

Tour Report Madagascar with Mike Dilger 11 – 26 September 2025

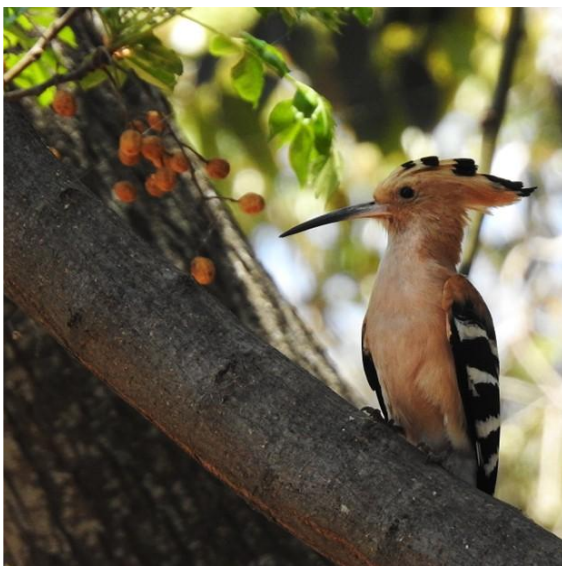
Giraffe-necked weevil



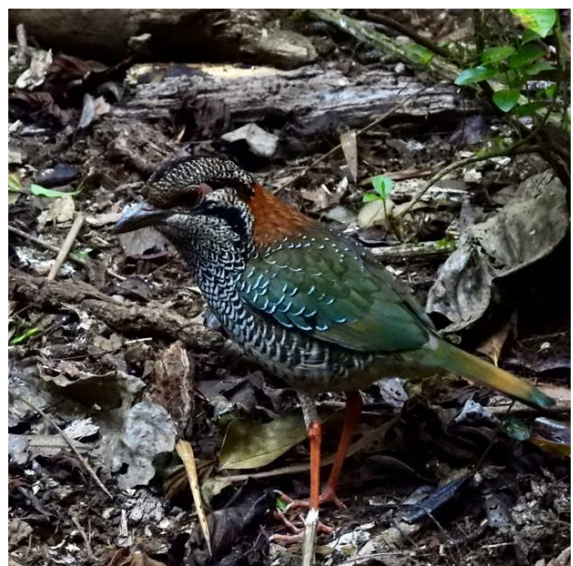
Golden bamboo lemur



Madagascar hoopoe



Scaly round roller



Compiled by Mike Dilger

Tour Leaders: Mike Dilger (MD) & Harry Rakotosalama (HR) with seven guests

Thursday / Friday 11 & 12 September 2025

Day 0:

Travel Days: London Heathrow T4 to Nairobi, Kenya (overnight), and Ivato International Airport in Antananarivo, Madagascar. Arrival at Relais des Plateaux

Tour-leader Mike Dilger (MD) met up with four of the seven guests at Heathrow T4, with the final three members making their own way from both Australia and elsewhere in the United Kingdom respectively. The plane for Nairobi left a little late, but the group nevertheless arrived almost on time in Kenya's capital and early on in the morning, before taking the opportunity to relax in the transit lounge. While waiting for our connecting flight to Antananarivo, a spot of birding was conducted through the terminal's windows, with a flock of pied crows the sole bird of note. Our flight to Antananarivo was also marginally late leaving, but all arrived in good order. The visa process at Arrivals was both exceptionally speedy and efficient due to the appearance and help of Harry (HR) and one of his colleagues, Tariri, who eased us through immigration in record time. Here we also met two more members of the group, who'd simultaneously arrived from Australia, by way of Dubai. And with all our hold bags accounted for, the group walked into arrivals, where our Malagasy driver Claude was patiently waiting for us.

After securing some local currency and sorting out local SIM cards for MD and a number of guests who wanted connectivity for the duration of their stay, we boarded our minibus for the short drive to the Relais Des Plateaux Hotel. Once everyone had been checked in and given time to shower, the group then reunited for dinner. MD was able to point out the call of the Madagascar nightjar, while all tucked into their first Malagasy meal. And with everyone tired after such a long journey, we then simply retired to our rooms for the night.

Saturday 13 September 2025

Day 1:

Relais des Plateaux Hotel, Antananarivo, to Analamazaotra, before an overnight at Vakona Lodge.

Waking up early, the group convened for a 6 am breakfast, with a long and hopefully exciting day ahead. Once breakfast had been completed, and while the bags were loaded up onto the bus, this gave some in the group a short time to watch birds around the hotel's grounds, with a pair of Madagascar wagtails, a few Madagascar fodies and a Madagascar magpie-robin all logged before we set off south towards central Antananarivo.

Located at just over 1,200m above sea level, the early morning temperature in the capital was pleasantly cool with clear blue skies. Rice paddies close to the city are a feature of Tana, which usually hold a variety of herons and egrets, but due to the extensive building work of a huge new infrastructure project right along the road, this prevented us from being able to stop. However, as we rumbled past, we were still able to identify a few great white egrets, along with a small flock of black herons. The black herons feed in a particularly entertaining way, by raising their wings over and above their heads to form an umbrella, which presumably both creates attractive shade for the fish and an opportunity for the hens to see their quarry more clearly in the water. A little further along, a small herd of cattle egrets were picked up in a section of drier paddies, while the introduced, and now cosmopolitan common mynah had already become a regular feature.

Zippering past a number of paddies, we also observed a number of brown-throated swallows. Taking a comfort stop next at a nearby garage, a number of the guests admired both a yellow-flowering shrub in the genus *Senna* and another flowering shrub in the genus *Bauhinia*. Set back from the road, a large tree held at least a dozen common mynahs. With some distance still to go, we were soon back on our way, and shortly joined the main highway RN2 that runs right across to the east coast. Along the way we noted yet more cattle egrets, along with the white form of dimorphic egret, which looks virtually identical to the little egret

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found in the UK. HR then spotted a hammerkop a little further on, enabling us to park up and take a moment to enjoy this most charismatic heron. With the hope of MD's scope everyone was able to gain a close up this species' unique head plumage, which when combined with the bird's bill, looks just like the head of a claw hammer, As a couple more were then spotted, this also gave us the opportunity to watch them in flight, with the species looking deceptively larger than it really is. Along with a few more egrets, our first Madagascar kestrel was also spotted from this location too.

Continuing westwards, we passed through the ribbon town of Manjakandriana, with a male Madagascar stonechat the sole addition to the trip list. By now, it was already mid-morning, and when slowing down to pass some contra-flow, HR somehow managed to spot a chameleon in a roadside bush. Parking up for a moment, we all took a moment to admire a male oustalet's, which for a number of the guests also represented their first ever chameleon. A red common dropwing dragonfly (Genus *Trithemis*) was also spotted perched along the roadside here too.

Further along, we crossed the Mangoro River, with HR informing us that Nile crocodiles still inhabit the quieter section of this river. A souimanga sunbird was then briefly seen by the side of the road, before we stopped for a very pleasant lunch in the town of Moramanga. Fully satiated, it was, however, another hour on the road before we finally arrived at the entrance to the Analamazaotra Special Reserve, where local guides and good friends of *Wildlife Worldwide* Patrice and son Michael were ready and waiting for us. As Michael headed off into the forest to track down the lemurs, Patrice stayed behind to show us a few birds in the surrounding trees.

The first species to be pointed out was a pair of chabert vanga, before a perching crested drongo joined the party. Entering into the forest, we then followed Patrice along the 'Indri 1 Trail' before stopping to admire two Madagascar turtle doves quietly feeding further ahead on the path. Once again, MD's scope proved invaluable for obtaining good views of what can, at times, be a shy bird. Carrying on, the next bird to be pointed out was a male red-tailed vanga, before a noisy common newtonia made a brief appearance. However, we were to remain frustrated as a somewhat more retiring white-throated oxlylabes kept out of sight.

Now deeper into the forest, we then chanced upon a passing mixed flock, where Madagascar paradise flycatcher, nuthatch vanga and Madagascar cuckoo-shrike were all identified in quick succession. Passing the fish farm, our second Madagascar stonechat sighting of the day was enjoyed, before everyone's attention became quickly diverted to that of a Madagascar malachite kingfisher perched on a pipe at the edge of the fish ponds. Here too, the trip's first Madagascar bulbuls were noted while they fed in amongst the path-side vegetation.

With the trip list quickly rising, a pair of calling Madagascar buzzards were then heard above our heads. Initially, the buzzards only permitted snatched views through the trees, but after a short while, they emerged above the fish farm, giving everyone a more prolonged sighting of what is yet another endemic species to this unique island. Back again in the forest and along the trail, we were then treated to simply astonishing views of a Goodman's mouse lemur feeding not only in broad daylight, but also right in front of the group. Considered one of the world's smallest primates, Patrice and Michael informed us that they had never seen this normally exclusively nocturnal species out feeding during the daytime. Despite some initial worry that the lemur may be unwell, it looked decidedly happy while feeding right in front of the group, in what could undeniably be described as the trip's 'first amazing moment'!

Hot on the heels of the mouse lemur, our next magic moment quickly followed further up the hill, when we almost bumped straight into a family party of diademed sifakas. Initially reluctant to give good views, they quickly disappeared through their trees, but were quickly relocated when taking a break. Looking up, we could initially see two lemurs perched up in the fork of a tree, before a baby suddenly emerged from in between them! Clambering up to the individual we presumed to be its mother, the photographers in the group then went into overdrive as they took innumerable family portraits of this stunning and critically endangered lemur.

Eventually tearing ourselves away, our next treat was to hear indris calling from further along the ridge-line, with HR labelling their unmistakable call nothing less than 'the sound of Madagascar'. And sure enough, our spotters ahead subsequently managed to locate the source of the call a few hundred metres further on. Consisting of a party of three very high up in a tree, everyone nevertheless managed to gain excellent views of Madagascar's largest surviving species of lemur. And having filled our boots with no less than three species of lemur in the space of little more than an hour, we then headed back down as Michael was keen to show the group something else he'd found prior to our arrival.

Mossy leaf-tailed gecko is surely one of the world's most difficult animals to track down, thanks to its frankly astonishing camouflage. Resting both vertically and head down along the trunk of a small, slender sapling, it was almost impossible to work out where the reptile started and tree ended, even after the creature had been pointed out! A second, larger gecko was then shown to us further along the same path, with all the guests equally flabbergasted as to both how well the geckoes were hidden and how well Michael had done to find them in the first place.

Slowly heading back to the park entrance, a young male velvet asity, complete with golden speckles along its flanks, represented another good find. While watching it eat some berries in the understory, MD additionally spotted a male nelicourvi weaver feeding close by. Heading back down the trail, we stopped briefly to admire a pink flowering terrestrial orchid in the genus *Cynorkis*, but the focus switched quickly back to birds while recrossing the bridge, when we picked up both a male Madagascar sunbird and a male ward's vanga at the top of a nearby tree. Back at the entrance, we were then presented with one final opportunity to enjoy yet another mixed flock, with the group identifying crested drongo, Madagascar paradise flycatcher, long-billed tetraka and a single Madagascar magpie-robin all in quick succession.

Back aboard the minibus, we then took a short drive back along the road to briefly enjoy a Madagascar scops owl roosting in a tangled patch of vegetation right next to the road. Thanking Michael and Patrice for what had proved to be the most marvellous afternoon, we then headed off to what would be our accommodation for the next couple of nights. Vakona Lodge is idyllically situated above a small lake, with the accommodation set a little further back, in the form of a number of well-appointed cabins. Having checked into our rooms, everyone then met up a short while later to enjoy a fine three-course meal, washed down (in some cases) with Madagascar's famous THB beer. This also gave everyone the opportunity to recap over the principal events of a simply superb first day.

Sunday 14 September 2025

Day 2:

Visit to Mantadia National Park & the night walk along the road adjacent to Analamazaotra NP.

Sitting on stilts above a small lake, we descended to Vakona's delightful restaurant and reception for a 6.30 am breakfast. Offering super views across the water meant we were also able to watch mascarene martins feeding while we ate. The martins, as in previous years, also appear not only to be feeding here, but also to be breeding both underneath the restaurant and its eaves. With the day starting off surprisingly cold and foggy, HR suggested these conditions appeared to indicate a fine day lay ahead. In addition to the martins, a couple of Madagascar white-eyes were picked up in the lakeside, while further back, a Madagascar blue pigeon was spotted perched in a tree. And by the time we finished our breakfast, we could indeed see that the mist (true to HR's words) was indeed beginning to disappear.

Walking the short distance up to where the minibus was parked, we met up with Patrice once more, but this time with his younger daughter Faviola, both of whom would be accompanying us to Mantadia National Park. Reaching the remote primary rainforest within the park can only be achieved with the use of 4WD vehicles due to the poor state of the road, so upon transferring into three different vehicles, we headed off on the 90-minute journey. By slowly working our way around the numerous pot-holes, we eventually reached the park's entrance, which also represented the halfway mark. And while HR secured our entrance tickets, the group took delight in observing a lined day gecko on one of the travellers' palms next to the guard station.

Hopping back into our 4WD vehicles, we then stopped no more than five minutes further down the road to admire a striated heron perched atop some bamboo. While scoping up the heron, MD also picked out the trip's first good view of a Madagascar sunbird, whose gorget appeared iridescent in what was now full sun. While watching the sunbird, Patrice also pointed out the common roadside purple-flowering plant as being from the genus *Ageratum* in the family *Asteraceae*.

Stopping once more a little further on, a singing rand's warbler (or tetraka) sat up high up in a tree, while a couple more blue pigeons were also noted. But interest in these birds immediately waned when the indris began suddenly calling from the primary forest ahead. Considered to carry for over a couple of kilometres, these haunting wails are produced by the indri's laryngeal air sac and serve to unify family groups, defend territory and communicate with other groups. Back in our 4WD's we next stopped briefly to observe a Madagascar coucal sitting quietly in the roadside vegetation, before covering the last few hundred metres on foot, with Patrice keen to show us a rather special invertebrate along the way.

