Madagascar

Mega



Helmet Vanga by Keith Valentine

At Rockjumper, we've built an outstanding reputation in Madagascar, having led over 150 tours to the world's fourth-largest island in the past decade. Often called the "Eighth Continent" due to its size and extraordinary biodiversity, Madagascar is a truly unique destination. Our Mega Tour is designed to target nearly every single one of the island's endemic bird species. We'll explore all the key habitats, building an impressive list of sightings that includes not just birds, but also lemurs, reptiles, chameleons, and frogs.

Rainforest highlights include the breathtaking Masoala Peninsula, the remote Montagne d'Ambre, and the renowned Ranomafana and Andasibe-Mantadia National Parks. Here, we'll search for iconic species like Helmet, Pollen's, and Bernier's Vangas, all four rainforest ground rollers, Amber Mountain Rock Thrush, Brown Mesite, Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity, Velvet Asity, and the elusive Madagascar Serpent Eagle.

One of the tour's standout experiences will be a visit to the remote Lac Matsaborimena, where we'll look for rare and endangered species such as the Madagascan Pochard, Slender-billed Flufftail, Malagasy Harrier, and the elusive Red Owl. We'll also explore the dry deciduous forests of Ankarafantsika, home to highly localized species like Van Dam's Vanga, White-breasted Mesite, and Schlegel's Asity.

No trip to Madagascar is complete without a visit to the spiny forests of the southwest - an otherworldly landscape teeming with remarkable species like the Long-tailed Ground Roller and Subdesert Mesite. Off-the-beaten-track stops will include Lac Kinkony, where we hope to find the elusive Sakalava Rail, and the Andohahela Mountains, stronghold of the nearly mythical Red-tailed Newtonia. Nearly every plant and animal on this island is found nowhere else on Earth. But with much of its unique habitat threatened by ongoing deforestation, Madagascar is not only a must-visit destination - it's also a critical region in urgent need of conservation.

Itinerary & Map

Mega

Day 1	Arrival in Antananarivo (Tana)
Day 2	Antananarivo to Andasibe (Perinet)
Days 3 & 4	Andasibe-Mantadia National Park & Analamazaotra National Park
Day 5	Andasibe to Antananarivo; flight to Fort Dauphin
Day 6	Fort Dauphin to Berenty via Andohahela National Park (Manangotry)
Day 7	Berenty Lemur Reserve
Day 8	Berenty Lemur Reserve to Fort Dauphin; flight to Tulear, transfer to Ifaty
Day 9	Ifaty
Day 10	Ifaty to Tulear, Nosy Ve & Anakao (San Augustin)
Day 11	Tulear, flight to Antananarivo
Day 12	Antananarivo to Ranomafana National Park
Days 13 & 14	Ranomafana National Park
Day 15	Ranomafana National Park to Antananarivo
Day 16	Antananarivo; flight to Antsiranana, transfer to Montagne d'Ambre
Day 17	Montagne d'Ambre
Day 18	Montagne d'Ambre to Antsohihy
Day 19	Antsohihy to Bemanevika Village
Day 20	Lac Matsaborimena & surrounds
Day 21	Beleanana to Antsohihy
Day 22	Antsohihy to Ampijoroa via Mahajanga
Day 23	Ampijoroa Forest Station (Ankarafantsika Reserve)
Day 24	Ampijoroa to Mahajanga
Day 25	Mahajanga to Makary Village (Lac Kinkony)
Day 26	Lac Kinkony
Day 27	Makary to Mahajanga
Day 28	Betsiboka Delta to Mahajanga; flight to Antananarivo
Day 29	Antananarivo; flight to Maroantsetra
Day 30	Maroantsetra to Masoala Peninsula
Days 31 & 32	Masoala Peninsula
Day 33	Masoala Peninsula to Maroantsetra; flight to Antananarivo
Day 34	Final departure


Antsiranana
Montagne d'Ambre
Bemanevika & Lac Matsaborimena
Antsohihy
Maroantsetra
Masoala Peninsula
Mahajanga
Lac Kinkony
Ampijoroa
Antananarivo
Andasibe
Ranomofana NP
Ifaty
Tulear
Nosy Ve
Berenty
Fort Dauphin
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
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 herons. 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 heron's 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, Madagascar Wagtail, Malagasy White-eye, Madagascar Mannikin and Red Fody.



Meller's Duck by David Hoddinott

Analamazaotra 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 Analamazaotra National Park and we will search for such specials as Madagascar Flufftail, the elusive Madagascar Wood Rail, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, scarce Greater Vasa Parrot, vociferous but retiring Madagascar Cuckoo*, Madagascar Spinetail, brilliant Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Cuckooshrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascar 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, tetrakas and allies, and the near endemic 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.



