

# The Best of Madagascar

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th October – 8th November 2022

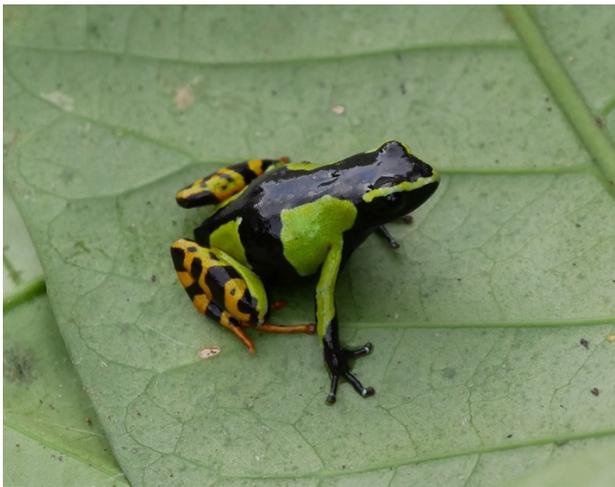
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Olive Bee-eater



Coquerel's Sifaka



Baron's Mantella Frog



Benson's Rock Thrush

Tour report and images by Keith Buchanan



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Tour participants: Keith Buchanan and Parson Andrianirina (Leaders) with 10 Naturetrek clients

## Days 1 and 2

## Monday 17th & Tuesday 18th October

Our adventure began at London's Heathrow Terminal 2, when the group boarded the flight to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The flight was on time, and we got into Addis with a couple of hours to spare before our on-going flight to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. In the event we were rather glad of this two hours as there was rather a long queue to go through security, even for transit passengers. Arriving in Tana on Tuesday 18th, we went through security yet again before meeting up with Parson, our local guide.

Money changed, we boarded our bus for the short drive to the hotel. The hotel was calm and peaceful, in stark contrast to the busy road outside. After settling in, we decided to have a quick look around the hotel garden and then at the rice paddies opposite. The first part of our plan was straightforward as we mulled over the colour variation found in the male Madagascan Fody, then spotted two Night Herons roosting quietly high in a tree. Out on the roadside we waited patiently for a gap in the traffic – which never came. Parson then resorted to the local tactic – he strode purposefully out into the road and held up his hand to stop the on-coming traffic, with all the authority of a traffic policeman. And it worked. From the edge of the rice paddy we scanned, noting the Mascarene Martins, Black Swifts and overflying Cattle Egrets. In the middle of the paddy, a Great White Egret walked slowly in its menacing way. The ubiquitous Indian Mynahs flew overhead.

Flagging now, we headed back to the hotel for some downtime before reconvening before dinner. There we held a briefing, going through an outline of the trip, things to watch out for in terms of staying safe and healthy etc, then settled down for our first dinner of the trip. Having been on a plane the previous night we retired early to bed.

## Day 3

## Wednesday 19th October

After breakfast we set off to brave the traffic of Tana once more. Although the journey was slow, the city is bustling and colourful, with squadrons of small motorbikes and bicycles jostling for road space with minibuses, tuk-tuks, bicycle rick-shaws etc. Our first stop was at Tsarasaotra Lake, an oasis in the midst of this busy city. We were greeted with a lake bursting with life. Large rafts of Red-billed Teal and White-faced Whistling Ducks were scattered over the open water, or sitting on logs. The island in the middle of the lake was alive with Great White and Dimorphic Egrets along with Black and Black-crowned Night Herons. A Malagasy Kingfisher obligingly landed on a log nearby. Further along the shore we began to pick out Hottentot Teal amongst the Red-billed Teal and overhead, a Yellow-billed Kite circled lazily.

We worked our way around the lakeshore, stopping to try and find a calling Malagasy White-eye and Malagasy Hoopoe. We failed to spot either but were intrigued by the call of the Hoopoe, very different from the familiar 'hoop-hoop-hoop' of the European species. As we scanned, one of the group spotted a 'different' heron, which turned out to be a Humblot's Heron. An excited alert from Parson alerted us to two large dark ducks swimming backwards and forwards in front of the island – these were Meller's Duck, a species that sadly is declining. At regular intervals we would pick up a Black Heron 'umbrella fishing', when it hunches over the water with spread wings, perhaps to see their prey better, or even lure them into the shade.

Moving on, we drove south until we reached the town of Ambatolampy. Here we visited our restaurant in order to pre-order our food. This turned out to be a rather confused and protracted process – not surprising given the mix of English, French and Malagasy being deployed. Having done that, we went to visit a local workshop where Aluminium was being recycled into pots and pans and decorative items. In the fierce heat of the workshop we watched as a pot was made. We were not sure that all Health and Safety rules were being fully deployed but we were certainly fascinated by the skill and speed on display. Afterwards we viewed the items for sale and some purchases were made and we were glad that we had made some small contribution to the local economy.

Back at the restaurant, we were treated to a gargantuan meal, following which we gratefully staggered back into the minibus to recover. We continued south through the highlands where the rice paddies were being prepared for the coming rain and so it was dark when we arrived at our hotel in Antsirabe, where many of us dined rather lightly after our amazing lunch.

## Day 4

## Thursday 20th October

We left Antsirabe and continued heading south. We stopped by some rice paddies to watch a man working the field with two Zebu cattle. And, as is often the case, we started noticing other things as well. Off to the right, a Hammerkop stood on the embankment, seemingly watching the proceedings. Along the roadside, a pale morph Madagascar Kestrel sat at the top of a tree, scanning the ground below. Mascarene Martins sat on some spindly vegetation, giving us a better view than on the wing. A lone Olive Bee-eater swooped about on the other side of the road, but by then it was time to move on.

Our next stop, just beyond a cutting, produced lovely views of the Bee-eaters as they were nesting in holes on the steep face of the cutting and were coming and going regularly. A call of ‘sunbird’ brought us a little further along the road where we were tantalised by the rapid coming and going of a pair of Souimanga Sunbirds. Good views of both were eventually obtained.

Our lunch stop was at Ambositra and, again, we pre-ordered at a restaurant then headed off to see the wood carving workshop. We had a demonstration of carving with a chisel, and also some more delicate work, before entering the showroom – a treasure trove of intricately carved goodies. One fascinating detail was that the equipment used to cut the more delicate work had been made from recycling bits of an old bed frame and an old tyre. Impressive recycling! We lunched outdoors, but not before finding and photographing a Peacock Day Gecko and tiny *Heterixalis* Tree Frog, both occupying one of the decorative plants at the restaurant.

Our next stop was at Ankazomivady, a protected area, and we stopped above a small lake. Here, with the assistance of a protected area staff member, we got views of the Madagascar Snipe, another endemic. It zig-zagged dramatically from one side of the lake to the other, disappearing on landing in typical snipe fashion. We were just about to leave the site when a movement high in the trees was spotted. After much peering, this turned out to individuals of two lemur species: Red-fronted Brown Lemur and Red-bellied Lemur – our first lemurs of the trip!

By now it was getting late but one more drama was to come. In the dark, as we drove along, the headlights picked out a Fossa which had been about to cross the road. Despite searching with a torch, it could not be relocated and, sadly, only Parson, our local guide had seen it. Soon afterwards we arrived at our hotel in Ranomafama, to partake of dinner and bed after a long day.

## Day 5

Friday 21st October

We started our exploration of the Ranomafana National Park with a walk from the Park centre. As we entered the rain forest environment, we could sense the change in humidity as well as experiencing the rich growth all around us. We listened to the songs of Magpie Robin and Souimanga Sunbird as we ascended and descended the often steep paths. Alerted by one of the scouts who accompanied us as well as the local guide we crept quietly to observe the lovely Golden Bamboo lemurs. Although aware of our presence they were unconcerned and continued to feed and interact with each other. Not long after we managed great views of Red-fronted Brown lemurs followed by Red-bellied lemurs.

