

# Madagascar's Lemurs

Naturetrek Tour Report

14th – 29th October 2023

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Long-tailed Ground Roller



Black and White Ruffed Lemur



Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec



Goodman's Mouse Lemur

Tour report and photos by Ben Chapple

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Tour participants: Ben Chapple & Desi Rajeriarison (Leaders) with seven Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Saturday 14th October**

### London Heathrow to Addis Ababa

Most of the group met up at Heathrow Airport for a late evening flight to Addis Ababa, where we would layover for a few hours before our eagerly anticipated arrival in Madagascar the next day.

## Day 2

**Sunday 15th October**

### Addis Ababa to Antananarivo

Our flight arrived on time in Antananarivo (Tana), the capital of Madagascar, and we were soon meeting Desi, our local guide. We then transferred to the pleasant Hotel Le Combava, whose gardens were alive with the calls of Madagascar Fodies. Rice paddies across the road from the hotel also provided us our first views of some widespread waterbirds, including Great and Dimorphic Egrets, and Squacco and Black Herons. As most of the group were tired from the overnight journey, we took a few hours to settle in and relax before a delicious dinner, which was followed by a short briefing about the days ahead and some of the extraordinary fauna and flora we would be hoping to see in the coming weeks.

## Day 3

**Monday 16th October**

### Antananarivo to Antsirabe

This would be mostly a day of travel, as we began the two-day journey to Ranomafana National Park. However, before setting off properly we were able to spend a few hours at the delightful Park Tsarasaotra. This tiny green oasis in the heart of Tana protects a wonderful patch of wetland habitat, and gave us our first serious opportunities for wildlife-watching. Birds were most in evidence, with thousands of Red-billed Teal coating the lake surface, alongside smaller numbers of Knob-billed and White-faced Whistling Ducks, Blue-billed Teal, and the rare endemic Meller's Duck. Black-crowned Night Heron, Western Cattle Egret and Squacco Heron were also abundant, although the real prize was Madagascar Pond Heron. Tsarasaotra is perhaps the best location to study this species in its stunning breeding finery, which features pure white plumage, pink legs and a bright blue bill.

Away from the main lake, a delightful Malagasy Kingfisher perched obligingly over a small stream, and an industrious pair of Madagascar Hoopoes busily flitted in and out of their tree nest-hole. Little Swifts and Brown-throated Martins hawked for insects overhead, and we achieved glimpses of two small brown skulkers – Madagascar Brush and Madagascar Swamp Warblers. Although the birding was fabulous, the highlight for many was perhaps our first chameleon, a spectacular Oustalet's which posed beautifully in some low scrub.

After lunch at a restaurant on the outskirts of Tana (featuring some intriguing local red wine), we continued on towards the town of Antsirabe. The journey provided views of soaring Hamerkop and Yellow-billed Kite, as well as of the largely treeless countryside. Antsirabe means "place with lots of salt", which is sometimes thought to be a reference to the occasional frosts that coat the ground of this high-altitude city. We arrived at the pleasant Café

Couleur in the late afternoon, and some group members were lucky to get excellent views of calling Madagascar Nightjar before dinner.

## Day 4

**Tuesday 17th October**

### Antsirabe to Ranomafana

Our journey continued after breakfast, as we pressed further south through Madagascar's Central Highlands. The first moment of wildlife excitement came when a Madagascar Bee-eater was sighted from the vehicle – upon stopping, we were delighted to observe a small colony nesting in a roadside bank, alongside a single pair of Madagascar Black Swift. A single male Souimanga Sunbird was also seen here.

A couple of hours later, we arrived at a small community-managed reserve, where we paused to have lunch. To our enormous surprise, a confiding pair of Red-fronted Brown Lemurs greeted us at the picnic tables – they were clearly accustomed to being fed, as they made several cheeky attempts at our sandwiches. Nevertheless, it was a great thrill to encounter our first lemurs, especially as their remaining presence in this tiny forest fragment (no more than five hectares in size) had not been confirmed by Desi in quite some time. How long they can survive here as their habitat continues to dwindle away is another question.

Opposite the forest was an area of marshland where we enjoyed flight views of Madagascar Snipe, Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Green Sunbird and an exquisite little Jewel Chameleon. Satisfied, we continued south, eventually turning off the main road and passing over the top of the dramatic eastern escarpment. From here, our approach to Ranomafana National Park became increasingly green and lush as we descended; the final stretch before we reached Setam Lodge, our base for the next three nights, offered rainforest-clad hillsides and the tantalising prospect of lemurs, birds and much more. We arrived at the lodge, unpacked and enjoyed dinner in the restaurant, outside which several Mascarene Martins were roosting. Expectations were high for our explorations of the forest the following morning.

