



Field Guides Tour Report

Madagascar 2019

Nov 2, 2019 to Nov 25, 2019

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



One of the first endemics we saw was Schlegel's Asity. Our guides knew the location of a nest, and we were able to get a great view of this lovely male. Photo by participant Eileen Keelan.

This was my tenth Field Guides Madagascar tour (12th overall), enlivened by a congenial, enthusiastic and observant group who were good spotters and enjoyed the excellent endemic birds and wonderfully varied assortment of lemurs, and put up with long travel days and unusual weather with admirable fortitude.

Driving up to Ankarafantsika, we encountered Phil's first Little Swifts in Madagascar at a town en route, then a Madagascar Partridge flushed up before we saw two Malagasy Harrier, plus our first Madagascar Pratincoles on the Betsiboka River. We were thankfully based at the park, arriving just after dark, and met up with our excellent local guide Ndrema. A short night walk got us Golden-brown Mouse-Lemur, Mongoose Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf-Lemur and Oustalet's Chameleon, plus some lovely roosting Common Jeries. Brian's infra-red spotting device was an interesting and useful item on these night trips, good for mammals and roosting birds.

The following day, we had a mission to see all of the local special species. We began very well with a newly discovered nest of Schlegel's Asity and some nice looks at White-breasted Mesite, then after breakfast more mesites and eventually 2 splendid Van Dam's Vangas -- a rare species that is easily missed. Coquerel's and Red-capped couas showed well too, as did Madagascar Green Pigeon for most. Milne-Edward's Sportive-Lemur was a good find peeking out of a crack in a hollow tree, then we managed a Madagascar Fish-Eagle sat by the lake plus a bonus in a vagrant Osprey soaring over, a new Madagascar bird for Phil. The Madagascar Jacana was again proving recalcitrant this year, but our guide knew of a site near the airport in Majunga and in the very late afternoon we scored some 5 of this rare bird, plus 7 White-backed Ducks and a couple of Madagascar Pond Herons.

The Betsiboka estuary boat trip worked like a charm this year, with a foray out at 0740 and back by 0940, with calm seas, the tide rising and just right for great looks at 5 of the rare and very distinctive "Malagasy" Sacred Ibis (split by the IOC and HBW/BirdLife checklists), plus a bonus of 8 Bernier's Teal, our first sighting for several years. Back then on an uneventful lunchtime flight to Tana, with a night at the Tamboho.

Next day was the first of two long travel days as we drove to Ambositre, stopping at a small marsh where we saw Madagascar Cisticola and Madagascar Stonechat but not much else due to the dry conditions. Then across to Ranomafana, seeing Madagascar Snipe at a marsh stop en route and getting to the

lodge in time for a very late lunch. This park is always a highlight but is also the most physically demanding part of the tour. There are a couple of hikes that can take most of the morning and involve a bit of up and down, though nothing too strenuous for most. The rewards are great, with Pitta-like Ground-Roller showing well, Velvet Asity, Rufous-headed Ground-Roller eventually seen after much effort, a nest of the rare Pollen's Vanga, good looks at Crossley's Vanga and a lucky pick-up of Madagascar Yellowbrow late one afternoon, also the first couas in Red-fronted and Blue. It is also the introduction to the wonderful lemurs, with Golden Bamboo Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur, Grey Bamboo Lemur (Eileen's 400th species of mammal), Brown Mouse Lemur, Red-fronted Lemur and Milne-Edward's Sifaka. Vanga and tetraka numbers seemed well down though overall, maybe too dry?

After Ranomafana we headed south, stopping at the Ambalavao artisan silk-making co-operative and the local paper-making enterprise before our new site at Anja for Ring-tailed Lemur. This proved to be great; the animals are in very fine condition and we encountered a nice close group before the first of what proved to be a series of storms over the next few days hit. This site is looked after by the local villages, so the money goes back to the community. Arrival at the beautiful Jardin du Roy was in the dark and we had the next day to explore the attractive sandstone and grassland surroundings, seeing Benson's Rock-thrush, Madagascar Hoopoe, roosting Torotoroka Scops Owl (thanks Dion) and a brief encounter with Madagascar Partridge.

Suitably rested, we drove two hours south to the precious forest fragment at Zombitse near the sapphire mining area, where Giant Coua and Cuckoo-Roller showed beautifully, a White-browed Owl, and the attractive Verreaux's Sifaka and Zombitse Sportive-Lemur showed well. For the first time ever the local guides failed to come up with the rare Appert's Tetraka, one of the most range restricted species on earth, no doubt due to the heavy recent rain. A stop on the way south got us Madagascar Sandgrouse after a trek up the hillsides in the pouring rain, the local lads were drenched but those of our group who did it were very happy to score so well.

On then via Tuléar to the coast at Mangily/Ifaty, seeing some migrant shorebirds en route as well as the Madagascar form of Three-banded Plover and Kittlitz's Plover. Our time in here was focused on the legendary spiny forest, and we spent most of our birding time in the eponymous Parc Mosa, for the first time ever dodging some epic storms and getting wet several times. Our guides here were Mosa himself, his supposedly 103-year old dad and Mosa's son Fredi. Despite the difficult weather and getting soaked, they were fantastic at pulling every last bird out of the inhospitable-looking spiny forest, from megas like Long-tailed Ground-Roller, and a forlorn, very wet Subdesert Mesite, to the tricky and secretive Thamnornis, and even a bonus Madagascar Sparrowhawk by her nest. The forest also produced Archbold's *Newtonia*, Lafresnaye's Vanga, and both Crested and Running Couas.

Nearby we had good looks in the heavy rain at Madagascar Plover, and the mudflats at Tsingoritelo gave us White-fronted Plover, Lesser Flamingo and Humblot's Heron. The Bamboo Club itself was good for some dusk views of Grey Mouse Lemur, picked up by Brian and his amazing infrared spotting device. A visit to the amazing arid dense thorny vegetation at La Table saw our guides Fredi and Mosa expertly track down both Green-capped and the rare Verreaux's Coua, and once again they did an amazing job of finding a male Red-shouldered Vanga. Both of these latter species have tiny worldwide ranges, and it was great to connect with them both.

It was not possible to do the boat trip out to Nosy Ve as it was still too rough, so we went down to the estuary at Ste Augustine and saw both Lesser and Greater Flamingoes plus Humblot's Heron. We got back in good time for lunch, then our late afternoon flight to Tana was uneventful.

The final eastern leg of the tour saw us splitting up into three SUVs for world famous Andasibe (also known as Perinet in the old days), and our hotel for some 3 nights was the rustic but beautifully sited Feon N'y Ala (which translates to "song of the forest", referring 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 gave us daily hearings of their wonderful calls, one of the most evocative of all Madagascar sounds.

We had a full morning each at the Mantadia (where the road gets steadily worse each year) and Andasibe units of the National Park, and we experienced some truly special birds- Scaly Ground-Roller after an epic long search, a fine Collared Nightjar late on our final afternoon, Red-breasted Coua and both Madagascar Long-eared and Madagascar Scops Owl, but dipped utterly on both Short-legged Ground-Roller and Nuthatch Vanga. In addition to Indri, our other non-birds included some Common Brown Lemurs, Diademmed Sifakas and an amazing Southern Leaf-tailed Gecko, plus an assortment of chameleons.

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 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.

