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BIRDING AFRICA MADAGASCAR TOUR NOVEMBER 2011

Trip report by tour leader Michael Mills

Dear Madagascar trip participants,

I think you'll agree with me that your 16-day Madagascar tour was jam-packed with activities, great birds and fabulous lemurs. During your short stay we covered all the island's main habitats: the eastern rainforests at Perinet-Mantadia National Park and Ranomafana National Park; the western woodlands at Ampijoroa in the Ankarafantsika National Park; and the spiny forest at Ifaty. We also birded the transitional woodland of Zombitse National Park, coral rag scrub around Tulear, grasslands of Isalo National Park and various wetland habitats scattered throughout, including the Betsiboka delta. During this time we saw almost all possible Malagasy endemics, although I think there were a couple of stand-out birds that were worthy of special mention.

On our drive to Andasibe we enjoyed our only views of the breeding-endemic Madagascar Pratincole. Then at Andasibe we enjoyed some exceptional views of Madagascar Wood-Rail and Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk, before spending some quality time at Mantadia. Here highlights included all four forest ground-rollers, Meller's Duck, Madagascar Flufftail, beautiful Collared Nightjar and unusual Nuthatch Vanga. Back at Perinet we added Madagascar Long-eared Owl and Red-breasted Coua to our list of top sightings before heading for Ranomafana National Park, with great views of Sooty Falcon en route. The forests at Ranomafana were tough going, but we did well to find Brown Mesite, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Red-fronted Coua, Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher, Velvet Asity, both species of Sunbird-Asity and Pollen's Vanga here. Then moving to the south-west of the island we made several stops to admire, amongst others, a beautiful male Madagascar Harrier, Torotoroka Scops-Owl, White-browed Owl and Benson's Rock-Thrush at Isalo National Park, and Giant Coua, Madagascar Buttonquail and the highly local Appert's Tetraka at Zombitse National Park. From here we moved on the coast at Ifaty, finding Madagascar Plover en route. The spiny forest here provided an other-worldly backdrop to some more gorgeous birds; Banded Kestrel, Subdesert Mesite, Running Coua, Long-tailed Ground-Roller and Lafresnaye's Vanga perhaps being most memorable. From here we moved south again a short distance to Tulear, spotting Baillon's Crake en route, and finding drinking Madagascar Sandgrouse, Verreaux's Coua, Red-shouldered Vanga, Red-tailed Tropicbird and

Littoral Rock-Thrush in this area. For the final leg of the trip we then flew way north to Mahajunga, from where we visited Ampijoroa in Ankarafantsika National Park and the Betsiboka delta. At Ampijoroa highlights included Madagascar Fish Eagle, White-breasted Mesite, Madagascar Jacana, Coquerel's Coua, Schlegel's Asity, Van Dam's Vanga and Sickle-billed Vanga, whereas we rounded off the tour at the Betsiboka delta with our best views of Humblot's Heron, two Madagascar Sacred Ibis and a single Bernier's Teal, to bring our trip total to a shade over 180 species (see full species list below), with just one species heard only and one species seen only by me. We worked exceptionally hard at making sure everyone had a good chance of seeing every species encountered, and I think in this respect we certainly succeeded.

Besides the birds there are a host of other animals worthy of special mention, most of them, of course, the lemurs, with at least 23 species seen (list below). These included Indri on our very first day in the country, four fabulous sifakas (Diademed at Mantadia, Milne-Edwards's at Ranomafana, Verreaux's at Zombitse and Coquerel's at Ampijoroa), three species of mouse lemur, three species of bamboo lemur, the iconic Ring-tailed Lemur and striking Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur. Chameleons also featured strongly, with at least eight species seen. Other highlights included the appropriately-named Leaf-tailed Gecko *Uroplatus phantasticus*, Giraffe-necked Weevil, some impressive (and thankfully harmless) Giant Hog-nosed Snakes, various species of striking Day Gecko (*Phelsuma*) and some spectacular plants, including Baobabs and the spiny forest.

Everyone knows there is nowhere on earth quite like Madagascar, and I think you'll all feel privileged to have witnessed so many of the natural highlights the island has to offer.

Happy birding

Michael

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

Family Numididae

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*

We saw a couple of these introduced birds near our accommodation at Isalo National Park, while searching for Madagascar Partridge.

Family Phasianidae

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

A species rarely recorded in Madagascar, we heard them at Antsirabe and on the plateau at Isalo, and flushed one at Isalo.

Family Anatidae

White-faced Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

There were quite a few of these ducks seen at Lac Ravelobe at Ampijoroa, alongside the following species.

Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

A few of these distinctive ducks were seen at Lac Ravelobe at Ampijoroa, mainly from the viewing platform.

Meller's Duck *Anas melleri*

We watched a pair of these scarce, endemic waterfowl at Mantadia National Park, on the second day of the trip.

Bernier's (Madagascar) Teal *Anas bernieri*

Our last endemic seen, just one bird first feeding on some mudflats and then flying around us a couple of times during the Betsiboka delta boat trip. We tried to find more, but had to be satisfied with just the one.