## Day 5

**Wednesday 18th October**

### Ranomafana National Park

We breakfasted at 6am today, in order to get into the forest as early as possible. Still, there was time for a little birding around the hotel at first light, which produced Nelicourvi Weaver (nesting in a tree outside the dining area), Madagascar White-eye and Madagascar Mannikin.

By 6:30 we were outside the main entrance to Ranomafana, where Madagascar Palm Swifts wheeled overhead. After meeting our local guide, Jean Chris, and his team of spotters, we crossed a low bridge over the breathtaking Namorona River and were soon enveloped in dense bamboo thickets. The spotters ventured off ahead to find lemurs, and it wasn't long before we received word that they had succeeded. A few minutes later, we were watching a magical family group of Milne-Edwards's Sifakas feeding at eye-level. Third largest of all lemurs, these endangered primates survive only in the vicinity of Ranomafana, but even here they can be agonisingly difficult to track down. We enjoyed wonderfully relaxed views before they melted away into the thick vegetation.

We ventured deeper into the rainforest, along occasionally steep and slippery paths, which eventually led to another group of lemurs. First seen was a single Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur, a rare species in Ranomafana. Knowing that we would have better chances to see this later in the trip, we pushed on to find a small group of gorgeous Golden Bamboo Lemurs. This is the real local speciality and was unknown to Western science until 1986 – it was their discovery that prompted the creation of Ranomafana National Park in 1991. Moving with them was an even rarer species – a single female Greater Bamboo Lemur. This is the last individual left within the tourism areas of the park – it is unclear why their decline has been so dramatic here, and it was a sobering privilege to watch her.

The bamboo lemurs were feeding high above a fairly treacherous hillside, so after we were all satisfied with our views, we descended to rest in a small clearing. Here, one group member (Mike) had an unfortunate encounter with a leech, which required the attention of a doctor back at the lodge. While Desi and Ben were dealing with this, the rest of the group enjoyed superb views of a Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher. Mike was not to be left out, however – his involuntary walk back to Setam Lodge featured a brief encounter with a Ring-tailed Vontsira, one of Madagascar's most beautiful small carnivores. The rest of the morning featured no more lemurs, although we did find some remarkable reptiles. First, a tiny Stump-tailed Chameleon hid expertly on a tree trunk, but its camouflage was thoroughly outdone by the perfect dead-leaf mimicry of a Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko. More conspicuous was an exuberant Peacock Day Gecko, showing off its colouration at the Belle Vue picnic site.

We returned to Setam Lodge for lunch and a siesta, seeing soaring Madagascar Buzzard over the opposite hillside. Although we attempted an afternoon excursion, this was thwarted by torrential rain, and we sought shelter until the storm passed. Thankfully, the weather had cleared by dusk, allowing a brief night walk along the road (nocturnal activities are sadly not permitted within the park itself). Our local guides smeared banana over an exposed branch, which soon attracted several minute Rufous Mouse Lemurs, one of the smallest of all primates. An Eastern Red Forest Rat also appeared briefly below the feeding spot. Chameleons too were much in evidence, and we found Blue-legged, Nose-horned and O'Shaughnessy's resting on exposed branches. After a productive evening, we retired for dinner, the day's checklist, and bed.

## Day 6

Thursday 19th October

### Ranomafana National Park

This morning we decided to explore the less-visited, higher altitude section of Ranomafana known as Vohiparara. Although lemurs can be harder to find up here, the more open forest proved excellent for birding – we found Forest Rock Thrush along the road, and a bizarre Cuckoo-roller flew over in full display mode. Singing Rand's Warbler and Common Newtonia also appeared, while Blue Coua and the skulking Crossley's Vanga eventually provided decent views.

The paths in Vohiparara are generally flatter than those in the main section of Ranomafana, but we still clambered up to the top of a ridge, which offered majestic perspectives over the sprawling jungle, and an enormous hunting O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon. Lower down, in a small marshy area, Jean Chris and Desi located a stunning Baron's Painted Mantella, surely one of the world's most attractive amphibians. These marvellous little creatures bear a striking resemblance to the poison dart frogs of South America, although they are not closely related.

Despite our spotters' best efforts, it was beginning to look like a lemur-free morning. However, just before we were due to return to the bus, we were directed to a small tree cavity, out of which leered a pair of goblin-like orange eyes – those of a Small-toothed Sportive Lemur. This nocturnal species is largely a leaf-eater, and the poor nutritional quality of its diet means it leads one of the slowest lives of any primate. While we watched, its head occasionally protruded curiously from the hole, giving us a great chance to study its features.

