

ITINERARY
MADAGASCAR
November 3 - 26, 2018
MAURITIUS & REUNION EXTENSION
Extension Nov 25 - 29



The lovely Scaly Ground-roller is one of five species of this endemic family we'll seek on Madagascar. These birds are found in lowland forests on the eastern part of the island; we'll look for them in the Andasibe Special Reserve, near Perinet. Photograph by participant Randy Beaton.

We include here information for those interested in the 2018 Field Guides Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world, but it has been separate from Africa for so many millions of years and has fostered the preservation and evolution of such a multitude of unique life forms that it is considered one of the major zoogeographic regions of the Earth. Ninety percent of its forest species are unique, as well as all of the native Malagasy land mammals, among them what are now recognized as 105-plus species of lemurs, an ancient primate group once widespread but now largely confined in shrinking numbers to Madagascar. More than half of the 250-plus bird species are endemic, including about thirty-six genera and six families of birds found only here or the nearby Comoros:

the mesites, the Cuckoo-Roller, the ground-rollers, the asities (false sunbirds, sometimes lumped into broadbills), the Bernieridae (Malagasy warblers) and the vangas. In addition, the couas comprise a bird subfamily endemic to Madagascar. Our tour visits all the major zoogeographic regions of the island, from xerophytic spiny forest near Tulear to deciduous tall forest near Mahajanga in the northwest and lush eastern rainforest at Mantadia-Andasibe (Perinet) and Ranomafana. This broad coverage, with intensive birding in the best locales, gives us an excellent chance to find representatives of all the endemic bird families as well as the endemic genera. Our tour route includes localities for more than 110 of Madagascar's endemic birds—a little more than a dozen remaining species being either nearly extinct, virtually unknown, highly localized, or inaccessible to groups. And though the proportion of endemics in Madagascar's avifauna is remarkably high, participants have an excellent chance of seeing most of these birds. We expect our past discoveries (including that of a new species of warbler, the Cryptic Warbler) and our extensive tape collection to serve us well on our upcoming tours to Madagascar, where Field Guides began running tours some thirty years ago back in 1986, a well-established pedigree! And with the assistance of several recent field guides to the birds and mammals, there is every reason to visit this remarkable island now.



In addition to many unique birds, we'll have the chance to see up to 20 species of lemurs, including Verreaux's Sifakas like this mother and baby. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Seeing so many unique and often bizarre birds—Sickle-billed Vanga, Sunbird Asity, Blue Coua, or Long-tailed Ground-Roller—makes for exciting birding indeed. And Madagascar offers many spectacular pluses. Most numerous and conspicuous of the indigenous mammals are the lemurs. A very few small, nocturnal relatives of lemurs survive in Africa, but only in Madagascar do lemurs still inhabit the daylight world, in graceful and beautifully colored and patterned forms to more than three feet tall. We should see 20 or more species of lemurs, including the nearly all-white sifakas and the tiny mouse lemurs, smallest of all primates. To walk the misty forest of Perinet to the dawn chorus of Indris crying, couas calling, and vangas scolding, or to see the Ring-tailed Lemurs near Isalo while Lesser Vasa Parrots and Cuckoo-Rollers fly overhead, is truly to feel one is returning to a living remnant of the Eocene era—the Earth as it might have appeared fifty million years ago when the last significant immigration of African species to Madagascar occurred.

You will see, too, we are sad to report, that Madagascar and the Mascarenes are islands lost in more than time. Humans did not reach Madagascar until about 500 A.D., and Mauritius and Reunion was not discovered until the 16th century. The incredible natural worlds those first visitors found are now largely despoiled and lost forever. On Madagascar, eleven species of lemurs and the twelve-foot-tall Elephant Bird (*Aepyornis*), largest bird that ever lived, were exterminated by hunting and by man-made fires that stripped the island of more than eighty percent of its forest cover. Few areas on Earth have so many species listed as endangered or threatened. Fortunately, the island has been the

focus since the 1980s of a concentrated conservation effort by international organizations in concert with the Malagasy government, and the outlook for preservation of areas representative of all of Madagascar's habitats may be improving slightly with concerted efforts from many overseas and local organizations. Our tour supports many local guides and support workers and we make a significant contribution to the local village economies, which is gratifying.

