

Madagascar's Lemurs

Naturetrek Tour Report

15 - 26 October 2011



Dancing Sifaka



Flatid Leaf Bug nymphs (*Phromnia rosea*)



Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko



Black and White Ruffed Lemur

Report compiled by Nick Acheson
Images courtesy of Simon Sperry-Jones



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Leader: Nick Acheson - Naturetrek Leader & Naturalist
Claude Rambeloson – Local Guide & Naturalist

Participants: Jane Starmore
Roger Forder
Diana Forder
Penny Asher
Simon Sperryn-Jones
Arline Sperryn-Jones
Geoff Ashworth
Edwina Kinch
Sheila Ford
David Kennedy
Elaine Kennedy
Lynda Sharpe

Summary

What a deluge of charismatic lemurs. What a host of beautiful birds. What a marvellous array of reptiles and amphibians. What fascinating forests. But success such as ours doesn't come without tremendous hard work on the part of many people. Our thanks are due to our many local guides, including Benoit in Berenty; Theo, Sabine, Flavien, Jao and Fidy in Ranomafana; and Maurice, Christophe and Victor in Andasibe. They opened our eyes to the beautiful forests they call home. Thanks too must go to our many careful and helpful drivers, especially to Benza and Donné. But without doubt our greatest thanks must go to Claude, our guide, naturalist, mastermind and interpreter of all things Madagascar. He is a rare combination of a charming person, an encyclopaedic mind, a brilliant field naturalist, a gifted linguist and a natural comic. Our experience of his beautiful country would have been half as good without him.

Thanks to you all too! This is a demanding tour and you attacked it, uncomplaining, with energy and enthusiasm throughout. You clambered up hills during the day, strode through the sweaty nights, smiled through long, hot journeys, were always on time, and brought much laughter and lightness to our tour. And finally, our thanks and admiration go to those who are bucking the trend and fighting for Madagascar's incomparable wildlife, especially all the guides and forest guards who daily watch over the peerless wildlife of their country. We are indebted to them all.

Day 1

Saturday 15th October

The trouble with remote places is that they're remote. They take a lot of getting to. And certainly Madagascar fits into this category. Paris first, for a night in an Ibis Hotel at Charles de Gaulle, then the long flight to Antananarivo.

The group united and a plan was hatched for the day and in no time we were heading to Lemurs Park, a short distance outside the city, where various families of lemurs live in semi-liberty within the grounds of an attractive park. Families of handsome chestnut-and-white Coquerel's Sifakas bounded through the trees, one of them sharing its patch with a Black-and-White Ruffed Lemur and a Crowned Sifaka. Brown Lemurs slipped through the forest of non-native eucalypts and pines, and shamelessly swapped genes with the Red-fronted Browns and Mongoose Lemurs who had joined their band. A family of rotund Eastern Grey Bamboo lemurs pinged between stands of bamboo, while a solitary male Black Lemur and a party of Ring-tailed Lemurs searched for food nearby.

We also met our first chameleons here: a couple of Oustalet's Chameleons (which we would later see in the wild) and a single, very beautiful Panther Chameleon. There were wild reptiles, however, in the form of a Spiny-tailed Iguanid on a jumble of sun-baked rocks and a handsomely stripy Broad-tailed Girdled Lizard in the mouth of his sandy burrow. There were wild birds too. A Madagascar Brush Warbler gave its snarling call and fed its chicks in a tussock of grass, while Madagascar White-eyes and Souimanga Sunbirds zipped through the trees. A Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo chimed plaintively from the top of a eucalypt and Mascarene Martins dived and darted over the stream.

On the way to and from Lemurs Park, we passed through the capital's rice paddies which were rich in waterbirds including Squacco Herons and four egrets: Great, Cattle, Black and Dimorphic. Here too were Madagascar Black Swifts and our only Greater Painted Snipe of the tour.

A fine introduction to a fine country... But much finer was yet to come and this evening, in preparation for adventures in the south east, we flew to Fort Dauphin and spent the night in the comfortable Hotel Dauphin.

Day 2

Sunday 16th October

After breakfast this morning, and the odd Common Jery, Pied Crow and African Palm Swift in the hotel garden, we started our journey by road to Berenty. I use the word road in its loosest sense, as National Highway Number 13 hasn't seen a great deal of love in the past fifty years; but what it lacks in tarmac, it more than makes up for in things to see. Bright red Combretum flowers glowed from the sides of the road and, amid mango trees in flower and litchi trees coming into fruit, the smiling people of Madagascar went about their business with Crested Drongos darting over their heads. As we drove, Benoit, who was to be our guide in Berenty, explained to us the burial customs of the people of this corner of the country, and in particular their veneration of the places in which people have been interred and in which their spirits still live.