Lunch at the lodge was followed by another bout of heavy rain, which was enough to dissuade most of the group from taking an afternoon walk. Perhaps foolishly, three of us decided to brave the weather, and were rewarded with some excellent sightings in the main Talatakeley section of the park. The highlight, perhaps, was a single female Red-bellied Lemur, but we also managed clearer views of Golden Bamboo Lemur, as well as some stunning birds like Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Madagascar Forest Rail and (best of all) Pitta-like Ground Roller. Those who stayed behind at Setam did not completely miss out, however, as they were visited by a troop of Red-fronted Brown Lemurs. We were all reunited for another night walk, again seeing Rufous Mouse Lemur and chameleons including O'Shaughnessy's and Short-nosed. Ben went out again after dinner along the road by the hotel, finding a single Groves's Dwarf Lemur and what appeared to be a Webb's Tufted-tailed Rat.

## Day 7

Friday 20th October

### Ranomafana to Isalo (via Anja Community Reserve)

Another lengthy day of travelling beckoned, so we departed early, making a brief stop before leaving the park at a waterfall, where a small colony of Major's Bent-winged Bats were day-roosting. We then left Ranomafana behind, and pressed on towards the village of Ambalavao, where we stretched our legs and visited a traditional paper factory.

Just a few kilometres down the road, we arrived at the Anja Community Reserve, where we would stop for lunch. Although it only covers 34 hectares, Anja is home to a thriving population of Madagascar's most famous inhabitant: the Ring-tailed Lemur. Despite its worldwide fame, and broad habitat tolerance, this species is amongst the most endangered of all lemurs. It is perhaps an indication of the Ring-tail's precarious status that this microscopic fragment of habitat supports more than 10% of the remaining wild population (some 300 individuals). Still, this community-run reserve has been fabulously successful, and we were thrilled to observe several troops, many of which contained playful youngsters – in fact, Desi said he had never seen so many babies at one time. Although the lemurs were, of course, the main attraction, we also found several gigantic Oustalet's Chameleons, and a surprisingly colourful Desert Locust.

Continuing on, for several hours we passed herds of Zebu cattle, bustling villages and lines of smoking brick kilns. As dusk was approaching, we found ourselves crossing the vast open Central Plains, where Madagascar Lark was flushed in abundance from the roadside. A Marsh Owl also made an appearance as it quartered the grasslands, prompting a brief stop so everyone could enjoy this elegant hunter. It was not until after dark that we finally arrived at the Jardin du Roy Hotel – everyone was tired after a long day, so after dinner we all went quickly to bed, although some were also lucky enough to watch an endemic White-browed Owl in the garden.

## Day 8

Saturday 21st October

### Isalo National Park

In daylight, the true splendour of our surroundings was revealed – the hotel was gloriously set amongst the giant boulders that typify the Isalo landscape. After breakfast, we set off for a morning walk into the Canyon des Makis, the national park's most productive area for wildlife. At first, it was the smaller species that most enthralled, as we found some delightful Reed Frogs, several Web-throwing Spiders, an enormous Stick Insect, Flatid Leaf Bugs and spectacular Madagascar Giant Swallowtails.

As we progressed further into the canyon, the vegetation became lush and more forest-like. Passing the nest of a Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, we eventually reached a small campsite, through which bounded the unmistakable shapes of a troop of Verreaux's Sifakas. There were four adults and one adorable baby, who hung upside down and continuously bounded through the branches. Although they were initially hard to keep up with, the family soon settled to feed in the upper branches of a flowering tree. It was difficult to tear ourselves away, and not even a roosting White-browed Owl was enough for most of the group. Nevertheless, after an extended encounter we left them to it, returning via the same path to our bus. It turned out we were quite lucky to find the sifakas at all – we were told of some tourists who had recently camped for three days in that exact spot without a single sighting. On the way out, we picked up the contact calls of a troop of Ring-tailed Lemurs, and were soon watching them moving through the leaf litter. The views were nowhere near as good as at Anja the previous day, but it was still lovely to see the species in a new environment.

It was now getting extremely hot, and we returned to Jardin du Roy for lunch and a free afternoon to make the most of the superb facilities. Wildlife abounded in the well-watered hotel grounds, with a delightful flock of Grey-headed Lovebirds a constant presence on the lawns. Some of the group chose to join an easy birding walk in late afternoon, which produced Madagascar Coucal, Madagascar Turtle and Namaqua Doves, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Mannikin, Lesser Vasa Parrot and many Collared Iguanids. As darkness fell, a Madagascar Nightjar swooped down to drink from the swimming pool, after which we settled in for dinner and the checklist.

