



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Madagascar 2017**

Nov 6, 2017 to Nov 27, 2017  
Phil Gregory & Doug Gochfeld

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)*



*We started the tour in the virtually pristine rainforests of Ranomafana, which the group (along with Gerard at right and Baku at far left) is enjoying here just prior to our dusk search for mouse lemurs. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

This year's Field Guides Madagascar tour was full of great features, including over twenty species of Lemur, more than one hundred species of endemic birds, and a litany of fascinating natural wonders and cultural insights. Indeed, there were so many highlights that there wasn't widespread agreement about just what the favorite bird or mammal or experience of the trip was. We fared very well with the weather; we had some cool and cloudy conditions to relieve us from the unforgiving tropical sun in a couple of locations, and the periods of rain mostly kept away from our birding excursions. Other than the plague scare that wasn't so scary after all, the bees of Andasibe, and a very minor Mad Air schedule change, the tour went off without so much as a hitch!

This year, we started out by heading to Ranomafana National Park, one of the real jewels among Madagascar's protected areas. Having this as our first stop means two days of mostly driving to start the tour, but to everyone's credit, it was handled gracefully and without complaint. We managed to fit in a couple of very productive birding stops on the way south: on day one at a nice flooded rice paddy area, where we scored our only Madagascar Snipes of the tour along with a swirling mass of Plain (Brown-throated) Martins, and then on day two at the Reserve Villageoise D'Ankazomivady, where the highlight among introductions to several Madagascar endemic species was a scarce Baillon's Crane!

We spent an afternoon and then two full days exploring the rainforests around Ranomafana, including the "Circuit 2" trail on the way to Vohiparara. It was a bit overwhelming starting the tour at such an amazingly rich location, and we were immediately inundated with new experiences, including our first asitys, vangas, tetrakas, and bamboo lemurs. Two of the headliners here were the endangered Golden Bamboo Lemur, for whose protection Ranomafana NP was created, and the even more endangered Greater Bamboo Lemur, of which only two known individuals remain in the publicly accessible area of the park. The birds were many and excellent as well, with highlights being Velvet Asity, Pitta-Like Ground-Roller, Pollen's Vanga, Blue Vanga, Dark Newtonia, Wedge-tailed Tetraka, an incredibly cooperative Yellow-browed Oxylabes, and Common Sunbird Asity (which is NOT common by any measure). Our excellent guides at Ranomafana were Jean-Chris and Baku, who did an amazing job rounding up and tracking down what seemed like every critter in the forest!

We then started working our way to the southwest, stopping for lunch in Ambalavao, where we also got some fascinating cultural insight into the processes of local silk-making and paper-making, and we were able to sample and buy some of the local products – it was great to support hardworking craftswomen directly. We spent the night at the lavish Jardin du Roy in the ruggedly beautiful Isalo National Park. We spent much of the next morning, after a wonderful breakfast with incredible French croissants, birding the grounds of the resort and a couple of nearby areas, primarily in search of Benson's Rock Thrush, a very range-restricted taxon. While we were trying to find our quarry we also enjoyed great experiences with Madagascar Bee-eater, a flyby Madagascar Pond-Heron, a bunch of Iguanas, the one-of-a-kind Pachypodium plants, and truly breathtaking scenery. It took quite a while,

but Gerard was eventually able to pull a Benson's Rock Thrush out of his hat as our time was running low, and as a bonus for waiting, we got great views of a pair of the difficult-to-see Madagascar Partridge.

The journey continued west, arriving at Zombitse Forest in the heat of the day. However, that didn't stop our Zombitse guides (Bertran, Randria, and Zerina) from finding us all of the specialties we were hoping for in quick succession, including one of the rarest birds in Madagascar, Appert's Tetraka. We got into the coua column in a big way, with three species of this endemic family (Crested, Giant, and Coquerel's), and other winners were the Verreaux's Sifakas, Zombitse Sportive Lemur, and the ever-present din of the aerial patrol of Cuckoo-Rollers (one of which gave us a great close flyover). From Zombitse, we headed west through the land of sapphire mining, eventually getting into Ifaty just before sunset. The day's drive was a very special one, as we got to witness a fascinating landscape change from the rocky canyons around Isalo, to the rolling grasslands west of Zombitse, and eventually to the barren low thorn forest of La Table before getting into the dry coastal plain of Toliara (also spelled Tulear), which featured mudflats, a huge dry river mouth, and some wide swathes of desert-like sand dunes.

Our time in Ifaty was focused on the legendary spiny forest of the southwest, and we spent most of our birding time in the region in the eponymous Parc Mosa. Our guides here were Mosa, his son Freddy, and his nephew Duffy, and they were fantastic at pulling every last bird out of the inhospitable-looking spiny forest, from megas like Long-tailed Ground-Roller, and Subdesert Mesite, to the tricky and secretive Thamnornis, and even a bonus Madagascar Sparrowhawk nest. The forest also produced Archbold's Newtonia, Lafresnaye's Vanga, and Green-capped and Running Couas. Nearby we had blisteringly good looks at Madagascar Plover, several Humblot's Herons, and a nice complement of salt-water shorebirds on the coastal mudflats. The Bamboo Club itself was good for one species each of Dwarf Lemur and Mouse Lemur, and some good dusk views of Madagascar Nightjar feeding or drinking over the pool. Our second afternoon was set aside for a targeted visit to the surprisingly biodiverse thorn forest at La Table, where we were able to track down Verreaux's Coua, and where Mosa did an amazing job of finding an astonishingly confiding pair of Red-shouldered Vangas. Both of these species are restricted to tiny worldwide ranges, and anyone who sees either one, let alone both, should count themselves lucky! Our final morning here held yet more surprises, including a great experience with a female Madagascar Sandgrouse coming to a drinking hole, and a Bank Swallow which flew by while we were waiting for the Sandgrouse to arrive. This is one of only very few records of Bank Swallow for the country of Madagascar. As if that wasn't enough for a final morning in this area, we went up the coast to the salt flats once more, and this time scored a trio of Crab Plovers! Then we had a leisurely lunch and headed to the airport for our flight to Ft. Dauphin.

We hit the ground running at Fort Dauphin, getting off an afternoon flight and right into a bus headed for Berenty Private Reserve, a not-so-straightforward 90 kilometers away. After four hours of driving a road which hasn't been re-paved since 1950, we arrived at Berenty. We went straight into a night walk through the very interesting spiny forest section of the reserve, and had exceptional views of Madagascar Nightjar, along with good experiences with confiding White-footed Sportive Lemur and Reddish-gray Mouse Lemur. The morning at Berenty came with the expected fan-fare, but even our expectations didn't prepare us for just how entertaining and adorable the combination of dancing Verreaux's Lemurs and confiding Ring-tailed Lemurs would be. It was a downright fun experience. The walk around the reserve after breakfast was also great, with more lemurs all over, three species of owls at day roosts, Excellent Giant Coua and Madagascar Hoopoe, and several regal white-morph Madagascar Paradise-Flycatchers. Sadly, the Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk wasn't attending its nest when we were in the vicinity, but it was still a wildly successful morning! We then packed up and turned around and headed right back to Ft. Dauphin, where we would stay overnight before catching our post-breakfast flight back to Tana the next day.

Once in Tana, we had one more night at the beloved Tamboho before splitting up into three SUVs for the eastern leg of the tour. As we drove east, we stopped for good views of Madagascar Pratincole, but little did we know at the time, those views would be dramatically improved upon a few days hence. World famous Andasibe (also known as Perinet in the old days) was the focal destination, and our hotel for the first two nights was the incomparable Feon'ny ala (which translates to "song of the forest", which refers to the haunting vocalizations of the Indri) nestled in at the very edge of this wonderful native forest. True to its name our home base produced multiple Indri sightings, although hearing their wonderful calls serenade the forest each morning made even more of an impression on some of us than seeing them did. We had a full morning each at the Mantadia and Andasibe units of the National Park, and we experienced some truly special birds- Scaly Ground-Roller, Short-legged Ground-Roller, Nuthatch Vanga, Malagasy Spinetail, Madagascar Wood-Rail, Madagascar Flufftail. To top it all off, we had cracking looks at the secretive Crossley's Vanga, and a fantastic White-throated Rail experience. In addition to Indri, our other non-birds included an adorable Gray Bamboo Lemur that Nestor somehow divined was in a dense patch of bamboo, some Common Brown Lemurs, a memorable experience with some forest bees, and an awesome Short-horned Chameleon moving about as fast as you'll ever see a chameleon move.

We then packed up and headed east, with our next target being the legendary Aye-Aye, a bizarre creature that makes you wonder if it was George Lucas's inspiration for Yoda. A half-day drive to the coast included a couple of rest stops, and during both of these we had the completely unexpected phenomenon of very vocal Madagascar Pratincoles flying around these small towns, right over our heads, and then landing on top of buildings. They were apparently nesting on some of the nearby roofs, and we got to see some of their excellent display flights.

We eventually made it to the coast, and got on our boat. Our boat ride took us through the Canal of Pangolana, and to the Palmarium resort, where we had a delightful lunch, followed by an interesting walk around the island with our resort guide Rico. He showed us some incredible tiny white frogs, several species of lemur, and an impressive vocal range as he imitated the lemur shouts throughout our forest walk. We also got a great rundown on how vanilla is produced on such a grand scale in Madagascar (it's exceptionally labor intensive). We then re-located to the wonderful beach cottages at the Palmarium Beach, before heading over to Aye-Aye Island. We were exceptionally fortunate with the Aye-Ayes, as there were three individuals at the viewing site upon our dusk arrival. Watching these pre-historic looking mammals devour coconuts with the help of their long, thin middle fingers was a huge highlight for everyone.

The next morning we loaded up on the boats dark and early to head all the way back to Tana. As we approached Andasibe on the return, we found that Mad Air had finally lived up to its reputation (after our first two painless flights of the tour) and delayed our flight. This ended up being just fine, as it permitted us a snack and coffee stop at Feon'ny ala, which allowed us fantastic views of Indri (our best views yet!), as well as a big bonus when Ray spotted an adorable Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher, our first of the trip as a group.

Our flight did eventually leave Tana, with us aboard no less, and we landed at Mahajanga (aka Majunga) without incident and were at the Edena Kelly Hotel in short order. A light dinner was in order for some, and some went straight to bed. The next day, we had a very pleasant boat trip in the Betsiboka estuary. While we couldn't track down any of the declining Bernier's Teal, we did see Madagascar Sacred Ibis, as well as a couple of bonus birds in the form of a Yellow-billed Stork and 50 Lesser Flamingoes, and a nice variety of shorebirds including Terek Sandpiper, and several species of small plover. After the boat trip, and lunch at Chez Karon, we headed south to Ampijoroa Lodge at Ankarafantsika National Park. We arrived at dusk, and saw a few Coquerel's Sifaka going through the trees immediately upon leaving the bus.

