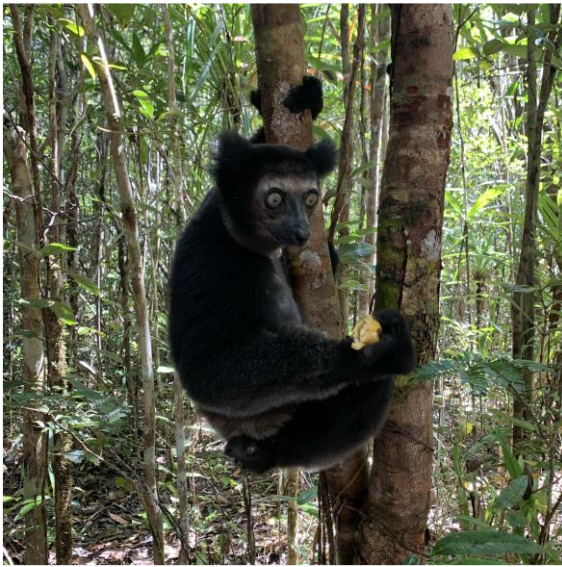


## Tour Report

# Madagascar with Mike Dilger

12 – 27 September 2022

Indri



Panther chameleon



Baobabs in the spiny forest



Ring-tailed lemur



Compiled by Mike Dilger

Image of Baobabs by Gloria Espinosa

Image of panther chameleon by Mike Dilger

## **Day 1: London Heathrow and Paris CDG to Antananarivo, Madagascar. Arrival at Relais des Plateaux**

**Monday 12 September 2022**

Mike met up with seven members of the group at Heathrow, before they all flew out to Paris CDG Airport to catch up with the final two Anglo-French members for the long flight to Antananarivo. Arriving at 22:20, a couple of hours were spent getting visas sorted and waiting for bags to emerge before we all finally emerged to meet up with Harry - our guide for the trip who was waiting for us with a broad Malagasy smile. Once the minibus was loaded, our driver Lantu then took a tired, relieved and thrilled group straight to the Hotel Relais des Plateaux, which was close to the airport, for their first night in Madagascar.

## **Day 2: Relais des Plateaux Hotel, in Tana, to Analamazaotra (or Indri special reserve) and overnight at Vakona Lodge**

**Tuesday 13 September 2022**

Convening for breakfast at 06:30, Harry and Mike met up with the group to talk through the day's itinerary. This would consist of a four-hour drive east, stopping for lunch on the way, before then taking an afternoon guided walk at the nearby Analamazaotra National Park, which itself sits alongside the much larger Mantadia National Park.

Once croissants, bread and coffee had been consumed, a spot of impromptu birding was carried out around the hotel, with Mike spotting the first endemic of the trip, in the form of a female Madagascar kestrel. Two separate sightings of Madagascar wagtails were then recorded in quick succession - one on the hotel roof and the other when it pitched up in the same tree as the kestrel. A Madagascar red fody was also recognised on call by Harry, but no one managed to see this common endemic bird of the high plateau.

Tana appeared bustling as the minibus hit rush hour, but eventually, we managed to clear most of the traffic upon reaching the new bypass road. Immediately east of the city the scenery began to change, as a myriad of paddy fields flanked either side of the road. Small brick kilns were also in evidence in many places. Here, the locals dig clay out of the fields before then shaping and firing it into bricks.

Heading steadily further east the group then began to spot a whole variety of wetland birds in the paddies, with great (white) egrets head and shoulders above all else. Along with the egrets, a single black heron was observed while feeding in its unique style, which entails using its wings as a cloak above its head. This not only enables the bird to see better underwater but also draws in fish looking for some shade from the hot sun - which then becomes easy prey. In addition to these species, a few cattle egrets, the pale form of dimorphic egret and a couple of short and squat squacco herons were also picked up in what was essentially 'Heron Central'. The first common mynas also put in an appearance along the road at this point. Since this species was introduced it has spread like wildfire across large swathes of Madagascar.

Stopping again a little further along the highway, one of the guests spotted a black-crowned night heron as it flew past, with a couple then subsequently observed in the paddies following a careful scan. It was also a first opportunity to see dimorphic egret well for the first time - which is the Malagasy equivalent of our little egret. After another 30 minutes of driving, the first planned stop of the journey was at a location called Gorilla Rock. Here a large granitic outcrop to the south of the road does indeed pass a striking similarity to that of a gorilla's head in profile. Souimanga sunbird was also heard and seen here in the vegetation fringing the road, along with more sightings of the apparently ubiquitous common mynas. Having by now joined RN2 (Route Nacional), the minibus began steadily climbing, and alongside the endless rice paddies, a few other crops began to be noted, such as peas and watercress.

With yet more birds further along RN2 again too good to resist, another impromptu stop led to the group's first sighting of the bizarre-looking hammerkop, as a few birds fed along a field margin. A couple of brown-throated martins were also seen trawling the airspace above the paddies for their lunch here too. Harry

then pointed out two olive (Madagascar) bee-eaters as they flew across the road, and the new bird species kept coming when a male and then female Madagascar stonechat was picked up as they perched on some roadside bushes. While the common stonechat was a very familiar bird to many from home, this Malagasy endemic species was both darker and lighter than the native British species that frequents our moorlands and coasts. Three common jerys were also seen briefly flitting around some roadside shrubbery. Looking superficially like very greenish chiffchaffs, this species belongs to the genus *Neomixis* which is endemic to Madagascar. Rather hilariously, one guest slightly misheard this bird's name, leading to this species henceforth being called 'Tom & Jerry'!

Continuing our progress eastwards, we passed through the colonial town of Manjakandriana, which Harry informed us would be the last major town before arriving at the afternoon's destination. We then quickly passed on to the smaller, but the much busier town of Moramanga, which was historically the centre for the mining of cobalt and nickel. This town also happened to be the site of a famous battle with the French in 1947, who were the colonial power at the time, which resulted in many Malagasy being killed. This battle then proved a tipping point, which marked the beginning of the end of French rule on the island.

Now dropping steadily in altitude as we dropped off the plateau, the group then stopped at the wonderfully situated Feon'ny Ala Restaurant situated at the boundary of the national park. Ravenous after an early breakfast, the group tucked into the typical Malagasy dishes of zebu, pork or tilapia, all served with rice and vegetables. While eating, the group spotted a clouded mother-of-pearl butterfly nectaring on a lantana hedge adjacent to the restaurant, before a crested drongo was then picked up by Mike on the adjacent telegraph wires. Here one of the guests was able to tell the group about the folklore surrounding this bird, which is regarded as highly superstitious by many Malagasy. The third Madagascar wagtail of the day was also spotted here, while another guest also managed to find and photograph a lined day gecko before all reboarded the minibus.

Arriving at the park headquarters close by, Harry then introduced us to local head guide Patrice, who along with his assistants Michael and Veronique, would accompany us for the duration of our stay in Andasibe (Analazamaotra). Harry then left us briefly to sort out the park admission paperwork related to our visit while Patrice immediately took us back along the road to observe our first lemur of the trip. A lone female common brown lemur was pointed out as it fed right along the road, while a mother, juvenile and a male were all dozing in the trees slightly further back. Patrice then gave us a masterclass on how to tell the difference between the males and females of this species, while the photographers in the group filled their boots with their first mammal photos of the trip.

Walking straight back to the park headquarters, a single male Chabert's vanga was then picked up on the top of a roadside tree, with a couple of Madagascar bulbuls following quickly on the vanga's heels. Upon entering the forest, a striped Madagascar garter snake was immediately encountered by Patrice, with Mike briefly handling it in front of the guests for a closer view, before safely releasing it back into the undergrowth. Walking back into the forest, we then chanced upon a mixed flock in a small cleared area, with common newtonia, common jery and a female red-tailed vanga all observed. A male red-tailed vanga was additionally briefly seen by some of the group as well.

Walking up into the forest, with Michael and Dominique often searching ahead of the group, a pair of Madagascar paradise flycatchers were the next birds encountered, along with another pair of Madagascar bulbuls. A touch further on, fabulous views were then obtained by all of a male red-tailed vanga munching on a cicada right above the group's heads, with another female seen briefly here too. Changing the focus, Patrice then located a male giraffe-necked weevil in the understory, which allowed everyone to see surely one of the island's weirdest, most celebrated and most photographed invertebrates.

Further along the same footpath, more birds were spotted in the trees, as the first Nelicourvi weaver and Madagascar white-eye of the trip were seen briefly, along with yet another red-tailed vanga and a common jery. Now deep in the forest's interior, our guides then observed a blue coua up in the canopy, with many surprised at the size of this uncommon Malagasy endemic. However, this bird was quickly left when one of

Madagascar's most famous lemur was located a touch further along the path. Indris are the largest remaining lemur on the island, and the group were thrilled to catch up with a small troop of three. While one was eating just above the path, the other two quietly dozed close by. Suddenly the eating animal then looked down at the group, giving everyone a fabulous opportunity to see all the characteristic features of this flagship species. The individuals are well known in this section of the forest, with Patrice stating that the only other known troop in this area of forest consists of a group of four individuals.

While all were glued to the lemurs, Mike was also able to point out both a tylas vanga and a second nelicourvi weaver. Mike and a couple of the guests were then given a brief view of a Madagascar cuckoo shrike. Taking us down another forest track, Patrice and the guides were then able to show us a young Parson's chameleon in the understory. Still not fully grown, this young male must have been close to 30 centimetres in length, with Patrice informing us that this species was known to be the world's largest chameleon. Present at such close quarters, the chameleon also represented the perfect photographic opportunity for the group. Walking slowly back to our starting point, a marshy area in the forest also played host to a very noisy white-throated rail, which was eventually seen briefly.

The group then finally emerged out of the forest after a thoroughly absorbing couple of hours, but before leaving for our hotel there was just enough time to admire a mossy-tailed gecko further back along the road, which our guide Michael had located earlier in the day. Lying vertically along the trunk, with its head down, the gecko's camouflage was nothing short of astounding. Jumping back into the minibus, Lantu then drove the group the short distance to Vakona Lodge, on the edge of Mantadia National Park. Upon arrival, we were treated to a wonderfully cold drink while watching the Mascarene martins feeding over the small lake surrounding the lodge. After everyone had settled into their rooms, all reconvened for a delicious dinner and a look back at a memorable first full day in Madagascar.

