

Madagascar's Lemurs

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 October - 3 November 2019



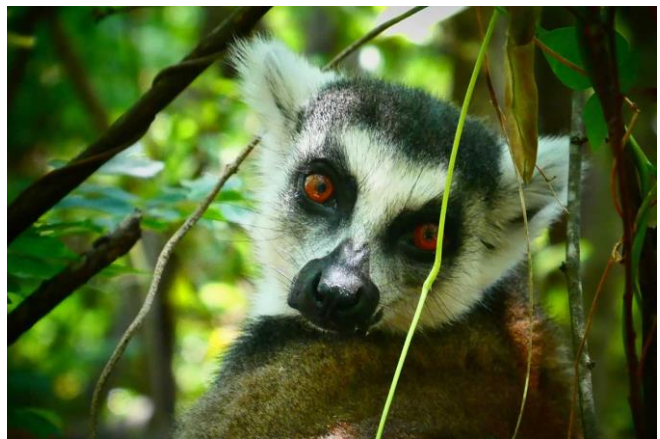
Ring-tailed Lemur (*Lemur catta*)



Indri, (*Indri indri*)



Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone mutata*)



Ring-tailed Lemur (*Lemur catta*)

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With twelve Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Saturday 19th October

Our Ethiopian Airlines flight to Addis Ababa departed from Heathrow this evening and we arrived in plenty of time to catch our connecting flight to Antananarivo the following morning.

Day 2

Sunday 20th October

Chloe arrived an hour after the main group, and after a very messy walk through the visa and immigration area, she came out to meet everyone who were already with the local guide, Parson. Everyone had already changed their money, so we made our way to the bus where we met the driver and his helper who loaded everything on board. We all then headed to Combava, a short drive away, where we stayed the night. As we arrived in the early afternoon, we all went for a short walk close to the hotel to look for some wading birds. We climbed up a small bank just opposite the hotel, which overlooked the rice paddies. Bush Taxis whizzed past, children ran up saying “hello” and then ran off giggling, women were drying out their clothes and we saw a small mud hut where people were drying out bricks.

It was wonderful experiencing the hustle and bustle of the everyday life of locals - you really felt like you were getting an insight into the crazy world of Antananarivo (Tana). We spotted Western Cattle Egret, Dimorphic Egret and Yellow-billed Kite. As we came back to the hotel, we were treated to even more wildlife in the trees on the property. We saw a Black-crowned Night Heron perched in a large tree right above where the minibus was parked, as well as a stunning Red Fody, with his striking bright red breast, flying above us. The hotel appeared to be a bit of an oasis for small birds.

Day 3

Monday 21st October

Antananarivo to Antsirabe

We had an early start with breakfast at 6:15, ready to seize the day. The sun was already shining and the skies were clear. The drivers loaded all the bags onto the bus whilst everyone had breakfast and we headed out around 7:00. Our first destination was Lake Tsarasaotra (translated as “the good place”), the last refuge for wild birds to live and breed within the capital city of Tana, which holds 14 endemic species. The lake is just 0.25 square km in area and actually includes Lake Alarobia as well as a smaller lake. We saw White-faced Whistling Ducks, Hottentot Teals, Squacco Heron, Malagasy Pond Heron and three stunning Knob-billed Ducks, and so much more. We walked past some men who were working on a small home who pointed out two Oustalet’s Chameleons to us...our first chameleons! We were off to a good start. The only thing missing was the endangered Meller’s Duck.

As we continued our journey, we were able to witness the everyday life of the villages we drove past, and the ever changing scenery. We drove past countless rice paddies where women work hard in the sun, planting and collecting the harvest. Parson was telling us how in the past nearly all of the rice from Madagascar would be exported and locals would buy rice that had been imported, which was not as good in quality, although nowadays people are keeping a lot of the rice to use themselves. The staple diet in Madagascar is rice, with an average of

three portions per person eaten every day, giving an annual consumption of 200 kilograms per capita. You can definitely see how important rice is by simply driving around - there are countless rice paddies, which unfortunately does not bode well for the natural forest.

We took a quick break where we got out and stretched our legs and took some photos. We were soon surrounded by some excited children who were keen to have their pictures taken and burst out laughing when shown the photos. We got back into the minibus and waved off the children as they shouted goodbye.