It took some 4 hours to get to the coast, and catch our boat. The boat ride took us through the Canal of Pangalanes, enlivened by a nice flight view of an Eleonora's Falcon, and to the Palmarium resort, where we had a nice lunch. This was followed by an interesting walk around the garden with our resort guide. Many of the tame lemurs came and had a look at us, and we got climbed on by Black Lemurs, Black and White Ruffed Lemur and hybrid Red-fronted Brown x Black lemurs. They are amazingly well mannered (totally unlike monkeys which I definitely would not have climbing on me!), have very soft paws, and weigh less than 4 kg (10 lbs), a nice encounter. We then headed over to Aye-Aye Island, typically for this tour coinciding with a thunderstorm which delayed our seeing one for some while. I was just glad it showed it all! Watching this prehistoric looking mammal devour coconut flesh with the help of their long, thin middle fingers was a huge highlight for everyone. Going back in the boat we had to turn off all lights as they travel without any lights, using the shape of the forest or lakeshore to navigate. They ran aground once, which was slightly disconcerting, but it all came good and this seems to be the standard practice here, all very odd.

The drive back to Tana took all day to go some 300 km, lorry traffic is now so heavy. Final dinner at the Carlton was good and the transfers next day went well enough. This year we reverted to our usual Mauritius and Reunion extension. The afternoon departure from Tana on Air Mauritius was delayed for an hour and we got to our hotel at Flic en Flac around 1000 pm, where they had kindly kept a dinner for us, which almost no-one wanted, being happy with fruit and yogurt.

The Mauritius/Reunion trip extension is outlined in a separate trip report this year but summarized below:

Our day around Mauritius was excellent and in good weather, with Mauritours doing a fantastic job and local guide Jean-Claude being great. We could not go to our usual site at Bel Ombre as construction of a golf course has blocked access, so Jean Claude took us instead to Chamarel where we saw the first Mauritius (Mascarene) Paradise-Flycatcher we had seen in some years. Bassin Blanc gave us Mauritius Bulbul and Mauritius Olive White-eye, two very good pick-ups, though trying for Mauritius Cuckooshrike proved hopeless at what was a good site until recently. This species is now down to

around 30 birds and is likely to go extinct, I fear. The short boat trip to Ile aux Aigrettes sanctuary was good again, and we enjoyed great looks at Pink Pigeon, Mauritius Fody, close Mauritius Olive White-eyes and a wonderful 105-year-old 200 kg adult male Aldabra Giant Tortoise. A fine addition to the trip and well worth the effort. Jean-Claude arranged for us to pay at a site at Ferney where they feed Mauritius Kestrel each day at 1130. Nice to see this species in action for once! We were still missing Echo Parakeet, but a trip to the picnic area at Petrin saw us make a short walk and have good fly-bys of 2 birds, with a single later.

Reunion this year was trouble-free and in good weather, with thankfully no protest, unlike 2018. Our first afternoon saw us visit the amusingly named Cascade Niagara, with several sightings of the rare Reunion Harrier the highlight, then a very calm conditions sea-watch late afternoon near St Denis which gave nice looks at many Barau's Petrels and a few Tropical Shearwaters, plus pale morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater and both Brown Noddy and Bridled Tern, with suspected Lesser Noddy too far away to be certain! Next day it was a lovely sunny early morning at La Roche Ecrite, ideal conditions for finding Reunion Olive and Reunion Grey White-eyes, Reunion Stonechat, Reunion (Mascarene) Paradise-Flycatcher, Reunion Bulbul and best of all terrific looks at a male Reunion Cuckooshrike, found right by the track just before it clouded over and we beat a retreat.

Particular thanks to our skilled associate Gerard, our long-time (since 1986 I think?) local fixer and birder, and to the various hard-working, skilled and entertaining local guides: Ndrema at Ankarafantsika Jean-Cris and Baku at Ranomafana, a team of guides at Zombitse, Fredi, Mosa, Mosa's ancient dad and 2 nephew "beagles" at the spiny forest, Fredi and Mosa at La Table, and Laurent and the somewhat eccentric Nestor at Andasibe. For the extension there was Jean-Claude on Mauritius and Fred on Reunion, who both did a fine job. Thanks to the group for good company, good spotting and cheerful outlook, I hope we can bird together again somewhere, sometime and best wishes for 2020.

Special thanks as ever to Sharon in the Field Guides office for good logistics on such a complex and difficult itinerary.

Itinerary 2019

Nov 4 Pre-tour outing to Ambabomirahavavy Lemur Park near Tana

Nov 5 Tana to Ankarafantsika by road via Ankozobe and Lac Amboromandy

Nov 6 Ankarafantsika Park and lac Ravelobe, then Lac Ampitolova late pm.

Nov 7 Boat trip to Betsiboka estuary 0800-1000, then flight to Tana 1130

Nov 8 Tana to Ambositre via Ambatofotsy and Antsirabe.

Nov 9 Ambositre to Ranomafana, roadside birding pm.

Nov 10 Ranomafana Bamboo lemur circuit and Bellevue, pm Vohiparara and mouse-lemurs.

Nov 11 Vohiparara Trail am and pm.

Nov 12 Ranomafana bamboo lemurs and Vohiparara upper levels.

Nov 13 Ranomafana to Fianarantsoa, Ambalavao silk-making then then Ring-tailed lemur reserve, night at Jardin du Roy at Isalo.

Nov 14 Isalo area

Nov 15 Isalo to Zombitse then Tulear and Ifaty, heavy rain after Zombitse

Nov 16 Parc Mosa trip aborted due to torrential storm, Mangily salines in the rain, Tsingoritelo mudflats then spiny forest 1600-1800.

Nov 17 Spiny Forest 0600-0800, some rain! Ifaty to Tulear depart 1400, Belalande marsh en route, and La Table 1545-1745.

Nov 18 Boat trip to Nosy Ve and Anakau cancelled due to rough weather, so trip to Ste Augustine estuary, before late pm flight to Tana

Nov 19 Lac Alarobia and then Andasibe

Nov 20 Mantadia and Andasibe roadside pm

Nov 21 Indri Circuit and roadside pm

Nov 22 To Pangalanes via Brickaville, Aye-aye island that evening.

Nov 23 Pangalanes then to Andasibe for picnic lunch and Antananarivo late pm

Sun Nov 24 Departure pm for Mauritius

Mon Nov 25 Mauritius Black River Gorges area and Ile aux Aigrettes pm

Tue Nov 26 Mauritius to Reunion, sea-watch off St Denis late pm

Wed Nov 28 Early departure to airport on Reunion, then assorted departures home.

PG 12/19

Particular thanks to the brilliant Gerard, our long-time local fixer and birder, and to the various hard-working, skilled and entertaining local guides: Jean-Cris, Zo and Baku at Ranomafana, Randria and Andry at Zombitse, Fredi, Dedi and Rofia the 3 beagles at the spiny forest, Fredi at La Table, Ndrema at

Ankarafantsika and the incomparable Nestor at Andasibe. For the extension there was also Jean-Claude on Mauritius and Fred on Reunion. Special thanks to Sharon in the Field Guides office for good logistics on such a complex and difficult itinerary.

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

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

WHITE-FACED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna viduata*) – Great looks at Lac Alarobia and a few near Ankarafantsika.

WHITE-BACKED DUCK (*Thalassornis leuconotus insularis*) – The marsh at Lac Ampitolova at Majunga has now become revegetated with lilies, and this year was host to some great birds, including my first White-backed Ducks for many years on this tour. Great views of 7 in flight as well as at rest, an excellent pick-up. An endemic race as well.

AFRICAN PYGMY-GOOSE (*Nettapus auritus*) – 6 at the marsh en route to Ankarafantsika, and then 4 at the newly revegetated lake near Majunga airport.