## Day 9

Sunday 22nd October

### Isalo to Ifaty (via Zombitse National Park)

We left this morning at the ungodly hour of 4:30am, in order to arrive at Zombitse National Park soon after dawn. This reserve protects a fragment surrounded by fire-ravaged rangeland, and represents the last significant tract of transitional habitat between the deciduous woodlands of western Madagascar and the spiny forests of the south. As such, it has incalculable biodiversity value and protects a vast array of species, many of which are now found nowhere else.

A single Madagascar Spinetail circled overhead as we wolfed down a quick breakfast at the park entrance. Entering the forest, we soon found a couple of Coquerel's Couas, terrestrial members of the cuckoo family, and a single individual of the pheasant-sized Giant Coua, although pictures were challenging in the close thickets. Having only seen one in flight in Ranomafana, it was exciting to get perched views of Cuckoo-roller. Vangas, too, were much more in evidence here, with a feeding flock of Madagascar Blue Vangas being followed by Rufous Vanga on the

nest, and a pair of Hook-billed Vangas near an ancient baobab tree. Also nearby was the emerald-spotted Standing's Day Gecko, which is known only from Zombitse. Another local endemic that proved more difficult to find was the Zombitse Sportive Lemur; like the Small-toothed species we had seen in Ranomafana, these nocturnal lemurs often like to rest in the sun during the day. However, Desi thought that the wind might be keeping them tucked away out of sight. At long last, we located a single individual near an old picnic area, although all we really got was partial views of its face.

Thanks to our early start, we reached the coastal town of Toliara in time for lunch, which we took at the Arboretum d'Antsokay. As well as delicious food, we enjoyed views here of some nice species including Sakalava Weaver and Stripe-throated Jery. Then it was on to Le Paradisier, a stunning beachside hotel set amongst decent spiny forest-type habitat. Three-eyed Lizards were abundant here on the sands, and some familiar wading birds graced the shoreline, including Grey Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and Eurasian Whimbrel. The group was left to their own devices for most of the afternoon, and while some elected for a dip in the azure Mozambique Channel, others explored the grounds, seeing species such as Running Coua, Subdesert Brush Warbler and Madagascar Buttonquail. Most of the group reconvened at dusk, when Desi led a short walk along a path behind the rooms. It wasn't long before the first Grey Mouse Lemurs appeared, their diminutive size strikingly apparent as they clambered and bounded through the low scrub. Just before we went back for dinner, a Madagascar Nightjar obligingly posed for photographs. After the checklist and another delicious meal, we retired to bed in anticipation of another early start.

## Day 10

Monday 23rd October

### Ifaty (Reniala Reserve) to Antananarivo

Although another 4:30 departure wasn't quite necessary, we still wanted to ensure we arrived at the spiny forest at dawn, so as to maximise our chances of locating its amazing wildlife. The spiny forest is a truly otherworldly habitat, dominated by impenetrably thorny trees and bushes, and dotted with mighty baobabs. Remarkably, it is thought that these defences represent an evolutionary relic – nothing alive today even attempts to consume the plants, so their dramatic adaptations probably evolved to repel now-extinct giant lemurs.

Our focus this morning was mostly on birds, and in particular on two spectacularly unusual species. The first was quickly found, as our superb local guides led us to a group of four bizarre Subdesert Mesites, frozen together in quirky poses in a small bush. The mesite family is unique to Madagascar, and has no close relatives, making its members amongst the country's most sought-after birds. Their isolated place on the tree of life is matched by their extraordinary appearance, which is something between that of a rail and a pigeon. The second species soon followed, as we silently positioned ourselves around a small clearing. After a couple of minutes of waiting, a blue-winged, white-moustached, lavishly plumed bird scuttled into view: a Long-tailed Ground Roller. Another family restricted to Madagascar, all but one species of ground roller – this one – are found only within the eastern rainforests. For what seemed like an eternity, this marvellous bird stood warily in front of us, allowing some superb photographs for the whole group.

With the two top targets already found, we were free to explore the spiny forest at a more relaxed pace. Nevertheless, we continued to encounter some brilliant species, including Crested, Running and Green-capped Couas, a gloriously cryptic roosting Madagascar Nightjar, Madagascar Kestrel, and a singing *Thamnornis* warbler. A wonderful Sickle-billed Vanga also made an appearance, as did a nesting pair of Madagascar Harrier-Hawk. The

guides also managed to locate a stunning Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec, which was gently returned to its daytime sleeping spot after we had taken a few pictures. Thoroughly satisfied by our morning's work, we took some time to peruse the souvenir stands at the reserve entrance, where several members of the group purchased pretty carved model baobabs. Despite the lack of lemurs here, many participants felt that our exploration of the spiny forest was an absolute highlight of the tour.