Parson told us about the Tapia trees *Uapaca bojeri* as we drove past a small patch where they were growing. These trees are fire resistant and are also economically important, as this is where the silk worm feeds. The silk from these worms are used to create scarfs and clothing which locals will sell in the markets. These trees also produce a fruit which people sell all along the roadside in small little bags for those driving past.

We had another short break and parked in a small area close to where there was a chance to see many Bee-eaters. We were lucky to see these beautiful birds flying around us and landing onto the rocks near the roadside, sitting beautifully on some of the protruding branches as if posing for photos. There were also numerous brilliant blue butterflies fluttering around us.

We jumped back into the bus and finally arrived in Antsirabe. Before heading to our hotel, we made a stop by the thermal baths and lake. We were guided around the facilities and was informed how people will travel from far and wide to benefit from the healing powers of the thermal baths, which reach temperatures of up to 52 degrees Celsius. Just opposite the Thermal Spa is a small lake where Hamerkops have been spotted in the past. Sadly, they decided not to make an appearance that day.

We then arrived at our lovely hotel, the Residence Camelia where we had dinner and a good night's rest.

Day 4

Tuesday 22nd October

Antsirabe to Ranomafana, via Ambositra and Ankazomifady

After a wonderful night's sleep and a filling breakfast, our driver loaded the roof racks with our luggage, and we set off.

We continued on to Ambositra (formerly known as the city of roses), now known for its ancestral handmade craftsmanship from a tribe called Zafimaniry, which is where many of the wooden carvings of Madagascar originally come from. We picked up our lunch, which we ordered in the morning, then went to a shop where we saw how the wood carvings were made. We entered a tiny room where a man sat with his hand made machine which he used to create small jigsaw like pieces, before putting them together to form different wooden carvings. He gave us a wonderful demonstration of his work, whilst we all stood squished together admiring his skills. He told us how he would leave some of the wood in the water in rice paddies to get a different colour and had other ways to naturally dye the wood. We then had the opportunity to buy some souvenirs before continuing to our next stop off.

We continued on towards Anjzoomifady, a community run reserve with a small pond. We had a picnic lunch of sandwiches, fries and vegetables accompanied by juice and hot drinks in a lovely spot under shelter with

beautiful views. As soon as we stepped away from the picnic table, we saw two Jewel Chameleons just hanging out in a small bush, and some of us even witnessed one catch a cricket, which it quickly guzzled up. Once we packed up our things from lunch and collected all the rubbish, we walked across the road where we went in search of the Madagascan Snipe. We had two helpers that went ahead to spot the bird and lure it out so we were able to see it fly past. After about 10 minutes we saw one shoot past, and we had another five sightings after this. The bird was so quick we were unable to capture it in a photo, but we were all excited to get a viewing and it soon became a game of guessing where this bird would shoot out from next.

Continuing the journey, we drove past areas of “slash and burn”. This was a sad thing to witness, especially as we got closer to Ranomafana. The main reason for slash and burn is to create agricultural land, which people rely heavily upon this as a main source of income as well as food for their families, making it a difficult task for conservationists to resolve. This is why national parks are so important - if people can make a living which benefits the biodiversity as well as their families then it means everyone benefits, but of course there aren't always enough jobs. We were also informed how families will often have many children to help look after their crops and livestock, which often results in taking children out of school at an early age as they are needed more in the fields with their parents. As you drive through vast areas of agricultural land, you do see children helping out during most of the day when you would normally expect them to be in school. Communities and families in Madagascar will help each other out and work together so it is just part of normal everyday life.

As we got closer to Ranomafana, the roads got even more winding and twisting, but it was made up for with the stunning scenery of lush green forest either side of the car. We arrived at our hotel at 17:30 and everyone went to their rooms for a much-needed rest after the long journey and met up again in the evening at 19:00 for dinner. After dinner we went for a little walk around the hotel grounds with Parson, but it was a very quiet evening.

Day 5

Wednesday 23rd October

Ranomafana National Park

We woke up to a magical view of mist covering the rainforest. The mist slowly started to disappear while had breakfast revealing an array of green colours amongst the trees. We met up with our guide, Jean-Chrys, at 6:45, then headed to Ranomafana National Park. We were lucky enough to have two spotters, Delor and Bako, Jean-Chrys's wife and son. Delor helps him occasionally and Bako was on holiday from school and was helping today as he wants to be a ranger one day “Just like his dad”, so was learning the tricks of the trade. He turned out to be a great spotter, and so did his mum. The spotter ran ahead of us to see what they could find.