Rufous-headed Ground Roller by Glen Valentine

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

Whilst in the Andasibe 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 Brown and Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs, while we will also search known roosting sites for the nocturnal but inquisitive Common 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 Andasibe 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.



Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur by Daniel Danckwerts

We will search for and should find Crossley's 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 Common Flat-tail Gecko, the aptly named Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko and the Southern Flat-tail Gecko, which looks as though its body has been adorned with moss.



Cryptic Warbler by David Hoddinott

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. Andasibe-Mantadia National Park lies a short distance from Andasibe, protecting a larger expanse of primary forest at a somewhat higher altitude. Though it has only recently been opened to the public, Andasibe-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 several 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 Ibis, Henst's Goshawk, Pitta-like^ and Short-legged Ground Rollers^, Crossley's Vanga, Common Sunbird-Asity, Common and Dark Newtonias, Wedge-tailed, Green, Stripe-throated and Common Jeries, Rand's Warbler, 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 Madagascar 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 Andasibe-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.



Red-tailed Newtonia by Dubi Shapiro

Andohahela National Park (Manangotry). In the Andohahela Mountains is a very special and unique area called Manangotry. This region of mid-altitude rainforest has only recently opened and is the only site where one has a reasonable chance of seeing the recently rediscovered and highly localised Red-tailed Newtonia. A special lemur that we may encounter here is the Red Collared Lemur, a beautiful and localised species that can only be seen in these south-eastern forests.

**Reaching this site depends on local road conditions and logistical issues.

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



Verreaux's Sifaka by David Hoddinott

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 dimunutive Madagascar Buttonquail as they scurry through the leaf litter. Potential new species we may also find here include Grey-headed Lovebird, Hook-billed Vanga, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk^, Helmeted Guineafowl and Madagascar Sandgrouse.



Giant Coua by Daniel Danckwerts

Berenty Reserve. The 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. We'll venture out in the evening to search for Torotoroka Scops Owl and the impressive White-browed Owl but may also encounter a host of other nocturnal creatures such as the strange Lesser^ and Greater Hedgehog Tenrecs^, the huge Madagascar Hissing Cockroach and several species of attractive geckos.

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 the ultra-low-density Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, Crested, Running and Red-capped Couas (represented here by the distinctive green-capped race), Madagascar Hoopoe, Lafresnaye's Vanga, Archbold's Newtonia, unique and melodious Thamnornis, Subdesert Brush Warbler and Sakalava Waver.



Littoral Rock Thrush by Daniel Danckwerts

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 Southern 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 Madagascar Plover, while wetlands and salt pans may hold numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Black-winged Stilt, Kittlitz's and Three-banded Plovers, assorted migratory waders, Humblot's Heron 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-plovers* roosting on the sandbars here and White-fronted Plovers on the shoreline. 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 Anakao (San Augustin), we'll enjoy lunch and search for another

target species - the localised Littoral Rock Thrush.

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!).



Hook-billed Vanga with prey by David Hoddinott

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, Madagascar 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.



Pitta-like Ground Roller by David Hoddinott

One of the country's last remaining highland marshes exists just within the national park's limits and we will venture here one afternoon to find dwindling and endangered endemics including Madagascar Rail, Grey Emutail, Madagascar Snipe and the more common and widespread Madagascar 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.



Red-fronted Coua by Adam Riley

Antsiranana. This small town, formerly called Diego Suarez is located on the northern tip of Madagascar. The town was originally named in honour of an early Portuguese explorer who landed and settled in the area. The towns current name means, 'Where there is salt'. It has an incredible natural harbour that served as a French naval base until 1973.

Montagne d'Ambre. Covering an area of 18 200ha, this park receives a large volume of rainfall relative to the surrounding area and supports some really luscious rainforest. Montagne d'Ambre is an extremely rewarding site as it combines easy access with a well laid-out trail system. Here we will search for specialities that include the beautiful and localised Amber Mountain Rock Thrush (its global distribution restricted to roughly 380km^2 on the Amber Mountain massif), Madagascan Ibis, Henst's Goshawk, Pitta-like Ground Roller, Dark Newtonia and White-throated Oxylabes. Other more widespread rainforest species that occur here include the lovely White-throated Rail, Madagascan Blue Pigeon, Cuckoo-roller, Red-tailed and Blue Vanga, Madagascan Cuckooshrike and Nelicourvi Weaver, amongst many others.

Target mammals comprise specials such as Sanford's Brown and Crowned Lemurs and the northern subspecies of Ring-tailed Mongoose. Night walks will afford us the opportunity to search for Ankarana Sportive Lemur, Amber Mountain Fork-marked Lemur and Northern Rufous Mouse Lemur. Falanouc, a rare nocturnal carnivore specialised at catching earthworms, has been seen here; however, a lot of luck will be required to see this elusive mammal, as it will be to find Red Owl, which has also been recorded from the park.



