

ITINERARY  
**MADAGASCAR**  
*October 26-November 18, 2024*  
**MAURITIUS & REUNION EXTENSION**  
*November 17-21, 2024*



*The unusual Cuckoo-Roller is neither a cuckoo nor a roller, but looks somewhat like these other species. This distinctive endemic, so different that it is placed in its own family, is found throughout Madagascar, and we've had very good views of it on recent tours. Photograph by guide Dave Stejskal.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2024 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 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

**NOTE REGARDING FLIGHTS:** In 2024 we are changing the order in hopes of eliminating some long, bumpy drives, and we will now fly on commercial flights from Tana to Tulear, and to and from Mahajunga. While these flights add to the tour cost considerably we feel the added cost is well worth the time it saves, not to mention flat tire changing we'll avoid!



*The vangas are an interesting group that has undergone some amazing adaption to the varying habitats of Madagascar. The Sickie-billed Vanga is one example; the bill of this species is specially adapted to pluck insects out of crevices and from between spines on plants in its habitat. Photograph by participant Sid England.*

**M**adagascar 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 (now placed with broadbills), the Bernieridae (Malagasy tetrakas and 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 Mahajunga 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 recording collection to serve us well on our upcoming tours to Madagascar, where Field Guides began running tours over 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.

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. The misty forest of Perinet can have an unforgettable dawn chorus of Indri

with their astonishing humpback-whale like vocalizations. We'll also have opportunities to see families of Ring-tailed Lemurs near Isalo, while Lesser Vasa Parrots and Cuckoo-Rollers are other species we should see and hear during our time here. It is truly amazing to feel one is returning to a living remnant of the Miocene 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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*), the 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 combined efforts from many overseas and local organizations. Our tour supports many local guides and workers, and we make a significant contribution to the local village economies, which is gratifying.



*Bird-life on the islands of Mauritius and Reunion has been heavily impacted by European settlement, and the Echo (Mauritius) Parakeet is no exception. The population of these parakeets was reduced to an estimated 10 individuals in the 1970-80's, but has been brought back through a combination of habitat conservation and captive breeding.  
Photograph by guide Phil Gregory.*

**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.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

## Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** Good amounts of walking (occasionally up to 3-4 miles per day), some of it on roads, some on trails. Trails vary from flat and broad with no obstacles (in most areas) to steep, slippery, and uneven, with obstacles such as rocks or fallen branches (two locations). Walking sticks are recommended on the more difficult hikes. Ranomafana also has some quite steep steps to negotiate.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We cover much ground on this tour, and on several days we must use dusty, very bumpy roads. Participants should be able to step up 12 inches into and out of our transports. We do spend a bit of time standing to watch birds on this tour (a small folding stool can provide relief as needed).
- **PACE:** Frequent early mornings (5:00-5:30 a.m. breakfasts), with afternoon breaks on some days followed by optional afternoon outings. On some days, we will be in the field all day, with a picnic lunch, to maximize field time or when traveling to the next lodging. Optional nighttime outings will also be offered.
- **WEATHER:** Temperatures will range from the low 60's F (15C) at night in the central highlands to the high 90s (or even low 100s) F (30-33 C) during the day in coastal lowlands. Rain showers are a possibility.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Participants should be prepared to make comfort stops (bush stops) in nature for most of this tour, as there are simply no other options along most of the tour's route, away from our lodgings.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations.

## 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, Forest Rock-Thrush (a beautiful songster), 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, described in 1972 and with a very patchy distribution within its tiny range in this part of the island. Few birders have seen this bird, and its restricted habitat is gravely endangered by charcoal production activities of the local people. 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, and it's also a great place for Cuckoo-roller.

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.



*The ecosystem known as the "spiny forest" is home to many unique plants and animals. We'll seek some wonderful birds here, including Subdesert Mesite and Long-tailed Ground-Roller. Photograph by guide Phil Gregory.*

**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, 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 kilometres inland from Mahajunga (also known as Mahjunga) in north-western 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. 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!).



*One of the world's rarest raptors is the Madagascar Fish-Eagle. These eagles are related to the African Fish-Eagle, and are found along the western coast of the island, and at freshwater lakes such as Lake Ravelobe.*

*Photograph by participant Sid England.*

**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 kilometres 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, the rare 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.