Our stops here were fascinating. In roadside bushes we saw our first two Spiny-backed Chameleons while at a park office of Andohahela National Park, Sakalava Weavers built their nests in a tree overhanging the road. Near here, now in transitional habitat between the humidity of the east and the punishing drought and heat of the south west, we saw groves of the rare triangular palm. Once we had crossed the coccyx of Madagascar's spine of mountains, we entered the spiny desert for which the area is celebrated. Spindly Didieraceae waved their spiny fingers on either side of the road and a female Lafresnaye's Vanga landed in the top of one for us to see. Also here were our first Mad. Magpie Robin, Mad. Bushlark and Stripe-throated Jery.

By lunchtime we reached the world-famous Berenty reserve, whose lemurs have been studied and filmed through generations. Slouched in a tree by our cabins were several Ring-tailed Lemurs and just metres from them in the same tree was a family of Verreaux's Sifakas. They dozed contentedly as we gasped and giggled at the ease with which we'd encountered our first lemurs.

After lunch, unashamed newbies that we were, we watched and photographed the Sifakas as they bounded around the camp in celebrated style. Meanwhile, small groups of Berenty's introduced population of hybrid Eulemurs (brown lemur types), raided the rubbish bins and nursed their adorable infants.

Later in the afternoon, as the intense heat of the day abated, we headed to the gallery forest for our first real taste of Madagascar's wildlife. Beautiful Crested Couas slipped along the branches of trees while Madagascar Coucals hooted and burbled from the shade. As we watched a delightful group of Sifakas bounding between trees, a Mad. Cuckoo Hawk slipped almost unobserved over the forest canopy. At the opposite end of the lemur activity spectrum, nocturnal (and impossibly sweet) White-footed Sportive Lemurs snoozed in their tree holes. Nearby, a pair of Mad. Hoopoes probed the leaf-litter and a darkly handsome White-browed Owl gave away his presence with his demonic chuckle.

As dusk fell we entered a different forest – this time the spiny desert – and in no time we were watching our first Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs ping and scampering through the spiky boughs of Alluaudias. Here too we met no fewer than six White-footed Sportive Lemurs going about their business and were delighted to watch a Totoroka Scops Owl singing right above us. Nearby, peaceful herds of Flatid Leaf Bug nymphs wandered mechanically over the spindly branches of shrubs. We went to bed thinking Berenty was rather a good place to be.

Day 3

Monday 17th October

Some of the party today opted to take an early morning walk to the river through gallery forests. Our first Giant Coua crossed a forest ride in front of us and Hook-billed Vangas attended a nest in an overhanging bough. Three beautiful Frances' Sparrowhawks put in appearances as Common Newtonias gave their happy, chippy songs. At the river a Mad. Pond Heron stood hunched on the sand and several Madagascar Sandgrouse flew in to drink while flocks of startlingly green Grey-headed Lovebirds whirred and chipped around us.

After breakfast the whole group went into the gallery forest, towards Berenty's well-known colony of Mad. Flying Foxes. Taking care not to alarm these sensitive creatures we stood in awe as they flapped their great wings above us and glowed gold in the already-impressive sunshine of the morning. Nearby we met our first Mad. Hissing Cockroach not, as expected, cowering under the bark of a dead tree, but balancing on the end of a twig.

This afternoon was lost to rain. As it would turn out, it was our only major rain of the whole tour and it came at the driest site we visited. At the rainforest sites we visited later we were troubled only by one brief storm over lunch. But the Berenty rain meant business and we wisely decided not to venture into it. By late afternoon it had petered out and at dusk we took to the gallery forest. Sportive Lemurs sported in the treetops and Big-headed Geckos clung to the rough bark of trees. Most fascinating though were the invertebrates we found: pill millipedes, giant land snails and an enormous camel cricket.

Day 4

Tuesday 18th October

As we gathered in the car park this morning, Mad. Spine-tailed Swifts zipped over our heads. Soon we were making the short journey to the Anjapolo Forest, Claude's favourite patch of spiny desert, with Chabert's Vangas flying alongside the bus and Mad. Bushlarks fluttering up from the sisal plantations. At Anjapolo there was something for everyone to admire. To the more botanically-minded, Claude explained in exquisite detail the differences between the many species of *Alluaudia*, *Didierea* and *Euphorbia* found here. Meanwhile Running Couas tiptoed through the undergrowth, a Green-capped Coua covered her nest, and we crept respectfully to the ground-roost of a beautiful Madagascar Nightjar. Also here were innumerable Sportive Lemurs scrunched into uncomfortable-looking crannies in the spiny *Alluaudias*.

