ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Madagascar

Highlights I

30th June to 14th July 2022 (15 days)



Long-tailed Ground Roller by Markus Lilje

Madagascar is often referred to as the 'Eighth Continent' and its exceptional fauna and flora have evolved over millions of years of isolation. This legendary uniqueness is nowhere better reflected than in its birds, and the island hosts no less than five endemic families (the ground rollers, cuckoo roller, mesites, Malagasy warblers and vangas)! But the wonder of Madagascar extends well beyond its avifauna and we do not neglect the amazing lemurs, colourful chameleons and fascinating flora of this appropriately named "laboratory of evolution." For our Madagascar Highlights tour we have cherry-picked the best of Madagascar and offered it in a shorter package, and as a result, this expedition provides a more relaxed pace and less demanding Madagascar experience than our Comprehensive tours. We target all five endemic Malagasy bird families as well as good numbers of lemurs and other representative wildlife, making this ideal for travellers with limited time or less interest in targeting every single endemic bird.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrival in Antananarivo**
Day 2	**Antananarivo to Perinet**
Days 3 to 6	**Perinet Special Reserve and Mantadia National Park**
Day 7	**Perinet to Antananarivo**
Day 8	**Antananarivo to Ifaty via Tulear**
Day 9	**Ifaty**
Day 10	**Ifaty to Tulear**
Day 11	**San Augustin and Nosy Ve**
Day 12	**Tulear to Berenty via Fort Dauphin**
Day 13	**Berenty Lemur Reserve**
Day 14	**Berenty Lemur Reserve to Fort Dauphin to Tana**
Day 15	**Tana and departure**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Cuckoo Roller by Glen Valentine

Day 1: Arrival in Antananarivo. Upon arrival in the bustling capital of Antananarivo, or "Tana" as it is more commonly known, we transfer to our hotel near the airport for an overnight stay. Travelling from the airport 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.

Depending upon the time of arrival, we will take our first birding excursion at Lac Alarobia. This 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 smaller numbers of Hottentot Teal and Knob-billed Duck and, with luck, Madagascar Grebe. A fantastic assortment of herons and egrets roost and breed in the sanctuary and these include Squacco Heron and Dimorphic Egret. Mascarene Martin is occasionally overhead and we will be watching in adjacent areas for more Madagascar endemics, which may include Malagasy Kestrel, Malagasy Coucal, Malagasy Black Swift, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar White-eye, Madagascar Mannikin and Red Fody.

Day 2: Antananarivo to Perinet. We depart early today for the drive eastwards across the Highland Plateau to the famous reserve of Perinet (otherwise known as Analamazaotra). Interesting species that are likely along the route include Hamerkop, Brown-throated Martin and Madagascar Cisticola.

Our accommodation for the next five nights is a delightful hotel, ideally located overlooking a lake at the edge of the forest. Being so close to the reserve means that wildlife is often right on our doorstep. Fluorescent, green Lineated Day Geckos scuttle on the outside walls of our chalets, Madagascar 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.



Blue Vanga by Dubi Shapiro

Days 3 to 6: 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. We will spend the following four days exploring both Perinet and Mantadia. Over 100 bird species have been recorded from within the small reserve of Perinet and we will search for such specials as Madagascar Flufftail, the elusive Madagascar Wood Rail, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Greater Vasa Parrot, Madagascar Spinetail, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar



Indri by Jonathan Rossouw

Cuckooshrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascar Starling, Long-billed Bernieria, Spectacled Tetraka, 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, vangas and Malagasy warblers. We will make a special effort to locate as many representatives of these charismatic families as possible, as well as those of two endemic sub-families, the couas and asities.

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 unique Nuthatch Vanga.

Highland marshes around the borders of the reserve support some of the island's threatened birds. Madagascar Swamp Warbler and Madagascar Rail are likely to be seen here, and we may also find Madagascar Partridge and Madagascar Snipe if we are exceptionally lucky.