**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.



*Reunion Stonechat is common on the island of Reunion, so we should get very good views of them.  
Photograph by guide Phil Gregory.*

**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, Reunion Olive White-eye and Reunion Grey White-eye. Two birds endemic to Reunion and Mauritius—Mascarene Swiftlet and Mascarene Paradise-Flycatcher (proposed as split for each island now)—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.

**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 it is unlikely that the sequence of days and flight times will be the same as what follows. The itinerary has been fine-tuned to balance Air Madagascar flights (with their many schedule changes!!) with driving where we feel the road conditions are withstandable, and allows time at some gorgeous local sites like Feon'NyAla and Ranomafana.*



*In addition to the rare birds, Madagascar is home to more than 100 species of lemur. We'll see quite a few, including the amazing Verreaux's Sifaka, found in the southwestern part of the island. We should see them at Zombitse. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

## Itinerary for Madagascar

**Days 1-2, Sat-Sun, 26-27 Oct. Flight to Paris; evening flight from Paris to Madagascar.** Those participants coming from the US will depart this evening (October 26), with most folks arriving in Paris, or another European city, on the morning of Day 2 (October 27). Flights to Madagascar's capital city of Antananarivo (known locally as Tana) will depart anywhere from mid morning to late evening. Please make sure your arrival in Tana on or before October 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Day 3, Mon, 28 Oct. Arrival in Madagascar.** On arrival in Tana you'll clear customs and transfer to our hotel, where we'll have some time to rest after the long flight. We'll plan to meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for dinner. Night at Hotel Carlton in Tana.

**Day 4, Tue, 29 Oct. Antananarivo to Tulear.** Today we'll transfer to the airport for the group flight to Tulear. Upon arrival we will drive northward along a stretch of new road to the town of Ifaty, which should take roughly an hour to drive. We'll plan a few birding stops along the way, as time permits. Our hotel in Ifaty is a fairly simple but comfortable coastal resort lodge. The sunsets here are fabulous and the sound of the lapping waves very relaxing. Night at the *Bamboo Club* in Ifaty.



**Day 5, Wed, 30 Oct. Parc Mosa, Ifaty.** 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 today. We'll return for a break during the mid-day heat, and there may be an opportunity for a dip in the Mozambique Channel, plus there is a swimming pool, so bring your swimsuit if desired. 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.

**Day 6, Thu, 31 Oct. Ifaty to Tulear.** We'll have an early departure to Tulear for a boat trip to Nosy Ve and Anakau where we'll be birding the local area. After lunch we'll make a visit to the dry coral rag scrublands at La Table, with a chance for Red-shouldered Vanga and Verreaux's Coua, two very localized endemics. We may also visit the local markets in Tulear where many interesting things are on sale, from carvings, baskets and rocks to *Aepyornis* eggs. Night in Tulear at Victory Hotel.



*The Red-shouldered Vanga is a small bird that was only recognized as a distinct species in 1997. These birds have a restricted distribution within Madagascar, occurring only in the far southwestern corner.  
Photograph by participant Randy Beaton.*

**Days 7-8, Fri-Sat, 1-2 Nov. Tulear to Ranohira.** Today we'll drive to the fascinating Zombitse Forest NP. Here we'll search for another local endemic—Appert's Tetraka (Greenbul). We'll be walking on hard-packed sand and over some granite plates, so comfortable footwear should be adequate. As the weather is warm, we recommend breathable moisture wicking clothing that is also comfortable for travel. We'll stop for lunch at Zombitse, then drive to Ranohira where we'll be accommodated at the lovely *Jardin du Roy* Hotel for our two-night stay. Ranohira is located in the quite recently established Isalo NP, and our comfortable lodge is of a beautiful architectural design, made of sandstone, with the very localized Benson's Rock Thrush right nearby. This area can also be good for Madagascar Partridge, Madagascar Hoopoe and White-throated Rail. Nights at Jardin du Roy.