Next we visited Rapihy Forest, the patch of spiny desert we should have visited the afternoon before if it had not rained. Here a subtly different mix of spiny plants predominates and Claude was once again in his botanical element. Not content with identifying plants, he pointed out two species of skink-like *Tracheloptychus* and an attractively-striped Big-eyed Grass Snake. The depth and breadth of his knowledge are astounding.

In the afternoon we drove back to Fort Dauphin, in readiness for our morning flight to Tana.

Day 5

Wednesday 19th October

Very early this morning we were en route to Tana, where, before our afternoon flight to Toliara, we visited Tsarasaotra and had an excellent lunch at the Relais des Plateaux. At Tsarasaotra we searched through the big flocks of Red-billed Teal and White-faced Whistling-Ducks for rarer species. A sprinkling of Comb Ducks were found, and a couple of Hottentot Teal, but we could find neither of the endemics. Two Grey-headed Gulls, looking rather sheepish among the rafts of ducks, were a new bird for Claude, a rare thing indeed in Madagascar. The papyrus stands were a-squabble with Squacco Herons, among which one or two Mad. Pond Herons glowed, and the trees sagged under the weight of Cattle Egrets and Black-crowned Night-Herons.

This evening we flew again, to the intense heat of Toliara, where we met Benza and Donn e, our drivers for the rest of the tour.

Day 6

Thursday 20th October

This morning we visited the well-known mudflats of Toliara. Claude's friends who very kindly allowed us to view the flats from their lodge smilingly assured us that there had been lots of waders present just half an hour before. However, by the time we arrived just a couple of Grey Plovers pattered over the mud and a party of Red Turnstones, visitors from the high Arctic, shot past over the sea. Our next port of call was a cluster of small ponds by the airport where two Kittlitz's Plovers trotted lightly over tussocks of grass.

This morning's main site was Zombitse National Park, the only stand of dry forest remaining in miles and miles of anthropogenic grassland. Our main targets here were restricted range endemics: Hubbard's (Zombitse) Sportive Lemur and Appert's Tetraka. I have no idea who Hubbard was but he has an awfully cute Sportive Lemur! We saw two of these lovely animals, poking their fluffy noses out of cracks in trees.

Also here, despite the intense heat of mid day, we saw several birds for the first time: an Appert's Tetraka foraged in a group of Long-billed Greenbuls, a Mad. Blue Vanga slipped through the trees, closely followed by a female Mad. Cuckooshrike and we encountered several bizarre Mad. Cuckoo Rollers. We left, all too soon, having hugely enjoyed our brief visit to this beautiful forest.

By the afternoon, having passed through the sapphire-slum of Ilakaka, we had reached the mighty rock formations of Isalo National Park. This afternoon we took the trail to Madagascar's impressive Grand Canyon and learned from our local guide Nirina about the burial customs of the local tribe. Here bizarre Pachypodium plants sprouted from outcrops of rocks and near-invisible stick insects clung to bare trees. A Spiny-tailed Iguanid poked his head from his burrow and as we walked down from the table mountain we met two new birds: a pair of Broad-billed Rollers and a single male of the Benson's form of Forest Rockthrush.

Day 7

Friday 21st October

Some of us ventured this morning into the deforested grasslands around the magnificent Isalo Rock Lodge, but little was to be seen here but Mad. Cisticola, Mad. Bushlark, Pied Crow, Mad. Kestrel and Yellow-billed Kite.

This morning's journey was slowed by the endless stream of zebu being driven to market in Tana, a journey which in some cases takes longer than five weeks for the locals. We made a late-morning visit to the charming reserve at Anja where, encouraged by guides such as Claude, local people have resolved to protect their forest and the lemurs which inhabit it and are reaping financial rewards as a result. In addition to a delightfully droopy group of Ring-tailed Lemurs, disturbed only by the enthusiastic antics of their offspring, here we saw our first Oustalet's Chameleon and our first Mad. Buzzard.

For lunch we stopped at Ambalavao and visited the paper factory which uses historic paper-making techniques brought by Arab settlers intent in producing their own copies of the Quran.

In the afternoon we sped on towards the rainforests of Ranomafana and made a brief roadside stop there before checking in to our hotel. During this briefest of first stops in a Madagascar rainforest we admired roadside orchids and had a glimpse of a Forest Rockthrush while Mad. Wagtails played on the rocks in the river.