### **Day 3: Andisibe-Mantadia National Park**

#### **Wednesday 14 September 2022**

Reconvening at 06:30 for an early breakfast, all enjoyed watching the Mascarene martins again as they collected nesting material. Many pairs chose to rear their young underneath the lodge yet above the water. Looking out over the small lake, we saw another male nelicourvi weaver as it moved through the palms, along with singles of Madagascar bulbul and crested drongo. Breakfast completed, the group then transferred their day kit into three 4x4 vehicles for the 16-kilometre journey along rough tracks to Mantadia National Park. Due to its remoteness, this reserve is rarely visited by tourists, but it is well worth the ride along bumpy and muddy tracks for the primary rainforest awaiting the group at the end of the road.

Leaving the lodge, the 4x4s took the turning towards Mantadia. We initially passed through farmland before forest took over on either side of the road. We also passed an old graphite mine before eventually reaching the park's entrance. However, there would still be another 6 or 7 kilometres before reaching the spot from where we would begin the walk. En route, a male Madagascar sunbird was seen in the adjacent vegetation before a blue pigeon was then spotted in a distant tree. Here Mike jumped out and scoped up the pigeon for the guests before a singing male rand's warbler then briefly made an appearance in the same tree. In marshy vegetation near the road, the call of a Madagascar flufftail was heard here but was far too secretive to make an appearance for the assembled guests.

Bamboo suddenly became evermore evident as we travelled yet deeper into the park, and the journey was improved with the brief appearance of a male Madagascar magpie robin, which briefly appeared on the road in front of the vehicles before quickly darting back into the understory. It was to be another hour more, however, before we eventually arrived at the place where the 4x4s would stop. While rain appeared in the air, it held off as the group listened to the sound of distant indris calling each other from deep within the forest. It almost felt like they were welcoming us to their reserve! Another male souimanga sunbird and Madagascar white-eye were briefly seen before heading off into the primary forest. All around us, the

repetitive calls of Madagascar cuckoo could be heard in the treetops, but on this occasion, none made an appearance for the assembled group.

Here too, another couple of indris were located high up in the canopy of a tree. The male and female were mostly sleeping, but the group enjoyed prolonged views until sore necks forced them to rejoin the trail. The forest was beautiful here, with tree ferns, epiphytic ferns, and a few orchids. Still, a notable epiphyte was *Rhipsalis baccifera*, the only cactus family member that is native to the old world. Pandanus plants, or screwpines, were also seen in the wetter spots, with our guide Dominique explaining that the locals used the dead leaves to make both hats and baskets.

While we looked at the screwpines, Patrice had looked for more lemurs. Whistling for us to come and join him, we had an incredible encounter with undoubtedly one of Madagascar's most beautiful lemurs - the diademed sifaka. Here, the group had terrific views of a single male feeding on leaves in the lower canopy before eventually bounding off through the trees with incredible leaps - what a wonderful moment! Patrice came up trumps once more with three black-and-white ruffed lemurs close by. Feeding on the fruits of a tree in the family Lauraceae, it was then joined by the same sifaka, with our guide Michael explaining that these two species could co-exist due to the lemurs favouring fruit while the sifakas predominantly ate leaves. By now, it was raining steadily, so after everyone had donned their waterproofs, we worked our way back towards the path whilst listening to a Henst' goshawk calling from elsewhere within the forest.

Further along the path, we encountered another mixed flock, with ward's vanga and Madagascar paradise flycatcher among those identified, before eventually emerging out of the forest for a lunch break. Then while taking our lunch, Patrice shouted out 'cuckoo roller!', just in time for us to look up and see two flying overhead with their characteristic lolloping flight. This species has such an ancient lineage that it has been placed in its very own taxonomic order, which means it has been evolving independently for an extended period.

Returning along the road, three more diademed sifakas were picked up while sleeping in the canopy. As we stopped to look, a calling Madagascar cuckoo was eventually picked up at the top of a distant dead tree. Also, on the long drive back, a couple of Madagascar coucals were spotted while drying their wings on some bamboo stems. Finally, before arriving back at the hotel, Patrice stopped at a small wetland. With the help of good playback, the group eventually gained brief views of the rare and ultra-secretive Madagascar rail as it briefly popped out to see what all the fuss was about. On the other side of the road, a calling swamp warbler was also seen while perching up in the vegetation, with most noting the distinct fanned tail and whitish throat, which are key features of this species. At this location, three or four African palm swifts were seen hawking for insects in the drizzle, while a female giraffe-necked weevil also helped keep the guests entertained.

Arriving at the lodge, everyone had a rest, a hot drink and a dry-off before heading out for the evening's excursion to look for nocturnal species. Suitably refreshed, the minibus then made the short journey to Analazamaotra National Park's entrance to meet up again with our local guides, Patrice, Michael and Dominique. The walk was conducted along the roadside because entry into the park is not permissible after dusk. Equipped with either a head or hand-held torch, everyone slowly scanned the vegetation for mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

Almost immediately, the distinct call of a Madagascar scops owl could be heard cutting through the night, but unfortunately, this endemic bird refused to reveal its position. The first animal to be spotted was that of a diminutive endemic tree frog, called the Madagascar tree frog *Boophis madagascariensis*, which was plastered to a roadside ginger leaf. Shortly after this, our guide Michael picked up a tiny chameleon called a big-nosed chameleon. When its casque was included, this creature must have been no longer than 7 or 8 centimetres. Underneath a tree fern frond, a large resting butterfly was also observed, which with the help of the book, was subsequently identified as the spotted sailer.

With several frogs now calling more readily, they began to be spotted more frequently. The next new species was identified as a bright-eyed green tree frog, *Boophis Viridis*, before our spotter Michael then picked up one of the *Spinomantis* or mossy-fringed frogs. This species doesn't have a common name but was thought to be *Spinomantis aglavei*. It was distinctly warty and streaky, with distinct fringing to its limbs that served to break up its outline as a defence against any would-be predators.

Another mossy-tailed gecko was then located on the roadside vegetation, with pale blotches on its skin, making the creature look just like it was plastered with patches of lichen - a pretty remarkable camouflage. But perhaps the best was saved to last, as Patrice, searching ahead, whistled to the group to quickly come over. Goodman's mouse lemur is one of the smallest primates in the world, and a single individual was picked up in a tangle of vegetation no more than three metres above our heads. About the size of a British dormouse, it had large eyes - befitting a nocturnal lifestyle - and a pointed snout with a large and distinct pale patch between its eyes. Sandy-brown on its back and limbs and with a pale belly, its sandy-coloured tail could be seen gently curling around the back of the vegetation. By careful use of the light, everyone could enjoy fabulous views of a creature that is not only confined to Madagascar but now appears restricted to just the forests surrounding Andasibe and Mantadia.

Leaving the mouse lemur, a young praying mantis was the group's next focus of attention before Harry called the group again for one last look at the mouse lemur. Having descended to just a metre from the ground it then proceeded to jump onto the forest floor before catching a spider in the leaf litter. With its prey duly trapped, the mouse lemur hopped back up to consume it on the trunk of a nearby sapling. This represented the perfect end to a sensational day's wildlife watching. And a tired but happy group returned to Vakona Lodge before dinner and an early bed.

#### **Day 4: Vakona Lodge to Palmarium Lodge at Akanin'ny Nofy, followed by a night walk.**

#### **Thursday 15 September 2022**

Arising for another early breakfast, the group were met with a spot of drizzle at Vakona as they tucked into omelettes before boarding the minibus. The destination was Palmarium on the east coast for a two-night stay and hopefully a date with a rather special lemur.

Passing by Analazamaotra National Park, the group rejoined RN2 to head in an easterly direction. Along the way, many small villages dotted the main road. The roadside is also used as a place to sell any number of products, and in quick succession, we were able to spot charcoal, firewood and quartz vendors keen for passing trade.

Passing through the village of Beforona, it appeared to be market day, so Harry suggested we stop for a brief look around. Stalls were set up along either side of the road as vendors jostled for business. Zebu meat, dried fish, rice, pulses, plastic buckets, mobile phones and clothes were among the items sold, with one of the guests bartering for a bunching of bananas to the amusement of many locals. Harry explained that market days are a huge social occasion for the whole community as they come to buy, sell and catch up with their neighbours, and it is often where locals scout for their future wives and husbands.

Boarding the minibus again, we only got a little further before the traffic stopped. Harry and I jumped out to investigate the hold-up and found that a lorry had jack-knifed across the highway. Nothing could pass, and the scene could be best described as chaotic, with around a hundred Malagasy rushing about as they worked out how to get the lorry back onto the road. After much pushing and shoving, and with the help of a tow from another lorry, the offending vehicle was eventually pulled around and back onto the road, with all the guests coming down to witness the spectacle.

While it had been genuinely fascinating to see how the Malagasy addressed the road traffic accident, the resultant delay would put us well over an hour late for the final two legs of the journey. Stopping to refuel in Antsampanana, Harry spotted two Madagascar pratincoles on the roof of the forecourt. This species only

spends the breeding season here before passing the austral winter over in East Africa, and with nesting starting in late September, these birds were obviously one of the first to arrive back. At this location, Mike spotted a Madagascar kestrel flying past some nearby rice paddies before being mobbed by a yellow-billed kite.

At the town of Brickaville, the group then transferred into three 4x4s for the last 6 kilometres along a bumpy track to the tiny hamlet of Manambato on the shore of Lac Rasoaby, where we boarded a boat for the final leg up to Palmarium. The lakes and interconnecting artificial canals that run parallel to this section of Madagascar's east coast are around 600 kilometres long, making these waterways the second-longest canal system in the world. Having joined at Lac Rasoaby, this then connected via a canal to Lac Rasoamasay before another longer canal saw us eventually reaching Lac Ampitabe, where Palmarium Lodge was located on the lake's western shore. Along the way, very few birds were seen, with a single purple heron and a few olive bee-eaters as the only species of note.

Having checked in, the group then tucked into an enormous, delicious and very late lunch before taking some time to relax before their evening excursion. As darkness began to descend, the group then travelled a short distance back in the boat to the small island of Palmarium aye-aye Island. Here around eight aye-ayes have been introduced, having been rescued from both the pet trade and degraded forest patches, and seem to happily co-exist on the small island with the help of a few supplementary hand-outs from the lodge. Therefore, this reintroduced site represents one of the few opportunities to see this scarce, shy, charismatic species in a wild setting. Romeo, who was based at the lodge, was our guide and, after arriving at the island, gave us a talk about the etiquette of watching aye-ayes. Due to the animals' apparent sensitivities to light, the only torches to be used would be operated by the guides, and when watching, voices were to be kept to an absolute minimum.