HOTTENTOT TEAL (*Spatula hottentota*) – Just 5 at Lac Alarobia, but some nice close views.

MELLER'S DUCK (*Anas melleri*) – Two at the Ankazomivady wetland as we came out from Ambositre, then 2 more skulking birds at Lac Alarobia; a large and rather rare species with an odd longish grey bill. [E]

RED-BILLED DUCK (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) – About 100 on the big drainage near Majunga, and quite a few at Lac Alarobia.

BERNIER'S TEAL (*Anas bernieri*) – A major plus on the Betsiboka boat trip was getting some 8 of this rare species, which has been missing in action for some years. Nice views, starting with a single then 2 plus a small group later. [E]

Numididae (Guineafowl)

HELMETED GUINEAFOWL (*Numida meleagris*) – Most folks saw them at Isalo; there seems to be some doubt as to whether or not they are introduced but somehow I don't see fat sedentary game birds as natural crossers of the Mozambique Channel! [I]

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

MADAGASCAR PARTRIDGE (*Margaroperdix madagarensis*) – A female flushed off the road at Ankozobe as we headed north, and we had brief views of 2 at Isalo; always a tough bird to get. [E]

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) – 14 in the estuary at Ste Augustine were a good trip bird, of a species we seldom see on the tour.

LESSER FLAMINGO (*Phoeniconaias minor*) – One at Betsiboka a and 9 at Ste Augustine, with a flock of about 45 at Tsingoritelo mudflats.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

MADAGASCAR GREBE (*Tachybaptus pelzelni*) – Just one on the small pond at Mantadia gave great view; this is our usual and only site for it. [E]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – A few seen in Tana and then common on Mauritius and Reunion; just about all the others were racing or domestic pigeons. [I]

MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia picturata picturata*) – Hardly any this year and none seen on Mauritius either, quite why it was sparse is a puzzle. However we saw quite a few on Reunion, where it is introduced.

NAMAQUA DOVE (*Oena capensis aliena*) – Good views in the drier areas, starting at Isalo.

MADAGASCAR GREEN-PIGEON (*Treron australis*) – Almost everyone saw one at Ankarafantsika, or at Feon Ny'Ala, but Phil only finally caught up with it when Brian, using his infra-red device, found 3 roosting on Aye-aye Island. [E]

MADAGASCAR BLUE-PIGEON (*Alectroenas madagascariensis*) – This species seems to be becoming harder and harder to find, but we saw one well at Vohiparara and the infra-red device got one roosting at Andasibe for some. [E]

Mesitornithidae (Mesites)

WHITE-BREASTED MESITE (*Mesitornis variegatus*) – Great vocals and sightings of two groups at Ankarafantsika, our first of this strange and endemic family. [E]

BROWN MESITE (*Mesitornis unicolor*) – A great find from Ranomafana, where we eventually got a responsive pair and got them into good view; by far the most difficult of the family to get. [E]

SUBDESERT MESITE (*Monias benschi*) – The wet conditions made me anxious about whether the lads would be able to track them down, but they got a fine female treed up which sat looking throughly dejected. I still have yet to see them do anything other than blink! [E]

Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)

MADAGASCAR SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles personatus*) – An exciting stop on the way to the far south, tramping (in pouring rain) the burned rocky hillsides, where our guides knew some birds were to be found. We had several good flight views of this big fat sandgrouse with the very black wings, a very welcome addition to the trip. [E]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

CRESTED COUA (*Coua cristata*) – This white-vented form was seen at Ankarafantsika. [E]

CRESTED COUA (CHESTNUT-VENTED) (*Coua cristata pyropyga*) – Good views at the spiny forest; this chestnut-vented race is split by HBW/BirdLife. [E]

VERREAUX'S COUA (*Coua verreauxi*) – As usual, skulking and elusive at La Table, but eventually gave fairly good views; sat on a nest hidden in a thorn bush before slipping away from our noise. [E]

BLUE COUA (*Coua caerulea*) – 4 sightings of one or two birds from the wetter forests; a very striking species and quite vocal at times. They look curiously like a turaco in flight. [E]

- RED-CAPPED COUA** (*Coua ruficeps*) – Good views at Ankarafantsika, our usual site. [E]
- RED-CAPPED COUA (GREEN-CAPPED)** (*Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps*) – Great views at both Parc Mosa and La Table where one sat up in plain view on an octopus tree. Split by BirdLife/IBW as Green or Olive-capped Coua. [E]
- RED-FRONTED COUA** (*Coua reynaudii*) – One seen from the roadside at Ranomafana, actually the first coua of the tour and one of the far less frequent ones. [E]
- COQUEREL'S COUA** (*Coua coquereli*) – Seen well at Ankarafantsika and then at Zombitse. [E]
- RUNNING COUA** (*Coua cursor*) – This is one of the more elusive ones, but we got one very well at Parc Mosa and La Table, complete with lilac cheek patch. [E]
- GIANT COUA** (*Coua gigas*) – Very nice views at Zombitse, where this very largest of the couas showed well, walking about on the forest floor. This is the only place on the tour we see it. [E]
- RED-BREASTED COUA** (*Coua serriana*) – Nestor got us one at the Parc Villageois at Andasibe, where it had a nest, which it visited then left as we were so noisy. One of the hardest of the genus as ever. [E]
- MADAGASCAR COUCAL** (*Centropus toulou*) – Widespread and vocal; we had some good looks at various sites. [E]
- MADAGASCAR CUCKOO** (*Cuculus rochii*) – A frequent voice "mad a cuk-oo", and seen at Ranomafana in flight, and then when it came in to a tall tree to roost, Brian's infra-red device picked out the location and we puzzled out where it was for good views. [E]
- Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies).*
- COLLARED NIGHTJAR** (*Gactornis enarratus*) – One of the most striking of all nightjars, and still vocally undescribed. Nestor found us one bird sat on the forest floor at the Parc Villageois, where we had great looks in the dark forest. [E]
- MADAGASCAR NIGHTJAR** (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*) – Seen at Majunga, Jardin du Roy, Bamboo Club, spiny forest and Aye-aye Island; a good trip for them. [E]
- Apodidae (Swifts).*
- MALAGASY SPINETAIL** (*Zoonavena grandidieri*) – Just one from Parc Mosa, thanks Brian; it is supposedly widespread and common but we never see it more than once or twice! [E]
- MADAGASCAR SWIFT** (*Apus balstoni*) – Nice looks with Little Swift at Mahitsy on the long travel day heading north, and then at Ranomafana waterfall area. [E]
- LITTLE SWIFT** (*Apus affinis*) – Some saw this en route to the lemur park, then we had about 8 next day at Mahitsy, a small town en route to Ankarafantsika; a Madagascar tick for Phil. Then two at the Tamboho Hotel later; it is very local and scarce in this country.
- AFRICAN PALM-SWIFT (MADAGASCAR)** (*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*) – Widespread in small numbers, the most at Ranomafana and Mahajunga. They were nesting in the palms at the Centr'est. This is now split by most as Malagasy Palm-Swift.
- Sarothruridae (Flufftails).*
- MADAGASCAR WOOD-RAIL** (*Canirallus kioloides kioloides*) – Good looks at a couple of skulking ones in Ranomafana, with 2 on the trail at Vohiparara later.
- MADAGASCAR FLUFFTAIL** (*Sarothrura insularis*) – Heard at the usual forest sites but always hard to lure out. Many of us saw one at Vohiparara when it was very close but obscured, then we had another next day at the higher levels. Finally a responsive one crossed the track at Andasibe. Now assigned to a new family along with Wood-Rails. [E]
- Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots).*
- WHITE-THROATED RAIL** (*Dryolimnas cuvieri cuvieri*) – A great bird from Lac Alarobia, and another bathing in the stream by Feon N'y Ala; a large and showy species.
- EURASIAN MOORHEN** (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorhoa*) – Seen with juveniles at Lac Alarobia and the marsh by the Tamboho. Also heard at Ambatofotsy snipe marsh; the call is nothing like the European birds.
- BAILLON'S CRAKE** (*Zapornia pusilla*) – A single at Belalande marsh, walking across a wide gap very nicely, a lucky find and now seen three trips in a row! It is a very widespread but elusive species, as Mike can attest.
- Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets).*
- BLACK-WINGED STILT** (*Himantopus himantopus*) – 5 at the marsh at Belalande and 1 at Belalande.
- Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).*
- BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – 4 at Tsingoritelo mudflats and 2 at Ste Augustine.
- GREATER SAND-PLOVER** (*Charadrius leschenaultii scythicus*) – 12 on the Betsiboka estuary, then 6 at Tsingoritelo and 2 at Ste Augustine.
- KITTLITZ'S PLOVER** (*Charadrius pecuarius*) – 5 at the salines at Belalande, then 4 on the mudflats and 4 at Mangily salt pans, lastly 6 near Tulear on the dried up marsh towards La Table.
- COMMON RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – 2 on the mudflats at Belalande and singles at Mangily and Tsingoritelo.
- MADAGASCAR PLOVER** (*Charadrius thoracicus*) – This rare bird was again at the saltflats at Mangily, still the only site I have ever seen it. We saw a pair in the pouring rain and had great views, but I do wonder if Kittlitz's Plover is displacing it? [E]
- THREE-BANDED PLOVER (MADAGASCAR)** (*Charadrius tricollaris bifrontatus*) – One at a lagoon near Ifaty was the only one we encountered. Interestingly, this taxon is rather different to African birds, with a greyish not white forehead, and it is split by the latest IBW/BirdLife review as Madagascar Three-banded Plover, *C. bifrontatus*. Note the Sinclair & Langrand guide depicts the white forehead of the African race!
- WHITE-FRONTED PLOVER** (*Charadrius marginatus tenellus*) – Good views of 2 on the sandflats at Tsingoritelo, we spent some time going over how to tell from sandplovers and Kittlitz's. This is smaller, more compact, paler and shorter legged bird than Kittlitz's, and white below.
- Jacaniidae (Jacanas).*
- MADAGASCAR JACANA** (*Actophilornis albinucha*) – The marsh near Majunga airport held at least 5 of this rare bird, the most I've seen; the sites at Ankarafantsika seem too heavily disturbed these days. [E]

Scolopaciidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

- WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – 4 at Betsiboka, 5 at Tsingoritelo, 2 at Ste Augustine and about 70 on the mudflats at Tulear. Again suggested as a split from Hudsonian Whimbrel, one in the bank.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – 5 at Tsingoritelo and 6 at Mangily.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*) – 60 on the Betsiboka estuary, then 6 at the salines near Belalande, 5 at Mangily and 6 at Ste Augustine.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – 6 at Tsingoritelo mudflats; always a nice bird to see.

MADAGASCAR SNIPE (*Gallinago macrodactyla*) – Our site en route to Ambositre was very dry this year so no sign, but happily the village reserve at Ankazomivady came good with fine flight views of 2 birds of this big pot-bellied snipe. [E]

TEREK SANDPIPER (*Xenus cinereus*) – Just a couple on the Betsiboka boat trip, the upturned bill, orange legs and dashing behaviour very distinctive.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Six day records of singles, starting at the Lemur Park.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – 4 on the Betsiboka, then small numbers around Tulear and Mangily.

Turnicidae (Buttonquail)

MADAGASCAR BUTTONQUAIL (*Turnix nigricollis*) – A splendid female walked across the track to the Bamboo Club, and almost everyone got to see her walking right through the thorn thickets. [E]

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

MADAGASCAR PRATINCOLE (*Glareola ocularis*) – Two on the Betsiboka river en route to Ankarafantsika, then again looked to be nesting on roofs in the small town near Brickaville. [E]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SAUNDERS'S TERN (*Sternula saundersi*) – Nice looks at 2 on the Betsiboka trip, then 8 at Tsingoritelo.

COMMON TERN (HIRUNDO/TIBETANA) (*Sterna hirundo hirundo*) – 6 at Tsingoritelo.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii*) – About 10 of the race thalassinus seen in the bay near Ste Augustine.

LESSER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bengalensis bengalensis*) – 2 at the Betsiboka estuary, 2 at Tsingoritelo and one at Ste Augustine. The orange bill is very distinctive.

Fregatidae (Frigatebirds)

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata minor*) – The stormy conditions brought a couple high over the Bamboo Club, with group of 9 offshore; these were my first in Madagascar.

Scopidae (Hamerkop)

HAMERKOP (*Scopus umbretta umbretta*) – Very few again this trip, all singles out in rice paddies, with just 4 day records; there was a huge untidy nest at the lemur park.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (MALAGASY) (*Ardea cinerea firsas*) – Singles at Betsiboka, Tsingotelo and Ste Augustine; this is an endemic pale race and is quite scarce.

HUMBLLOT'S HERON (*Ardea humbloti*) – One flew over us whilst we were in the forest at Ankarafantsika, then we had a scope view of one at Tsingoritelo and finally a good look at one at Ste Augustine. [E]

PURPLE HERON (PURPLE) (*Ardea purpurea madagascariensis*) – A single at Ankozobe followed by 4 at the marsh en route to Ankarafantsika, then a surprise one at the Jardin du Roy.

GREAT EGRET (AFRICAN) (*Ardea alba melanorhynchos*) – Widespread in very small numbers, we had 6 day records and a maximum of 3 birds at Lac Alarobia.

LITTLE EGRET (DIMORPHIC) (*Egretta garzetta dimorpha*) – Also widespread in small numbers, with a breeding colony en route to Ranomafana. Around 70 dark morph birds were seen on the Betsiboka boat trip, then about 130 white morph at Lac Alarobia where they are nesting. IOC split this as Dimorphic Egret, but the taxonomy remains vexed.

BLACK HERON (*Egretta ardesiaca*) – Up to 5 at the Tamboho marsh, and we watched them doing the umbrella shading with the wings, then around 50 at Lac Alarobia.

CATTLE EGRET (WESTERN) (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – Very small numbers, the only concentration being the colony at Lac Alarobia.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – A very good count of 100+ at Lac Alarobia where they are nesting, with begging juveniles harassing the parents. Also 10 at Ambomdromamy marsh, and 5 at Lac Ampitolova by Majunga airport.