Andrema guided us around during our full day at this fascinating swathe of protected dry forest, and we had our two early morning targets, Schlegel's Asity and White-breasted Mesite, by 5:35 AM, a new record for Phil. We then spent some more time leisurely birding those trails and got to view a pair of Schlegel's Asity in the act of nest-building. It was good that we got the sunrise stuff so quickly, because it took us a while to find Van Dam's Vanga, but eventually, and despite the cacophonous cicada noise, Andrema came through and found a silent pair, which seemed unconcerned with our presence as we ogled them from close range. We also had a really nice Rufous Vanga here, and two high flying Sooty Falcons. We finished up the morning with a Madagascar Jacana that Andrema had found nearby the day before. The afternoon netted us the rare and declining Madagascar Fish-Eagle (two, in fact!), and a small flock of Whiskered Terns in full breeding plumage (so probably the African subspecies) at a lake to the north. We did a night walk with some phenomenal views of a few species of lizard, great views of the adorable big-eyed Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur, an insane-looking leech with a spade-shaped head, and a roosting Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher!

Our final day was mainly a travel day, with a long drive all the way back to Tana, but that didn't mean we were quite done with the birding just yet! We stopped at Abondromamy Marsh on the way to the south, and had the striking African Pygmy-Goose, great views of several Greater Painted-Snipe, and a new Madagascar bird for Phil in the form of Harlequin Quail! We arrived back at the Carlton in time for a delicious dinner (and dessert), and had enough time for those flying out on the red-eye to say their goodbyes.

Phil and I had a fantastic time exploring the Eighth Continent with you all, from the fascinating culture, to the delightful people, the jaw-dropping landscapes and ecology, and the one-of-a-kind wildlife. It was truly a pleasure to share this voyage with you, and we hope to see you in the field again soon!

Until we next meet, somewhere in this magical world,

Good Birding!

-Doug

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## KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**WHITE-FACED WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna viduata*) – The largest numbers by far were at the two wetlands in Tana (there were multiple hundreds at Lac Alarobia). In fact, we only saw very small numbers elsewhere, with one during our second visit to Feon'ny ala, and then a couple each at the Jacana pond and at Abondromamy.

**AFRICAN PYGMY-GOOSE** (*Nettapus auritus*) – The last species of waterfowl that we added to the trip list. We had a bunch of these charismatic birds at the extensive marsh at Abondromamy, and some of these green-and-white-headed ducks were close enough to allow for excellent scope views.

**MELLER'S DUCK** (*Anas melleri*) – We counted 16 of this scarce, large, marsh-loving duck at Lac Alarobia, which is a very good count for Antananarivo. [E]

**RED-BILLED DUCK** (*Anas erythrorhynchos*) – Gobs around the Tamboho, with up to 300 counted, and then small numbers in a couple of other stops, including over 20 at the snipe spot on day one, and 7 at the pond at our impressive resort in Isalo.

**HOTTENTOT TEAL** (*Anas hottentota*) – Our only ones were in Tana, at both of our wetland sites there, though we didn't see more than 16 at either site.

### Numididae (Guineafowl)

**HELMETED GUINEAFOWL** (*Numida meleagris*) – The ones in the forest at Berenty, though introduced there, are part of a self-sustaining population. There were also some wild-type ones along the roadside on the way back to Tana on the final day. [I]

### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

**MADAGASCAR PARTRIDGE** (*Margaroperdix madagarensis*) – An excellent pickup on our morning birding around Isalo. A pair of these walked out onto the road in front of our bus as we lumbered along scanning for rock-thrush. While we were watching them they twice evacuated from the road as vehicles tore by us, but each time they came back out after very short time periods. After those couple of false starts, another car came by, and this time the partridges were already more than halfway across the road, and as the car approached they flushed across and out over the grasslands, finally completing our "why did the partridges cross the road" episode. These secretive partridges tend to be very difficult to see, as they stay hidden in long grass and don't flush easily. The male is an especially striking bird, with its intricate blue and black head pattern. [E]

**HARLEQUIN QUAIL** (*Coturnix delegorguei*) – A great bit of scouting by Ndrema allowed us to get several of these near the wetlands on the way south from Ankarafantsika to Tana. This was actually a new Madagascar tick for Phil, showing just how hard they are to find in the country.

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**MADAGASCAR GREBE** (*Tachybaptus pelzelni*) – It's typically a bird we only get in a single location within the dry northwest, but we were in for a big surprise when we got to Lac Alarobia right in the middle of Tana, as one of these beautiful grebes was swimming around just off shore. We got to watch it employ a very unorthodox foraging technique, which was to repeatedly lunge forward in the water and grab stuff close to, or on, the surface, rather than the diving one expects from a grebe like this. [E]

### Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

**LESSER FLAMINGO** (*Phoeniconaias minor*) – We lucked out and had a flock of 50 (exact count!) on the first mudflat we came to during our boat trip to the Betsiboka Estuary. Fifteen of them broke off from the main flock, taking flight and circling around us, seemingly only for our benefit, as they settled back down close to from where they had originated.

### Ciconiidae (Storks)



**YELLOW-BILLED STORK** (*Mycteria ibis*) – A nice 11th hour pickup on the Betsiboka boat ride, we saw one of these at a distance as it fed on a tidal mudflat in the bay. Though it had its head down as it busily foraged most of the time, we all eventually got reasonable views of its distinctive head and bill.

Scopidae (Hamerkop)

**HAMERKOP** (*Scopus umbretta umbretta*) – We had a total of ~4 individuals spread out over three of our drives, with some of the best views being of a couple of birds circling very close to us as we made our way down out of the mountains going from Berenty to Fort Dauphin.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GRAY HERON (MALAGASY)** (*Ardea cinerea firsas*) – We had these on both of our visits to the Ifaty salt flats, and then we also had another one on very different habitat far inland at a freshwater pond near Ankarafantsika (The one that housed the Jaçana).

**HUMBLLOT'S HERON** (*Ardea humbloti*) – We had four of these on our first morning at the tidal flats at Ifaty, which is quite a good number for this monster ardeid which is also known as Madagascar Heron. [E]

**PURPLE HERON (PURPLE)** (*Ardea purpurea madagascariensis*) – One flew over at the snipe spot on our first day of the tour, and then we had another one down the river during our brief stop at Feon'ny ala on the way back to Tana.

**GREAT EGRET (AFRICAN)** (*Ardea alba melanorhynchos*) – We had these scattered around the island, including a few with all black bills and bright green faces, which is their full-on breeding regalia. One bird at Lac Alarobia even had some tawny/golden breeding plumes on its back that you don't see on this species much.

**LITTLE EGRET (DIMORPHIC)** (*Egretta garzetta dimorpha*) – Plenty of these scattered throughout, and our most frequently encountered ardeid by a large margin. White morphs predominated for most of the trip, with a reasonable number of dark morphs scattered around too. This was the case until we got to our boat ride at the Betsiboka Estuary, where something like 90% were dark morphs. When most of the dark morph birds fly, they sport conspicuous white patches in the forewing, bringing to mind many species of birds, few or none of which are herons.

**BLACK HERON** (*Egretta ardesiaca*) – A big highlight of the tour for several folks was getting to watch a few of these giving their best Mary Poppins impression, as they performed their umbrella dance foraging technique at Lac Alarobia. It really is ingenious of them, and it's a delight to watch. The colony there was undoubtedly our best experience with them, but we also saw them in a couple of other places, including a large roving mass of a couple of hundred over a mile away at the big reservoir north of Ankarafantsika.

**CATTLE EGRET (WESTERN)** (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – Common through most of the tour. The only places in which they were conspicuously absent were many of the natural areas, notably Ranomafana, Andasibe, and around Ifaty. The massive colony behind our bungalows at Lac Ravelobe numbered well over 1,000 individuals.

**SQUACCO HERON** (*Ardeola ralloides*) – Scattered around various appropriate wetland habitats here and there, with the best numbers by far at Lac Alarobia, where they were tending some adorably awkward young ones.

**MADAGASCAR POND-HERON** (*Ardeola idae*) – An adult flying a loop over the riparian forest at El Jardin du Roy was only seen by about half the group, as we were spread over the gorgeous rocky landscape behind the resort at that point. Luckily, we had another one fly over a couple of days later at the road south to St. Augustin, shortly after we finished watching a Madagascar Sandgrouse. [E]

**STRIATED HERON (OLD WORLD)** (*Butorides striata rutenbergi*) – One flying over El Jardin du Roy early in our morning walk was the first. We then encountered them several more times, often singly. Some other locations for this species were the salt flats in Tulear, Feon'ny ala, Ankarafantsika, and the Tamboho.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – The Tamboho was the best spot for these, though we also encountered several along the coast at Ifaty.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – John and perhaps some others saw a few of these mixed into the prodigious colony of Cattle Egrets at Ankarafantsika.

**MADAGASCAR IBIS** (*Lophotibis cristata*) – Also known as Madagascar Crested Ibis, we got to see one of these secretive forest ibis sitting in its nest in Andasibe. [E]

**SACRED IBIS (MALAGASY)** (*Threskiornis aethiopicus bernieri*) – We had excellent luck with this species during the Betsiboka boat ride. We found one foraging on the mangrove mudflats, and it was quite confiding, allowing for excellent views of it and its funky black bustle, to the point where we could even make out its eye color. This taxon, split as a full species by some authorities, has purely white wings, unlike its close congeners in the rest of the Sacred Ibis complex. [E]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**MADAGASCAR HARRIER-HAWK** (*Polyboroides radiatus*) – A gorgeous adult was circling in a display flight on our first day at Parc Mosa. We then had some other flight views before we caught up with one along the road on the way to Ankarafantsika which was alternately flying around and perching up, forcing us to contemplate whether it looked better perched in its elegant gray garb, or in flight with the distinctive contrasts of starkly bicolored underwings and strikingly patterned tail and rump. [E]

**REUNION HARRIER (MALAGASY)** (*Circus maillardi macroseles*) [E]

**FRANCES'S GOSHAWK** (*Accipiter francesiae*) – We had the first couple of these at Berenty, including one bird standing on freshly killed prey on the ground while getting mobbed by paradise-flycatchers. We then had fantastic views of a great looking male perched out in the open along the belle vue track at Ankarafantsika. [E]

**MADAGASCAR SPARROWHAWK** (*Accipiter madagascariensis*) – The Mosa crew had a nest of one of these nailed down, which allowed us to get phenomenal looks at a bird which can be bloody difficult away from known nest sites. [E]

**BLACK KITE (YELLOW-BILLED)** (*Milvus migrans parasitus*) – Widespread throughout open areas, and pretty common. One of the most frequent species sighted from the bus on our various drives about the country, especially numerous between Ranomafana, and Tulear.

