

# Birding Africa: Madagascar 2016

Report by tour leader Michael Mills

Our comprehensive 2016 Madagascar Tour once again showcased Madagascar's best birds and wildlife in just 16 days, with an optional five days spent at Masoala at the end. We enjoyed excellent views of all available endemic birds, making it our most successful tour of Madagascar to date. Among the 190 species logged were all five species of Ground Roller, all three Mesites, all species of Vanga, all ten Couas and all four Asity species. The most enjoyed birds of the trip were **Rufous-headed Vanga** and **Crossley's Vanga** in tie ninth, **Pitta-like Ground Roller** and **Giant Coua** in tie seventh, **Short-legged Ground Roller** in sixth, **Scaly Ground Roller** in fifth, **White-breasted Mesite** in fourth, **Long-tailed Ground Roller** in third, and **Velvet Asity** in second, and the peerless **Helmet Vanga** took our top honours! We also recorded 25 lemur species and lots of other great critters.

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Deservedly called the eighth continent, Madagascar is simply one of the most unusual and spectacular wildlife destinations on the globe. With more than 120 bird endemics and several endemic bird families, plus all the unique mammals and habitats, we met up at our comfortable base hotel in Antananarivo, exhilarated at what the coming weeks held for us. A short stint of birding in the hotel gardens with **Madagascar Nightjar** on its day roost tickled our taste buds before we enjoyed our first of many scrumptious meals together.

This year Air Madagascar wasted no time in consolidating its reputation for being near-mythical, completely disappearing from the first day of the trip and forcing us, instead, to spend many hours watching the Madagascan countryside go by during the very long drive north. Still, the scenery was new and with regular leg stretches we managed the journey well and arrived in Mahajanga not too late or too fatigued.

Early the next morning we were out on the placid waters of the Betsiboka River, making our way up to the mangrove-covered islands of the delta area. When we arrived all the mudflats were covered by water, but we were relieved to note that the tide was dropping and soon the first mudflats were exposed. A distant **Madagascar Sacred Ibis** in flight got the pulses racing, and not long afterwards we spotted the first of eight **Madagascar Teal** (Bernier's Teal) feeding discretely on the edge of the shore. The boat's captain did a good job of pulling in for close views, before we headed for some nearby mudflats to observe **Madagascar Sacred Ibis** at closer range, alongside a small flock of **Lesser Flamingo**, several **Greater Sand Plover**, a single **Lesser Sand Plover** and some **Terek Sandpiper**.

Back on shore we wasted no time in heading for Ampijoroa Forest Station in Ankarafantsika National Park. As the afternoon cooled we struck out into the drier woodlands already having seen **Sickle-billed Vanga** in the car park and **Humblot's Heron** at the lake shore, with **Rufous Vanga** on the nest as one of the first birds seen. A chance encounter with **Banded Kestrel** proved rather fortuitous and was the only sighting of the trip, so in retrospect it was especially appreciated that it perched for long enough for everyone to have a good study of it through the scope. A little further along the trails we enjoyed a good encounter with a pair of **Van Dam's Vanga**, before being led to **Madagascar Crested Ibis** on the nest, which could be seen well through the scope. Heading back to HQ we added to our lists **Red-capped Coua** in the path and **White-breasted Mesite** beside the path, before a night walk with point-blank views of **Torotoroka Scops Owl**, and some nice *Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemurs*, *Grey Mouse Lemurs* and *Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemurs* to add to the list of diurnal lemurs seen earlier in the day, namely *Coquerel's Sifaka* and *Common Brown Lemur*.

A productive walk the next morning yielded some perched **Madagascar Green Pigeons**, even better views of **White-breasted Mesite** than had the previous day, fantastic views of a pair of **Schlegel's Asity** building a nest, **Coquerel's Coua**, **Madagascar Hoopoe** and **Hook-billed Vanga**. Making our way back to the park offices via the lake shore we spent some time studying a group of about seven falcons hunting over the forest, all **Sooty Falcons** except for one, much larger **Eleonora's Falcon** that gave us plenty of time to compare alongside its more common cousin. At the lake shore a smart

**Madagascar Pond Heron** allowed close approach and a single **Madagascar Jacana** was watched for some time, but a pair of **Madagascar Fish Eagle** was certainly the most popular find and wrapped up our target list for the reserve.

The next day we made the longish drive back to Antananarivo, but now had more time for stops, the first of which was spent making a detailed study of **Madagascar Pratincole** at one of the numerous river crossings. A post-lunch stroll in some grasslands brought good flight views of flushed male and female **Madagascar Partridge**, before we spent the afternoon scanning and scanning for harriers, eventually rewarded with success as a lovely male **Madagascar Harrier** drifted by, giving good flight views. As we approached Antananarivo some sharp spotting had us stopping for roadside **Meller's Duck**, although they were a bit flighty and the untimely arrival of some heavy rain drove us back to the bus before we'd seen them as well as we'd hoped.