With their hugely long necks, giraffe-necked weevils are surely one of the strangest invertebrates on Planet Earth. Additionally, the species are easily sexed, as the males possess clearly longer necks. Once Patrice had located a couple in the undergrowth, he brought them out into the road so everyone could attempt that perfect macro-portrait. While admiring the weevil, the monotonous and repetitive calls of the Madagascar cuckoo and common newtonia could clearly be heard from the surrounding forest, while a fly-by from a greater vasa parrot briefly interrupted the weevil photography workshop.

By now, it was decidedly hot, so we immediately plunged into the comparatively far cooler forest, with Patrice once more at the helm. Declaring he could hear the call of a short-legged ground roller ahead, he then left us to investigate further. While waiting, we chanced upon another mixed flock, and successfully managed to identify both a Madagascar cuckoo-shrike and tylas vanga before the birds passed on by. Coming back to join us, Patrice then led the group down to the stream, where a few of us obtained a brief, tantalising view of a single short-legged ground-roller up in a tree, which is also the only member of the ground-roller family that does not live on the ground. And then, after a slightly frenetic period of near-misses, we eventually managed to locate a pair perched quietly and directly above us on a horizontal branch. It was nothing short of a glorious moment, with everyone able to gain sensational views of a difficult and yet hugely charismatic bird - with it even being a lifer for MD! While watching the ground-roller, a number also picked up brief views of the trip's second nuthatch vanga, while MD also spotting a white-headed vanga - but most, of course, only had eyes for the ground-roller.

Coming back out of the forest for a quick break and to collect our backpacks, one of the guests then found a dragonfly, which was subsequently identified as *Orthetrum stemmale*, along with a Madagascar diadem butterfly, when it briefly alighted on the ground. While watching the butterfly and dragonfly watching along the forest edge, MD additionally pointed out both a couple of Madagascar white-eyes and the seemingly ever-present Madagascar bulbuls. Back, once again, in the forest, we could clearly hear the calls of scaly ground-roller, but the second member of this charismatic ground roller remained well hidden, on this occasion, leaving us compensation in the form of another small flock, in which red-tailed vanga, common newtonia and souimanga sunbird were quickly logged.

Moving yet further into the forest, Patrice and Michael next managed to 'magic up' a pair of red-bellied lemurs resting high up in the trees, with their distinctive long black tails hanging vertically downwards like velvet bell-pulls. As the lemurs were slightly tucked away, good views here were decidedly tricky, but a small troop of brown lemurs close by appeared far more active and obliging. And the good lemur sightings continued as we caught up with another troop of red-bellied lemurs close by, which were far more obliging. On this occasion, the lemurs were busily feeding, enabling the group to clearly see the males' white-eyes, which easily helps differentiate the sexes. On this occasion, at least five lemurs were seen, with the highlight being when a male chased a female through the canopy.

Heading down for lunch, our exit out of the forest was somewhat delayed in the most wonderful way by the sudden appearance of the trip's second family party of diademed sifakas. While the lemurs quietly rested in the trees, we were able to note yet another young baby clinging to its mother. Our lunch was then pushed

back even further by a quick dash over to a possible roosting location of a Madagascar long-eared owl. Eventually reaching the spot, the bird was pointed out to us high up in the canopy, but due to the density of the foliage, all we could see properly was the lower half of the bird!

Taking lunch in a new reception building close to the parking area, the lateness of the hour meant that there would be insufficient time to go back into the forest, so instead we decided to take our time driving out. Stopping to enjoy some more weevil action, the highlight, certainly for MD's vehicle, was the brief sighting of a Madagascar cuckoo-hawk perched on a tree branch made by our eagle-eyed driver.

Back once again in the degraded forest, it appeared the lemurs were also keen to give us a send-off as we picked up a couple of diademed sifakas feeding in the vegetation right along the road. This sighting, far from the primary forest, was also perhaps a sign that this species might ultimately be turning a corner, which would certainly be a good reason to celebrate. Finally heading out of the park, the only other species of note was a snake in the middle of the road, which was quickly recognised as being a collared bright snake. Subsequently identified, it was then safely moved across to the vegetation running along the roadside.

Arriving back at Vakona Lodge, everyone then proceeded to take a short rest before meeting up together once again at 5.30 pm for a night walk. Heading back to the section of the road running past Analamazaotra Special Reserve, we firstly stopped in the village of Andasibe to pick up Patrice and Faviola. Parking up, Patrice then took us immediately to a spot where he knew there to be a fruiting fig tree, and almost immediately we could see the tell-tale sign of a pair of orange eyes staring back down at us. The eyes, in fact, belonged to those of a crossley's dwarf lemur, which was busily feeding on the tree's seasonal bounty. Nocturnal lemurs can often be difficult to see well, but on this occasion, we enjoyed super views as the species gained a whole new legion of admirers.

A little further along the road, a young stick insect and a roosting butterfly were spotted, before Dominique (Patrice's other daughter) managed to locate the trip's first tree frog, in the form of *Boophis viridis*. Moving on, another group of tourists helped to reveal the precise location of yet another new species of lemur, as a pair of eastern woolly lemurs became lit up by our torches. Once again we were able to secure excellent views of another lemur that is rarely seen well, marking another perfect end to a day stuffed full of super sightings and memorable moments.

More than satiated with our amphibian and mammal sightings, the group headed back to the lodge for a late dinner and, in some cases, a beer, as we celebrated the end of another fabulous day.

Monday 15 September 2025

Day 3:

Vakona Lodge to VOIMMA Reserve and travel onwards to Palmarium Lodge at Akanin'ny Nofy, with a night walk to Aye-aye Island

Meeting down at the lodge, a number of guests opted for an impromptu spot of birding before breakfast, where a quick scan over the water produced the usual mascarene martins, a Madagascar wagtail and a malachite kingfisher on a snag sticking out of the water. While in the surrounding trees, a Madagascar bulbul, a green jery, a male nelicourvi weaver and a Madagascar white-eye ensured a fine start to the day.

With the weather clearing beautifully once again, we then met up with Patrice and Dominique at the entrance to the VOIMMA Reserve, who were immediately able to point out five blue pigeons roosting high up in a tree. A calling cuckoo-roller was next up, which was initially picked up first by call, before being spotted high up in a tree. Scoping up the bird, it then proceeded to conduct several display flights, while MD emphasised that as this bird is so different to any other, it has even been placed in its very own family, the *Leptosomidae*. Meanwhile, back at the entrance three Madagascar green pigeons and a female Madagascar kestrel were also spotted roosting high up in different tree-side roads.

While HR sorted out the entrance tickets, Patrice led the group straight into the forest. One of the first things

he then pointed out was a huge ground species of palm in the large Genus of *Pandanus*, with this particular species presumably inspiring the name of the lodge at which we'd been staying. Resembling a huge bromeliad, Patrice explained that the plant is, in effect, an entire ecosystem that is the home to both frogs and a vast array of invertebrates. Walking initially through some secondary and highly disturbed forest, Patrice then pointed out a small flock of four or five Madagascar starlings as they shot past the group.

While walking along the path, we also noticed the very characteristic cocoon of a comet moth above our heads, before Patrice took us up a hill and along a ridge where our spotters had earlier managed to locate a family party of indris. On closer inspection of the lemurs, we were delighted, once again, to see that the female was carrying a baby on her belly, while the father peaceably sat a little higher up, watching guard.

Descending from the ridge, a young male Parson's chameleon was the next stellar species to be enjoyed when one was located in the understory. Parson's are considered to be the world's largest species of chameleon, and the males are easily distinguished by the presence of two divergent horns on their heads. These horns are used by the males for both displaying and fighting, and with one of this individual's two horns already looking slightly damaged, it looked like he'd already been involved in a scrap or two. While photographing the chameleon, Patrice also pointed out the call of a purple heron, flying out of sight above the canopy.

Heading back into the forest, Patrice then declared that his brother had managed to locate a pygmy kingfisher in the forest. Reaching the patch of forest where it had last been encountered, we could initially hear it calling, but were unable to find it. This species, even at the best of times, can be decidedly difficult to track down, but after a bit of patience this gem of a bird eventually showed beautifully for the entire group. Unusually, this species of kingfisher prefers to stay well away from water. Sitting quietly on a perch, it then uses its eyesight to spot prey on the forest floor.

Back, once more on the forest trail, Patrice next pointed out the call of a blue coua - a large, endemic forest bird that makes a living eating from chameleons. However, on this occasion, the coua decided not to make an appearance. With the action non-stop, we next came across a troop of six or seven common brown lemurs. This species is well known for being particularly confiding, and at one point the lemurs were so close to our position that they were virtually within touching distance - making for a thrilling encounter for both the photographers and the watchers alike. Then just before heading back out of the forest, the clear ringing call of a lesser vasa parrot was picked up above our heads, while the decidedly sibilant call of a green jery appeared much closer.

Leaving Andasibe's forests for the last time, we thanked our wonderful guides Patrice and Dominique with a rendition of the 'Lamako', before then heading off on our long drive with Claude that would ultimately end in our arrival at Palmarium later that same evening. The road to the town of Brickaville tends to be long and winding, but as we slowly made our way in a northeasterly direction, we were also able to take the time to watch Malagasy folk getting about their daily life.

Stopping for lunch at the small town of Sahamamy, we tucked into our sandwiches while watching a slice of home - in the form of a small colony of house sparrows! Heading off once again, our next stop was just a short while later at the town of Antsampanana, where we had an appointment with a very special bird. As in previous years, the gas station here is always a hotspot for Madagascar pratincoles, and they didn't disappoint on this occasion either. Upon alighting the minibus, we were delighted to count a total of four individuals, as they flew noisily above the station forecourt, while constantly interacting with one another. It's thought that this species may well breed close by along the Laroka River just to the south of the town. While not strictly a Madagascan endemic, this wader-cum-hirundine only breeds in Madagascar, but then spends the Austral winter across the Mozambique channel in East Africa, before then returning back here in late September. While watching the pratincoles, MD also managed to spot a single African black swift, as it hawked for insects in the airspace above the pratincoles.

However, with a boat still to catch, there could be no time to waste, and upon reaching the outskirts of Brickaville, we crossed the town's river in the knowledge that the small lakeside village of Manambato was

now not too far away. In Brickaville, the traffic was incredibly heavy, as the town represents the location of both a large sugar refinery and a railway station which marks a key staging post between the capital Antananarivo and the island's east coast. And just a few miles further north, we then turned off RN2 for the thirty-minute drive to the village of Manambato, itself positioned both on the shores of Lake Rasoabe and at the southern end of the Pangales Canal network. Previously, this last leg of the journey could only be managed by 4WDs, but over the course of the last twelve months, this road has been completely reconstructed and resurfaced, such that on this occasion, we were able to make up a large portion of the time we'd lost earlier in our journey.

Thanking Claude and Cheeky for both their fine company and safe driving with another rendition of the 'Lamako', we then headed straight down to the lake, before boarding the boat that would take us north to Palmarium. The entire waterway here runs parallel to the coast, and consists of a series of natural lakes and rivers that have in turn been connected via man-made canals, resulting in a total navigable stretch of around 650km. This makes the network one of the longest navigable inland waterways in the world. Like in previous years, very little wildlife was seen on the way, with the exception of a black-crowned night heron and a small flock of lesser crested terns, but the journey certainly made a welcome change from the monotony of bouncing around in the minibus. With us now down at sea level, this meant the temperature had also increased appreciably, so the onboard breeze and a light sprinkle of rain along the way made for a most welcome addition. Finally arriving at Lake Ampitabe, all that then remained was the short trip across to the northwestern shore where Palmarium Lodge was located, which would also serve as our accommodation for the following two nights.

Due to the lateness of our arrival, a very quick turnaround was necessary before the evening's excursion - which entailed an appointment with a very special animal. Reconvening with our torches and cameras a short while later, we then re-boarded the boat for the 15-minute trip back across the water to the small island which doubles as home to a grand total of eight aye-ayes. Joining our local guide Romeo, we then briefly assembled for a chat on the island's beach, before commencing the short, dark walk up to the viewing arena.

Walking in single file through the forest, we quickly arrived at the viewing amphitheatre to find that an aye-aye was already present, but due to the sheer number of other folk already present, we could barely see it. However, after a short while, the first group disappeared, leaving us alone with the animal. Attracted by coconuts, which are wedged in the forks of trees as supplementary food by the park rangers, the aye-aye only stayed briefly, so we then moved on to the second viewing arena, where a young animal was busily slurping away from an already opened coconut. While here, a couple of rats, along with a very brief view of a greater hedgehog tenrec were spotted as they scuttled around on the forest floor.

Finally moving back to the first arena, the group then became utterly entranced as we watched two lemurs climbing, descending and feeding. To further enhance the experience, the lemurs were little more than a few metres away, enabling all to clearly appreciate this species' unique appearance, with them having been described as 'possessing the face of a possum, tooth of a mouse and ear of bat'. These aye-ayes here are either animals or progeny of animals that have either been recovered from deforested areas or confiscated by rangers, before being placed on the island. According to folklore, aye-ayes supposedly bring bad luck and death, and so were traditionally killed on sight, but attitudes mercifully appear to be changing, with authorities having acted quickly to ensure this iconic Malagasy species is now one of the most heavily protected species in the entire country.

After the most wonderful entertainment, the group then took the short boat ride back across to the lodge to enjoy a decidedly late meal. All that remained then was to collapse into our beds - marking the end of another action-packed day.

Tuesday 16 September 2025

Day 4:

Palmarium Lodge & grounds, plus a second visit to Aye-aye Island

Deciding to take a late breakfast of 7 am after the rigours of the previous day's travel, we then met up afterwards with Romeo - our guide for the day - for the morning walk around the hotel's grounds. Almost immediately upon setting off, we then came across a couple of black-and-white ruffed lemurs, which are one of a number of species of lemur that have been introduced to the lodge's grounds and so are out of their natural range. This opportunity did, however, enable the photographers in the group to take fabulous close-up pictures of these charismatic animals.

The next creature to be admired was a wild juvenile male panther chameleon in a small tree, before attention was diverted straight back to mammals with the arrival of three brown lemurs. This is considered one of the few lemur species that occurs here naturally at Palmarium, although these animals have also become somewhat habituated to humans. It nevertheless allowed us to study the differences between the black-faced males and more uniform-coloured females.

