

Trip Report

Madagascar Birding and Wildlife Tour 25 September- 10 October 2023

Text and photos by Dayne Braine

The interests in the group varied from birds to general natural history.

135 species of birds were seen of which 79 are endemics

19 species of mammals were seen

25 species of reptiles and amphibians were seen

Day 1: Antananarivo

John, Hilary, Rebecca and Robert were collected at the airport and we settled into our accommodation a 5-minute drive from the airport.

Some of the common bird species were picked up in and around the garden. These included, Common Waxbill, Madagascar Munia, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar Bulbul and African Stonechat.

Day 2: Antananarivo to Andasibe

An early start saw us on the road towards Andasibe. Along the way we picked up a few species around the rice paddies such as Rock Dove, Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Black Heron, Dimorphic Egret, Plain Martin, Pied Crow and Common Myna.

A stop along a large river yielded our only Madagascar Pratincole for the trip as well as one of many Common Sandpipers.

Once we had checked in and had some lunch at our accommodation near Andasibe we looked through our garden and found Crested Drongo, Madagascar Fody, Madagascar White-eye, Madagascar Wagtail, Side-striped and Four-coloured Day Geckos.

In the late afternoon we headed to the VOI reserve and added Blue Coua, Madagascar Paradise-flycatcher, Rainforest Scops Owl and Common Jery. We also saw our first Common Brown Lemur and a few reptiles such as Parson's Chameleon, Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko, as well as the bizarre-looking Giraffe Weevil.

Day 3: Andasibe

Today we had a morning in the Analamazoatra Reserve, followed by a visit to the Lemur Island at Vakona and a nightwalk in the VOI reserve. Some more interesting species were added including Madagascar Palm Swift, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Madagascar Coucal, Madagascar Cuckoo, Common Moorhen, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher, Ashy Cuckooshrike, Common Newtonia, Tylas, Red-tailed, Nuthatch, Chabert, Blue, Hook-billed and White-headed Vangas! Further we added Souimanga and Malagasy Sunbirds, Nelicourvi Weaver, Stripe-throated Jery, White-throated Oxylabes, Long-billed Bernieria, Spectacled Tetraka, Malagasy Brush Warbler and Madagascar Starling.

Quite a few more mammals and reptiles were seen through the course of the day and night such as the infamous Indri (the largest of the living Lemurs) with its whale-like call echoing through the forest, Diademed Sifaka, Greater Bamboo Lemur, Goodman's Mouse Lemur, Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur and Red Ruffed Lemurs (Lemur Island), Lowland Streaked Tenrec, Brown Leaf and Big-nosed Chameleons, Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko, *Boophis madagascariensis* and *laevis*.

Day 4: Andasibe to Antsirabe

Today was a long travel day enroute towards Ranomafana. A few repeat birds adding only Striated Heron along the way.

Day 5: Antsirabe to Ranomafana

Another travel day towards Ranomafana added several new species including Hamerkop Black-crowned Night Heron, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Cisticola, Mascarene Martin, Madagascar Nightjar and Yellow-billed Kite.

After a late arrival we headed straight for an hour's nightwalk which got us Brown Mouse Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur, Short-nosed and O'Shannessy's Chameleons.

Day 6: Ranomafana

This morning was spent in Ranomafana which is the only place to see the Golden Bamboo Lemur, the reason for the creation of the park.

We managed to add a few more rainforest species such as the stunning Pitta-like Ground-roller, Velvet Asity, Rand's Warbler, Collared Nightjar, Madagascar Buttonquail and of course the Golden Bamboo Lemur.

Day 7: Ranomafana to Isalo

Another driving day but with a stop at Anja Park enroute to break the journey a bit.

Today's birds added to the list were Red-billed Teal, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Madagascar Hoopoe, Grey-headed Lovebird and Madagascar Lark.

We saw our first Ring-tailed lemurs and Oustalet's Chameleons.

Day 8: Isalo

A hike along the top of the Isalo towards the vegetated gorge was very scenic and geologically interesting but the bird life was sparse. The life returned slightly when we entered the gorge seeing a lot of the usual suspects but adding Madagascar Buzzard, Benson's Rock Thrush, Verreaux's Sifaka and Striped Chameleon.

Day 9: Isalo to Ifaty

We left the Isalo massif behind and headed west towards the spiny forests around Ifaty with a break at Zombitse Park. The first of many Namaqua Doves were seen as the habitat changed.