Walking up a set of forest steps in the dark proved an interesting experience before the group arrived at a specially laid out amphitheatre. Here to everyone's delight, an aye-aye had already made an appearance and was tucking into a coconut provided by the lodge that had been wedged into the fork of a tree. It was astonishing to watch this wonderful creature feeding as it used its long middle finger to extract the coconut flesh from a hole its two front incisor teeth had created. The lemur's tail was huge and surprisingly bushy with the aye-aye perhaps most closely resembling a cross between a gremlin and Yoda from Star Wars!

It was apparent that the aye-aye had been habituated to both the presence of visitors and a low light level, meaning photos and videos could be taken by visitors. However, after 10 minutes, the lights were turned off to leave the lemur to finish off its coconut without an audience. Walking a short distance along another path, we arrived at a second feeding station where yet another aye-aye was busily tucking into another coconut wedged up in a tree. All were utterly enchanted with their audience with undoubtedly one of the world's most famous and unforgettable animals - what an opportunity to get eye to eye with an aye-aye!

After another ten absorbing minutes, this animal was also left to enjoy its dinner. Descending back down to the beach, we took the short boat trip back to Palmarium Lodge, where dinner awaited our arrival. Shortly after dinner, the group were royally entertained by Harry, and two of his fellow guides, who played a few Malagasy folk songs with the help of a drum, a rattle, and a peculiar stringed instrument called a valiha. Replete and soothed with the music, everyone headed for their first night's sleep at Palmarium.

## **Day 5: Palmarium Lodge & Palmarium Aye-aye Island**

### **Friday 16 September 2022**

After the late night watching aye-ayes, breakfast was pushed back to 07:30, allowing everyone a more leisurely start to the day's proceedings. With everyone full after fresh fruit, omelettes, bread, cheese and coffee, the group was rejoined by local guide Romeo for a walk around the lodge's grounds to see some of the rehabilitated lemurs and look for other wildlife around the various trails.

Stopping firstly at a giant eucalyptus in the grounds and close to the lodge, Romeo explained that this newly cultivated tree has since become hugely important for the Malagasy, who use it primarily for firewood and the production of charcoal. The Malagasy know it as vasa tree, or 'white man's tree' because it originally hailed from Australia. He also showed us a flowering orchid, *Angraecum sesquipedale* pollinated by moths and the famous Madagascar periwinkle *Catharanthus roseus*, which is believed to have anti-cancer properties. The Palmarium also contains a collection of radiated tortoises confiscated from private homes. This endemic reptile originally hails from the southern part of Madagascar. Still, it was good to see these long-lived animals thriving here, enjoying the beautiful patterning of their shells.

The first of the lodge's tame and rescued lemurs we encountered was single crowned lemur, which originates from the north of the island and was then joined by a hybrid between the crowned and black lemur. A black lemur joined the tree to investigate the 'vasa' below. Also present a little further down the path was another hybrid between brown and black lemur. Despite being habituated animals, with many not even from this geographical region, it nevertheless gave the photographers in the group an excellent opportunity to take close-up pictures of these marvellous animals. By now, it was mid-morning and so too warm to spot many birds, but a Madagascar coucal could be heard calling regularly. A couple of brown lemurs were also encountered, a species we had previously seen in the wild near Andasibe.

Looking in a rotten tree stump by the path-side, one of the guests found a *Phelsuma* gecko, before a Madagascar hog-nosed snake was admired in the path-side vegetation. This endemic species was at least two metres long, and despite looking fierce, Romeo informed the group that it was a non-venomous constrictor looking for prey much smaller than humans! Before walking into the forest, we encountered a couple of the reserve's rehabilitated indries, which were given a few small pieces of banana. These were then joined by two noisy black-and-white ruffed lemurs, which we'd also seen in Anasibe. Here too, the ever-present hybrids also turned up before jumping on the guests' shoulders, to the amusement of the whole group.

Moving on into the forest, we then encountered more indris. Consisting of a breeding pair, the female also had a young baby on her belly, with Harry explaining that after three months, the youngsters tend to move onto their mother's back, which made this individual very young indeed. Romeo then proceeded to impersonate the indri's call, which resulted in the lemurs responding. The call, from a distance of just a few metres, was astounding and deafening in equal measure and certainly left a lasting impression with the group.

Now down on the lake's shoreline, Romeo showed the group two endemic species of pitcher plant in a swampy area just set back from the beach. Pitcher plants originate from Asia, so it was interesting to speculate how the ancestor of these two species must have arrived in Madagascar - possibly from a raft of vegetation from Indonesia. Back on the beach, a frog species of the genus *Heterixalus* was also found on the eucalyptus beech trees, with photos taken which helped identify it later as being the starry-night reed frog *Heterixalus alboguttatus*. While strolling along the shoreline, the group observed an immature male Madagascan sunbird as it sang from a palm frond.

After a walk back to the lodge, lunch was taken outside, with the rest of the afternoon free for the guests to relax how they saw fit. Mike took the opportunity to walk back with Romeo to help him find his sunglasses, which resulted in the trip's first sighting of a couple of pied crows and another yellow-billed black kite along the beach. Romeo also found a young panther chameleon with Mike, then took the guests back to see the same individual later that day.

In the evening, eight guests, Mike & Harry, rejoined Romeo for our second and last trip to see the aye-eyes. Arriving at the island, the aye-eyes were not to be seen at the first feeding station, so after a 20-minute wait in the pitch dark, the group then moved to the second feeding point. Here an aye-aye was seen for around two minutes before disappearing into the canopy. Returning to the first location, the group arrived just in time to see an aye-aye descending from the trees. In amazement, we watched it rip into the coconut's green husk with its incisor teeth before the middle finger came into use once more as it pumped



it in and out of the hole, just like a sewing machine, to extricate the fresh. It was, in fact, the best view of both nights' viewing, and a quick look at one of the aye aye's nests was a great way to finish our stay at Palmarium Lodge.

**Day 6: Palmarium Lodge to Anambato, through Brickaville and onto Analamazaotra National Park. Hotel Vakona.**

**Saturday 17 September 2022**

Arising early at 06:30 for a 07:30 departure, the group enjoyed their last breakfast at Palmarium before transferring by boat back to Anambato. After the short distance in the waiting 4x4s, we were reunited with our driver Lantu and the minibus before the four-hour journey back to Analamazaotra. On the way, we passed numerous small villages along the RN2 highway, with many selling charcoal, bananas and firewood. A pitstop on the way enabled a Madagascan kestrel to be spotted, with one of the guests also spotting a Madagascan malachite kingfisher by a fish pond. While watching Malagasy life, it was sad to see such a degraded landscape, primarily denuded of trees and with very little wildlife.

At the park headquarters, we were reunited with Patrice, Michael and Dominique and set off to walk the 'indri 2' trail. In the park's garden, Patrice showed the guests a crab spider in its web and a crested drongo before we crossed the bridge into the park proper. Almost immediately, the group encountered a mixed flock, with perhaps the most prominent bird being the back & white form of a male Madagascan paradise flycatcher alongside a rufous female. A common jery and Madagascar white-eye were also picked up here.

Once more, Patrice had ventured further to scout for lemurs before ushering us towards him with yet another new species of lemur - eastern grey bamboo lemur. Sitting quietly in a bamboo thicket, we watched the pair quietly feeding on the bamboo with much enjoyment. Moving further along, a henst goshawk was heard calling from elsewhere in the forest before the group took a left turn that led steadily upwards. This trail then eventually levelled out to form a ridge-top walk. Once again, further ahead, Patrice beckoned for us to join him to enjoy a pair of indris he'd just encountered. Catching him up, it became apparent that the female had a young baby, and they put on quite the show as they bounced around the trees above our heads.

But this was to provide only the warm-up act when we encountered a troop of diademed sifakas a little further along. Used to the presence of visitors, the sifakas appeared to ignore us as they fed, played and bounded through the trees, to the group's delight. Only a few metres above our heads, the group had the privilege of witnessing an extraordinary moment as a total of 11, plus a baby were counted. To delight the photographers further, the sifakas spent most of their time bathed in a beautiful light, giving everyone a chance to take some fantastic photos.

After half an hour of joyous watching, the troop eventually carried on further down the ridge and out of sight, leaving everyone to climb back up, but all the richer for a truly exceptional experience. Patrice then pointed out the cocoon of a comet moth high up in the canopy, where a silken tent containing caterpillars could be just made out.

Eventually, turning off the ridge and back down through the forest, we chanced upon a mixed bird flock. As they were moving through the forest so quickly, it was tricky to identify many birds, but a female nelacourvi weaver was made out before they disappeared from view. Eventually dropping down to a path running along the edge of the forest, we could walk between the forest and a series of old fishponds. This proved a rich birdwatching spot as purple heron was flushed to a nearby tree, and then one of the guests picked up a Madagascar malachite kestrel, with Mike managing to get it in the scope for many to enjoy. The purple heron was then flushed from its spot by a blue coua, and a few Madagascar spinetail swifts were also observed hawking for insects over the ponds.

Harry then spotted four brown lemurs quietly feeding in a tree above our heads before the group were distracted when two cuckoo rollers were observed flying overhead. Michael then picked out the call of Madagascar fluff tail hidden in the vegetation alongside the ponds. But perhaps the best bird was spotted by Patrice, who pointed out a pair of Madagascar starlings high up on a dead tree. A decidedly tricky bird to see in much of Madagascar, all commented how little they looked like our native species of starling back in the UK.

Before arriving back at the park's headquarters, a slight detour allowed us to catch up with the other two bamboo lemurs again, only from the other side of the bamboo thicket. This marked the end of a scintillating time in the company of our three Malagasy guides, who we bid fond farewells to after dropping them off in Andasibe. Another warm welcome awaited the group upon our arrival back at Vokona Lodge as everyone settled into their rooms before a fine meal and completing the day's checklist.