Whilst in the Perinet area, we will make a special effort to see the reserve's most famous residents, these being the huge, singing lemurs known as Indri. A journey in search of these magnificent creatures can be equated with gorilla-trekking in the mountain forests of Uganda, 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 Grey Bamboo Lemur, while we will also search known roosting sites for the nocturnal and inquisitive Weasel Sportive Lemur and Eastern Avahi. Another "must see" member of the island's 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. These include Eastern Avahi and the diminutive Goodman's Mouse Lemur, which we will also search for. The island's reptile and amphibian ("herp") fauna is



Madagascar Cuckooshrike by Rich Lindie



Common Sunbird-Asity by David Erterius

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 *Uroplatus fimbriatus*, the aptly named *Uroplatus phantasticus*, and the moss-like *Uroplatus sikorae*.

Mantadia National Park lies a short distance from Perinet, protecting a large 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 sought-after forest birds. Not least amongst these are a number of species formerly considered to be restricted to the poorly accessible rainforests of the far northeast, such as Red-breasted Coua and Scaly Ground Roller. Both these species are, however, very rare in the park and we will require a hefty dose of luck to see them. Some of the wonderful forest species we will target here include Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Common Sunbird-Asity, Crossley's Vanga, Common and Dark Newtonia (now placed in the Vanga family), Wedge-tailed, Green, Stripe-throated and Common Jery, the newly described Cryptic Warbler, Forest Fody and, if we are very lucky, the gorgeous Pitta-like Ground Roller. Rufous-headed and Short-legged Ground Rollers also occur here but are extremely difficult to find in winter and we'd be very fortunate to encounter either of these two secretive and elusive endemics.

Other attractions in this scenically 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), endearing Red-bellied Lemur and Painted 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 understorey will require that we take to the forest trails.

Day 7: Perinet to Antananarivo. After a final morning birding in the Perinet area to catch up with any forest specialities we might have missed, we will return to Tana.

If time allows after check-in at our comfortable hotel, we may visit the Tsimbazaza Zoo. While strolling along the open paths through the extensive gardens we could encounter some of Madagascar's widespread but nonetheless enjoyable birds including Malagasy Kingfisher, Malagasy Turtle Dove, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Hoopoe, Common and Stripe-throated Jery, Malagasy Brush Warbler, Red Fody and Madagascar White-eye.



Baweng Satanic Leaf Gecko by Markus Lilje



Subdesert Mesite by Markus Lilje

Day 8: Antananarivo to Ifaty via Tulear. From Tana, we will take an early plane flight to the southwestern coastal town of Tulear. Upon arrival, we will transfer to our hotel in the small resort of Ifaty, an hour's drive to the north, for a two-night stay. We will stop en route to bird some wetlands and salt pans, which may hold numbers of Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, several over-wintering waders, Kittlitz's and the rare and local Madagascar Plover and if we are very fortunate, the rare and endangered Malagasy Marsh Harrier.

Day 9: 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, Running and Red-capped Couas, Archbold's Newtonia, Thamnornis, Subdesert Brush Warbler and Lafresnaye's Vanga. Two very special birds here are the Subdesert Mesite, which we may find adopting its strange, cryptic posture on a thorny branch, and the 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.

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 myriad of colours of a coral reef or relax in the warm shallows in front of our hotel. An optional afternoon excursion will be taken to bird some wetlands to the south of Ifaty, where previous Rockjumper tours have found Greater Painted-snipe, Little Bittern, White-throated Rail and Baillon's Crake.

Day 10: Ifaty to Tulear. After some final birding in the Ifaty area, we will make our way southwards to Tulear, for a two-night stay. In the afternoon, we will make our first excursion to a flat-topped mountain aptly known as La Tabla. The habitat of this desolate area is known as coral rag scrub and consists of dense thorny scrubs, *Euphorbias* and twisted baobabs. Our target birds in this area include two species with highly restricted ranges: Verreaux's Coua and the recently discovered Red-shouldered Vanga.