As we progressed around the trail, we were diverted to visit a troop of Milne-Edwards Sifakas. This involved some steep climbing but what a reward. A mixed group were feeding high in the trees. Some were feeding. A mother with a youngster was fending off another adult trying to handle her baby. Others were playing or grooming: a fascinating experience.

A further diversion led us to the only Greater Bamboo lemur left in the park. Although it was sleeping, we did manage to see its tufted ears – a key identification feature. Our final lemur of the morning was a very active group of Grey Bamboo lemurs. Some were making spectacular jumps through the foliage, and generally making life difficult for those trying to take photos.

Not content with just lemurs, we also spotted a number of stick insects despite their amazing camouflage, but the prize for camouflage went to the amazing Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko, all but indistinguishable from the dead leaf on which it was sitting. As we headed back for lunch, another real treat was finding the truly bizarre Giraffe-necked Weevil: what a morning!

In the afternoon we visited another part of the park. As we started along the footpath, a huge spider sat in the middle of a web. This was a sub species of the more widespread Golden Orb spider and at the base of the huge web, keeping out of the way of the huge female, were two tiny males. Tiptoeing past this, we enjoyed the walk through the forest. Highlights were various species of frog, either in the river or sitting on logs, a large chameleon and a female Paradise Flycatcher which came to have a good look at us. As it grew dark, we did a night walk along the road. Almost immediately we spotted others with torches and had great views of two diminutive Rufous Mouse Lemurs. As we worked our way along the road we found several species of chameleon resting on branches not far above the ground. They ranged in size from the tiny to the chunky and sat still obligingly as we photographed them. By then dinner was calling and we headed back to the hotel. We had seen six of the seven diurnal species and one of the six nocturnal lemur species – a spectacular day.

## Day 6

Saturday 22nd October

Another early start today, and we headed out into the park while it was still cool. Along the roadside we picked up a pair of Pollen's Vangas calling and chasing each other through the treetops. While standing there we also enjoyed good views of sunbirds and Magpie Robin for example. Further along the road a calling Hook-billed Vanga toyed with us as it darted in and out of sight.

On entering an open area within the Park, a small bird singing on a nearby tree – a Stripe-throated Jery continued singing and indeed was still singing when we re-passed it several hours later. Because of the open view, we were also able to pick out a Madagascar Cuckoo-roller which was performing a display flight, with strikingly lowered wings, above the clearing. In this clearing we also found both male and female Giraffe-necked Weevils; the female was chewing through the stem of a leaf which she would then fold up on the ground around a single egg. Later, we were excited to find that she had indeed done this and we located the tiny packet containing her precious cargo underneath the vegetation.

Moving on, a highlight was the discovery of a Tylas nest. The female was coming in surreptitiously with food then sitting on the nest, with just her head and tail protruding. Following this, the small movements in the ground vegetation betrayed the presence of a Madagascar Flufftail – a little rail, but with our best endeavours we could not get more than a glimpse of it, even when it dashed frantically across the path.

Then it was back in the bus for the short trip down to the National Park Centre, where some of the group bought vanilla. Our final stop of the morning was opposite some houses at a bend in the road. The message had got to our guide that there was a snake. Indeed, there was, but two not one. They were both Madagascar Tree Boas and both were curled up sleeping under vegetation. With their green pattern they were virtually invisible. Then we returned to the hotel for lunch and a break before our next outing.

After a short siesta we headed back up the hill to the Vohiparara region. On the way we stopped to admire the magnificent waterfall. On the damp slope on the other side of the road, a small Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog croaked amiably at us, at eye level. A little further down, an O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon peered at us from a low branch. Later, we parked at a bridge, but no sooner were we out of the vehicle when one of the scouts beckoned us over. He carefully laid some large leaves on the ground and popped onto it one of the amazing Baron's Mantella frogs. Closely resembling the poison dart frogs of South America (but not related), it was a kaleidoscope of colour, both on the upper and lower side, and was a fitting end to our stay at Ranomafana National Park.

## Day 7

**Sunday 23rd October**

Setting off early, we first stopped just outside our hotel to admire the waterfall. It was a stunning view and we all took pictures while being wooed by the vanilla sellers. The familiar tones of a Stripe-necked Jery floated over the valley on this lovely bright morning. Then off we headed south west into the central highlands.

We passed through the town of Fianarantsoa, famous for its early development of schooling and subsequent production of lawyers, judges etc. Our next stop was in Ambalavao, at the silk factory. Here we learned that two sources of silk were used locally. One was the conventional method of silk production but the other used wild silkworms which fed on the leaves of the native *Tapia* trees. In this case the silk was gathered after the larvae had hatched, then boiled with soap made using zebu fat. The end products in the shop were very alluring and at least one purchase was made. This was quickly followed up by a visit to the paper factory. This was in fact a small scale operation using the wood from a local tree in an ancient technique of Arab origin. As it happened, it was closed but the yard was accessible, and Parson stepped into the breach to give us a potted version of the paper production. The end results were items like envelopes, which had real flowers embedded in them.

Before lunch we arrived at the community reserve at Anja. This was a remarkable story, and a good news story in terms of biodiversity. Ring-tailed Lemurs had been in the area but had declined significantly by the mid-nineties due to felling of the Lilac trees on which they depended. The community decided to reverse this on the expectation that their income from visitors would be raised. So they stopped felling and started replanting, in 1999. The end result was that they now have about 400 lemurs and 14,000 visitors a year producing a very significant community income.

As the lemurs are not hunted, they are relatively unafraid. As a result, with our guide Victor, we had wonderful viewings, particularly of mothers with young. A large, dark male Oustelet's Chameleon proceeded along a branch, doing its characteristic backwards and forwards motion. Later, finding a small bright green chameleon, we discovered that this was the female of the species.

Reluctantly we left Anja and drove across the flat land towards Isalo. We learnt that this great vista, now the haunt of herds of Zebu, and village crops, had once been dry deciduous forest, of the sort we would see on the following day. With that to look forward to we reached our comfortable hotel and dinner; but not before a White-browed Owl had been spotted in the hotel grounds.

## Day 8

## Monday 24th October

Our first stop this morning was to pick up our guide, Peter, in Ranohira ready for our exploration of the Isalo National Park. We made our way gingerly down a rutted road and parked at the entrance. We entered the park in single file along a narrow track. We stopped to look at the Pandanus, of which two species were present. The fruits are not edible except by bush pigs. A male Oustelet's Chameleon climbed up a tree beside the path. Overhead, the Madagascar Cisticola recited its characteristic 'zeep zeep zeep' in flight before disappearing back into the vegetation.

The valley sides rose steeply above us, with parallel beds of sandstone rising to the summit. We learnt how the local tribe used to bury their dead in caves in this sandstone. The first internment was temporary – two or three years – then the bones were removed, the deceased was celebrated, and the bones moved to a permanent resting place in another cave.

On reaching the camping place we sat down for a rest but almost immediately a troop of Ring-tailed Lemurs came parading through, tails raised vertically, and began exploring and socialising. After watching them for some time we began to explore more widely. Across the valley, a Chabert's Vanga showed briefly, its pale belly contrasting with the dark blue back. Madagascar Paradise Flycatchers hopped about in the low bushes along with Magpie Robins. An early highlight was a lovely male Benson's Rock Thrush, blue-grey above and with a rufous belly.

While one member of the party walked up to the waterfall, the rest remained in the same area, looking for lemurs. Our guide soon found a Red-fronted Brown Lemur and we climbed up a short slope to view it. As we stood there, it came down through the vegetation and passed by some of us no more than a metre away, chattering all the while; a wonderful experience. A Madagascar Coucal flew towards it, perhaps looking for left-overs, but it was chased away by the lemur.

Further back in the site, a roosting White-browed Owl had been found and we made our way up through difficult vegetation to try and see it. Typically, it was high up and partially obscured, but most, finally were able to pick it out, particularly when it peered down at us with its dark eyes. But another Owl had been found – a Madagascar Scops Owl, brown morph. This little owl had secreted itself in a Pandanus so that only its face and a little of its body were visible: even trickier to pick out!

