Madagascar

Remote

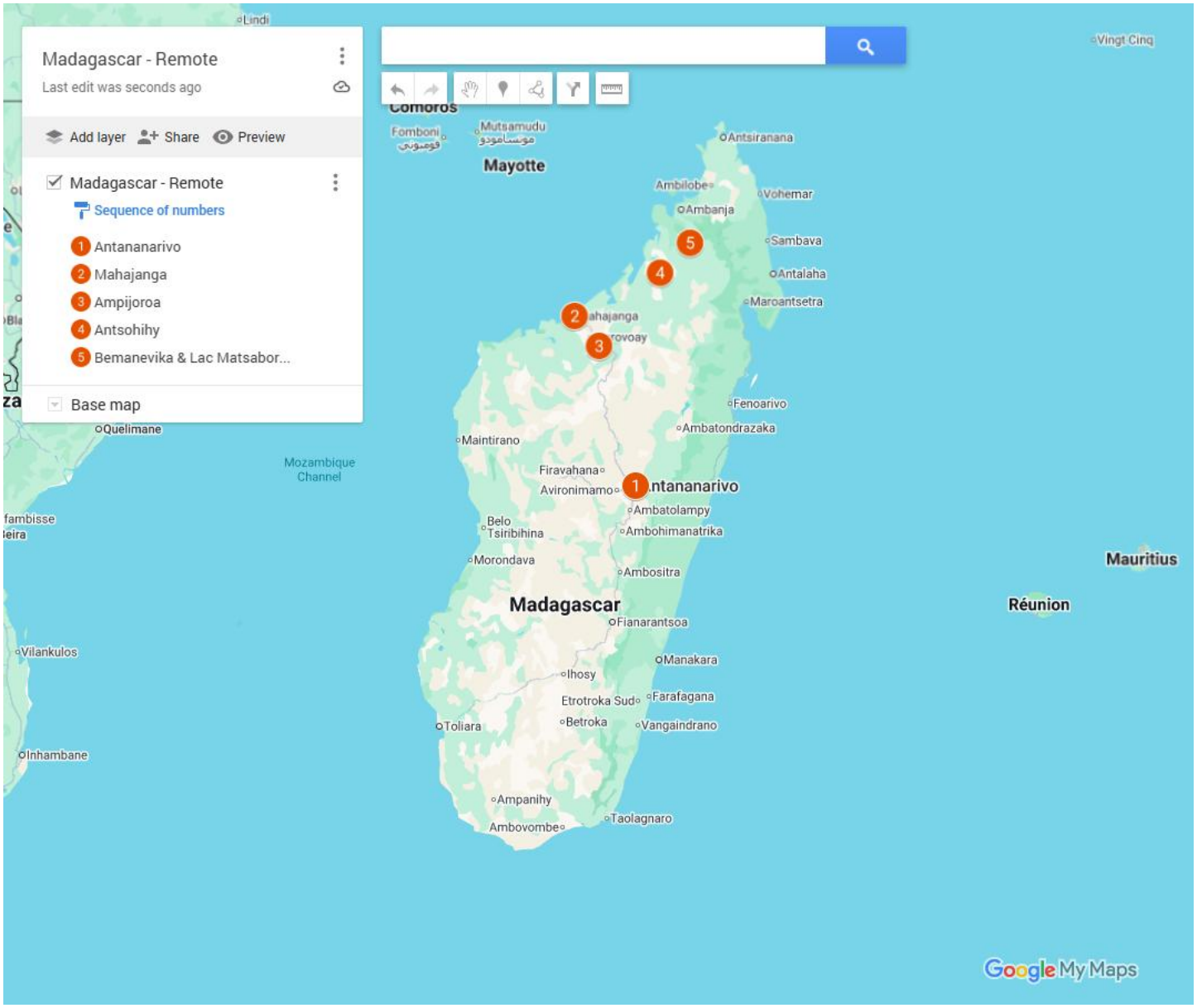


Madagascan Pochard by Reece Dodd

This tour of remote northern Madagascar is dedicated to finding several rarely encountered endemics. We'll start birding in the dry deciduous forests of the Ampijoroa Forest Station located in the Ankarafantsika Reserve for the highly localised Van Dam's Vanga, White-breasted Mesite and Schlegel's Asity. Then it is off am an adventure to reach the remote Lac Matsaborimena, which will be the undoubted highlight of the trip as we search for Madagascan Pochard, the critically endangered Slender-billed Flufftail, declining Malagasy Harrier and rare Red Owl.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Antananarivo (Tana)**
Day 2	**Antananarivo; flight to Mahajanga, boat excursion on Betsiboka Delta**
Day 3	**Mahajanga to Ampijoroa Forest Station (Ankarafantsika Reserve)**
Day 4	**Ampijoroa Forest Station (Ankarafantsika Reserve)**
Day 5	**Ampijoroa to Antsohihy**
Day 6	**Antsohihy to Bemanevika Village**
Days 7 & 8	**Lac Matsaborimena & surrounds**
Day 9	**Bemanevika Village to Antsohihy**
Day 10	**Antsohihy to Mahajanga**
Day 11	**Mahajanga; flight to Antananarivo**
Day 12	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Bernier's Teal by Adam Riley

Betsiboka Delta. We'll explore part of the Betsiboka Delta from on a motorised boat. 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 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) and Madagascar Harrier-Hawk.

Mahajanga area. Time permitting, we may visit a seasonal pan near to Mahajanga that often harbours a variety of shorebirds that usually include Black-winged Stilt and Kittlitz's Plover and, if we are very fortunate, the rare, endemic Madagascar 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 Madagascar Cisticola, Olive Bee-eater, Madagascar Mannikin and Red Fody.

Ampijoroa Forest Station (Ankarafantsika Reserve). Ampijoroa Forest Station is a ranger base and research centre that also provides hutted and camping accommodation situated in the extensive deciduous forests of the Ankarafantsika Reserve. 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.

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, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascar Hoopoe, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Green Pigeon and Malagasy Turtle Dove.

We'll walk 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



White-breasted Mesite by Daniel Danckwerts



Van Dam's Vanga by Keith Valentine