The next morning a short visit to Lac Alarobia made for a birdy start, with hundreds of **Red-billed Teal**, **Hottentot Teal**, **Dimorphic Egret**, **Squacco Heron** and **Western Cattle Egret** creating quite a spectacle. We took our time to pick out **Meller's Duck**, this time for a detailed study, saw another **Madagascar Pond Heron**, and enjoyed our best views of the trip of **Black Heron** and **White-throated Rail**, before making our way to Andasibe for our eastern rainforest introduction. A very productive walk along the road in the later afternoon got things off to a good start, with highlights including *Indri*, our first **Madagascar Blue Pigeon** and **Blue Coua**, superb views of **Madagascar Wood Rail**, the only **Frances's Sparrowhawk** of the trip, and walk-away views of **Madagascar Long-eared Owl** which allowed a detailed study through the scope and even for some experimentation with selfies...

Early the next morning we slowly bumped our way down the narrow track to Mantadia, with two hoped-for ground rollers topping our hit list. Overall we enjoyed a very productive day. **Red-breasted Coua** showed reasonably well, a camera blowing **Collared Nightjar** sat atop its birds-fern nest, a very relaxed **Scaly Ground Roller** put on a brilliant display, **Cuckoo-Roller** perched close by, **Madagascar Starling** was seen, a pair of **Nuthatch Vanga** were found in a large mixed species flock and watched for some time, **Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher** was seen well, a pair of **Madagascar Grebe** were active around their nest, *Lowland Streaked Tenrec*, *Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur* and *Diademmed Sifaka* represented the hairies, and **Madagascar Rail** was observed well on our way home. However, hours of searching had failed to turn up Short-legged Ground Roller, so a return visit the next morning was on the cards. Fortunately it proved more successful for this biggie, and besides enjoying prolonged and close-range views of **Short-legged Ground Roller** after fighting our way up a tangle-covered hill, we also had a memorable encounter with a male **Madagascar Flufftail** and a second **Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher**. A brief afternoon visit to the Andasibe part of the reserve quickly turned up a roosting **Rainforest Scops Owl**, and produced our first views of **Red-fronted Coua** in the path. *Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur* and **Madagascar Sparrowhawk** at the nest were other good finds, and after dark *Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur* was the highlight of a short night walk.

Continuing with the theme of eastern rainforests, we made the long drive to Ranomafana National Park, broken with an overnight stay at Antsirabe. Here, around our accommodation, we flushed another pair of **Madagascar Partridge**, enjoyed good views of a pair of **Madagascar Buttonquail** on the ground, and took time to study some noisy **Madagascar Lesser Cuckoos**. The next day our lunch spot brought good flight views of a pair of **Madagascar Snipe**, and **Baillon's Crake** was lured from the dense reed beds for great views. The road conditions slowed our progress and numerous stops for roadworks were becoming tedious when a brown raptor flashed passed the windscreen of the bus – "**Madagascan Cuckoo-Hawk**" I bellowed with earthmoving vigour, but the bird quickly vanished from sight. Fortunately there was a "good" looking patch of *Eucalyptus* beside the road in the direction in which the bird was headed, so we all piled off the bus and were soon watching a pair of these secretive raptors at close range. Needless to say the last hour of the drive to Ranomafana felt easier than normal!

With three full days at Ranomafana, we had plenty of time to track down all the tricky understorey skulkers for which it is so notorious. Overall the weather was sunnier and drier than normal, but we fared exceptionally well on the birds. A pair of **Brown Mesite** was ushered into view, **Pitta-like Ground Roller** showed well, a pair of **Pollen's Vanga** were tracked down, **Common Sunbird-Asity** showed exceptionally well, **Henst's Goshawk** perched for great views in the scope on our second attempt, **Rufous-headed Ground Roller** was coaxed into view on two occasions, a bright male **Forest Fody** was

scoped for all, **Dark Newtonia** was seen twice, **Cryptic Warbler** was seen below eye-level, **Crossley's Vanga** was watched at point-blank range, **Grey-crowned Tetraka** was found building a nest, **Brown Emutail** was watched moving back and forth through the undergrowth for some time, a male **Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity** was admired near its nest, several incredible male **Velvet Asity** showed remarkably well, **Grey Emutail** proved no challenge, and **Madagascar Yellowbrow** gave an astounding display for a bird that is usually so shy. Lemurs played along nicely too, with highlights including *Golden Bamboo Lemur*, *Greater Bamboo Lemur* with its "sorry for you" attitude, *Milne-Edward's Sifaka*, *Red-fronted Brown Lemur*, *Red-bellied Lemur* and the diminutive *Rufous Mouse Lemur*.