A few nice birds we saw here included Giant and Coquerel's Couas. We flushed a Madagascar Crested Ibis which, unfortunately, none of us managed to see as it flew into the dry deciduous forest.

Furthermore, we saw White-browed Owl, Cuckoo-roller, Lesser Vasa Parrot with the star of the show being the range-restricted Appert's Tetraka. Of other interest we saw Madagascar Three-eyed Lizards, Standing's Day Gecko, Madagascar Birdwing, Flatid Leaf Insects and Blue Swallowtail. We saw our first Black-winged Stilt as we neared our destination.

Day 10: Ifaty's Spiny Forest

Today was an action-packed day that ended with an evening flight back to Tana to catch our connecting flight to Mahajanga the following day.

A very early start got us running into my favourite part of Madagascar, the spiny forests. We then saw a few waders on the mudflats and headed to the table top outside of Toliar for some final birding before dinner and our flight.

We happily added some very good species such as Subdesert Mesite, Running, Green-capped, Crested and Verreaux's Couas, Long-tailed Ground-roller, Archibold's Newtonia, Red-shouldered, Lafresnaye's and Sickle-billed Vangas, Sakalava Weaver, Thamnormis, Sub-desert Brush Warbler, Madagascar, Kittlitz's, White-fronted and Greater Sand Plovers, Greater Flamingo, Western Reef Egret, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Greater painted Snipe, Curlew Sandpiper and Common Greenshank. The only mammals today were White-footed Sportive Lemur and a surprise Ring-tailed Mongoose crossing the road on our way to the airport.

Day 11: Tana to Ankarafantsika

We arrived in Mahajanga early in the morning and headed straight for Ankarafantsika. We had an afternoon boat cruise on Lake Ravlobe. Today's highlights included White-faced Whistling Duck, Madagascar Green Pigeon, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, African Darter, the critically endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle as well as Western Girdled Lizard, Madagascar Spiny-tailed Iguana, Tropical House Gecko and Coquerel's Sifaka.

Day 12: Ankarafantsika

The dry deciduous forest of Ankarafantsika harbours lots of interesting life. On the bird front we saw White-breasted Mesite, Humblot's Heron, Schlegel's Asity and Van Dam's Vanga. We also added some good mammals such as Western Woolly Lemur, Milne Edwards Sportive Lemur, and reptiles including Big-headed and Ebenau's Leaf-tailed Geckos, Giant Green Day Gecko, Golden Mouse Lemur and Rhinoceros Chameleon.

Day 13: Ankarafantsika to Mahajanga

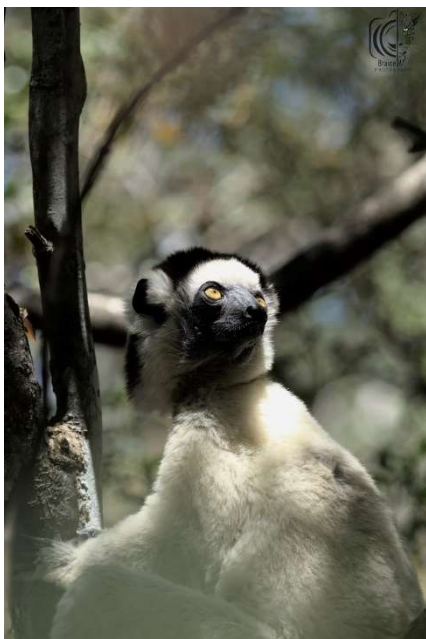
A short walk before departing got us a Rufous Vanga which had evaded us so far.

Day 14: Mahajanga to Tana

A pre-sunrise boat trip took us into the Betsiboka Delta in search of two rare species. We managed to get both Bernier's Teal and Madagascar Sacred Ibis. Other birds included Lesser Flamingo, Malagasy Swift, Grey Heron, Common Ringed Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Sanderling, Terek Sandpiper, Little Tern and Lesser Crested Tern.