## **Day 7: Vokona Lodge to Tana and Antsirabe**

### **Sunday 18 September 2022**

The group woke on their last day at Vokona Lodge to a misty morning. After an early breakfast, washed down with quick sightings of both Mascarene martins and a pair of crested drongos, all were soon aboard for a big travel day that would take the group to Antsirabe for an overnight en route to Ranamofana. Leaving Andasabe we joined RN2 with the compass heading in a southerly direction.

Passing mile after mile of paddy fields, cultivated areas and treeless landscapes, very little wildlife of interest was seen, with the sole highlight being a grey heron. But near Manjakandriana, 45 kilometres east of Tana, more wetland birds were noted in the area's extensive paddies, including a Madagascar malachite kingfisher, great white egret, three cattle egrets and two striated herons. Indian mynahs were abundant along the road too. A little closer to Tana, brown-throated martins and at least three Madagascar stonechats were additionally spotted from the minibus.

Stopping for lunch at Ambohimanambola, on the outskirts of Tana, Mike saw four Madagascar mannikins along the river. At the same time, on the lunch terrace, one of the guests also spotted a male Madagascar fody, representing the first good sighting of this widespread species for many in the group. An olive bee-eater was also seen while lunching here too.

Back on the road, Lantu (our driver) then drove us onto RN 7, which would follow south to Antsirabe. On the way, we passed through Ambatolampy, renowned for recycling aluminium and producing beautiful objects from metal. North of Antsirabe, we steadily climbed to a height of over 1,500 metres. The environment was of hills that had long since been deforested before being converted into paddies and cultivated fields for growing vegetables. This central Highland area also tends to be very sparse for wildlife, with zebu and chickens the only animal life seen for large parts of the journey. The land also became steadily drier, as evidenced by two yellow-bill kites, which were picked up while soaring above the road. Close to Antsirabe, Harry pointed out the abandoned Tiko dairy factory, which the ex-president had owned until a coup d'état in 2008 forced him into exile. Just beyond the factory, a flock of around 50+ cattle egrets was noted before we finally arrived at the Hotel Royal Palace close to the centre of Antsirabe. Once checked in, all the guests had time to relax before meeting for dinner and compiling the day's somewhat short checklist.

## **Day 8: Antsirabe & Ambositray to Ranomafana**

### **Monday 19 September 2022**

Today would be the second of our long drive days as we headed to the south of the island, with Ranomafana National Park as our ultimate destination. Convening at the Hotel Royal Palace for breakfast,

once the minibus was loaded up, we took the short trip into Antsirabe so Harry could take us for a short walk around the city.

Starting with the old and now abandoned colonial station, we learnt about the significance of 29th March 1947 to all Malagasy, the date when many were slaughtered by the French, marking the beginning of the end of colonial rule. We walked along the street, followed by a trail of street vendors intent on selling us T-shirts, purses and shawls before reaching the Hotel de Thermes, a magnificent French-built hotel which is now managed by the Malagasy government and was in serious need of renovation.

Birdwatching in the hotel's garden, we could log a yellow-billed kite, an olive bee-eater and several Indian mynahs. After another quick stop at a gemstone shop, the group left the city and re-joined RN7 for all points south. Travelling through a similar landscape of rice paddies, cultivated land and eucalyptus plantations, we briefly stopped to watch some Malagasy preparing and planting rice. Here also represented an excellent opportunity to photograph the paddy farmers hard at work as Harry explained the rice-growing process. Also seen during our rice lesson were a pair of Madagascar kestrels and four cattle egrets.

The next stop along the way was the town of Ambositra, where everyone appreciated the famous wood sculpture shops, with many making several purchases. Mike then took a few of the group to visit the workshops just below the shop, where we could see the carvers in action. Before leaving the town, we took lunch while additionally enjoying a delightful dance display which had been put on for our entertainment while we dined.

Back on the road, we passed through many more small villages on our journey south. Particularly memorable were the communities living close to Anteza, which sold palm hats, wooden spoons and wooden bowls. Along this section of the journey pied crows began to appear with ever more regularity and yellow-billed kites were also more abundant here. Watching a slice of Malagasy life as we passed, several guests commented that Madagascar seems to have a very young demographic, as evidenced by the vast numbers of small roadside children. While our minibus drove past, many of the children chased gleefully after us while shouting either 'vasa!' which means white people, or 'mvula!' which means give me money!

Charcoal smokers were prevalent here, too, with this form of fuel being the predominant way that many rural Malagasy both cook their food and heat their homes. We stopped briefly for a pit stop at Abohimahsoa and eventually turned off RN7 to complete the final leg to Ranomafana. By now, darkness had descended, and we could only see relatively little of the Centrest Hotel, upon arrival, which would be our home for the next three nights. A special thanks should be reserved for our driver Lantu, whose driving was exemplary for the entirety of the journey, in what could be best described as 'testing conditions'. Settling into our respective rooms, the group reconvened for dinner and usage of the WiFi before retiring for the night.

## **Day 9: Antsirabe, RN7 to Ambositra & RN25 to Ranomafana**

### **Tuesday 20 September 2022**

Due to our late arrival the previous evening, Mike & Harry had arranged for a slightly later breakfast before tackling the rainforest. Firstly we were introduced to the guides for our stay at Ranomafana, who Stephan led, with his three sons: Stephan Junior, James and Christian, who were employed as spotters and helpers.

A short drive took us to the park headquarters, where Harry validated our tickets while we set off on the Talata Kely Trail. At the edge of the forest, we could observe male and female souimanga sunbirds, with the male showing particularly well while singing from the top of a tree. Descending into the forest and down towards the Namuruna River, we picked up the call of green jery, while Madagascar cuckoos constantly called from the canopy with their 'lesser cuckoo!' call. In the distance, both male and female ward vangas were also noted in the treetops. Stephan also taught us the distinctive call of tyias vanga, which sounds like a three-note wolf whistle.

Crossing the bridge, we could then appreciate the vast size of the Namuruna River first hand as it rushed below us. A few plants were prominent, with Stephan able to point out moonlight orchid (genus *Oenia*), an *Osmunda* fern, spider lilies, montbretia and small path-side lobelias. Passing through a patch of bamboo, a spectacled tetra was heard and briefly seen by a few of the group, but all were able to enjoy a young satanic leaf-tailed gecko in a small path-side shrub, with its tail perfectly mimicking the shrub's slightly browning leaves.

Further up ahead, our spotters had come up with the goods as we enjoyed a small troop of perhaps Ranomafana's most celebrated residents - golden bamboo lemurs. First identified in the park in 1985, this is still pretty much the only location where it is possible to see this flagship species. Here, we observed a couple curled up while resting on a branch while a third lemur was wedged in the fork of a tree a short distance away. Stephan explained that these diurnal lemurs tend to rise early in the day to feed before resting by mid-morning to digest the contents of their stomachs. The lemurs' pelage was primarily brown but had golden caps, tails and bellies.

A little further on, we struck lucky with our second new lemur of the trip when a troop of five red-fronted brown lemurs were found resting up on a large horizontal branch. With them all cuddled together in one mass, it was challenging to work out where one lemur ended and another began! After a short while of watching the slumbering group, one male lemur woke up and sat on his own, enabling the group to see the characteristic black mark between his eyes and his rufous coloured cap.

Moving further and upwards, we came across a mixed flock of birds moving quickly through the forest, including rand's warbler, red-tailed vanga, tylas vanga, common newtonia, Madagascar cuckoo-shrike and Madagascar paradise flycatcher. Steadily climbing up a steep slope before venturing off-piste, our spotters had subsequently located the only greater bamboo lemur in the national park. Stephan told us that when he was a young boy living next to the forest, the population of this species was thought to be around 300, but by 2014 deforestation, hunting and disturbance had reduced its numbers to just two - a father and daughter. In 2019 the father died, leaving his daughter sadly alone. Minimal populations of this species do exist elsewhere. However, it can still justifiably be called not just the rarest lemur in Madagascar but one of the rarest mammals in the world.

Used to a constant stream of visitors, the female appeared quite happy to sit just a few metres from her human admirers while divesting a section of bamboo of its outer pith to get to the marginally more digestible layer beneath. Returning to the bridge, we enjoyed flowering plants from the genera *Microcenia* and *Eugenia* along the way, while another Madagascar white-eye was also briefly observed in the riverside vegetation. Our guides also found a couple of giraffe-necked weevils, with both male and female observed, while in an adjacent *Melastoma* bush their cocoons inside specially curled-up leaves were also noted.

Arriving back at the Headquarters after a terrific first walk, a female Madagascar sunbird was noted in a tree before Stephan had one last treat for us - in the form of a Madagascar buzzard sitting on its nest halfway up a tree on the other side of the valley. Once Mike had retrieved his telescope from the minibus, all eventually got a good view of this uncommon forest raptor.

Returning back to lunch at the hotel, a pair of Madagascan-lined day geckos were observed while hunting for their lunch from the surrounding walls. As many members of the group were keen to relax in the afternoon, just two guests joined Mike, Stephan and his sons for a second trip out to the forest. This time the somewhat depleted group travelled further east and higher up the road before commencing a portion of the Sahamalaotra Trail, which is flatter than the Talata Kely Trail, but of a distinctly higher altitude.

Almost immediately after entering the forest, the call of green jery was picked up, which was part of a mixed flock also containing grey-crowned tetraka, spectacled tetraka & male nelicourvi weaver. While Mike was watching the birds, the guests along the path managed to spot an eastern red forest rat in the undergrowth, crossing the path directly in front of them.

The group then admired several *Dypsis* palms, with Stephan informing them that 75 different species belonging to this genus have been identified in Madagascar. During the entire time, the group was serenaded by the constant call of Madagascar cuckoos hidden in the canopy. Walking around an area that had previously been cut down for cultivation but was now slowly reverting to scrub, we also passed a small stream. Here Stephan looked inside the axils of fallen *Pandanus* palms for frogs and found a few belonging to the *Guibemantis pulcher*. Further along the stream, Stephan's astonishing eyesight also spotted a couple of larger brown frogs close to the water, which were thought to be *Blommersia wittei*.

Climbing steadily up into the good-quality forest, we eventually hit a ridge, where Stephan heard the distinctive mooring call of a troop of Milne-Edwards sifaka nearby. And a few moments later we successfully located three adults resting in the tops of the trees, one of which was a mother with a young baby clinging to her belly. All these lemurs had collars with distinctive tags and so must, at some point, have been part of a research project to understand more about the movement and ecology of these rare and charismatic lemurs. Eventually, they woke up and began eating leaves before bouncing from tree to tree, much to the group's delight down below. It was a marvellous moment to see such wonderful and natural behaviour play out before us.