Next up was a female black lemur, which subsequently became a touch too well acquainted with the group, by using some of us —to much hilarity— as a vantage point. Here too, we saw a forest nymph butterfly, with a couple of smaller butterflies in the large *Pieridae* & *Lycaenidae* families remaining unidentified. Attention then swung briefly onto birds with the discovery of a hook-billed vanga. And continuing the theme of constantly switching between different animal groups, the next creature to be both spotted and identified was that of a juvenile Manohoro tree-hole frog on the forest floor.

Whilst here, we also enjoyed watching a small troop of crowned lemurs, with MD pointing out the difference between the males —with their little black caps— and the plain-capped females. A pair of red-bellied lemurs also entertained the group, which was a species we'd previously seen very well in the wild at Andasibe. Neither of these species are native to Palmarium either, with the crowned's natural range to be found in the north of the country, while the red-bellied's are confined to higher altitude rainforests up on the plateau. In addition to the pure species on show, Palmarium also contains a bewildering array of hybrid lemurs within its collection, with a few individuals considered to be either a combination of black & crowned or brown & crowned.

The next lemur to be admired was both the largest surviving species and another species we'd previously seen earlier in the trip - the indri. Here, Romeo introduced us to an adult pair at very close quarters, with the mother thrilling everyone when she revealed a young baby clinging to her belly. Attracting them close to our position with a small piece of banana, Romeo then proceeded to imitate the indri's call, which after a brief moment, elicited the most remarkable response, as all enjoyed a front-row seat to one of the loudest and most impressive sounds in the entire natural world - that of the indris responding.

Leaving the Lodge's immediate grounds and taking to the paths with our ears still ringing, the level terrain throughout the forest was a welcome bonus after the hilly trails of Andasibe. After enjoying a variety of ferns, fungi and mosses along the way, we eventually reached the sea, whereupon Romeo pointed out a Cuvier's Madagascar swift (or plated lizard) on a tree guarding the entrance to the beach. This species, while native to Madagascar, is another that has been introduced to Palmarium, with a natural distribution confined to southwest Madagascar. Once on the beach, the invasive Australian bottlebrush plants (Genus *Callistemon*) that have colonised the sand were also home to three white-bellied reed-frogs *Heterixalus alboguttatus*, which interestingly is a species with two different colour forms - but on this occasion just the pale pastel blue form was present amongst the individuals we found.

As the photographers switched to 'macro' for these handsome, diminutive herps, MD picked up the call of Madagascar bulbul, along with a yellow-billed kite, while a couple of Madagascar bee-eaters and a fork-tailed drongo also ensured that those guests whose interest was primarily centred on birds were kept entertained.

Moving into the dunes just set back from the beach, Romeo next showed the group a large patch of pitcher plants in a wet slack, which comprised two endemic Malagasy species - *Nepenthes Madagascariensis* and *Nepenthes masoalensis*. This insectivorous family of plants reaches its maximum expression in Asia, meaning the plants here are believed to have rafted across on some floating vegetation from Asia, following the breakup of Gondwanaland. Once settled here and separated from their ancestral genetic stock, they then slowly evolved into their own unique species. Here, too in the swampy area was a particularly distinctive swamp-loving *Pandanus* plant. Strolling back to the hotel, after a fascinating morning of close encounters and cool plants, we then proceeded to take lunch, before taking a much-needed afternoon for the guests to enjoy at their own leisure.

Meeting up once again, at 5.30 pm, the group once again took the short boat ride back across the water to enjoy aye-aye island for the second and final time. Having left much earlier than on the previous night, we were, this time, the first group to arrive at the viewing arena, and were obviously thrilled to see two aye-ayes already present. Watching the action unfold with our front row seats, both lemurs then proceeded to open up the fresh coconuts with their incisor teeth. Once a hole had duly been created, they then lustily drank the milk, before using their long index finger to prise away pieces of coconut flesh.

It then became even more fascinating when a third lemur came down to try and cash in on the action. However, the later arrival was immediately shooed away by both incumbent animals, clearly demonstrating a level of hierarchy within the animals on the island. Here too, another lovely surprise came in the form of a dwarf fat-tailed lemur, which had also been drawn to the arena to feed on a small piece of banana left out. This was the first time MD had ever seen this lemur at such close quarters and so represented a total bonus for all present. Utterly delighted with stellar views of this brace of lemurs, we then retraced our steps back down to the jetty, before enjoying a fine dinner at Palmarium after the short boat ride back across the water.

However, there was one last treat waiting for us, as five members of the group then joined MD, HR & Romeo for a short night-walk in the forest around the lodge. After finding a couple of millipedes, jewel beetles and a Phelsuma gecko, Romeo managed to find our main quarry, this being the tiny chameleon *Brookesia nophi*, which is in the process of currently being described to science. Palmarium is this species' only known locality, and as we found a couple more, we revelled in the fact that we were looking at one of the smallest vertebrates run the world. No longer than around 2.5cm in length, this star species represented quite a challenge for the macro-photographers in the group, particularly given the low light levels. Returning to the lodge, we then quickly retired - full in the knowledge that the following day would be a long one that involved three modes of travel: boats, planes and minibuses!

Wednesday 17 September 2025

Day 5:

Palmarium Lodge to Toamasina, flight to Fianarantsoa & drive to Ranomafana - Centrest. Wednesday 17th September 2025

With a long travel day ahead, we all met for a quick 6.00 am breakfast before boarding the 7 am boat for the ride north along the Panagales Canal to Toamasina. This route had been trialled with *Wildlife Worldwide* for the first time in 2024, in a successful bid to cut out the best part of two tough travel days down to Ranomafana. And with the boat ride north taking around three hours, we settled back in our seats to enjoy the scenery.

With the weather looking partly cloudy, the first bird to be spotted was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a yellow-billed kite. Heading into the first of the narrow man-made channels which have been excavated to link up the lakes, a couple of Madagascar bee-eaters were observed, followed by two African pygmy geese in flight. Wildlife always tends to be scarce on these canals, possibly due to a combination of over-fishing and disturbance, so we considered the sight of four red-billed teal as a good sign. And as we began to enter more degraded habitat, we instantly began spotting the introduced species of Indian mynah with monotonous regularity. Singles of yellow-billed kite, African pygmy goose and great egret were also picked up as we took in the scenery *en route*.

After a couple of hours, we finally began to approach the outskirts of Toamasina, with a corresponding huge increase in the amount of litter seen along the waterway, too. On the outskirts, we also passed a huge nickel and cobalt factory, which has recently seen a large foreign investment, with the result that all the surrounding roads were in virtually the best condition we'd seen anywhere else across the country. Despite the pollution, wildlife was still present, as we picked up a crested drongo, seven cattle egret and a couple of malachite kingfishers in quick succession. Unlike the previous year, the last section of the canal had been closed due to construction, meaning we then had to offload both ourselves and our bags alongside a bridge, but after a short while HR managed to pass on a message to our new driver with regards to our new RV location, who had in fact been waiting for us at another bridge close by!

Loading up, the drive then took us through the busy suburbs, with all enjoying the sights of Malagasy folk getting about their daily business. After around 45 minutes, we reached Toamasina's Provincial Airport, where our charter was waiting for us. Using the short wait before departure to consume our packed lunches, we then boarded the small 12-seat Cessna and were quickly up and away. The journey took around two hours and gave us a fabulous opportunity to enjoy Madagascar's high plateau from the air, along with great views of paddy-fields, small rural communities and any small patches of remaining forest.

Upon landing in the busy city of Fianarantsoa, our new driver Alain and his assistant (and son) Antonio were waiting for us, both of whom would also now be with us every step of the way until we departed from Toliara. Quickly loading up, we headed northeast out of the city, only stopping briefly to admire a large conifer containing a huge breeding colony of egrets and herons, which was dominated by both colour forms of the dimorphic egret and a lower number of black-crowned night herons. A little further on, we then passed a large open area where bricks were being constructed from clay out in the fields. The whole process - from digging up the clay in the first place, to firing the shaped bricks in roadside kilns, was clearly visible here, as a number of the guests jumped out to preserve this production line with photos.

On the way we passed innumerable paddy fields containing very little wildlife interest, with the exception of the trip's first pied crows. But after a couple of hours, the sides of the road began to become ever more forested, giving us a clear indication that Ranomafana was close by. Spotting a male common fody in the road, we also began to appreciate the distinguishing features of this famous reserve, such as the Namuruna River down below the road and the extensively forested ridges that make this National Park so special. Along the roadside, we also commented on the abundance of both a plant in the genus *Vernonia* (*Asteraceae* family) and the flowering tree in the genus *Dombeya* (*Malvaceae* family), which in Madagascar alone comprises over 175 species. Shortly before arriving at our hotel, the omnipresent species of Madagascar magpie-robin, Madagascar green sunbird and Madagascar bulbul were also picked up while perching in roadside vegetation.

Finally arriving at Centrest Lodge at around 4 pm, which would also be home for the next three nights, everyone then checked in, but not before taking a moment to enjoy the African palm swifts that were whizzing around in the airspace above our heads. Shortly afterwards, we also briefly met up with our guides for Ranomafana, in the form of Stefan and his son James, both of whom MD had previously worked with during the course of his last three visits.

With everyone suitably refreshed after a few hours to settle in, we then reconvened at 7.15 pm, before enjoying a three-course meal, washed down with THB and Coke. It was then straight to bed, in order to make the most of our first full day in Ranamofana.

Thursday 18 September 2025

Day 6:

Ranomafana NP - AM Talatakely Trail, PM Sahalamaotra Trail & evening walk along the road

Once breakfast had been completed, we met up with our guides at the hotel for the planned morning walk along the famous Talatakely Trail, located within the National Park. The weather looked clear and windless, and the birders in the group had already logged African palm swifts, Madagascar magpie-robin, Madagascar wagtail and Indian myna before even having left the lodge, with the fervent hope that an array of specialist birds would be waiting and waiting for us in the forest.

Heading off, we passed the research station on the way before arriving at the park entrance. While HR paid for our entry tickets, we set off into the forest with Stefan and James operating as guide and spotter respectively, while Antonio was also hired to help assist the guests. Walking down to the bridge over the Namorova River, we could hear the distinctive, wailing call of the cuckoo roller, while Stefan pointed out the fragrant flowers dropped from a tree he called 'grapefruit' in the family *Myrtaceae*. Also admiring the ferns, Stefan informed us that the National Park contained 145 species in this group, including an impressive 12 different tree ferns.

Almost immediately we could hear what were quite possibly Ranomafana's quartet of commonest bird songs - these belonging to Rand's warbler, souimanga sunbird and Madagascar cuckoo (or 'less-er cuck-oo') and common newtonia. As the bridge spans the entire width of the river, it offers fine views up and down the scenic, forested gorge and the rushing water below.

We had only just reached the forest on the other side when the call went up that our spotters had already succeeded in finding our first lemur of the day. Golden bamboo lemurs are a hugely important species, as this species' initial discovery to science by the Primatologist Dr Patricia Wright and her team ultimately resulted in the initial formation and protection of the park in 1991. It was also excellent to 'bag' such an important species so early on in our visit. With plenty of other tourists enjoying the lemurs, it was initially a bit tricky to position ourselves in the right viewing spot, but after a bit of patience everyone eventually enjoyed excellent views of a species that is not just endemic to Madagascar, but is wholly confined to Ranomafana. The troop appeared to consist of at least six individuals, with certainly a couple of individuals proving very photographable while basking in the early morning sunshine. Alongside the bamboo lemurs, a second lemur species was also present, in the form of a small troop of around four red-bellied lemurs. But having seen this species well elsewhere, the most attention was lavished on those lemurs with a golden hue.

Leaving the lemurs to get about their business, Stefan next pointed out a tree in the genus *Pittosporum*, which is Genus well known to gardeners in the UK, before then quickly changing tack when he picked up the call of a hook-billed vanga. The bird then suddenly appeared right above our heads rough out in the open. As we continued up into the forest and away from the rushing sound of the river, the bird sounds became ever more obvious, allowing us to pick out the calls of both green jery and green sunbird in quick succession. The 'vanga' theme then continued as we snatched brief views of both ward's and red-tailed vanga.

Following the trails even higher into the forest, we were next delighted to locate a singing male Madagascar cuckoo high up in a tree. Like its British counterpart, the Madagascar cuckoo can be very difficult to spot at the best of times, so our sighting represented a very good find and only the second one MD had seen.

The focus then quickly switched from birds back to lemurs as our guides next led us to where a troop of red-fronted brown lemurs were quietly feeding. Representing yet another new species for the trip, the rufous caps and greyer bodies immediately help distinguish the males from the rufous-brown females. The species is also both patriarchal and polygamous, in contrast to many of the other lemur species, where the females tend to be dominant. This troop consisted of at least six or seven animals, and all the guests took great delight as they hopped and clambered past our viewpoint.

Walking along the paths, a number of guests were intrigued by the small powder-blue *Lobelia* which

appeared to be sprinkled along many of the paths, with Stefan telling us that four different members of this genus have been logged within the park. While walking along, the ratchet calls of Madagascar bush warblers could also be heard whenever the understory became particularly dense and tangled. The four fittest members of the group, along with MD, then followed Stefan down a steep hill and to where a troop of Milne-Edwards sifakas were last seen heading. But in the end, this proved to be a 'wild lemur chase', so we abandoned the search and headed instead for the viewpoint which looks out over both the forest and towards the park entrance.

Scanning the forest as we walked back up, we managed to spot a pair of chabert vanga and a Madagascar white-eye in the surrounding trees, while Stefan also pointed out a fallen branch that was covered in orchid bulbs from the genus *Bulbophyllum*. Here too, we stopped to inspect the fallen flowers from a tree in the *Bignoniaceae* family just above our heads, while Stefan also pointed out an understory plant in the genus *Anthocleista*, which is considered to have a number of useful medicinal properties. And just short of the viewpoint, the call of red-fronted coua was picked up, but on this occasion decided not to make an appearance.