White-throated Oxylabes by Daniel Danckwerts

Montagne d'Ambre to Antsohihy. We'll keep our eyes open on this long drive for Malagasy Harrier, Madagascan Buzzard and Malagasy Kestrel.

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



Madagascan Pochard by Reece Dodd

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.



Malagasy Harrier by Daniel Danckwerts

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

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 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.



White-breasted Mesite by Daniel Danckwerts

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*.)



Schlegel's Asity by Glen Valentine

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.

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.

Mahajanga to Makary Village, Lac Kinkony. After crossing the vast Betsiboka Delta by ferry, we'll travel in 4x4 vehicles to Makary village on the edge of Lake Kinkony. Makary has become famous in birding circles as the site for the very rare and recently rediscovered Sakalava Rail. Known previously from only a few sightings at three different locations in Western Madagascar, this lake is extremely reliable. We will be one of the first organised bird tour groups to visit this remote area.



Van Dam's Vanga by Keith Valentine

En route, we'll stop at Katsepy, a good site for the critically endangered Crowned Sifaka, and we can expect superb views and photographic opportunities of these beautiful creatures. En route, we will look out for Madagascan Pratincole at various river crossings, while Madagascan Sandgrouse is also regularly encountered.

Lac Kinkony. We will venture out in dugout canoes arranged by the local community, and with the help of local guides, we will search for our main target, the Sakalava Rail. The rails inhabit reedbeds with shallow, muddy edges and after a careful and quiet approach, we should observe pairs feeding or sunning themselves. The birds are well known to the local villagers and are not hunted because of their small size and newly acquired fame! Sadly, due to draining and uncontrolled burning of swamps, the rails' habitat is nevertheless decreasing at an alarming rate. Birdlife International is working closely with the local communities in preserving reedbed habitats throughout this area.



Sakalava Rail by Adam Riley

Other species that Rockjumper has recorded at this site on previous visits include Humblot's Heron, Black Egret, Little Bittern (fluffy fledgelings observed!), Glossy Ibis, Comb Duck, Hottentot Teal, White-throated Rail, Purple Swamphen, Malagasy Kingfisher and Madagascan Swamp Warbler. In surrounding dry woodlands, we will seek out Banded Kestrel, Madagascan Green Pigeon, Long-billed Greenbul, Chabert's, White-headed, Hook-billed and Sickle-billed Vangas, Namaqua Dove and Sakalava Weaver. Lemurs still occur in good numbers and we will search for the very rare Van der Decken's Sifaka as well as Mongoose Lemur and if we are lucky, Western Grey Bamboo Lemur. At night we will spotlight for Northern Rufous Mouse Lemur and Coquerel's Dwarf Lemur, as well as Torotoroka Scops Owl and Madagascar Nightjar.

We will once again camp in a community campsite near the village and lakeshore, and the sunsets from our camp are nothing but spectacular!



Sickle-billed Vanga by Glen Valentine

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.

Maroantsetra. This is a small fishing village in the remote northeast of the island. Our time here will be spent birding the coastline and mudflats in the area where some interesting

species could be seen and may include some appealing waders like the extraordinary Crab-plover, Greater and Tibetan Sand Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot. The latter was discovered here by Rockjumper Birding Tours and is a new species for the Madagascar list. We will also enjoy other good birds around our accommodation including Malagasy Green Sunbird, White-throated Rail and Mascarene Martin. Interesting herps abound and may include the huge Tomato Frogs and brilliant Panther Chameleons. The bizarre Lowland Streaked Tenrec also occurs in the vicinity of our hotel.



Aye-Aye by Keith Valentine

We will make a special evening excursion to look for one of the most sought after and rare mammals on earth, the enigmatic Aye-Aye. Cloaked in a mysterious and unfortunate Malagasy superstition, this strange creature will be at the centre of our walk into the secondary forest on the outskirts of the town. Finding this creature may take a little persistence, but the reward certainly justifies the effort!

Maroantsetra to Masoala. To reach the fabled Masoala Peninsula National Park requires a short boat trip, where we'll keep our eyes peeled for any seabirds such as Greater Crested, Lesser Crested and Roseate Terns and possibly even Brown Noddy.

After setting foot on the peninsula and freshening up, we can begin our exploration of this amazing area. Birding around our lodge may offer up Blue Coua, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascan Pratincole and Greater Vasa Parrot. This evening, we will search for the delightful Rainforest Scops Owl, a species that resulted from the recent splitting of the scops owl on Madagascar into the aforementioned species and the dry country Torotoroka Scops Owl.