By then it was time to start moving back to the vehicle, stopping to examine a little lizard – a Madagascar Swift – before getting back to the hotel and a somewhat late lunch.

Later in the afternoon we went for a stroll around the beautiful hotel grounds. Up on top of the rocks, enjoying the late afternoon sun, Dumeril's Madagascar Swifts (a type of lizard) were basking. High on a pandanus a Broad-billed Roller surveyed proceedings. Olive Bee-eaters flew back and forth. On our way back, high on a crag, a single Greater Vasa Parrot was perched, and we got a brief glimpse of the Lesser Vasa Parrot as it flew from a nest. As we got back the light was beginning to fade, bringing to an end another eventful day.

## Day 9

## Tuesday 25th October

This morning it was back down the N7, south west, towards Toliara. Our first stop was at Zombitse National Park. Here our local guide took us through this important area of dry deciduous forest. As we moved along the path, he pointed out a nearly invisible nocturnal gecko which was sheltering in a tree hole – just its toes clasping the edge gave the game away. Later, we found the beautiful Standing's Day Gecko, with its delicate pattern of spots overlaying a bright green background.

Overhead, for much of this walk, the piercing calls of a Cuckoo-roller could be heard, often as it undertook its spectacular display flight – gliding with lowered wings. When it landed, we could see the massive head and beak. Further on, we had evidence that this bird was a formidable predator of chameleons when we found the remains of the latter wedged in a branch fork, with only the head remaining.

One of the first birds encountered was the impressive Giant Coua. We followed the calls of this stately bird, pushing through thorny vegetation to eventually catch up with it in the mid-canopy. This pheasant sized Coua – the largest of the Couas – sported the same blue facial skin of its congeners. We followed it with some difficulty as it hopped from tree to tree, calling as it went. Not long after, we encountered the lovely Crested Coua, with its Ziggy Stardust look, as it also moved in mid-canopy. Both of these birds were carrying nesting material in anticipation of the coming wet season. Finally, we had a fleeting glimpse of the smaller Coquerel's Coua as it dashed across the path on some secret mission.

In between these Coua encounters we had delightful time with the dainty Verreaux's Sifaka. These endearing lemurs came down the tree trunk to eye height to have a good look at us, giving wonderful photographic opportunities. They were strikingly thin – this is normal at the end of the dry season when food is scarce, and they would fatten up again when the rains came.

We admired a 20m high Baobab which was 600 years old. Amazingly for a 20m high tree, its roots extended out for about 60m, taking full advantage of any rainfall. On our way out, a juvenile Big-eyed Snake peered at us from the rough bark of the tree it was ascending.

On leaving Zombitse, we again headed south west until we reached a place where Madagascar Sand Grouse are sometimes found. Unfortunately, a large group of people were there and when we descended from the bus they insisted on showing us the place. Nevertheless, we did see seven birds in flight, with brief glimpses of them on the ground.

We then had lunch at the Antsokay Arboretum, followed by a tour of the wonderful arboretum. Here we learnt about some of the amazing endemic plants of the spiny forest, including how to tell some of the Baobab lookalikes from the real thing. Engrossed in all this, we were rather late in arriving at our beachfront hotel in Ifaty, where we had dinner and collapsed into bed.

## Day 10

## Wednesday 26th October

Our early morning visit was to the wonderful Reniala spiny forest, created and maintained by the local community which had stopped the cutting of the forest for charcoal production etc. Here were many individual Baobabs and other trees which store water in their trunk, as well as the bizarre Octopus trees, whose leaves are eaten by Ring-tailed Lemurs which manage to jump between them, and cling onto them, despite the trees armour of nail-like spines. Interestingly, the site also hosts a cage for rescued Ring-tailed Lemurs, previously kept as pets etc. Some of these are now free-living in the spiny forest. We couldn't resist a group photo in front of the largest of the Baobabs – a 1,200 year old giant.

We encountered a number of bird species which were becoming familiar; for example Stripe-throated and Common Jerys, and Magpie-robins. An early highlight was the Green-capped Coua, a subspecies of the Red-capped Coua which is only found in the south west of the country. A *Thamnornis* Warbler, with its typical warbler subdued tones, came very close to us on the trail. Moving to a different area of spiny forest, we managed to locate one of the famous endemics: the Long-tailed Ground Roller. This dramatic bird proved to be surprisingly well camouflaged as it stood motionless under low bushes, but all did eventually manage to get nice views. We were also able to see its nesting burrow, which give the bird at least part of its name. Then it was back to the hotel for breakfast.

In the afternoon we investigated the salt pans near Ifaty. Rather unpromising at first glance, after a few minutes we began to get our eye in. The first bird we found was the Madagascar Plover with its distinctive black chest band. Almost immediately after we began to pick out the very similar Kittlitz's Plover, lacking the neckband. These little plovers were chasing each other over the short grass next to the salt pans, mysteriously disappearing regularly as they ran into dead ground on the superficially flat surface. On some pools almost opposite, we located the Three-banded Plover with its striking red eye ring, along with Ringed Plover and more Kittlitz's Plovers.

Our final outing of the day was in the early evening when we investigated the hotel grounds with the help of torches. With the enthusiastic assistance of hotel staff we located, through reflected eye shine, a couple of the little Grey Mouse Lemurs. They were difficult to photograph in torchlight for they retreated back into the bushes and gazed back out with improbably large eyes. Their ability to spring from one bush to another if disturbed was amazing; as if they were on coiled springs! Later, as we headed for our chalets in the hotel grounds, more of these endearing little beasties were encountered through torchlight.

## Day 11

Thursday 27th October

We left our comfortable hotel in Ifaty this morning and drove to the place from where we could catch the boat to the island of Nosy Ve. Boarding the boat from the shore is normally done on a Zebu cart, but the tide was particularly deep and so we were towed out to our waiting craft with a small tractor whose bright colours and small size made it look like it was made out of Duplo bricks. Safely on board we began the hour-long trip out to the island. As we approached a narrow spit at one end, we began to pick out a line of very long legged, predominantly white birds. As we got closer the black, boat shaped bills became evident and we identified them as Crab Plovers, famous breeders on this island.

Moving along the shore a little, those with non-waterproof footwear removed it in preparation for a wet landing. We strode through the warm surf onto the glistening white sand of this lovely little island. Although still early, the heat was intense as we walked along on a boardwalk through the Euphorbias and other succulent and spiny vegetation. On some low trees, a small colony of Dimorphic Egrets were grunting and growling in their startling way. Both light and dark morphs were present, but seemingly unhappy with our company. Occasional white tombs indicated that the island was sacred to the local tribe. At the far end, a single Red-tailed Tropic bird was circling. This was their normal nest site but exploration of the bushes revealed only empty nests – we surmised that they had nested early this year.

The water was now so shallow at the end of the island that our boat could not approach very close, and so a protracted boarding procedure commenced. This involved manoeuvring small outrigger boats into the shallows and then pushing them into deeper water where they could be paddled. Much rolling up of trousers was necessary before all were safely back aboard and we were able to complete our journey to Anakoa for our overnight stay.

After lunch and a siesta, some of the group took a walk through the hotel grounds. After some searching we had a quick view of a Sub-desert Brush Warbler as it shot over some low trees. We persisted however and eventually got good views of this long tailed warbler, slightly paler around the head than the Brush Warbler we had seen further north. Our second quarry was the Littoral Rock Thrush. Again, an initial quick view was rewarded when the bird sat obligingly on the top of a bush in the warm gold of the evening. A splendid sight.

Finally, we scoured the thatched roofs of the hotel buildings for mouse lemurs, after darkness had fallen. Several tantalising glimpses were obtained but no good views so we turned, instead, to our wonderful seafood dinner.