**MADAGASCAR FISH-EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus vociferoides*) – BingBangBoom. We found this exceptionally endangered species at exceptionally close range along the edge of Lac Ravelobe, and got extended looks at it, saving us a walk of undetermined length to potentially see one perched at a distance. Then it got even better: a couple of hours later we found that a second adult had joined it nearby, and we got to see two perched together as they surveyed their domain from the trees at the edge of the lake. [E]

**MADAGASCAR BUZZARD** (*Buteo brachypterus*) – We had one of these on our second morning of the tour, at the Baillon's Crake spot. It even perched up for us to get scope views of it sitting in a treetop. We saw the species a few more times, though the only other one that we saw "on the deck", was one perched over the dining area at Ankarafantsika. [E]

#### Mesitornithidae (Mesites)

**WHITE-BREASTED MESITE** (*Mesitornis variegatus*) – WOW!! Not much else can be said for our luck with this normally retiring species.

Typically, the views one gets of this species are as it shyly hustles through the undergrowth in the dark forest, but we found a pair singing their heads off in Ankarafantsika and they eventually brought their duet right down a footpath towards the whole group and then across the main trail to the surprise of the 11 awe-struck birders standing just a few meters away. A few people's jaws, Phil and Doug's included, had to be lifted off the ground afterward. After describing how difficult it would be to observe the species well, we were both fairly delighted to be proven wrong. [E]

**SUBDESERT MESITE** (*Monias benschi*) – What a strange animal! Mosa and Freddy eventually tracked down one of these exceptionally range restricted endemics on our first morning in the spiny forest. We then got to watch it at our leisure as it perched motionless in a bush, as this species does. It blinked its eyes several times, leading Phil to remark that it's the most active one he's ever seen. [E]

#### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**WHITE-THROATED RAIL** (*Dryolimnas cuvieri cuvieri*) – We worked hard for the species at Lac Alarobia and eventually and got good close range of a couple of individuals there. However, a couple of days later we were treated to a show by a couple of them during lunch at Feon'ny ala, which included one that grabbed a large fish out of the river and then ran off with it, even dropping and retrieving it once before disappearing in what we assume was the direction of a nest.

**BAILLON'S CRAKE** (*Zapornia pusilla*) – We were exceptionally fortunate to see one of these foraging in a small roadside marsh on the way down to Ranomafana. It also vocalized several times, with some calls most unlike the typical ones of European and Asian Baillon's Crakes.

**EURASIAN MOORHEN** (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorrhoa*) – We saw this species at both of our wetlands in Tana, and then again on the final drive south at the Abondromamy marsh.

**RED-KNOBBED COOT** (*Fulica cristata*) – We had the one continuing individual at Lac Alarobia in the middle of Tana. It's quite a rare and difficult-to-find species in Madagascar, so this was a very nice bonus bird!

#### Sarothruridae (Flufftails)

**MADAGASCAR WOOD-RAIL** (*Canirallus kioloides*) – Calling very loudly at Mantadia, and we eventually got reasonable looks for most of the group. Its ability to remain visually undetected, even when vocalizing extremely loudly from close range is a very frustrating tendency of this species.

**MADAGASCAR FLUFFTAIL** (*Sarothrura insularis*) – During our trek through the forest at Mantadia we ran into one, which everyone heard, and most people got at least a glimpse of, though it's amazing how visually hidden these can be despite calling conspicuously at close range. [E]

#### Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

**BLACK-WINGED STILT** (*Himantopus himantopus*) – A few on the salt pannes around Ifaty accounted for the sum total of most people's experience with this species. Some may have had distant looks at them on the opposite shore of the large reservoir north of Ankarafantsika.

#### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Abundant on the salt flats off Ifaty.

**GREATER SAND-PLOVER** (*Charadrius leschenaultii scythicus*) – Common on the mudflats off Ifaty, and then abundant at the delta of the Betsiboka River.

**KITTLITZ'S PLOVER** (*Charadrius pecuarius*) – We saw a bunch of these around Ifaty, both on the pans along the side of the road and on the salt flats, as well as on the road to St. Augustin. According to the conjectures of the local guides like Mosa, this species is outcompeting the much more local Madagascar Plover, which is why numbers of the latter are declining.

**COMMON RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – Our first few were on the mudflats in the distance at Tulear, and then we had another group, numbering a half dozen or so, at the Betsiboka estuary.

**MADAGASCAR PLOVER** (*Charadrius thoracicus*) – A great score was this Madagascar endemic at the salt pans just outside Ifaty. Their numbers have dropped dramatically in recent years, the prevailing wisdom is that it is being outcompeted by Kittlitz's Plover. Luckily, Mosa had one of these up his sleeve a very short walk from the road, and on top of that it was an extremely obliging individual that was initially close and then came closer. It was a really great experience to spend time with one of these, especially with the background music of a couple of local women who were singing some beautiful songs in Malagasy. [E]

**THREE-BANDED PLOVER** (*Charadrius tricollaris bifrontatus*) – A couple of these were at the lake before breakfast on the very first day of the tour, in Tana.

**WHITE-FRONTED PLOVER** (*Charadrius marginatus tenellus*) – We found these on the Ifaty salt flats, and there may have been a couple on the plover swarm at the Betsiboka estuary, though these were seen poorly and from a distance from the boat.

#### Rostratulidae (Painted-Snipes)

**GREATER PAINTED-SNIPE** (*Rostratula benghalensis*) – We connected with these gorgeous shorebirds (though they're not actually true snipe) on the very last day of the tour, as we headed south towards Tana. We got good views of both males and females perched and in flight, and we figured that we laid eyes on at least 8 individuals.

#### Jacanidae (Jacanas)

**MADAGASCAR JACANA** (*Actophilornis albinucha*) – Fantastic work by Ndrema at Ankarafantsika. All birding groups had been missing this species recently; it is a surprisingly scarce species due to the lack of undisturbed wetland habitat in the country. Lake Ravelobe has been largely cleared of the lily pads that lined it in order to make fishing easier, but sadly that great edge vegetation was perfect habitat for the jacana, and the species now seems to be absent from this former stronghold. Ndrema went out the previous day and rode his bike all over the place trying to find one of these for us. We showed up and there was immediately a territorial male flying all around and calling. We got to watch this white-headed jacana with the baby blue bill and facial shield at our leisure at point blank range, thanks to Ndrema going above and beyond. [E]

#### Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – All over the Ifaty mudflats, and even from the breakfast table at the Bamboo Club, and then again a week later at the Betsiboka River.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – In the southwest, the first ones were in the mangrove mudflats along the Ifaty coast, and we also had one down at Tulear mudflats.

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** (*Calidris ferruginea*) – A couple of these were on the extensive mudflats at Ifaty on our first visit there, and then we had a bunch more at Betsiboka.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*) – In the distance at the Ifaty mudflats.

**MADAGASCAR SNIPE** (*Gallinago macrodactyla*) – Our very first birding stop of the tour was at a rice paddy where we hoped to connect with this species. The suitability of this spot for snipe varies wildly year to year, sometimes being completely dry, or even too flooded out for snipe, so we were pleasantly surprised upon our arrival to see that the water level was perfect. In short order we had a couple of local kids gallivanting through the paddy in pursuit of our quarry, and they did a great job finding a few of these huge snipe for us, and eventually everyone had great views of these impressive beasts. [E]

**TEREK SANDPIPER** (*Xenus cinereus*) – We finally connected with this species when we found a bunch of these at Betsiboka. The white trailing edges of the wings, that goofily upturned bill, and their frenetic foraging style combine to make Tereks a big winner.

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – We had one of these at the hotel in Tana to start with. We then connected with singles of these several more times, seeing them on 7 days in total. Some of the memorable ones were the one on the rocks above the waterfall at the cascade overlook at Ranomafana, the couple in the mangroves at Betsiboka, and then the one very close on the rock wall at the reservoir north of Ankarafantsika.

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (*Tringa nebularia*) – These were common on the mudflats between Tulear and Ifaty, and we even saw a couple of them on the salt pannes away from the ocean.

**WOOD SANDPIPER** (*Tringa glareola*)

#### Turnicidae (Buttonquail)

**MADAGASCAR BUTTONQUAIL** (*Turnix nigricollis*) – Only seen in flight this time around. It was seen on both the morning and afternoon outings on our first day at Parc Mosa, and then again by some in Gerard's vehicle on the way from Andasibe to Tana. [E]

#### Dromadidae (Crab Plover)

**CRAB PLOVER** (*Dromas ardeola*) – Bingo! On our third trip in two days to the extensive coastal mudflats at Ifaty, we finally connected with three of these (one very contrasty adult, and two young birds that were much grayer dorsally than the starkly black-and-white grown-up). Any time you get to see a bird that's in its own monotypic family is a great day, and Crab Plover is the sole representative of the family Dromadidae, so this was indeed fantastic.

#### Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

**MADAGASCAR PRATINCOLE** (*Glareola ocularis*) – We stopped at the classic spot for this species, the Mangoro River bridge, on the way to Andasibe, and we found 6 of them there. This would've been enough, and we considered the pratincole case to be closed, but that was until a couple of days later during our long drive to the coast towards the land of the Aye-Aye. We stopped for a refreshment and stretching break in a small town and after a couple of minutes of being there we realized that there were Madagascar Pratincoles on the roof of the building right across the street!! We watched these unique shorebirds engage in some of their graceful display flights right over the hustle and bustle of main street. We then found even more on rooftops and displaying over them when we stopped for gas in Brickaville. Our last two sightings of the species were on the island in the Canal of Pangolana, and above the massive waterfall at the bridge over the Betsiboka River on our final day. This much better than average year for pratincoles on the tour is probably attributable to our reshuffling of the itinerary, and a very welcome byproduct it was! [E]

#### Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

**SAUNDERS'S TERN** (*Sternula saundersi*) – We passed a handful of these while we were taking the boat around Betsiboka, but sadly they didn't stick around for extended views. We could see that they were obviously small terns, and a couple had conspicuously extensive dark in the other primaries, and photos showed a gray rump concolorous with the back on these as well, which is all enough to put these squarely in the Saunders's camp, and eliminate the very similar Little Tern.

**WHISKERED TERN** (*Chlidonias hybrida delalandii*) – A nice surprise was a flock of 11 of these flying over the reservoir north of Ankarafantsika. This is a scarce bird in Madagascar, and it was only the second time Phil had seen the species in the country. We could tell they weren't the long distance migrant subspecies that breeds across Europe and Asia because they were all in really conspicuous breeding plumage, with full black caps and very dark bodies.

**GREAT CRESTED TERN** (*Thalasseus bergii*) – A few of these were perched at the edge of the mudflats off of Ifaty, waaay in the distance. We then ran into a handful on the Betsiboka boat ride.

**LESSER CRESTED TERN** (*Thalasseus bengalensis bengalensis*) – The most commonly encountered tern from the boat at Betsiboka. We had more than a dozen at the flamingo mudbar, as well as scattered individuals throughout our trip around the river mouth.

#### Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)

**MADAGASCAR SANDGROUSE** (*Pterocles personatus*) – We were very fortunate to have a female fly into a watering hole south of Tulear that we had staked out specifically for the species. It flew in and drank for 10 minutes, and then it flew out far to the south, eventually becoming no longer resolvable in the scope. It's a big, bulky, and slow-flying sandgrouse; rather different in flight than most sandgrouse (more like a small heron in its flight style and wingbeat rate). A great experience all around! [E]

#### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Introduced in low densities at various towns around Madagascar. They don't have nearly the foothold here that they have in most other parts of the world where they have been introduced. [I]

**MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE** (*Streptopelia picturata picturata*) – Seen by some a couple of times over the first few days from the vehicle, as they shot across or down the road. Eventually we caught up to repeated good views of them on the ground (Zombitse, Andasibe, Ankarafantsika), and even on nests (Parc Mosa).

**NAMAQUA DOVE** (*Oena capensis aliena*) – A lovely little dove, it is sprinkled quite liberally throughout all the dryer open country of the island. The males are especially attractive with their long tails, rusty wing flashes in flight, and of course their halloween-themed black throats and orange bills.

**MADAGASCAR GREEN-PIGEON** (*Treron australis*) – We finally caught up to these on our final evening at Andasibe thanks to Nestor. Then, to show that when it rains it pours, we found some more at Ankarafantsika, this time of the much scarcer western race. The latter were comprised of an adult tending two fledged but still fluffy and not fully-grown youngsters. [E]

**MADAGASCAR BLUE-PIGEON** (*Alectroenas madagascariensis*) – A great view of a bird repeatedly perching up high along the road to Vohiparara on our first evening birding excursion at Ranomafana was quickly eclipsed on our final morning in the park, when one perched up in a dead snag at exceptionally close range for all to see. We then took a week off from the species, as we went through the dry country of the south, before re-connecting with a good many around Andasibe. It's a truly fine-looking bird, with a beautiful satin blue ground color, and bright red tail and facial skin to go along with some regal silver streaks through the head. [E]



### Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

- CRESTED COUA** (*Coua cristata cristata*) – We had this white-vented form at Zombitse (our first Crested Coua of any kind) and then again at Ankarafantsika. It's a wonderful looking bird, despite its predilection for hiding itself behind the dense upper limbs of tall trees.
- CRESTED COUA** (*Coua cristata pyropyga*) – This is the subspecies with the peach or rusty-colored undertail coverts, and we encountered it repeatedly around the spiny forest of Parc Mosa, and then again at Berenty. [E]
- VERREAUX'S COUA** (*Coua verreauxi*) – This exceptionally range-restricted endemic is one of the two species that are the main draw to the deceptively vibrant La Table area, and we got excellent views of multiples, including seeing one heading into an amazingly well-hidden nest in an octopus tree. Some even saw some coua hanky-panky just as we were departing La Table. [E]
- BLUE COUA** (*Coua caerulea*) – Brief views on our final evening at Ranomafana, and then we didn't connect again until Andasibe. Despite the fact that they seemed to be much less conspicuous in this area than usual, we all eventually got great views of this big, dark, and handsome coua. [E]
- RED-CAPPED COUA (RED-CAPPED)** (*Coua ruficeps ruficeps*) – This one treated us to some nice views at Ankarafantsika, where one charged at us a couple of times, completely un-prompted. It was so intent in foraging around the path it seemed like it didn't even notice us. This one may indeed be a separate species from the following species at some point, so it's an important one to keep track of. They occur in very different locations, and are conspicuously different-looking as well.
- RED-CAPPED COUA (GREEN-CAPPED)** (*Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps*) – We had to wait until our second morning at Parc Mosa to finally connect with this distinctive green-capped version of Red-capped Coua. As mentioned with the previous species, the two taxa within Red-capped Coua are likely to be split in the future (indeed some authorities already split them). Whenever that split comes, this one would likely have the common epithet "Green-capped Coua." [E]
- RED-FRONTED COUA** (*Coua reynaudii*) – Calling on our first morning at Ranomafana, near where we tried unsuccessfully for the Wood-rail, and then very brief views for one or two folks of a different individual as half the group returned from seeing the Greater Bamboo Lemur. A couple of weeks later we had a very close call with a really vocal bird at Andasibe, but it never quite got to a place where we could see it. [E]
- COQUEREL'S COUA** (*Coua coquereli*) – We had a pair of these in the forest at Zombitse, where our exceptional local guides put us in position to see them twice, as they warily crossed the trail in front of us at fairly close range. [E]
- RUNNING COUA** (*Coua cursor*) – While they often live up to their name, we encountered one at Parc Mosa that was more like a sauntering coua, strutting in front of us in a leisurely fashion, allowing everyone to get great looks at this usually skittish bird. [E]
- GIANT COUA** (*Coua gigas*) – We got our fill of this, the largest coua species in the world, over several observations, each of which seemingly better than last. We saw them first at Zombitse, and then again a few days later at Berenty. As long as you give these some space and keep still, they tend to tolerate being observed out in the open, unlike most of the other couas. [E]
- RED-BREASTED COUA** (*Coua serriana*) – One of the species involved in Nestor's 11th hour magic on our final afternoon at Andasibe. We were able to see an exceptionally well-hidden bird sitting on a nest in the crown of a pandanus tree at the village park. Even when just a few feet away it was difficult for some to see. Luckily, it was relying so much on being inconspicuous that we were able to watch it in the scope from unusually close range (for a coua) at our leisure, drinking in all the details of the many shades of blue contained in the bare skin around the eye. [E]
- MADAGASCAR COUCAL** (*Centropus toulou*) – We first got on the scoreboard with these when were serenaded with their deep, resonant songs in stereo before and at dawn in Isalo. That was the first of 13 days in a row in which we detected this species, and we even got visuals of it on 11 of those days. [E]
- MADAGASCAR CUCKOO** (*Cuculus rochii*) – One of the few species in Madagascar for which the description "widespread and common" holds true in practice. We even heard them at the isolated dry forest at Zombitse. The only regions where we didn't detect any were Berenty and the coast near the Palmarium and Aye-Aye Island. We also got several good views of this species, which is, more often than not, heard only. [E]

### Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

- BARN OWL** (*Tyto alba*) – A great view of a pair of these on a day roost under the canopy of a dense vine tangle in the dry forest at Berenty.

### Strigidae (Owls)

- MALAGASY SCOPS-OWL** (*Otus rutilus*) – Heard by a few people on a couple of early evening occasions in Ranomafana. Then, on our very first afternoon in Andasibe, Nestor found a pair of these slumbering in the forest and we got some really cracking up close and personal views. [E]
- TOROTOROKA SCOPS-OWL** (*Otus madagascariensis*) – We heard these on our night at Berenty, but then Olivier found one inside the deepest recesses of a dense, dark vine tangle that would have been absolutely impossible to find had he not heard it calling in the middle of the day. [E]
- MADAGASCAR LONG-EARED OWL** (*Asio madagascariensis*) – Nestor showed us one of these staked out way high up in a roost tree on our first evening at Andasibe. [E]
- WHITE-BROWED OWL** (*Ninox superciliosus*) – One of our three species of owl on our big owl morning at Berenty, this was perhaps the most exciting of the three. The one that we found on a day roost was terminably patient with us as we got to see it from every angle imaginable, from a mostly obscured view of its rear end from underneath, to a really good view of the entire bird in all its glory from closer to eye level. [E]

### Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

- MADAGASCAR NIGHTJAR** (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*) – We laid eyes on these at the Bamboo Club (on three straight days), at Berenty (on the night walk), and at Ankarafantsika (on the night walk again). We also heard it very well and from point blank range at the Aye-Aye spot. [E]

### Apodidae (Swifts)

- MALAGASY SPINETAIL** (*Zoonavena grandidieri*) – We saw a few of these immediately upon our arrival at the forest at Mantadia. [E]
- MADAGASCAR SWIFT** (*Apus balstoni*) – We saw this poorly known, though frequently seen, species in multiple locations, including the hotel in Tana, and along the road below the cascade overlook at Ranomafana, and even got to see them exceptionally low and calling in a couple of these locations. [E]
- AFRICAN PALM-SWIFT (MADAGASCAR)** (*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*) – Not only did we get excellent views of these flying around in front of the hotel at Ranomafana, but we saw several active nests furred up inside folded palm fronds there as well. It was a really neat experience with this endemic taxon. We then ran into more as we drove west through the dry country of Isalo and Zombitse, and continued to see them here and there throughout the tour, especially during our drives. Another place where we saw a bundle of them around a (presumed) nesting site was at the Orania Lodge, where we boarded the boat to bring us to the Palmarium.

### Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-Roller)

- CUCKOO-ROLLER** (*Leptosomus discolor*) – From almost the second we arrived at Zombitse, up to when we emerged from the forest, we were in the presence of their instantly recognizable high-pitched calls falling down upon us from on high as they patrolled the skies over the dry forest. We also

heard them on one day at Andasibe, and then heard and saw them at Ankarafantsika. This is a very special bird, as evidenced by the fact that it comprises its very own monotypic family, Leptosomidae!

#### Upupidae (Hoopoes)

**MADAGASCAR HOOPOE** (*Upupa marginata*) – One flew by just as we were threading the needle of merchants and getting on the bus at the end of our long morning in the spiny forest at Parc Moosa. It landed a little way down the road, and we were able to view it as it foraged in the sandy substrate. Other sightings included excellent and leisurely views of several birds foraging on the trails around the forest at Berenty, and an individual that Ann found bringing food to a presumed nest at Ankarafantsika. [E]

#### Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

**MALAGASY KINGFISHER** (*Corythornis vintsioides*) – Excellent views at the hotel in Tana, then again at the Baillon's Crake spot, and at the unproductive marsh (which had mostly been converted to rice paddies) on the way out of Ranomafana. We encountered the species a few more times at various places on our route, but these early views would remain the best for most of us. [E]

**MADAGASCAR PYGMY-KINGFISHER** (*Corythornis madagascariensis*) – An excellent find by Ray at Feon'ny ala, where he connected with this difficult-to-find forest-dwelling kingfisher on two different days. The second time he was able to bring the entire group to it, and we got spectacular views of this fluffball of cuteness as it endearingly pumped its tail up and down as it sat otherwise motionless seemingly heedless of our prying eyes. [E]

#### Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

**MADAGASCAR BEE-EATER** (*Merops superciliosus*) – Seen on more than half the days of the tour, though often from a moving vehicle. The best and most prolonged looks were during our morning around the resort at Isalo.

#### Coraciidae (Rollers)

**BROAD-BILLED ROLLER (MADAGASCAR)** (*Eurystomus glaucurus glaucurus*) – We saw these in the distance at Isalo, and also had a couple nicely perched up as we were leaving Zombitse. However, we all got more than our fill at Ankarafantsika, where it was by far the most vocal species around the lodges, and where we got to see these feathered balls of charisma soaring around and interacting raucously.