Although everyone would have loved to stay longer on the coast, we sadly had to fly back to Tana in the early afternoon. There was time, however, for some to enjoy a quick swim in the sea before departure. Frustratingly, on arrival at Toliara Airport, we discovered that Desi had been mistakenly booked on the following day's flight, so we were forced to go on without him. Fortunately, everything went smoothly in his absence for the rest of the day, and we were met in Tana by our new driver and transferred successfully to Hotel Le Combava, where we passed the evening with dinner and the day's checklist.

## Day 11

**Tuesday 24th October**

### Antananarivo to Andasibe

A small miscommunication with our new driver meant that we departed late this morning, but this turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as we were able to visit a few shops as they opened at 8:30. Supplies of bottled water and medicine replenished, we were soon on our way to our last destination: the rainforests of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. What should have been a four-hour journey turned into more like six, due to traffic and poor road conditions, but we still arrived at the smart Mantadia Lodge in time for lunch.

In the afternoon we met up with Maurice, our local guide, and set off for a walk in the VOIMMA community reserve. Here, our first sighting of note was a gigantic Parson's Chameleon. Moving further into the forest, the trees above us suddenly began to ring out with a deafening, plaintively whale-like song: Indri! It was impossible not to be thrilled by the sound of the largest living lemur – no matter how many recordings one has heard, nothing comes close to the real thing. These calls represent territorial warnings to other Indri groups, but also likely contain all sorts of other complex messages to neighbours. After negotiating some tangled vines and sheer muddy slopes, we found ourselves at eye-level with a small family, which was joined as darkness approached by a troop of Common Brown Lemurs – these two species often roost in close proximity. As we arrived back at the bus, it started to rain heavily, which scuppered our night walk, but we were nevertheless delighted with our introduction to the area.

## Day 12

**Wednesday 25th October**

### Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

The best sighting this morning was arguably that of Desi, with whom we were reunited after his arrival late the previous night. All together again, we set off for the Analamazaotra Special Reserve, part of Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. This park is split into two sections: the smaller, largely secondary forests of Analamazaotra, and the extensive primary forests of Mantadia, which we would be visiting the following day. The smaller section is much more accessible and is famous for the ease with which a remarkable variety of lemurs can be seen. Before that,



however, we found a few new birds, including Red-tailed and Chabert Vangas, and the elusive Collared Nightjar, whose call is still unknown to ornithologists.

Our first lemur of the morning was found by Maurice, who led us to a group of Eastern Woolly Lemurs. Despite being members of the same family as sifakas and the Indri, these owl-like primates (which are also known as avahis) are nocturnal, competing with sportive lemurs for access to the most nutritious forest leaves. Although mostly asleep, they occasionally glanced down at us from their tree-fork resting place. We had them entirely to ourselves, which could not be said for a nearby group of Indri, which seemed to have attracted every tourist for miles around. Nevertheless, we enjoyed good views of them feeding and calling in the canopy, above a Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko that almost perfectly blended in with a tree trunk.

At this point, Desi received word that Maurice had found another sought-after species. Getting the message to everyone in the group without alerting the rest of the gathered crowd proved slightly challenging, but we were soon peering up at a family group of Diademed Sifaka, a species that is second in size only to the Indri. With their exquisite coat of black, white, grey and gold, they are justly regarded as the most beautiful of all lemurs. Initially remaining high amongst the top branches, they eventually descended, with one female and her baby even coming to the floor, where she appeared to be foraging for subterranean flowers (a regular component of their diet). The news of their presence soon spread, and before long other groups of tourists were arriving – at this point, we decided to move on, thrilled with our intimate views of this stunning primate.

Returning to the main path, Desi led us to a group of around ten Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs, which provided much better views than the single individual seen in Ranomafana. Back at the park entrance, a Malagasy Hog-nosed Snake crossed the track ahead of us. Maurice then took us to a place where Madagascar Scops Owl was known to roost, and we enjoyed lovely views of one bird. A nearby abandoned weaver nest contained an even greater surprise, however – a pair of sleeping Goodman's Mouse Lemurs! Their tiny tails dangled conspicuously below, and the face of one could be seen peering out from the nest entrance.

After lunch at a Chinese restaurant in Andasibe village and a rest at Mantadia Lodge, we initially did some birding along the main road, seeing Madagascar Green Pigeon and Madagascar Starling. We soon decided that we'd rather be inside the forest proper, however, and so took a trail into the Mitsinjo Community Reserve. Although quiet on the lemur front, it was still lovely to be amongst the trees, and we added Ward's Vanga to our bird list. At dusk, we embarked upon a brief night walk around a small lake, flushing a Madagascar Crested Ibis and finding a Parson's Chameleon.