Day 15: Tana - Depart

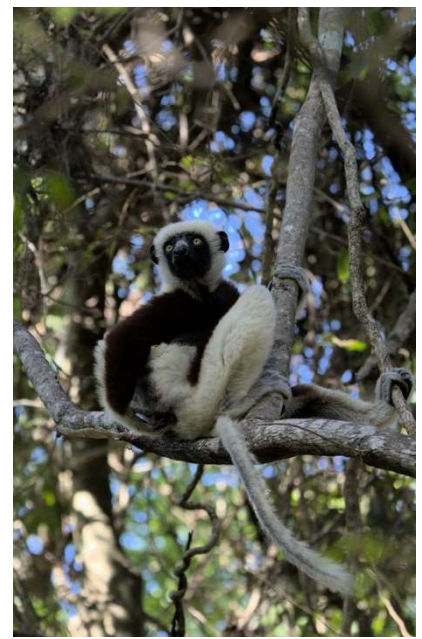
We had time for one last visit before flights commenced. And a visit to Tsarasaotra is compulsory! Here we picked up Blue-billed Teal, Meller's Duck, Comb Duck, Madagascar Pond Heron and Madagascar Swamp Warbler.



Verreaux's Sifaka



Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur



Coquerel's Sifaka



Madagascar Magpie-Robin



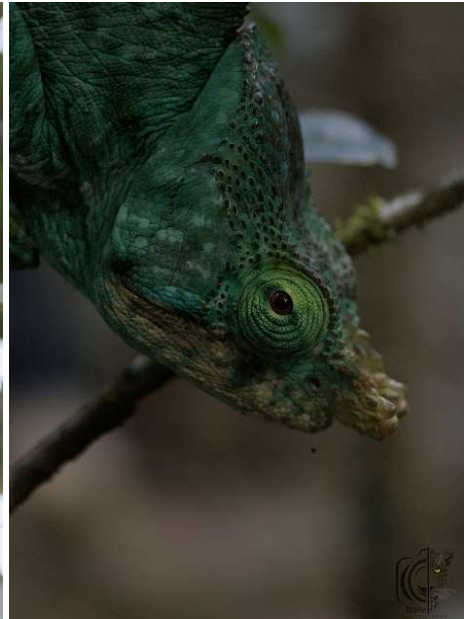
Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur



Madagascar Fish Eagle



Nuthatch Vanga



Parson's Chameleon



Little Tern



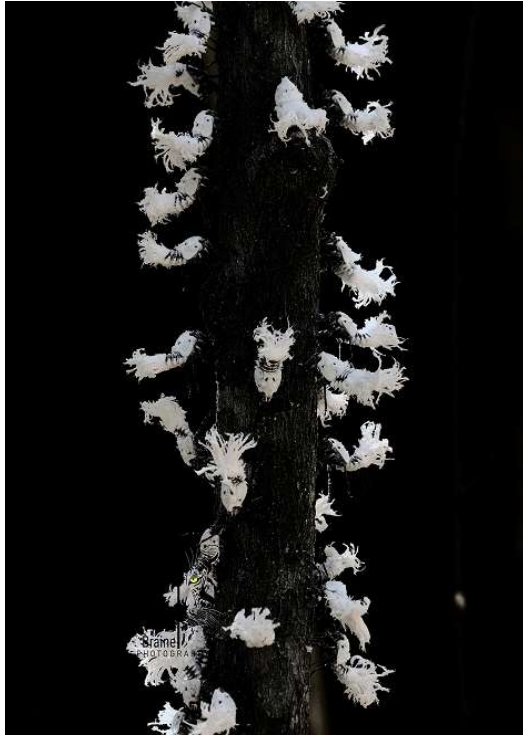
Thamnornis



Blue Coua



Red-capped (Green-capped) Coua



Flatid leaf-bug



Madagascar Day Gecko



Bernier's Teal



Madagascar Sacred Ibis



Madagascar Buzzard



Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher



Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher



Madagascar Kingfisher



Collared Nightjar



Female Malagasy Sunbird



Lowland Streaked Tenrec



Appert's Tetraka



Long-billed Bernieria



Nelicourvi Weaver



Spectacled Tetraka



Mascarene Martin



Red-shouldered Vanga



Rufous Vanga



White-footed Sportive Lemur



Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur



Golden Bamboo Lemur



Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur



Schlegel's Asity



Diademed Sifaka



Common Brown Lemur



Madagascar Spiny-tailed Iguana



Bright-eyed Frog



Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko



Giraffe Weevil



White-breasted Mesite



Subdesert Mesite



Long-tailed Ground-Roller



Pitta-like Ground-Roller