MADAGASCAR POND-HERON (*Ardeola idae*) – Two fine breeding dress birds at Lac Ampitolova, then 2 at Lac Alarobia, the blue bill base very conspicuous. Looked to have a nest there too, which is good, as the Squacco Heron seems to be replacing it. Some Squaccos also showed a blue bill, but this may simply be a breeding dress phenomenon which is only kept for a very short time [E]

STRIATED HERON (OLD WORLD) (*Butorides striata rutenbergi*) – Widespread in very small numbers, singles only.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – 20 at Lac Alarobia and odd sightings at other wetlands including Tamboho.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

MADAGASCAR IBIS (*Lophotibis cristata*) – One on a large untidy stick nest at Zombitse, the top of the head and the eye being visible, then slightly more including a russet back seen on the nesting bird at the Parc Villageois. One flushed up along the Vohiparara Trail too but almost no-one saw it; this is a hard bird to see well, let alone photograph. [E]

SACRED IBIS (MALAGASY) (*Threskiornis aethiopicus bernieri*) – Five of this rare bird on the Betsiboka estuary. A rare and endangered species, split by the IOC and HBW/BirdLife checklists as the plumage is quite distinct, with white wing tips and a pale yellow eye. [E]

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (HALIAETUS) (*Pandion haliaetus haliaetus*) – Good views of a single unexpected bird at Lac Ravelobe, the first Ndrema has ever seen here and would have been a new bird for Gerard. A vagrant to Madagascar and a country tick for Phil.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

MADAGASCAR HARRIER-HAWK (*Polyboroides radiatus*) – The group saw one from the C'Entrest at Ranomafana, but no others were seen, which is very unexpected and the first time Phil has not seen it on a trip! [E]

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO-HAWK (*Aviceda madagascariensis*) – A very good find from Laurent was a nesting bird in eucalypts near Feon N'y Ala, the short crest easily visible. A rare and difficult bird to find, actually part of the Baza group, a term not used in Africa. [E]

REUNION HARRIER (MALAGASY) (*Circus maillardi macroscelus*) – We did really well for this on the upland grasslands near Ankozobe, with Mike spotting the first, then a total of 4 birds seen over several km, including a fine adult male. Split by most checklists as Madagascar Harrier. [E]

FRANCES'S SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter francesiae*) – One flew over at Ranomafana, with an accipiter sp as we were leaving, then a fine male at Andasibe before a female perched up at Feon N'y Ala on two days. A low density and elusive species. [E]

MADAGASCAR SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter madagascariensis*) – Great views of female by her nest at Parc Mosa again this year; this is quite a rare species. [E]

HENST'S GOSHAWK (*Accipiter henstii*) – Heard one afternoon at Andasibe, then an amazing calling bird next day that eventually flew out, mobbed by a Crested Drongo, and circled calling loudly. My first sighting for some years and by far the rarest and least often seen of the Madagascar accipiters. [E]

BLACK KITE (YELLOW-BILLED) (*Milvus migrans parasitus*) – Widespread in small numbers, many checklists split this as Yellow-billed Kite.

MADAGASCAR FISH-EAGLE (*Haliaeetus vociferoides*) – Nice perched views of an adult by the lake at Ampijoroa, a shame it had moved when Ellen went to get it, as it looked well settled. A Critically Endangered species and one of the rarest eagles in the world. [E]

MADAGASCAR BUZZARD (*Buteo brachypterus*) – We had some 7 records, the first near Ankozobe, and ending with a couple from Mantadia. [E]

Strigidae (Owls)

MALAGASY SCOPS-OWL (*Otus rutilus*) – Heard at Ranomafana, then a lovely bird roosting in a thicket at Andasibe (Perinet), near its old roosting site from previous years. [E]

TOROTOROKA SCOPS-OWL (*Otus madagascariensis*) – Dion Hobcroft kindly showed me one roosting in a pandan at Jardin du Roy, and we got great views by going in quietly and singly and peering up. This is the dry country version of Malagasy Scops-Owl of the wet forests, and has a different call. [E]

WHITE-BROWED OWL (*Athene superciliaris*) – The guides at Zombitse had a beautiful bird at a day roost. [E]

MADAGASCAR OWL (*Asio madagascariensis*) – Nestor was on point for this one and we duly trekked up into the pine forest to see a fine adult preening at its roost. Suellen got to see it later too; a fine bird and a tricky one to get. [E]

Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-roller)

CUCKOO-ROLLER (*Leptosomus discolor*) – This is a very special bird, a very ancient lineage with no known close relatives, comprising its very own order and monotypic family, Leptosomidae! The call is one of the great sounds of the Madagascar forests. We had great looks at Zombitse and Mantadia in particular, and this was a trip favourite.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

MADAGASCAR HOOPOE (*Upupa marginata*) – One from Ankarafantsika, then lovely looks at Jardin du Roy with two groups of 3 birds. [E]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

MALAGASY KINGFISHER (*Corythornis vintsioides*) – Atypically scarce; we saw one from the bus in Tana, then singles at Ambatofotsy and Ankazomivady marshes en route to Ranomafana. There were none at Lac Alarobia for the first time ever for me. [E]

MADAGASCAR PYGMY-KINGFISHER (*Corythornis madagascariensis*) – Ndrema had a staked out bird in the dry forest at Ankarafantsika, a hard bird to get and easily missed on a tour. [E]

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

MADAGASCAR BEE-EATER (*Merops superciliosus*) – Widespread in small numbers.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

BROAD-BILLED ROLLER (MADAGASCAR) (*Eurystomus glaucurus glaucurus*) – Likewise widespread in small numbers, and with a great quacking call.

Brachypteraciidae (Ground-Rollers)

SCALY GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias squamiger*) – This proved to be an epic effort this year, tracking one down in the forest at Mantadia with frustrating flight glimpses. Not helped by a hardcore Belgian group and some lemur tourists also being there, but eventually we got a great view of the bird perched on a vine; video on Smugmug. [E]

PITTA-LIKE GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis pittoides*) – Good views from Ranomafana; the most obliging of this prized group but still very tricky to photograph, Phil still needs a really good photo or video! Twenty years ago, you were lucky to see two or 3 of the 5 species, this being the most widespread. [E]

RUFIOUS-HEADED GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis crossleyi*) – Very hard again this year; we tried up at Vohiparara three times and got a partial result late one afternoon when we got one calling fairly close, coming back next morning for quite good views for most before it slunk away; this is always the hardest of the family to get. [E]

LONG-TAILED GROUND-ROLLER (*Uratelornis chimaera*) – We watched Fredi and his crew herd a rather damp bird towards us at Parc Mosa, giving great views of this exceptionally rare bird (which used to be so hard to find). This species is restricted to the spiny forest in the Ifaty area, so it has an extremely small population, and its habitat is being steadily degraded, making it likely that it will only get rarer. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MADAGASCAR KESTREL (*Falco newtoni*) – Widespread throughout with up to 10 in day. [E]

ELEONORA'S FALCON (*Falco eleonora*) – A single from the boat on the Pangalanes, with very long wings and tail, greyish upperparts and some rusty on the underparts. A tough bird to get; the world population is just a few thousand and they winter over a vast area of Madagascar, with few in East Africa.

SOOTY FALCON (*Falco concolor*) – Mike had a bad view of one in Ambositre, but it was not till we were making our final departure that we finally got 2 birds at Tana airport! Another with a very low world population, wintering over much of Madagascar.

Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

GREATER VASA PARROT (*Coracopsis vasa*) – Seen very well at Ampijoroa. Not easy to tell from Lesser Vasa, though bigger and with a different head pattern. 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.

LESSER VASA PARROT (*Coracopsis nigra*) – Relatively few this trip, the best being from Zombitse where we had a perched flock of 5. This was a frequently heard voice at Ranomafana.

GRAY-HEADED LOVEBIRD (*Agapornis canus*) – Very sparse; we had one flyby at the Jardin du Roy, then two fly by on the sandgrouse trek, and that was it! [E]

Philepittidae (Asities)

VELVET ASITY (*Philepitta castanea*) – Great views of a male at Ranomafana, thanks to Jean-Cris, and then unexpectedly one at Indri Ridge in Andasibe where we rarely see this species.