Finally arriving at the viewpoint, we took a much-needed break in the shade before finally heading back down to join the rest of the group waiting for us at the park entrance. We were, however, quickly called back when one of the other guides shouted to Stefan. Quickly retracing our steps, we were utterly thrilled to find a ring-tailed vonsira skulking at the edge of the forest path. This is not only a rarely seen endemic mongoose, but when it does make an appearance appears to be decidedly unafraid of humans. It was also persuaded to stay around a touch longer when one of the guides threw down a few crumbs from his lunch. As everyone manically took photos of a species that not even MD had seen before, it seemed that this sighting had been just reward for a fruitless lemur chase earlier on!

Heading back down, we then stopped briefly to enjoy a satanic leaf-tailed gecko that James had found earlier. This creature has one of the finest camouflages in the natural world, with a tail that perfectly mimics a browning leaf, and when Stefan initially pointed to the shrub and asked if anyone could actually spot it, everyone of course failed! Once this remarkable creature had been successfully photographed, we continued back to the bridge. On the way, we heard the distinctive 'whoop!' call of a pitta-like ground roller and also achieved fine views of a pair of blue coua, which was a species we'd previously missed during our time in Andasibe.

Linking up with the rest of the group once more, we were delighted to hear they too had managed to spot both the vonsira and blue coua, while also successfully identifying a commodore butterfly. Returning back to Centrest for a slightly later lunch than planned, we then took some time off in the hottest part of the day, before MD and four of the guests took the opportunity later in the afternoon to walk some of the Sahamalaotra Trail with Stefan.

Heading onto the trail and into the forest, Stefan first pointed out a number of interesting plants - these being a fern ally in the genus *Selaginella*, a shrub with small blue berries in the same family as coffee (Family *Rubiaceae*), a wild jasmine tree (Family *Oliaceae*) and the cactus *Rhipsalis baccifera*. The latter species is endemic to Madagascar and is the only known native species of cactus to grow in the wild outside of the Americas.

Stopping to watch a green jery up in the trees, Stefan suddenly stopped dead in his tracks before pointing upwards... Having spent the best part of 90 minutes chasing Milne-Edwards sifakas off the beaten track earlier that day, we'd then bumped straight into a troop of four eating peacefully in the tops of trees right next to the path! In the morning we'd also had to 'share' the lemurs with a number of other tourists, but having found these ourselves, we were able to enjoy them all alone.

Two of the lemurs appeared to have collars from an ongoing research project to track their movements, but this detracted little from our fabulous find, as Stefan informed us that these lemurs must eat double their own weight of fruit and leaves per day and also that sifakas never need to drink. - as they can obtain all the water they need from what they eat. Once they'd had their fill, the lemurs then simply bounded off past us

and down the valley, leaving us in awe once again of their astonishing ability to move so quickly through the trees, with horizontal leaps of four and five metres, nothing unusual for this remarkable animal.

With the light levels now dropping, we dropped down to the valley bottom where we could hear frogs calling from the stream. Here, *Pandanus* palms were common along the water's edge, and by carefully searching amongst a few of the larger plants, we managed to find three *Pandanus* frogs. With time now against us and the light levels quickly dropping, we began heading back to the entrance of the trail, where we chanced upon two more red-bellied lemurs on the way. But before leaving the forest, Stefan had one last surprise for us, as he took us to a partly hollowed-out tree just off one of the trails. Looking up to a hole in the trunk, we could immediately see a small-toothed sportive lemur peering out of a hole. All sportive lemurs are not only solitary, but also nocturnal, and so usually rest up during the day in their favourite cavity for one. Many are also incredibly localised, with this species, for example, barely known outside the National Park. Leaving it in peace we walked back out of the forest and along another section of trail that Stefan informed us had been used for hundreds of years by locals when travelling to and from Antananarivo.

Back out again on the roadside, we then started walking downhill to meet up with HR and the rest of the group who'd spent the afternoon at the hotel. Other tourist groups were already out looking for wildlife along the roadside and we soon joined a small group staring intently at one point along the forest edge. Training our lights and cameras in the same direction, we were delighted to see a single, tiny mouse lemur feeding along a branch. At Ranomafana, the native mouse lemur species is that of rufous mouse lemur, which is often attracted to the forest edge with bananas smeared on the leaves by the local guides. All of a sudden another lemur suddenly appeared on the same branch, obviously with bananas on its mind too! This arrival then caused a quick scuffle as the two flyweights squabbled with each other for the right to feed. It was only then that we noticed a third mouse lemur watching this skirmish from the sidelines! As a winner emerged, it was remarkable to see just how quick and agile these tiny lemurs are when clambering through the tangle of the understory.

Leaving the mouse lemurs, Stefan then called over the 'Vaza' (Westerners) to play his favourite game of spotting the chameleon, and it was some time before the first of our group picked out the small short-horned chameleon hanging head-down down at the end of a long twig. Barely more than 3cm long, its camouflage was nothing short of remarkable. A second short-horned chameleon was then found nearby, before a male O'Shaughnessy's chameleon was located barely a couple of metres further on. This is not only a much larger and more impressive species, but it is also capable of changing colour quite quickly. Unlike the other larger chameleons - such as the Parsons we'd seen at Andasibe - this has distinct flaps of skin at the back of its head and also possesses scales of often very different sizes. Having found one, it appeared O'Shaughnessy's were 'like buses', and we quickly found a couple more. The next chameleon to be located was that of a young male blue-legged. This species has a distinctive row of spines along its dorsum, but the 'bluish-coloured' legs only develop when the chameleon reaches maturity.

Ring the change from reptiles, two roosting Madagascar white-eyes were spotted asleep under a large leaf by the roadside, before Stefan implored us to quickly join him. Pointing our torches upwards and at the fork of a tree, we could just about make out a furry ball asleep, which also represented our yet another new lemur - Crossley's dwarf lemur. Similar in appearance to the fat-tailed dwarf lemur we'd seen at very close quarters in Palmarium, this particular individual appeared far more reluctant to show itself well so we left it resting up in the tree. Heading back to our hotel after the most extraordinary count of new lemurs, birds and reptiles, we all dined before retiring in preparation for what had been planned as an early birding session in the forest the following morning.

Friday 19 September 2025

Day 7:

Ranomafana National Park - The Talatakely trail & Samahalaotra Trail

Meeting up at the early hour of 5.30 am, four guests, MD and our guides Stefan & James headed straight up to the park entrance for another walk along the Talatakely trail, where birds would be unashamedly front

and centre. Turning into the deserted parking area, a Madagascar magpie-robin was noted perched on top of the park sign - hopefully a good sign of things to come. In the trees above, a Madagascar white-eye was soon located, while the distinctive trill of a rand's warbler was heard before its song was eventually drowned out by the sound of the rushing water on the way down to the bridge.

Crossing the river, we then began ascending the other side, and about halfway up, Stefan heard the familiar 'whoop' call of a pitta-like ground roller from the understory. Following the call along a much fainter path, perpendicular to the main trail, Stefan then stopped dead in his tracks before proceeding to point out this stunning and charismatic bird calling from a looped branch a metre above the path. We all watched it for 20 or 30 seconds, delighting as the bird bobbed its head while calling, before then proceeding to flit off into the undergrowth and out of sight. And despite no photos having been taken, we were still thrilled to have picked up a simply first-rate bird - and the species (no less) that adorns the front cover of 'Birds of Madagascar'.

Back on the main path, and a little further up, we stayed a while to try and spot a white-throated oxylabes, but once again this famously skulking bird decided to keep hidden in the undergrowth, while by contrast the omnipresent Madagascar bulbuls were, unsurprisingly, somewhat more showy. Also from the dense undergrowth, the harsh, ratchet call of Madagascar bush warbler was noted, along with the familiar wolf-whistle of red-tailed vanga from somewhere high up in the canopy.

We then became distracted from birding for a short while by the appearance of a small troop of golden bamboo lemurs, which showed beautifully in the early morning light - but unlike our sightings of the lemur the previous day, when there were plenty of other tourists present as well, on this occasion there was just us enjoying this highly endemic lemur. While still watching the lemurs, Stefan then implored us to quickly come and join him further along the path, as James had managed to locate a scaly ground-roller. Breathlessly reaching our guides' position, we were then somewhat flabbergasted to see the second mega of the morning RIGHT by the path, and no more than a few metres away from our position. 'The scaly' is a simply stunning bird, with a scaly breast and a multi-coloured back, and we watched in awe, with the bird seemingly totally unfazed by our presence. Stefan then proceeded to dig a small hole with a stick at the edge of the path, which encouraged the bird to investigate, no doubt, for any invertebrates which might have been unearthed in the process. Loving every second of the five minutes we spent in this fabulous bird's company, we then left it to search for breakfast as we continued onwards. Back down the hill and on the other side, both pollen's vanga and red-fronted coua were a touch less confiding than the ground-rollers we'd seen earlier, with the result that their presence was restricted to that of just being 'heard'.

Next up, and in amongst a tangle of lianas, Stefan pointed out a female velvet asity, to go with the juvenile male we'd seen earlier in the trip. And while trying in vain to see another pollen's vanga, MD suddenly picked up a male blue vanga. Most of the rest of the group managed nothing more than a blue flash of this much sought-after species, but with the bird activity now picking up once again, our attentions were quickly diverted to that of two distant lesser vasa parrots sitting in a tree.

Continuing back up another ridge, we briefly observed a long-billed tetraka in the understory, while a grey-crowned tetraka appeared little more than a silhouette as it whizzed past the group. Above the canopy, we could also, at this point, hear the wailing call of a cuckoo roller, but having seen this species well earlier in the trip we didn't dwell on searching for it. Walking back around and up to the viewpoint, we then located a pair of Madagascar cuckoo-shrikes that appeared to be making a nest directly above the shelter roof. Suddenly realising that time had (once again) run away with us, we headed back for the entrance.

On the way back down we then hit yet another mixed flock of birds, with a quartet of vangas quickly identified as belonging to a male and female blue vanga, a female rufous vanga, a red-tailed vanga and tylas vanga. The undoubted star of the flock, however, was the male blue vanga, with his blue black, white front and even bluer beak - what a bird! Continuing further along the ridge, we also logged common newtonia, while securing our second, but far briefer view of another pitta-like ground-roller. With the day now heating up, and the call of the Madagascar cuckoo dominating the soundscape we then dropped back down towards the river.

Even here, the birds continued to show, with a second and far better view of a long-billed tetraka, which appeared to be either building a nest or even incubating a clutch. And closer to the river, our second lemur of the morning made an appearance when a female brown lemur was picked up on the path. Crossing the river, we quickly ascended the other side, only stopping to appreciate our third nest of the morning, which happened to belong to pair of Madagascar paradise flycatchers. Here, the male and then the female made appearances in quick succession as we delighted in the mossy cup they'd fashioned that had been built in the fork of a sapling.

Back at the car park, a male forest fody was observed in the trees before Stefan urged us to pay a quick visit to the information centre, where a comet moth had roosted inside the building. Delighted to have seen surely Madagascar's most famous moth, we then returned to join the others back at Centrest for a very well-earned breakfast.

Our morning session departed at around 9.45 am, with MD, HR, our guides and five of the guests heading back up the road and into the park once again. Stopping briefly at the park entrance once again, this was an opportunity for those who'd missed the comet moth earlier in the week to partake of its magnificence. Moth admired, we then headed straight up to the Sahamalaotra Trail, which sits on the other side of the main road to the Talatakely Trail. Upon alighting from the minibus, the first call heard was the penetrating call of a henst goshawk, but despite scanning the far ridge-line with MD's scope we could not see this apex predator perched anywhere immediately visible.

The temperature was, by now, decidedly hot without a cloud in the sky, but blissfully cooler under the canopy. The omnipresent calls of both rand's warbler and souimanga sunbird were quickly picked up, while a Madagascar magpie-robin completed the trio of Ranomafana's commonest forest birds. Once again, another dense patch of scrub in the understory appeared to hold a skulking Madagascar brush warbler, with this individual briefly making an appearance as it dashed across the path a touch ahead of us. A little further on, a spectacled tetraka was also noted in the undergrowth, which represented yet another new bird species to add to our burgeoning trip-list.

While the group waited by the path, Stefan then disappeared down a slope to check on the presence of another sportive lemur, and after five minutes we could hear him calling for us to follow him down. It was a bit of a scramble while bush-whacking down the slope, but well worth it when we reached him. Looking up to a tree-hole no more than 2m off the ground, and patently curious about the noise outside, the lemur then stuck his head out, allowing us yet another view of this highly localised lemur. A touch lower down, another hole in the trunk had formed and simply by looking through this, we could also see part of the lemur's rear and one of its feet sticking out too! It was yet another magic moment, as the photographers preserved this mercurial lemur for posterity.

Returning back to the main path, Stefan then heard the high-pitched call of a common sunbird asity, before finally catching sight of it high up on a branch. Despite being back-lit, the bird's decurved bill was immediately obvious and represented another lifer for most of the group. Heading back down to the valley bottom, Stefan and James then split up to look for lemurs, while we were kept entertained by a couple of giraffe-necked weevils that one of the guests had discovered on the large *Pandanus* plants down at the water's edge.

With our guides specifically looking for Milne-Edwards sifakas, the lemurs were initially nowhere to be seen, but upon slowly walking back out, we luckily bumped into a family party of four feeding right by the path. Quite low in the trees, we could even hear them utter their alarm call, which we presumed might be warning of a predator nearby. Eventually they swung off through the trees, leaving us feeling slightly bereft, yet richer for the experience.

Taking a late lunch back at the hotel, we then enjoyed some leisure time during the heat of the day, before reconvening at the minibus for a quick trip to the wet cliffs, near the waterfall, to look for frogs before dusk descended. Crossing the busy road, the flowering plants along the cliffs were immediately obvious as we noted both a purple *Penstemon* and a pink orchid in the genus *Cynorkis*. Everyone then began searching for

Boophis madagascariensis frogs amongst the wet moss, and it was unsurprisingly James who spotted the first one, discreetly tucked into a wet crevice. A second one was then spotted in a more favourable position before we slowly began walking down the road and back towards where the minibus had been parked. James then came up with the goods again when he spotted a singing forest rock-thrush perched out in the open. Despite the lower light levels, everyone achieved great views of this much sought-after species.