## Day 12

Friday 28th October

Today was a transfer day back to Tana, ready for the next phase of our adventure. So after an early breakfast we waded out to the boat waiting to take us back to Toliara. The sea, fiercely blue in the tropical sun, was studded here and there with colourful sails from the canoes of the fisherman. Overhead, a Crested Tern and Frigatebird flew past. After an hour or so we approached the landing place. No tractor to land us this time, but the more traditional zebu carts. Three of them, each pulled by two zebu, picked us all up in turn, with our bags, and landed us without mishap.

Once on the minibus, we drove to the hotel where our main luggage had been stowed and we rearranged our packing, ready for the flight back to Tana. There was time for coffee and some leisurely birdwatching in the hotel

gardens. The flight was uneventful, and we arrived in Tana in time for a late lunch then some time off before dinner. Dinner was early as we had a very early return to the airport the following morning.

## Day 13

Saturday 29th October

We had a very early start this morning to get to the airport in time for the 0700 flight from Tana to Tolognaro (Fort Dauphin). The airport was relatively quiet so we had time to relax before the two hour flight. On arrival, we filed out to the waiting minibus. A visit to the pharmacy had been requested so we manoeuvred along the bustling streets, avoiding the constant stream of cyclists, pedestrians, cycle rickshaws and other vehicles, mixed with occasional chickens and assorted other animals. The pharmacy was clearly popular, and we waited patiently in line to be served.

Pharmacy business completed, we headed back to where the luggage vehicle was waiting and we set off westwards. The road had once had a tarmac surface but it was now so worn that it had disappeared every few hundred metres and the dirt sections were deeply rutted. This made progress meandering and slow, and no danger of nodding off after our early start! Another curiosity was the extraordinary ingenuity of cyclists in carrying other objects. We spotted a cyclist carrying a table and two chairs, another a full-size mattress and another carrying a dead goat.

Finally, we arrived at Berenty in time for an excellent lunch and check in to our individual lodges. In the late afternoon we went for a walk around the reserve with our guide, Lambert. A troop of Ring-tailed Lemurs were on the edge of the roof of one of the buildings. A mixture of adults and young were in a huddle, which we dubbed a lemur 'heap'. We all tried to count them but with no agreement except somewhere around ten. We encountered Ring-tailed lemurs in various places – sometimes feeding on the leaves of the Oyster trees, sometimes with males scent marking, sometimes playing. Most of the females had youngsters clinging onto their back – an endearing sight. Equally endearing were young males who would come down the tree and peer intently at you at eye level. There is something special about making eye contact with an animal in this way.

An undoubted highlight was watching the troop of Verreaux's Sifakas, led by the dominant female, 'dancing' across open ground to reach the next tree. They have very long back legs hence easier for them to travel upright on the ground. They also had babies in tow.

In terms of charm, it was difficult to beat the White-footed Sportive Lemur, a nocturnal species, which was sleeping, or rather just waking up, nestled in the cavity of a dead branch. It gazed at us with big eyes, yawning occasionally.

In the evening we did a night walk in the spiny forest. Using torches to detect eye shine, our first find was a White-footed Sportive Lemur, wide awake this time and busy hunting. It was sitting high in an Octopus Tree; like other lemurs it seemed able to avoid or tolerate the fierce spines. We encountered another one later and, in between, we found two Grey Mouse Lemurs. Both were extremely active, refusing to stay still long enough to get a photograph but very entertaining to watch. Then it was back to Berenty for dinner.

## Day 14

## Sunday 30th October

This, our full day in Berenty, began with a walk around the reserve, including the gallery forest by the river (dry at this time). A plaintive single note alerted us to the presence of a Hook-billed Vanga. We searched for it high in the trees, where they normally sit. Eventually we located one in silhouette. This was perfect for picking out the hooked tip of the bill.

A group of Red-fronted Brown Lemurs appeared in the trees above us. We learned how the females are greyer, with paler faces, than the males. The female we were observing had a baby, and these are always carried underneath the mother unlike the Ring-tailed Lemurs which transfer the young to the back when they reach a certain age. These Brown Lemurs had been reintroduced here and were expanding rapidly. Some considered this a mistake as they, unlike the other lemur species here, do not eat the leaves of the Octopus tree. Food for them is therefore relatively sparse and their lifespan is probably shorter as a result.

A little later we came upon a troop of Verreaux's Sifaka and we hugely enjoyed watching them as they played and wrestled on the forest floor, quite unconcerned by our appearance beside them. They were also feeding on the young leaves of the Tamarind tree. This tree is a very important lemur food source and they eat the leaves, flowers and fruit. Unfortunately, it is also very popular amongst local people for making charcoal and hence these trees disappear outside protected areas.

Sharp eyes located the exquisite nest of a Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher at about eye level. We could pick out the head of the male in the nest, his long tail sticking up out of the back of the nest. A little further along the trail a female was sitting on another nest.

We had great views of a number of Crested Couas, one of which was interacting with a Malagasy Cuckoo – no love lost there we sensed. Giant Couas were also seen on the ground and in the trees. A young Jewelled and a young Warty Chameleon were also spotted.

A final highlight was a Striped Madagascar Garter Snake. On seeing us it immediately disappeared down a hole. But we waited and sure enough it re-emerged and moved quickly through the leaf litter, head raised, wary and observant. By then it was getting hot and we retreated to the centre for a well-earned break.

Our late afternoon visit to the spiny forest produced another White-footed Sportive Lemur sleeping in a tangle of vegetation. It did not wake up as we looked at it, unlike the little Grey-brown Mouse Lemur that was sleeping in the fork of a tree. It was initially sleeping with its tail curled around its head but at our approach it woke up and gazed at us all with huge, reproachful eyes.

In a small clearing lit by sun, a juvenile Nightjar sat on the red clay. It did not move as we watched it as that is its strategy – to rely on being cryptic. We crept away quietly and found ourselves in front of a large Baobab. Its branches were covered in the nests of the Sakalava Weaver. The whole thing was a throng of activity as the birds came and went, the males being particularly eye-catching as their bright yellow heads caught the evening sun. With one final visit to an even bigger and older Baobab, we made our way back to the bus before it got dark. Just before dinner we did a night walk around the Berenty complex. We found some nocturnal lemurs – White-footed Sportive and Grey-brown Mouse lemur, but our most startling find was the intimidatingly large Hissing Cockroach.

## Day 15

## Monday 31st October

Today we headed out before breakfast to try and locate Madagascar Sandgrouse. We drove a short distance and parked by a field where young sisal plants had been established for later replanting in their final positions. We were barely out of the vehicle when movement in the field was spotted. The sisal plants were very small so the red soil was clearly visible, as were the approximately 22 Sand Grouse moving slowly away from us in stately procession. We moved quietly up an adjacent track and got even better views. Then, as if by some unseen signal, they all took off and flew towards the river. We then wandered slowly back towards breakfast, pausing only to watch Ring-tailed Lemurs feeding in the Oyster Trees, and a couple of distant Helmeted Guineafowl.

After breakfast we set off to find the roosting trees of the Madagascar Flying Fox, the huge fruit bat with a wingspan of 1 metre. They roost in Tamarind trees, and it was already getting hot when we got there. As a result, many of the bats were flapping their wings gently, presumably to cool themselves a little. The colony was noisy and active, with many bats circling above, coming into the trees, leaving again etc. We enjoyed this spectacle, then began making our way back slowly. A White-footed Sportive Lemur, resting in the cavity of a tree, watched us suspiciously as we walked past, then we retreated gratefully into the shade for a rest before lunch.

After lunch it was time to drive back to Tolagnaro (Fort Dauphin). This is a dusty affair, as much of the road surface is missing and the surface is frequently deeply rutted. Apparently it has had no maintenance since its construction in the 1950s! As a result there is much switching from one side to the other, swerving to avoid chickens etc. We stopped on a bridge to observe the activity in the river below. It was full of people bathing, washing, playing, bringing animals down to drink etc – clearly a very important aspect of village life. We also stopped by a tomb while Lambert, the guide from Berenty who was getting a lift with us, explained the local customs associated with burials. Finally, dusty but undaunted, we arrived at our hotel in Tolagnaro, ready for our flight back to Tana the next day.