#### Brachypteraciidae (Ground-Rollers)

**SHORT-LEGGED GROUND-ROLLER** (*Brachypteracias leptosomus*) – This one felt especially sweet given how hard we had to work for it. We couldn't find one at Mantadia, so the pressure was on in a big way the next day at Andasibe PN. Luckily, Nestor went off ahead of the group as he is wont to do, and fifteen minutes later we heard his shouting from the forest and he came running down the trail telling us to follow him. Several creek crossings, many branches to the face, and one landslide later, and we were in the middle of the forest away from any trails, staring at one of these motionless high up in a tree as it tried to find some sun to help dry its wings after the morning rain. These are the largest of the ground-roller family. Despite this family being endemic to Madagascar, this particular species bears an incredible resemblance, in both appearance and behavior, to the puffbirds of Central and South America, making for an excellent example of convergent evolution filling similar niches in very disparate places. [E]

**SCALY GROUND-ROLLER** (*Brachypteracias squamiger*) – Almost immediately upon entering the forest at Mantadia, providence smiled upon us in the form of a Scaly Ground-Roller foraging just off the trail. We got several excellent looks at it, as it perched on various fallen logs, and eventually it came up with a green grub. After posing with its prey for a while to the delight of all, it flew off into the forest. Much rejoicing ensued after this remarkable experience. [E]

**PITTA-LIKE GROUND-ROLLER** (*Atelornis pittoides*) – This rainbow-colored forest dweller is undoubtedly one of the most gorgeous species of bird in Madagascar, and it graces the cover of the field guide. We had great views of them at a couple of locations in Ranomafana, and Ketki voted it as one of her three favorite birds of the trip. [E]

**RUFIOUS-HEADED GROUND-ROLLER** (*Atelornis crossleyi*) – We heard this one, and maybe even saw some vegetation moved by it, on our final evening at Ranomafana. It came tantalizingly close, but we never laid eyes on it. [E\*]

**LONG-TAILED GROUND-ROLLER** (*Uratelornis chimaera*) – We watched Mosa and his crew herd different pairs of these towards us on consecutive mornings at Parc Mosa, providing us with better views of this exceptionally rare bird than anyone could possibly ask for. This species is restricted to the spiny forest in the Ifaty area, so it has an extremely small population, and its habitat is being pressured from all sides, making it likely that it will only get rarer. [E]

#### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**MADAGASCAR KESTREL** (*Falco newtoni*) – Widespread and fairly common in many habitats. [E]

**SOOTY FALCON** (*Falco concolor*) – An excellent tour for this wonderful species of falcon. We had our first one on the road from Berenty to Fort Dauphin, and then the next day we had another one perched on the control tower of the airport in Tana. That was two more than we sometimes see, and that was before we got to Ankarafantsika, where we ended up seeing three individuals in one day, including two very high flying individuals that gave us a great sense of the long-winged shape of these agile falcons.

#### Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

**GREATER VASA-PARROT** (*Mascarinus vasa*) – We started seeing these early on in the tour, on our first evening at the hotel in Ranomafana, and continued to see them in appropriate forested habitat throughout the tour. [E]

**LESSER VASA-PARROT** (*Mascarinus niger*) – We got to see a small portion of their legendarily long courtship displays at Parc Mosa. They were also courting for hours, perhaps without rest, at Ankarafantsika. The vasa-parrots are among the most primitive of all extant parrots, and as such they have several unique attributes, the most striking of which are related to their reproductive cycles. The females are larger and dominant, and they often live in loose polygynandrous groups, with a single female having anywhere from 3 to 8 sexual partners, and courtship and single copulations often lasting over an hour. Both vasa parrots are also known to use tools, especially for grinding calcium out of seashells, perhaps to help make stronger eggs come breeding season. [E]

**GRAY-HEADED LOVEBIRD** (*Agapornis canus*) – We lucked out with a spectacle of dozens, perhaps even hundreds, on our first morning at Parc Mosa. This was possibly one positive effect of the overcast skies that we encountered there which suppressed a lot of other bird activity. We ran into handfuls along the way elsewhere, but nowhere did we have the experiences that we had in the spiny forest. [E]

#### Philepittidae (Asities)

**VELVET ASITY** (*Philepitta castanea*) – The very first species we stopped for during our first hike at Ranomafana. We ended up having a pair flying all around us, with the smart-looking jet black male eventually performing excellently for us, showing off its outrageous green facial iridescence. [E]



- SCHLEGEL'S ASITY** (*Philepitta schlegeli*) – A real show-stopper of a bird, and a scarce specialty to the forests of the northwest. Ndrema and his guiding partner found us a male Schlegel's Asity just minutes after our pre-breakfast walk at Ankarafantsika. After seeing the mesite, and then walking all around the forest looking for other pairs of this species without success, we headed back to the trailhead. Just before we left, we once again found the male we had originally seen, and this time it was with a female, and they were both carrying nesting material! We got to watch both of these for several minutes before moving off so as not to disturb their nest-building any more. The males are truly stunning birds, with an outlandishly shaped neon blue and green patch of facial skin surrounding their eye and bill. [E]
- SUNBIRD ASITY** (*Neodrepanis coruscans*) – We had a very nice experience with 3 or 4 of these repeatedly coming to flowering trees on the Circuit 2 trail in Ranomafana. [E]
- Vangidae (Vangas, Helmetshrikes, and Allies)*
- ARCHBOLD'S NEWTONIA** (*Newtonia archboldi*) – The specialty newtonia of the dry forests of the southwest, we got really good views of a couple of these at Parc Mosa. The buffy forehead and eye-ring was really quite noticeable, and added a really nice bit of color to the typical drab newtonia template. [E]
- COMMON NEWTONIA** (*Newtonia brunneicauda*) – Widespread in the forests in the east, and encountered regularly in appropriate habitat. Especially conspicuous by their loud and simple two-noted song, which was a common background noise in several of our birding venues. [E]
- DARK NEWTONIA** (*Newtonia amphichroa*) – On our morning hike on the trail towards Vohiparara (at Ranomafana NP), we found a group of at least three of these which turned out to be quite obliging, giving good views for all as they flitted around in some tangles below eye level. This is rather well-named, as it's the newtonia with the dark eye and bill, and is overall fairly dusky gray. [E]
- TYLAS VANGA** (*Tylas eduardi*) – Our first ones were on our second morning at Ranomafana, and we had some again later that day and then again the next morning on our brief roadside stop. We encountered the species several more times in Andasibe as well. [E]
- RED-TAILED VANGA** (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*) – This loud and distinctive call greeted us upon our arrival at the Ranomafana visitor's center parking lot on our first morning at the park. We then had some reasonably good, albeit not lengthy, views at the pair as they moved through some trees overhanging the parking lot. We doubled down the next day and got more extensive looks while we were staking out the Common Sunbird Asity. The males have a very striking chickadee/tit-like facial pattern, in addition to the obvious red tail and shoulders. [E]
- RED-SHOULDERED VANGA** (*Calicalicus rufocarpalis*) – An exceptional experience with this exceptionally rare bird! It was one of our two target species at La Table, where Mosa really came through for us in a big way (yet again). His dogged determination and familiarity with the land allowed him to find the species within an hour of our arrival, and we ended up seeing a pair of these secretive birds from such close range that binoculars were scarcely necessary. One of the rarest endemic birds of Madagascar, there are likely fewer, perhaps far fewer, than a thousand individuals. It was first described in 1947, and not seen again by biologists until 1997. It is restricted to a few known sites along the exceptionally arid Mahafaly plateau near Tulear, whose harsh landscape it inhabits in lower densities than you would expect. [E]
- NUTHATCH-VANGA** (*Hypositta corallirostris*) – This is one of the most unique species within the diverse Vangidae family. It truly lives up to its name, behaving like a nuthatch. Indeed it was formerly assumed to be one, and carried the moniker "Coral-billed Nuthatch" for many years. We were fortunate enough to enjoy a group of four of these in a mixed species vanga flock along the roadside at Andasibe on our final morning of birding there. Their frenetic behavior and nonstop motion are very unlike most of the other vangas we encounter, and watching them climb up along limbs and trunks and then fly down to the base of the next one and repeat (reminiscent of the behavior of a Brown Creeper, but faster!) was a real treat for all of us. [E]
- CHABERT VANGA (CHABERT)** (*Leptopterus chabert chabert*) – We had one or two of these early on during our first morning at Ranomafana, while we were still in the carpark at the entrance. It was moving through the trees along the road with a few other birds including the schematically similar Ward's Flycatcher (Vanga). We then got back into the thick of this taxon of Chabert's Vanga when we returned to the wet forests of the east, at Andasibe. They were especially common around the lodge at Feon'ny ala.
- CHABERT VANGA (WHITE-TAILED)** (*Leptopterus chabert schistocercus*) – We saw this taxon of Chabert's Vanga several times during our mornings in the spiny forest at Parc Moosa, where it repeatedly showed quite well, even allowing us to see the white bases of the outer tail feathers which differentiate it from the previous taxon. [E]
- CROSSLEY'S VANGA** (*Mystacornis crossleyi*) – After not even getting a sniff of one on our first morning at Ranomafana, we lucked into a great one on our roadside stop on the final morning at the park, and it actually showed out in the open for a brief time, allowing most of us to get good views of this striking ground-dweller. We then cleaned up views for all at Andasibe, when Nestor did some fine bird-dogging to get us onto another one of these skulky birds, and then everyone worked really well as a team to ensure that great looks were had by all despite the dense undergrowth which it was inhabiting. [E]
- BLUE VANGA** (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*) – Wow, what a bird!! We encountered these, both aurally and visually, several times at Ranomafana. We weren't focused on it during our first visual encounter because it was while we were focusing on the Sunbird Asity, but the next morning, on our roadside stop in the fog on the way out of the region, we got some spectacular views of this bird and all of its different shades of brilliant blues (including the bill!). We also saw a few at Andasibe, and its loud, grating call was one of the hallmarks of the beautiful rainforests of the east. [E]
- HOOK-BILLED VANGA** (*Vanga curvirostris*) – Brief views of a pair our first afternoon along the road to Vohiparara. Luckily one performed exceptionally well the next morning along the main road through Ranomafana, perching out in the open and singing its heart out for cracking walk-away views. We also had a great experience with the species at Parc Mosa (on a nest!), and then with a very vocal bird early in our morning walk at Berenty, where it was competing with the cacophony of several species of nearby Lemurs. [E]
- WARD'S FLYCATCHER** (*Pseudobias wardi*) – Encountered a couple of times at Ranomafana, and was the first vanga (yes, it's actually a vanga, not a flycatcher) that the whole group got to see well, on our very first morning at Ranomafana. [E]
- RUFOUS VANGA** (*Schetba rufa*) – It took us a while, but we finally connected with one of these handsome rufous, black, and white vangas during our walk on the trails above the lodge at Ankarafantsika. [E]
- SICKLE-BILLED VANGA** (*Falcula palliata*) – Ankarafantsika was the place for this striking species. While we did see it on the trails a couple of times, there was no better location for observing them than the area around the lodge itself. We even got to watch them using their specialized long, curved bill to pry insects out from beneath pieces of bark. What a bizarre and amazing bird! [E]
- WHITE-HEADED VANGA** (*Artamella viridis*) – Most people got views of at least one of a couple of individuals at Parc Mosa, but our best experience came on the final birding evening of the trip, at Ankarafantsika. One of these striking birds flew into the tree which was already hosting two equally or more striking Sickle-billed Vangas, and we got to see just how different these schematically similar (they're both black-bodied, white-headed vangas) really are. It was an especially good study of the size difference, and it looked to some like this species was just a baby Sickle-billed Vanga. [E]
- POLLEN'S VANGA** (*Xenopirostris polleni*) – An excellent pickup at Ranomafana, on our second full day there. We found 3-4 of these massive-billed vangas loudly vocalizing late in the morning, and they ended up being fairly responsive. We got very good views of a male and multiple females, and

got to see one of the females working a tree trunk for food. We also heard at least one on our roadside stop on the way out of Ranomafana on our final morning there. [E]

