ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Madagascar

Comprehensive III

23rd October to 13th November 2021 (22 days)



Scaly Ground Roller by Dubi Shapiro

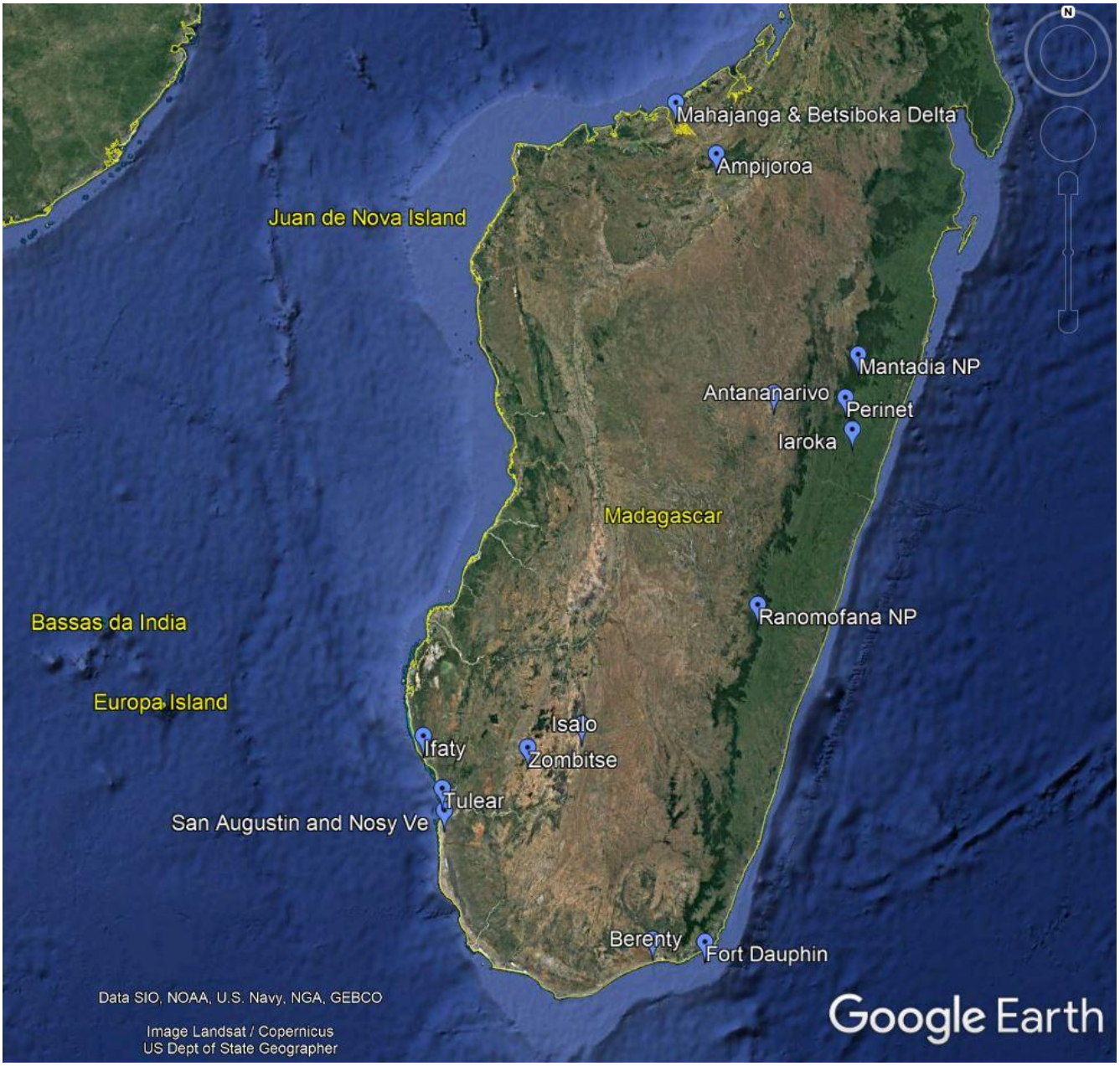
We at Rockjumper have an unbeatable reputation in Madagascar, having run more than 100 tours over the past 10 years to this, the world's fourth-largest island. In fact, Madagascar is often referred to as the "Eighth Continent" due to its size and incredible biological diversity. Its exceptional fauna and flora have evolved over millions of years of isolation into a remarkable selection of utterly unique and often spectacular wildlife. This legendary uniqueness is nowhere better reflected than in its birds, and the

island hosts no less than five endemic bird families (the ground rollers, cuckoo roller, mesites, Malagasy warblers and vangas)! But the wonder of Madagascar extends well beyond its avifauna and we also spend time seeking out and marvelling at the amazing lemurs, colourful chameleons and fascinating flora of this appropriately named "laboratory of evolution." Virtually every plant and animal on the island is endemic; but sadly, most are threatened by continued deforestation, thus making Madagascar one of those "must-visit-soon" destinations, not to mention a region in urgent need of immediate ecological preservation.

