepis (Mabuya) aureopunctata</i>								✓												
30	Elegant Mabuya	<i>Trachylepis (Mabuya) elegans</i>			✓									✓								
31	Broad-tailed Girdled Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus laticaudatus</i>																✓				✓
32	Madagascar Girdled Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus madagascariensis</i>									✓					✓	✓		✓			
33	Ornate Girdled Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus ornatus</i>							✓													
<b>Snakes</b>																						
34	Big-eyed Snake	<i>Mimophis mahafalensis</i>									✓											
35	Bernier's Striped Snake	<i>Dromicodryas bernieri</i>								✓										✓		
36	Madagascar Tree Boa	<i>Sanzinia madagascariensis</i>		✓	✓																	✓
37	Dumeril's Boa	<i>Acrantophis dumerili</i>												✓								
38	Malagasy Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon madagascariensis</i>																	✓			
39	Blonde Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon modestus</i>																	✓			
40	Golden Collared Snake	<i>Liophidium rhodogaster</i>						✓														
<b>Turtles &amp; Tortoises (c = Captive)</b>																						
41	Spider Tortoise	<i>Pyxis arachnoides</i>								c				c	✓							
42	Radiated Tortoise	<i>Geochelone radiata</i>								c				c								
43	Madagascan Big-headed Turtle	<i>Erymnochelys madagascariensis</i>												c								
<b>Others.</b>																						
44	Nile Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>																✓				

### Birds (\* = Island Endemic; \*\* = Regional Endemic)

	Common name	Scientific name																					
1	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>												✓	✓								
2	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>																		✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																		
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>	✓													✓					
4	Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	✓																		
5	Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>	✓	✓																	
6	Bernier's Teal*	<i>Anas bernieri</i>												✓							
7	Collared Nightjar*	<i>Gactornis enarratus*</i>																			✓
8	Madagascar Nightjar*	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>						✓						✓							
9	Madagascar Spinetail*	<i>Zonavena grandidieri</i>																			✓
10	Malagasy Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus gracilis</i>																			
11	Malagasy Black Swift*	<i>Apus balstoni</i>	✓																		
12	Malagasy Coucal**	<i>Centropus toulou</i>	✓		✓					✓			✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
13	Crested Coua*	<i>Coua cristata</i>							✓				✓				✓	✓			
14	Blue Coua*	<i>Coua caerulea</i>		✓	✓																✓
15	Red-capped Coua*	<i>Coua ruficeps</i>																	✓		
16	Green-capped Coua*	<i>Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps</i>							✓									✓			
17	Coquerel's Coua*	<i>Coua coquereli</i>							✓	✓		✓									
18	Running Coua*	<i>Coua cursor</i>								✓		✓									
19	Giant Coua*	<i>Coua gigas</i>							✓					✓							
20	White-breasted Mesite*	<i>Mesitornis variegatus</i>																	✓		
21	Subdesert Mesite*	<i>Monias benschi</i>								✓											
22	Rock Dove [Feral]	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	✓																		
23	Malagasy Turtle Dove*	<i>Nesoenas picturatus</i>						✓				✓									
24	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>								✓		✓	✓								
25	Madagascar Green Pigeon*	<i>Treron australis</i>																		✓	
26	Madagascar Wood Rail*	<i>Canirallus kiolooides</i>																			✓
27	White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>									✓					✓			✓	✓	
28	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓																		✓
29	Madagascar Grebe*	<i>Tachybaptus pelzelinii</i>																			✓
30	Lesser Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus minor</i>										✓			✓				✓		
31	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>							✓												
32	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>							✓		✓										
33	Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>								✓									✓		
34	White-fronted Plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus</i>								✓											