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha*

We saw quite a few of these ducks, first at the Anja Ring-tailed Lemur Sanctuary and again on the large lake north of Tulear.

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*

The best sighting of these little ducks was of about a dozen on the large lake north of Tulear, where we could see their blue bills through the telescope.

Family Turnicidae

Madagascar Buttonquail *Turnix nigricollis*

First seen by Frank and perhaps some others on the plateau near Isalo. Our most memorable sighting was of a pair at Zombitse forest, where we had a boldly-coloured female and a dull-coloured male feeding nearby. Most people had to get down on their knees for a really excellent look, but it was worth it!

Family Upupidae

Madagascar Hoopoe *Upupa marginata*

Only encountered in the more arid western half of the island, the first sighting near Ifaty. We also spent some time watching a nesting pair feeding their chicks near the entrance at Ampijoroa.

Family Alcedinidae

Madagascar Kingfisher *Alcedo vintsioides*

One of the very first birds seen on the tour while watching Madagascar Pratincole, and then seen regularly in small numbers thereafter.

Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher *Ispidina madagascariensis*

Our first unsuccessful nest experience, we spent some time along the road at Mantadia watching a nest in hope of seeing this species. Needless to say, it never came. Then, on our last morning at Ranomafana one of the guides called us back to look at this beauty, which he had spotted perched in the forest. But it disappeared before we could see it! However, it was re-found a little while later (this time missed by Diana and Espen who were lagging behind to photograph a chameleon), and then found again for everyone to have great views. Whew!

Family Meropidae

Madagascar Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*

Almost deafening yells came from Eli from the back of the bus on our first drive into Mantadia, when she spotted some of these in flight, so I knew we should stop soon and get this common and widespread (although admittedly attractive) species. We had sighting almost every day, including some really close, perched birds.

Family Coraciidae

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*

Regular sightings in the more wooded areas, but most common and approachable at Ampijoroa where several pairs were nesting and posed at eye level for the cameras. Click, click, click...

Family Brachypteracidae

Short-legged Ground-Roller *Brachypteracias leptosomus*

We did things the “wrong” way round with this family. This was a first ground-roller seen, usually the trickiest! At our very first stop at Mantadia we climbed through some dense forest to where our guide had heard a bird almost a month previously. After a while we heard one calling in the distance, which we managed to track down and spend almost half an hour studying at close range. Excellent!

Scaly Ground-Roller *Brachypteracias squamigera*

Our second ground-roller, seen remarkably quickly at Mantadia, where we got to study its finer plumage details at close range.

Pitta-like Ground-Roller *Atelornis pittoides*

Really the fourth forest ground-roller to be seen well, although we did see the species third. The first brief sightings that not everyone enjoyed were on our first morning at Mantadia, but we had to wait until our second day here before enjoying excellent views. Also seen very well on a few occasions at Ranomafana, where they are perhaps most common.

Rufous-headed Ground-Roller *Atelornis crossleyi*

The one we worked the hardest for; early on our second morning at Mantadia we climbed up to a high ridge where the forest was dense and stunted. Initially the bird called from far below us, but it gradually came closer. Initially it showed well for only on or two people, but we managed to lure it back for everyone to see well and at close range. Then we found a second bird at Vohiparara for Frank to see, and an excellent third sighting was enjoyed here while waiting for Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity to visit its nest.

Long-tailed Ground-Roller *Uratelornis chimaera*

The only arid-country member of the family, we saw two different birds in the spiny forest at Ifaty. We felt our guides were a bit too pushy in trying to move them towards us, so called it quits as soon as everyone had enjoyed great views (although I'm sure some of the paparazzi would have preferred to stay longer).

Family Leptosomidae

Madagascar Cuckoo Roller *Leptosomus discolour*

Certainly the most common and distinctive Madagascan bird call, although not always easy to see. Our first sighting was of a male that came flying right past us while walking down the road at Ranomafana. Then at Zombitse most of the group has some amazingly close views of a perched male. And at Ampijoroa we saw several displaying and perched birds.

Family Cuculidae

Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*

Along with the previous species, perhaps Madagascar's most distinctive and ubiquitous bird call, and also not seen that often, although we had really close views on a couple of occasions, the first on a bare snag at Mantadia.

Giant Coua *Coua gigas*

A couple of these big couas were seen very close by at the forest in Zombitse, the only place we stood any chance of seeing them at the trip.

Coquerel's Coua *Coua coquereli*

First heard at Zombitse and then seen several times at close range at Ampijoroa.

Red-breasted Coua *Coua serriana*

Certainly the coua of the trip! We spent a lot of time looking for this species at Perinet and Mantadia, and after three days had not even heard one. Then, on our last morning at Perinet we heard distant calls of one from the valley below us, and scrambled down the slope towards it and soon had one bird circling us at close range, giving excellent views.

Red-fronted Coua *Coua reynaudii*

Heard a couple of times at Perinet/Mantadia, but we had to wait until we got to Ranomafana before we laid eyes on one. We had several excellent sightings here. Another attractive coua.

Red-capped Coua *Coua ruficeps*

The one watched walking along the forest trails at Ampijoroa. Great bird!