Reunion and Mauritius have been, since their discovery, synonymous with rare birds. The Dodo, a huge, flightless, aberrant pigeon, survived in Mauritius until about 1681, but the abundant, fearless bird life on which every visitor to those islands commented did not long survive the settlers' hunting and clearing. One of the characteristics of ecosystems long isolated is their great fragility, with plants and animals unused to predators and to competition and lacking in disease immunity. The degradation has not ended. Good native forest habitat in Reunion has been much reduced, whilst in Mauritius, what little forest is left is highly threatened by introduced and highly invasive shrubs, which form a dense understory through which native seedlings cannot emerge, and macaques and mongoose are two very serious introduced predators that threaten the long-term survival of all the endemics. It is not surprising that Mauritius has some of the rarest birds on Earth—Mauritius Kestrel (the few wild pairs have now been supplemented by a release program to the point that

the carrying capacity is close to being reached), Mauritius Parakeet (captive breeding is now greatly supplementing the tiny population), and Pink Pigeon (once down to about 10 birds in the wild, now being supplemented by a release program). By searching diligently and working with local experts, we have a good chance of seeing all the surviving endemics of Mauritius and Reunion, but it is a sobering experience to realize what has been lost and just how threatened are the few remnants, come and see them now whilst you can! We will also see a good number of non-endemic and introduced species.

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: In an area with a remarkably high number of endemic and unusual birds (and some fabulous Malagasy mammals), we wish to see as many as possible on our route. To succeed, our itinerary must be fairly comprehensive and somewhat complex. That said, we intend to conduct the tour with a balanced pace in mind. The Madagascar portion of the tour will be faster-paced than our typical schedule in the islands and will involve some early starts to reach some more distant birding sites or simply to get out early while birds are most active, in particular in the Tulear, Ifaty and Mahajunga areas, where temperatures climb rapidly on clear mornings.

Both Mauritius and Reunion are very much a mainstream tourist destinations, a fact reflected in their good hotel facilities, transportation, and general tourist infrastructure. Madagascar, by contrast, is largely off the mainstream resort tourism track (except for the popular island of Nosy Be, which has become like so many other resort destinations). While facilities and tourism support in many parts of the country have improved significantly in recent years, participants should be prepared for simple accommodations at Ankarafantsika NP and the Bamboo Club at Ifaty (but all are greatly improved over previous years' tours). The fabulous birds, wonderful lemurs, and fantastic landscapes should help to distract us from the accommodations on those few nights.

Temperatures on Mauritius and Reunion are typically quite sunny but, with sea breezes, quite pleasant. We'll see a greater range of temperatures on Madagascar, however. While the central highlands can be very pleasant with highs in the 80's, coastal regions like Mahajanga (including Ankarafantsika), Zombitse, Ifaty and Tulear are usually quite hot (high 90's-low 100's) at this season.

Hiking on trails in most areas is easy to moderately difficult (if you count walking for a couple of hours one way as difficult), with quite good trails and few trail obstacles. Hikes at Ranomafana, and at Perinet/Mantadia are more challenging with some significant elevation change and slippery or uneven trails. We'll be sure to let participants know the day before what's in store for the next day's walking.

About the Birding Areas

Ranomafana National Park—Situated on the slopes of Madagascar's humid eastern escarpment, Ranomafana National Park protects an area of rainforest habitat similar to that we'll find later at Mantadia-Andasibe (Perinet), but at a slightly higher elevation. In the mid 1980s Ranomafana received much attention because of the discovery of a new species of lemur, the Golden Bamboo Lemur; other species including Greater Bamboo, Red-bellied, and Red-fronted lemurs, Milne-Edwards Sifaka, and Eastern Mouse Lemur occur as well, making the area of particular interest to primatologists. We'll hope to find all of these lemurs, of course, but the real draw for our group will be a host of birds typical of rainforest, Madagascar's richest habitat. Beyond the forest regulars, our main quest will be a cadre of birds we are unlikely to see anywhere else. These include Brown Mesite (affording us a realistic opportunity to see all of the mesites on one tour), Madagascar Snipe, Madagascar Wood-Rail, Pitta-like Ground-Roller (fairly common here and seen well repeatedly on our past tours), Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity (rare), Gray-crowned Tetraka (Greenbul) Forest Rock-Thrush (a beautiful



We'll have a chance to walk through some very interesting landscapes. This is a recent Field Guides group hiking in Isalo National Park. Photograph by participant Randy Beaton.

songster), Gray Emu-tail, Wedge-tailed Tetraka (Jery), Cryptic Warbler, White-throated Oxylabes (little groups of which skulk in the densest forest undergrowth), the elusive and skulking Madagascar Yellowbrow (Yellow-browed Oxylabes), and the handsome Pollen's Vanga. Almost all of these species are difficult to see, and we will invest most of our time seeking them out while still enjoying the more common and widespread rainforest birds as we encounter them. The terrain at Ranomafana is quite hilly, but with three nights and two full days to explore the area, we will have time to look for all of these birds at a reasonable pace.