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrival in Antananarivo (Tana)**
Day 2	**Tana to Perinet**
Days 3 & 4	**Perinet Special Reserve and Mantadia National Park**
Day 5	**Perinet to Iaroka Forest**
Day 6	**Iaroka Forest**
Day 7	**Iaroka Forest to Fort Dauphin via Tana**
Day 8	**Fort Dauphin to Berenty via Manangotry (Andohahela National Park).**
Day 9	**Berenty Lemur Reserve**
Day 10	**Berenty Lemur Reserve to Fort Dauphin, fly to Tulear and drive to Ifaty**
Day 11	**Ifaty**
Day 12	**Ifaty to Tulear, Nosy Ve and San Augustin and excursion to La Table**
Day 13	**Tulear to Isalo via Zombitse Forest Reserve**
Day 14	**Isalo National Park to Ranomafana National Park**
Days 15 & 16	**Ranomafana National Park**
Day 17	**Ranomafana National Park to Tana**
Day 18	**Tana fly to Mahajanga and drive to Ampijoroa Forest Station**
Day 19	**Ampijoroa Forest Station**
Day 20	**Ampijoroa to Mahajanga**
Day 21	**Boat excursion to Betsiboka Delta and flight from Mahajanga to Tana**
Day 22	**Tana and departure**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Meller's Duck by Dubi Shapiro

Day 1: Arrival in Antananarivo (Tana). Upon arrival in the bustling capital of Antananarivo, or "Tana" as it is more commonly known, we transfer to our hotel on the edge of this intriguing city for an overnight stay. For those who arrive sufficiently early this morning, there may be time to visit the Tsimbazaza Zoo, which showcases a range of Malagasy lemurs and herps. The artificial water bodies on the property provide a home to a number of waterfowl, and we may see our first Madagascan Grebe, Malagasy Kingfisher, Common Jery, Malagasy Turtle Dove, Madagascan Hoopoe, Malagasy Pond Heron and Dimorphic Egret of the trip.

This afternoon we will visit the nearby Lake Alarobia. Travelling from our hotel into the city, one cannot help being struck by the uniqueness of the Malagasy culture, a strange mixture of African and Asian influences reflected in the landscape and architecture. Lake Alarobia, a private sanctuary set within the city, protects large numbers of ducks and egrets. As evening sets, the small lake literally teems with waterfowl. Large numbers of White-faced Whistling Duck and Red-billed Teal should be seen, usually accompanied by small numbers of Hottentot Teal, Knob-billed and sometimes Fulvous Whistling Duck, as well as the very rare and endangered Meller's Duck. The Lake also supports a fantastic assortment of egrets that roost or breed in the sanctuary, including a few splendidly adorned Malagasy Pond Herons and Dimorphic Egrets. African Openbill, a very scarce bird in Madagascar, is sometimes also recorded here. Mascarene Martins are common overhead and are sometimes joined by Malagasy Black and Little Swifts. We will also be watching in adjacent areas for more Madagascar endemics and near endemics, which may include Malagasy Kestrel, Malagasy Coucal, Malagasy Kingfisher, handsome White-throated Rail, Madagascan Wagtail, Malagasy White-eye, Madagascan Mannikin and Red Fody.



Indri by James Wakelin

Day 2: Antananarivo to Perinet. This morning we depart early for the short drive eastwards across the Highland Plateau to the famous reserve of Perinet (otherwise known as Analamazaotra). Hamerkop, Yellow-billed Kite, Brown-throated Martin and Madagascan Cisticola are regularly encountered en route. We will also keep a lookout for the delightful Madagascan Pratincole, but will require a fair amount of luck to see this beautiful bird today.

Our accommodation for the next four nights is a comfortable hotel, ideally located overlooking a lake at the edge of the forest. Being so close to the reserve means that wildlife is often



Velvet Asity by Dubi Shapiro

right on our doorstep: fluorescent green day geckos scuttle on the outside walls of our chalets, Madagascan Wagtails flit along the paved walkways and we may well be serenaded by the beautiful songs of the world's largest extant species of lemur, the handsome Indri. At night, a family of Furry-eared Dwarf Lemurs are sometimes seen in the gardens of the hotel as they forage through the trees.