Green-capped Coua *Coua olivaceiceps*

Probably the least striking coua of the trip (and thus the world), although if it was the only species of coua we'd now doubt have been well impressed. We saw one very close by in the spiny forest at Ifaty.

Running Coua *Coua cursor*

A very elegant and beautiful little coua, which gave us excellent sightings in the spiny forest at Ifaty

Crested Coua *Coua cristata*

Despite being the most widespread coua, this was the last one we saw on the trip, with a couple of birds showing well along the main road at Ampijoroa on our last morning here.

Verreaux's Coua *Coua verreauxi*

A slightly atypical coua with its arboreal habits and spiky crest, we enjoyed excellent views of one confiding bird near Tulear.

Blue Coua *Coua caerulea*

Our very first coua seen, at the entrance to Perinet and again many times after that at Perinet, Mantadia and Ranomafana. This is perhaps the most un-coua-like species, with its behaviour often likened to the African turacos.

Family Centropodidae

Madagascar Coucal *Centropus toulou*

Very common and widespread, especially by call, seen numerous times, with our first sighting at Perinet.

Family Psittacidae

Grey-headed Lovebird *Agapornis canus*

We first saw these bright little parrots at the lake north of Tulear, where they were perching in the reeds. After this we saw many more in the south-west of the country, although our best looks probably came around the entrance to Ampijoroa.

Greater Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis vasa*

Seen regularly throughout the tour, with several good looks.

Lesser Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis nigra*

A bird with a very distinctive and un-parrot-like call which we saw many times, with the first good looks of a very relaxed, perched bird on the ridge in Mantadia where we were looking for Red-breasted Coua.

Family Apodidae

Madagascar Spine-tailed Swift *Zoonavena grandidieri*

Surprisingly, only one good sighting during the trip, of a couple of birds flying around at Mantadia. There were also some distant birds fluttering over the forest at Ampijoroa

African Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

Common in the lowlands.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Seen on at least two occasions by some of the group (and not by me), at our accommodation at Ranomafana and Isalo.

Madagascar Black Swift *Apus balstoni*

Several looks during the tour, the first during our bus ride from 'Tana to Perinet.

Family Tytonidae

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

One bird was seen by some of the group at our hotel in Mahajunga.

Family Strigidae

Rainforest (Malagasy) Scops-Owl *Otus rutilus*

A bird which caused some frustration, heard several times but seen only once, during our first night walk at Perinet. One bird crossed the road several times but always landed out of view, until eventually it perched up and in the full spotlight beam, although only for a few seconds.

Torotoroka (Western) Scops-Owl *Otus madagascariensis*

Three great looks at this species, the first after dark near our accommodation at Isalo, then three birds on a day roost at Zombitse, and finally a pair with a recently-fledged chick near our accommodation at Ampijoroa.

White-browed Owl *Ninox superciliaris*

Everyone who came on the night walk enjoyed excellent views of this distinctive owl near our accommodation at Isalo.

Madagascar Long-eared Owl *Asio madagascariensis*

One of the highlights of the trip was watching an adult bird in the early evening near Perinet, and then finding three fluffy, white, immature birds nearby, where we watched them at close range for at least five minutes.

Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*

One of the surprises of the trip, we first watched two birds circling low near Isalo, and then Paul spotted a third bird near the roadside from the vehicle, which we stopped and admired in the great evening light.

Family Caprimulgidae

Madagascar Nightjar *Caprimulgus madagascariensis*

Seen well on several occasions, the first time near Perinet while we were waiting for the Madagascar Long-eared Owl to show. Also common around our accommodation on the south-west coast.

Collared Nightjar *Caprimulgus enarratus*

A bird nobody will forget, and not only for its amazing plumage. Late on our third day in the Perinet/Mantadia area our guides came back from a search mission very happy – they had found a bird on its bird's-nest-fern roost. We climbed up to where it was, and enjoyed close views of this striking species, although it was slightly above eye level and the paparazzi were not getting the shots they wanted. Jan Erik decided that some extra height could help, and well, we all know what happened next... The following morning our local guide's expert eyes spotted another bird while in Perinet, this time with at least one chick hidden beneath it, but below eye level so the entire plumage could be appreciated and captured on camera.

Family Columbidae

Rock Dove/ Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

A pity this bird is on the list...

Madagascar Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia picturata*

Widespread and seen regularly, although never common and easy to see. Probably our best sighting was of a very confiding individual at the entrance to Ampijoroa.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*

Common in the west.

Madagascar Green-Pigeon *Treron australis*

First seen in our hotel garden at Ranomafana by some of the party, then again in front of our accommodation at Tulear, but some of the group had to wait until Ampijoroa to get good views of this species, where we admired several perched birds in the telescope.

Madagascar Blue-Pigeon *Alectroenas madagascariensis*

Seen remarkably often during our time at Mantadia, Perinet and Ranomafana, with some great eye-level looks of this attractive pigeon, especially at the latter locality.

Family Mesitornithidae

White-breasted Mesite *Mesitornis variegata*

After a bit of a struggle, we eventually enjoyed great looks at Ampijoroa where a bird crept past us through the undergrowth and then slowly crossed the trail, completing the family for us!