Zombitse Forest/Isalo Massif—We'll take advantage of a necessary travel day to visit these two areas in south-central Madagascar and seek out two very local endemics, though it will be hot by the time we get there. The Zombitse comprises tall deciduous forest reminiscent of what we saw at Ankarafantsika in the northwest. It is home to the Appert's Tetraka (Greenbul), described in 1972 and with a very patchy distribution within its tiny range in this part of the island. On our past tours, we've had great looks at small groups of these birds foraging on the ground in the company of the bulkier Long-billed Tetraka (Greenbul). Few birders have seen this bird, and its restricted habitat is gravely endangered by charcoal production activities of the local people.

The Isalo Massif is a fabulous landscape of large, rugged rock outcrops amidst near-desert surroundings, though at 3100 feet elevation it is quite comfortable. This is the area where our past tour groups have found one of Madagascar's seldom-seen species, the taxonomically challenged Benson's Rock-Thrush.

Tulear/Ifaty area—The region north of Tulear in southwest Madagascar is covered with great tracts of the island's bizarre and unique spiny forest (although in recent years there has been an increased amount of cutting and burning). Here, the landscape is dominated by a fantastic association of baobab trees, with endemic euphorbias and *Didierea* shrubs on the sandy soil. The huge, fat trunks of baobabs stick out above the waving arms of bizarre, spine-covered plants reminiscent of a giant version of the Ocotillo of the American Southwest. This completely foreign landscape is home to a broad assortment of Malagasy birds, but we'll search most of all for two members of endemic families: Subdesert Mesite and Long-tailed Ground-Roller. Our recent tour groups have enjoyed long, close looks at both species, and some years we are fortunate enough to find active nests of the ground-roller. Other prizes among the many possibilities include: Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, Banded Kestrel, Madagascar Buttonquail, Madagascar Hoopoe (split from the continental forms by its peculiar voice), Sickle-billed, Chabert, Red-tailed, Lafresnaye's (restricted to the southwest), and White-headed vangas, Running, Crested, and Olive-capped (if split from Red-capped) couas, Archbold's Newtonia, Thamnornis, Stripe-throated Jery, and Sakalava Weaver. We'll also bird an area of white coral rag scrub near Tulear, home to a couple of very local endemics—Verreaux's Coua and the very recently discovered (1997) Red-shouldered Vanga.

Ankarafantsika Forest Station and Lake Ravelobe—These birding sites lie about 110 kilometers inland from Mahajunga (also known as Majunga) in northwestern Madagascar. Important birding habitats include marshes and rice paddies, a large freshwater lake, and dry deciduous woodland. On a typical birding trip to Madagascar, a number of specialties are seen only here, including Madagascar Jacana, Madagascar Fish-Eagle (one of the world's rarest raptors), White-breasted Mesite, Coquerel's and Red-capped couas, Rufous and the rare Van Dam's Vanga, and the rare and decidedly wonderful Schlegel's Asity. The richly colored Coquerel's Sifaka is sometimes seen very close to the forest station entrance. The Madagascar (Crested) Ibis (a spectacular, rare and elusive forest ibis) has nested in the reserve and we sometimes encounter them here as we did again in 2014. Collared Iguana is common here, the day geckoes and chameleons can be fascinating, and a couple of species of the spectacular hog-nosed snake are possible (non-venomous!)

Andasibe (Perinet) Special Reserve / Mantadia National Park—This reserve and the adjacent national park comprise an area of 10,000 hectares of rainforest. Located about 130 kilometers east of Antananarivo (known to most as Tana), Andasibe's forest features very tall trees with a particularly dense understory, a feature apparently caused in part by the cyclones that regularly hit the island. Low hills and ridges characterize the area, and a number of trails in the reserve will give us access to both streamside and ridge forest as well as a small lake. Many of the birds here will be shared with Ranomafana. Specialties include Madagascar Grebe, Madagascar Flufftail (a tiny crane that can hide effectively behind even the smallest leaf but which we have a good chance of seeing), Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher (elusive), Red-breasted Coua (scarce here), Ward's Flycatcher (Vanga), Rand's Warbler, Dark Newtonia, Nuthatch Vanga and the fabulous Rufous-headed Ground-Roller plus a couple of rare nocturnal species (that we often find in daylight): Collared Nightjar (vocalization unknown) and Madagascar Long-eared Owl (the largest of the island's endemic owls). We'll also visit the recently opened Mantadia National Park, about a 90 minute drive on a very bad road from Perinet, giving us a chance to find the beautiful Scaly and the much more elusive Short-legged ground-rollers, as well as several other species that are more easily found here than at Perinet itself.