## Day 16

## Tuesday 1st November

This was essentially a transfer day. We caught the morning flight from Tolagnaro to Tana and arrived in time for lunch. Afterwards we drove to our hotel, stopping at the local supermarket to buy water for our journey the following day.

Some of us then decided to investigate the local market, which was adjacent to the rice fields. A vast range of local craft produce was on offer and we all made some purchases, the prices being very reasonable even before the inevitable haggling began. A very entertaining afternoon. The walk back revealed a typical array of quirky and interesting details; such as the little girl selling a basinful of live crayfish and a colourfully dressed woman walking along sedately carrying a duck in front of her. Then it was back to the hotel for an early dinner, ready for the early start the next morning.

## Day 17

## Wednesday 2nd November

We set off early the next morning for the long drive north. Normally this would be a flight but schedules ruled it out on this occasion so we set off in comfort in 4x4 vehicles. We made steady progress up through the central

highlands of Madagascar. This area has been almost completely deforested and some of the hills, stripped of trees and subsequently burnt, and would seem likely to be seriously eroded in the upcoming wet season.

Our only wildlife focussed stop was to scan the lakes at Ravelobe. However, both lakes were busy with people fishing and washing etc so not much was to be seen. The second lake was difficult to view as we were staring straight into the sun so we decided to press on.

We arrived at the Blue Vanga Lodge in late afternoon, and settled into our rooms before meeting our guides, Olga and Justin, for our exploration of Ankarafantsika National Park. We decided to do a night walk and so drove a short distance, head torches at the ready, ready to explore. Eyeshine revealed our first find and a first for the group – the Fat-tailed Dwarf lemur. It was very mobile and so difficult to get a good view; this proved to be the pattern for the evening as the lemurs were in mating mood and not hanging around to be photographed by us. One of several Golden Brown Mouse Lemurs was a little more accommodating, coming lower down in the tree and not moving so frenetically. A Grey Mouse Lemur added to our tally of these little lemurs.

At eye height, right at the tips of tiny branches, we found some tiny dwarf geckos – *Lygodactylus* spp, some only about 3cm long. It seemed a curiously exposed position to choose but is presumably explained by their tiny size enabling them to blend into the branch tip. A Big-headed Lizard chomping a Cockroach had us all as fascinated observers. By then it was time to return to our accommodation for dinner after a long day.

## Day 18

## Thursday 3rd November

Our time up north in this dry deciduous forest was limited so we made the most of the day by getting out early. As we set off a Western Plated Lizard shot along the path in front of us. By now familiar species were soon spotted but we were on a mission – to locate one of Madagascar's most striking endemics – the Schlegel's Asity. We crept along forest paths looking for sign of this little bird. Suddenly our guide got excited and pointed to a nearby bush a little below canopy height. A small hunched figure was the glorious male, with its iridescent blue face. Just below sat the female with her more muted colours but heavily striped belly. They were fabulous birds, and good views too. When we got back to the road, we spotted a neat oblong hanging nest in the tree opposite and waited patiently until the architect – in this case a Green Sunbird – came back to visit.

Moving on to a different part of the park, came across a Red-capped Coua striding along the forest floor, as is their wont, and got good views of its red cap. Vangas were a highlight of the day and the lovely Rufous Vanga was an early star. The first proved elusive but the second seemed as interested in us as we were in it. Hook-billed vangas put in an appearance but we were focussed on the rare Van Dam's Vanga and finally managed to observe it, helped by a Crested Drongo which seemed intent on hounding it from place to place. Other Vangas – Chabert's and Blue for instance, also featured but pride of place for distinctiveness went to the stunning Sickle-billed Vanga which we watched as it, woodpecker fashion, dismantled a section of dead wood searching for insects.

It was also a day for snakes, with five individuals of three different species being seen. The most dramatic was the rare Leaf-nosed Snake with its bizarre leaf-like projection from the nose, indicating that it was a female. Two large hog-nosed Snakes were the most dramatic, and we watched one disappear down a hole with startling speed.

Out on the lake, the group (actually split into two groups for this purpose) had tremendous views of the rare Madagascar Fish Eagle which breeds here regularly. Both adults and a juvenile were seen, their heavy bulk easy to pick out on lakeside trees. Good views of a variety of herons and egrets were also obtained.

A smaller group undertook another night walk. A number of nocturnal lemur species were seen, for example Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur and Western Woolly Lemur, as well as a number of mouse lemurs. As with the previous night, these were very active and bounded out of sight very quickly. The piercing cries of Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemurs lent an air of menace to the night. Three snakes were also found, these Cat-eyed Snakes are hunters of birds and small mammals. Interestingly, a couple of roosting birds were also located, including one sitting out on an exposed branch, which seemed a curious choice. Finally, back at the car park, a sleeping Coquerel's Sifaka high in a tree over the car park was our final sighting before going off for dinner.

## Day 19

## Friday 4th November

Today we had to make the long journey back to Tana, ready for the next phase of our adventure. We set off early but it was already hot and muggy when we made our first stop at the lakes at Ambondromamy. Pushing our way down through the spiny Acacia to get to the lake edge, we began to scan. A slightly tentative inquiry produced what we had been looking for – Pygmy Geese. They were out in the middle of the lake, which had a lot of floating vegetation, so we managed to get everyone onto them by the use of landmarks, including Great White Egrets which were dotted around. A Purple Heron stood still, far out on the vegetation, and a solitary Jacana picked its way delicately across the floating leaves.

Our next stop was at a new suspension bridge, with the old one still in place but used these days mostly by pedestrians and Zebu cattle. Egrets and White-faced Whistling Ducks were by the water's edge and, at the end of the bridge, two Spiny-tailed Iguanas (also called Madagascar Swifts) lounged in the sun.

After lunch we stopped at the bridge at Betsiboka. We walked gingerly across, avoiding the heavy lorries which were coming in regular succession. Almost immediately the characteristic profile and white rump of Madagascar Pratincole was spotted and we also began to pick out these lovely birds sitting on the rocks, and got close views through the telescope. At the end of the bridge, as we had coffee, movement in a tree drew our attention to a pair of Chabert's Vangas, with their striking blue eye ring.

We stopped again when our guide had a glimpse of the increasingly rare Banded Kestrel (often killed because it will take chickens) but we were unable to find it. A further stop, beneath some Mango trees, revealed a snake about 1.5m in length ascending one of the Mangos. This was one of the Madagascar Tree Snakes, this one known locally as the 'Zebu killing snake' even though its prey consists of birds and small mammals.

As we got closer to Tana, a dramatic storm blew up, with thunder and lightning. It resulted in some overhead wires coming down and this held us up for some time, but we eventually got safely to Tana and our hotel.

## Day 20

## Saturday 5th November

The weather had dried again as we set off to brave Tana's traffic on our way to Andasibe. As we moved through the rice fields people were already busy in the fields, some catching the fish that are found there. We were briefly

mesmerised by the sight of two men carrying a pig across the road, although we were pleased to see they were using a zebra crossing...

The road is not good, and much time was spent zigzagging from one side of the road to the other, often through dramatic landscapes. We arrived at our hotel at lunchtime and our guide for this part of the trip – Maurice – gave us some briefing about what delights were to come.

At 4pm, we met Maurice for our first outing. This was to the community reserve near the hotel. On the way to reception, staff working in the grounds helpfully pointed out the large Long-nosed Chameleon in a bush by the path. It was explained that this community reserve was secondary forest, the original big trees having been felled during French times. Later planting of Eucalyptus was difficult to eliminate as it re-grew when cut. Tree ferns were present – Cyathea – and were a very ancient group. The star of the outing was undoubtedly a Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko, seemingly glued to a slender branch and indistinguishable from it – truly spectacular camouflage; and necessary to avoid the attention of Blue Coua which are important predators of geckos. Later we found some Indri sleeping high in a tree, whetting our appetite for better views on another occasion, and a party of three Common Brown Lemurs danced acrobatically through the trees as we headed back to the hotel.