Brown Mesite *Mesitornis unicolor*

Superb, close up views of a pair of these under-stated birds at Ranomafana. One of the highlights of the trip.

Subdesert Mesite *Monias benschi*

Our guides at Ifaty quite quickly managed to tree first a male and then a female, the latter perched awkwardly in some spindly outer branches of a shrub, as though it had crash landed there.

Family Rallidae

Madagascar Flufftail *Sarothrura insularis*

Excellent and prolonged views of a male bird at Mantadia. It's not often that 13 people can see a Flufftail at the same time...

Madagascar Wood-Rail *Canirallus kiolooides*

Several excellent views at Perinet, especially on our last morning here, and another sighting of Ranomafana. They seemed to be easier than normal to see.

Madagascar Rail *Rallus madagascariensis*

Excellent, close-up views of a single bird near Mantadia, on two consecutive days.

White-throated Rail *Dryolimnas cuvieri*

On our first afternoon in Madagascar we watched an adult and three little black fluff balls in a swamp in Perinet. Seen again at Ampijoroa.

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*

Excellent views of at least two birds feeding along a reedbed at the lake north of Tulear.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Several at Lac Ravelobe at Ampijoroa.

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni*

A few seen at Lac Ravelobe from the viewing platform.

Family Pteroclididae

Madagascar Sandgrouse *Pterocles personatus*

Our first sighting of this large, attractive sandgrouse was a bit of a surprise: shortly after leaving Isalo once came flying over us, bringing the bus to a rapid halt. Then near Tulear we watched at least six birds coming into drink.

Family Scolopacidae

Madagascar Snipe *Gallinago macrodactyla*

Two good flight views of this bulky snipe, flushed at Vohiparara.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Several seen during the tour.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Quite common on the south-west coast.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Quite common on the south-west coast.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

About half a dozen seen on the Betsiboka delta boat trip.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

A few seen in the south-west.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

A few seen in the south-west.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Common in the south-west and at the Betsiboka delta

Family Jacanidae

Madagascar Jacana *Actophilornis albinucha*
Good scope views from the viewing platform at Lac Ravelobe, of an adult and juvenile bird feeding for long periods on the edge of the wetland.

Family Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Several in the Tulear/Ifaty area.

Family Charadriidae

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
Several along the coast.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
Common along the coast.

Madagascar Plover *Charadrius thoracicus*
A pair of these smart plovers was studied for a good half hour near Ifaty.

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*
Regular along the coast.

White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*
The best sightings were of several on Nosy Ve.

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii*
A few on the west coast.

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*
First seen at Vohiparara and then again at Ifaty.

Family Glareolidae

Madagascar Pratincole *Glareola ocularis*
A great encounter on our first morning in Madagascar of two birds. Paul also spotted one next to our accommodation at Ranomafana.

Family Laridae

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*
Quite a few in the Betsiboka delta.

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*
A few seen on the Nosy Ve boat trip.

Saunders' Tern *Sterna saundersi*

Good numbers of small terns seen at the Betsiboka delta are assumed to be this species, although honestly we could see no features to distinguish them from Little Tern.

Family Accipitridae

Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda madagascariensis*

One of my trip highlights, on our very first afternoon in Madagascar we spotted one beside the road at Perinet and watched it through the scopes for nearly 20 minutes as it sat silently, occasionally swooping down to take some prey off some tree foliage.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

Common.

Madagascar Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus vociferoides*

One of Madagascar's rarest birds, we all enjoyed a fantastic encounter with one and then two birds during the boat trip on Lac Ravelobe.

Madagascar Harrier *Circus macrosceles*

One of the highlights of the trip, we had close flight views of a striking male as it crossed the road and then flew slowly next to our vehicle, this after more than an hour of dedicated scanning turned up nothing.

Madagascar Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides radiatus*

By the morning of day 15, we had still seen no trace of this species despite keeping an eye out for it. After some patient and dedicated scanning we eventually spotted one circling low over the forest at Ampijoroa, which gave great views.

Frances' Sparrowhawk *Accipiter francesii*

Great views of a male at the entrance to Perinet, first sitting in a low palm tree and then on the ground with some prey.

Madagascar Sparrowhawk *Accipiter madagascariensis*

While waiting for the Madagascar Long-eared Owl to show near Perinet, a largish accipiter came hurtling past. Unfortunately I didn't see it, but our local guide called it as a Madagascar Sparrowhawk and a few of the group managed to see it.

Henst's Goshawk *Accipiter henstii*

One of the frustrations of the trip. We spent at least two hours watching a nest at Ranomafana, but no bird ever showed and if there was a bird on the nest it did a great job of concealing itself. Then at Ampijoroa we heard a bird calling nearby twice and some of us glimpsed what was probably one shooting through the forest canopy, but I don't think anyone will claim to have seen this bird.

Madagascar Buzzard *Buteo brachypterus*

The most often-encountered raptor over forest, with many sightings at Mantadia, Perinet, Ranomafana and Ampijoroa.