## Day 13

Thursday 26th October

### Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

For many, this was one of the most eagerly anticipated days of the trip. Following an early breakfast, we swapped our bus for two 4x4 vehicles and set off for the remote primary forests of Mantadia National Park. The necessity of the different means of transport soon became clear – the road was terrible, and it took around two hours of bone-shaking travel before we reached the start of our trail. Entering the forest here, we were immediately struck by the difference in vegetation; compared to the low canopy of Analamazaotra, this section was dominated by towering ancient trees.

Our two major targets for the day were the Red-bellied Lemur, seen only by a few group members in Ranomafana, and the Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur, a species that is largely confined to primary forest. Both can be exceedingly difficult to locate, but once again Maurice worked his magic – within minutes of arriving we were watching a pair of Red-bellied Lemur, the male especially gorgeous with his russet underside and striking white tear-marks below the eyes. Almost immediately after leaving them, we were gazing up at Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs. This luxuriantly coated species, almost panda-like in colour with a canine muzzle, typically feeds in the crown of emergent trees; these giants are generally the first to be removed by logging operations, so only the most undisturbed tracts of rainforest can support thriving Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur populations. They are also heavily targeted by bushmeat hunting operations, being large in size, and frequently giving away their location with bouts of barking calls. True to form, these ones at first stayed high, providing mere glimpses through the canopy, but with patience they came a little lower and everyone got good views.

Nearby, familiar wails gave away the presence of an Indri family – individuals here are often much blacker than those in Analamazaotra. New birds for the morning included Tylas Vanga and Madagascar Blue Pigeon, while we also found Bernier's Grass Snake and Elegant Mabuya (a beautiful skink). Not to be outdone was a gem-like Madagascar Painted Mantella, very similar in appearance to the poison frogs we had seen in Ranomafana. Another Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur proved more obliging than the earlier pair – after eating its fill, it descended to a branch in mid-canopy where it settled to rest.

Returning to the vehicles, we picked up our packed lunches, which we took to a small chalet hut overlooking the forest. After eating, we made our way to a nearby pond, where we failed to find the hoped-for Madagascar Grebe. Several Common Moorhens were a poor replacement; better consolation was provided by Broad-billed Roller, Madagascar Buzzard and some lovely Madagascar Wagtails flitting amongst the lily pads. As it was now getting hot, we began the long and bumpy road back to Mantadia Lodge; remarkably, several group members were able to sleep through the entire journey.

After a proper afternoon siesta, we headed back to the VOIMMA community reserve for a night walk. One of our first sightings was of an active Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko, followed by several Crossley's Dwarf Lemurs, our 19<sup>th</sup> and final new lemur species of the tour. Dwarf lemurs are notable in being the only primates that hibernate, and they are only active during Madagascar's warmer wet season. Having seen the sleeping Goodman's Mouse Lemurs the previous day, it was nice to see a couple of active individuals. Maurice also glimpsed a Lowland Streaked Tenrec, but it was not seen by anyone else. We then returned to the hotel for dinner and bed, before one final forest excursion in the morning.

## Day 14

Friday 27th October

### Andasibe to Antananarivo

Although we sadly needed to return to Tana today, we still had time for one more visit to the Analamazaotra Special Reserve. With no new lemurs available, our main objective was more encounters with the same species we had seen over the previous couple of days. In this we were very successful, finding more Indri, Diademed Sifaka and Common Brown Lemur. With our time in the forest running out, Maurice went off with Mike (the keenest birder in the group) to see if he could add a few more species to his list. Predictably, the rest of the group were

soon watching a mixed feeding flock of birds, including such desirable species as White-headed and Nuthatch Vanga, the latter being perhaps Madagascar's most spectacular example of convergent evolution (so convincing is the resemblance to its northern hemisphere namesake that its true allegiance to the vanga family was only uncovered relatively recently). It was a relief to discover, upon reuniting, that Mike and Maurice had also located this iconic species, along with a White-throated Rail.

## Day 15

Saturday 28th October

Flight from Antananarivo to Addis Ababa

## Day 16

Sunday 29th October

Addis Ababa to London Heathrow

We arrived back in London in the early hours, and after navigating passport control and baggage reclaim it was finally time for the group to go their separate ways after a wonderful holiday.