We walked across a bridge admiring the scenery and the rushing water below us. We first made a descent and walked along the river before we made our way to an area full of bamboo. This was the perfect spot to find any bamboo lemurs, so we had our eyes peeled open in hope of finding our first lemur. Within 20 minutes we were lucky enough to see the Golden Bamboo Lemur, which was a really exciting find as there a few small pockets of bamboo growing. This species was discovered in 1986 by Patricia Wright, and this discovery led to the park being opened in 1991 to protect them, as well as many other lemurs in the area. We were really happy to find them, and we ducked through the bamboo trying find the optimal position with the help of the guides. We admired them as they sat munching away on the cyanide-rich shoots of the Giant Bamboo.

Full of excitement we continued our walk and started to make a slow ascent, passing a tiny little chameleon known as *Brookesia stumpffii*, which sat positioned nicely on a little twig for us to do a bit of a photo shoot. Just a little further down we saw one of Chloe's favourite geckos, the Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko (*Uroplatus phantasticus*), it was positioned nicely on a dead leaf, demonstrating why they have the name of a leaf-tailed gecko.

We heard back from our spotters who said they found the Black and White Ruffed Lemur, so we hurriedly made our way to the area. We soon realised we had to make a descent down a steep hill just off the main path. This was a bit of a challenge and some decided that it just wasn't for them. Those that continued made their way down slowly, slipping and sliding through the leaves, using our bottoms to make our way at times. We reached the place where they had been spotted but the cheeky things were staying very well hidden amongst the treetops. We managed to develop a method of sitting down and lying on our back at a certain angle so we could get a sighting, but binoculars were very much needed because of how high up they were. The lemurs were reluctant to move and clearly very comfortable with their positioning, so we decided to continue and hope to spot them in a more favourable place.

Hot and sweaty, we continued our walk seeing other lemurs such as the Red-fronted Brown Lemur and the Red-bellied Lemur which swung right over us! We made our way to a platform which looked out into the forest. Standing on the platform it looked as if the trees went on forever and did give some hope for the future of this forest. The morning had been a tough, but very rewarding, walk which had a few steep moments and we covered about two miles in five hours. During our hike we also saw a Madagascan Buzzard, Malagasy Coucal, Red-tailed Vanga, Chabert Vanga and Crested Drongo.

We got back at 12:00 and met up for lunch at 12:30. At 15:15 we went looking around the accommodation for the Giraffe Weevil (*Trachelophorus giraffa*). These peculiar insects are endemic to Madagascar. The male has an extended neck which is almost half the length of the body in total. They use these extended necks to fight other males, even pushing their opponent off the leaves, in a bid to impress a female. The female will then lay one egg which she will delicately wrap up in a single leaf, whilst the male stands guard. They only feed on two species of trees, the *Dichaetanthera arborea* and *Cordifolia*, which makes finding them that more special. Our luck just continued, and we saw two males and a female, as well as an egg case, which was really exciting. One of the staff members at the Lodge also called us over as he found a ground Boa, which took a little bit of climbing to get to.

We met up at 17:00 and all jumped on the bus to check out the waterfall nearby. After the waterfall we had our night walk along the roadside as the reserve is closed at night-time and slowly made our way to a spot where banana was smeared over trees in a bid to entice the nocturnal lemurs out of their hiding spots. Within five minutes we caught a glimpse of some movement, then a Rufous Mouse Lemur revealed itself. We watched the lemur greedily lick away at the banana before heading to a second spot where we saw the Greater Dwarf Lemur. There were a few other groups who were out looking for nocturnal lemurs, but the guides made sure that each tree didn't have large groups in order to try to reduce the disturbance as much as possible. The lights used by the guides were also not too bright to prevent damaging the eyes of these beautiful little creatures.

We all then came back for dinner and went to sleep tired and happy.