Family Falconidae

Madagascar Kestrel *Falco newtoni*

Many encounters of this neat little falcon, probably best seen at Isalo.

Banded Kestrel *Falco zoniventris*

An unbelievable encounter at Ifaty, with a bird perched right above our heads and then taking giant hissing cockroaches off the ground a few metres away from us. This is not an easy species to see.

[**Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonorae*]

Late in the evening, what was either a pale phase of one of these or a juvenile Sooty Falcon came flying low over Lac Ravelobe towards us. Unfortunately I never had good looks at the profile and it was getting too dark to see the colours properly, so as tempting as it is to claim this species, I just can't rule out the next species...

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*

Superb perched views of one bird near our accommodation near Antsirabe, in great morning light, with some poorer flight views at Ampijoroa.

Family Podicipedidae

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

More than 50 on the lake north of Tulear.

Madagascar Little Grebe *Tachybaptus pelzelni*

Just a single sighting of this now-rare species, at at Mantadia, where two adults were feeding some stripy chicks.

Family Phaethontidae

Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*

We spent a long time admiring these beauties at Nosy Ve.

Family Anhingidae

African Darter *Anhinga rufa*

At least two at Lac Ravelobe.

Family Ardeidae

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A few seen in coastal areas.

Humblot's Heron *Ardea humbloti*

A smart heron, first seen perched in a tree along the coast south of Tulear (great spotting by Jarl), then better views of a bird at Lac Ravelobe (where it had a grey bill – breeding?), and excellent views of a bird perched and then flying at the Betsiboka delta.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Most numerous at Lac Ravelobe, where we had some close views from our boat trip.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Common.

Dimorphic Egret *Egretta dimorpha*

Common and widespread, but especially numerous in plateau rice paddies and on the Betsiboka delta. White, pale grey and dark grey birds were seen.

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*

Our best sightings were at Lac Ravelobe, Ampijoroa, where several birds were watched fishing under their umbrellas.

Common Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Many seen.

Madagascar Pond-Heron *Ardeola idae*

About five of these smart white herons were seen at Lac Ravelobe.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

A healthy breeding colony at Lac Ravelobe provided the most memorable sightings. Even I had to admit that they looked smart in full breeding dress.

Green-backed Heron *Butorides striatus*

Quite common.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

A few sightings throughout the trip, including a juvenile bird on the boat ride at Lac Ravelobe.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Seen by some of the group over reed beds and Lac Ravelobe, which others tried to turn Common Myna into this species!

Family Scopidae

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*

Several seen on our first morning, just as we left 'Tana, with other scattered sightings throughout the trip.

Family Threskiornithidae

Madagascar White (Sacred) Ibis *Threskiornis bernieri*

Two of these rare ibis were seen well feeding on some mudflats at the Betsiboka delta, with one bird scoped.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Many at Ampijoroa.

Madagascar Crested Ibis *Lophotibis cristata*

One of the disappointments of the trip, as nobody seemed to know of any active nests during our visit. I was the only one to see this species, with one bird being flushed out of the riverbed ahead of us at Mantadia, but we could not relocate it after that.

Family Phoenicopteridae

Great Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

There was a small flock of these at the lake north of Tulear.

Family Eurylamidae

Velvet Asity *Philepitta castanea*

Quite a stunner, and seen very well on several occasions at Ranomafana and Vohiparara.

Schlegel's Asity *Philepitta schlegeli*

Perhaps even smarter than the previous species! We had good looks at several females and everyone had fabulous looks at a male except for poor Jan Erik. Apparently his trip report is going to have a Cattle Egret on the front cover, in protest. Let's see...

Common Sunbird-Asity *Neodrepanis coruscans*

Smart little birds, although not easy to see well. After a bit of chasing we managed to get everyone good views of a male at Vohiparara, and some people enjoyed amazing and close views here.

Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity *Neodrepanis hypoxanthus*

A rare and localised species, we did well to find a pair quite quickly at Vohiparara, although it took some time for everyone to see it. First we saw the female feeding in some flower, and then later we found a nest. We spent quite a bit of time at the nest watching birds come and go, although it must be said it was not easy getting great looks at these little beauties. In the end everyone seemed happy with what they had seen, so we turned our attention to other species.

Family Dicruridae

Crested Drongo *Dicrurus forficatus*

Seen every day of the trip, including at some very inconvenient times... (see Red-shouldered Vanga)

Family Vangidae

Red-tailed Vanga *Calicalicus madagascariensis*

Common by voice, although it took us an amazingly long time before everyone connected with a fine male. At Mantadia and Perinet we only managed to spot females, then a male showed at Ranomafana for some of the group, and finally at Ifaty we called in a smart little male for everyone to admire at close range.

Red-shouldered Vanga *Calicalicus rufocarpalis*

When Air Madagascar made one last and nearly fatal (to our chances of seeing this species) schedule change to our flight departing from Tulear, we lost our only morning to look for this species, leaving us just with a hot and windy afternoon to search for this often-tricky species. Our first two attempts drew a complete blank, but at the third area we tried we could hear the distant calls of one. We scrambled closer through the dense vegetation, but it always seemed to be out of sight. Eventually we realised that we had been chasing a Crested Drongo that were mimicking the calls! Exhausted and hot by this time we almost gave up, but one last attempt brought success, finally! At first the calls were distant, but eventually we managed to track down a lovely male of this species. It still took quite a scramble for the whole group to see it (the bird was on the move and the light was fading), but in the end everyone got good views and I had it at less than one metre from me at the end. Whew!