**LAFRESNAYE'S VANGA** (*Xenopirostris xenopirostris*) – Pronounced "Lay-frennay's". We had this range-restricted vanga in the spiny forest at Parc Mosa. It was actually one of our first birds of the morning there, as the local guides showed us one sitting right in a nest. We encountered another one later on in the morning, but since it wasn't tied down to a nest, it was much more difficult to pin down, and only some saw it. [E]

**VAN DAM'S VANGA** (*Xenopirostris damii*) – Considered the rarest and most threatened of all the vangas, this species is only known from two locales, and it's no picnic to track down even at those two sites. Luckily, after a couple of hours in the forest above the lodge at Ankarafantsika, and despite the deafening cicada noise and complete lack of vocalization from these birds, Ndrema went off trail on his own and tracked down a wonderfully obliging pair for us. These two Van Dam's Vangas stuck around long enough for us to ogle at point blank range for several minutes before they finally evaporated back into the dry forest. [E]

#### Campephagidae (Cuckooshrikes)

**ASHY CUCKOOSHRIKE** (*Coracina cinerea*) – Reasonably common around Ranomafana, and we encountered it in at least four birding locations there. We continued to see it here and there throughout the tour in both dry (Parc Mosa) and wet (Andasibe) forested habitats. [E]

#### Dicruridae (Drongos)

**CRESTED DRONGO** (*Dicrurus forficatus*) – Our first ones were at Ranomafana, where we got to watch the species engage in some really entertaining aerial flycatching. We then continued to encounter them throughout the tour, including various individuals chasing the Madagascar Sparrowhawk, and also being chased by other smaller birds that felt endangered by them. We also saw several of these on nests in our travels, including at the Mangoro River and at Ankarafantsika. [E]

#### Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

**MADAGASCAR PARADISE-FLYCATCHER** (*Terpsiphone mutata*) – A pair of these came across in front of us as we were making an attempt for Yellow-browed Oxylobes on our second day at Ranomafana. One of them perched right out in the open virtually over our heads, giving everyone a pleasantly surprising consolation prize (made all the better since we would eventually see the oxylobes really well). The big highlight with regards to this species, however, are the white morph males. Undoubtedly one of the most elegant-looking birds in all of Madagascar, we got to see a whole bunch of these, starting with a pile of them at Berenty, and then with several at Mantadia, Andasibe, and Ankarafantsika. Their active nature and beauty often diverted many people's attention from the quests for rarer species, and justifiably so. [E]

#### Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**PIED CROW** (*Corvus albus*) – A very smart-looking crow, with a very raven-like flight style. It was fairly widespread in the open country around Madagascar, mostly during our drives. Despite the frequency of our sightings, the most we saw at any one time was 12-15.

#### Alaudidae (Larks)

**MADAGASCAR LARK** (*Eremopterix hova*) – Widespread in Madagascar, but mostly seen from various vehicles during our drives. They are actually a very distinctive looking lark, with their front-heavy appearance and exceptionally short tails (the latter contributing to the former, of course). [E]

#### Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**PLAIN MARTIN (MADAGASCAR)** (*Riparia paludicola cowani*) – At our very first birding stop (the snipe spot) outside Tana, this was the first species we scoped. It is widespread through Madagascar, but its distribution is patchy, and we don't see too many. The 15+ individuals were very cooperative, doing lots of perching in the sparse reeds, and there were constantly one or two flying around at close range.

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – A big-time rarity in Madagascar, we had two small swallows fly over while we were at the sandgrouse spot on the road to St. Augustin, one of which was definitely this species. We only had time to seriously scrutinize and photograph that one before they disappeared to the south, but they both looked to be the same, so it's likely there were two Bank Swallows present! This is perhaps only the 3rd ever record of Bank Swallow for Madagascar.

**MASCARENE MARTIN** (*Phedina borbonica madagascariensis*) – The widespread and common swallow in Madagascar, we got our fair share starting at the Tamboho in Tana, and continuing on to Ranomafana (where some even saw a nest with eggs in cavity in the wall alongside the road), and all the way to the very end of the tour.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – A surprise flyover of a group of three in the spiny forest at Parc Mosa was a nice pickup. We then had one later that same morning at the salt pannes, while looking at Madagascar Plover.

#### Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

**MADAGASCAR BULBUL** (*Hypsipetes madagascariensis*) – Common and widespread in forested areas (even dry ones) throughout, it is actually a really nice looking bird, with its deep blue-gray coloration and bright orange bill. [E]

#### Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

**MADAGASCAR BRUSH-WARBLER** (*Nesillas typica*) – A commonly encountered chattering throughout our travels away from the dry country, where it is replaced by the following species. We got looks at them on a couple of occasions, including at the Baillon's Crake marsh, and during the morning that we departed from Ranomafana. [E]

**SUBDESERT BRUSH-WARBLER** (*Nesillas lantzii*) – We picked these up easily at La Table, and we even got to see them perching out in the open quite well and from very close range. [E]

**MADAGASCAR SWAMP-WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus newtoni*) – We started out by seeing these at the Tamboho, and the only other place we saw these was also in Tana, at Lac Alarobia. [E]

#### Bernieridae (Malagasy Warblers)

**WHITE-THROATED OXYLABES** (*Oxylobes madagascariensis*) – We had two very loud and close birds on our second full day at Ranomafana, though they stayed hidden quite well. A couple of the most well-positioned and eagle-eyed in the group got some reasonable looks at at least one of them, as well. [E]

**LONG-BILLED BERNIERIA** (*Bernieria madagascariensis madagascariensis*) – Known by most authorities as Long-billed Tetraka at this point, this was a fairly common sight in the primary forests of Ranomafana and Ankarafantsika. [E]

**CRYPTIC WARBLER** (*Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*) – We got one of these foraging in the treetops during our second morning at Ranomafana NP. [E]

**WEDGE-TAILED JERY** (*Hartertula flavoviridis*) – On our first morning at Ranomafana, we lucked into this fairly sparsely distributed Tetraka, and obtained good looks for all. [E]

**THAMNORNIS** (*Thamnornis chloropetoides*) – A great bird of the spiny forest, this was the first of the spiny forest specialty species we saw on our first morning at Parc Mosa. Thamnornis is in its own eponymous monotypic genus, and we were fortunate enough to have a really good experience with this often shy and retiring bird. Everybody got unobstructed views, and in addition we got to hear its distinctive chatter loudly and repeatedly. [E]

**YELLOW-BROWED OXYLABES** (*Crossleyia xanthophrys*) – Whoa! Great looks at this exceptionally secretive species on our second day at Ranomafana. We were actually on our way back to the trailhead for lunch, and the forest had quieted down a lot, when Jean-Chris spotted this tiny bird shoot across the trail in front of us. We were then able to track it down and watch it at close range as it foraged on or very near the ground in fairly open understory. A great pickup of an always-challenging species. [E]

**SPECTACLED TETRAKA** (*Xanthomixis zosterops*) – We encountered this widespread forest tetraka briefly a couple of times at Ranomafana, but our best views by far were of a really close bird on a nest at Andasibe on our final evening there. [E]

**APPERT'S TETRAKA** (*Xanthomixis apperti*) – This one of the rarest birds in Madagascar, inhabiting just two patches of transitional forest between the central plateau and the arid west. The easiest place to see it is at Zombitse, and our guides did a great job finding a couple, and then managing to maneuver everything and everyone into position. They ensured that everybody got more than satisfactory views of these shy and skulking birds, as they foraged on and near the ground just off the edges of a trail. There are around 1,000 Appert's Tetrakas in the entire world, according to IUCN population estimates, so anybody who sees one is a member of a fairly exclusive club. [E]

**GRAY-CROWNED TETRAKA** (*Xanthomixis cinereiceps*) – This species typically works their way along tree trunks and are stealthy and difficult to track down, even where they occur. Only a few folks got on this one on our morning and afternoon jaunts along the trail towards Vohiparara. [E]

**RAND'S WARBLER** (*Randia pseudozosterops*) – A couple were singing and perching up conspicuously as soon as we arrived at Ranomafana on our first visit, and we continued to see, and especially hear, them throughout our birding there, and then again at Andasibe. [E]

#### Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

**COMMON JERY** (*Neomixis tenella*) – Heard at Ranomafana, and seen by a few. It became more common after that, and everybody eventually caught up with this species in several places. [E]

**GREEN JERY** (*Neomixis viridis*) – Heard at Ranomafana, and seen briefly by some. We got really excellent looks at a couple of them at Andasibe on our very productive final afternoon there. [E]

**STRIPE-THROATED JERY** (*Neomixis striatigula*) – This taxon was seen (though much more often heard) mainly at Andasibe and Mantadia. [E]

**STRIPE-THROATED JERY** (*Neomixis striatigula pallidior*) – We saw this taxon of Stripe-throated Jery at Parc Mosa, La Table, and Berenty, and it was actually quite common at some of those places. Our best views were at Parc Mosa and La Table. [E]

**MADAGASCAR CISTICOLA** (*Cisticola cherina*) – We got started on these by seeing them at a couple of stops on the way from Tana down to Ranomafana at the beginning of the tour. We saw them in several other places scattered through the trip, but the real motherlode came in the Tulear area. We got a lifetime's supply of these tiny charismatic songsters performing display flights all over the place at the sandgrouse spot along the road to St. Augustin. [E]

#### Zosteropidae (White-eyes, Yuhinas, and Allies)

**MADAGASCAR WHITE-EYE** (*Zosterops maderaspatanus*) – Abundant and widespread throughout all of our forest birding with the exception of the dry country in the southwest. [E]

#### Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

**MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-BELLIED)** (*Copsychus albospectus inexpectatus*) – We saw this black-tailed, white-bellied taxon fairly commonly at Andasibe and Mantadia. The best studies were along the beginning of the road into Mantadia. [E]

**MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-WINGED)** (*Copsychus albospectus pica*) – Just a couple of these seen at Ranomafana, but we were serenaded by their song at the hotel in the pre-dawn hours starting around 4:00 AM every morning. After that we encountered these commonly throughout our birding expeditions within this taxon's range, with the highest concentration being at Parc Mosa. [E]

**FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (FOREST)** (*Monticola sharpei sharpei*) – Some saw a male nicely in the fading light of our second evening at Ranomafana, and all heard it very well. The very next morning we went to the same spot and everybody got scope views of a very cooperative male as it sat motionless in a tree for several minutes. It was sitting so still that we almost had to assure everyone that the local guides didn't put a stuffed one up there.

**FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (BENSON'S)** (*Monticola sharpei bensoni*) – It took a while, but we finally connected with this species that is native to the rocky regions around Isalo. On our final stop before we would have to leave the area, Gerard the magician managed to extract one from the rocky landscape and it showed well for all (on top of a flagpole of all places) before it disappeared back into the landscape. [E]

**AFRICAN STONECHAT (MADAGASCAR)** (*Saxicola torquatus sibilla*) – We saw these in only a few places, with the best looks coming early on in our morning visit to Mantadia, around the entrance gate to the park. [E]

#### Sturnidae (Starlings)

**COMMON MYNA** (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Very widespread, unfortunately. An introduced bird to the country, thankfully one of few. The densities aren't huge in most places, with the highest concentration being a couple of dozen around the lake at the Tamboho. We speculated that their ascendance in the Isalo region could be why Benson's Rock-Thrush has all of a sudden become much more scarce than it was just a few years ago, as they could be getting outcompeted for nesting cavities. Mynas do seem to be expanding into and multiplying within the Isalo area concurrent with the decrease in rock-thrushes. [I]

**MADAGASCAR STARLING** (*Hartlaubius auratus*) – We had a couple of brief views upon our arrival at the parking lot Ranomafana, but then the next morning we had an excellent couple of birds in the road and then perched in trees right next to the bus as the very first birds of the day! [E]

#### Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)

**SOUIMANGA SUNBIRD** (*Cinnyris sovimanga*) – Common in all forested areas. The males are especially striking if you get one that sits still long enough for you to get a look at. In part because of the constant companionship we experienced from the species, this was one of Ray's top three birds of the tour. [E]

**MADAGASCAR SUNBIRD** (*Cinnyris notatus*) – A male was one of the first things we saw when we started birding at the small patch of native forest on the way to Ambositre. [E]



### Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**MADAGASCAR WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla flaviventris*) – Scattered liberally throughout our route, with the exception of the dry forest sites in the southwest and south (though a few were seen by some folks on the long and unforgettable drive to Berenty). There was a pair or two at our hotel in Ranomafana, and these were our most obliging birds of the tour. [E]

### Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – We saw a few in Majunga, which is where they have been well known to be for several years now. However, this year we also encountered them at a couple of places in between Andasibe and the east coast, including both the towns with Pratincoles (including Brickaville). They seem to be expanding in Madagascar, so there is a certain sense of foreboding with regards to this species. [I]

### Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

**NELICOURVI WEAVER** (*Ploceus nelicourvi*) – In addition to some great examples of nests in the forests at Ranomafana, we also had views on at least three different occasions here. We got a second chance at the species in the Andasibe region, and everybody came away with good views of them from there as well. [E]

**SAKALAVA WEAVER** (*Ploceus sakalava*) – Abundant in the spiny forest at Parc Mosa, and also seen at La Table and south of Tulear. We really got to enjoy watching their active nesting colony at the entrance to Parc Mosa. [E]

**RED FODY** (*Foudia madagascariensis*) – Widespread through the tour, especially in human-influenced areas. They were particularly abundant around the hotel in Tana, where we got to watch them foraging on flower nectar of jacaranda trees by removing an entire flower, holding it against the branch it was perched on, and then just munching right down on the base of the flower. Most males are stunningly red, while the females strongly resemble female House Sparrows, whose niche they somewhat fill in the cities, in terms of being the common weaver finch. [E]

**FOREST FODY** (*Foudia omissa*) – Brief views of a male that then got chased away by bulbuls at our final morning stop at Ranomafana, and then another one briefly seen by Gerard and few other folks along the road into Mantadia. [E]

### Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

**MADAGASCAR MUNIA** (*Lonchura nana*) – Encountered here and there in disturbed second growth habitats and near human habitation. Also known by the much more evocative name of "Madagascar Bibfinch", and moved into a genus away from *Lonchura* by many authorities. [E]

## MAMMALS

**MADAGASCAR FRUIT BAT** (*Pteropus rufus*) – A large pteropus, we saw a colony of these at the end of our morning jaunt around the riparian forest at Berenty.

**GRAY MOUSE LEMUR** (*Microcebus murinus*) – "Cute" is definitely the word for this one!! We got a great show from this adorable critter at the Bamboo Club in Ifaty, where we recorded them all three days that we spent there. They were most reliable in the evenings, but we also connected with them in the morning at least once. We got to see them coming down for banana slices right behind the dinner table, but their forays into the open were usually exceptionally quick, as these are fairly shy. We also saw them in the trees around the bungalows several times.

**BROWN MOUSE LEMUR** (*Microcebus rufus*) – This was our very first mouse lemur of the tour, as Jean-Chris showed us a very skittish one of these along the road at Ranomafana during our evening excursion there.

**REDDISH-GRAY MOUSE LEMUR** (*Microcebus griseorufus*) – Actually called Gray-Brown Mouse Lemur by most authorities, these were the ones we had during our beautiful night walk at Berenty.

**GOLDEN-BROWN MOUSE LEMUR** (*Microcebus ravelobensis*) – This was the mouse lemur that was seen briefly a couple of times by a few folks during our night walk at Ankarafantsika, but they weren't very confiding.

**FAT-TAILED DWARF LEMUR** (*Cheirogaleus medius*) – One of these came down to the tree near the dining area at the Bamboo Club, and then we saw it exceptionally well at Ankarafantsika, in all of its lovable wide-eyed glory.

**COMMON BROWN LEMUR** (*Eulemur fulvus*) – We had a troop of these one afternoon at Andasibe, and then we had them scattered around the lodge grounds at Ankarafantsika, including mixed in with the Mongoose Lemurs.

**RED-FRONTED BROWN LEMUR** (*Eulemur rufifrons*) – We had these at Ranomafana very well. They were part of our initial lemur experience, as an extremely curious and confiding troop came through while we were looking at the Golden Bamboo Lemur. We also saw them at Berenty, where they are introduced, though neither Doug nor Phil could fathom why.

**MONGOOSE LEMUR** (*Eulemur mongoz*) – Thanks to Sid and Randy, we were able to divert from the beginning of our afternoon excursion at Ankarafantsika to see these richly brown-faced lemurs intermixing with their Brown Lemur cousins over the bungalows.

**RING-TAILED LEMUR** (*Lemur catta*) – Perhaps Madagascar's most recognizable animal internationally (especially since the release of the movie "Madagascar") is the Ring-tailed Lemur. With their striped black and white tails and dark goggles they bear a resemblance to the Coati and the Raccoon, but beyond those superficial similarities it is really a beast alone in the world. They're an absolute must-see, and not only did we see these, but we saw them in perhaps the best place in the world to experience them in the wild. Our morning at Berenty was characterized by encounters with this species, including many mothers with young. Some even came over to try and eat breakfast and lunch with us, though they were usually chased off by the water bottle toting staff before they could make any real inroads on our food. Watching these confiding animals interact with each other, and watching their adorable babies, was a big highlight for everyone in the group. Randy even selected them as one of her two favorite mammals of the trip.

**GRAY BAMBOO LEMUR** (*Haplemur griseus*) – Nestor conjured one of these up out of thin air (and thin bamboo) shortly after our arrival at Andasibe PN. There were three other groups and their native guides in close proximity, but none of them had found this guy - a great example of why we love our long-time local guides like Nestor. Another indescribably cute one, it was formerly known as Eastern Lesser Bamboo Lemur, but most authorities now refer to it as Gray Bamboo Lemur.

**GOLDEN BAMBOO LEMUR** (*Haplemur aureus*) – Our first lemur was this very range restricted animal. This species was the impetus behind making Ranomafana a National Park, and we connected with one fairly atypically low and out in the open on our very first morning there.

**GREATER BAMBOO LEMUR** (*Prolemur simus*) – An exceptionally rare lemur, and there are only two known individuals left in the publicly accessible area of Ranomafana. We were lucky to be within striking distance when one of the roving Ranomafana guides found one.

**BLACK-AND-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR** (*Varecia variegata*) – We heard this species' distinctive grunting up at Mantadia (probably multiple troops). We saw it a couple of days later at the Palmarium, but the species was introduced there.

**WHITE-FOOTED SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur leucopus*) – This was the sportive lemur at Berenty, and we saw them really well at night, and then again tucked up inside a dense vine tangle during the day.