Day 8

Saturday 22nd October

This morning saw us preparing for every conceivable eventuality – rain, sun, leeches, mosquitoes, starvation – except one. We weren't prepared to bump into another Naturetrek Madagascar tour group being expertly led by Cathy Harlow! I was alerted to their presence when two of Cathy's clients, who had travelled with me on the first ever Brahmaputra Cruise, greeted me warmly as we strode up to a family of Red-bellied Lemurs!! I was delighted to see both, former clients and exquisitely beautiful lemurs. The family consisted of a spectacled male and two white-bellied females, one of them carrying a young infant. We watched excitedly for minutes on end, as the lemurs manoeuvred themselves into ever more photogenic positions. Eventually though we decided to leave, in pursuit of one of the park's most-sought creatures, the Golden Bamboo Lemur. The route we took was, shall we say, adventurous but eventually we reached a tree where two Golden Bamboo Lemurs had curled up on high branches to roost for the heat of the day.

Craning our necks to the sky, squinting and filling in the blanks with our imaginations we reckoned we could say we had seen this rare, only recently-discovered, and beautiful primate. Our next new lemur was considerably more obliging. A troop of handsome Red-fronted Brown Lemurs crossed the path right over our heads near the Belle Vue watchpoint, allowing us superb looks as males, females and their young. Taking a break at the watchpoint we admired the dazzling beauty of several Four-eyed Emerald Day Geckos. These vied for our affections with the astonishing Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko we had seen earlier, dangling from a twig like a withered leaf. On the way back to lunch we stopped to admire Madagascar's signature Giraffe Weevils and two sun-basking Mad. Tree Boas.

After lunch at our hotel almost everyone headed back to the Talatakeley forest for a second bout of lemurs. And what lemurs they would turn out to be! Our main aim was to see the Greater Bamboo Lemur. Now we knew they were rare and we knew that lately they had been tricky to see but we had no idea how rare or how tricky. We sent off our guides and scouts in search of them and settled down to pass the time under a magnificent stand of bamboo. Before he left our charming guide Theo enlightened us: there were tragically thought to be only two Greater Bamboo Lemurs left in Ranomafana and these had not been seen in six weeks. Six weeks! Hearing this we gave up hope of seeing them and settled into a discussion of conservation biology and the past and future of Madagascar's wildlife. CRASH! Something big moves through the bamboo above us! Twelve pairs of binoculars swing up to it. It has little white ear tufts, a prominent muzzle and a slaty back with a chestnut patch at the base of the tail. It's a Greater Bamboo Lemur! It's a Greater Bamboo Lemur and behind it is another. Allowing us a great look, the lemurs moved up the slope above us. Elated we waited for the return of our guides. On Fidy's arrival we showed him the photos the group had taken. 'It's a Greater Bamboo Lemur!' he hooted with glee. Our guides shot up the slope and quickly announced that they had found the pair in a stand of bamboo on a precarious slope. We carefully made our way up to them and were rewarded with point-blank views of the younger female above our heads and brief looks at the male.

Regaining the trails we looked up to see a family of Golden Bamboo Lemurs scampering through the same bamboo stand under which we'd stood earlier. Then a Red Forest Rat (alas not identified with certainty to species) shot across the path and a Pitta-like Ground Roller hopped onto a spindly horizontal branch for all to admire and photograph. As the dusk fell and we left the park we were chaperoned out by a large family of charmingly tame Red-fronted Brown Lemurs.

From here we drove a short distance to the start of our night walk. Gathering round banana-smearred roadside bushes with several other groups we watched in amazement as charming Brown (Rufous) Mouse Lemurs sprang through the branches of the bushes, pinching minuscule specks of banana. Walking on we encountered no fewer than six species of chameleon: Short-nosed, Short-horned, Nose-horned, Blue-legged, Glaw's and O'Shaughnessy's. An added bonus came in the form of an adorably dopey Greater Dwarf Lemur over the road. What a phenomenal day!

Day 9

Sunday 23rd October

Today wasn't too shabby either. This morning we visited the Vohiparara forest with two very special lemurs in our sights. But first we were distracted by other wildlife: Rands' and Cryptic Warblers sang from the treetops and White-headed Vangas whistled like giant Bullfinches. Two delicate Guibemantis pulcher frogs sheltered in the axils of a Pandanus and a Pitta-like Ground Roller could be heard giving its loud bark.

Soon news came that both target lemurs had been found in the same place and we started the longish walk to reach them. First we paid court to two gorgeous Milne-Edwards' Sifakas as they sat in low trees, occasionally bounding from trunk to trunk with remarkable ease. Their startling red eyes bored into us and, just as it says in the books, they were surrounded by clouds of flies. Having admired and photographed these wonderfully handsome creatures we moved a little way back along the trail to a Small-toothed Sportive Lemur who was dozing in full view outside his roost hole. Disgruntled, perhaps, that we had left them, the Sifakas sprang past, leaping onto the Sportive's tree causing him to shoot into his hole and another Sportive to poke its head out from the depths. In no time the first Sportive was back in the sun and some superb photos were taken.