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																			
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
35	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>								✓		✓										
36	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>								✓												
37	Madagascan Snipe*	<i>Gallinago macrodactyla</i>		✓																		
38	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>													✓							
39	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>								✓					✓							
40	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>									✓				✓							
41	Red-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubicauda</i>									✓											
42	Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>									✓											
43	Malagasy Sacred Ibis**	<i>Threskiornis bernieri</i>													✓							
44	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>												✓								
45	Madagascan Ibis*	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>																			✓	
46	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓												✓							
47	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>											✓		✓	✓						
48	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	✓													✓					✓	
49	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓			✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
50	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>									✓											
51	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>				✓										✓						
52	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓																			
53	Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>	✓																			
54	Yellow-billed Egret	<i>Ardea brachyrhyncha</i>			✓																	
55	Dimorphic Egret	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>	✓	✓							✓	✓			✓	✓						
56	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>																				✓
57	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	✓				✓							✓							✓	
58	Madagascan Harrier-Hawk*	<i>Polyboroides radiatus</i>														✓						
59	Frances's Sparrowhawk*	<i>Accipiter francesiae</i>												✓	✓							
60	Madagascan Sparrowhawk*	<i>Accipiter madagascariensis</i>									✓											
61	Malagasy Harrier**	<i>Circus macroscelus</i>						✓		✓						✓						
62	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
63	Madagascan Fish Eagle*	<i>Haliaeetus vociferoides</i>														✓						
64	Madagascan Buzzard*	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>				✓			✓												✓	✓
65	Torotoroka Scops Owl*	<i>Otus madagascariensis</i>						✓						✓								
66	Rainforest Scops Owl*	<i>Otus rutilus</i>																				✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																			
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
67	White-browed Owl*	<i>Athene superciliaris</i>							✓				✓	✓	✓							
68	Cuckoo Roller*	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>			✓	✓		✓									✓					
69	Madagascar Hoopoe*	<i>Upupa marginata</i>						✓								✓	✓					
70	Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>							✓			✓	✓			✓	✓				✓	
71	Pitta-like Ground Roller*	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>			✓																	
72	Long-tailed Ground Roller*	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>								✓												
73	Malagasy Kingfisher*	<i>Corythornis vintsioides</i>		✓		✓			✓							✓		✓	✓	✓		
74	Olive Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓													
75	Malagasy Kestrel*	<i>Falco newtoni</i>	✓	✓				✓				✓		✓					✓	✓		✓
76	Lesser Vasa Parrot*	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>							✓	✓			✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓
77	Grey-headed Lovebird*	<i>Agapornis canus</i>					✓		✓	✓		✓										
78	Schlegel's Asity*	<i>Philepitta schlegeli</i>																✓				
79	Hook-billed Vanga*	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>								✓												
80	Van Dam's Vanga*	<i>xenopirostris damii</i>																✓				
81	Pollen's Vanga*	<i>xenopirostris polleni</i>				✓																
82	Sickle-billed Vanga*	<i>Falcula palliata</i>							✓	✓	✓					✓	✓					
83	White-headed Vanga*	<i>Artamella viridis</i>														✓						
84	Chabert Vanga*	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>			✓																	✓
85	Blue Vanga*	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>																			✓	
86	Rufous Vanga*	<i>Schetba rufa</i>			✓																	
87	Tylas Vanga*	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>				✓																✓
88	Common Newtonia*	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓												
89	Archbold's Newtonia*	<i>Newtonia archboldi</i>								✓												
90	Madagascar Cuckooshrike*	<i>Cebblepyris cinereus</i>															✓					
91	Crested Drongo**	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	
92	Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher**	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	
93	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>					✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓							
94	Madagascar Lark*	<i>Eremopterix hova</i>		✓			✓		✓													
95	Malagasy Bulbul**	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	
96	Mascarene Martin**	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>																				✓
97	Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	✓																	✓		
98	Malagasy Brush Warbler**	<i>Nesillas typica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓																✓



	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																		
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	Madagascan Orange Tip	<i>Colotis evanthe*</i>							✓	✓											
8	Broad-bordered Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema brigitta pulchella</i>						✓													
9	Malagasy Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema floricola</i>																			
10	Yellow painted copper white	<i>Lycaenidae sp.</i>										✓	✓								
11	Common Zebra Blue	<i>Leptotes pirthous</i>	✓																		
12	Hairstreak'	<i>Saribia tepahi*</i>				✓							✓								
13	Madagascan Forest Nymph	<i>Aterica rabena*</i>				✓							✓								
14	African Monarch or Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>					✓														
15	Madagascar leopard	<i>Phalanta phalantha</i>									✓	✓									
16	Brilliant Blue	<i>Junonia rhadama*</i>						✓	✓				✓								
17	Commodor	<i>Precis eurodoce</i>	✓																		
18	Madagascar Beauty	<i>Salamis anteva</i>						✓													
19	Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sp.</i>		✓																	

## Other Invertebrates:

1	Dragonfly (Red)	<i>Trithemis selika</i>	✓				✓														
2	Dragonfly	<i>Theremthemis madagascariensis</i>	✓																		
3	Rainbow Milkweed Locust	<i>Phymateus saxosus</i>					✓	✓													
4	Praying Mantis	<i>Polyspilota sp.</i>						✓													
5	Hissing Cockroach	<i>Gromphadorhina portentosa</i>								✓		✓	✓								
6	Cicada (large)	<i>Tibicinidae sp.</i>																		✓	
7	Ant-lion sp.	-										✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
8	Stick Insect	-																			✓
9	Flatid Leaf-bug	<i>Phromnia rosea</i>					✓	✓					✓								
10	Snout Bug or Flat-backed Weevil	<i>Zanna tenebrosa</i>						✓													
11	Giraffe-necked Weevil	<i>Trachelophorus giraffa</i>			✓	✓															
12	Giant Centipede	<i>Scolopendra c.f. subspinipes</i>										✓									
13	Large Black Millipede	-			✓	✓															
14	Madagascar Golden Orb-web Spider	<i>Nephila madagascariensis*</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓															
15	Thorn Spider (Yellow / Black)	<i>Gasteracanthinae sp.</i>		✓	✓																
16	"Huntsman" Spider	<i>Holconia sp.</i>											✓								
17	Darwin's Bark Spider	<i>Caerostris darwini*</i>																		✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																				
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
18	Web-casting Spider	<i>Deinopis sp.</i>						✓															
19	Scorpion	<i>Opisthacanthus madagascariensis</i>												✓									

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