Sickle-billed Vanga by Dubi Shapiro

Day 11: San Augustin and Nosy Ve. This morning we will board a speedboat for an excursion to the small uninhabited islet of Nosy Ve to the south of Tulear. En route we will stop at the cliffs near San Augustin, where both Humblot's and Grey Herons breed annually. The main attraction of Nosy Ve, however, is its colony of beautiful Red-tailed Tropicbirds, which allow close approach as they are left unmolested by local people due to a taboo, or *fady*. We will also have another chance to



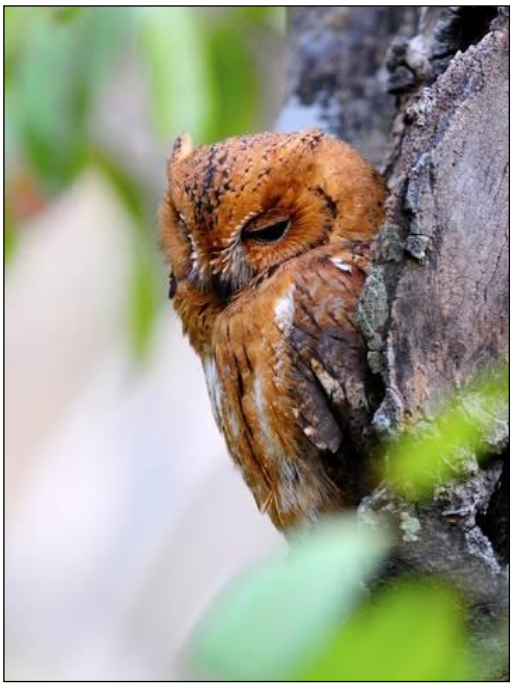
Ring-tailed Lemurs by Markus Lilje

snorkel on the pristine coral reef encircling the island. After snorkelling we will enjoy a scrumptious seafood lunch on the mainland opposite the island, and will then search for the localised Littoral Rock Thrush in the adjacent coastal *Euphorbia* scrub. In the early afternoon, we will return to Tulear by speedboat, where we can rest up before dinner and enjoy a lovely hot shower after our exciting but salty day out at sea.

Day 12: Tulear to Berenty via Fort Dauphin. This morning we will take a short flight to Fort Dauphin (also known as Toliagnaro), in the southeastern corner of the country. Upon arrival, we will transfer to the world-famous private lemur reserve of Berenty. The +- 4-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 *Didierea* trees are diagnostic of the spiny desert. As we near Berenty, the natural habitat is replaced by extensive tracts of sisal plantations, stretching as far as the eye can see. Berenty Lemur Reserve 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.

Tonight we will venture out in search of Torotoroka Scops Owl and the impressive White-browed Hawk-Owl, but may also encounter several species of attractive geckos (including the remarkable Plain and Painted Big-headed Geckos and unique Fish-scaled Gecko).

Day 13: 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. Brown Lemurs occur in large numbers during the day and both White-footed Sportive and Grey Mouse Lemurs are regularly encountered on night walks through the reserve; though the undoubted favourites are the Ring-tailed Lemurs and Verreaux's Sifakas. Whilst the bands of cat-like, quizzical ringtails are often the first to steal visitors' hearts (as well as any spare fruit they may have on their persons!), 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.



Torotoroka Scops Owl by Rich Lindie

A further mammalian highlight of Berenty is visiting the Madagascar Flying Fox roost, where about 300 of these impressive animals, sporting 1.25 metre (4ft) wingspans, spend their day squabbling and presumably sleeping. In addition, we will be on the lookout for the numerous Giant Couas that stroll along the well-cleared paths through the woodland, along with many other woodland birds.



Giant Coua by Rich Lindie

Potential new species we may find here include Reed Cormorant, Peregrine Falcon, Madagascar and Frances's Sparrowhawks, Helmeted Guineafowl, Madagascar Sandgrouse, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk and Alpine Swift.

Day 14: Berenty Lemur Reserve to Fort Dauphin to Tana. We will have a final morning to enjoy and photograph the approachable wildlife in Berenty, as well as visit the well-presented local museum, which displays one of the few complete Elephant-bird eggs in the world. In the afternoon we will then transfer back to Fort Dauphin to connect with our return flight to Tana, where we will spend our final night of the tour.

Day 15: Tana and departure. This morning we will depart for our flights back 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 dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 15;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Snorkelling at Nosy Ve;
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and
- 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/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

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 Highlights tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be reasonably fit and in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot, and may require walking for several hours at a time. Generally, walking will be easy and on flat ground, however, some trails in the rainforest can be quite steep and slippery, especially after rain. 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.

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 15 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.**