- PETTER'S SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur petteri*) – A specialty to the wondrous spiny forest of the southwest, this species has yet to be formally described, but is still recognized by many authorities as its own species. Mosa and company found this one for us on our final morning walk around Parc Mosa.
- HUBBARD'S SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur hubbardorum*) – This is called Zombitse Sportive Lemur by most, because it is restricted just to the small remnant of transitional forest in this region. Our guides here did a fantastic job of finding one of these in a day roost very close to where we saw our Appert's Tetrakas.
- EASTERN WOOLLY LEMUR** (*Avahi laniger*) – In addition to all of his other entertaining antics, Rico's pronunciation of "woolly lemur" was particularly memorable. Not only that, but this was the only lemur species during our afternoon walk at the Palmarium that wasn't introduced to the area by man.
- PEYRIERAS' WOOLLY LEMUR** (*Avahi peyrierasi*) – Our first woolly lemurs of the tour, and probably our most memorable encounter with them. Baku found this family group roosting in a tight bunch in a fairly low tree, and adorable can't even begin to convey just how heartwarming seeing them was. This species is basically restricted to Ranomafana and the surrounding areas, but Ranomafana is the only place anybody sees it.
- VERREAUX'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus verreauxi*) – A bunch of these were scattered around Zombitse forest, and they included a very inquisitive 4-month old that seemed to have tired out all of the attending adults with its curiosity and playfulness. We, however, were not worn out one bit by watching it explore the world. However just when you thought that experience would be hard to top, along came the sifakas at Berenty. The dancing sifakas alone would probably be worth the six-hour round-trip drive to Berenty. Gerard pointed out the first ones as we were eating breakfast, and the dining area cleared out in seconds. The breakfast table didn't see us again until 40 minutes later, when we had had our fill of their nightclub-worthy dance moves (though I'm not sure you could ever have enough of the absurd antics of these guys).
- COQUEREL'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus coquereli*) – A really sharp-looking sifaka, they were numerous around the lodge at Ankarafantsika, where we got to watch their amazing agility swinging around limbs and making tremendous leaps from tree to tree. Before we got to Ankarafantsika, we first encountered a small troop at the hotel in Majunga, but these are the free-roaming pets of someone living nearby. A few of us did get to feel just how soft the pads of their hands are (spoiler alert: VERY soft), courtesy of these habituated ones.
- MILNE-EDWARDS' SIFAKA** (*Propithecus edwardsi*) – Really great experiences with these along the trail which we took on our second full day in Ranomafana. We got to watch them eat, bicker with Red-fronted Lemurs, vocalize, interact with each other, and more, and all at point blank range!
- INDRI** (*Indri indri*) – Favorites are always subjective, but Indri indri is just about as close to an objective favorite among the animals of Madagascar as you can get. Their voices are one of the most hauntingly evocative jungle noises anywhere in the world. Hearing "The Song of the Forest," as it is justifiably known by the Malagasy people, is a highlight for anyone lucky enough to experience it. We had the great fortune to be serenaded by this primeval jungle sound on multiple occasions, and on top of that we got to observe them (including some with adorable young ones) cavorting and leaping through the forest at close range at Feon'ny ala.
- AYE-AYE** (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) – Aye-Aye is one of the strangest and most mysterious of all the primates, and very few visitors to Madagascar get to see it. We devoted an entire segment of the tour to seeing this poorly known animal, and it was one of the big highlights for several people, including Randy, Ketki, and Kiran. Part of the reason it was so memorable was because of just how good of an experience we had with these beasts at point-blank range, watching them excavate and devour some coconuts with the help of their bizarre extended middle finger.
- RED FOREST RAT** (*Nesomys rufus*) – We saw a few in the woods at Ranomafana.
- FOSSA** (*Cryptoprocta ferox*) – Brief views for only a couple of folks at Mantadia. This endemic but really difficult-to-see carnivore was up in a tree being mobbed by Blue Couas and the like, and one of our drivers actually drew attention to it, but in the commotion of getting people over to see it, it scampered down the tree, through the undergrowth, and eventually across a nearby river, and even the tireless Nestor couldn't run it down.
- Herps
- LINED DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma lineata*) – Encountered by some around the hotel at Ranomafana a couple of times.
- PEACOCK DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma quadriocellata*) – The first of our day gecko encounters, Randy spotted this one just after our first lunch at Ranomafana, right outside the restaurant. We encountered it once more in Ranomafana NP, but this first encounter was the most satisfying.
- STANDING'S DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma standingi*) – This good looking large Phelsuma was in the arid regions towards the southwest and we were subjected to some exhibitionist X-rated behavior by a pair of them at the Bamboo Club.
- KOCH'S DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma kochi*)
- MODEST DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma modesta*) – We had a few of these around the restaurant at the Bamboo Club.
- OUSTALET'S CHAMELEON** (*Furcifer oustaleti*) – This large chameleon is known by most as Oustalet's Chameleon, we saw several of these over the course of the trip, and this species was the best example of the changeable nature of chameleons. We saw them in blacks, whites, greens, and reds, and even got to see one of them change color when it retreated from sunlight into a dark bush.
- RHINOCEROS CHAMELEON** (*Furcifer rhinoceros*)
- WARTY CHAMELEON** (*Furcifer verrucosus*)
- SHORT-HORNED CHAMELEON** (*Calumma brevicorne*) – Nestor spotted one of these for us on our second afternoon at Andasibe, and we got to see this funky lizard make a slow motion "leap" from one limb of its tree to another.
- O'SHAUGNESSY'S CHAMELEON** (*Calumma oshaugnessyi*) – We saw one of these excellent lizards along the trail on our second full day of birding at Ranomafana. The "nose" isn't really a nose, but a horn.
- BLUE-LEGGED CHAMELEON** (*Calumma crypticum*) – Two of these graced us with their crepuscular presence on our dusk mouse-lemur walk along the road at Ranomafana. The camouflage is strong with these.
- PARSON'S GIANT CHAMELEON** (*Calumma parsonii*) – Our first chameleon of the tour, someone found one of these on the hotel grounds on our first afternoon at Ranomafana, and then we got to see a display of its insect-devouring ability, and its completely insane tongue. Rico showed us another one of these during our day walk around the Palmarium as well.
- SATANIC LEAF-TAIL GECKO** (*Uroplatus phantasticus*) – An amazing find by Baku, one of our local guides at Ranomafana. I have no idea how she possibly found it, but we were all exceptionally grateful that she did. This is one of the most difficult-to-spot of the *Uroplatus* genus, and this one looked very much like the curled up dead leaf that it was resting in- so much so that most of us were having a hard time figuring out what part of it was where!
- AFRICAN HOUSE GECKO** (*Hemidactylus mercatorius*) – All over the restaurant walls at the hotel in Ranomafana, where they observed our dinner proceedings every night. We also saw them at various other of our establishments, often in the dining areas, but they were also sometimes our roommates.

**MADAGASCAR GROUND GECKO** (*Paroedura picta*) – Sid and Randy had what was likely this boldly patterned species at the Bamboo Club, and then Kiran and Ketki had one on the window of their bungalow at Ankarafantsika that several folks twitched from the dining chamber. It's a really snappy looking little gecko.

**MADAGASCAR GROUND BOA** (*Boa manditra*) – A very cool find in a pool of water that had formed inside a buttress of a tree along the trail at Ankarafantsika. It was coiled up, but luckily the head was visible just at the surface of the water.

**MALAGASY GIANT HOGNOSE SNAKE** (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*) – One of these was sprawled across the trail during our late morning walk at Ankarafantsika, and it only grudgingly moved off to the side as we passed. Though we were all impressed by its size, it was actually only about half as big as the largest individuals of this species.

**MADAGASCAR NIGHT SNAKE** (*Madagascarophis colubrinus*) – A few folks had one of these in the pre-dawn gloaming on the way to breakfast on the final morning at Ankarafantsika. It is a nocturnal, and very aggressive snake, so there was some consternation when a local worker tried to grab it with the good intention of allowing us a better look. It ended up being fine, with no bites (though one of the draws of herping in Madagascar is that there are zero Malagasy snakes that are venomous to humans, so even if bitten, you won't be in dire straits). This is also known as the Madagascar (or Malagasy) Cat-eyed Snake.

**MAHAFALY SAND SNAKE** (*Mimophis mahfalensis*) – We saw several of these slim snakes along the trails at Parc Mosa. The species has quite a range of variation: some were a subdued brown pattern, while others were much more contrasty and black, brown, and white.

**COLLARED IGUANA** (*Oplurus cuvieri*) – We ran into this large and widespread lizard of the arid country at La Table, the Palmarium, and at Ankarafantsika.

**MADAGASCAR ZONOSAUR** (*Zonosaurus madagascariensis*) – This was the skink-like lizard around the lunch area at the Palmarium. A very distinctive reptile, and it was also very obliging.

**BROAD-TAILED ZONOSAUR** (*Zonosaurus laticaudatus*) – We encountered a big ol' specimen of one of these skink relatives during our late morning walk at Ankarafantsika.

**THREE-EYED LIZARD** (*Chalarodon madagascariensis*) – Great looks at some of these distinctive lizards with a third "eye" in the center of the top of the head during our afternoon at La Table.

**MADAGASCAR BRIGHT-EYED FROG** (*Boophis madagascariensis*) – On our evening roadside walk at Ranomafana, we saw one of these absurd-looking big-eyed anurans perched on the mist-covered muddy wall above the road.

**BARON'S MANTELLA** (*Mantella baroni*) – Jean-Chris and Baku disappeared into a marsh along the road to Vohiparara in Ranomafana, and they came back having tracked down one of these gorgeous neon frogs, and we got some really good looks. The best way to differentiate between this and the very similar *Mantella madagascariensis* is the pattern on the underside of the animal, which we were lucky enough to see briefly, locking in the identification as this taxon.

**WHITE FOLOHY MADAGASCAR FROG** (*Gephyromantis luteus*) – Completely strange frogs unlike any that we had ever seen, these truly live up to their moniker, as they are essentially color of the white sandy/rocky beaches along the coast. We saw two of these in very disparate locations during our afternoon walk around the Palmarium, and it was one of the big non-bird highlights for several people!

**MADAGASCAR JUMPING FROG** (*Aglyptodactylus madagascariensis*) – We saw this striking pale frog with noticeable ear spots while we were on the circuit two trail on our second full day at Ranomafana.

**MARSH TERRAPIN** (*Pelomedusa subrufa*) – We lucked into one of these scarcely seen turtles out in the wet field where the Madagascar Sandgrouse had just visited to drink.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

As would be expected in such a unique location, there were many other creatures of interest encountered that aren't listed above. We can't generate a complete list of all of them, and indeed we may not even be sure what class at least one animal was, let alone the orders or families of many more.

Here is a list of some of the ones we could pin down. Butterflies account for most of these, as there are reasonable references available to aid in their identification.

Giraffe-necked Weevil (*Trachelophorus giraffa*)- We had our first at Ranomafana, and then saw a couple of more through the tour, including at Mantadia.

Flatid Leaf Insect (*Phromnia rosea*)- We ran into the nymphs of these in two or three places along the way. They are truly bizarre creatures.

We had a Scorpion in Parc Mosa that was apparently in the genus *Opisthacanthus*.

The worm-like thing that the local guides tentatively identified as a leech was actually a Terrestrial Flatworm of the family *Geoplanidae*. The genus might be *Bipalium*.

We had many Giant Pill Millipedes in several places.

Identified butterflies (and one moth) were as follows:

Madagascar Commadore (*Precis andremaia*)

Madagascar Swordtail (*Graphium Evombar*)

Citrus Swallowtail (*Papilio demodocus*)

Banded Blue Swallowtail (*Papilio oribazus*)

Madagascar Giant Swallowtail (*Pharmacophagus antenor*)

Green Lady (*Graphium Cynus*)



Madagascar Orange Tip (*Colotis evanthe*)

Madagascar Dotted Border (*Mylothris phileris*)

Polka Dot (*pardopsos punctatissima*)

Yellow Pansy (*Junonia hierta* (paris))

African Monarch (*Danaus chrysippis*)

*Acraea turna* (this one at Ifaty)

Clouded Mother of Pearl (*Protophormothoe anacardii duprei*)

Madagascar Brown Pansy (*Junonia gaudotii*)

Many skippers (*Hesperiidae*)

Many Satyrs, likely of several species.

Madagascar Sunset Moth (*Chrysiridia rhipheus*)

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**Totals for the tour: 178 bird taxa and 26 mammal taxa**