While also walking down, a few new plants were added to our informal checklist: these being a form of *Kalanchoe*, a yellow bushy ragwort-type plant in the family *Asteraceae* and the dominant flowering tree *Dombeya* in the *Malvaceae* family. And just before jumping on the bus, MD spotted another forest rock-thrush further down.

Taking an early dinner, we then took the short ride back to the Research Station, where HR & MD had previously arranged for the famous Primatologist Patricia Wright (who happened to be in town) to give a talk about the formation of the park. It was an inspirational half hour and we were all incredibly impressed by her single-minded drive that ultimately ensured full protection for the wonderful, wild asset that is Ranomafana National Park. Back at the Centre, we then thanked Stefan and James for their hard work with an immaculately performed 'lamako'. Most then disappeared to finish off their packing, full in the knowledge that we would be leaving Ranomafana early the following morning.

Saturday 20 September 2025

Day 8:

Centrist hotel - Ranomafana to the Anja Community Reserve & hotel Relais de la Reine, Isalo - via RN25 & RN7.

Meeting with our bags packed for a 6 am breakfast, we were fully loaded up and on our way by 7 am as we first headed west along RN25, before joining RN45. The road along this section tends to be very winding, with a number of large pot-holes, but began to improve by the time we reached RN7 which leads southwest towards Fianarantsoa. Passing through Anjamba, we noted a number of pied crows, with the white form of dimorphic egret seemingly common in the town's paddies. On the outskirts of Fianarantsoa we once again passed the area where the bricks were being produced from old paddy fields.

Along the way, HR explained that the city of Fianarantsoa was also the capital of the Betsileo tribe - which is just one of 18 such tribes spread right across Madagascar. The Betsileo tribe tends to predominate in the Central Highlands and with the majority of the city's inhabitants being Roman Catholic, this was confirmed when we noted a large, imposing statue of the Virgin Mary high on the hill. The highly varied topography sees the city divided between a high town, middle town and low town. Stopping briefly to refuel, pied crows and yellow-billed kites were suddenly everywhere, while the terrain had also changed subtly to that of dry, arid hills and terraced paddy fields in the valleys. Near Ambohimaha we briefly stopped to photograph the local woman planting rice out in the paddies, which is the second stage after the terraces have been prepared by the men. And while enjoying this typical scene of rural Malagasy life, MD also spotted a malachite kingfisher zipping around the paddy margins.

Getting progressively drier as we continued our western journey, grassy plains surrounding huge granite outcrops now became the predominant habitat. Zebu herds, along with their shepherds, were also being noted with increasing regularity, and a couple of particularly large herds were observed around the small town of Ambalavao. HR explained we were now moving into an area dominated by people from the Barra Tribe. Among these nomadic folk, zebu represent both currency and wealth, and this is also a tribe where polygamy is practised. At around 1,000m asl we were still, nevertheless, on top of Madagascar's Highland plateau, and in the wetter areas, the occasional paddy-fields still contained the egret trio of cattle, great and dimorphic.

Having driven for most of the morning, our next stop was at the Betsileo Country Park Lodge, where we all partook of a delightful lunch, which was blissfully inside and so out of the sweltering mid-day heat. Upon leaving, the staff pointed out a large male oustalet's chameleon in the Lodge's well-tended garden. Fully

satiated and now back on the road again, the next leg was thankfully much shorter, as another 15 minutes saw us arriving at the Anja Community Reserve, a dry forest site located at the base of a huge granitic outcrop, and which has been protected to conserve one very special lemur. The reserve is entirely owned and managed by the local community, and upon our arrival, the group was welcomed by Mila, our local guide for the duration of the visit. Leaving the minibus behind, we then walked the short distance into the forest with our cameras at the ready.

It did, however, not take long to appreciate our first wildlife when Mila pointed out another male oustalet's chameleon in a nearby tree, which was decidedly smaller than the one we'd just seen at our lunch spot. Moving further into the forest, we had barely walked 50m before chancing upon our first lemurs, these of course being ring-tailed, and for which the reserve is justifiably famous.

Suddenly surrounded by a troop consisting mostly of mothers with very young babies, Mila explained that the total 'ring-tail' population within the reserve has risen from an initial count of around 100 in 2001, to a current population of around 650, which is testament to the success of this community-based project. As we delighted in their approachability, everyone attempted to take the perfect mother and baby portrait, while our guide explained that this particular troop comprised around 50 individuals. The middle of the day tends to be the best time for close ring-tail encounters, as the intense heat drives them both down to the ground and into the shade. Ring-tails are also surely the most terrestrial of all Madagascar's lemurs.

Moving on a little further into the woodland, the next troop we encountered appeared to be mostly resting above us in an Indian lilac tree. In addition to females with young, we could also spot the occasional male sitting on the periphery of the troop, these being lower in the pecking order of a species with a strongly ingrained matriarchal society. MD also managed to spot a pair of grey-headed lovebirds here too, enabling most of the guests to get good views of these pint-sized parrots before they flew off through the forest. After enjoying our third troop of the visit, this time on the edge of the forest, we walked back to the minibus, via a Madagascar cat-eyed snake which the locals were keen to show us. Also on the short walk back across the farmland, MD spotted a Madagascar hoopoe, which only a couple managed to catch before this charismatic bird disappeared from sight.

Continuing our journey westwards, the most common birds were, once again, pied crows and yellow-billed kites, as dry grassland seemed to stretch for as far as the eye could see. HR explained that the land here is frequently burnt to provide new growth for the zebu to eat, and sometimes the fires have gotten out of control. Passing the 'Bishop's Hat' hill, our first Madagascar lark of the trip was also spotted, before we all took a brief pit-stop to refuel in the town of Ihosi - a town that also doubles as the capital of the Barra tribe.

As the afternoon stretched into early evening, we were treated to the most wonderful sunset, but by the time we reached the town of Ranohira, which also hosts both the Isalo National Park's offices and the entrance to the reserve it was already dark. Just a short distance further on and a spontaneous round of applause erupted when Alain finally turned off the main road towards the La Reine de Isalo Lodge - our accommodation for the next two nights.

After such a long journey, the warm welcome from the staff at the lodge went down incredibly well, with all enjoying a thirst-quenching drink before checking into their rooms. Once the group was suitably refreshed, we then reconvened for a delightful dinner before retiring for the night.

Sunday 21 September 2025

Day 9:

Relais de la Reine, Isalo, to Isalo National Park - Piscina & Namaza Trails.

Having arrived after dark the previous evening, a 6.30 am breakfast gave everyone the opportunity to see for the first time the remarkable location of the Relais de la Reine Lodge. Set in amongst huge sandstone boulders, and looking (to be honest) more like the backdrop to a *Star Wars* set, it was radically different to anywhere else we'd stayed up to this point on the trip. The lodge's gardens were also beautifully tended,

with flowering *Pachypodium* plants already visible, along with a variety of local flowering shrubs. Some extraordinary trees were present too, such as an avenue consisting purely *Bismarckia nobilis* palms, a species not just endemic to Madagascar, but entirely confined to the region around Isalo.

It had been a windy night, but by morning this had fallen away and the wall-to-wall blue skies suggested the day had all the makings of being a hot one. Upon reaching the park HQ in Ranohira at around 8 am, we picked up Tody, our guide for the day, along with his assistant Tanaza, and with our tickets duly secured headed for the main entrance. En route, Tody talked a little of the origins of the word 'Ranohira' - with 'Rano' meaning water and 'hira' a local name for ring-tailed lemur. He also explained that Isalo was the first reserve to be given National Park status in 1962 and is the fourth largest in Madagascar. The entire park also considered sacred to the local Barra Tribe.

Kitting ourselves up for the long walk to the viewpoint, MD then spotted a small male oustalet's chameleon on the ground before everyone then set off up the hill. Looking to the rock faces ahead, the different colour bands of rocks were very striking, with Tody explaining that the cliffs are composed of sandstone that contains large amounts of bauxite, or iron. The presence of this metal not only creates an incredibly distinctive effect but also makes the rocks surprisingly dense. Large sections of cliff appeared additionally daubed with a bright, light green colour, which is due to the presence of a very distinct species of lichen commonly found across the park.

Initially, the only bird species to be seen were pied crows, common mynas or black kites, but a little higher up, Madagascar bulbuls and common jerys were also spotted flitting around in the branches of the dry deciduous forest running along the path. Next to be observed, as we passed through a patch of scrubby woodland, was an aggregation of flatted bugs on the trunk of a tree in the genus *Albizia*, while the call of the Madagascar brush warbler provided a familiar sound from a dense patch of undergrowth below the path.

Moving steadily upwards and into a slightly more open area, we were now surrounded by tapia trees *Uapaca bojeri*, which Tody explained were both a key component of the landscape here and an economically important species for the local population. These trees are not only able to withstand most fire outbreaks due to their tough, gnarled bark, but are also the food plant of the Madagascar silkworm, which is harvested commercially for the production of silk. As if to illustrate this, he then pointed out a moth cocoon wedged in a branched fork. A little further along, the botanical theme continued as our guide pointed out a species of sundew along the path edge, which was identified as *Drosera natalensis* - one of two endemic species of sundew found in Madagascar.

While here, Tody also pointed out some of the Barra Tribe's ancestral burial sites located higher up on the cliffs. He then went on to explain that the burial sites situated lower down tend to be temporary, but after a period of anywhere between two to five years, the dead person's ancestors then remove their relative's remains to a permanent site with a far more commanding view. Tody also gave us an important lesson on how to point by not fully extending the finger - which is deemed a sign of disrespect when indicating any sacred location.

Moving eventually up onto a large open plateau, we also noted both a plant in the genus *Helichrysum*, in the family *Asteraceae*, which the locals value highly for its medicinal properties and a small member of the genus *Mimosa*, which collapses upon being touched as an anti-herbivory response. In addition to a sparse scattering of tapia trees, plenty of termite mounds were suddenly apparent across the landscape, but we didn't dwell long as the unrelenting sun was by now beating heavily down on the group. Stopping at a nearby bush with some shade, Tody then played the perennial guides' game of 'spot the creature', with MD eventually finding a large female Isalo stick insect that looked remarkably and perhaps unsurprisingly just like a twig - as its name suggests. Tody went on to explain that the females are not only larger but also have a differently shaped tail. As if to demonstrate this, we then located one of the smaller males with its characteristic 'broken' tail.

The invertebrate theme then continued as Tody next showed the group the small endemic scorpion *Opiscanthus madagascariensis*, which spends the day underneath flat stones scattered across the plateau,

before then presumably emerging at night. At another bush close by, a small praying mantis was next to be the centre of attention, before a Madagascar lark and a male souimanga sunbird were spotted in a nearby tapia tree. One of the guests then found what could only have been a Madagascar button-quail moving through the ground vegetation, which subsequently refused to reappear, with the group having to settle for a second lark instead.

Elsewhere on the plateau, a large bluff of sandstone held two very impressive plants of *Pachypodium rostratum*, the undoubted emblem of the park. Possessing hugely swollen stems, just like an elephant's foot, the spiky branches emanating from the football-sized water storage receptacles are always topped with glorious lemon-yellow flowers at this time of the year. All agreed that the plant was simply one of the most extraordinary plants they'd ever seen, with HR also adding that some individual plants are believed to last well over 200 years. This is also not the sole *Pachypodium* representative in Madagascar, as eight other species are known - all of which are endemic to this magical island.

Carrying on, we then walked up to the most astonishing viewpoint, which offers an incredible vista across what has become known as 'Madagascar's Grand Canyon', with everyone taking a moment to preserve the vista either in their mind's eye or with the help of a camera. While taking in the full glory of this geological spectacle, one of the guests then spotted a large iguana-type lizard, which was subsequently identified as Dumeril's Madagascar swift and closely related to the introduced species that we'd previously observed at Palmarium Lodge earlier in the trip. With the natural swimming pools down in the canyons below, a touch too far to reach on this occasion, we slowly began retracing our steps.

On the way down, and with the weather a touch cooler, the birds proved to be more confiding than on the way up as we firstly spotted a Madagascar bee-eater, before then watching two peregrines fighting with a kestrel along the main cliff-face. And reaching the trees down below, we then spotted a female Madagascar paradise flycatcher in the undergrowth, before our attention switched to that of a yellow pansy butterfly flitting along the path ahead.

Back down at the parking area, we were reunited with the final member of our group who'd enjoyed a morning off. Having used this time to explore the hotel's grounds, she'd managed to obtain good views of both a pair of Madagascar hoopoes and a Madagascar giant swallowtail.

Back aboard the minibus once again, we then undertook the 45-minute drive around to the Namaza Trail, before walking across and down to the picnic tables close to the river. In the open, black kites and pied crows were once again abundant, while brilliant blue butterflies led us a merry dance along the forested section of the path. Arriving at our lunch spot, it was immediately obvious we would be sharing it with a troop of ring-tailed lemurs, which were present all around the camp, and we were just about to sit down to eat when we were interrupted by the discovery of the day's second lemur, in the form of Verreaux's sifaka. Dashing back down the path along which we'd just come, we immediately observed two individuals, seemingly on top of each other, and some 5m above us in a tree fork. Also called the 'white monkey', this also represented our third sifaka of the trip, and is the species that is well known for its 'dance moves' on the ground. However, on this occasion, the sifakas stayed up in the tree, so we returned to enjoy our delicious lunch that had been brought into the forest by local caterers.

Aware of the fact that time was now surely against us, we abandoned the idea of walking to the waterfall and instead decided to take a leisurely walk back out. Undoubtedly, the star in our return walk was that of a Madagascar emperor dragonfly, which was photographed in pristine condition by the side of the road, with MD remarking how similar to the British emperor dragonfly this species resembles. Carrying on the invertebrate theme, Tody next pointed out a large snout bug, which is the larval form of a local and endemic plant hopper. He then went on to explain that these bugs are frequently roasted whole by rural folk in Madagascar and supposedly taste just like bacon. While photographing the bugs we could also hear the soft, plaintive call of the Madagascar turtle dove, calling from further down the valley too.

Back at the bus, we then headed off for the second night at our hotel, paying a quick homage to the 'Queen of Isalo' rock formation *en route*, which does look remarkably like Queen Victoria sat on the throne!