Rufous Vanga *Schetba rufa*

Most people missed the one we saw at Ranomafana, but we had two close encounters of this striking bird at Ampijoroa.

Hook-billed Vanga *Vanga curvirostris*

Not an easy vanga to see, although often heard, we had great scope views of one on the forest edge at Vohiparara and another at its nest near the entrance to Ampijoroa.

Lafresnaye's Vanga *Xenopirostris xenopirostris*

A great bird, seen really well in the spiny forest and again while looking for Red-shouldered Vanga.

Van Dam's Vanga *Xenopirostris damii*

This Endangered vanga was seen well in the dense plateau woodland at Ampijoroa, where a pair was watched at close range in the tree above us.

Pollen's Vanga *Xenopirostris polleni*

We enjoyed some superb, roadside views of this bulky vanga near Vohiparara, where a male sat up for everyone to watch in the scope. Seen briefly again the following day and heard nearby on our final morning at Vohiparara.

Sickle-billed Vanga *Falculea palliata*

One of Madagascar's top birds (and that is saying something)! Our first encounter was brief, as a pair flew past us in the spiny forest while we were admiring the male Subdesert Mesite. However, we had many excellent and close encounters of this bird at Ampijoroa, where we could watch its unusual foraging behaviour at close range.

White-headed Vanga *Artamella viridis*

The small, short-billed version of the previous species, seen well at Perinet, Ifaty and Ampijoroa.

Chabert's Vanga *Leptopterus chabert*

Common and widespread, we had our best sightings at Ifaty where we could even see the white in the tail clearly.

Madagascar Blue Vanga *Cyanolanius madagascarinus*

Smart little birds, we had great looks in lovely afternoon light along the road near Vohiparara, and another close encounter at Ampijoroa.

Tylas *Tylas eduardi*

Another neat vanga seen many times in the eastern rainforest, but first in a foraging flock at Mantadia.

Nuthatch Vanga *Hypositta corallirostris*

Several good sightings at Mantadia and then Perinet, and I even saw one at Ranomafana where the species appears to be quite rare.

Ward's Flycatcher *Pseudobias wardi*

A smart little bird, now known to be a vanga, seen well at Perinet, Mantadia and Ranomafana.

Crossley's Babbler *Mystacornis crossleyi*

Immediately after seeing Short-legged Ground-Roller we turned our attention to one of these attractive, under-storey vangas that was singing nearby. It took some time, but in the end everyone enjoyed excellent views as it walked on the ground and sang from some low perched. Another one that brought us to our knees!

Dark Newtonia *Newtonia amphichroa*

One bird seen at close range at the beginning of the Rufous-headed Ground-Roller walk in Mantadia, and heard again at Vohiparara.

Common Newtonia *Newtonia brunneicauda*

Common indeed, although more often heard than seen.

Archbold's Newtonia *Newtonia archboldi*

Close views of a pair in the spiny forest at Ifaty.

Family Corvidae

Pied Crow *Corvus albus*

The first birds caused some excitement, but people soon realised that they were not that special...

Family Campephagidae

Madagascar Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina cinerea*

A neat bird, seen several times, with our first views on our final morning at Perinet.

Family Monarchidae

Madagascar Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone mutata*

Common, widespread and rather distracting at times, especially to those with cameras!

Family Hirundinidae

Brown-throated Martin *Riparia paludicola*

First seen by some of the group near the entrance to Mantadia, but later seen really well at some marshes near Vohiparara. The darker plumage, very different calls and different habitat selection of the Madagascar subspecies makes me think there may be a cryptic species lurking here...

Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica*

Fairly common and widespread, we enjoyed some excellent perched views at both Ranomafana and Ampijoroa.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Several seen on the coastal plain of the Tulear/Ifaty area.

Family Pycnonotidae

Madagascar Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*

Common, widespread and often mistaken for other birds!

Family Zosteropidae

Madagascar White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatanus*

Fairly common and widespread in wooded habitats, we had many opportunities to see this species well.

Family Sylviidae/unresolved

Madagascar Swamp-Warbler *Acrocephalus newtoni*

Seen regularly throughout the trip adjacent to wetlands, our first two sightings were at the 'duck pond' in Mantadia and some great views along the river besides our accommodation at Ranomafana.

Brown Emu-tail *Dromaeocercus brunneus*

The tricky-to-see, forest under-storey emu-tail, we had two very close encounters with this species at Vohiparara, during which some of the group had excellent views, others reasonable looks, and other slightly-less-than satisfactory views.

Gray Emu-tail *Dromaeocercus seebohmi*

The easy-to-see, marsh emu-tail, we searched for this one at some marshes near Vohiparara and enjoyed some excellent views of at least two singing birds.