This afternoon we made the long drive to Antsirabe, stopping for lunch by a wetland where our only Jewel Chameleon of the tour hid in the long grass in the searing middle-of-the-day heat.

Day 10

Monday 24th October

I don't mind admitting that today was a tricky one for me. Never having led this tour before, and never having seen the sites, I was faced with the unenviable decision of what to do with our last two days. Should we spend the long day in Analamazaotra (Périnet), thereby bagging Indri with ease, but making it less likely that we see other charismatic creatures? Or should we head for Mantadia for the full day, in the hope of finding the rare denizens of this large patch of primary forest, but with the risk of not seeing Indri at all the following day if it rained. These thoughts sloshed round my mind as we drove the long distance to Andasibe. We stopped on the outskirts of Tana to collect our picnic lunch and again by the Mandraka River to eat it, as a Nose-horned Chameleon and a Blue-legged Chameleon (of the Mandraka subspecies) moved slowly through the bushes around us.

On reaching Andasibe we met our outstanding local guide Maurice and called in to the park office to collect our permits for the next two days. With the wails of Indris in our ears (how exciting!), I beckoned Maurice to one side and we had a strategy meeting. He assured me it wasn't going to rain, that it was definitely a good idea to spend the full day in Mantadia, that we were all but guaranteed sightings of two very special lemurs there, and that Indri would be in the bag the following day. Phew. Mantadia it was.

But first we went on a night walk along the edge of the Analamazaotra reserve. We heard both Mad. Long-eared Owl and Rainforest Scops Owl here and Maurice tried very hard to call them in for us. However the owls weren't to be fooled. A White-throated Rail could also be heard singing from a roadside stream. Just when we'd given up hope of seeing anything amazing this evening (were we to be stuck on thirteen species of lemur forever?) our beams fell on a Furry-eared (Crossley's) Dwarf Lemur. This has to have been the cutest and most obliging of all the nocturnal lemurs we saw, sitting for minutes on end in a tree by the road, allowing excellent photos to be taken. Fourteen species. We're in business again.

Day 11

Tuesday 25th October

But we weren't to be on fourteen for long. Today we ventured to Mantadia. No sooner had we parked than a cry of Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur went up. One of these charming animals was sitting in the open on top of a stand of bamboo right by the road. He was hotly followed by a family of Mad. Woodrails which Maurice and his sharp-eyed colleagues, Victor and Christophe, found lurking under a stand of ginger lilies.

Almost as soon as we entered the forest we were very pleased to have made the decision to come here today. Nuthatch Vangas scampered up the trunks of trees and both Pitta-like and Scaly Ground Rollers allowed us to admire them at close quarters. Scrambling up a short slope we visited a pair of gorgeous Collared Nightjars at their roost.

We soon received news that Victor had found a family of rarely-seen Black-and-White Ruffed Lemurs. On the long walk to see them we heard their curious dog-like barks and snarls, which, though they sound blood-curdling to us, are apparently very jolly and sociable if you're a lemur. On reaching their tree we were thrilled to see not just two adults of this incomparably lovely lemur but also four diminutive and hugely playful infants. With the hoots of Indris in our ears we were delighted to watch these critically endangered animals at length.

Our falling-at-the-feet of the Ruffed Lemurs came to an end only when news reached us that Victor had done it again: he'd found a family of Indris. So off we set on another walk through the forest. However it was all worth it when we stood beneath two resplendent adult Indris and one well-grown juvenile. They were eating fruit from the boughs of a mighty rainforest tree, occasionally turning the full power of their imposing stares down on us. Magnificent!

One charismatic lemur remained to be seen today. It is in the opinion of many the most beautiful lemur of all: the Diademed Sifaka. We saw many beautiful things during our search, including a Painted Mantella frog and our only Mad. Crested Ibis of the tour (not seen, alas, by everyone) but we had no luck finding the exquisite primate. So we called in at a lake for some delightful birds – Mad. Starling, Broad-billed Roller, Mad. Swamp Warbler, Ward's (Flycatcher) Vanga, Mad. Buzzard and Crested Drongo – and stopped for lunch in the cool shade by a stream in which a Thiel's Lined Snake swam in search of frogs.

In the afternoon we walked back through the forest, eyes still peeled, but sifakas came there none. The solitary consolation was our only Tylas Vanga of the tour. After such a spectacular day we tacitly resolved not to be disappointed by our failure to find the sifakas and we pinned our hopes on seeing the relocated population in Analamazaotra the next day. As we drove home Maurice, whose sharp eyes we had craftily positioned at the front of the bus, called out that he had seen them over the road! There they were: two absurdly beautiful Diademed Sifakas glowing gold in the sullen afternoon sun.