Our final activity was a night walk. Almost immediately we encountered the diminutive Crossley's Dwarf Lemur. It did not move for some time, merely contemplating us with those big eyes. But the highlight was great views of an Eastern Woolly Lemur, complete with baby on her back. Both mother and baby periodically peered down at us, and we felt very privileged to share a few minutes with them, before going back to our comfortable rooms.

## Day 21

## Sunday 6th November

This was our day to visit the primary rain forest of Mantadia National Park. An invigorating two hour ride in 4x4s followed, in which most of our anatomy was rearranged, but we finally arrived in full working order. We entered the cool shade of the rainforest and walked quietly along its paths. Tree ferns were here but the main difference between this and the secondary forest was the presence of big trees which had developed buttress roots to give stability in the thin soil. A small dark rugby ball-shape in a bush was identified as a female Velvet Asity. She toyed with us – keeping within view but always behind leaves - but we all eventually got good sightings.

As we approached a bend in the river the call of a White-throated Rail was answered by Maurice, our guide, and soon this lovely bird approached us and crossed the river in front of us. We seemed to have started something because the rail came back across the river and another calling bird appeared and then a third! Quite a chorus of rail calls followed and then suddenly, as if by some unseen signal, they all fell quiet and melted away.

A little later a calling Blue Coua was heard, but very high up in the canopy and only the tail was visible. After a picnic lunch we began to make our bumpy way back. The first vehicle stopped and we all spilled out to get a glimpse of the Indris in the roadside trees. They looked at us but then gradually drew back out of sight. The next stop was for Diademed Sifaka, but they too were shy and denied good views. Finally, at the third stop, one Indri was more accommodating and sat in the tree near the road peering at us nervously, showing those big teddy bear ears. Eventually it leaped up the tree then into the vegetation beyond. Arriving back in the early afternoon the group relaxed before the next outing.

The night walk took us back into the community reserve. Almost immediately we encountered the first of several Crossley's Dwarf lemurs. Still sleepy, they were gradually waking up for the night of active feeding ahead. Not long after, the torch revealed a large chameleon sleeping in a tree. This was Parson's Chameleon, which apart from being the largest in the area, is unusual in that it does not change colour.

We next encountered another chameleon, also sleeping. This one, known as the Short-horned, is also sometimes called the Elephant's Ear Chameleon in view of its general colour. But our highlight of the evening was a diminutive Goodman's Mouse Lemur which gazed sleepily down at us. Then it was back to the hotel for dinner.

## Day 22

## Monday 7th November

This was our last day, and our day to explore the special reserve of Analamazaotra (Perinet). This was just a short drive from our hotel. At a fish farm, near the entrance, we stopped to admire the brilliant colours of the Lined Day Geckos which were scampering about on the wooden boundary fence.

We climbed higher into the reserve and found an adult Indri three quarters of the way up a tree. It was busy eating leaves but stopped every now and again to check us out, the big Teddy Bear ears jutting out to either side. We were enjoying this but received intelligence that the Diademed Sifakas were near the river. If they crossed, we would be unable to see them, so we decided to move to their location. On the way we got distracted firstly by a Blue Coua high in a tree above us, and then by very clear views of an Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur.

But soon we found the Diademed Sifakas, which were, conveniently, low in the trees and two were actually feeding on the ground. These are reputedly the most beautiful Sifakas and, as we watched, we found it hard to disagree with that assessment. We watched different individuals for a long period as they fed busily, eating young leaves. A mother with baby was much more cautious and stayed high in the canopy.

Afterwards, we went back to the Indri. A mother with a six month old was high in a tree. The young one was old enough to climb away from its mother from time to time but retreated to cling onto her belly at regular intervals. The most magical moment was when a distant troop began calling, which triggered our group to respond. The noise, at this relatively close range was amazing – what an experience!

Reluctantly we left these magical animals and made our way down to the community shop at the entrance to the reserve. Here, in a small tree, we got excellent views of a Parson's Chameleon. Following a few purchases to help support the reserve, we went back to the hotel for lunch. As it was to be a very early start the next day, we had a relaxing afternoon followed by an early dinner and bed.

## Day 23 /24

## Tuesday 8th and Wednesday 9th November

The drive back to Tana was uneventful, with a couple of comfort stops. So we arrived at the airport in good time for our flight to Addis Ababa. On arrival there we were slightly bemused to have to go through two more security checks before our connecting flight to Heathrow. But all flights were on time and we arrived in Heathrow early on the morning of 9 November. Here we said our goodbyes having spent more than three weeks together on a magical island; an island of contrasts – wonderful wildlife but a frightening rate of deforestation, warm friendly people but much abject poverty: a trip not easily forgotten.

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Baobabs, Ifaty

## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

		October - November 2022																							
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
* = Island Endemic, ** = Regional Endemic, Do = Domesticated, LO = Leader Only																									
Common name	Scientific name																								
African Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus auritus</i>																								
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>		✓															✓	✓						
Hottentot Teal	<i>Spatula hottentota</i>		✓				✓																		
Meller's Duck	<i>Anas melleri</i>		✓																						
Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>		✓	✓																					
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>							H							✓										
Red-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubicauda</i>										✓														
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓																						
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>		✓															✓	✓						
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		✓															✓	✓	✓					
Malagasy Pond Heron*	<i>Ardeola idae</i>																	✓							
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		✓	✓			✓								✓			✓	✓	✓					
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>										✓														
Humblot's Heron*	<i>Ardea humbloti</i>		✓															✓							
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>												✓				✓	✓							
Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>		✓						✓			✓			✓			✓	✓	✓					
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>		✓															✓	✓						
Dimorphic Heron	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>		✓								✓				✓			✓	✓	✓					
Madagascar Ibis	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>								✓																
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>			✓			✓																		
Frigatebird sp	<i>Fraegata spp</i>											✓													
Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>																	✓							
France's Sparrowhawk*	<i>Accipiter francesiae</i>					✓																✓			
Madagascar Sparrowhawk*	<i>Accipiter madagascariensis</i>														✓										

		October - November 2022																					
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
Madagascan Fish Eagle*	<i>Haliaeetus vociferoides</i>																	✓					
Madagascan Buzzard*	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>			H		✓	✓	✓		✓													
Madagascan Wood Rail*	<i>Canirallus kiolooides</i>				✓																		
Madagascan Flufftail*	<i>Sarothrura insularis</i>					✓																	
White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>																				✓		
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓																✓				
Crab Plover	<i>Dromas ardeola</i>										✓												
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>									✓													
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>										✓												
Madagascan Plover*	<i>Charadrius thoracicus</i>										✓												
Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>										✓												
Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>										✓												
White-fronted Plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus</i>										✓												
Madagascan Jacanar*	<i>Actophilornis albinucha</i>																				✓		
Madagascan Snipe*	<i>Gallinago macrodactyla</i>				✓																		
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>										✓	✓											
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>									✓													
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓							✓													
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>									✓													
Madagascan Pratincole	<i>Glareola ocularis</i>																	✓	✓				
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>											✓											
Madagascan Sandgrouse*	<i>Pterocles personatus</i>									✓					✓								
Rock Dove (feral)	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Malagasy Turtle Dove*	<i>Nesoenas picturatus</i>					✓		✓		✓				✓	✓			✓					
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				
Malagasy Coucal**	<i>Centropus toulou</i>				H	✓		✓		H				H	✓		✓	✓	✓			H	
Crested Coua*	<i>Coua cristata</i>								✓				✓	✓	✓			✓					