During our visit to Andasibe (Perinet), we'll also have the chance to watch a variety of lemurs—Brown, Eastern Mouse, Greater Dwarf, and Gray Bamboo—and there is even a chance for the splendid Diademed Sifaka, now a rare species due to habitat destruction. However, the Indri, largest of the living lemurs, will be a focus of part of one of our mornings, usually our finale. Indris are far and away the greatest single attraction for the general visitor to Perinet, and we have an excellent chance of seeing these magnificent creatures at close range, and you will likely hear them singing just after dawn from our hotel. Their loud, plaintive wails—surely one of the Earth's most evocative sounds, like a terrestrial Humpback Whale—carry for great distances through the forest. Herps both here and at Ranomafana are outstanding, with beautiful and colorful day geckoes, amazingly camouflaged *Uroplatus* leaf-tailed geckoes (if we are lucky), chameleons and skinks.



*Barau's Petrel nests in the forests on Reunion.
Photograph by guide Jesse Fagan.*

Reunion—This small and mountainous island, an overseas department of France since 1946, has now has native forest on the higher slopes, but this habitat harbors a handful of endemic land birds—Reunion Cuckoo-shrike (restricted to the remnant *Acacia heterophila* forest on the higher slopes of the island and now very hard to see), Reunion Bulbul (quite shy and sometimes difficult), Reunion Stonechat, and Reunion Olive White-eye. Three birds endemic to Reunion and Mauritius—Mascarene Swiftlet, Mascarene Paradise-Flycatcher (proposed as split for each island now), and Mascarene Gray White-eye (usually split)—all occur here as well, and the Reunion Harrier is also usually split these days from the very rare Madagascar form. In this damp forest, fed by mist and cloud and draped with mosses, lichens, ferns, and orchids, a large percentage of the plant species are unique as well. The views across the dark green mountainsides to the sea beyond provide an insight into the untouched beauty that Reunion must have held before humans first arrived several hundred years ago. Reunion is home also to two endemic seabirds, Barau's Petrel, unknown to science until 1963 when a beached specimen was sent to French ornithologist Christian Jouanin, and the extremely rare Mascarene Petrel. On recent tours we've watched as hundreds of beautiful Barau's Petrels passed by the shore, some only fifty feet from where we stood.

Mauritius, with Reunion and several smaller islands, comprises the Mascarene Islands. Like Reunion, it is volcanic in origin. Also like Reunion, there is only a small tract of native forest remaining, and here we'll search for a number of endemic land birds, many of them highly endangered. These range from Mauritius Kestrel to Pink Pigeon and Mauritius Parakeet, all objects of long-term captive breeding and release programs to save their tiny populations. We'll look for these birds in the wild, though the birds we see in the wild are often not necessarily "originals," and in 2013 the parakeet feeding program was suspended, making the birds harder to find. We'll also seek out the island's other endemic land birds: Mauritius Cuckoo-shrike (now very hard to see since macaque control was discontinued in 2011), Mauritius Olive

White-eye (ditto), the striking Mauritius Fody (very different in behavior from the introduced Red Fody), and Mauritius Bulbul. We plan to visit the Mauritius Wildlife Conservancy reserve of Ile aux Aigrettes in the afternoon, a short boat ride across the harbor at Mahebourg. The island is being rewilded and has a good population of Mauritius Fody, some Mauritius Olive White-eyes, and many Aldabran Giant Tortoises which are put there to help replicate what used to be a tortoise-dominated ecology before the local species was exterminated. Some rare skinks from Round Island have also been introduced here and there is a good chance of seeing Telfair's Skink.

IMPORTANT! *Although we plan to visit all of the areas below, a precise itinerary is always difficult to produce far in advance. Much depends on local flight schedules that fluctuate from year to year and season to season. In Madagascar, schedules are decidedly elastic and we will undoubtedly encounter changes. We will do our best to duplicate the outline below but can't guarantee that the sequence of days and flight times will be the same as what follows.*

Itinerary for Madagascar

Days 1-2, Sat-Sun, 3-4 Nov. Flight to Paris; evening flight from Paris to Madagascar. Those participants coming from the US will depart this evening (November 4), with most folks arriving in Paris, or another European city, on the morning of Day 2 (November 5). Flights to Madagascar's capital city of Antananarivo (known locally as Tana) will departure anywhere from mid morning to late evening. Please make sure your arrival in Tana is on or before November 5.

Day 3, Mon, 5 Nov. Arrival in Madagascar. Arrival in Tana (November 5). We'll clear customs and transfer to our hotel, where we'll have some time to rest after our long flight. We'll plan to meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for dinner. Night in Tana.

Day 4, Tue, 6 Nov. Drive to Mahajunga; Ankarafantsika NP. This morning we'll drive for some 9 hours on reasonable roads to the National Park at Ankarafantsika. We should arrive mid-afternoon and will wither have lunch en route, where we hope to arrive in time for some late afternoon birding. Our lodging is in simple but comfortable double bungalows with private bathrooms, though singles are limited and will need to share a communal bathroom. Night at Ampijoroa Lodge.