Day 6

Thursday 24th October

Ranomafana National Park

We had another early start and made our way to another part of Ranomafana called Vohiparara, known more for spotting birds. This route was a lot flatter, which was very welcome after the previous day. The day started off fairly quiet although we saw a Lesser Parrot, Magpie Robin and Blue Coua

Our spotters then contacted our guide to say they had found some Black and White Ruffed Lemur. After not having a great view of these lemurs the previous day we were eager to get there. We retraced our steps and was able to get a great view of them, including a mother and baby. Not long after admiring the lemurs we then came across the Mossy Tailed Gecko, which was so well camouflaged that it took a few people some time to realize what it was they were looking at!

After lunch we had a second walk back to the same place that we went to the day before. Due to the challenging terrain not everyone was convinced, but when word got out that the Greater Bamboo Lemurs had been spotted, many people couldn't resist. These lemurs are critically endangered and are only found in Ranomafana and Adringta National Park, as well as a few small patches of fragmented forest in-between these parks. There are currently only two individuals in Ranamofa, a father and daughter. However, there are plans to introduce more individuals to this area so they can breed and hopefully increase in numbers. Nothing is yet set in stone for this plan and finding information regarding this was challenging, but it is at least promising that it is being talked about.

The location of the lemurs was known so we made a bee line for them, which, as always, was near the top of the forest. We took our time to not exert ourselves too much, and we made it where they had been seen, with the two spotters in the area to make sure they didn't lose sight of them. Unfortunately, they were both perched up in a bushy tree with only a small opening. Everyone took it in turns to crawl through some vines and under a large fallen tree which gave optimal viewing of a bushy tail and lower back! Patience is a virtue, and we soon discovered this as after patiently waiting for around 30 – 40 minutes, they moved. We were given a wonderful display of leaping, eating and grooming, to the point where they crossed right in front of us! Everyone had a spectacular view and we had them to ourselves, not one other soul in sight. We realized we had lost track of time and were due to meet the rest of the group for the night walk, so we hurriedly made our way back to the car park.

Before we started our night walk, we made our way to a place where the Rainbow Frog (also known as the Malagasy Painted Frog) can be found. It took all of ten minutes before our spotter, Bako, came out with frog in hand and gently placed it onto a banana leaf for us, making sure he kept the frog wet. Once everyone was happy, we continued on for a night walk. We were once again lucky enough to see the same nocturnal lemurs as the night before, however it was much busier than the night before and it seemed almost impossible to avoid a crowded area.

Day 7

Friday 25th October

Ranomafana to Isalo

We had an early start to make our long drive down to Isalo. Before we left, some Red-fronted Brown Lemurs were spotted crossing the road at the entrance to our hotel. We all hurried down to watch them, still keeping a respectful distance, as they all took it in turns to carefully cross the road. The one at the back was a little bit more cautious and took his time in crossing, making a few attempts before finally running for it. Luckily the roads were quiet, and we were told this is something they do on a regular basis.

En route we drove past locals working hard in the field to make bricks. The men worked with their sons, collecting clay from the earth before throwing it into a brick mould which the young boys would transport to a pile for them to dry out. Some young boys and girls were also collecting all of the dried bricks, placing them steadily on their heads in stacks of five, before carefully walking up the mound to where the bricks were being stored and effortlessly taking the bricks, one at a time, from their heads and safely placing them down. Everyone was amazed at the work that goes into it so we pulled over to watch the process whilst taking some photos, and it was a nice excuse to stretch our legs. We continued on the winding road and stopped in Ambavalo, to visit a paper museum. We watched the process of how the locals create paper, delicately placing some petals to make them look pretty. Some of the paper was designed as scrapbooks, photo frames and bookmarks. Restaurants will often make special orders for their menus, which the women working there, design. We collected our picnic lunch and continued to Anja forest reserve.

Anja is a small community-run reserve which is home to the famous Ring-tailed Lemur. Our guide informed us that they are currently in the process of trying to get more land, so they are able to extend the reserve. He also told us how they have a very good relationship with all the locals as so many people have family members who work in the reserve.

Ring-tailed Lemurs live in large families of up to 15 individuals, and many we saw had young babies who were starting to venture away from their mothers. One particular infant was feeling very confident and started to climb high up into the trees leaving his mother behind, until he realised just how far he had got and then started to cry for his mother. His mother appeared to be tired of his mischief and ignored his calls for a while, until she finally gave in and slowly made her way back to him, much to his relief. We walked around the reserve and everyone seemed to have been won over by the cheekiness of the babies. Many of the babies had great fun bouncing from one tree to the next, to the ground, to their mothers' head and back into the tree again. Although we could have watched these all day, the midday heat was becoming stronger and the call of lunch was inviting us to eat. We headed back to the car park where the picnic area was located and got out our lovely packed lunch.