**Day 9, Sun, 3 Nov. Ranohira to Ranomafana.** Today we'll drive northward to Ranomafana, with stops to visit a local silk-making co-operative, as well as the Ring-tailed Lemur Reserve of Anja, which has about 600 of these delightful primates. We'll have a picnic lunch and hopefully some time for some afternoon roadside birding during our drive back to the lodge. Today we may see our first Cuckoo-Rollers, Madagascar Plovers and Madagascar Three-banded Plover, with the added possibility of Blue Coua. Night at Centrest Hotel or Grenat.

**Days 10-11, Mon-Tue, 4-5 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 Emutail, 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 here 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 at Centrest Hotel or Grenat.

**Day 12, Wed, 6 Nov. Ranomafana to Ambositra.** We'll have a final morning of birding at Ranomafana NP, and after lunch we'll make the drive to Ambositra with some birding on the way. Night at Fianarantsoa at Zomatel or Pietra Hotel.

**Day 13, Thu, 7 Nov. Ambositra to Antananarivo.** Today we'll make the drive back to Tana. In the afternoon we will plan to visit to Lac Alarobia, which is a RAMSAR site and notable for the heronry of Squacco Herons, and perhaps Madagascar Pond Heron, Cattle Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron, in addition to Dimorphic Egret and a few Black Herons. Meller's Duck has also been good here, and White-throated rail could also be seen in this area. Night in Tana at Carlton Hotel.

**Day 14, Fri, 8 Nov. Antananarivo to Majunga, then Ankarafantsika.** We'll have a travel day today, starting with a transfer to the airport in Tana for our group flight to Majunga. Upon arrival we'll transfer by car to Ankarafantsika, which is roughly a two-hour drive. We'll make a stop en route to enjoy a packed lunch, and we should make it to our destination in the late afternoon; hopefully in time for some pre dinner birding. Later in the evening, after dinner, a short night walk is not to be missed. Our lodging is in simple but comfortable bungalows with private bathrooms(singles are limited here so we maybe be required to double-up). Night at *Ampijoroa Lodge*.



*White-breasted Mesite can be difficult to see, but we've been able to get good looks at them. The Mesites are odd birds, classified currently between doves and sandgrouse. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

**Day 15, Sat, 9 Nov. Ampijoroa Forest Station.** 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 to the birding site 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 must! 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. After lunch 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 at *EdenaKely* in Mahajunga.

**Day 16, Sun, 10 Nov. Mahajunga to Tana.** After an early breakfast, we'll take a short boat trip to the mouth of the Betsiboka River for a chance to see the rare and elusive 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 right 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. In the evening we'll take a flight back to Tana. Night at Hotel Carlton in Tana.

**Day 17, Mon, 11 Nov. Antananarivo to Andasibe.** Early in the morning we'll again visit Lac Alarobia, the previously visited RAMSAR site(see Day 13). We'll then make the three-four hour drive (135 km) to the FeonN'y Ala Hotel, our comfortable base near the Andasibe Reserve. We'll enjoy some roadside birding at Andasibe after lunch, where our local guide may know of roosting Madagascar Long-eared Owl. Night at *Feon N' y Ala* ("Song of the Forest") in Andasibe.



*Scaly Ground-Roller is one of the forest dwellers we'll look for at Andasibe. Photograph by participant Randy Beaton.*

**Days 18-20, Tue-Thu, 12-14 Nov. Andasibe (Perinet/Analamazaotra) Special Reserve.** We'll spend these three days exploring the Andasibe (Perinet) 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. Night at *Feon N' y Ala* ("Song of the Forest") in Andasibe.

**Day 21, Fri, 15 Nov. Andasibe to Pangalanes Area.** We'll make another drive lasting around three-four hours via Brickaville to the Pangalanes area. From here we'll make a one-hour boat crossing to our comfortable waterside hotel where we shall be ready for the short trip to Aye-aye island where chances of seeing this legendary little creature are excellent, and where our group has had great experiences on past trips. Overnight at the local waterside hotel. Palmarium Hotel in Ankanin'Nofy.

**Day 22, Sat, 16 Nov. Pangalanes Area to Antananarivo.** We can explore the area around the hotel early, then take the boat back to meet up with our bus and driver, before heading back to Tana. This is largely a travel day, but if time is on our side we'll make a quick shopping stop. Night at Hotel Carlton in Tana.