		October - November 2022																							
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Blue Coua*	<i>Coua caerulea</i>				H	✓															✓	✓			
Red-capped Coua*	<i>Coua ruficeps</i>																	✓							
Green-capped Coua*	<i>Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps</i>									✓															
Coquerel's Coua*	<i>Coua coquereli</i>								✓									H							
Giant Coua*	<i>Coua gigas</i>								✓					✓											
Madagascan Cuckoo*	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>			✓	H	H								✓				✓		✓	H				
Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>													✓											
Torotoroka Scops Owl*	<i>Otus madagascariensis</i>							✓										✓							
Rainforest Scops Owl*	<i>Otus rutilus</i>																			✓					
White-browed Hawk Owl*	<i>Ninox superciliaris</i>						✓	✓	✓				✓	H	H										
Madagascan Nightjar*	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>			✓			✓							✓				✓			H				
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus gracilis</i>							✓	✓									✓	✓	✓					
Malagasy Black Swift*	<i>Apus balstoni</i>	✓						✓																	
Cuckoo Roller*	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>				H	✓			✓																
Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>							✓						✓	✓			✓							
Long-tailed Ground Roller*	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>									✓															
Malagasy Kingfisher*	<i>Corythornis vintsioides</i>		✓	✓														✓		✓	✓				
Olive Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		H	✓	✓			✓							
Madagascan Hoopoe*	<i>Upupa marginata</i>		H				✓	✓		✓				✓				✓							
Malagasy Kestrel*	<i>Falco newtoni</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓					✓					
Greater Vasa Parrot*	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>							✓	✓									✓				✓			
Lesser Vasa Parrot*	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>							✓					✓	✓	✓			✓	✓						
Grey-headed Lovebird*	<i>Agapornis canus</i>				✓				✓	✓					✓				✓						
Velvet Asity*	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>					✓															✓				
Schlegel's Asity*	<i>Philepitta schlegeli</i>																	✓							
Common Sunbird-Asity*	<i>Neodrepanis coruscans</i>					✓																			
Red-tailed Vanga*	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>								✓																
Hook-billed Vanga*	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>					✓								✓	H			✓							

		October - November 2022																							
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Van Dam's Vanga*	<i>Xenopirostris damii</i>																	✓							
Pollen's Vanga*	<i>Xenopirostris polleni</i>					✓																			
Sickle-billed Vanga*	<i>Falculea palliata</i>																	✓							
White-headed Vanga*	<i>Artamella viridis</i>																	✓							
Chabert's Vanga*	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>							✓										✓	✓						
Blue Vanga*	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>					✓												✓							
Rufous Vanga*	<i>Schetba rufa</i>																	✓							
Tylas Vanga*	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>					✓																			
Nuthatch Vanga*	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>															✓									
Common Newtonia*	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>								✓	✓								✓			H	H			
Ward's Vanga*	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>					✓																			
Madagascan Cuckooshrike*	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>				✓																				
Crested Drongo**	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓			
Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher**	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓			
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					
Madagascan Lark*	<i>Eremopterix hova</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓									✓						
Malagasy Bulbul**	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Mascarene Martin**	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓			✓		✓	✓						
Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>							✓																	
Malagasy Brush Warbler**	<i>Nesillas typica</i>		H		H	H				✓	✓														
Subdesert Brush Warbler*	<i>Nesillas lantzii</i>												✓		✓										
Long-billed Bernieria (Tetraka)	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>					✓												✓							
Thamnornis* (Subdesert Tetraka)	<i>Thamnornis chloropetoides</i>									✓															
Spectacled Tetraka*	<i>Xanthomixis zosterops</i>				✓																				
Grey-crowned Tetraka*	<i>Xanthomixis cinereiceps</i>					✓																			
Common Jery*	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>					H		✓	✓																

		October - November 2022																					
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Stripe-throated Jery*	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>				✓	✓	✓		H	✓												H	
Madagascan Cisticola**	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>							✓		✓									✓				
Malagasy White-eye**	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>				✓	✓								✓								✓	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Madagascan Magpie-Robin*	<i>Copsychus albospecularis</i>				H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Littoral Rock Thrush*	<i>Monticola imerina</i>											✓											
Forest Rock Thrush*	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>							✓			✓												
Madagascan Stonechat*	<i>Saxicola sibilla</i>			✓				✓											✓	✓			
Souimanga Sunbird**	<i>Cinnyris sovimanga</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				H	✓			✓		✓	✓	H	
Malagasy Green Sunbird**	<i>Cinnyris notatus</i>			✓		✓		✓										✓					
Nelicourvi Weaver*	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>				✓																	✓	
Sakalava Weaver*	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>								✓					✓	✓			✓					
Red Fody*	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓							
Forest Fody*	<i>Foudia omissa</i>																					✓	
Madagascan Mannikin*	<i>Lepidopygia nana</i>			✓	✓		✓								✓					✓			
Madagascan Wagtail*	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓													✓	✓	

## Mammals

		October - November 2022																					
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>LEMURS:</b>																							
<b>Cheirogaleidae</b>																							
Grey Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>									✓			✓	✓			✓						
Grey-brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus griseorufus</i>										✓			✓			✓	✓					
Rufous Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>				✓																		
Goodman's Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>																					✓	
Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogalus medius</i>																	✓	✓				

Crossley's Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>																	✓	✓		
	<b>Lepilemuridae</b>																				
Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur edwardsi</i>																	✓			
White-footed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur leucopus</i>																	✓	✓	✓	
	<b>Lemuridae</b>																				
Grey Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur griseus griseus</i>																			✓	✓
Ranomafana Grey Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur griseus ranomafanensis</i>																				
Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur aureus</i>																				
Greater Bamboo Lemur	<i>Prolemur simus</i>																				
Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>																				
Common Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>																				
Red-fronted Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur rufifrons</i>																				
Red-bellied Lemur	<i>Eulemur rubiventer</i>																				
Mongoose Lemur	<i>Eulemer mongoz</i>																				
	<b>Indridae</b>																				
Eastern Woolly Lemur	<i>Avahi laniger</i>																				
Western Woolly Lemur	<i>Avahi occidentalis</i>																				
Verreaux's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>																				
Coquerel's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus coquereli</i>																				
Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>																				
Milne-Edwards' Sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>																				
Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>																				
<b>OTHER MAMMALS:</b>																					
Madagascan Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus rufus</i>																				

## Reptiles &amp; Amphibians

		October/November 2022																						
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
<b>REPTILES &amp; AMPHIBIANS:</b>																								
* = Indicates a species is endemic																								
<b>Frogs</b>																								
Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog	<i>Boophis madagascariensis*</i>					✓																		
Baron's Painted Frog	<i>Mantella baroni*</i>					✓																		
Dumeril's Madagascar Frog	<i>Mantidactylus lugubris*</i>				✓																			
Ivohamanita Madagascar Frog	<i>Mantidactylus majori*</i>				✓	✓																		
	<i>Mantidactylus pulcher*</i>				✓																			
<b>Chameleons</b>																								
Short-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma brevicornis</i>																						✓	
Blue-legged Chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>				✓																			
Nose-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma nasuta</i>				✓																			
O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>				✓	✓																		
Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii parsonii</i>																						✓	
a Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii cristifer</i>																						✓	
'Jewel' Chameleon	<i>Furcifer lateralis</i>													✓										
Oustalet's Chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>						✓	✓							✓		✓							
Rhinoceros Chameleon	<i>Furcifer rhinoseratus</i>																	✓						
Spiny-backed Chameleon	<i>Furcifer verrucosus</i>							✓						✓										
a nose horned chameleon	<i>Calumma fallax</i>																					✓		
<b>Lizards, Geckos &amp; Skinks</b>																								
Collared Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cuvieri</i>																	✓	✓					
Spiny-tailed Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cyclurus</i>							✓		✓														
	<i>Oplurus (Chalarodon) madagascariensis</i>									✓	✓			✓										
Three-eyed Lizard	<i>Oplurus quadrimaculatus</i>							✓																
Four-lined Iguanid	<i>Oplurus quadrimaculatus</i>							✓																
Large-headed Gecko	<i>Paroedura bastardi</i>													✓										
Grandidier's Dwarf Gecko	<i>Lygodactylus tolampyae</i>																✓							