This evening we ventured out for a second night walk, visiting the Mitsinjo Private Reserve which is protected through the initiative and dedication of local guides. Madagascar Nightjars swooped effortlessly over our heads as we arrived and we were soon in the forest. The denseness of the vegetation made it tricky for us all to see the same things; however everyone saw at least one of the two Eastern Avahis (Woolly Lemurs) that were found and we also encountered a young Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko dangling precariously right over the trail. Yet another fine evening, in yet another fine Madagascar forest!

Day 12

Wednesday 26th October

How could our tour have come to its end so soon? Surely there must be more days in the forest. Surely there must be more lemurs to see. Alas no; this morning was our last day and we spent it visiting Analamazaotra Special Reserve (also known as Périnet).

This is without question the world's best site for watching Indris and we were not to be disappointed. Our first port of call was the family of Indris known as Group One. Four adults sat low in the trees above us, eating buds and generally being beautiful. We watched entranced for half an hour. Just as I was preparing to move us the Indris began to sing. Their heart-rending wails seemed to start in our cores and emanate outwards and we were all left humbled by the time we'd spent with these extraordinary animals.

Next news came of a roost of Eastern Avahis. We'd seen these lovely nocturnal members of the Sifaka family the night before, but not nearly well enough. As we went, we heard that Diademed Sifakas were passing through the Avahi roost (seriously, you couldn't script it) so we quickened our pace and caught up with these prime primates before they moved. Two adults, both radio-collared members of the group relocated to Analamazaotra when a nearby pipeline was built, sat in the trees with a young juvenile. We admired their impossibly beautiful pelage from every angle before – in a flash – they scooped up their youngster and tore off at breakneck speed through the forest. A beautiful Blue Coua sat in full view nearby, just to keep the side up for the birds. Rather more sedate than the sifakas were the three adult and one juvenile Eastern Avahis at the same spot. These clung to the trunks of a tree and peered dozily at us as we admired them.

I had decided early on that twenty species of lemur was a very tall order. But here we were on the last morning on nineteen species, all seen extremely well, in a forest in which the Common Brown Lemur was supposedly, well, common. But where were they? Having pestered the guides all morning over the Common Brown, news at last came back to us that they'd been found. And, after a short walk to find them, very lovely they were too. Twenty species of lemur! Well done Naturetrekkers! Many of us all too soon eschewed the delights of the first posse of Common Browns to see a Mad. Pygmy Kingfisher which Christophe had found nearby. However, having found one pair of Common Brown Lemurs we seemed to be surrounded by them for the rest of the morning. Even when we bumped into some of Indri Group Two – two adults and a charming juvenile born in May – we were still accompanied by the inquisitive, handsome Browns. As we left the park, our very last lemur of the tour was a delightful Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur chomping his way through a stand of bamboo.

So it was that, dosed up on lovely lemurs, we headed back to Antananarivo, to wash, re-pack, share supper at the Relais des Plateaux, say our good-byes to the incomparably brilliant Claude and board our flight home.

And still the lemurs bound through my mind as I sit to write. Cheeky-faced Bamboo Lemurs peer at me from the dense forests of Ranomafana; baby Ring-tails, their baby tails ringed, cling to their mothers in the heat and dust of Berenty; tiny Mouse Lemurs hop through the spiny forests of my head; and Indris wail their plaintive songs loud in my ears...

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Mammals (✓ = sighting; h = heard only; f = sighting in feral state)

	Common name	Scientific name	October												
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
1	Grey-brown (Reddish-grey) Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus griseorufus</i>		✓		✓									
2	Brown (Rufous) Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>									✓				
3	Greater Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus major</i>									✓				
4	Furry-eared (Crossley's) Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>											✓		
5	Small-toothed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur microdon</i>										✓			
6	Hubbard's (Zombitse) Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur hubbardi</i>						✓							
7	White-footed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur leucopus</i>		✓	✓	✓									
8	Eastern Grey (Lesser) Bamboo Lemur	<i>Haplemur griseus</i>												✓	
9	Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Haplemur aureus</i>									✓				
10	Greater Bamboo Lemur	<i>Prolemur simus</i>									✓				
11	Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓					
12	Common Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>												✓	
13	Red-fronted Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur rufifrons</i>									✓				
14	<i>Eulemur</i> hybrids	<i>Eulemur</i> sp.		f	f	f									
15	Red-bellied Lemur	<i>Eulemur rubriventer</i>									✓				
16	(Southern) Black-and-White Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata editorum</i>												✓	
17	Eastern Avahi (Woolly Lemur)	<i>Avahi laniger</i>												✓	
18	Verreaux's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>		✓	✓	✓									
19	Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>												✓	
20	Milne-Edwards' Sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>										✓			
21	Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>											h	✓	
22	Red Forest Rat sp.	<i>Nesomys</i> sp.													
23	Madagascar Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus rufus</i>			✓						✓				