Walking back down, a red-fronted coua was heard calling from the undergrowth but, unfortunately, could not be encouraged to reveal itself to the group. *Tylas vanga* and Madagascar white-eye were seen again before the group finally reached their starting point. From here, we began walking down to catch up with the minibus and the rest of the group, whom we'd arranged to meet for a night walk.

Sauntering down the road in the dusky light, green jerys and Madagascar mannikins were seen while a forest rock thrush sang from the surrounding vegetation but sadly didn't appear. Plenty was flowering along the roadside, including a distinctive pink flowering orchid in the genus *Sinorchis* and a beautiful flowering tree, with substantial white pom-pom flowers, in the genus *Dombeya*. Before meeting the group, Stephan found the small, perfectly disguised band-bellied chameleon *Calumma gastrotaenia* on a small roadside weed before finding a large O'Shaughnessy's chameleon next to a banana tree. The chameleon's large triangular head and prominent twin horns on the nose was more than enough to identify this large and charismatic chameleon and subsequently enjoyed by all as the rest of the group joined us.

A couple of rufous mouse-lemurs were then picked up as they ran around some roadside vegetation. Our guides steadily found more chameleons as *Calumma nasutum* and *Calumma fallax* were added to the list. While watching one of these, Stephan junior noticed a large cryptic, or blue-legged, chameleon *Calumma crypticum* directly above Mike's head in a bush! The distinctive blue legs were evident here before the attention and torches caused it to change colour to that of the surrounding vegetation quickly. With five species of chameleon and a new mouse lemur seen by the group, it had marked a successful end to an exciting first day in Ranomafana, as all retired back to the hotel for dinner and an early night.

## **Day 10: Antsirabe & Ambositray to Ranomafana**

### **Wednesday 21 September 2022**

Mike had suggested that an early start might offer the best way to catch up with some of Ranomafana's rarest and most secretive birds. But due to the arduous walk from the day before, just one guest joined him, Harry, Stephan and his three sons for a 05:15 start. At the hotel in the half-light, Madagascar magpie robin was singing in the pre-dawn light, which was then quickly joined by an Indian mynah.

The weather looked set fair as Lantu drove us up to the park headquarters, and perhaps unsurprisingly, virtually no one was around as we once more took to the Talata Kely Trail. The first birds to be logged were a singing Madagascar drongo and two Madagascar bulbuls. Walking down towards the Naruma River, a mixed flock was observed in the dense vegetation, with common newtonia observed, while a stripe-

throated jery was heard and then seen in flight. Rand's warbler was also a common component of the dawn chorus, along with Madagascar magpie-robin.

During the climb up the other side of the river, Stephan suddenly heard a grunt, which he recognised as belonging to golden bamboo lemur. And 50 metres further up, we encountered a troop feeding in the bamboo. Watching them feeding on the bamboo leaves and slender stems, the whole troop of six then crossed the path just in front and above us. Thrilled with such an incredible sighting, this helped spur us on upwards.

A little further on, Stephan stopped in his tracks to declare he'd heard a velvet asity - a high calibre bird of the rainforests. It can also be difficult species to spot, but eventually, Mike located a female quietly eating the fruits from a sapling in the family Rubiaceae. All obtained great views, but the real prize of the handsome male was to frustrate us by shooting past and out of sight. At this point, we also heard the distinctive call of cuckoo rollers flying past, but we had our minds elsewhere after hearing Stephan declare that this was the best place to look for the pitta-like ground roller.

Marching off ahead of us, Stephan eventually heard the 'woop!' call of a male, and fortunately, it kept calling as we honed in on the sound. Frustratingly the bird went quiet, only to be picked up further back down the trail. Doubling back, we took a side path and unbelievably, Stephan managed to spot it calling from around a metre up in dense undergrowth. It was the most dazzlingly attractive bird - with all ground rollers a big prize - and the white bib, electric blue mantle and olive wings could be seen. It then flew even closer, perching on a branch in the open for a few seconds while calling. It was terrific to see it bob its head and pump its tail downwards while calling.

It then flew off, with Stephan thinking he saw a rival male as a brief clatter of wings was heard in the undergrowth. What a bird and what a moment! Steadily walking back to the bridge and the entrance, another female velvet asity was observed in the understory, and finally, rand's warbler was seen for the first time from the top of a small tree. As we left the reserve, another good view of Madagascar white-eye was obtained while fork-tailed palm swifts were already hawking for their breakfast, reminding us how hungry we were.

With a few guests opting out of the morning walk, six guests took to the somewhat more manageable (and higher altitude) Sahamalaotra Trail to look for lemurs. Walking into the forest, a red forest rat, however, was the first mammal to be spotted by the group when it scuttled past. A pair of souimanga sunbirds were also observed out in the open at this location. A little further on, and in a dense agave thicket, the familiar whistle of tylas vanga was heard, before Stephan declared he'd heard a much more secretive vanga in the form of Crossley's vanga. This is a mysterious, forest-floor dwelling bird, and after peering into the thicket on our hands and knees for around ten minutes as we listened to its plaintive whistle, it eventually shot out across the path, never to be seen again. No wonder this was one of the species that Harry, our guide, called 'evil birds'!

Further along the trail, and where a stream runs close to an old cultivation area, a blue coua was heard. At the same time, another search in the fallen Pandanus palms found the same species of frog we'd seen at the exact location the previous afternoon. As we climbed up the ridge, a noisy lesser vasa parrot was also heard but did not show itself. Eventually reaching the top of the ridge, we were surrounded by calling Madagascar cuckoos, with the group seeing at least one of these birds well. At this point, Stephan's boys came to tell us they'd spotted both Milne-Edward's sifakas and red-bellied lemurs. The red-bellies were down a very steep slope, so Mike took one of the guests who had already seen the sifakas down to see them while Harry took the remaining guests onwards for their first views of the Milne-Edwards sifakas.

The slope down to the red-bellied lemurs was a 'both hands job', but eventually, we met up with local guide James who showed us a male and a female curled up asleep on a branch at around 20 metres away. The male was awake, and as he looked across, we could see the familiar white eyespots above his eyes, a characteristic feature of this species. Scrambling back up, we eventually joined the others who were

watching the same Milne-Edwards sifakas that had been observed the day before. On this occasion, they were asleep, but all the guests were still more than happy with their views of this critical species of rainforests here.

We were slowly working our way down off the ridge when we then hit a huge mixed flock with Madagascar cuckoo-shrike, red-tailed vanga, blue vanga, tylas vanga, long-billed tetraka and Madagascar white-eye. A pair of Madagascar paradise flycatchers were also seen. While watching a female Madagascar sunbird sunbathing at the top of the tree, Stephan also picked out the call of brown mesquite from elsewhere in the forest, with Harry declaring this to be another 'evil bird' on account of being devilishly difficult to see.

Back towards the entrance, a beautiful flowering orchid *Aerangis fastuosa* was seen before another red-fronted coua played hide and seek with us. Finally emerging out of the forest and back onto the road, a Madagascar flufftail was heard calling from a patch of ginger close to some water, but, like the mesquite and coua, it appeared keen not to deign us with its presence.

Returning to the hotel for lunch, the group then took the opportunity for a few hours of relaxation before boarding the minibus at 15:00 for another walk along RN25.

A Madagascar wagtail was seen by the large waterfall, and a large millipede was also spotted in a roadside tree. The cliffs on the other side of the road were a great place to look for frogs due to the spray rising from the waterfall and the constant drip-drip from the forest above, which helped keep the whole cliff-face moist. This white wall was covered in a pink orchid in the Genus *Sinorchis*, and in amongst the moss clinging to the rock face, another two Madagascar tree frogs were spotted.

'Come quick!' was the call from Stephan further along the track. He'd found a forest fody, a new species for the group. Although it initially proved elusive, it eventually gave everyone good views while flitting around the branches of a dead tree. The widespread but elusive green jery was seen well from here, too. As we approached the 'golden hour', where the light is polarised, and colours tend to be at their most decadent, a couple of Chabert's vangas, and ward's vangas showed themselves to all the group in the trees adjacent to the road. Approaching our pick-up point, the ever-present souimanga sunbird put in another show with an obliging red-tailed vanga before we called it a day and headed back for some R&R before dinner.

Stephan and his three sons joined us briefly for a pre-dinner drink, enabling us to thank them for their hard work in making Ranomafana a memorable stay. Along with a tip, we showed our appreciation with the Madagascan 'lamako' - a way of clapping our hands in thanks.

## **Day 11: Centrest Hotel - Ranomafana to Anja Community Reserve & Le Relais del la Reine - Isalo**

### **Thursday 22 September 2022**

We woke up to a very wet and foggy early morning in Ranomafana, making us realise how lucky we'd been to stay dry for the entirety of our stay in the rainforest. An early breakfast enabled us to leave at 06:45, and after saying our goodbyes we rejoined RN25 to head west. After around an hour, we rejoined RN7, but this time headed south and west with Isalo, our final destination towards the end of the day.

Passing through the town of Alakamisy-Ambohimaha, it was patently market day. It took quite some time to ease the minibus between the crowded market stalls and thronging crowds of crowds of locals keen to enjoy their big social occasion of the week. Soon back into the countryside, pied crows and yellow-billed kites became ever more prevalent, and amongst the crops and few remaining paddy fields, a couple of dimorphic egrets were seen - one of each colour morph. We then reached the city of Fianarantsoa, which is the cultural centre for the Betsileo tribe. From here onwards to the town of Ambalavao, the road seemed to be in distinctly better condition, and all enjoyed taking in the impressive rice terraces which were cut into the hillside.

As we dropped off the central plateau, the land began slowly changing, with savannah grassland taking over as the primary habitat. We also stopped for a brief photo opportunity of the Three Sisters Rocks and Sleeping Lady Mountain as the surrounding rock formations became more impressive. Further along, we then turned off at the signpost for Anja for a necessary appointment with a rather special lemur.

Anja Community Reserve is a mere 30 hectares in size but survives as a community-run project to protect its population of ring-tailed lemurs. The steady stream of visitors coming to see surely Madagascar's most celebrated resident gives many locals employment opportunities and a sense of pride in protecting the scrubby woodland that is such a vital home to the lemurs.