Days 3 & 4: Perinet Special Reserve and Mantadia National Park. The moist rainforest cloaking Madagascar's eastern escarpment protects the richest assemblage of birds on the island, including many that are rare or poorly known. Over 100 of these have been recorded from within the small reserve of Perinet and we will search for such specials as Madagascan Flufftail, the elusive Madagascan Wood Rail, Madagascan Blue Pigeon, scarce Greater Vasa Parrot, vociferous but retiring Madagascan Cuckoo, Madagascan Spinetail, brilliant Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascan Cuckooshrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascan Starling, Long-billed Bernieria, Spectacled Tetraka, furtive White-throated Oxylabes, Nelicourvi Weaver and Souimanga Sunbird.

Amongst the most sought-after of Madagascar's birds are those of the five families endemic to the Malagasy region: the peculiar mesites, exquisite ground rollers, Cuckoo Roller, Malagasy warblers and the vangas. Some of these, such as the magnificent Cuckoo Roller, sensational Pitta-like Ground Roller and a number of the Malagasy warblers and vangas are reasonably common and regularly encountered, whilst most of the others remain rare, local or elusive. We will make a special effort to locate as many representatives of these charismatic families as possible, as well as those of the endemic sub-families, the couas and asities.



Blue Coua by Dubi Shapiro

In the forested hills around Perinet, we hope to find the localised Red-fronted and Blue Couas, Velvet Asity, and flocks of vangas that may include White-headed, Chabert's, Blue, Red-tailed, Hook-billed and the bizarre Nuthatch Vanga.

Whilst in the Perinet area, we will make a special effort to see the reserve's most famous residents: the huge, singing lemurs known as the Indri. A journey in search of these magnificent creatures is an incredible experience, and if we are fortunate we will be treated to a close encounter with a family group; their eerie, whale-like howling echoing through the forest. Other lemurs we hope to see include Common Brown and Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs, while we will also search known roosting sites for the nocturnal but inquisitive Weasel Sportive Lemur. Another "must see" member of the island's



Hook-billed Vanga by Dubi Shapiro

fauna is the Giraffe-necked Weevil, a tiny red and black insect named for its unusually proportioned neck!

In the evenings, we will embark on night walks. Nocturnal outings are a thrilling and indeed, essential part of any trip to Madagascar and Perinet is one of the best sites to search for the island's night birds. Specialities here include Madagascar Owl, Rainforest Scops Owl and both Madagascar and the rare and little-known Collared Nightjar. Whilst seeing these birds will be the focus of our walks, we will not neglect the immense variety of non-avian life that also emerges after dark. Although Madagascar is famous for the spectacular lemurs that have adapted to a daytime existence, a number of species of these primitive primates remain, like their African cousins the galagos, denizens of the night.

We will search for and should find Eastern Woolly, Furry-eared Dwarf and the diminutive Goodman's Mouse Lemurs, and may also encounter some of Madagascar's other evolutionary masterpieces such as the bizarre Lowland Streaked Tenrec. The island's reptile and amphibian ("herp") fauna is equally fascinating and even the most hardened birder would not fail to be impressed by the plethora of colourful and bizarre frogs, chameleons and geckos to be seen on an evening's stroll through the rainforest. In particular, we will search for the giant Parson's Chameleon and three species of eccentric leaf-tailed geckos: the huge Fimbriated Leaf-tailed Gecko, the aptly named Fantastic Leaf-tailed Gecko and the Sakora Leaf-tailed Gecko, which looks as though its body has been adorned with moss.



Short-legged Ground Roller by Dubi Shapiro

Mantadia National Park lies a short distance from Perinet, protecting a larger expanse of primary forest at a somewhat higher altitude. Though it has only recently been opened to the public, Mantadia is now an essential destination on any birding trip to Madagascar, having rapidly gained a reputation as an excellent site for a handful of highly prized forest birds. Not least amongst these are a number of species formerly considered to be restricted to the poorly accessible rainforests of the far north-east, such as Red-breasted Coua and Scaly Ground Roller. We will concentrate on finding these specials, while also watching for more widespread yet no less desirable forest birds including Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Rufous-headed and Short-legged Ground Rollers, Crossley's Vanga, Common and Dark Newtonias, Wedge-tailed, Green, Stripe-throated and Common Jeries, the newly described Cryptic Warbler and Forest Fody. We will also scan across a small forest pond that often holds a pair of Meller's Duck and Madagascan Grebe, two highly threatened and declining endemics. Other attractions in this scenically



Helmet Vanga by Keith Valentine

beautiful park include the vocal Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur, the elusive Diademed Sifaka (considered by many to be the world's most beautiful lemur) and Baron's Mantella, a spectacularly coloured forest frog. Much of the birding in Mantadia National Park can be enjoyed from the wide road that runs up into the reserve, although seeing the skulkers of the forest understory will require that we take to some of the steep and at times slippery trails into the rainforest.