Parson's Chameleon and Common Brown Lemur

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## Species lists

### Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	October 2023											
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec - E	<i>Echinops telfairi</i>								1				
Ring-tailed Vontsira - E	<i>Galidia elegans</i>			1									
Crossley's Dwarf Lemur - E	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>											3	
Groves's Dwarf Lemur - E	<i>Cheirogaleus grovesi</i>				1								
Goodman's Mouse Lemur - E	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>										2	1	
Grey Mouse Lemur - E	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>							5					
Rufous Mouse Lemur - E	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>			3	4								
Zombitse Sportive Lemur - E	<i>Lepilemur hubbardorum</i>							1					
Small-toothed Sportive Lemur - E	<i>Lepilemur microdon</i>				1								
Common Brown Lemur - E	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>									3	5	10	5
Red-bellied Lemur - E	<i>Eulemur rubriventer</i>				1							3	
Red-fronted Brown Lemur - E	<i>Eulemur rufifrons</i>		2	3	6								
Golden Bamboo Lemur - E	<i>Hapalemur aureus</i>			2	1								
Eastern Lesser Bamboo Lemur - E	<i>Hapalemur griseus</i>			1							10		
Ring-tailed Lemur - E	<i>Lemur catta</i>					50	15						
Greater Bamboo Lemur - E	<i>Prolemur simus</i>			1									
Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata</i>											4	
Eastern Woolly Lemur - E	<i>Avahi laniger</i>										4		
Indri - E	<i>Indri indri</i>									4	3	2	2
Diademed Sifaka - E	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>										5		5
Milne-Edwards's Sifaka - E	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>			3									
Verreaux's Sifaka - E	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>						5						
Webb's Tufted-tail Rat - E	<i>Eliurus webbi</i>				1								
Eastern Red Forest Rat - E	<i>Nesomys rufus</i>			1									
Major's Bent-winged Bat - E	<i>Miniopterus majori</i>					30							

## Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	October 2023											
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>	✓											
Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	✓											
Blue-billed Teal	<i>Spatula hottentota</i>	✓											
Meller's Duck - E	<i>Anas melleri</i>	✓											
Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>	✓											
Collared Nightjar - E	<i>Gactornis enarratus</i>										1		
Madagascar Nightjar - N	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>	1					2	3	1				
Madagascar Spinetail - N	<i>Zoonavena grandidieri</i>							1					1
Malagasy Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus gracilis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Malagasy Black Swift - N	<i>Apus balstoni</i>		2	✓									
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	2											
Malagasy Coucal - N	<i>Centropus toulou</i>	H					✓	H			✓		
Crested Coua - E	<i>Coua cristata</i>								1				
Blue Coua - E	<i>Coua caerulea</i>				2					H	1	1	1
Coquerel's Coua - E	<i>Coua coquereli</i>							2					
Running Coua - E	<i>Coua cursor</i>								2				
Giant Coua - E	<i>Coua gigas</i>							1					
Madagascar Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>		H	1	1			H		H	H	1	H
Subdesert Mesite - E	<i>Monias benschi</i>								4				
Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
Malagasy Turtle Dove	<i>Nesoenas picturatus</i>				2		3						
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>						✓	✓	✓				
Madagascar Green Pigeon - E	<i>Treron australis</i>										1		
Madagascar Blue Pigeon - E	<i>Alectroenas madagascariensis</i>											1	
Madagascar Forest Rail - E	<i>Mentocrex kioloides</i>			2	3						1		
Madagascar Flufftail - E	<i>Sarothrura insularis</i>				H						H		
White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>												1
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	20										4	
Madagascar Buttonquail - E	<i>Turnix nigricollis</i>						1	2	2				

Common name	Scientific name	October 2023											
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>							1					
Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>							1					
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>							1	1				
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>							1	1				
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>							10					
Madagascar Snipe - E	<i>Gallinago macrodactyla</i>		1										
Madagascar Ibis - E	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>									H	H		
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	✓	✓							✓			
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>									1			
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	✓								✓	✓		
Malagasy Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola idae</i>	2											
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓		✓
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		1										
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓			✓
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>	✓	✓										
Dimorphic Egret	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>	✓	✓							✓			✓
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	2	2										
Madagascar Harrier-Hawk - E	<i>Polyboroides radiatus</i>									2			1
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Madagascar Buzzard - E	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>			✓	✓		✓					✓	✓
Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>												H
White-browed Owl - E	<i>Athene superciliaris</i>					1	1						
Rainforest Scops Owl - E	<i>Otus rutilus</i>									H	1	H	
Marsh Owl	<i>Asio capensis</i>					1							
Cuckoo-roller - N	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>				1			3					
Madagascar Hoopoe - E	<i>Upupa marginata</i>	2					4						
Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>						1						2
Pitta-like Ground Roller - E	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>				2								
Long-tailed Ground Roller - E	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>									1			
Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher - E	<i>Corythornis madagascariensis</i>			1									
Malagasy Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis vintsioides</i>	1					1						1