Madagascar Brush-Warbler *Nesillas typica*

Common in the eastern rainforest. Some people initially had trouble seeing this species, but we encountered them often enough that everyone got great views in the end.

Subdesert Brush-Warbler *Nesillas lantzi*

Common in the arid areas of the south-west, we saw our first birds at close range in the spiny forest.

Family Bernieridae

Long-billed Bernieria *Bernieria madagascariensis*

We enjoyed many sightings of this species, although perhaps the best sightings were at Ampijoroa.

Spectacled Tetraka *Xanthomixis zosterops*

Common and seen many times in the eastern rainforest.

Appert's Tetraka *Xanthomixis apperti*

After a long and hot walk at Zombitse our guide eventually located a very confiding pair of these dainty little birds. Initially there was some confusion as some of us ended up watching some Long-billed Bernieria's feeding nearby, but in the end we all enjoyed great views at less than two metres.

Grey-crowned Tetraka *Xanthomixis cinereiceps*

Seen a couple of times at Vohiparara where its characteristic foraging behaviour could be observed.

Thamnornis Warbler *Thamnornis chloropetoides*

One of the prominent voices of the spiny forest, we had a couple of good sightings of this species at Ifaty.

Rand's Warbler *Randia pseudozosterops*

Heard often at Perinet-Mantadia and Ranomafana, but not easy to see. Some of the group had good views while we were watching Indri at Perinet, but most people had to wait until our second morning at Vohiparara for good views, when I scoped one singing on a bare branch above the tree canopy.

Cryptic Warbler *Cryptosylvicola randriansoloi*

On our first morning at Vohiparara, before even entering the forest, we located a bird singing from the forest canopy next to the road, and got it in the scope for everyone to see in detail.

[**Wedge-tailed Jery** *Hartertula flavoviridis*]

Probably the most unexpected miss of the trip, there was no sign of these birds in their various haunts. We were shown a nest at Vohiparara of what was supposedly this bird, but it appeared to have been deserted and no birds were seen during several hours in the vicinity.]

White-throated Oxylabes *Oxylabes madagascariensis*

The first sighting was an excellent one of a party with young at Mantadia, towards the start of the Rufous-headed Ground-Roller walk. The birds showed very well. Some people saw it again at Ranomafana.

Madagascar Yellowbrow *Crossleyia xanthophrys*

Often a tricky species to see well, we did well to get good views of a bird feeding nearby on the ground for everyone, on our first morning at Vohiparara. It did require joining the bird in the undergrowth, but fortunately everyone was up for that.

Family Cisticolidae

Madagascar Cisticola *Cisticola cherinus*

Seen on our first morning in Madagascar, at the pratincole stop, but most numerous in the grasslands around Isalo.

Common Jery *Neomixis tenella*

The one we saw most often, with the grey hind-neck. We enjoyed many good looks in the eastern rainforest, spiny forest and western woodlands.

Green Jery *Neomixis viridis*

Common in the eastern rainforest by voice, although not easy to see. We failed to see one at Perinet/Mantadia, despite several attempts, but then had very close, eye-level views of a bird called in along the road at Ranomafana.

Stripe-throated Jery *Neomixis striatigula*

A very common species by voice in the eastern rainforest, but not always easy to see as they call from the treetops. Everyone watched them singing in the scope at Perinet and some saw them at close range while we were looking for Madagascar Rail for the second time. In the spiny forest, however, they were common and easy to see; the subspecies here has a slightly different call, although it doesn't feel different enough to warrant full specific status, as has been suggested by others.

Family Alaudidae

Madagascar Lark *Mirafra hova*

Common in the plateau grasslands and south-west.

Family Muscicapidae

Forest Rock-Thrush *Monticola sharpei*

A bird that gave us more than its fair share of hassle. Frank first saw one in Mantadia while the rest of us were up the ridge looking at Rufous-headed Ground-Roller. Then, on our first morning at Vohiparara, we had one calling near us for a long time, and it even crossed the trail, but nobody laid eyes upon it. After that we visited the roadside nest with three large chicks, watching for a while without the adult birds visiting, and when we returned two days later the chicks had fledged! Thus, by the time our last morning at Ranomafana arrived, only Frank had seen an adult bird. Finding a calling male right beside the track was hence especially welcome, and it stayed long enough to keep the photographers happy too.

Benson's Rock-Thrush *Monticola bensoni*

A couple of birds were seen well around our accommodation at Isalo. This species is now lumped with Forest Rock-Thrush, above.

Littoral Rock-Thrush *Monticola imerinus*

We enjoyed great views of a male feeding a recently-fledged youngster in the arid sand dunes at Anakao, just before heading for the island of Nosy Ve.

Madagascar Magpie-Robin *Copsychus albospectularis*

Very common and widespread with many great sightings.

African Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

Common in highland areas.

Family Sturnidae

Madagascar Starling *Saroglossa aurata*

This species can often be tricky, although we enjoyed a couple of excellent roadside sightings in and around Mantadia and another sighting near Vohiparara. The white flashes in the wing and tail are the giveaway.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Common, widespread and confused with various other species including Little Bittern!