Arriving at the community's entrance, we picked up Daniel and Mila, our two guides, before driving to the parking area. Mike picked up an olive bee-eater on the way, which posed briefly before flying off, and upon jumping out, a single male grey-headed lovebird was in the top of an adjacent tree. However, everyone was soon distracted by their first sightings of wild ring-tailed lemurs. Two were sitting eating the tree's flowers and fruits, and being used to the near-constant stream of human admirers, were not in the slightest fussed by our presence below.

Daniel, our guide, explained that when they started protecting the forest, the lemurs only numbered around 50 but had now reached an impressive total of about 450. Moving into the forest, we were soon amongst a large troop, many of which had very small babies clinging to their backs. With birthing season generally in September and October, the young must have only been a couple of weeks old, and the sight of numerous mother and offspring bonding proved heaven for the photographers in the group as they tried to line up the perfect family portrait.

Moving around the edge of the forest to locate another troop, we were lucky enough to watch an ichneumon wasp dragging a spider it had just paralysed back to its lair. Having seen this happening in South America, Mike gave a complete blow-by-blow account of this incredible insect's grisly lifecycle. While walking out in the sun, African monarch butterflies appeared to be in plentiful supply.

Moving back into the forest, we then engaged with another troop of ring-tails, with many of the lemurs contentedly feeding on the forest floor right in front of the deliriously happy guests. As many of the females had young, it had been a bumper breeding season, and one hard-pressed mother was even spotted with two babies. Males were also spotted in attendance, but being lower down in the pecking order, they are only usually allowed to feed after the females have finished. Scent-marking and tail waving were even seen as the males tried to impress the females, but as many were still feeding babies, it was apparent they were not in the mood. When together, the lemurs made a constant grunting sound, presumably as communication between each other, and also made a different call which sounded just like the miaowing of a cat!

With a long drive still ahead of us, we reluctantly left the feeding lemurs to enjoy our fabulous al fresco lunch at a sheltered picnic bench just outside the forest, and once fully replete, we hit the road once more. During the long drive across the grassland savannah, Harry explained that this habitat was regularly burnt to provide fresh pasture for the zebu. Heading progressively west, the land became evermore dramatic, and a fine view of the iconic South Gate rock formation allowed everyone to stretch their legs and take a few pictures. Along the way, we also passed several zebu herders patently taking their cattle to market.

On passing Madagascar's second-highest mountain of Andringitrar Pic Boby, and with several guests 'minibus-sore', it was good to know that we had broken the back of the journey. The town of Ihosa is the centre of the Bara, or Fighting Tribe, with Harry explaining that many of the more wealthy members were polygamous. Here the Plateaux of Horombe seemed to go on forever, but eventually, we reached the small town of Isalo, which marked the entrance to the park. Our hotel Le Relais del la Reine was a 30-minute ride further on and a fabulous place surrounded by impressive geological formations.



While checking in, we heard the sounds of Madagascar nightjar churring away in the surrounding land and then enjoyed a delightful meal before turning in for the night.

## **Day 12: Le Relais del la Reine, to Isalo National Park: Piscina Naturel Trail & Namaza Trail**

### **Friday 23 September 2022**

Rejuvenated after a good night's sleep in beautiful surroundings, a leisurely breakfast was then consumed. With half the group keen on some R&R at the hotel, the rest boarded the minibus for the 30-minute journey to Isalo to obtain our entry permits and meet our guide Nirina. During the three kilometre trip to the start of the trail, Nirina filled us in on the history of the national park, which is 81,540 hectares in size and was created in 1962. The astonishing landscape consisted of wonderfully shaped geological formations and was primarily composed of eroded Jurassic sandstone. In this strata, bands of iron, aluminium and clay were also present, which along with the presence of surface lichens, made the rocks a very colourful sight.

Upon arrival at the drop-off point, a Namaqua dove was quickly spotted, while one sharp-eyed guest also spotted a Madagascar hoopoe. In a tree nearby, Nirina was first able to show us a male oustalet's chameleon, which was superbly camouflaged along one of the branches of a tree close to the parking area. Almost immediately, the first grey-headed lovebirds were seen when a couple of males were observed in another tree nearby. The ubiquitous common jery and crested drongo were also spotted here as we walked.

Nirina knows the park's plants well and was able to point out the endemic species of *Pymphis madagascariensis* (family Myrtaceae) with beautiful pinky-coloured flowers. On the shade along the path, two insectivorous plants of the genus *Drosera* were then pointed out. The first of these was *Drosera rotundifolia*, which incredibly also grows in the UK, while the second was *madagascariensis* - which perhaps unsurprisingly doesn't!

The dominant tree in this open terrain was *Uapacia bojeri*, or the Tapia tree, which is fire-resistant and also the food plant for the Madagascar silkworm - which is commercially used for harvesting silk. On one small plant, Nirina pointed out *Acrioptera impennis*, an incredibly well-disguised stick insect. A little further on, we then saw our first *Pachypodium rosulatum*, or elephant's foot tree, an iconic Madagascan species with its truly remarkable bulbous base. All these trees we spotted were also in flower and possessed beautiful five-petalled yellow flowers. They were also covered in spines and would have made a pretty unappetising meal.

A little further on a terrestrial orchid with the name *Sinorchis angustipilata* was pointed out, which put it in the same genus as the pink orchid we'd seen earlier in Ranomafana. Plenty of rocks were littering the surface here, and Nirina demonstrated the high levels of iron by simply asking the guests to pick one up - all could confirm they were much heavier than they looked! By turning over a few rocks, he showed us an endemic species of scorpion *Opiscanthus madagascariensis*. By now, we were steadily climbing uphill, often in full sun, so taking breaks and a drink was essential whenever the opportunity prevailed.

Reaching a gap in the rocks, we clambered up for a panoramic view of a large part of the park, with the vista resembling a smaller version of the USA's Grand Canyon. A white *Erica* species was also present in this desert environment. Dropping down into the valley bottom, as we reached Isalo's famous natural swimming pool, the arid vegetation instantly became more luxuriant. Here *Pandanus* plants dominated the valley bottom floor, with *Anax*, *Aeshna*, *Sympetrum*, *Crocbothemis* and *Libellula* dragonflies suddenly abundant. Common jery and Madagascar cuckoo-shrike were in this fertile valley as we made our way to the swimming pool.

Here Mike spotted a large iguana on the rocks just above the pool, which was subsequently identified as Dumeril's Madagascar swift. At the pool, a most enjoyable time was had by all, with a couple of guests dipping their feet in the cooling waters, but only Mike was brave/stupid enough to venture in and so was

able to testify to the icy nature of the water! Due to the time taken to reach the pool and as we had planned to meet the remaining guests, this necessitated a quick frog-march back to make our pre-arranged time, and so we saw little on our return.

After a (very) long lunch in Isalo, the full complement of guests met up once more with Nirina for the trip along the Namaza Trail, which follows a route through some dry deciduous woodland. The first 800 metres were out in the open, and in blistering heat, so they were covered as quickly as possible. A different species of Pandanus was seen here along with Merem's Madagascar swift on a rock. Common jery, Madagascar bulbul and a brilliant blue butterfly were the highlights of this red-hot walk.

Once in the forest, Nirina showed us the webs of numerous trapdoor spiders littering the woodland floor. Taking a deserved rest in a sheltered and seated area within the forest, we saw Namaqua dove and around 15 ring-tailed lemurs asleep in a nearby fruiting tree. The regular call of Madagascar coucal could also be heard here, while a female Madagascar magpie-robin not only showed obligingly for the group but also posed for pictures. Nirina had gone ahead to look for some of the reserve's Verreaux's sifakas. Still, unfortunately, due to our late arrival at the trail, it appeared they had climbed up into the valley's surrounding rocks to pass the night, so on this occasion, we missed this iconic species.

Recompense, however, came in the form of a Madagascar scops owl in a tree, resulting in fabulous views of this rarely-seen owl. The owl was also of the rufous-coloured morph and presented quite the challenge for the photographers due to its choice of roost in the dark, dense understory. Strolling back, we then briefly saw an olive bee-eater, with a total of five Madagascar turtle doves spotted in the seating area. At the same time, Nirvana unsuccessfully tried to track down a Madagascar buttonquail.

On the way back through the forest, a pair of Madagascar hoopoes were spotted feeding on the ground, and the group then watched for at least 20 minutes while the male dug successfully for at least seven or eight grubs, which he then fed to the female. Each time food was passed between birds, they raised their crests to mark their excitement, and for the group, it was simply fabulous viewing. Reluctantly leaving the hoopoes, a small party of Madagascar fodies in non-breeding plumage were then spotted alongside another oustalet's chameleon. Nirina also pointed out wonderful and weird Madagascar flatid bugs, with their feathered backs, as they collectively fed on sap from a tree in the understory.

Leaving the forest, a male Madagascar stonechat was observed along with a female Madagascar sunbird, and Nirina also pointed out parrot's beak flower (*Crotalaria gravei*). A white-headed vanga was then heard, but unfortunately, on this occasion did not reveal itself. The bizarre collection of weird invertebrates then continues with an incredibly well-camouflaged net-throwing spider *Deinopsis madagascariensis*, which is endemic to Madagascar.

Back at the bus, we thanked Nirina for his help with the 'Lamako' and then returned to our hotel, passing the 'Queen of Isalo' rock formation on the way. A tired but happy group celebrated the day's sightings with a few glasses of Malagasy wine before our last dinner at La Reine.

### **Day 13: Le Relais del la Reine - Isalo, to Zombitse National Park & Ifaty**

#### **Saturday 24 September 2022**

Taking breakfast at 06:45, we bid goodbye to many of the guests' favourite accommodations of the trip to head southwest towards Toliara and Madagascar's west coast. The day would comprise a visit to two terrific places with a large amount of driving in between.

Heading west again, a pair of Madagascar kestrels were spotted while hovering along the road just outside Isalo. The land was arid here, resembling savannah grassland. Harry pointed out the distinctive and endemic palm *Bismarckia nobilis*, a common feature across large parts of the rolling plain. Yet further west, we then passed through the town of Ilakaka, which Harry explained was a little more than a small shanty

village a few years ago until sapphires were discovered. This resulted in a huge influx of Malagasy keen to make their fortune, just like the 'California gold rush' in the mid-19th century. The village has now become a boom town, with the main street dominated by gemstone brokers and miners keen to sell what they've managed to unearth.