Common name	Scientific name	October 2023											
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Olive Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>		5				✓	✓	✓				
Malagasy Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓
Greater Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>			1				✓					
Lesser Vasa Parrot - E	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>			5			3	10					
Grey-headed Lovebird - E	<i>Agapornis canus</i>						20						
Velvet Asity - E	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>				3								
Red-tailed Vanga - E	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>										2		1
Hook-billed Vanga - E	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>							2					
Sickle-billed Vanga - E	<i>Falcula palliata</i>								1				
White-headed Vanga - E	<i>Artamella viridis</i>												1
Chabert Vanga - E	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>										2	1	
Madagascar Blue Vanga - E	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>							2					
Rufous Vanga - E	<i>Schetba rufa</i>							1					
Tylas Vanga - E	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>											1	1
Nuthatch Vanga - E	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>												1
Common Newtonia - E	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>				1		1	2	1		1		
Ward's Vanga - E	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>										2	2	
Crossley's Vanga - E	<i>Mystacornis crossleyi</i>				3								
Madagascar Cuckooshrike - E	<i>Ceblepyris cinereus</i>			✓			✓					✓	
Crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>						✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					
Madagascar Lark - E	<i>Eremopterix hova</i>					✓		✓					
Malagasy Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mascarene Martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	5											
Malagasy Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>	✓	✓		✓								
Subdesert Brush Warbler - E	<i>Nesillas lantzii</i>							✓	✓				
Madagascar Swamp Warbler - E	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>	1	H									2	
Long-billed Bernieria - E	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>							1			1		
Wedge-tailed Jery - E	<i>Hartertula flavoviridis</i>			1									

Common name	Scientific name	October 2023											
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Thamnornis - E	<i>Thamnornis chloropetoides</i>								1				
Spectacled Tetraka - E	<i>Xanthomixis zosterops</i>			2							2		1
Rand's Warbler - E	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>				1								
Common Jery - E	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>							1	5				
Green Jery - E	<i>Neomixis viridis</i>			1									
Stripe-throated Jery - E	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>							2	1				
Madagascar Cisticola - N	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>		1				1						
Malagasy White-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>	✓		✓						✓			
Common Myna - I	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Madagascar Starling - E	<i>Hartlaubius auratus</i>										2		
Madagascar Magpie-Robin - E	<i>Copsychus albospecularis</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Forest Rock Thrush - E	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>				1		2						
Madagascar Stonechat - E	<i>Saxicola sibilla</i>	✓	✓				✓				✓	✓	✓
Souimanga Sunbird - N	<i>Cinnyris sovimanga</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Malagasy Green Sunbird - N	<i>Cinnyris notatus</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓		H			
Nelicourvi Weaver - E	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>				2								3
Sakalava Weaver - E	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>							2	1				
Red Fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	✓				✓			✓	✓			✓
Forest Fody - E	<i>Foudia omissa</i>			1									
Madagascar Mannikin - E	<i>Lepidopygia nana</i>						✓				✓	✓	
Madagascar Wagtail - E	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	



## Reptiles &amp; Amphibians

Common name	Scientific name	October 2023													
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27		
Malagasy Painted Frog	<i>Mantella madagascariensis</i>												✓		
Baron's Painted Frog	<i>Mantella baroni</i>				✓										
Brown Leaf Chameleon	<i>Brookesia superciliaris</i>			✓											
Short-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma brevicornis</i>			✓											
Blue-legged Chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>			✓	✓										
Short-nosed Chameleon	<i>Calumma gastrotaenia</i>				✓										
Nose-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma nasuta</i>			✓											
O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>			✓	✓										
Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii</i>									✓	✓				
Jewel' Chameleon	<i>Furcifer lateralis</i>		✓												
Oustalet's Chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>	✓				✓		✓							
Three-eyed Lizard	<i>Oplurus madagascariensis</i>							✓	✓						
Collared Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cuveri</i>						✓	✓							
Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>				✓										
Spearpoint Leaf-tailed gecko	<i>Uroplatus ebenau</i>				✓										
Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>										✓	✓			
Four-lined Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata</i>	✓		✓	✓						✓				
Peacock Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>			✓							✓				
Standing's Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>							✓							
Elegant Mabuya	<i>Trachylepis elegans</i>												✓		
Bernier's Grass Snake	<i>Dromicodryas bernieri</i>												✓		
Malagasy Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon madagascariensis</i>										✓				