Common name	Scientific name	October/November 2022																					
		18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
a Dwarf Gecko	<i>Lygodactylus tuberosus</i>								✓														
Madagascar Velvet Gecko	<i>Blaesodactylus sakalava</i>								✓				✓										
Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>				✓																		
Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>																	✓					
Lined Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata lineata</i>					✓															✓	✓	
Thick-tail Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma mutabilis</i>												✓				✓						
Peacock Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>			✓	✓	✓																	
Standing's Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>									✓													
Gravenhorst's Mabuya	<i>Trachylepis c.f. gravenhorstii</i>					✓			✓														
Broad-tailed Girdled Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus laticaudatus</i>																✓						
Ornate Girdled Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus ornatus</i>					✓													✓				
<b>Snakes</b>																							
Big-eyed Snake	<i>Mimophis mahafalensis</i>								✓									✓					
Madagascar Lined Snake	<i>Bibilava (Liopholidophis) lateralis</i>												✓										
Western Cat-eyed Snake	<i>Madagascarophis colubrinus occidentalis</i>																	✓					
Zebu-killing Snake	<i>Ithyocyphus miniatus</i>																		✓				
Madagascar Tree Boa	<i>Sanzinia madagascariensis</i>					✓																✓	
Malagasy Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon madagascariensis</i>																	✓					
A leaf nosed snake	<i>Langaha spp</i>																	✓					
	<i>Ithyocyphus oursi</i>																		✓				
<b>Others</b>																							
Nile Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>																	✓					

## Invertebrates

<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
<b>BUTTERFLIES:</b>	
	<b><i>Papilionidae</i></b>
Citrus Swallowtail	<i>Papilio demodocus</i>
Banded Blue Swallowtail	<i>Papilio oribazus</i>
Madagascar Giant Swallowtail	<i>Pharmacophagus antenor*</i>
African Monarch or Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>
Brilliant Blue	<i>Junonia rhadama*</i>
Clouded Mother of Pearl	<i>Protogoniomorpha anarcardii</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
	<b><i>Satyridae</i></b>
Common Evening Brown	<i>Melanitis leda leda</i>
<b>MOTHS:</b>	<b><i>Saturniidae</i></b>
Emperor Moth or Suraka Silkmoth	<i>Antherina suraka</i>
<b>OTHER INVERTEBRATES:</b>	
Katydid (Green)	<i>Encalypta cucullata</i>
Praying Mantis	<i>Polyspilota sp.</i>
Hissing Cockroach	<i>Gromphadorhina portentosa</i>
Ant-lion sp.	-
Stick Insect	-
Flatid Leaf-bug	<i>Phromnia rosea</i>
Plataspid Shield Bugs	<i>Libyaspis coccinelloides</i>
Giraffe-necked Weevil	<i>Trachelophorus giraffa</i>
Pill Millipede (Large Brown)	<i>Sphaerotherium sp.</i>
Large Black Millipede	-
Madagascar Fire Millipede	<i>Aphistogoniulus sp.</i>
Madagascar Golden Orb-web Spider	<i>Nephila madagascariensis*</i>
Orb-web Spider	<i>Nephila sp.</i>
spider	<i>Peucetia lucasi</i>
a weevil	<i>Lixus barbiger</i>

## Plants

<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common name</b>
<b>Please Note:</b> Nomenclature contained within this list follows the taxonomic amendments by the Missouri Botanic Garden, published in the <i>Catalogue of the Vascular Plants of Madagascar</i> , and following <i>The Plant List</i> , an internationally accepted list of vascular plant families, published and maintained by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Missouri.	
<b>[ ] = Planted, * = Endemic</b>	
<b>PTERIDOPHYTES</b>	<b>Ferns &amp; Fern Allies</b>
<b>Lycophytes</b>	<b>Clubmosses &amp; Quillworts</b>
<b>Lycopodiaceae</b>	<b>Clubmoss Family</b>
<i>Lycopodium</i> sp.	-
<i>Huperzia megastachys</i>	-
<b>Leptosporangiate Ferns</b>	<b>True Ferns</b>
<b>Cyatheaceae</b>	<b>Tree Fern Family</b>
<i>Cyathea madagascariensis</i> *	a Tree Fern
<i>Cyathea madagascariensis</i> *	a Tree Fern
<i>[Mangifera indica]</i>	Common Mango
<i>Pachypodium rosulatum</i> subsp. <i>gracilius</i> *	Elephant's Foot
<i>Pervillaea venenata</i> * ( <i>Menabea venenata</i> )	Trial Plant'
<i>[Plumeria rubra]</i>	Frangipani
<i>[Plumeria rubra</i> var. <i>alba]</i>	White' Frangipani
<b>Balsaminaceae</b>	<b>Balsam Family</b>
<i>Impatiens inaperta</i> *	Madagascar Busy Lizzie

<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common name</b>
<b>Bignoniaceae</b>	
<i>[Jacaranda c.f. cuspidifolia]</i>	Jacaranda
<b>Cactaceae</b>	<b>Cactus Family</b>
<i>Rhipsalis baccifera*</i>	Mistletoe Cactus
<b>Compositae (Asteraceae)</b>	<b>Daisy Family</b>
<i>Ageratum conyzoides</i>	Goat Weed
<i>Erigeron karvinskianus</i>	Mexican Flaebane
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	
<b>Crassulaceae</b>	<b>Stonecrop Family</b>
<i>Kalanchoe beharensis*</i>	Napoleon's Hat
<b>Didiereaceae*</b>	<b>Octopus Tree Family</b>
<i>Didierea spp</i>	Octopus tree
<b>Droseraceae</b>	<b>Sundew Family</b>
<i>Drosera madagascariensis</i>	Madagascan Sundew
<b>Ebenaceae</b>	<b>Persimmon Family</b>
<i>Diospyros kaki</i>	Persimmon or 'Ebony'
<b>Euphorbiaceae</b>	<b>Spurge Family</b>
<i>Euphorbia mili*</i>	Crown of Thorns
<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Tamarind
<b>Malvaceae</b>	<b>Mallow Family</b>

<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common name</b>
<i>Adansonia za</i> *	Baobab
[ <i>Ceiba pendrandra</i> ]	Kapok
<b>Meliaceae</b>	<b>Mahogany Family</b>
<i>Melia azedarach</i>	Indian Lilac or Bead Tree
<b>Musaceae</b>	<b>Banana Family</b>
[ <i>Musa</i> sp.]	Banana
<b>Solanaceae</b>	<b>Nightshade Family</b>
[ <i>Brugmansia versicolor</i> ]	Angel's Trumpets
<b>Verbenaceae</b>	<b>Verbena Family</b>
<i>Lantana camara</i>	Lantana
<b>Zingiberaceae</b>	<b>Ginger Family</b>
<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	Ginger
<b>Areaceae</b>	<b>Palm Family</b>
[ <i>Cocos nucifera</i> ]	Coconut Palm
<i>Dyopsis decaryi</i> *	Triangle Palm
<i>Ravena madagascarensis</i>	travellers palm
<b>Asparagaceae</b>	<b>Asparagus Family</b>
[ <i>Agave sesalana</i> ]	Sisal
<b>Cyperaceae</b>	<b>Sedge Family</b>
<i>Cyperus papyrus</i>	Papyrus

<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common name</b>
<b>Orchidaceae</b>	<b>Orchid Family</b>
<i>Cynorkis purpurescens</i>	Dancing Ladies
<i>Oeonia rosea</i>	-
<b>Pandanaceae</b>	<b>Pandanus Family</b>
<i>Pandanus ambongensis</i> *	a Screwpine
<i>Pandanus pulcher</i>	a Screwpine
<b>Poaceae</b>	<b>Grass Family</b>
[ <i>Oryza sativa</i> ]	Rice
<b>Pontederiaceae</b>	<b>Pickerelweed Family</b>
<i>Eichhornia crassipes</i>	Water Hyacinth