Day 5: Perinet to Iaroka Forest. After some final birding in the Perinet/Mantadia area we'll make our way towards Iaroka Forest. This patch of rainforest is an interesting primary forest; similar to the forest in Mantadia but with slight differences, such as more extensive moss cover on the trees, more ferns, and richer undergrowth.

Day 6: Iaroka Forest. We have the full day to scour this forest for our key quarry, Helmet Vanga. This species is a classy bird that is unmistakable in appearance and is often first located by its call. The Helmet Vanga is an uncommon species with a patchy distribution, and it is one of the most sought-after of the over one hundred endemic birds of Madagascar. It is restricted to the northern part of the humid evergreen forests of eastern Madagascar, and is only known from the most undisturbed low- and mid-altitude primary forests.

Aside from Helmet Vanga, we will also be searching for a host of other interesting species such as the little-known Bernier's Vanga, Rufous-headed and Short-legged Ground Rollers, Wedge-tailed Jery, Grey-crowned Tetraka, Forest Rock Thrush, Common Sunbird-Asity, Velvet Asity and White-throated Oxylabes.

*To reach the Helmet Vanga site requires an optional long and arduous hike. For those not participating on the hike, we will bird the lower sections of the trail.



Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec by Markus Lilje

Day 7: Iaroka Forest to Fort Dauphin via Tana. Today is mainly a travel day as we drive back to Tana to connect with an internal flight to Fort Dauphin (also known as Toliagnaro), in the south-eastern corner of the country.

Day 8: Fort Dauphin to Berenty Lemur Reserve via Manangotry (Andohahela National Park). This morning we will make an early departure into the nearby Andohahela Mountains to a very special and unique area called Manangotry. This region of mid-altitude rainforest has only recently opened up and is the



Red-tailed Newtonia by Dubi Shapiro

only site where one has a reasonable chance of seeing the recently rediscovered and highly localised Red-tailed Newtonia. This rare and endearing endemic will be the prime target this morning. We will systematically traverse the track that winds through the beautiful Andohahela National Park in search of this species. An array of exciting but more widespread species may also be encountered this morning and include the immaculate Madagascan Blue Pigeon, Greater Vasa Parrot, Madagascan Cuckoo, Madagascan Spinetail, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascan Cuckooshrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascan Starling, Long-billed Bernieria, Spectacled Tetraka, White-throated Oxylabes, Nelicourvi Weaver, Souimanga Sunbird, the bizarre Cuckoo Roller and flocks of Vangas that could include White-headed, Chabert, Blue, Red-tailed and Hook-billed. A special lemur that we may encounter is the Collared Brown Lemur, a beautiful and localised species that can only be seen in these south-eastern forests.

After a morning's birding at Manangotry, we will then transfer to the world-famous, private lemur reserve of Berenty. The 3.5-hour drive takes us from the wind-blown but picturesque town of Fort Dauphin through well-watered valleys packed with paddy fields and, finally, into the rain-shadow of the Andohahela Mountains, where the octopus-like trees of the *Didiereaceae* family are diagnostic of the xerophytic spiny forest. As we near Berenty, this natural habitat is sadly replaced by extensive tracts of sisal plantations stretching as far as the eye can see. Berenty Preserve belongs to the De Haulme family who have set aside sections of gallery forest along the Mandrare River to conserve its population of lemurs and other wildlife. This evening we shall venture out in search of Torotoroka Scops Owl and the impressive White-browed Hawk-Owl, but may also encounter a host of other nocturnal creatures such as the strange Lesser and Greater Hedgehog Tenrecs, Grey Mouse Lemur, the huge Madagascan Hissing Cockroach and several species of attractive geckos (including the remarkable Painted and Plain Big-headed Gecko and the unique Fish-scaled Gecko).



Ring-tailed Lemur by Dubi Shapiro

Day 9: Berenty Lemur Reserve. Berenty is justly famous for its lemurs, not only because its deciduous woodland is home to no less than five species of these primitive primates, but also for the ease with which they may be seen and appreciated in the wild. Red-fronted Brown Lemur occurs in large numbers during the day, while White-footed Sportive Lemur and Grey-brown and Grey Mouse Lemurs are regularly encountered on night walks through the reserve, though the undoubted favourites are the delightful Ring-tailed Lemurs and Verreaux's Sifakas.