SCHLEGEL'S ASITY (*Philepitta schlegeli*) – Our guides knew of a nest, so we went straight there and had great views of a male of this bizarre and very rare species with the strikingly colored facial skin. There was a female seen later as well, and this is the only site we get this bird. [E]

COMMON SUNBIRD-ASITY (*Neodrepanis coruscans*) – Only heard at Vohiparara this year, though Mike glimpsed one along the road later. "Common" really is an absurd modifier for this species. [E]

Vangidae (Vangas, Helmetshrikes, and Allies)

ARCHBOLD'S NEWTONIA (*Newtonia archboldi*) – Good views of a calling bird at the spiny forest, the only place we see this species. [E]

COMMON NEWTONIA (*Newtonia brunneicauda*) – Widespread in the forests in the east, and encountered regularly in appropriate habitat. Especially conspicuous by their loud, simple two-note song, which was a frequent sound at the forest sites. [E]

DARK NEWTONIA (*Newtonia amphichroa*) – On our morning hike on the trail towards Vohiparara (at Ranomafana NP), we found a vocal bird which turned out to be quite obliging, giving good views. This is rather well named, as it's the Newtonia with the dark eye and bill, and is overall fairly dusky gray. There may also be two species, involved, but they look pretty much alike so if adopted it's one of these dodgy genetic splits. [E]

TYLAS VANGA (*Tylas eduardi*) – Astonishingly, just one bird this trip, from Ranomafana roadside. Vangas overall were very low density, I hope it's just a weather related phenomenon and not something more sinister. [E]

RED-TAILED VANGA (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*) – Vocal in the wet forests and often heard, with nice views from Ranomafana and Andasibe. 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*) – Fredi and Mosa did very well to find one of these, a male that showed very well; video on the Smugmug site. One of the rarest endemic birds of Madagascar, there are likely fewer, perhaps far fewer, than a thousand individuals. It was first collected in 1947, but not described 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]

CHABERT VANGA (*Leptopterus chabert*) – Nominate dark tailed birds showed well at Ranomafana and Andasibe. [E]

CHABERT VANGA (WHITE-TAILED) (*Leptopterus chabert schistocercus*) – This taxon with white in the tail was seen at Ankarafantsika and the spiny forest. [E]

CROSSLEY'S VANGA (*Mystacornis crossleyi*) – Calling well at Ranomafana, and our second encounter on the main trail got a fine bird to show very well. Formerly called Crossley's Babbler, but now shown to be an odd terrestrial vanga! [E]

BLUE VANGA (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*) – Heard on 3 days but really only seen once, on the Vohiparara Trail at Ranomafana, a gorgeous bird when seen well. [E]

HOOK-BILLED VANGA (*Vanga curvirostris*) – We had to wait right up until Andasibe before we saw this species, at a nest, too. It is very reminiscent of a Butcherbird in Australia in both coloration and shape, a curious convergence. [E]

WARD'S FLYCATCHER (*Pseudobias wardi*) – Frustratingly elusive at both Ranomafana and Andasibe and no really good views this year. Formerly placed with flycatchers but another one that is now placed with vangas. [E]

RUFOUS VANGA (*Schetba rufa*) – 4 in the dry forest at Ankarafantsika, video on the Smugmug site, and a nest at Zombitse. [E]

SICKLE-BILLED VANGA (*Falcolea palliata*) – Only seen at Ankarafantsika on the first morning there, the wet weather dished our chances later in the south. [E]

WHITE-HEADED VANGA (*Artamella viridis*) – Brian found at male at Feon N'y Ala and it sat for ages, allowing everyone to come see it, the only one of the trip. [E]

POLLEN'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris polleni*) – A nest at Ranomafana, then two seen very well at Vohiparara, another uncommon and elusive *Xenopirostris vanga*. [E]

LAFRESNAYE'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris xenopirostris*) – A nest at Parc Mosa, then two out in the spiny thickets at La Table. [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 an hour or so in the forest above the lodge at Ankarafantsika, and despite the complete lack of vocalization from these birds, Ndrema located two, which showed well. This rare bird is easily missed on a tour. [E]

Campephagidae (Cuckooshrikes)

ASHY CUCKOOSHRIKE (*Coracina cinerea*) – Just two at Ranomafana roadside, thanks Mike, and a single later at Andasibe. [E]

Dicruridae (Drongos)

CRESTED DRONGO (*Dicrurus forficatus*) – Small numbers at most sites, with one aggressively mobbing the Henst's Goshawk at Andasibe. [E]

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone mutata*) – Lovely views from all the forested habitats; we seemed to see more females this time, though we did find several of the spectacular white morph males. [E]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PIED CROW (*Corvus albus*) – A very smart -looking large 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 highest day count was 15.

Alaudidae (Larks)

MADAGASCAR LARK (*Eremopterix hova*) – Good views en route to Ankarafantsika and at La Table, this bird is now placed in *Eremopterix* with sparrowlarks, to which it bears no resemblance whatsoever! [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

PLAIN MARTIN (MADAGASCAR) (*Riparia paludicola cowani*) – we saw 4 at Ambatofotsy marsh and then around Ranomafana and Isalo. This race is also a likely split from the African taxa, looking much paler bellied.

MASCARENE MARTIN (*Phedina borbonica madagascariensis*) – The widespread and common swallow in Madagascar; we saw them at the airport then at the Tamboho in Tana, and continuing on to Ranomafana, Ampijoroa and Andasibe.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – One at the Jardin du Roy was a surprise, then we had 7 over the big reedbeds near the dry river at Tulear, and singles at the salines there and at the dry marsh near Tulear; it is rare in Madagascar but this region is now known to be a regular wintering site.

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 olive coloration, black cap and bright orange bill. [E]

Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers and Allies)

MADAGASCAR BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas typica*) – A commonly encountered chattering voice throughout our travels away from the dry country, where it is replaced by the following species. The first again came in the grounds of the Carlton Hotel in Tana in a hedgerow there. [E]

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

MADAGASCAR SWAMP WARBLER (*Acrocephalus newtoni*) – Nice views at a marsh between Ambositre and Ranomafana, also at Lac Alarobia and the Tamboho Hotel marsh. [E]

Bernieridae (Malagasy Warblers)

WHITE-THROATED OXYLABES (*Oxylabes madagascariensis*) – I think only Mike got fleeting glimpses of this skulker at Andasibe; I did not even hear them this year. [E]

LONG-BILLED BERNIERIA (*Bernieria madagascariensis madagascariensis*) – Known by most authorities as Long-billed Tetraka rather than the hideous *Bernieria* construction, this was seen in the primary forests of Zombitse, Ranomafana and Ankarafantsika. The dry country taxon *incelebris* is actually a good bet as a split in due course. [E]

LONG-BILLED BERNIERIA (*Bernieria madagascariensis incelebris*) – Seen at the Zombitse forest and a good bet as split in due course, but sadly no sign of Appert's Tetraka this year. [E]

CRYPTIC WARBLER (*Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*) – A warbler/jery with a pale bill perched up at Mantadia might be this species, but sadly Mike inadvertently deleted the photo! No sign of it from Ranomafana this year, which was odd. [E]

WEDGE-TAILED JERY (*Hartertula flavoviridis*) – I think only Mike and Marianne got a glimpse at Ranomafana. [E]

THAMNORNIS (*Thamnornis chloropetoides*) – Now boringly renamed the Subdesert Tetraka, this is a specialty from Parc Mosa where we had good views of it eventually, and heard them calling very well. The weird wet conditions made things hard, of course. [E]

YELLOW-BROWED OXYLABES (*Crossleyia xanthophrys*) – Another lucky pick-up from Vohiparara late afternoon after no sign on the previous day. I think some rain had sparked activity and we encountered two birds deep in the undergrowth on the forest floor. They were as ever, ultra-skulking, but I think we all managed to get them in the end. I regard this and the Brown Emutail as among the hardest to see forest birds in Madagascar. [E]