Chabert's Vanga by Keith Valentine

Masoala Peninsula. The Masoala Peninsula National Park provides a sanctuary for some of Madagascar's most endangered species and also protects the largest area of lowland and sub-montane rainforest remaining on the island. We will be spending two full days in this remote area searching the narrow trails that lead through the forest for some of the region's rarest and most seldom sighted wildlife. The lowland rainforest will give us a chance at finding two of the most sought-after species of vanga, namely Helmet and Bernier's and these will form the basis of our explorations. The Helmet Vanga is an extremely classy bird that is unmistakable in appearance and is often first located by its call. Bernier's Vanga is much trickier to locate, with the males looking somewhat similar to large crestless Drongos; the females, however, are diagnostic in

their mostly ginger, banded plumage. We will be searching the mixed feeding flocks carefully for this species in and amongst the other vangas, including Blue, Hook-billed, Rufous, Tylas, Nuthatch and White-headed. Red-breasted Coua, a species that is tough to find on the main comprehensive tour, is fairly easily found along the forest paths. The secretive Brown Mesite is another uncommon species that we will look for in dark areas of forest as it walks quietly across the leaf litter. Four members of the ground roller family are also present in this area, with the shy Scaly Ground Roller being more reliable here than anywhere else on the island. The others are the fantastic Pitta-like, Rufous-headed and Short-legged Ground Rollers.



Red Ruffed Lemur by Glen Valentine

Our other targets include two highly endangered species that are very challenging to observe, namely Madagascan Serpent-Eagle and Red Owl (in case we missed them earlier). The serpent-eagle was rediscovered in this area of Madagascar and ranks as one of the rarest raptors in the world! It is a species that inhabits pristine rainforest and often perches motionless for long periods, making it very difficult to find. The owl only occurs in low numbers and is, of course, nocturnal, hence our chances of observing this species are unfortunately slim. The little-known and rarely recorded Dusky Tetraka has also been reported from these lush forests but remains a rather mythical species! As far as mammals are concerned, the highly secretive and endangered Aye-Aye is a possibility; however, we will need to be exceptionally lucky to obtain a view of this most bizarre creature. Other remarkable mammals that we may encounter include Red Ruffed Lemur (regarded as one of the best looking of the world's lemurs!), White-fronted Brown and Eastern Fork-marked Lemurs, Lowland Streaked and Greater Hedgehog Tenrecs, quarrelsome Madagascar Flying Foxes and Madagascar's largest predator, the elusive Fossa. The spectacular scenery of the peninsula also offers up some excellent photographic opportunities and we will certainly make good use of this during our stay here.



Bernier's Teal 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.



Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity by Keith Valentine

Summer - Temperatures often reach the high 30°C's (>100°F) daily 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 unexpected.

Larger mammals are all active throughout the year and can be found with the same likelihood during either season. 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.

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. The drive from Antananarivo to Ranomafana National Park is so poor that it would take an entire day in either direction, hence we now use charter flights instead.

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.

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	🟥 🟨 ⬜	Fast to brisk paced tour suited for those in good health with very good level of fitness & stamina. Not suited for anyone with mobility challenges or serious medical conditions.
Birding Ease	⬜ 🟨 ⬜	Moderate, several difficult rainforest skulkers that may require repeat efforts. Target focussed trip.
Accommodation	🟥 🟨 🟩	Comfortable standard of hotels & resorts in contrasted with more basic lodges & basic camping.
Walking / Trails	🟥 🟨 ⬜	Some trails in the rainforest can be steep & slippery, especially after rain. Some longer walks necessary for more localised species.
Vehicles / Roads	🟥 ⬜ ⬜	Road conditions are poor. Very long & rough drives are to be expected, more so if flights are delayed/cancelled. Vehicles don't always have functioning air conditioners. Seas during the boat trip to Nosy Ve Island can be rough. Charter flights used for Masola Peninsula.
Photography	⬜ ⬜ 🟩	Excellent to incredible.
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

This tour is made available through our Tailor-made tours department. To explore this offering further for pricing, precise day to day itinerary, inclusions & exclusions, or to tailor the tour to your personal requirements, please contact our Tailor-made team on tailormade@rockjumper.com

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.

- **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.
- 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 to locate some of the more localised species.
- 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, 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 Bealanana and Makary, 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.
- 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).
- In some areas, it can be hot to very hot, especially at midday. We will thus make several early starts to maximise the most pleasurable time in the field. Many days are long and demanding.
- If you are a more relaxed birder preferring an even-tempered tour, then please consider an alternate tour option.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour starts on day 1 in Antananarivo and concludes after breakfast on day 34 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.

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.