After lunch we all jumped back into the minibus and continued our journey to Isalo. We arrived as the sun was setting so on arrival everyone made their way to their rooms and freshened up before meeting for dinner.

Day 8

Saturday 26th October

Isalo National Park

After breakfast we visited Isalo National Park. This park was traditionally inhabited by the Bara people. Parson told us stories how the Bara people would prove their manhood by stealing cattle from cattle farmers, much like

the Masai in Kenya would have to kill a Lion as a passage of right into becoming a man. Although these practices are no longer in place, Zebu cattle are still of importance and represent wealth.

Isalo National Park consists of sandstone massifs which have been greatly eroded by wind and rain creating bizarre ridges, impressive gorges and tiny stalagmite pinnacles, and has been referred to as something out of the “wild wild west”. This dry deciduous forest is also home to some of Madagascar’s largest tapia woodland, which is of economic value.

It was another very hot day, and there was very little shade available, so we took our time walking and took advantage of any tall tree offering shade. We spotted some birds such as the Yellow-billed Kite, Madagascan Buzzard, Madagascan Buttonquail and the Madagascan Hoopoe.

We then arrived at the camping grounds where we saw Ring-tailed Lemurs which we admired for a short while, whilst some took advantage of the facilities. Some of us continued on, making the climb up to admire the waterfall, while the rest of us sat by a small river and admired the Bulbuls as they dipped in and out of the water. A few of those that continued on to the waterfall even went for a refreshing, and very welcome, dip. We made our way back to the Lodge for lunch and then went for an afternoon stroll around the grounds. We all re-joined for dinner and then headed back to our rooms ready to get up early the next day.

Day 9

Sunday 27th October

Isalo to Zombitse National Park & Ifaty

We set off for Ifaty at 5:00 after having breakfast which was delivered the previous night. En route we passed three “Sapphire Villages” which rocketed in population after the precious stones were found. We stopped off along the way to catch some photos of life in general. Parson told us how Ilakaka was home to around 100 people in the 1980’s, but after the gems were found the population reached 10,000. It has been estimated that in Ilakaka and surrounding areas there is now a population of 120,000 Madagascans and foreigners. It was quite sad to see vast areas of dirt with massive craters in the ground where people had dug, in places which had once been lush rainforest. It really brought home how 80% of Madagascar’s original forest has been lost, and only around 12% of the country is covered by primary forest.

We then stopped at Zombitse reserve where we had a guide show us the forest. We were lucky enough to spot the Verreaux's Sifaka alongside the road as we arrived. Parson told us that they are slowly coming closer to the edge of the forest, near the roads, as it is difficult to manage illegal bushmeat deeper in the forest and people are less likely to hunt for the lemurs if they are close to the road.

We got a guide who showed us around. In every national park in Madagascar it is mandatory to have a local guide to enter the park, which is great as it ensures locals can also benefit from the presence of reserves and it encourages the protection of the species found within the reserves. We had a lovely sighting of the White-browed owl and some even saw the Zombitse Sportive Lemur. Sadly, he popped his head back into the tree before we were all able to get a good view. Walking around we also admired the wonderful Baobabs in the reserve. We then continued our drive to the Antsokay Arboretum where we had lunch first before having a tour where we learnt more about the spiny forest and all the plants that we could expect to see. We had a lovely day

of spotting wildlife and saw Frances's Sparrowhawk, Black-winged Stilt, Warty Chameleon, Spiny-tailed Iguanid and the Big-eyed Snake.

We then continued onto Ifaty and arrived around 18:00, showered, had dinner and went to bed.

Day 10

Monday 28th October

Ifaty & Reniala Reserve

We had hot drinks at 5:00am and made our way Reniala private reserve 5:20. The sun was shining and as the morning progressed it become hotter, reaching around 33 degrees Celsius. We walked around the spiny forest and were lucky enough to see Long-tailed Ground Roller, thanks to the hard work of the guides. They took us to an open area and after locating the bird they gently guided it to our direction. We were also lucky enough to see the White-breasted Mesite and we all got to see the Olive Bee-eater, Hook-billed Vanga, Blue Vanga and Sickle-billed Vanga.