Along this barren stretch, Madagascar larks were occasionally observed by their distinctive flapping flight over the grassland, but the occasional presence of yellow-billed kites and pied crows provided the only other wildlife. Carrying on further west, the land became steadily dryer, but eventually, dry forest on either side of the road became the dominant vegetative force which marked the outskirts of the Zombitse National Park. Just before the entrance to the reserve, we screeched to a halt when Harry spotted a small troop of Verreaux's sifakas in the trees running along the road. This was the group's first sighting of this charismatic lemur, who appeared quite happy to munch on various leaves nearby. Predominantly pale but with a chestnut cap, we could all see why locals call this species the 'white lemur'. It was also fabulous to see them effortlessly bounding from tree to tree when they decided they wanted to forage elsewhere.

Driving the short distance to the park entrance, we met our three guides, Gerina, Odilon & Tiavo, who had spent the morning tracking down various species for us to see due to the limited time we could spend in the park. Right by the entrance, the first impressive species was a giant coua, which was quite happy at close quarters to people due to being habituated. Crossing the road, we joined one of the circular trails around the park while Odion talked to us about the national park itself. Created in 2002, Zombitse is characterised as a transition forest, between the wetter forest further east and the dry spiny forest found along the west coast. The park is the only surviving block of any size of this critical habitat and contains many species not known from anywhere else in the world.

The guides could point out a distinctive Pandanus palm, with prop roots, just like you would find in the mangrove. And while we were admiring this palm, a second giant coua was spotted quietly walking through the undergrowth. This far wilder bird was a male due to the white tail-tips and represented another great view of this very localised forest bird. A little further on, a Madagascar hoopoe was spotted on the forest floor, and then another coua turned up in the form of Cocquerel's coua, which is smaller but often more challenging to see due to its shy nature. However, most group members managed to get at least a brief glimpse as it crept past the forest floor.

The next thrilling spot was a male white-browed owl found earlier by one of the guides. Roosting about 10 metres up in some dense vegetation, this shy and elusive owl occasionally opened half an eye to check us out but largely ignored our presence. A little further away, a large male oustalet's chameleon was also admired as it lay head-up along the main trunk of a small understory sapling. The males have a distinctive casque and are generally darker than the females. The camouflage of this individual was particularly effective, with many of the guests unable to find it until its presence was pointed out.

A little further into the forest, another small troop of Verreaux's sifakas were then located. Here, one of the four adults had a young baby clinging to her back, with many commenting on how wonderful it had been to see so many lemur babies during the trip. A third troop, consisting of just two lemurs, was then found nearby, with the pair no more than seven or eight metres away, allowing all the guests an unimpeded view as they quizzically looked down us.

Before leaving the lemurs, a stripe-throated jery was seen for the first time, even though this species had been briefly spotted in flight earlier in the trip. Once again, as we followed the guides around the labyrinthine paths, they had prepared another treat for us: a Zombitse sportive lemur. Classified in an entirely separate family, the sportive lemurs are generally chunky animals with large eyes, ears, and a typically vertical posture. The group are nocturnal and tends to roost during the day in tree holes or dense tangles. Upon our arrival at the known location, all we could initially see of our first sportive lemur was the tip of one of its ears, as the rest of the animal hunkered down in a tree hole around four metres up. But eventually, it stuck its head out to investigate the commotion down below, allowing everyone to see its

chestnut brown large eyes, with tiny black pupils and canines extending just beyond its upper lip, which gave the animal something of a 'dusk til dawn' appearance!

The number of species in this genus has increased rapidly in recent years, with 26 currently recognised. This species is not known from anywhere else in Madagascar away from Zombitse - talk about a species with a restricted range! Elsewhere in the park, the group was able to see their first baobab trees, in the form of the western baobab *Adansonia za*. This is the most widespread of Madagascar's six species of endemic baobabs, with the oldest trees believed to be approaching a thousand years in age. One particular specimen with two even-sized trunks particularly impressed the guests.

Walking out of the forest, and back to the park entrance, a couple of standing day gecko *Phelsuma standingi* were spotted close to the park's entrance board, with a smaller dwarf gecko, possibly *Lygodactylus tolapyae*, also noted while sunbathing on a fence post. Bidding goodbye to our fabulous three guides we jumped back in the minibus for our final appointment of the day.

Continuing west along RN7 Harry explained we were now entering the home of the Antanosy tribe, who were considered primarily nomadic herding people. The Antanosy often live in temporary homes, which allows them to dismantle them quickly when taking their cattle to new pastures. To re-emphasise this, we then started to see large numbers of herders driving their goats, sheep and zebus along the road. Mango trees were also far more evident along this stretch of the road. Very quickly we then passed into the home of the Mahafali tribe, stopping briefly to appreciate a vast painted tomb patently belonging to a wealthy local family, which was in the shape of a boat.

Passing through the town of Sakaraha, the land became more rugged, with the road deteriorating. Here *Opuntia* cacti could be seen lining the street, and we passed a couple of villages whose entire economy was based on distilling local rum or *toaka gasy*. This liquor is supposedly so strong that it has even been claimed to resurrect the dead and is made by the distillation of sugar cane with tamarind. Despite being sold by the side of the roads, none of the guests, however felt compelled to sample the liquor for themselves!

As we approached Toliara the distinctive Table Mountain suddenly dominated the horizon. Here, umbrella and octopus trees (*Didierea madagascariensis*) were evident as the scrub became drier. The spiny forest of Ifaty - our final destination - lay just north of Toliara. In the town, we could also see several flame trees (*Delonix regia*), an endemic to Madagascar but now grown all over the world as an ornamental species. The first baobabs of the species *Adansonia rubrostipa* were also seen here and with their red, bottle-shaped trunks, were undoubtedly one of the most astonishing trees the guests had ever seen. Sisal is also grown here in large plantations - with the crop used to create string, but this has resulted in the loss of a large section of the spiny forest cleared to make way for the agricultural expansion.

Finally, we arrived at Ifaty and immediately met up with Relache and his team for five spotters. Due to the late nature of the afternoon, time was of the essence, so we walked straight into one of Madagascar's most unique habitats - that of the spiny forest itself. This is the habitat with the highest level of plant endemism, as 95% of all the species growing here are confined to Madagascar. Following a beautifully laid-out trail with baobabs, balsa wood trees *Givotia madagascariensis* and octopus trees dotted amongst a thorny shrub layer; we set about trying to find a couple of Ifaty's most famous birds. Both souimanga and Madagascar green sunbirds were seen here, along with a Madagascar turtle dove, until our spotters managed to find a long-tailed ground roller which subsequently walked onto the path in front of an astonished group.

Superficially looking just like a roadrunner, the white bib, long tail and blue in the wings were immediately noticeable, with Mike telling the guests they'd just seen one of the best, rarest and elusive birds in the world. Moving on, Relache then showed us the plant Madagascar bushwillow (*Combretum grandidieri*), which, like the long-tailed ground roller, could not be seen outside of the spiny forest. Then Mike spotted a Madagascar harrier hawk as it flew past before landing on a nest at the edge of the forest, not all the guests saw this but Relache promised we'd catch up with this species later as he had one more important bird species to show us.

Walking through more spiny forest, a brief glimpse was obtained of a crested coua before Relache took us to where one of his spotters had tracked down one of Madagascar's most bizarre and ancient birds - the sub desert mesite. Perched up in a tree, this bird was frozen on the branch, perhaps hoping it had not been seen, which was a characteristic feature of this bird. It did allow, however, for everyone to gain a superb view of this mega rarity. Lying almost horizontal to the branch, the mesquite's decurved bill, white supercillium, brown back and pale spotted belly were immediately apparent. Mike then explained to the group that mesites are considered so different to any other birds that they have been placed in their very own order.

While watching the mesite, one of the guests spotted a snake quickly identified as a Mahafaly sand snake before Relache took the group on another mystery tour around the baobabs before, eventually pointing to a tangle of lianas. Peering into the spiky fork of an octopus tree, it was suddenly apparent that we could see our second sportive lemur of the day. While sportive lemur identification has been undergoing an extensive revision, Nick Garbutt's new mammal book suggests that this species is now considered to be Petter's sportive lemur.

Walking back out to the forest entrance after an exhilarating couple of hours, one last treat was waiting for us as Relache was able to impersonate a Madagascar harrier hawk, which resulted in the bird coming closer for a look. This enabled the group to observe Madagascar's second-largest raptor with the sun setting behind. Bidding farewell to our guides, we travelled the short distance to our hotel Le Paradisier. And even though, by now dark, it was great to hear the sound of the Indian Ocean lapping at the shore just a few metres away while we dined before an early night.

#### **Day 14: Ifaty to Toliara & flight to Antananarivo Domestic Airport. Overnight at Le Royal Palissandre**

##### **Saturday 24 September 2022**

Much as everyone enjoyed their brief trip to the arid southwest, the unfortunate change of internal flights resulted in a very early departure from the hotel to catch our early flight back to Antananarivo. At the airport, a small flock of Madagascar (red) fodies were seen, along with the ubiquitous mynahs and a few fork-tailed palm swifts. At this point, we also said thanks and goodbye to our driver Lantu, who had driven so well and navigated all the pot-holes so safely for the entirety of our stay.

The flight was smooth and went without a hitch, but as everyone was so tired from the early start, many chose to spend the rest of the day relaxing at the hotel Le Royal Palissandre in Tana after lunch. During the afternoon, Mike went for a brief walk with two guests down to the local market before everyone then met up again in the evening for a fine dinner. Fully replete everyone then retired in preparation for their last day in Madagascar.

#### **Day 15: Visit to Tsarasaotra Park, the local shops and journey to Antananarivo International Airport for the flight home**

##### **Sunday 25 September 2022**

With batteries fully recharged, Harry arrived with a new minibus and driver to take the guests out for their last outing of what had already been an unforgettable trip. Dropping firstly into a T-shirt shop to buy any last-minute souvenirs, the minibus then parked outside the entrance to Park Tsarasaotra, a privately run reserve that is a small, green oasis in the north of the city. A Ramsar site, the reserve consists of two lakes and represents an essential refuge for many waterbirds throughout the year.

