Madagascar

Comprehensive III

21st October to 11th November 2023 (22 days)

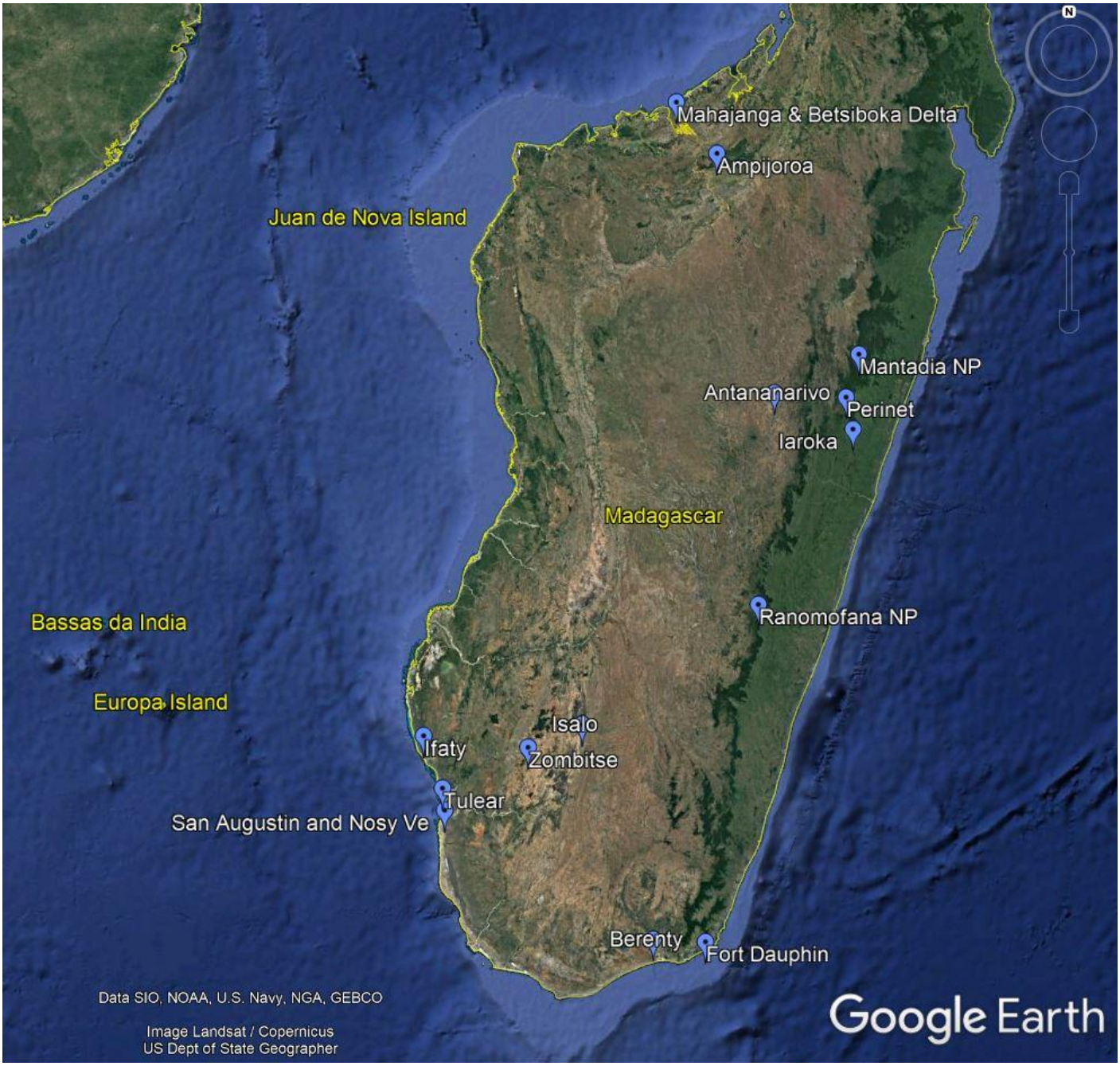


Sickle-billed Vanga by Glen Valentine

We at Rockjumper have an unbeatable reputation in Madagascar, having run more than 100 tours over the past decade to 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.