Long-tailed Ground Roller by Dubi Shapiro

Whilst the bands of cat-like, quizzical ringtails are often the first to steal visitors' hearts, their appeal is easily matched by the strikingly patterned sifakas, with their soulful expressions and bizarre, bipedal dancing locomotion. To spend time with groups of these gentle creatures will certainly be one of the highlights of our Madagascar adventure! A further mammalian highlight of Berenty is visiting the Madagascar Flying Fox roost, where about 300 of these impressive animals sporting 1.25-metre wingspans spend their day squabbling and presumably sleeping.

Here we will also be on the look-out for the numerous Giant Couas that stroll along the well-cleared paths through the woodland, and we may be lucky enough to find the dimorphic Madagascan Buttonquail as they scurry through the leaf litter. Potential new species we may also find here include Reed Cormorant, Peregrine Falcon, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascan Cuckoo-Hawk, Helmeted Guineafowl, Madagascan Sandgrouse and Alpine Swift.

This evening there will be an option to embark on another pre-dinner night walk into one of the surrounding patches of remnant spiny forest in search of nocturnal lemurs such as White-footed Sportive and Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs. We are also likely to encounter the large, spiny Warty Chameleon as well as colonies of bizarre Flatid Leaf Bugs.

Day 10: Berenty Lemur Reserve to Fort Dauphin, fly to Tulear and drive to Ifaty. This morning we will return to Fort Dauphin from where we connect with our internal flight to Tulear, in the south-western corner of the island. Upon arrival, we will then transfer directly to our hotel in the small resort town of Ifaty, an hour's drive to the north of Tulear, for a two-night stay. Depending on the time of our flight we may have some time early this morning for some final explorations, birding and photography around Berenty.



Giant Coua by Rich Lindie

Day 11: Ifaty. Much has been written about the strange *Didierea* woodland, or "Spiny Forest", around Ifaty, but this in no way lessens the feeling of awe that overcomes one as we set foot in this botanical wonderland. Venturing out at dawn, before the day's heat, we will stroll amongst the myriad of multi-stemmed succulents, squat baobab trees and thorny scrub in search of such spectacular endemics as Banded Kestrel, the ultra-low-density Madagascan Sparrowhawk, Running and Red-capped Couas (represented here by



Blue Vanga by Dubi Shapiro

the distinctive green-capped race), Archbold's Newtonia, unique and melodious Thamnornis, Subdesert Brush Warbler and Lafresnaye's Vanga.

Two very special birds that occur here are the strange Subdesert Mesite, which we may find adopting its cryptic posture on a thorny branch, and Long-tailed Ground Roller, an elusive ground dweller best located by its low, hooting call. Flocks of noisy Sickle-billed Vanga are another feature of this bizarre, Tolkienesque landscape. We should also see the numerous Three-eyed Lizards as the day heats up in the mid-morning, while we may be lucky enough to find a beautiful Spider Tortoise or rare Dumeril's Boa.

In addition, the tropical ocean off Ifaty is alive with marine life and we will have some time to don masks and snorkels and appreciate the multiple colours of a coral reef or relax in the warm shallows in front of our hotel. This afternoon we will search the surrounding fields for the uncommon and range-restricted Madagascan Plover, while wetlands and salt pans may hold numbers of Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Kittlitz's Plover, assorted migratory waders, and Malagasy Harrier if we are very fortunate. Greater Painted-snipe, Little Bittern, White-throated Rail and Baillon's Crake also occur here on occasion and are worth looking out for in the vast wetlands.

Day 12: Ifaty to Tulear, boat trip to Nosy Ve and San Augustin and excursion to La Table. We will leave Ifaty after an early breakfast this morning and make our way back to Tulear, where we will board a speedboat for an excursion to the small uninhabited islet of Nosy Ve to the south. The main attraction of Nosy Ve is its colony of Red-tailed Tropicbirds, which allow close approach as they are left unmolested by local people due to a taboo, or *fady*. We may also find Crab-plover roosting on the sandbars here, as well as good numbers of other migrant waders and a large tern roost that could harbour Greater Crested, Lesser Crested, Common and Saunders's Terns. Depending on time and weather conditions, we may have an opportunity to snorkel on the beautiful coral reef encircling the island. A delicious lunch will then await us on the mainland near San Augustin where another target species will be searched for - the localised Littoral Rock Thrush. In the mid-afternoon, we will then begin the boat trip back to Tulear, where upon arrival we will have the opportunity to freshen up back at our hotel before heading out to a nearby, flat-topped mountain at the edge of town, aptly named La Table.



Red-tailed Tropicbird by Markus Lilje

The habitat of this desolate area is commonly known as coral rag scrub and consists of dense



Pitta-like Ground Roller by Markus Lilje

thorny scrubs, *Euphorbias* and twisted Baobabs. Our target birds here include two species with highly restricted ranges: Verreaux's Coua and the recently discovered Red-shouldered Vanga. Reptile life is also particularly rich and we should find large, sleek *Zonosaurus* plated lizards as well as more Three-eyed Lizards and, if very lucky, the stunning Dumeril's Boa and/or endangered Radiated Tortoise.