Family Nectariniidae

Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris sovimanga*

One of the most abundant and often seen species, with many excellent sightings.

Madagascar Green Sunbird *Cinnyris notatus*

Not nearly as common as the previous species. Seen near Mantadia, Ampijoroa and near Ifaty, although our best sightings were of males and females at Vohiparara.

Family Ploceidae

Nelicourvi Weaver *Ploceus nelicourvi*

A very smart weaver seen regularly in the eastern rainforest, although we probably had our best sightings at Perinet, where they appear to be especially common.

Sakalava Weaver *Ploceus sakalava*

Many seen in the arid west, the first between Tulear and Ifaty.

Madagascar Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*

Common and widespread, one of the first and last birds seen.

Forest Fody *Foudia omissa*

Good views of a male showing no hybrid features at Perinet, with a couple more seen at Ranomafana inside dense forest.

Family Estrildidae

Madagascar Mannikin *Lonchura nana*

One of the first birds seen in Madagascar, although most people enjoyed their best sighting at our accommodation near Antsirabe.

Family Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Seen in Andasibe village.

Family Motacillidae

Madagascar Wagtail *Motacilla flaviventris*

Common around Perinet and Ranomafana. There were some especially tame birds around the entrance to Perinet which posed well for the cameras.

ANNOTATED LIST OF LEMURS RECORDED

Family Cheirogaleidae: Mouse & Dwarf Lemurs

Grey Mouse Lemur *Microcebus murinus*

One seen well during our second night walk at Ampijoroa.

Golden-brown Mouse Lemur *Microcebus ravelobensis*

Seen exceptionally well on our second night walk at Ampijoroa, as we watched a tiny mother suckling her tinier babe.

Brown/Rufous Mouse Lemur *Microcebus rufus*

Sadly none showed up during the two evenings we waited at the feeding stations at the road at Ranomafana, causing our guides to speculate that they'd fallen prey to something. However, we did manage to find two during our night walk here along the road, which showed well.

Goodman's Mouse Lemur *Microcebus lehilahytsara*

One seen on our second night walk at Perinet was this species.

Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur *Cheirogaleus crossleyi*

At least five seen, some very well, during our first night walk at Perinet.

Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur *Cheirogaleus medius*

Very nice views during both walks at Ampijoroa.

Family Lepilemuridae: Sportive Lemurs

Milne-Edwards' Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur edwardsi*

One was watched coming out of its day roost just after sunset, at the start of our second night walk at Ampijoroa.

Hubbard's Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur hubbardi*

A couple were seen really well on their day roosts at Zombitse.

Unknown Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur sp.*

One seen on its day roost in the spiny forest at Ifaty. The identity of the sportive lemurs in this area is not known to scientists.

Family Lemuridae: True Lemurs

Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur *Hapalemur griseus*

Several seen on our first day at Perinet, and again at Mantadia.

Golden Bamboo Lemur *Hapalemur aureus*

The one discovered only in 1985, which we watched for some time at Ranomafana as it foraged overhead in a large stand of bamboo.

Greater Bamboo Lemur *Prolemur simus*

The second bamboo lemur seen on the afternoon walk at Ranomafana, also watched feeding a stand of bamboo for some time.

Ring-tailed Lemur *Lemur catta*

Great views of some relaxed (but not hand-fed 'zoo' animals like at Berenty) between Ranomafana and Isalo. We got caught here in a big rain storm, but the benefit was that we got to see how lemurs coped with rain! They curled themselves up in their warm fluffy tails and waited things out.

Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur *Varecia variegata*

For those not rescuing Jan Erik, great views were had of these striking lemurs at Mantadia.

Mongoose Lemur *Eulemur mongoz*

The ones making a lot of noise and throwing mangoes at us at Ampijoroa, seen well in the spotlight after dark.

Red-bellied Lemur *Eulemur rubriventer*

First seen at the start of the Rufous-headed Ground-Roller walk at Mantadia, and again by some of the group at Vohiparara.

Common Brown Lemur *Eulemur fulvus*

Briefly seen at Perinet when we were trying to track down Madagascar Wood-Rail, but great views at Ampijoroa

Red-fronted Brown Lemur *Eulemur rufus*
Seen several times at Ranomafana.

Family Indriidae: Indri and others

Eastern Woolly Lemur (Avahi) *Avahi laniger*
Wonderful views of three huddled in a thicket during the day at Perinet.

Diademed Sifaka *Propithecus diadema*
Spectacular lemurs seen well at Mantadia, although this required quite a climb.

Milne-Edwards's Sifaka *Propithecus edwardsi*
Another fabulous lemur seen well by everyone who tried, at Vohiparara.

Verreaux's Sifaka *Propithecus verreauxi*
Nice views of three (including a mother and baby) at Zombitze.

Coquerel's Sifaka *Propithecus coquereli*
We enjoyed some time with some very tame individuals at Ampijoroa.

Indri *Indri Indri*

Three seen for an extended period low overhead on our very first day in Madagascar, after hearing their loud calls nearby. We continued to hear the calls almost continuously for the next three days (and even into the night)!