SPECTACLED TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis zosterops*) – Bizarrely, just one from Ranomafana, which not everyone saw; this is usually the most widespread of the tetraka family. [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. We continued to see, and especially hear, them whilst birding there, and then again at Andasibe. [E]

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

COMMON JERY (*Neomixis tenella*) – The 3 seen roosting side by side on the night walk at Ankarafantsika were a big favorite. Common and vocal and all the wet forest sites, but by no means easy to see well, we did quite well for them this trip. [E]

GREEN JERY (*Neomixis viridis*) – Another inconspicuous forest jery, more often heard than seen, though we had brief looks at Andasibe. [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 Zombitse, Parc Mosa and La Table, and it was actually quite common there. The voice is different to that of the eastern taxa and it is split as Subdesert Jery by the HBW/BirdLife Checklist. [E]

MADAGASCAR CISTICOLA (*Cisticola cherina*) – Widespread and often heard, seen well at Ambatofotsy then around Isalo. [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. The first were at the lemur park pre-trip. [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-BELLIED) (*Copsychus albospecularis inexpectatus*) – This white-bellied taxon has a black tail; we saw them at both Ranomafana and Andasibe. Anticipated to be split from the dry country one that has much more white in the wings and tail. [E]

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-WINGED) (*Copsychus albospecularis pica*) – A couple of these white-bellied birds were seen at the Ring-tailed Lemur park and Isalo, then commonly in the S and W, with most being at Parc Mosa. This form has white in the tail and more white in the wings, and is a pending split. [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola sharpei*) – Great views of a singing male at Ranomafana. [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (BENSON'S) (*Monticola sharpei bensoni*) – No longer found at our lovely hotel at Isalo, but we had super looks at 2 in a rocky area nearby, and saw a nest on a ledge as well. Another taxonomically challenged form with a dubious genetic study lumping it with Forest Rock Thrush despite clear habitat and vocal distinctions. [E]

AFRICAN STONECHAT (MADAGASCAR) (*Saxicola torquatus sibilla*) – Just 2 day records, starting at Ankozobe and then en route to Mantadia. Stonechat taxonomy remains vexed, IOC split this as Madagascar Stonechat, and some of the African taxa also need splitting. [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 scarcer than it was just a few years ago. Mynas do seem to be increasing within the Isalo area concurrent with the decrease in rock-thrushes. [I]

MADAGASCAR STARLING (*Hartlaubius auratus*) – One at Ranomafana on the first morning, and a couple of singles seen later by some at Andasibe were the only ones of the tour; they were again very scarce this trip. [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, and their voice is a typical sound of the forest areas. [E]

MADAGASCAR SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris notatus*) – This large long-billed species with the green head is much less common than the Souimanga. The first were a pair at the Carlton in Tana, which was a surprise, then we had nice looks at Ranomafana (with nest), Ankarafantsika and Mantadia. [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. There was a pair at our hotel in Ranomafana, and these were our most obliging birds of the tour. [E]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen at Mahajunga, then again at Antsano en route to the Pangalanes, it is spreading slowly in this country where it is very restricted as yet. [I]

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies).

NELICOURVI WEAVER (*Ploceus nelicourvi*) – An uncommon bird that we saw at both Ranomafana and Andasibe, with a nest at the former site. These two Madagascar weavers are about to be transferred to new genera as they are not closely allied to the Asian Ploceus species. [E]

SAKALAVA WEAVER (*Ploceus sakalava*) – Frequent in the spiny forest at Parc Mosa, and also seen at La Table. There was a large active nesting colony at the entrance to Parc Mosa but it was too wet to linger this year! [E]

RED FODY (*Foudia madagascariensis*) – One of the few widespread and common endemics. Most males are stunningly red, while the females strongly resemble female House Sparrows, whose niche they somewhat fill in the cities. [E]

FOREST FODY (*Foudia omissa*) – A fine male at Ranomafana roadside, One useful character is that the black eye mask seems more extensive and less lozenge shaped with this species as compared to the less robust Madagascar Red Fody. [E]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies).

MADAGASCAR MUNIA (*Lonchura nana*) – Encountered here and there in disturbed second growth habitats and near human habitation, with the first at the Carlton and then at the C'Entrest. Also known by the much more evocative name of "Madagascar Bibfinch", and moved into the genus *Lepidopygia* rather than *Lonchura* by most authorities. [E]

MAMMALS

GRAY MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus murinus*) – Seen at the Bamboo Club, where Brian and his infra-red device were invaluable in picking up their whereabouts. [E]

BROWN MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus rufus*) – Seen very well at the roadside at Ranomafana where they come to honey or bananas put out by the guides. [E]

GOLDEN-BROWN MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus ravelobensis*) – A lovely look at this relatively recently described species on the night walk at Ankarafantsika.

FURRY-EARED DWARF LEMUR (*Cheirogaleus crossleyi*) – Most folks got to see this at Feon N'y Ala, again helped by Brian and his infra-red device. [E]

FAT-TAILED DWARF LEMUR (*Cheirogaleus medius*) – Seen very nicely on the night walk at Ankarafantsika. [E]

COMMON BROWN LEMUR (*Eulemur fulvus*) – One seen at Andasibe right at the end of the stay. [E]

RED-FRONTED LEMUR (*Eulemur rufifrons*) – Great looks at Ranomafana on 3 days. [E]

MONGOOSE LEMUR (*Eulemur mongoz*) – A fine male at Ankarafantsika on the night walk. A quite rare species. [E]

RED-BELLIED LEMUR (*Eulemur rubriventer*) – Seen very well at Ranomafana, the two calling to each other were a terrific experience. [E]

RING-TAILED LEMUR (*Lemur catta*) – We returned to our new site this year, and I was again well impressed, the animals look healthy, far more so than the scabby looking ones at Berenty, and they are there in good numbers. It is a village conservation area with local guides, so the money goes back to the community. They showed us a fine family group of these lovely animals before the storm hit. They have around 600 in the park, and the species is now classified as Critically Endangered with a total population > 5000 animals, all very sad. [E]

EASTERN LESSER BAMBOO LEMUR (*Haplemur griseus*) – Usually known as Grey Bamboo Lemur; we had great views of one at Ranomafana and then some feeding in the bamboos at Andasibe, peeling the stems. This animal was a special treat for Eileen as it was her #400 species of mammal, a hard total to amass. [E]

GOLDEN BAMBOO LEMUR (*Haplemur aureus*) – Ellen saw one on her morning with Baku at Ranomafana, and we all caught up with 2 active animals that showed unusually well a couple of days later, after a bit of a scramble to get to where they were. [E]

GREATER BAMBOO LEMUR (*Prolemur simus*) – This great rarity was our first Ranomafana lemur, with the male and his female offspring seen very nicely, the only 2 remaining in the park. [E]

BLACK-AND-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR (*Varecia variegata*) – Heard calling at Ranomafana and Andasibe but far away, and then a fine tame one at the Palmarium that draped itself round Mike's neck and visited several of us, lovely to see how light they are and how soft are the paws! [E*]

MILNE-EDWARDS' SPORTIVE LEMUR (*Lepilemur edwardsi*) – Very nice at Ankarafantsika, and very active and noisy by the cabins at night. [E]

PETTER'S SPORTIVE LEMUR (*Lepilemur petteri*) – The sportive lemur we saw in the rain at Parc Mosa is assumed to be this species, but may be another of these genetic microsplits so beloved of primatologists.