Day 13: Tulear to Isalo National Park via Zombitse Forest. We have another opportunity this morning to search for Red-shouldered Vanga and Verreaux's Coua should we have missed either of these key species the previous afternoon. If success was had with both birds yesterday, we will instead make our way directly to Zombitse Forest in the early morning in order to search for the dainty Appert's Tetraka. This species is listed as Vulnerable by Birdlife International and restricted to two tiny forest patches in south-western Madagascar. A variety of other interesting species are resident in the dry, deciduous forest and we may find the tricky Madagascan Ibis, Madagascan Harrier-Hawk, Giant and Crested Couas, raucous Cuckoo Roller displaying high overhead, Madagascan Cuckooshrike, Long-billed Bernieria, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Rufous, Blue and Red-tailed Vangas, and Madagascan Spinetail. The highly elusive Fosa also occurs here, though we will have to be most fortunate to see this, Madagascar's largest predator.

After a picnic lunch at Zombitse, we will continue the drive across the Central Plateau, to the isolated limestone massif of Isalo. Watercourses through the bizarre sandstone formations of the Isalo National Park act as a magnet to the birds of this dry area and we may find Madagascan Harrier-Hawk, White-throated Rail, small flocks of Grey-headed Lovebird, Stripe-throated Jery, Madagascan Buttonquail, the elegant Namaqua Dove, Madagascan Lark, Forest Rock Thrush (sometimes split as Benson's Rock Thrush), flocks of Madagascan Mannikin and, if we are lucky, Marsh Owl, Common Quail and/or the scarce and exquisitely patterned Madagascan Partridge during an afternoon walk in this picturesque landscape.



Forest Rock Thrush by Dubi Shapiro

Day 14: Isalo National Park to Ranomafana National Park. Today we embark on the long drive from Isalo to Ranomafana, the scenery characterised by grassland and dramatic granite hills. Our main target on this drive will be the rare Malagasy Harrier, which can sometimes be seen quartering over the vast grasslands that we bisect. Like Perinet, Ranomafana is situated on the eastern slope of Madagascar's mountainous backbone. However, this national park is much greater in extent, spanning



Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity by Markus Lilje

a wide range of elevations and forest types. We will round off our rainforest birding in Madagascar by exploring these rich forests, concentrating on the many specials of the park and any forest birds that we may have missed at Perinet and Mantadia.

Days 15 & 16: Ranomafana National Park. Ranomafana National Park was originally proclaimed to protect its population of Golden Bamboo Lemur, a smart animal first described to science as recently as 1987. In addition to this extremely localised species and both Greater and Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs, we may also find Red-fronted Brown, Red-bellied and Small-toothed Sportive Lemurs, the impressive Milne-Edwards's Sifaka and other mammals such as Common and Lowland Streaked Tenrecs and the handsome Ring-tailed Mongoose. Night walks in this area are especially rewarding owing to the high concentration of "herps" here, and we should find a range of fascinating chameleons and frogs (this park is particularly well endowed with frogs, with over 100 species recorded!).

In the lower elevation forest near our lodging, we hope to find the elusive Brown Mesite with its strange duetting call, Wedge-tailed Jery, Pollen's, Tylas and Crossley's Vangas, Madagascar Starling, Forest Fody, White-throated Oxylabes, electric Velvet Asity, Spectacled Tetraka, Madagascan Wood Rail and Nelicourvi Weaver. The delightful Pitta-like Ground Roller is also fairly common here.

The higher elevation forests around the village of Vohiparara are home to several highly desirable species that we would not yet have encountered on the trip. Foremost amongst these is the highly localised Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity, with this being the most accessible place to see this endangered, altitude-specific and elusive species. We will concentrate our searches in some stunted ridge-top forest where we may also locate the scarce Grey-crowned Tetraka, unobtrusive Forest Rock Thrush, skulking Madagascar Yellowbrow, Red-fronted Coua, the elegant Rufous-headed Ground Roller, rodent-like Brown Emutail, Rand's and Cryptic Warblers, Common Sunbird-Asity, vibrant Blue Coua and the uncommon Pollen's Vanga. One of the country's last remaining highland marshes exists just within the national park's limits and we will venture here one afternoon in order to find dwindling and endangered endemics including Madagascan Rail, Grey Emutail, Madagascan Snipe and the more common and widespread Madagascan Swamp Warbler. One of Madagascar's least seen and most endangered endemics, the near-mythical Slender-billed Flufftail, is also known



Golden Bamboo Lemur by Markus Lilje

from this area, but we'd require a hefty dose of luck to see or even hear this very rare and secretive species.