We made our way back to the accommodation where people had the rest of the morning at leisure to either use the pool, go for a swim in the sea or just explore. We met up for lunch and went out again at 16:00 to look for water birds. The first spot we went to we were chased off by a disgruntled man, but this turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the area was very quiet and the new spot we went to, had more life. There were a few small watering holes just on the side of the road, one of which was a salt flat so was bright pink in colour. We spotted Three-banded Plover as well as Greenshank. We then returned and had a walk around the accommodation where we saw nightjars and about seven Grey Mouse Lemurs hiding in the roofs of the bungalows.

We were treated to a performance before dinner of an all-female drumming band "BOCO Gasy", from Tulear in the evening. They had so much energy and really put on a show, which was fantastic to watch before we sat down for BBQ dinner.

Day 11

Tuesday 29th October

Ifaty to Tana and on to Andasibe

As our flight was in the afternoon, we decided to make a little stop off on the way to the airport after a relaxed breakfast, leaving at 8am. We stopped off in search of some wading birds en route, and we saw some Lesser Flamingos in the distance. We continued on to a small area where mangroves are cared for by the local community. We walked along the boardwalk, spotting some little Mudskippers darting into the water as we approached. There was a small lookout which we took in turns to get into as we could only fit about five people in, and even that was a squeeze.

We picked up a picnic from a restaurant in Tulear before we arrived at the airport. Check-in went smoothly and after we checked in our bags we sat down and had our lunch. When we arrived in Tana, we went straight to Andasibe as we knew we had a long journey ahead of us. Unfortunately, we got caught in heavy traffic in Tana, and en route we were often slowed down by what appeared to be convoys of lorries. We arrived at the lodge at 21:00, exhausted from the journey and keen to get to bed straight after dinner.

Day 12

Wednesday 30th October

Andasibe Analamazaotra

By popular consensus we decided to have a later breakfast at 7:00, heading to the park at around 8:00. We met up with our guide, Maurice, and spotter Antasha at the entrance of the car park where we saw Paradise Flycatcher, Mascarene Martins and Robin Magpies flying around us. Our guide told us a little bit about the park and what he was hoping to find, whilst Parson sorted out the entrance tickets.

Before we even entered the park, we saw a stunning Comet Moth right above the entrance of the centre. Already feeling positive, we made our way into the forest. It felt as if all the lemurs had been summoned especially for us as along the main route - within 90 minutes we saw the Diademed Sifaka. Right behind us Rosemary also spotted a little tail poking out of a nest. We all looked and saw a male Paradise Flycatcher awkwardly trying to fit into his nest, waiting for the female to come and switch places. We heard the cries of some Indri in the distance, which got us all really excited and positive for the rest of the walk, so we continued on and just a little further came across three Indris! They were stretched out showing us just how long their limbs were, trying to reach some tasty leaves. They also leapt huge distances from one tree to the next, which some were able to capture in a photo!

Parson told us how the Indri got its name. When a European naturalist was out looking for lemurs the locals shouted out Indri, Indri, which means “there it is”, and he understood it to be the name of the lemur! In actual fact, the locals have named this lemur “Babakoto”, which means ancestor of man. You can see why it got this name as it is the only lemur species without a tail, and is also the largest living lemur, so it can appear human-like to some. Because of its affiliation with ancestors it is “fady”, so taboo, to harm or eat them.

We got word that our spotter had found something exciting, so we made our way up a steep slope and came across a very well camouflaged Collared Nightjar. It was nestled on the ground sleeping amongst the leaf litter, not fazed by our presence. As we walked along, we saw so many flycatchers in their nests, which were bizarrely all very close to the footpaths around eye level, which didn't seem like a very sensible place to be raising your chicks. Maybe one reason could be, being in a reserve where they are protected, they have not learned to fear humans.

Once again, we came across a group of Indris, and whilst we stood there admiring them they started calling right before our eyes. The volume of their vocalization was phenomenal; you could almost do with some ear plugs. It didn't sound quite so melodic as when you heard it from a distance, but wow it was impressive! Having experienced such a wonderful moment we were all very happy with the morning walk!