Itinerary & Map

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


Mahajanga & Betsiboka Delta
Ampijoroa
Juan de Nova Island
Mantadia NP
Antananarivo
Perinet
Iaroka
Madagascar
Ranomofana NP
Bassas da India
Europa Island
Isalo
Ifaty
Zombitse
Tulear
San Augustin and Nosy Ve
Berenty
Fort Dauphin
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
US Dept of State Geographer
Google Earth

Birding sites in detail

This itinerary covers different seasons. Please note the below notations:

*** Summer migrants occurring between late October and early April.**
^ Species that whilst resident, are most easily found between October and March.

Lac Alarobia. This private sanctuary set within the city of Antananarivo 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 Blue-billed Teal, Knob-billed Duck 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.



Meller's Duck by David Hoddinott

Perinet Special Reserve (Analamazaotra). 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.



Cuckoo Roller by Glen Valentine

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.

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.



Rufous-headed Ground Roller by Glen Valentine

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 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.



Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur by Daniel Keith Danckwerts

Mantadia National Park. 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 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.



Helmet Vanga by Keith Valentine

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.



Red-tailed Newtonia by Dubi Shapiro

**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.

Manangotry (Andohahela National Park). In the Andohahela Mountains is a very special and unique area called Manangotry. This region of mid-altitude rainforest has only recently opened up and is the 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.



Verreaux's Sifaka by David Hoddinott

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.

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 and Madagascan Sandgrouse.



Archbold's Newtonia by Keith Valentine

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.

Berenty Preserve. 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. We'll venture out in the evening to search for 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).



Littoral Rock Thrush by Daniel Keith Danckwerts

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 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.

We'll also spend a little time birding 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. White-throated Rail and Baillon's Crake also occur here on occasion and are worth looking out for in the vast wetlands.

Nosy Ve. From Tulear, 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. Depending on time and weather conditions, we may have an opportunity to snorkel on the beautiful coral reef encircling the island.



Red-shouldered Vanga by Glen Valentine

Near San Augustin, we'll enjoy lunch and search for another target species - the localised Littoral Rock Thrush.

La Table. Named after the flat-topped mountain at the edge of town - the habitat of La Table is desolate, commonly known as coral rag scrub, and consists of dense 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.



Brown Mesite by Daniel Keith Danckwerts

Zombitse Forest. We make a stop here 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.

Isalo National Park. This isolated limestone massif has numerous watercourses flowing through the bizarre sandstone formations which act as a magnet to the birds of this dry area. 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 a walk in this picturesque landscape.

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', and we should find a range of fascinating chameleons and frogs (this park is particularly well endowed with frogs, with over 100 species recorded!).



Red-fronted Coua by Adam Riley

In the lower elevation forest, 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.



Pitta-like Ground Roller by David Hoddinott

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

Ampijoroa Forest Station. 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, Madagascan Magpie-Robin, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascan Hoopoe, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascan Green Pigeon and Malagasy Turtle Dove.



Schlegel's Asity by David Hoddinott

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 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.