Red-shouldered Vanga by Glen Valentine

Day 17: Ranomafana National Park to Tana. This morning we will depart early after breakfast for the long drive back to Tana. The journey will be broken by a lunch stop at the quaint, highland town of Antsirabe, famous for its locally manufactured handicrafts. The drive will take us northwards across the open landscape of the Horombe Plateau, offering an insight into the traditional lifestyle of the Malagasy people. Steeply terraced rice paddies, tall earthen houses with thatched roofs and roadside markets displaying a wide variety of handicrafts form part of the passing pageant, all against the backdrop of golden-yellow grasslands and bare granite inselbergs making for a wonderfully scenic journey.

Day 18: Antananarivo fly to Mahajanga and drive to Ampijoroa Forest Station. Today we fly to Mahajanga on the north-west coast of Madagascar, for the final leg of our island adventure. Upon arrival, we will wind our way through Mahajanga, which has a distinctly East African feel about it. Hand-drawn rickshaws and roadside markets full of fresh, tropical fruit and vegetables dominate the town. The landscape opens up rather starkly after leaving the town and we will pass cashew nut sellers and ladies washing and drying their laundry next to the many small streams that we pass along the way to Ampijoroa. Rolling hills of dry grasslands, interspersed with stunted palm trees and valley bottoms filled with rice fields dominate the scenery. En route to the reserve, we may encounter Purple, Striated, Squacco and Malagasy Pond Herons, as well as flocks of Black Herons performing their bizarre "umbrella-feeding" routine in the roadside water-bodies. We can expect to arrive at our destination, Ampijoroa Forest Station, in time for lunch in the early afternoon. Ampijoroa, a ranger base and research centre that also provides hutted and camping accommodation, is situated in the extensive deciduous forests of the Ankarafantsika Reserve and will be our comfortable base for the next two nights. It is famous as the home of World Wildlife Fund's Plough-shear Tortoise captive breeding program and is an ideal base from which to search for the numerous endemic birds of the region.



Rufous-headed Ground Roller by Markus Lilje



Schlegel's Asity by Rich Lindie

On arrival at the forestry station we should encounter numerous "camp residents" such as the gaudy Broad-billed Roller, screeching Lesser Vasa Parrot, Crested Drongo, Madagascan Magpie-Robin, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascan Hoopoe, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascan Green Pigeon and Malagasy Turtle Dove, before birding the dry semi-deciduous forest that surrounds the camp. There will also be an optional pre-dinner night walk this evening in search of the large range of reptiles and mammals that occur in these faunal and floral rich woodlands.

Day 19: Ampijoroa Forest Station. We have a full day to explore the network of trails through the dry forest surrounding Ampijoroa, in search of the many birds restricted to this region. Foremost amongst these are the secretive White-breasted Mesite and the jewel-like Schlegel's Asity, the latter of which recalls a miniature Bird-of-paradise! We will also concentrate on finding the highly localised Van Dam's Vanga and the two species of coua that are restricted to these deciduous forests: Red-capped and Coquerel's. Other birds we will be on the lookout for whilst searching for these specials include Madagascan Ibis, Madagascan Buttonquail, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher, and Rufous, Hook-billed, White-headed, Chabert and Red-tailed Vangas.

No less than eight species of lemur occur in the near vicinity of the camp and we are likely to be treated to excellent views of the comical Coquerel's Sifaka and Common Brown Lemurs during the day, while at dusk the rare Mongoose Lemur becomes active. Western Avahi (Woolly Lemur), Milne-Edward's Sportive, Fat-tailed Dwarf and Grey Mouse Lemurs are all nocturnal and will be searched for after dark. If we are lucky, we may also find the recently described (1998) Golden-brown Mouse Lemur, one of the world's smallest primates and only known from the immediate vicinity around Lake Ravelobe (hence its scientific name *Microcebus ravelobensis*.)

Reptiles are also plentiful along the trails and we hope to see the impressive Giant Hog-nosed Snake, as well as several smaller species of snake (all harmless – amazingly, there are no venomous snakes in Madagascar!), Oustalet's Chameleon (the world's largest species) and the aptly named Rhinoceros Chameleon, with its enlarged nasal protuberance. Impressively spiky Cuvier's Iguanids scurry around the campsite along with Wide-tailed Plated Lizards. We will also spend some of the afternoon birding along the edge of the adjacent Lake Ravelobe, where we hope to find the critically endangered Madagascan Fish Eagle, a pair of which is resident here. Wintering Sooty and Eleonora's



Coquerel's Sifaka by Rich Lindie



Rhinoceros Chameleon by David Erterius

Falcons are sometimes seen hunting overhead, while White-throated Rail, Humblot's Heron, Madagascan Jacana and Allen's Gallinule favour the waterside vegetation. We may also encounter noisy groups of Sickle-billed and Blue Vangas moving along the forest fringe.