Thanking our guides for their expertise, with 'the Lamako', we arrived back at our delightful base, where we found a little time to relax and freshen up before reconvening once more for both dinner and the compilation of the day's checklist. With it being our last night at Isalo, and due to the following day being a long, travel day, it was not long before all had retired for the night.

Monday 22 September 2025

Day 10:

Relais de la Reine, Isalo to Zombitse National Park & Les Dunes d'Ifaty, Ifaty.

Having missed the Madagascar hoopoes the previous day in Isalo, MD suggested a quick birdwatching session around the hotel grounds before breakfast. Meeting up with five of the group just outside the rooms at 6 am, we immediately hit the ground running with a flock of around 15 Madagascar munia, which also boosted the bird trip list by yet another species. Taking a meandering route down towards the tennis courts, we heard the ever-present call of Madagascar bulbuls, before then picking up a couple of common jerys flitting around in one of the ornamental shrubs.

Walking next along a section of path which consisted of mown grassland that bordered scrubby woodland, we then chanced upon at least six Madagascar turtle doves quietly feeding on the ground ahead of us. At this hour, the Hotel's grounds also echoed to the calls of at least two or three Madagascar coucals, so we were pleased to finally spot one as it flew along the woodland edge and before perching atop one of the trees. While watching the coucal through the scope, the familiar outline of a crested drongo was also noted in an adjacent tree.

Walking past the tennis courts, MD then picked up the incredibly recognisable flight pattern of a Madagascar hoopoe. Alighting on one of the rocky bluffs, it then proceeded to raise its crest to the delight of all concerned. Also appearing to carry a food item, it then quickly disappeared from view, before its mate flew in to exactly the same spot, also with food - clearly indicating that they were feeding a brood close by. While walking back up to the restaurant, our final bird of a very successful mini session proved to be that of a vasa parrot.

After breakfast and with our bills settled, we bid farewell to the staff at La Reine de Isalo, and boarded the minibus for the drive to Zombitse National Park. Much of the landscape during the three-hour journey consisted of flat, grassy plains, which were occasionally interspersed with sections that had recently been burnt to encourage growth for new zebu fodder. The only standout plant that broke up the monotony of the terrain here was the distinctive palm *Bismarckia nobilis*. Birds too, were few and far between, with Madagascar skylarks, common mynahs and Madagascar kestrels the only species we picked up while heading steadily west.

We passed a number of towns on the way, the most memorable of which was of course Ilakaka, otherwise known as the 'Sapphire boom town'. HR explained that in the early 1990s, there were only about 40 residents living in the area, but after the discovery of one of Earth's largest known deposits of alluvial sapphires in the Ilakaka River in 1998, the population quickly boomed to 60,000 by 2005. Since high profits are at stake, this then quickly becomes something of a 'cowboy town', with many stores buying and selling the gemstones either unearthed or discovered by locals panning in the river. While more heavily regulated now, driving through the town, it definitely still had that 'wild west' feel that many had only perhaps seen in the movies. And further on, while passing through the town of Manombo, we were able to see the locals panning for the sapphires in the river, in what appeared to be a huge operation.

By now we had moved over into the Mahafaly tribal area, as demonstrated by the number of tombs along the roadside. HR explained that the large tombs only tend to be erected for very important or rich folk, and are frequently adorned with zebu skulls and paintings - with one even modelled on a boat.

Finally, we began to see our first baobabs dotted across the savanna, which all belonged to the species *Adansonia za*. HR informed us that these isolated trees were in fact the last remnants of a great woodland

that had ultimately been decimated, initially for the collection of wood for building and cooking, before being cleared to make way for zebu grazing. The baobabs survive this massacre due to a combination of not being considered commercial timber and also being more fire-resistant than many other species.

Forest, however, began to be seen on both sides of the road, which marked the boundary of Zombitse National Park, with the habitat here classified as 'dry transition forest'. While driving to the entrance, marshals could be seen stationed at regular intervals along the road to ensure that no accidental fires were started, for example, by discarded cigarettes tossed from passing cars.

Reaching the Park entrance, our two guides Zirina and Lucien were waiting for us, and after a pit-stop, we immediately headed across the road and onto the park's well-marked trails. Our guides informed us that the park comprised 36,000ha, and represented the last remaining example of this type of forest across the entirety of Madagascar - in essence a truly special place.

The first birds noted were a couple of common jerys flitting around above our heads, while our guides pointed to a standing's day gecko on the back of the 'Welcome to Zombitse' sign. Now fully in the forest, and with the temperature still high, despite the canopy cover, a giant coua was suddenly spotted in the undergrowth. Obviously a habituated bird, due to its apparent tameness, the bird also appeared to have a damaged left leg, but this affliction didn't seem to hinder it unduly as all admired its gorgeous blue cere and large size.

A little further along the same trail, Lucien then showed us an endemic species of *Pandanus*, with prop roots much like a mangrove tree, which we were told was used by the locals to treat syphilis. While listening to his explanation, a number were temporarily distracted by a clearwing butterfly, with red hindwings, and in the genus *Acraea*, fluttered past. Moving on, MD was able to point out both the calls of common newtonia and souimanga sunbird, but rather more distinctive was that of the giant coua, which consisted of three or four clear notes sliding down a scale.

Lucien then stopped the group to point out a couple of warty chameleons, which is a large species primarily found in the drier southwest of the country and is also closely related to the more common oustalet's chameleon. Following word that a small troop of sifakas had been found, we then quickly followed our guides to the spot where they'd last been seen. Fortunately they hadn't moved far and were contentedly eating four or five metres above our heads. Consisting of a mother, babe and two other adult family members, we then spent a very happy half-hour watching them eat and interact with one another.

Leaving them to enjoy their late breakfast, we next tried to catch up with a coquerel's coua by moving towards its constantly repeated call. Gaining just a brief view, before it then dashed off through the dense undergrowth, rather easier to spot were two particularly fine baobab specimens close by - one comprising a single stem, while the other was 'a double'. While photographing the trees, HR spotted a kestrel, which had all the hallmarks of being the much rarer banded kestrel, but frustratingly most only saw its outline as it dashed out of sight, leaving it very much in the 'unconfirmed' category. While searching for the kestrel, a degree of recompense came from a fine view of a hook-billed vanga.

While on this occasion, a Zombitse sportive lemur could not be located, our guides managed to take us instead for wonderful views of a Madagascar scops owl. Sitting perfectly still at the entrance of a tree-hole, this endemic owl proved much easier to see than one we'd caught up with earlier in the trip at Andasibe. And with our time at Zombitse almost up, we headed back towards the toad, with yet another warty chameleon and a nocturnal Sakalava velvet gecko ensconced in a tree-hole observed on the way. While admiring the gecko we then stumbled across the Verreaux's sifakas once again, but as they were not mostly asleep, we left them to digest their breakfast in peace.

Also on the way, Lucien pointed out a Pallisandre tree, otherwise known as African rosewood. This is considered a tree of high commercial value and is easily identified by its distinctively rippled bark. With the sun now beating down, a mocker swallowtail butterfly whizzed past the group, before one of the guests managed to take excellent photos of a dragonfly with black bands on a yellowish abdomen.

But before leaving, our wonderful guides had one last surprise for us, by taking us to the roosting spot of our second owl species of the morning, this being a white-browed owl. Initially we could only see its back, but by relocating, we secured wonderful views and were also able to see why the owl was so well named!

Taking our lunch on the other side of the road, we were joined by a lovely American couple, before thanking the guides with our now customary 'Lamako'. Heading off in a southwesterly direction and towards the coast, once again, we passed through the roadside town of Sakaraha where some impressive Mahafaly tribal tombs were on show. Further on and near the small village of Mahaboboka, the road began to deteriorate even further, but our slower speed had the one advantage of enabling us to spot a small flock of cattle egrets, a couple of hammerkops and a Madagascar kestrel. Stopping briefly to take in the mixed flock, one of the hammerkops then flew straight up into an enormous nest that appeared to be almost the size of an eagle eyrie.

The next village we drove through was Andoharodsy, which is famed for the distillation of toaka gasy - the Malagasy rum. This 'moonshine' is produced from fermenting sugar cane and tamarind by the roadside, before bottling and selling it to passing trade along RN7. This distillation process creates an incredibly strong liquor, with apocryphal tales of some locals losing their sight after Toaka gasy fuelled binges! By now, it was the hottest part of the day and we were thankful for the AC within the minibus as we spotted our first namaqua doves along the roadside, in addition to the regular sprinkling of larks, pied crows and black kites.

As we neared the coast, the vegetation began to subtly change to that of a spiny scrub-type landscape, with the baobab *Adansonia rubrostipa* suddenly prominent, along with a couple of scrubby trees and bushes from the families *Didieraceae* and *Euphorbiaceae*. Here too, goats appeared to finally be replacing zebu as the default livestock, and we passed a number of sizeable herds being tended by their owners. Finally, at around 5.45 pm, we obtained our first view of the sea, or Mozambique Channel, while also passing Table Mountain, which, much like the 'Table Mountain' of Cape Town, South Africa, is considered the symbol of the town of Toliara.

Passing a huge date palm plantation, we then entered the outskirts of Toliara, before stopping briefly at a hotel for a pitstop. With an hour still to go, and dusk descending over the city, it was a riot of colour and noise as we eased through the melee of people, cyclo taxis and other vehicles. But after the best part of 45 minutes of 'bumper-to-bumper' traffic, we finally managed to break free from the city, and noticed the habitat abruptly change to that of coastal grassland, with distant coastal dunes and salt pans just about still visible on the horizon.

Driving down the private road to 'Les Dunes d'Ifaty' in darkness, we finally pulled into the car park, and while being assigned our room could hear Madagascar nightjars churring outside - as if to welcome us! Retiring to our rooms, everyone then had the opportunity to refresh before dinner. And with a very early start planned at the spiny forest the following morning, most retired almost immediately after dinner for what would be our last full day's wildlife-watching of the trip.

Tuesday 23 September 2025

Day 11:

Ifaty Private Reserve and then Belalanda and Ifaty Salt pans.

Meeting outside the lodge at 5.30 am, we all boarded the minibus for the short drive to the spiny forest, with an exciting morning of bird and mammal watching surely ahead of us. Picking up our guide Relaché *en route*, along with his spotters, Christian & Manula, dawn was breaking as we parked up at the forest entrance. The 70ha private reserve is owned and managed by Relache's family and is not just a stunning place, but also an astonishingly important site for a number of species found virtually nowhere else in the world.

With the sun slowly rising above the horizon, we were able to catch our first glimpse of the reserve's famous baobab trees, which looked incredibly atmospheric when backlit in the low, polarised dawn light.

Almost immediately, our spotters disappeared off into the forest to see what they could track down, while we followed Relaché into this most surreal of reserves. Our first good bird was waiting for us right at the entrance, in the form of a male sakalava weaver. Here, the male has a distinctive yellow head, while the females are much plainer, and just like the African weaver species they also build sociable nests in palm trees.

The spiny forests are also renowned for being home to a number of species of coua, and it wasn't long before we encountered our first, in the form of a running coua. Picked up initially just a few metres away, we all managed to get great views of a species that can sometimes be tricky to see well. With the temperature also beautifully cool at this time of day, bird activity looked to be high as we quickly picked up both a singing souimanga sunbird and a calling Madagascar turtle dove. Looking at a newtonia that 'sounded a bit different' Relaché was able to confirm MD's suspicions that this was indeed Archibold's newtonia - a very localised species to the dry, arid habitats of southwest Madagascar. This was not just a lifer for all the group, but for MD as well - and only the second of the trip!

Once fully immersed in the forest's interior, and with the light now steadily improving, we were finally able to fully take in both the majesty of the baobab species *Adansonia rubrostipa* and the weirdness of the octopus trees *Didiera madagascariensis* - the reserve's two most distinctive and celebrated trees. The reserve is also very well managed too, with many of the plants possessing labels that denote each species' common Malagasy name and scientific name. There is additionally a wonderful feeling to the spiny forest, with all commenting how different it was to anything they'd experienced elsewhere in the country.

Suddenly the spotters could be heard whistling to Relaché, who implored us to quickly follow him, as they'd managed to locate a long-tailed ground roller. Initially, the bird was only seen poorly, resulting in just brief glimpses, but after a little bit of patience, the bird walked right in front of the assembled group before then pecking away for food in the sandy substrate. Surely one of Madagascar's rarest birds, it is also one of the most localised, being confined entirely to the spiny forests of southwest Madagascar. But perhaps most importantly of all, the long-tailed ground roller is a stunning bird, with all delighting in this Malagasy equivalent of the North American roadrunner!

Moving on, our spotters once again earned their keep by tracking down another rare spiny forest resident - this being the sub-desert mesite. The mesites are an ancient family of birds entirely confined to Madagascar, and all three species are well known to freeze when disturbed, which is very handy when a group of eight naturalists are equally keen to catch up with them! This individual thankfully appeared to have read the 'mesite-manual' and so was frozen to a branch, enabling all to see and photograph the bird's distinctive hooked bill and spotted breast.

Elsewhere in the forest, at least two stripe-throated Jerys were noted here too, which were initially identified as common jery, but subsequently separated on their more musical call. Souimanga sunbirds and Madagascar coucals also dominated the soundscape here, while a single namaqua dove was noted atop one of the stems of an octopus tree. Looking up, two greater vasa parrots then flew past, before Relaché pointed out two sickle-billed vangas on the edge of the forest. Quite a noisy bird, this is always a difficult species to spot, but there can be no mistaking the species' long, decurved bill, which perfectly complements their striking black & white plumage.

A harsh parrot-like call then signalled the presence of the day's second species of coua, this being crested. Seemingly even shyer than the running coua, and happier up in trees, most got nothing more than just a glimpse of the bird's elegantly coiffured crest before disappearing off into the scrub, never to be seen again.

By now, many of the guests had become decidedly hungry and so we hastily returned to the bus, with some of the guests purchasing souvenirs from the locals at the reserve's entrance. Enjoying a late breakfast back at the hotel, we met up once again with Relaché and his spotters at around 10 am for a trip to Belalanda and the adjacent salt pans.