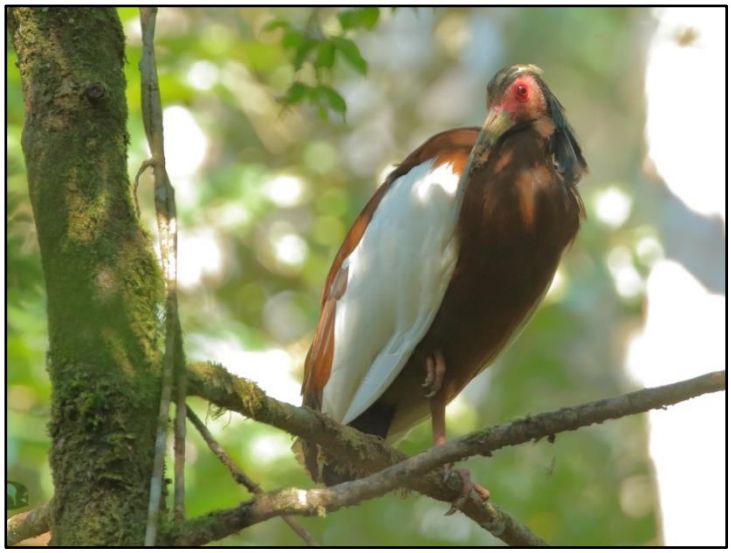
No less than eight species of lemur occur in the near vicinity of the camp and we are likely to be treated to excellent views of the comical Coquerel's Sifaka and Common Brown Lemurs during the day, while at dusk the rare Mongoose Lemur becomes active. Western Avahi (Woolly Lemur), Milne-Edward's Sportive, 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.)



Hook-billed Vanga with prey by David Hoddinott

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 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.

Mahajanga area. A seasonal pan near to Mahajanga 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 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.



Madagascan Ibis by David Hoddinott

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 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) and Madagascan Harrier-Hawk.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate to brisk paced tours suited for those in good health with reasonable level of fitness. Not suited for anyone with mobility challenges or serious medical conditions
Birding Ease		Mostly unchallenging, several difficult rainforest skulkers
Accommodation		Generally decent standard of hotels and resorts. Some more basic lodges are clean and comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Some trails in the rainforest can be steep and slippery, especially after rain. Some longer walks necessary for more localised species. Iaroka hike for Helmet Vanga is tough, but optional.
Vehicles / Roads		Road conditions are challenging, and could involve very long drives if flights are delayed/cancelled. Seas during the boat trip to Nosy Ve Island can be rough.
Photography		Excellent to incredible.
Annoyances		Can be hot to very hot at some sites. Some long and demanding days.

It is critical to be aware that Madagascar has been on a long path of ecological and environmental destruction, but that this regression has increased dramatically on many fronts since late 2019. Many 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 or more.

The southern third of the country is experiencing a severe famine due to drought, exacerbated by the total obliteration of any vegetation cover due to slash and burn agriculture, charcoal production, and logging. The area amounts to little more than a heavily eroded desert with many abandoned rice paddies and ghost towns.

Areas such as Ifaty have seen significant human encroachment into the remnant spiny forest patches, causing an evident decrease in species density and diversity.

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 lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 22;
- 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.**

- This tour requires a reasonable level of fitness, and guests 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.

Seasonal Considerations

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

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

Winter – Temperatures average around 10°C cooler. Days are shorter, which also means that night walks start and end earlier. We don't lose birding time in winter because the cooler temperatures allow both ourselves and birds to remain active for longer in the mornings. The cooler temperatures and shorter days make the winter tours far less tiring.

As noted in the text above, there are seasonal variations to the bird list. The Palaearctic and Intra-African migrants that we would normally find in spring are not around during the winter (most shorebirds, including Crab-plover and Madagascar Pratincole. Raptors, Sooty and Eleonora's Falcon). Ground Rollers are particularly tricky in winter - of the 5 species endemic to the island, only Long-tailed Ground Roller in the dry south-west would be likely; any of the rainforest species would be highly unexpected.

Larger mammals are all active throughout the year and can be found with the same likelihood during either time period. Some of the smaller mammals, however, are totally inactive in the dry winter, when they estivate and are highly unlikely to be found - these include Tenrecs, Dwarf and Mouse Lemur species - which are never easy to find even under optimal conditions. Reptiles and frogs are better represented in the spring, when it warms up and is more likely to rain. Chameleons are around throughout the year, as are the amazing Leaf-tailed Geckos, while a few snakes and other lizards can be seen in winter.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 has been set aside as an arrival day, so you are free to arrive at any time. 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.

Internal flight delays and last-minute schedule alterations are an inherent risk on any tour to Madagascar, 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 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).

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. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: Visa HQ for Travel

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