	Common name	Scientific name	October												
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	

Birds

1	Madagascar Pond (Squacco) Heron	<i>Ardeola idae</i>			✓		✓							
2	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	✓				✓					✓		
3	Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓	✓		✓							
4	Striated (Green-backed) Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>			✓					✓	✓	✓		
5	Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	✓		✓		✓					✓		✓
6	Black Egret	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>	✓				✓							✓
7	Dimorphic Egret	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
8	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
9	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>						✓			✓			
10	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	✓	✓		✓						✓		
11	Madagascar Crested Ibis	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>												✓
12	Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>					✓		✓		✓			
13	Hottentot Teal	<i>Anas hottentota</i>					✓							
14	White-faced Whistling-Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>					✓							
15	Comb (Knob-billed) Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>					✓							
16	Henst's Goshawk	<i>Accipiter henstii</i>												h
17	Frances' Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter francesiae</i>			✓									
18	Madagascar Buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>							✓	✓	✓		✓	
19	Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk	<i>Aviceda madagascariensis</i>		✓										
20	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
21	Madagascar Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
22	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>			✓	✓				h	h			
23	Madagascar Woodrail	<i>Canirallus kiolooides</i>											✓	
24	Madagascar Buttonquail	<i>Turnix nigricollis</i>						✓						
25	White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>							h				h	
26	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					✓							
27	Greater Painted Snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	✓											
28	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>						✓						
29	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>						✓						
30	Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>						✓						

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			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
31	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			h										
32	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			✓										
33	Grey-headed Gull	<i>Larus cirrocephalus</i>						✓							
34	Madagascar Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles personatus</i>			✓										
35	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓						
36	Madagascar Blue Pigeon	<i>Alectroenas madagascariensis</i>												✓	
37	Madagascar Green Pigeon	<i>Treron australis</i>										✓			
38	Madagascar Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia picturata</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				h	
39	Grey-headed Lovebird	<i>Agapornis canus</i>			✓	✓									
40	Greater Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>												h	
41	Lesser Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>			✓					✓			✓	h	
42	Madagascar Coucal	<i>Centropus toulou</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓					h	h	h	
43	Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>	h			h				✓		h		h	
44	Green-capped Coua	<i>Coua olivaceiceps</i>				✓									
45	Running Coua	<i>Coua cursor</i>				✓									
46	Giant Coua	<i>Coua gigas</i>		✓	✓	✓									
47	Coquerel's Coua	<i>Coua coquereli</i>							✓						
48	Red-fronted Coua	<i>Coua reynaudii</i>									✓	h			
49	Blue Coua	<i>Coua caerulea</i>												✓	
50	Crested Coua	<i>Coua cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓								✓	
51	Madagascar Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio madagascariensis</i>											h		
52	Rainforest Scops Owl	<i>Otus rutilus</i>											h		
53	Torotoroka Scops Owl	<i>Otus madagascariensis</i>		✓	✓	✓									
54	Collared Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus enarratus</i>												✓	
55	Madagascar Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>		h	h	✓								✓	
56	Madagascar Black Swift	<i>Apus balstoni</i>	✓						✓						
57	Madagascar Spine-tailed Swift	<i>Zoonavena grandidieri</i>				✓								✓	
58	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>		✓		✓					✓				
59	Madagascar (Malachite) Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo vintsioides</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	
60	Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx madagascariensis</i>												✓	
61	Madagascar Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>	✓		✓					✓		✓		✓	
62	Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>							✓					✓	