Day 5, Wed, 7 Nov. Ampijoroa Forest Station; return to Mahajunga. The advantage of staying at the Ampijoroa Lodge will be immediately apparent when we step out of our cabins at dawn, knowing we didn't need to leave our beds at 3:00 a.m. as we've done in the past to get there for the dawn chorus! Being here at dawn is extremely important as this region is one of the hottest and driest we'll encounter on the trip. The trails are not particularly difficult—mostly flat and sandy—but we will do at least a little climbing and the heat can be intense so carrying sufficient water is an absolute necessity!

The three big targets here—White-breasted Mesite, Schlegel's Asity, and Van Dam's Vanga—can all be quite tricky, so we'll focus on these birds first, though we'll certainly see many other species along the way. After birding the deciduous forest on the plateau, we'll go to nearby Lake Ravelobe, a good site for Madagascar Fish-Eagle, one of the world's rarest raptors, and sometimes Humblot's Heron and Madagascar Jacana. Our return to Mahajunga will be somewhat dependent on how we do with the birds, though we'll try to be back before dark. If time permits, we may make a few stops in the marshes and rice fields en route to check for Black Herons, Greater Painted-snipe, and the striking African Pygmy-Goose. Night in Mahajunga.



The colorful Asities are a group endemic to Madagascar. This is Schlegel's Asity, found on the northern-western portion of the island. Photograph by participant Sid England.

Day 6, Thu, 8 Nov. Mahajunga and Tana. After a more leisurely breakfast this morning, we'll take a short boat trip to the mouth of the Betsiboka River for a chance to see the rare Bernier's Teal, Humblot's Heron, and the distinctive Madagascar race of Sacred Ibis (split by most), though we do need the tide to be falling to have a chance of these rarities. The exposed mudflats usually have a range of migrant shorebirds (which can include Crab Plover), which will keep us occupied while we search for the scarcer species listed above. Flight back to Tana late pm or evening.

Day 7, Fri, 9 Nov. Tana; drive to Andasibe (Perinet). This morning we'll make the long 3-4 hour drive to the Feon'ny Ala Hotel, our comfortable base near the Andasibe Reserve. We'll plan to make an initial visit to the nearby Andasibe Reserve this afternoon. Night at Feon 'Ny Ala ("Song of the Forest").

Days 8-9, Sat-Sun, 10-11 Nov. Andasibe (Perinet/Analamazaotra) Special Reserve. We'll spend these two days exploring the Andasibe (Perinet) reserve and nearby areas, including a visit to the new Mantadia National Park. Trails vary but most of the walking is on fairly flat terrain with only occasional steeper sections. Condition of the trails will depend on recent weather; if there has been rain, rubber boots may be valuable, though typically the trails are in good, firm condition. Raingear and/or an umbrella should always be carried. During our time here we will have second looks at many of the forest birds we saw at Ranomafana, and undoubtedly we'll also find some new ones—Andasibe/Perinet often proves to be the best area for Madagascar Ibis, Madagascar Flufftail, Collared Nightjar, Nuthatch Vanga, and with a great deal of luck, Scaly and Short-legged ground-rollers. The park is also excellent for lemurs, including the fabulous Indri, and the herps here include a fascinating variety of chameleons, leaf-tailed geckoes and lizards, plus many small and very colorful frogs. Nights at Feon 'Ny Ala.

Day 10, Mon, 12 Nov. Perinet; drive about 3-4 hours via Brickaville to the Pangalanes area. Followed by a one-hour boat crossing on the canals to our comfortable waterside hotel where we shall be ready for the short trip to Aye-aye island where chances of seeing this legendary creature are excellent. Overnight at the local waterside hotel.

Day 11, Tue, 13 Nov. Pangalanes to Tana by road We can explore the area around the hotel early, then take the boat back to meet up with our bus and head back to Tana, so this is largely a travel day. There may be enough time after en route back in Tana for a visit to a souvenir shop area, which has some nice artefacts and gifts. Night at the Tamboho Hotel or maybe the Carlton, Tana.

Day 12, Wed, 14 Nov. Morning flight to Tulear; drive to Ifaty. We'll fly this morning to Tulear and then head north along nice new road to the town of Ifaty, which now takes about an hour. We'll plan a few stops for some shorebirding or a Madagascar Plover if time permits. Our hotel in Ifaty is a fairly simple but comfortable coastal resort. The sunsets are fabulous and the sound of the lapping waves very relaxing. Night in Ifaty at the Bamboo Club.



This Subdesert Mesite was seen on our last Field Guides tour; it sat frozen on this branch for many minutes, giving us a very good look at this endemic species. Photograph by participant Randy Beaton.