HUBBARD'S SPORTIVE LEMUR (*Lepilemur hubbardorum*) – This is called Zombitse Sportive Lemur by some, 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, which climbed out and had a tiny baby attached. [E]

- WESTERN WOOLLY LEMUR** (*Avahi occidentalis*) – An endearing huddle of 3 of these at Ankarafantsika, peering down at us like some Picasso-lemur, as there seemed to be too many limbs emerging from the group. Our local guides call them "Oooli Lemurs" which at one time I took to be a newly described species, until it dawned that this was the local version of "woolly!" [E]
- VERREAUX'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus verreauxi*) – Two at Zombitse were a lovely sight, but strangely we encountered none on our forest walk there, I think the rain had made them shelter. [E]
- COQUEREL'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus coquereli*) – Seen nicely at Ankarafantsika, where a mango tree full of them made for a lovely photo, see the Smugmug site. A beautiful animal. [E]
- DIADEMED SIFAKA** (*Propithecus diadema*) – Several of them up on Indri Ridge, with many lemur tourist admirers with cell phone cameras. This is one of the most colorful of the genus with orange furred legs, and quite a rare one. [E]
- MILNE-EDWARDS' SIFAKA** (*Propithecus edwardsi*) – Great views of 6 of these large dark sifakas at Ranomafana on the Vohiparara trail. [E]
- INDRI** (*Indri indri*) – One of the most evocative of all Madagascar sounds, and hearing them calling pre-dawn at Feon N'y Ala is just wonderful. They were very vocal at Mantadia too. The first we saw we saw was a single animal in the forest near the park HQ, and we had a couple of sightings of 3 from Feon N'y Ala as well. This is the largest of the extant lemurs, and lacks a tail. [E]
- AYE-AYE** (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) – This enigmatic and truly strange lemur took some little effort this year as a thunderstorm began just as we reached the island. This meant no feeding activity for a while, but eventually one turned up at another feeding station and we had great looks at it using its weird long fingers to dig out coconut flesh. Driving on the boat back in the dark was another adventure too, all part of a memorable experience! [E]
- RED FOREST RAT** (*Nesomys rufus*) – Several sightings from Ranomafana and Andasibe. [E]
- BLACK RAT** (*Rattus rattus*) – The rat some saw in Tana is likely to be this species.
- Herps*
- LINED DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma lineata*) – Encountered around the hotel at Ranomafana a couple of times, and at Andasibe. [E]
- STANDING'S DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma standingi*) – This good looking large Phelsuma was in the arid regions towards the southwest, starting at Zombitse then at the Bamboo Club, with a very large one on a wall there. [E]
- MADAGASCAR DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma madagascariensis*) – This was the species we saw at Ankarafantsika. [E]
- MALAGASY GIANT 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, the first being at Ankarafantsika. The guides staged a demonstration of the use of the projectile 20cm long tongue by having an insect on stick for the one at the Ambalavao Ring-tailed Lemur reserve. [E]
- MADAGASCAR GIANT CHAMELEON** (*Furcifer verrucosus*) – I think this was the species we saw at Ranomafana one afternoon. [E]
- BELTED CHAMELEON** (*Furcifer balteatus*) – One handsome animal along the roadside at Ranomafana. [E]
- SHORT-HORNED CHAMELEON** (*Calumma brevicorne*) – 4 day records from Parc Mosa then at Andasibe. [E]
- O'SHAUGNESSY'S CHAMELEON** (*Calumma oshaugnessyi*) – Several sightings of this amazingly variable species from Ranomafana, one of the most psychedelically coloured of the family. [E]
- BLUE-LEGGED CHAMELEON** (*Calumma crypticum*) – A lovely one by the waterfall at Ranomafana. [E]
- SOUTHERN LEAF-TAIL GECKO** (*Uroplatus sikorae*) – Nestor got us one of these amazing creatures at the Parc Villageois, I still harbor an ambition to find my own but fear I will never succeed! [E]
- 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 BOA** (*Boa manditra*) – Ellen got to see one with Baku at Ranomafana. [E]
- MALAGASY GIANT HOGNOSE SNAKE** (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*) – Video on Smugmug of one eating the egg of a Collared Iguana at Ankarafantsika, having dug it out of the sand on the track. [E]
- BERNIER'S STRIPED SNAKE** (*Dromicodryas bernieri*) – A striped snake at Parc Mosa may have been this species. [E]
- COLLARED IGUANA** (*Oplurus cuvieri*) – Great views from Ankarafantsika, a really distinctive species. Now apparently known as Cuvier's Swift. [E]
- GRANDIDIER'S MADAGASCAR SWIFT (LIZARD)** (*Oplurus grandidieri*) – One was seen at the Palmarium by some. [E]
- BROAD-TAILED ZONOSAUR** (*Zonosaurus laticaudatus*) – We encountered several big specimens of one of these broad-backed skink relatives during our late morning walk at Ankarafantsika. [E]
- THREE-EYED LIZARD** (*Chalarodon madagascariensis*) – Nice views of a couple in the dunes at Belalande. [E]
- MALAGASY GOLDEN FROG** (*Mantella madagascariensis*) – The wonderfully colorful Mantella we saw at Vohiparara apparently shows some characters of this species. [E]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Birds of the trip were a diverse assortment, with Cuckoo-roller, Velvet Asity, Schlegel's Asity, Scaly Ground-Roller, Brown and White-breasted Mesite, with another highlight, of course, the exceptional array of lemurs we saw this year

As would be expected in such a unique location, there were many other creatures of interest encountered that aren't listed above. 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. I'd love to know the identity of the very large bright blue dragonfly with the green head that was patrolling up and down the creek at Andasibe.

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

We had Giant Pill Millipedes in several places, and a large hissing cockroach at Ankarafantsika.

A large lizard called Dumeril's Swift (*Oplurus quadrimaculatus*) was seen at Jardin du Roy.

Identified butterflies were as follows:

Madagascar Commodore (*Precis andremlaja*)

Madagascar Swordtail (*Graphium evombar*)

Citrus Swallowtail (*Papilio demodocus*)

Banded Blue Swallowtail (*Papilio oribazus*)

Madagascar Giant Swallowtail (*Pharmacophagus antenor*)

Green Lady (*Graphium cyrnus*)

Madagascar Orange Tip (*Colotis evanthe*)

Yellow Pansy (*Junonia hierta* (paris))

African Monarch (*Danaus chrysippis*)

Acraea sp.

Madagascar Brown Pansy (*Junonia gaudotii*)

Brilliant Blue (*Junonia rhadama*)

Many skippers (*Hesperiidae*)

Assorted Satyrs, of several species.

Recommendations

I recommend the xeno-canto (XC) website which is a fantastic archive of bird sounds of most of the species in the world, freely downloadable. I usually publish significant cuts from my tours here as it is a valuable research tool for anyone interested.

The Internet Bird Collection (IBC) run by Lynx Edicions (of Handbook of Birds of the World) is another wonderful free access site, you just have to register, and can then view thousands of videos, photos and sound recordings, with many of them from my tours. Again, it is an invaluable research site, and is now being subsumed into the Cornell Lab archive.

I also recommend the IOC World Checklist of Birds, a free access downloadable Excel file of all the world's species which is updated every 4 months or so. This is the one I use for my own checklists as it is the most current and has a progressive outlook on taxonomy and names. You can find them at worldbirdnames.org or google IOC (but NOT the Olympics stuff!)

PG Kuranda Dec 2019

Totals for the tour: 177 bird taxa and 26 mammal taxa