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 Madagascar Ibis, Madagascar Buttonquail, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascar 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 Madagascar Fish Eagle, a pair of which is resident here. Wintering Sooty and Eleonora's Falcons are sometimes seen hunting overhead, while White-throated Rail, Humblot's Heron, Madagascar 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.

Lac Matsaborimena & surrounds. The rediscovery of the Madagascan Pochard was made here in November 2006. The pochard was only known from the vast Lac Aloatra but was last seen there in the 1970's until a fisherman captured a bird alive in 1991. Since then, the species had been considered extinct until this monumental find was made by a Peregrine Fund researcher whilst studying Malagasy Harriers, which occur in healthy numbers in the area. The total population of these pochards is estimated to be as few as 60 birds, including those already part of a captive breeding programme. BirdLife International and the Peregrine Fund are working closely



Schlegel's Asity by Glen Valentine

together with the local community to conserve this species and proceeds from our stay will be used in this conservation programme.



Malagasy Harrier by Daniel Danckwerts

To reach the "pochard lake" we still need to drive a short distance across open grassland and when the road finally peters out we will hike the final distance. This special area consists of rolling grasslands with patches of forests and here 3 lakes of volcanic origin are situated. Two of the lakes hold open water while the third is a large marsh. The pochards breed on Lac Matsaborimena but also use the nearby open-water lake for foraging. The 86 acre Lac Matsaborimena is surrounded by pristine forest, and even before reaching the lake and looking for the pochard and other waterbirds, superb birding is available. Some of the highlight species of this forest include Red Owl (researchers have radio-collared some individuals and sightings are almost guaranteed), Madagascar Serpent Eagle (a pair has nested here), Madagascan Ibis, Madagascan Wood Rail, Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher, Pitta-like Ground Roller, Forest Rock Thrush, Rand's Warbler, Hook-billed, Blue, Tylas and the rare Pollen's Vanga and Forest Fody (occurs in very good numbers, elsewhere becoming a difficult bird). Mammals recorded here on our previous tour include Western Grey Bamboo Lemur, Common Brown Lemur and the little known Sambirano Avahi. This amazing forest still produces some surprises, so expect the unexpected!