Located a touch further to the south, the short drive to the wetlands at Belalanda was peppered with pied crows and Indian mynas, but upon driving across to the first lake, we could immediately see a small flock of lesser flamingoes, composed of one adult and a number of immature birds. Also out on the water were a handful of black-winged stilts, along with a single greenshank, while much closer to our position, a white-fronted plover and its young chick were enjoyed by all. Scanning around the mud, a few more white-fronted plovers were found, followed by a small, tight flock of kittlitz plovers, which are superficially similar to their white fronted cousins - and so need an experienced eye to be confidently identified.

By now, the heat was searing, with the saving grace coming from a gentle breeze that kept conditions just about bearable. The main lake is more heavily vegetated, and behind an extensive patch of Papyrus, a large flock of several hundred red-billed teal was next to be noted. Here black-winged stilts were far more numerous, but most eyes were drawn to a larger flamingo flock composed of both greater and lessers. An impromptu masterclass (with the help of MD's scope) then ensued on the key distinguishing features of these two superficial species - which primarily focused on bill pattern, colour and size. Along with the flamingoes, a few white-faced whistling ducks, and at least four hottentot teal were also visible out on the lake's muddy fringe.

While watching the flamingoes and ducks, HR also pointed out a noisy, displaying Madagascar cisticola in the scrubby vegetation behind us, while the call of a Madagascar swamp warbler could clearly be heard from the papyrus stands out on the water. Moving a little further along, many more ducks instantly became viewable, which up to that point had remained hidden behind the papyrus stand. Confident that we'd seen pretty much all there was to see, we then headed back to the minibus, spotting a few bee-eaters on the way.

Back aboard, we then began heading north again, before Relaché suggested we should stop by the beaches for a scan across the water's edge. A few large blocks of mangroves were also present here, but by searching the stretches of beach clearly visible in between, we quickly found a moulting grey plover, followed by 20 or 30 whimbrel, a single greenshank and a few turnstone. While continuing to scan, a pair of common terns were spotted relaxing on a sand bar, before a single wader was then picked up. Initially unsure as to its identification, good views through the scope helped us pick out what appeared to be all the key features of a greater sand plover moulting into winter plumage.

Back in the bus, we next drove back past a section of salt marsh, where after a little bit of scanning Relaché declared he'd found no less than three, three-banded plovers. Descending onto the roadside once more, we were then treated to simply marvellous views of this terrific and super-smart wader. With its three bands and red eye, this wader's star quality definitely outshone that of a couple of kittlitz plovers close by, which we'd also seen well earlier that morning.

The short grassland surrounding the salt pans just outside Ifaty are also well known as being the one location where it is possible to find a Madagascar plover. Stopping by the roadside, we all proceeded to scan for what would comfortably be the rarest wader of the trip. A common sandpiper represented another new bird for the week, but despite spotting a few kittlitz plovers, another greenshank, a crested drongo and a Madagascar kestrel, there was no sign whatsoever of our target species. Relaché said that his spotters would have another good look later in the day, and if they managed to locate it, then we could potentially return before the evening's night walk.

Back at the hotel, we took a delightful lunch before everyone enjoyed some relaxation time for the rest of the afternoon. Reconvening once again at 5 pm, we then headed straight back to the salt pans where Christian and Manula had managed to track down a single Madagascar plover, and after a long walk around the edges of the various salt pans, we finally clapped eyes on the black chevron around the chest that is the defining feature of this bird. This charismatic wader also made it a 'sensational sixth' different species of plover that we'd encountered during the course of the day. Thanking our spotters for their dedication to the cause, we then drove straight around to Ifaty to commence our night walk in the spiny forest.

By now, at 6.15 pm, it was already decidedly dusky as we walked back through the now familiar entrance of the reserve with Relaché and his spotters. Almost immediately, they led us straight to the location of a white-footed sportive lemur, which was wedged into what appeared to be an incredibly uncomfortable roosting spot situated in between the branches of a spiky octopus tree. To be honest, from most angles all we could see was a little bit of fur on its flanks, and either a hand or a foot, but this sighting still represented yet another new lemur species to add to our list.

With it now pitch black, we were totally reliant on our head torches, as a giant blue-legged cricket *Colossopus grandidieri* at the entrance to a tree hole was next to be admired. Possessing black and white stripes, along with blue bands on its legs, the enormous ovipositor projecting from its rear end enabled us to sex it as being a female. Also close by, a couple of warty chameleons were noted, before one of the spotters located a fine Dumeril's ground boa slithering along in the undergrowth. At least 1.5m long, it was a beautifully marked creature and a memorable find for many in the group.

Suddenly a cry of delight came up as Relaché spotted a lesser hedgehog tenrec, low down on the ground. Endemic to the spiny forests, this individual had patently just come out of hibernation and represented the very first tenrec of the trip for many of the guests. Thrilled to have finally caught up with a member of this most peculiar and endemic Malagasy family, these remarkable forests had one last surprise in store for us on the way out, in the form of a grey-brown mouse lemur. Initially spotted running up a tree like a turbo-charged squirrel, it then paused in the light for a proper appreciation of what amounted to our third mouse-lemur of the trip.

Thanking Relaché and his wonderful team for all their efforts, we gave them a good send-off with the 'lamako', before heading back for our final dinner at Dunes D'Ifaty, and prior to our eventual return to Antananarivo the following day.

Wednesday 24 September 2025

Day 12:

Reniala Forest Reserve and the Arboretum in Toliara, before & flight to Antananarivo Airport in the evening. Overnight at the Relais des Plateaux

Rising early once more, and with our flight back to Tana not scheduled until the evening, this gave us the perfect opportunity to visit the Reserve of Reniala for the first time. Located immediately adjacent to the forest owned and managed by Relaché's family, Reniala consists of around 64ha of spiny forest. Our guide for the tour was Dabe, who explained that the entire forest was surrounded by an electric fence, presumably to keep out those intent either on taking either firewood or hunting, and contained around 800 baobabs, all consisting of just one species - *rubrostipa*.

Stopping to look at an octopus tree, Dabe explained that the wood was used for making paddles and that the locals also call it the 'compass tree' as the branches always tend to point in a southerly direction. Next to be pointed out was a 'fake baobab' in the *Fabaceae* family - *Delonyx decaryi*, which is distinguished by its trunk being far narrower at the base. And next to the fake baobab was a tree known locally as 'balsa-wood' *Givotia madagascariensis*, which being strong and very light is used for making boats.

While learning about the trees, we also kept both an eye and ear out for birds, and this was rewarded with the calls of crested coua, Madagascar coucal and Madagascar hoopoe from somewhere in the reserve's interior. Taking in a particularly impressive baobab, we next learnt that these trees are incredibly slow growing - often no more than a centimetre a year - but may ultimately reach three or four thousand years of age.

With Dabe patently a very knowledgeable Ethnobotanist, the next tree to be studied was a representative in the *Euphorbiaceae*, *Euphorbia tirucalli*, which produces sap that the locals collect to stun fish in water. Switching between trees and birds, We then gained lovely views of a male Madagascar magpie robin, and a male souimanga sunbird, before then listening to the distinct call of a running coua. An olive-capped coua

then appeared briefly, which up to that point, was a species we'd only heard on the trip. Originally considered merely a different colour form of the red-capped coua, this has recently been elevated to that of a species in its own right. Also skulking in the undergrowth here was a Madagascar buttonquail, which many of the guests had missed at Isalo National Park earlier in the trip.

Back to the trees once more, Dabe next pointed out both a tree in the family *Boraginaceae* - *Cordia madagascariensis*, which is most frequently cut in the production of charcoal, and another in the family *Bursuraceae* - *Commiphora mahafaliensis*, which has green, peeling bark that is capable of photosynthesising. This clever innovation negates the need for too many leaves, which can be energetically expensive to produce.

Having seen the elephant's-foot *Pachypodium* at Isalo, we were then shown another very distinctive member of the genus, in the form of *Pachypodium geayi*, which comprised a metallic, grey bottle-shaped trunk, with uniformly placed thorns and thin, grey-green leaves. This enabled Dabe to also complete the list of the four different types of wood (from different trees) within the spiny forests that are used to make boat components - such as the outrigger, paddles, seat and canoe itself.

Turning our gaze upwards, the group then enjoyed terrific views of a pair of Madagascar hoopoes close by, along with the distinctive silhouette of a Madagascar drongo. Here too we picked up a pair of stripe-throated Jery, which then proceeded to bathe and preen in the sun, allowing us to properly appreciate a species which we'd previously not seen well elsewhere. Dabe then showed he was not just a plantsman by pointing out a perched Madagascar buzzard on the edge of the reserve, with the only other time we'd recorded this species having been when we'd spotted a couple on the wing back in Mantadia. While watching the buzzard, a common jery was also clearly picked up by its call, which tends to be higher-pitched than the vocalisations made by its stripe-throated cousin.

Changing focus to that of invertebrates, we then admired some cotton stainer bugs, along with their red larval instars, which were feeding on some baobab fruits. Switching quickly back to birds once more, a chabert vanga was picked up high in an octopus tree, while down below our second running coua in as many days sauntered across the path directly in front of us. Also on the ground here were a colony of at least four or five Madagascar plated lizards, before a couple of three-eyed lizards were picked up dashing around in the sand. This brief flurry of reptiles then abruptly ended upon reaching the entrance once again, with our last bird being that of a female sakalava weaver along the electric fence.

Purchasing a few souvenirs from locals, who had been patiently waiting for our emergence with an array of stalls, we then returned to Dunes d'Ifaty. With a couple of hours off, to both relax and pack, we then headed south towards Toliara and onto the Hotel Auberge, which adjoins the Arboretum Antsokay, where we would be able to have some lunch and another opportunity to relax before our evening flight back to Tana.

On the way to the arboretum, we passed a small community of folk from the Vezo Tribe, who are semi-nomadic fishermen. HR explained that they make their houses from local timber and palms, which can be quickly broken down, much like flat-pack furniture, when they are ready to move on. While driving along the coast, we were also able to note plenty of Vezo boats, with virtually every single one containing at least a patch of blue, which the tribe consider to be a sacred colour.

Driving into the hotel and botanical gardens, we immediately noted a few namaqua doves flying around the scrubby vegetation. And after a moment to refresh, we took our seats at a table laid out for lunch, which also offered an idyllic view across both a swimming pool and a well-tended garden. While waiting for the food to arrive, entertainment was provided by a pair of Madagascar paradise flycatchers building a nest in a palm close by.

After a delightful meal, MD, HR, and a few of the guests then took a short tour around the botanical gardens in the company of guide Yorban. The gardens here were very well maintained, with plenty of labels to help us identify what we were looking at. Always on the lookout for birds, MD spotted a pair of chabert vanga building a nest, while a bonus was provided with the brief sighting of a pair of sub-desert brush warblers

flitting around in the understory. Now back at the entrance, our guide had one more surprise for us, in the form of a roosting Mauritian tomb bat high up in a palm tree - which was a new species for all concerned.

After the short drive back to the airport, we finally bid farewell to Alain and his son Antonio, who had both driven and looked after us so well from Fianarantsoa right to Ifaty. The flight back was packed, but trouble-free, and once back in the capital, we were met by our new driver before being driven the short distance back to Relais Des Plateaux, where we'd started our trip two weeks previously. Having arrived so late, most went straight to bed, while a small cadre enjoyed a quick beer before heading for their rooms too!

Thursday / Friday, 25 & 26 September 2025

Day 13 & 14:

Suitably invigorated after a good night's sleep, we met up with HR and our new driver after breakfast for the 30-minute drive to Lake Tsarasaotra - surely the best reserve in the whole of the country's capital. With the reserve a short distance to the southeast, we first passed the rice paddies close to Lake Avato, on the Betsimistatatra Plain. Out in the fields here, there were plenty of herons and egrets - including great white egret, dimorphic egret and a few black herons.

Parking up outside the reserve, which is also a notified Ramsar Wetland site, we paid the entrance fee and headed in. Immediately, we could see hundreds, if not a couple of thousand ducks, with an abundant supporting cast of herons and egrets. However, before getting to grips with identifications here, all were able to enjoy a pair of Madagascar hoopoe excavating a hole in a tree right by the entrance. Also here, a perched malachite kingfisher excited the photographers in the group, while the rest got stuck into the birds on and around the lake.

Scanning around, red-billed teal were the most numerous wildfowl species on the water, followed by white-faced whistling ducks, which were mostly roosting on the branches of fallen trees along the water's edge. A few handsome hottentot teal were also noted in amongst the red-billed teal too. The herons, by contrast, were most abundant on the island, as black-crowned night heron, great white egret, dimorphic egret, squacco heron, a few cattle egrets and black herons were quickly logged. A couple of common moorhen also represented a good find here, but not necessarily one to excite the guests with it being exactly the same species that breeds in the UK!

HR then managed to find a couple of meller's ducks right at the edge of the island, which is an endemic species classified as 'Endangered' by the IUCN and also one of two key species that Tsarasaotra is rightly famed for. Walking further around, HR was also able to locate an adult Madagascar pond heron, enabling all to be able to enjoy close-up views of this species' characteristic snow-white plumage, blue bill and blue cere so clearly. And the good birds kept coming when MD spotted a couple of fulvous whistling ducks tucked in at the base of the island. This duck is considered a rare species at Tsarasaotra and also represented our third new trip bird of the morning.

Walking slowly round, we picked up a small flock of common fodies, while one of the guests who stayed near the entrance to watch butterflies managed to identify brown pansy, African monarch and brilliant blue. Reuniting back at the entrance, we were all able to enjoy a family party of Madagascar kestrels before bidding farewell to a simply fabulous urban oasis.

Next on their agenda was to take the 45-minute drive to Bohimanga and the King's Palace up on the Hill. Here the palace is surrounded by a small patch of remnant forest at an altitude of over 1,300m and rises above the rest of the city, with HR explaining that Bohimanga means 'blue forest' with blue considered a colour of real beauty.