Day 13, Thu, 15 Nov. We'll start early this morning, trying to beat the heat of the day while exploring the nearby spiny forest—which is sadly being cut and burned but is fortunately still full of wonderful birds! The tracks are soft and sandy but well worth the effort with Sub-desert Mesite, Long-tailed Ground-Roller, and Lafresnaye's Vanga being possible highlights. A full water bottle or two and a hat for sun protection are necessities. We'll return for a break during the heat of the day, and there may be an opportunity for a dip in the Mozambique Channel, so bring your swimsuit. This afternoon we'll do some birding along the coast or return to the spiny forest, depending on what we still need to see. Night in Ifaty at the Bamboo Club.



*The male Red-shouldered Vanga is striking bird.
Photograph by participant Randy Beaton.*

Day 14, Fri, 16 Nov. Ifaty to Tulear. We'll have another morning to look for any of the spiny forest specialties we might have missed yesterday. Then, we'll return to our hotel for lunch before heading back down the coast to Tulear; we should have time to do some shorebirding along the way and hope to make a foray out to the limestone rag forest around La Table, with a chance for Red-shouldered Vanga and Verreaux's Coua, two very localized endemics. Night in Tulear.

Day 15, Sat, 17 Nov. Boat trip to Anakau and Nosy Ve. Today, we'll catch a boat from a dock near our hotel and split our time between two places: the offshore island of Nosy Ve, and the southwestern shore surrounding the town of Anakau. We now have a new and faster boat, so the crossing is only about an hour, and we should be back in time for a late lunch at Tulear. Nosy Ve provides nesting sites for Red-tailed Tropicbirds, and it's often possible to find nests and young tucked under bushes within yards of shore. Crab Plovers, Madagascar Plovers, and various terns are also

possible. The coastal vegetation around Anakau, south of the Onilahy River, is home to a healthy population of Littoral Rock-Thrush, another Madagascar endemic. **The crossing to Nosy Ve may be choppy (we won't go if it's rough!); those who suffer from seasickness should be sure to take appropriate precautions.**

After returning from the boat trip, we may pay a visit to the dry scrub of La Table for Verreaux's Coua and Red-shouldered Vanga, which will otherwise be done next day, or visit the local markets in Tulear where many interesting things are on sale, from carvings, baskets and rocks to *Aepyornis* eggs! Night in Tulear.

Day 16, Sun, 18 Nov. Tulear to Ranohira. We'll have the early morning to bird the coral rag euphorbia scrub around La Table. This is arid country and our birding will be along dirt roads or tracks, so comfortable footwear will be adequate to bird this area which is home to two of Madagascar's most local endemics—Verreaux's Coua and the recently described Red-shouldered Vanga. We will then drive to Ranohira in the quite recently established Isalo NP, stopping at the fascinating Zombitse Forest NP. Here we'll search for another local endemic—Appert's Tetraka (Greenbul). In both places, we'll be walking on hard-packed sand and over some granite plates, so comfortable footwear should be adequate. It should be warm throughout, so dress for comfortable travel. Our hotel at Ranohira is a really beautiful architect designed sandstone building, with the very localized Benson's Rock Thrush living on the grounds and in what can also be a good area for Madagascar Partridge and White-throated Rail. Night at Ranohira.

Day 17, Mon, 19 Nov. More time around Isalo NP where there is a village conservation program based around Ring-tailed Lemurs which we plan to visit. Night at Ranohira.

Day 18, Tue, 20 Nov. Isalo NP – Fiananarantsoa - Ranomafana. After a final early morning around the lovely safari-style lodge in the Isalo National Park, we'll begin the long drive towards Ranomafana. Watch for Eleonora's Falcons- long overdue now, and just maybe Malagasy (Reunion) Harriers, but both rare and unlikely, and Madagascar Partridges along the way. We anticipate arriving at our hotel near the park by late afternoon, depending on road conditions and weather, and may be able to do some birding as we near the national park. Night in Ranomafana.

Days 19-20, Wed-Thu, 21-22 Nov. Ranomafana NP. We'll spend two full days and part of a third exploring various trails in the park, one of the most beautiful rainforest areas in the whole of Madagascar. In addition to many of the more common forest birds, we'll be hoping for Brown Mesite, Pitta-like and Rufous-headed ground-rollers, Sunbird Asity, Gray-crowned Tetraka (Greenbul), Brown Emu-tail, and Cryptic Warbler. In addition to the birds, we should see a number of lemurs, including Eastern Mouse, Golden and maybe Greater Bamboo, and Brown Lemur, and perhaps Milne-Edwards Sifaka. Herps are also outstanding, with a variety of day geckoes, leaf-tailed geckoes, chameleons and lizards. The terrain here is primarily hill forest between 3000 and 5000 feet, and the park trails climb up and down accordingly—sometimes rather steeply. Some of the trails can be muddy and slippery if they're wet, but a couple of areas we'll visit will offer at least some flat walking. The condition of the trails will depend on recent weather; if there has been rain, rubber boots may be valuable, though typically the trails are in good, firm condition. Raingear and/or an umbrella should always be carried. Nights in Ranomafana.