The lake itself supports the Madagascan Pochards and from platforms built along its edge and quiet shores, we can all expect to obtain superb views of this lovely white-eyed duck. The endemic Meller's Duck also occurs in strong numbers, and the population of Madagascan Little Grebe is quite exceptional.

The third marshy lake is also definitely worth exploring, and on Rockjumper's previous visit this produced good numbers of Grey Emutail and Madagascan Snipe, as well as both Madagascan and the extremely rare Slender-billed Flufftails. The surrounding grasslands support arguably the healthiest population of Malagasy Harriers remaining on the island, as well as good numbers of Madagascan Buttonquail, Common and Harlequin Quail, Madagascan Lark and Madagascan Cisticola. Finally, after what promises to be one of the most notable days of your entire birding career, we will return to our camp from where Madagascan and Rainforest Scops Owls call at night and Madagascan Nightjars flit overhead.



Red Owl by Adam Riley

Seasonal Considerations

Madagascar is well-known as being one of the toughest birding tours due to its very hot summer temperatures. Most days of the tour are long and cover difficult terrain at the rainforest sites. The addition of numerous night walks and lengthy travel days means this tour is very tiring.

Summer - Temperatures often reach the high 30°C's (>100°F) daily in late October through March, particularly in the southern and western parts.

It is crucial to be aware that Madagascar has been on a long path of ecological and environmental destruction, and this regression has accelerated dramatically on many fronts since late 2019. Most primary arterial roads are beyond the point of repair, either through a lack of any maintenance, or destruction caused by increasingly powerful and more frequent cyclones. Typical drives that used to take 6 hours are now taking double that time or more.

Internal flight delays and last-minute schedule alterations are to be expected and we may have to re-arrange the tour itinerary due flight schedule changes. 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 will need to embark on long road journeys, or use charter flights if available (these are very expensive). Chartered flights present 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.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	🟥 ⬜ ⬜	Demanding & tiring. Designed for the dedicated lister & serious birder. **Not suitable for inexperienced travellers**, dedicated or avid photographers; inexperienced birders; or anyone with mobility or health challenges.
Birding Ease	🟥 🟨 ⬜	Moderate to difficult. Many low-density targets that may require repeat attempts.
Accommodation	🟥 🟨 ⬜	Generally comfortable standard of hotels & resorts in main cities. Otherwise basic dome tents at Bemanevika.
Walking / Trails	🟥 🟨 ⬜	Some trails in the rainforest can be steep and slippery, especially after rain. Some longer walks may be necessary.
Vehicles / Roads	🟥 ⬜ ⬜	Road conditions are poor. Very long and rough drives are to be expected, more so if flights are delayed/cancelled. Vehicles don't always have functioning air conditioners.
Photography	⬜ 🟨 🟩	Good to very good, opportunities are limited due to time.
Annoyances	🟥 🟨 ⬜	Can be hot to very hot at some sites. Several very long & demanding days. Generally dire & poor state of the Madagascar environment can be very depressing. Electricity supply is variable & cannot be relied on.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 11.
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions & activities;
- Special gratuities;
- 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.

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 you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is 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. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Our Mega tours are fast-paced birding adventures designed for the dedicated lister and serious birder. The focus of the tour is to see as many of the endemics and area specials as possible in the time given.
- Not suitable for inexperienced travellers, dedicated or avid photographers; inexperienced birders; or anyone with mobility or health challenges.
- 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.
- Accommodation is of a generally good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of are clean and comfortable. Some of the accommodations, however, are very basic and less comfortable from than what you have come to expect from the developed world; we will, however, make efforts to make this tour as comfortable

as possible. This applies particularly to the Bemanevika area, where camping facilities are particularly basic, with only Igloo style tents with mattresses and a sleeping bag, and with common ablutions facilities consisting of only a bucket of hot water for showering and portable, chemical toilets.

- In some areas, it can be hot to very hot, especially at midday. We will thus make several early starts in the morning to maximise the most pleasurable time in the field.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins on day 1 in Antananarivo. As this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time before 17:00. The tour concludes after a morning flight from Mahajanga to Antananarivo on day 11.

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.

For international flights the main port of entry is Ivato International Airport, Antananarivo (IATA: TNR).

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.