The Palace was home to the King of the Merina Tribe, prior to the colonial era of the French and is still considered a spiritual and holy place by Malagasy people. Driving up the hill, MD stayed back with one of the guests, while HR took the group around the site with a local guide. Initially built in 1610 under the

guidance of King Andrianjaka, the palace eventually passed onto King Adrianampoinimerina, who had many wives and an enormous family. The visit proved to be a fascinating insight into the history and culture of what is now a very modern Madagascar.

Heading back for lunch, HR then met up with us at around 4 pm for an opportunity to buy some souvenirs at the famed Digue Market. Guests then tried their bartering skills as they picked up everything from wooden sculptures to beautiful carved spoons made from zebu horn. On the way back to the hotel, we witnessed many young Malagasy out on the streets as part of a protest at the continued power cuts and interrupted water supplies in the city, but we didn't realise the significance of this until we tried to get to the airport later on in the evening. Apparently, the protests had turned violent and all flights out of the country had suddenly been cancelled.

Faced with nowhere to sleep, the staff at the Relais des Plateaux went above and beyond the call of duty by sorting out camp beds and blankets for us to sleep in for the night. Waking up the following morning, and after breakfast, we were very relieved to find the situation somewhat improved, and with a new flight booked for us, we headed to the airport. After managing to get home, HR joined us at the airport, where we were all able to thank our fabulous Malagasy guide and good friend one last time for all his incredible help and good humour throughout the entire trip. While two of the guests had stayed on to travel elsewhere in Madagascar, the rest boarded their respective planes to destinations in London and the USA after a life-enhancing and unforgettable trip.



Clockwise from top left: forest rock thrush (© Pat Hogarth), mother and baby ring-tailed lemur, a baobab, O'Shaunessy's chameleon, long-tailed ground roller & ring-tailed vontsira (all © Mike Dilger)

Cover images by: Golden bamboo lemur & Scaly round roller (Mike Dilger), Giraffe-necked weevil & Madagascar hoope (Pat Hogarth)

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Checklist for Madagascar with Mike Dilger



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13
	BIRDS														
1	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			H										
2	Squacco heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	✓												✓
3	Madagascar pond heron	<i>Ardeola idae</i>													✓
4	Striated heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>		✓											
5	Black-crowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			✓		✓								✓
6	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓				✓			✓					✓
7	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓		✓		✓			✓		✓	✓		✓
8	Black heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>	✓												✓
9	Dimorphic egret	<i>Egret garzetta</i>	✓				✓				✓				✓
10	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	✓									✓			
11	Greater flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>											✓		
12	Lesser flamingo	<i>Phoeniconaias minor</i>											✓		
13	African pygmy goose	<i>Nettapus auritus</i>					✓								
14	Fulvous whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>													✓
15	White-faced whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>											✓		✓
16	Meller's duck	<i>Anas melleri</i>													✓
17	Red-billed teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>					✓						✓		✓
18	Hottentot teal	<i>Anas hottentota</i>											✓		✓
19	Madagascar cuckoo-hawk	<i>Aviceda madagascariensis</i>		✓											
19	Madagascar cuckoo-hawk	<i>Aviceda madagascariensis</i>		✓											
20	Madagascar buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>	✓	✓										✓	
21	Yellow-billed kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
22	Henst's goshawk	<i>Accipiter henstii</i>							H						
23	Madagascar kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Banded kestrel	<i>Falco zoniventris</i>									✓				
25	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>									✓				

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26	Madagascar buttonquail	<i>Turnix nigricollis</i>									✓		✓		
27	Subdesert mesite	<i>Monias benschi</i>											✓		
28	Madagascar flufftail	<i>Sarothrura insularis</i>						H							
29	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>													✓
30	Red-knobbed coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>											✓		
31	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>											✓		
32	Madagascar pratincole	<i>Glareola ocularis</i>			✓										
33	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>											✓		
34	Greater sand plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>											✓		
35	Madagascar plover	<i>Charadrius thoracicus</i>											✓		
36	Kittlitz's plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>											✓		
37	Three-banded plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>											✓		
38	White-fronted plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus</i>											✓		
39	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>											✓		
40	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>											✓		
41	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>											✓		
42	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>											✓		
43	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>											✓		
44	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓		✓								
45	Madagascar turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia picturata</i>	✓								H	✓	✓		
46	Namaqua dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>										✓	✓	✓	
47	Madagascar green pigeon	<i>Treron australis</i>			✓										
48	Madagascar blue pigeon	<i>Alectroenas madagascariensis</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓						
49	Grey-headed lovebird	<i>Agapornis cana</i>								✓	✓		H	✓	
50	Greater vasa parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>		✓											
51	Lesser vasa parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>				H		H	✓						
52	Crested coua	<i>Coua cristata</i>											✓	H	
53	Blue coua	<i>Coua caerulea</i>				H		✓	✓						
54	Red-fronted coua	<i>Coua reynaudii</i>						H	H						
55	Olive-capped coua	<i>Coua olivaceiceps</i>												H	✓
56	Coquerel's coua	<i>Coua coquereli</i>										✓			
57	Running coua	<i>Coua cursor</i>											✓	✓	
58	Giant coua	<i>Coua gigas</i>										✓			
59	Madagascar coucal	<i>Centropus toulou</i>	✓	✓		H	H	H	H		H	✓	✓	H	

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60	Madagascar cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>		H	H			✓	H						
61	Madagascar nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>	H	H		H					H	H	H	H	H
62	Madagascar scops owl	<i>Otus rutilus</i>	✓			H						✓			
63	White-browed owl	<i>Ninox superciliaris</i>										✓			
64	Madagascar long-eared owl	<i>Asio madagascariensis</i>		✓											
65	African palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
66	African black swift	<i>Apus barbatus</i>			✓										
67	Madagascar malachite kingfisher	<i>Alcedo vintsioides</i>	✓	✓			✓			✓			H		✓
68	Madagascar pygmy kingfisher	<i>Ispidina madagascariensis</i>			✓										
69	Velvet asity	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>	✓						✓						
70	Olive bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Cuckoo roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>		H	✓			H	H						
72	Madagascar hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>								✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
73	Short-legged ground roller	<i>Brachypteracias leptosomus</i>		✓											
74	Scaly ground roller	<i>Brachypteracias squamiger</i>		H					✓						
75	Pitta-like ground roller	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>						H	✓						
76	Long-tail ground roller	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>											✓		
77	Common sunbird asity	<i>Neodrepanis coruscans</i>						H	✓						
78	Madagascar green sunbird	<i>Nectarinia notata</i>	H	✓				H	H						
79	Souimanga sunbird	<i>Nectarinia souimanga</i>		H		H	H	✓	H		✓		✓	✓	
80	Madagascar lark	<i>Mirafra hova</i>									✓	✓	✓	✓	
81	Mascarene martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>		✓	✓										
82	Brown-throated martin	<i>Riparia paludicaola</i>	✓												
83	Madagascar wagtail	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓				
84	Forest rock thrush	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>							✓						
85	Madagascar magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus albospecularis</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓				✓	✓	
86	Madagascar stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	✓												
87	Common jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>	H					H	✓		✓	✓	✓		
88	Green jery	<i>Neomixis viridis</i>			✓			H	✓						
89	Stripe-throated jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>											✓	✓	
90	Rand's warbler	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>		✓	H			H	H						
91	Madagascar cisticola	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>											✓		
92	Madagascar brush-warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>						H	✓						
93	Sub-desert brush-barbler	<i>Nesillas lantzi</i>											H	✓	

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94	Madagascar swamp-warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>											H		
95	Spectacled tetraka	<i>Xanthomixis zosterops</i>							✓						
96	Grey-crowned tetraka	<i>Xanthomixis cinereiceps</i>							H						
97	Long-billed tetraka	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>	✓						H						
98	White-throated oxylabes	<i>Oxylabes madagascariensis</i>	H						H						
99	Madagascar white-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓				
100	Archbold's newtonia	<i>Newtonia archboldi</i>											✓		
101	Common newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>	H	H	✓			H	H			H	✓	✓	
102	Red-tailed vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>	✓	✓	✓			H	H						
103	Blue vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>							✓						
104	Chabert vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>	✓										✓	✓	
105	White-headed vanga	<i>Leptopterus viridis</i>		✓											
106	Hook-billed vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>				✓		✓				✓			
107	Rufous vanga	<i>Schetba rufa</i>							✓						
108	Sickle-billed vanga	<i>Falcolea palliata</i>											✓		
109	Madagascar cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>	✓	✓					✓						
110	Madagascar bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H
111	Tylas vanga	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>		✓					✓						
112	Pollen's vanga	<i>Xenopirostris polleni</i>					✓		H						
113	Madagascar paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓				✓
114	Nuthatch vanga	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>	✓	✓	H										
115	Ward's vanga	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>	✓					✓							
116	Crested drongo	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>	✓			✓	✓	H	H		✓	✓	✓	✓	
117	Pied crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>					✓	H		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
118	Madagascar starling	<i>Hartlaubius auratus</i>	✓		✓										
119	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
120	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓		✓								
121	Nelicourvi weaver	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>	✓	✓	✓				H						
122	Sakalava weaver	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>											✓	✓	
123	Madagascar fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	✓		✓		✓				✓		✓		
124	Forest fody	<i>Foudia omisa</i>							✓						
125	Madagascar mannikin	<i>Lonchura nana</i>										✓			
126	Lesser crested tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>			✓										

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MAMMALS															
1	Grey-brown mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus griseorufus</i>													✓
2	Goodman's mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>	✓												
3	Rufous mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>							✓						
4	Fat-tailed dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus medius</i>				✓									
5	Crossley's dwarf lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>		✓					✓						
6	Small-toothed sportive lemur	<i>Lepilemur microdon</i>							✓	✓					
7	Petter's sportive lemur	<i>Lepilemur petteri</i>													✓
8	Golden bamboo lemur	<i>Haplemur aureus</i>							✓	✓					
9	Ring-tailed lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>									✓	✓			
10	Brown lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓					
11	Red-fronted brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur rufifrons</i>							✓						
12	Red-bellied Lemur	<i>Eulemur rubriventer</i>		✓		✓			✓						
13	Black-and-white ruffed lemur	<i>Varecia ariagata</i>				✓			H						
14	Eastern woolly lemur	<i>Avahi laniger</i>		✓											
15	Diademed sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>	✓	✓	✓										
16	Milne-Edward's sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>							✓	✓					
17	Verreaux's sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>										✓	✓		
18	Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>	✓	H	✓	✓									
19	Aye-aye	<i>Daubentonia madagascariensis</i>			✓	✓									
20	Crowned lemur (Introduced)	<i>Eulemur coronatus</i>				✓									
21	Black lemur (Introduced)	<i>Eulemur macaco</i>				✓									
22	Greater hedgehog tenrec	<i>Setifer setosus</i>			✓										
23	Lesser hedgehog tenrec	<i>Echinops telfairi</i>													✓
24	Ring-tailed Vontsira	<i>Galidia elegans</i>							✓						
25	Brown rat (Introduced)	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>			✓										
26	Mauritian tomb bat	<i>Taphozous mauritanus</i>													✓
AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES															
1	Mascarene ridged frog	<i>Ptychadena mascarensis</i>													✓
2	White-vented reed frog	<i>Heterixalus alboguttatus</i>				✓									
3	Betsileo reed frog	<i>Heterixalus betsileo</i>				✓									
4	Green bright-eyed frog	<i>Boophis viridis</i>		✓											
5	Madagascar frog	<i>Mantidactylus sp. majori</i>								✓					

6	Pandanus frog	<i>Guibemantis pulcher</i>							✓						
7	Mahanoro tree-hole frog	<i>Plethodontohyla notosticta</i>				✓									
8	Radiated tortoise	<i>Astrochelys radiata</i>				✓					✓	✓			
9	Short-horned chameleon	<i>Calumma brevicorne</i>						✓							
10	O'Shaughnessy's chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>						✓							
11	Parson's chameleon	<i>Calumma parsoni</i>	✓		✓										
12	Oustalet's chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>	✓							✓	✓	✓			
13	Warty chameleon	<i>Furcifer verrucosus</i>										✓	✓	✓	
14	Panther chameleon	<i>Furcifer pardalis</i>				✓									
15	Palmerium chameleon	<i>Brookesia akin-nofy</i>				✓									
16	Blue-legged chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>						✓							
17	Three-eyed lizard	<i>Chalerodon madagascariensis</i>												✓	
18	Dumeril's Madagascar swift	<i>Oplurus quadrimaculatus</i>									✓				
19	Cuvier's Madagascar swift	<i>Oplurus cuvieri</i>				✓					✓				
20	Madagascar keeled plated lizard	<i>Tracheloptychus madagascariensis</i>												✓	
21	Lined day gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		
22	Peacock day gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>						✓							
23	Standing's day gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>										✓			
24	Sakalava velvet gecko	<i>Blaesodactylus sakalava</i>										✓			
25	Satanic leaf-tailed gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>						✓							
26	Mossy leaf-tailed gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>	✓												
27	Duméril's boa	<i>Acrantophis dumerili</i>											✓		
28	Madagascar cat-eyed snake	<i>Madagascarophis colubrinus</i>								✓					
29	Bernier's striped snake	<i>Dromicodryas bernieri</i>									✓				
30	Collared bright snake	<i>Liophidium torquatum</i>		✓		✓									
	BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS														
1	Mocker swallowtail	<i>Papilio dardanus meriones</i>										✓			
2	Madagascar giant swallowtail	<i>Pharmacophagus antenor</i>									✓				
3	African migrant	<i>Catopsilla spp.</i>									✓				
4	African monarch	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>									✓				✓
5	Madagascar forest nymph	<i>America rabena</i>				✓									
6	Madagascar leopard	<i>Phalanta madagascariensis</i>						✓							
7	Acraea spp.	<i>Acraea spp.</i>				✓									

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23	Firefly	<i>Lampyridae</i>				✓									
24	Giant blue-legged cricket	<i>Colossopus grandidieri</i>										✓			
25	Amblypigyd spider	<i>Amblypygi</i>										✓			
26	Cotton-stainer bug	<i>Dysdercus sp.</i>												✓	
27	Red dropwing sp.	<i>Trithemis sp.</i>	✓												

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