Day 20: Ampijoroa to Mahajanga. After a final morning's birding, lemur watching and photographing around Ampijoroa, we will return to Mahajanga for an overnight stay in a comfortable, beachside hotel. In the afternoon we can head out to a nearby seasonal pan which often harbours a variety of shorebirds that usually includes Black-winged Stilt and Kittlitz's Plover and, if we are very fortunate, the rare, endemic Madagascan Plover may also be in attendance. Depending on water levels, the far end of the pan may be blanketed in water lilies and if this is the case we will almost definitely be rewarded with rafts of beautiful African Pygmy Goose and perhaps the odd Greater Painted-snipe. The adjacent scrub and thickets also usually support good numbers of Madagascan Cisticola, Olive Bee-eater, Madagascan Mannikin and Red Fody. In the late afternoon, we will return to our hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 21: Boat excursion to Betsiboka Delta and flight from Mahajanga to Tana. Today we fly back to "Tana" for our final night. Our flight in the early afternoon provides us with enough time to take a motorised boat ride up the Betsiboka Delta. This seldom-visited region is home to two of Madagascar's rarest and most endangered birds, Bernier's Teal and Malagasy Sacred Ibis, and we have an excellent chance of finding both of these specialities during our morning's outing. Other noteworthy birds we may encounter on this journey are Humblot's Heron, African Openbill, Greater Flamingo, African Spoonbill (a very rare bird in Madagascar), Madagascan Harrier-Hawk, Terek Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Crab-plover and Lesser Crested and Saunders's Terns. This afternoon we will then connect with an internal flight back to Tana, where this epic birding and wildlife adventure around Madagascar will conclude.



Appert's Tetraka by Markus Lilje

Day 22: Tana and departure. Today we depart from Tana to connect with our international flights home.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 22;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary ie: Snorkelling at Nosy Ve);
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights (see above);
- Any drinks;
- Snorkelling at Ifaty; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc) are included on this tour. However, this does not include your Rockjumper leader. If, therefore, you feel that he has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

Special Notes:

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.

- Fitness: This Madagascar Comprehensive tour requires a reasonable level of fitness and participants should be in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot, and may require walking for several hours at a time. Some trails in the rainforest can be quite steep and slippery, especially after rain, and a few longer walks will be made in an attempt to locate some of the more localised species. The hike at Iaroka forest for Helmet Vanga is optional. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a generally good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of are clean and comfortable. Some of the accommodations, are basic and less comfortable from what you have come to expect in the developed world; we will, however, make efforts to make this tour as comfortable as possible. There is no camping on this trip.
- Please note that the seas during the boat trip to Nosy Ve Island can be rough, and it is advised that you carry a suitable rain jacket and protection for photographic/electronic gear aboard the boat (a thick waterproof plastic bag is very useful in this regard). Tidal variation may require us to walk (in water) across sharp substrate when accessing and/or leaving Nosy Ve. It is advised that you carry a pair of shoes that you do not mind getting wet (plastic sandals are very useful).
- If you have any medical conditions or physical limitations relating to balance and mobility please do let the Rockjumper office know.
- In some areas, it can be hot to very hot, especially at midday. We will thus make a number of early starts to maximise the most pleasurable time in the field. Some days are long and fairly demanding.
- If you are a more relaxed birder preferring an even-tempered tour, then our Highlights tour has been designed as a suitable alternative to this tour.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. Day 1 has been set aside as an arrival day. If you arrive in the morning then a short afternoon visit will be made to Lac Alarobia in Antananarivo. If you arrive in the evening or afternoon on this day then you will not take part in this activity. The tour will conclude on the morning of day 22 in Antananarivo.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

All internal flights will be taken with Air Madagascar. Internal flight delays and last-minute flight schedule alterations are an inherent risk on any tour to Madagascar and we may have to re-arrange the tour itinerary due to changes of the internal flight schedule. We will take all reasonable action to ensure the tour follows the advertised itinerary as closely as possible. Where flights get cancelled or rescheduled, we may need to embark on long road journeys, or use charter flights if available (these are very expensive). Chartered flights present possible extra costs to the tour, so it is imperative that you consult with your travel insurance company to ascertain what amount they may cover should the situation arise.

For international flights the main port of entry is Ivato International Airport, Antananarivo (IATA: TNR) and is serviced with regular flights from Johannesburg operated by Air Madagascar and from Paris operated by Air France. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**