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			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
63	Madagascar Cuckoo-Roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>							✓					✓	✓
64	Scaly Ground-Roller	<i>Brachypteracias squamigera</i>												✓	
65	Pitta-like Ground-Roller	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>									✓	h		✓	
66	Velvet Asity	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>										✓			
67	Mascarene Martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>	✓					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
68	Madagascar Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Appert's (Greenbul) Tetraka	<i>Bernieria apperti</i>							✓						
70	Long-billed Greenbul	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>							✓					✓	
71	Madagascar Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus albospectularis</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Madagascar Hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓				
73	Forest Rockthrush	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>								✓					
74	(Benson's) Forest Rockthrush	<i>Monticola (sharpei) bensoni</i>							✓						
75	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓							✓		✓	✓	✓	
76	Madagascar Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
77	Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Tersiphone mutata</i>		✓	✓	✓						✓		✓	✓
78	Common Newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>			✓	h			✓		h	h	✓	h	h
79	Madagascar Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>				✓				✓					
80	Madagascar Bush Lark	<i>Mirafra hova</i>		✓		✓			✓	✓					
81	Madagascar Swamp Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>												✓	
82	Madagascar Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>	✓					h				✓	✓	h	
83	Subdesert Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas lantzii</i>				h									
84	Common Jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>		✓	✓	✓			h	h		h			
85	Stripe-throated Jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>		✓		h			✓						
86	Green Jery	<i>Neomixis viridis</i>												✓	
87	Wedge-tailed Jery	<i>Neomixis flavoviridis</i>												✓	
88	Rand's Warbler	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>									✓	h			h
89	Cryptic Warbler	<i>Cryptosilvicola randrianasoloi</i>										✓			
90	Madagascar White-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	
91	Madagascar Green Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia notata</i>				✓						✓			
92	Souimanga Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia sovimanga</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Ward's (Flycatcher) Vanga	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>											✓	✓	
94	Nuthatch Vanga	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>												✓	

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95	White-headed Vanga	<i>Artamella viridis</i>										✓		✓	
96	Chabert's Vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>				✓			✓			✓		✓	
97	Madagascar Blue Vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>							✓						
98	Red-tailed Vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>									h				
99	Lafresnaye's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris xenopirostris</i>		✓											
100	Hook-billed Vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>			✓										
101	Tylas Vanga	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>												✓	
102	Madagascar Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>							✓			✓			
103	Madagascar Starling	<i>Saroglossa aurata</i>												✓	
104	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
105	Crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
106	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
107	Madagascar Fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓		✓	
108	Forest Fody	<i>Foudia eminentissima</i>												✓	
109	Sakalava Weaver	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>		✓	✓	✓									
110	Nelicourvi Weaver	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>										✓	✓	✓	
111	Madagascar Mannikin	<i>Lonchura nana</i>	✓			✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	

Amphibians

1	Treefrog sp.	<i>Boophis viridis</i>											✓	
2	Treefrog sp.	<i>Boophis madagascariensis</i>									✓			
3	Painted Mantella	<i>Mantella madagascariensis</i>												✓
4	Treefrog sp.	<i>Guibemantis pulcher</i>										✓		
5	Treefrog sp.	<i>Platypelis barbouri</i>									✓			
6	Frog sp.	<i>Plethodontohyla inguinalis</i>									✓			

Reptiles

1	O'Shaughnessey's Chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnesseyi</i>									✓			
2	Short-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma brevicornis</i>									✓			
3	Short-nosed Chameleon	<i>Calumma gastrotaenia</i>									✓			✓
4	Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii</i>											✓	
5	Nose-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma nasuta</i>									✓		✓	

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6	Glaw's Chameleon	<i>Calumma glawi</i>									✓				
7	Blue-legged Chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>									✓				
8	Mandraka Blue-legged Chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum mandraka</i>										✓		✓	
9	Spiny-backed Chameleon	<i>Furcifer verrucosus</i>		✓	✓										
10	Oustalet's Chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>								✓					
11	Jewel Chameleon	<i>Furcifer lateralis</i>										✓			
12	Three-eyed Iguanid	<i>Chalerodon madagascariensis</i>			✓	✓			✓						
13	Spiny-tailed Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cyclurus</i>	✓						✓						
14	Large-headed Gecko sp.	<i>Paroedura bastardii</i>			✓										
15	Day Gecko sp.	<i>Lygodactylus tuberosus</i>		✓											
16	Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>									✓				
17	Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>											✓		
18	Lined Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata bifasciata</i>												✓	
19	Four-eyed Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>									✓				
20	Changeable Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma mutabilis</i>				✓									
21	House Gecko sp.	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>		✓											
22	Broad-tailed Girdled Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus laticaudatus</i>	✓												
23	Madagascar Girdled Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus madagascariensis</i>											✓		
24	Peters' Keeled-Plated Lizard	<i>Tracheloptychus petersi</i>				✓									
25	Madagascar Keeled-Plated Lizard	<i>Tracheloptychus madagascariensis</i>				✓								✓	
26	Big-eyed Grass Snake	<i>Mimophis mahalafensis</i>				✓			✓						
27	Lateral Lined Snake	<i>Bibilava (Liopholidophis) lateralis</i>		✓											
28	Thiel's Lined Snake	<i>Bibilava (Liopholidophis) thieli</i>											✓		
29	Madagascar Tree Boa	<i>Sanzinia madagascariensis</i>									✓			✓	
30	Brown Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon modestus</i>				✓									

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