We went back to the hotel for lunch and a little chill out before meeting again at 16:00. We went to another spot for our afternoon walk, and it soon got dark, so we slowly made our way out of the forest and did a night walk in a small area close to the road. We saw Grey Mouse Lemur, Goodman's Mouse Lemur, Crossley's Dwarf Lemur and Parsons Chameleon.

We went back to the hotel for dinner and then retreated to our rooms.

Day 13

Thursday 31st October

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

Seeing as everyone had already seen the Comet Moth, which was the main attraction of the moth trap, everyone decided they would much rather have a lie than wake up at 4:30 to see what had been caught.

After breakfast we all jumped into some 4X4 vehicles to explore the primary forest in Mantandina. The roads to Mantandina are so rough and bumpy that the minibus would never have made it, so we took three cars instead.

We first stopped off at a location where the guide had previously spotted the Short-legged Ground Roller, in the hope of finding it again. We searched high and low and Parson even helped build a small bridge for us to cross a stream. It was all very adventurous, which made that particular visit a little more interesting as it was a little quiet on the wildlife side of things.

We jumped back into our vehicles and drove to the next stop, around 30 minutes away, to another trail. Not long into the walk we spotted the Black and White Ruffed Lemur and admired them for a while. As we started to make our way out of the forest we came across a young Tail-less Tenrec, who was, uncharacteristically, out during the day. He scurried along so quickly that it was impossible to get a photo. We emerged out of the forest and crossed the road to head towards an old quarry which was around 200m away, if that. This small pond was in a scenic spot, but very exposed to the hot sun. We sat admiring the Red-billed Teal, Madagascan Grebe and Common Moorhen as well as an array of colourful dragonflies perching photogenically on the water lilies. We headed back to the entrance of the trail feeling hungry, so we stopped off at a little picnic area just outside the entrance. We admired small Day Geckos whilst eating lunch, consisting of the usual sandwich accompanied by chips, vegetables and fruit juice. Full and happy we jumped back into our cars and made the bumpy ride back to the hotel.

Some decided to stay behind for the night walk to get some much-needed rest, whilst the rest of us headed to Mitsinjo Reserve, a locally run re-forestation project. We saw a Tree Boa, Parson's Chameleon, Short-nosed Chameleon and some nocturnal lemurs such as the Rufous Mouse Lemur, and Crossley's Dwarf Lemur.

When we got back Parson and Chloe tried to look for the Tenrec to show everyone before dinner. We found ourselves walking through a bit of a marsh just next to the car park, trying our best not to slip in the mud. We heard something shuffle through the leaves, Parson got a quick look, we both got excited. Parson leapt up and tried to get closer, whilst Chloe stayed lower down monitoring any movement. Alas, we were foiled by the clever Tenrec which managed to disappear into thin air and we didn't find him, so decided to go for dinner, once we had changed shoes! Although we weren't successful, some of us spotted a Tenrec on their way to bed.

Day 14

Friday 1st November

Andasibe Mantadia National Park - Tana

We had a short morning walk in the national park again before heading back to Tana. We were taken to see a very sleepy Scops Owl, nuzzled away in a tree, in a perfect position to get some nice photos and admire him without disturbing him. We were also able to see the Indris one last time, a wonderful lemur to end the tour on.

We reluctantly got into the minibus and made the long journey back to Tana.

We had our last meal together and chatted before retiring back to bed full and happy with the experiences we had all had.

Day 15

Saturday 2nd November

Tana – London

We had breakfast together and most of the group went to the local artisanal market, where they practiced their bartering skills trying to haggle down the prices. We spent around an hour there admiring all the beautifully crafted items, and beautiful tapestries before we jumped back into the bus and made our way back to the hotel where everyone collected their things ready to load into the bus. We all went to the airport and said our goodbyes!

Day 16

Sunday 3rd November

London

Our return flight, again via Addis Ababa, landed safely at Heathrow and after collecting our luggage the group went their separate ways, after a memorable holiday experiencing the extraordinary wildlife of this island country, and also gaining something of an insight into its culture.

Final words.

I want to say a big thank you to Parson for being such an amazing guide and great person to work with. I also want to say thank you to everyone on the tour - we had some great moments and laughs and it would be a pleasure to be on a tour with you again.

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