Day 21, Fri, 23 Nov. Morning in Ranomafana; drive to Ambositre. After a final early morning in the park, we'll head north to Tana, breaking our journey with an overnight at Ambositre. We'll stop along the way at a highland marsh where we've had some luck in tracking down both Madagascar Snipe and the beautiful White-throated Rail. We'll also see a significant patch of good quality native forest here, which is always worth a look. Night in Ambositre.

Day 22, Sat, 24 Nov. Ambositre to Tana. Today is mainly a travel day, though we'll plan to make a few stops along the way. We'll traverse the denuded hills and paddyfields of the Madagascar countryside and see a few of the more common widespread endemics as we wind our way northward through the highlands. Night at Carlton Hotel, Tana.

Day 23, Sun, 25 Nov. Leave Tana for home, or the extension.

Day 24, Mon, 26 Nov. Arrival in the US.

Mauritius and Reunion Extension



*The Pink Pigeon of Mauritius has been rescued from extinction by a captive breeding and reintroduction effort.
Photograph by guide Dave Stejskal.*

Day 1, Sun, 25 Nov. Depart Madagascar for flight to Mauritius. A leisurely day in Tana today will allow us plenty of time to pack and get ready for our late afternoon flight to Mauritius. Upon arrival in Mauritius, we'll be met at the Plaisance airport on the southeast of the island and transferred to our hotel (about 45 min) on the southwest part of the island, near where we'll be birding. Late supper for those who feel like it. Night in Aanari Hotel, Flic en Flac.

Day 2, Mon, 26 Nov. Birding Mauritius. Today, we'll spend time at Bassin Blanc, the Maccabbe-Mare Longue Reserve, and the lower Black River Gorges in search of some of the rarest birds on Earth. Accompanied by staff of the Mauritius Wildlife Appeal Fund, we have a fair chance of seeing all of the endemics, but be aware that the Mauritius Cuckooshrike and Mauritius Olive White-eye have recently gone from the accessible sites and are now teetering on the brink of extinction; also, purists beware: given the major efforts to save the most endangered species through captive breeding and

reintroduction, sightings of "pure" Pink Pigeons, Mauritius (Echo) Parakeets, and Mauritius Kestrels may be a thing of the past. Our local guide will also give us the latest word on the progress of the project, population numbers, and the outlook for the future of these species on the brink of extinction. We may visit on the last afternoon a reserve called Ile aux Aigrettes, a small island very near Mahebourg, which is a great place to see Mauritius Olive White-eye, plus the very rare Telfair's Skink and Aldabra Giant Tortoise. This depends on tides and opening hours, but we will include it if we can. It's a bit like Tiri-tiri Matangi in New Zealand where they are trying to restore an island to good native forest and is well worth a look. The boat ride is five minutes, and the entire trip will last about two hours, with a short walk on coral rag tracks on the island. Night at the Aanari Hotel, Flic en Flac.

Day 3, Tue, 27 Nov. Departure Mauritius to Reunion; afternoon birding on Reunion. After our arrival in St. Denis, we'll clear customs and, if time permits, take a bus tour of the island, seeing the lava fields and hopefully the scarce Reunion Harrier. In the late afternoon, we'll travel by bus to the eastern side of the island. There, at the mouth of the Riviere Gol, graceful Barau's Petrels concentrate before spiraling upward and flying inland to recently discovered nest sites in the walls of the great volcanic cirques. If we do arrive later than 5:00 p.m., we can still see the petrels close to the city. Night in St. Denis, Reunion.

Day 4, Wed, 28 Nov. Birding Reunion; departure for home. We'll continue our exploration of this French island with an early departure by bus up a steep, winding road above St. Denis and Le Brule to the head of a forest trail. (*If you suffer from motion sickness, this is a good day to use an appropriate remedy!*) Here, we'll hike into one of the remaining native mountain forests of Reunion where we have a good chance of seeing all of the surviving endemic land birds of the island. We'll climb about three kilometers, from 3900 to 5000 feet elevation, along a well-maintained trail that is not particularly steep but can be quite slippery if there has been recent rain or mist—a common phenomenon in these lush mountains. You'll want comfortable footwear with good tread, a canteen of water, and your raingear. We will also provide a picnic lunch that you may wish to carry on the hike in case some of the birds prove difficult to locate.