**Day 23, Sun, 17 Nov. Departure from Tana.** Today we'll say farewell to those who are departing for home (with a connection in route). Those who will be joining the guide for the island adventure will take a flight to Mauritius to start the extension (see Day 1 of the extension itinerary below).

**Day 24, Mon, 18 Nov. Arrival back home in the U. S.**



The Pink Pigeon on Mauritius was saved from extinction through a captive breeding program. We'll be able to see the results of this effort on our visit. Photograph by guide Phil Gregory.

## Mauritius and Reunion Extension

**Day 1, Sun, 17 Nov. Depart Madagascar on flight to Mauritius.** A leisurely day in Tana today will allow us plenty of time to pack and get ready for our afternoon flight to Mauritius (currently scheduled for 12:50 p.m.). Upon arrival in Mauritius, we'll be met at the Plaisance airport on the southeast side of the island and transferred to our hotel (about 45 min) on the southwest part of the island, near where we'll be birding. We'll have a late supper for those who feel like it. Night in Flic en Flac.

**Day 2, Mon, 18 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. 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 in Flic en Flac.

**Day 3, Tue, 19 Nov. Departure Mauritius to Reunion; afternoon birding on Reunion.** After our arrival in St. Denis (likely around 2:00 p.m.), 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 spiralling upward and flying inland to recently discovered nest sites in the walls of the great volcanic cirques. If flight times change and we arrive later in the day (after 4:00 p.m.'ish) we can still see the petrels close to the city. Night in St. Denis, Reunion.

**Day 4, Wed, 20 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 kilometres, 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 and we are late returning.

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, 21 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 430-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 published *Birds of Paradise and Bowerbirds* title in the Pica/Helm series in 2019 and a *Field Guide to the Birds of New Guinea* for Lynx Edicions (2017) and in 2018 a *Photoguide to the Birds of Far North Queensland* (with Jun Matsui), with a second edition imminent. He is also involved in guide development and training and tourism promotion in the Solomon Islands.

*"Phil Gregory was outstanding, not only acoustically and visually, but also when it came to logistics and relating to individual tour participants and taking care of their special needs." D.S., Madagascar, Mauritius & Reunion*

Phil and his extended family now own and live on a Nature refuge near Malanda and the Atherton Tablelands, where the grandchildren have plenty of space and lots of chances to see birds and wildlife, with Cassowary and tree-kangaroo on the property!

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

Phil Gregory will be joined by a local guide.

## Financial Information

**FEE: \$10750 (includes domestic flight(s) within Madagascar)**

**FEE FOR EXTENSION: \$2650 (includes the flights from Madagascar to Mauritius and from Mauritius to Reunion)**

**DEPOSIT: \$1075 per person**

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE: April 29, 2024**

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$950 for main tour (single rooms are limited at Ampijoroa Lodge); \$350 for Mauritius/ Reunion Extension (single rooms are limited; possible shared bathroom facilities depending on the number of singles)**

**LIMIT: 9**

**All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one).** Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

## 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 2023), 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 Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion. The passports of all travellers must also contain at least one clean (unstamped) visa page at each time entry is sought for each country. Amendment and endorsement pages cannot be used in lieu of visa pages. US citizens must obtain a **tourist visa** for Madagascar and application should be made in advance of travel, though it is possible to pay and get one on arrival in Madagascar. We will provide you with the necessary visa application form, and recommend getting it in advance of travel. If arriving from a Yellow Fever infected area you'll be required to show proof of vaccinations. Additionally, you'll need to show proof of being vaccinated against Covid19 when entering each country.

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 \$10750 for one person in double occupancy from Antananarivo, Madagascar. It includes all lodging from Day 3 through Day 22, all meals from dinner on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 23, 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 \$2650 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 \$350. (Depending on tour size, singles may not be available, and shared bathroom facilities may be in order.)

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact us at [fieldguides.com/contact-us/](https://fieldguides.com/contact-us/). Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$1075** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by April 29, 2024**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 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 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation 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 that 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 airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

**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, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs within 90 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 90 to 179 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 citizens will receive information from us 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, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

**Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii.** We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

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 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. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible 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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