Walking through the gate we were confronted with the sight of hundreds of wildfowl on the water, and large numbers of herons and egrets in the vegetation along parts of the perimeter. The main species on the water was red-billed teal, with at least a thousand on the largest lake. Also present were around 200 white-

faced whistling ducks, which were primarily confined to the lake's muddy margins. Egrets and herons were also present in vast numbers, with squacco heron, black heron and black-crowned night heron all in abundance. There were lower numbers of dimorphic and great white egret here too, with a solitary cattle egret also picked out.

From the bushes around the margins, a Madagascar coucal was also observed before Harry picked up a Madagascar malachite kingfisher, with Mike then picking up a second one further away. Mike had also brought in his scope so the guests had stellar views of these beautiful and endemic birds.

Walking around the larger lake in an anti-clockwise fashion, Mike spotted three hottentot teal from amongst the red-billed teal. However, not all the guests could see them as they promptly swam out of view. Looking at the lake, it was also immediately obvious that it was suffering from an invasion of water hyacinth, with large mounds along the water's edge where local conservation management had patently been carried out to clear the water's surface. On the smaller of the two lakes, the water hyacinth issue was even more significant, with nearly half of the water's surface covered by this invasive species.

Eventually, back around the large lake again, Mike picked out seven meller's ducks. Looking like a large female mallard with a long bill, this is a much sought-after species in Madagascar. Traditionally hunted, this endemic duck has now become so rare that it has been classified as Threatened by the IUCN, so it was excellent to see it doing relatively well here too.

Taking our leave for the reserve, we stopped at a restaurant for a brief lunch with bird interest provided by several Madagascar fodies and a Madagascar wagtail. A short shopping trip to an area where artisanal crafts are sold followed, with those more interested in birding able to look out over the paddy fields. Here, hundreds of feeding brown-throated martins were seen, with a smattering of great white and dimorphic egrets feeding in the paddies below. A brief tour of the city followed as we took in the football stadium, the old French station and local markets before Harry dropped us off at the hotel to finish our packing.

Dinner followed before Harry then picked us all up at the hotel at 21:00 for our early morning flight back to Paris. Mike and seven of the guests then caught a connecting flight back to Heathrow, marking the end of an incredible and memorable trip to the unforgettable island of Madagascar.

# Checklist



	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	Day 14
	<b>LEMURS</b>	<i>LEMUROIDEA</i>														
1	Goodman's mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>		✓												
2	Brown mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>								✓						
3	Zombitse sportive lemur	<i>Lepilemur hubbardorum</i>												✓		
4	Petter's sportive lemur	<i>Lepilemur petteri</i>												✓		
5	Eastern grey bamboo lemur	<i>Haplemur griseus</i>					✓									
6	Golden bamboo lemur	<i>Haplemur aureus</i>								✓	✓					
7	Greater bamboo lemur	<i>Prolemur simus</i>								✓						
8	Ring-tailed lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>										✓	✓			
9	Brown lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>	✓			✓	✓									
10	Red-fronted brown lemur	<i>E. rufifrons</i>								✓						
11	Red-bellied lemur	<i>Eulemur rubriventer</i>								H	✓					
12	Black-and-white ruffed lemur	<i>Varecia ariagata</i>		✓		✓										
13	Diademed sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>		✓			✓									
14	Milne-Edward's sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>								✓	✓					









31	Lesser vasa parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>									H						
32	Crested coua	<i>Coua cristata</i>												✓			
33	Blue coua	<i>Coua caerulea</i>	✓	H			✓			H	✓						
34	Red-fronted coua	<i>Coua reynaudii</i>									H						
35	Coquerel's coua	<i>Coua coquereli</i>												✓			
36	Giant coua	<i>Coua gigas</i>												✓			
37	Madagascar coucal	<i>Centropus toulou</i>		✓		✓				H	H		✓				
38	Madagascar cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>		✓						H	✓						
39	Madagascar nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>										✓					
40	Madagascar scops owl	<i>Otus rutilus</i>		H									✓				
41	White-browed owl	<i>Ninox superciliaris</i>												✓			
42	Madagascar spinetail	<i>Zoonavena grandidieri</i>		✓			✓										
43	African palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>		✓	✓					✓	✓					✓	
44	Madagascar malachite kingfisher	<i>Alcedo vintsioides</i>					✓		✓								✓
45	Velvet asity	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>									✓						
46	Olive bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓			✓	✓				
47	Cuckoo roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>		✓			✓				H						
48	Madagascar hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>												✓			
49	Pitta-like ground roller	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>									✓						
50	Long-tail ground roller	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>												✓			

51	Common sunbird asity	<i>Neodrepanis coruscans</i>									H					
52	Madagascar green sunbird	<i>Nectarinia notata</i>				✓							✓	✓		
53	Souimanga sunbird	<i>Nectarinia souimanga</i>		H	H		H			✓						
54	Madagascar lark	<i>Mirafra hova</i>	H						✓					✓		
55	Mascarene martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>	✓	✓						✓						
56	Brown-throated martin	<i>Riparia paludicaola</i>	✓						✓							✓
57	Madagascar wagtail	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓					✓
58	Forest rock thrush	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>									H					
59	Madagascar magpie-robin	<i>C. albospecularis</i>		✓									✓			
60	Madagascar stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓			✓			
61	Common jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>	✓	✓			✓				✓		✓			
62	Green jery	<i>Neomixis viridis</i>		H							✓					
63	Stripe-throated jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>	H	H										✓		
64	Rand's warbler	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>		✓							H					
65	Madagascar brush-warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>									H					
66	Madagascar swamp-warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>		✓												
67	Spectacled tetraka	<i>Xanthomixis zosterops</i>									✓					
68	Grey-crowned tetraka	<i>Xanthomixis cinereiceps</i>									✓					
69	Long-billed tetraka	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>									✓					
70	Madagascar white-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>	✓	✓			✓				✓					

71	Common newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>	✓	✓							✓				
72	Red-tailed vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>	✓				✓				H				
73	Blue vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>		✓							✓				
74	Chabert's vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>	✓	✓							✓				
75	White-headed vanga	<i>Leptopterus viridis</i>										H			
76	Madagascar cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>	✓	✓							✓	✓			
77	Madagascar bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	✓	✓							✓	✓			
78	Tylas vanga	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>	✓	✓							✓				
79	Madagascar paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>	✓	✓			✓				✓				
80	Crossley's vanga	<i>Mystacornis crossleyi</i>									✓				
81	Ward's vanga	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>									✓				
82	Crested drongo	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓		✓		
83	Pied crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>					✓			✓		✓			
84	Madagascar starling	<i>Hartlaubius auratus</i>					✓				H				
85	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓				H			✓	✓		✓		
86	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓												
87	Nelicourvi weaver	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>	✓	✓			✓				✓				
88	Madagascar fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	H						✓				✓		✓
89	Forest fody	<i>Foudia omissa</i>									✓				

90	Madagascar mannikin	<i>Lonchura nana</i>							✓		✓					
	<b>REPTILES</b>	<i>REPTILIA</i>														
1	Radiated tortoise	<i>Astrochelys radiata</i>				✓										
2	Cryptic chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>								✓						
3	Perinet chameleon	<i>Calumma gastrotaenia</i>								✓						
4	Big nose chameleon	<i>Calumma nasutum</i>	✓							✓						
5	O'Shaughnessy's chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>								✓						
6	Parson's chameleon	<i>Calumma parsoni</i>	✓													
7		<i>Calumma falax</i>								✓						
8	Oustalet's chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>											✓			
9	Panther chameleon	<i>Furcifer pardalis</i>				✓										
10	Merrem's Madagascar swift	<i>Oplurus cyclurus</i>											✓			
11	Dumeril's Madagascar swift	<i>Oplurus quadrimaculatus</i>											✓			
12	Lined day gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata</i>	✓							✓						
13	Peacock day gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>								✓						
14	Standing's day gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>												✓		
15	Lygodactylus spp.	<i>Lygodactylus tolapyae</i>												✓		
16	Satanic leaf-tailed gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>								✓						
17	Mossy leaf-tailed gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>	✓	✓												
18	Giant hognose snake	<i>Leioheterodon madagascariensis</i>				✓										

19	Striped Madagascar garter snake	<i>Thamnosophis lateralis</i>	✓														
20	Mahafaly sand snake	<i>Mimophis mahfalensis</i>												✓			
	<b>AMPHIBIANS</b>	<b>AMPHIBIA</b>															
1	Starry-night reed frog	<i>Heterixalus alboguttatus</i>				✓											
2		<i>Blommersia wittei</i>								✓							
3	Madagascar tree frog	<i>Boophis madagascariensis</i>		✓							✓						
4	Green bright-eyed frog	<i>Boophis viridis</i>		✓													
5	Pandanus frog	<i>Guibemantis pulcher</i>								✓	✓						
6		<i>Spinomantis aglavei</i>		✓													
	<b>BUTTERFLIES</b>	<b>LEPIDOPTERA</b>															
1	Spotted blue swallowtail	<i>Papilio epiphorbus</i>			✓												
2	African monarch	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>			✓								✓				
3	Clouded mother-of-pearl	<i>Protogoniomorpha anacardii</i>	✓														
4	Spotted sailer	<i>Neptis saclava saclava</i>		✓													
5	Madagascar satyrs 37 spp.	<i>Strabena spp.</i>				✓											
	<b>MOTHS</b>	<b>LEPIDOPTERA</b>															
1	Comet moth	<i>Argema mittrei</i>							✓								
2	Saturnidae	Owl moth		✓													
	<b>OTHER INVERTEBRATES</b>																
1	Giant African land snail	<i>Achatina fulica</i>				✓	✓										

2	Madagascar hissing cockroach	<i>Grompadorhina portentosa</i>															
3	Golden orb web spiders	<i>Nephila spp.</i>		✓		✓											
4	Giraffe-necked weevil	<i>Trachelophorus giraffa</i>	✓	✓													
5	Flatid leaf insect	<i>Pyromania rosea</i>										✓					
6	Praying mantis	<i>Polyspilota sp.</i>		✓													
7	Stick insect	<i>Achrioptera sp.</i>		✓													
8	Crab spider	<i>Cyriogonus sp.</i>					✓										
9	Isalo stick-insect	<i>Acrioptera impennis</i>										✓					
10	Madagascar scorpion	<i>Opiscanthus madagascariensis</i>										✓					
11	Trapdoor sider	<i>Rhianodes sp.</i>										✓					
12	Net-casting spider	<i>Deinopsis madagascariensis</i>										✓					