Flights depart this evening for Paris. Depending on your arrival time into Paris, you may need to overnight there and continue to the US the following day. Please contact your tour manager if you would like help with overnight arrangements. *Bon voyage!*

Day 5 Thu 29 Nov. Arrive US

About Your Guides

Phil Gregory was born in Southampton, UK, and became a birder as a youth when the steam engines were scrapped and birding offered a way to travel and look for wonderful things. The quest for birds has led to many forays in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australasia, and the Pacific. He and his wife, Sue, worked as teachers for eight years in Nigeria and Zambia, where they raised their family and made serious inroads into the birds of Africa before transferring to the Falkland Islands for a two-year stint. From 1991-97 they lived in Papua New Guinea where the 400-plus endemics proved a great challenge, and since then they have lived in the Northern Territory and far north Queensland, Australia.

Phil's major interests are field identification, vocalizations, and the geographic distribution of birds. He is also a writer with assorted contributions to many reference books including doing some family accounts for the *Handbook of Birds of the World*. He is currently working on a *Birds-of-paradise and Bowerbirds* title in the Pica/Helm series and a newly published *Field Guide to the Birds of New Guinea* for Lynx Edicions. He has also published and now maintains three on-line checklists, one for the *Birds of Australia and Island Territories*, one for the *Solomon Islands* and the other for *New Guinea and Associated Islands*. He is also involved in guide development and training and tourism promotion in the Solomon Islands.

Phil and Sue run the well-known Cassowary House, a birding and nature lodge situated in a great birding spot in the rainforest at Kuranda, near Cairns in the far north of Queensland.

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/guides> for Phil's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

A **second guide** will be added as tour size warrants.

Financial Information

FEE: \$9550 (includes the flights within Madagascar)

FEE FOR EXTENSION: \$2175 (includes the flights from Madagascar to Mauritius and from Mauritius to Reunion)

DEPOSIT: \$1000 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: July 6, 2018

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$950 for main tour (single rooms are limited at Ampijoroa Lodge); \$230 for Mauritius/ Reunion Extension (single rooms are limited; possible shared bathroom facilities depending on the number of singles)

LIMIT: 9

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Sharon Mackie. Sharon will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

ACCOMMODATIONS: While Madagascar is definitely "off the beaten track," its accommodations have improved enormously over the past few years. Though some accommodations are typical of third-world countries without an overwhelming amount of tourism, overall our lodgings are surprisingly good, particularly given the remoteness of some of the birding areas. At Ampijoroa Lodge singles are limited so some folks may need to double up, and anyone in the research section with the guides will need to share bathroom facilities.

For those situations where netting isn't provided (Ambositre and Tana only in 2017), you might want a portable, self-supporting mosquito-net sleeping tent which you can erect over your bed in order to sleep free of mosquito worries; alternatively, buy some insect spray in the local towns. If you're a light sleeper, you may also want to bring along earplugs.

Mauritius and Reunion are a popular tropical vacation destination for Europeans, so accommodations there are quite good.

DOCUMENTS: A current **passport** valid six months beyond the date of your return is necessary for US citizens to enter both countries. The passports of all travelers entering Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion must contain at least one clean (unstamped) visa page at each time entry is sought. Amendment and endorsement pages cannot be used in lieu of visa pages. US citizens must obtain a **tourist visa** for Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion and application should be made well in advance, though it is possible to pay US\$30 (2017 price) and get one on arrival in Madagascar. We will provide you with the necessary visa application form. At this time, no vaccinations are required—unless you are arriving from a yellow fever-infected area elsewhere.

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the consulates nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed. Please ensure you either have or have copies of your onward ticket or itinerary out of Madagascar and Mauritius/Reunion, immigration may want proof of how you intend to depart.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

Also, once the tour is set to operate it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$9550 for one person in double occupancy from Antananarivo, Madagascar. It includes all lodging from Day 3 through Day 24, all meals from dinner on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 25, the flights within Madagascar, all ground transportation, boat trips, entrance fees, tips for baggage handling, plenty of drinking water, and meal service, and the guide services of the tour leader(s).

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Madagascar, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the main tour is \$950. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

The fee for the **Mauritius/Reunion Extension** is \$2175 for one person in double occupancy. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 3, day rooms in Reunion on Day 4, all meals from breakfast on Day 1 through lunch on Day 4, the flights from Tana to Mauritius and from Mauritius to Reunion, any boat trips, all ground transportation, entrance fees, tips for baggage handling, plenty of water and meal service, and the guide services of the tour leader(s).

The extension fee does not include airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement for the extension** is \$230. (Depending on tour size, singles may not be available, and shared bathroom facilities may be in order.)

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the enclosed Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$1000** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by July 6, 2018. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute another guide for the original one. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members, and they will have the right to cancel their participation and receive a full refund.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US and Canadian citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.html> and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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