Having cleaned up the eastern rainforests in just five days of birding, we moved on very satisfied to the drier habitats of the south. We first paused at Anja Lemur Reserve where we spent an hour with a family of *Ring-tailed Lemurs*, before continuing on to Isalo, where windy weather made our night walk difficult. Fortunately it meant the next day was especially productive, with cloudy conditions keeping the weather far more pleasant than normal, and by then the wind had dropped. We started off in the garden of our hotel admiring **White-browed Hawk-Owl** and **Torotoroka Scops Owl**, before making a brief foray in search of **Forest Rock Thrush** (here called **Benson's Rock Thrush**). With that in the bag we moved on to Zombitse Forest for a few hours, where highlights were close views of **Appert's Tetraka** and a fantastic encounter with **Giant Coua**, with the local race of **Crested Coua** (split by BirdLife as Chestnut-vented Coua) and **Coquerel's Coua** also seen. Several *Verreaux's Sifakas* were appreciated, and a sleepy *Hubbard's Sportive Lemur* peered from its sleeping spot, before it was time to move on.

With conditions so much more pleasant than normal as we neared Toliara, we decided to make several roadside stops in search of some of the local specialities. First up was **Subdesert Brush Warbler**, and then a **Green-capped Coua** was persuaded to come out in the open. The second stop quickly produced a pair of **Verreaux's Couas**, and some distant *Ring-tailed Lemurs*. And finally, at our third stop we found **Running Coua** (our sixth coua for the day!), a very tame pair of **Lafresnaye's Vanga**, and a lovely pair of enigmatic **Red-shouldered Vanga**. All this success had put us well ahead of schedule.

Up early the next morning we were out in the incomparable Spiny Forest as the sun was rising. Our first stop was to admire a localised **Subdesert Mesite** on the nest, before we were whisked off to see **Long-tailed Ground Roller** at close range. **Thamnornis** and **Archbold's Newtonia** were seen a couple of times as we made our circuit, with **Madagascar Sparrowhawk** and **Madagascar Harrier-Hawk** at the nest up next. We chanced upon another pair of **Long-tailed Ground Rollers**, this time sunbathing in the track and allowing us prolonged views of two very relaxed birds. Another **Running Coua** was found for those who wanted better views, and a pair of **Madagascar Buttonquail** were seen well just as we were nearing the end of the walk. Two species of demure lemur were also seen on their day roosts, including one species thought to be unnamed and preliminarily called *Black-shouldered Sportive Lemur*. By now it was really getting very hot, so we wasted no time in making a short detour to some salt pans to admire a pair of **Madagascar Plover**, before we headed to the hotel to wait out the heat of the day.

With just a few birds left to find in the south, we decided to put some extra effort into seeing **Madagascar Sandgrouse**, and were very pleased to enjoy scope views of a single male in some open grassland. Here too we found a covey of six **Madagascar Partridge**, watched for some time as they ran ahead of us across short grass. The final day of the main tour had now come, and after seeing some **Three-banded Plovers** near our hotel we made the hour-long boat trip to Nosy Ve island. A much-celebrated flock of more than 50 eccentric **Crab-Plover** were found on arrival, and it was certainly turning out to be a black-and-white day. We then quickly popped across to the mainland at neighbouring Anakao where **Littoral Rock Thrush** was spotted in record time (about 15 seconds!), before returning to the island for some quality time with **Red-tailed Tropicbird**. **White-fronted Plovers** were a popular addition here too, and a large roost of terns was checked for anything unusual.

The boat trip back to Toliara was rather uneventful, and we were pleased to depart on time on our Air Madagascar flight to Antananarivo, where we bade farewell to some of our travel companions before continuing onto Maroansetra the next day. Near our beach-side hotel in Maroansetra we found **Allen's Gallinule** and Albert saw and photographed a female **African Pygmy Goose**. The crossing to Masoala provided some excitement in the form of a **Lesser Noddy** (a write-in!), and

our very first walk at Masoala notched up **Red-breasted Coua**, *Red-ruffed Lemur* and gobsmacking views of **Helmet Vanga** at the nest, catapulted into top spot of “bird of the trip” contest. Fortunately **Bernier’s Vanga** was not too tricky this year, and we spent some time watching a female foraging in some *Pandanus* palms, although the male was certainly not sticking around for us to see. This meant there was plenty of time for kicking off one’s shoes and enjoying some down time at the beach after a long and productive trip, although we also found **Short-legged Ground Roller** and another pair of **Brown Mesite** on our meanders, plus more **Madagascar Starlings**, **Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher** on a night roost, **Madagascar Spinetail**, **Madagascar Blue Pigeon** and **Helmet Vangas**. Mammals were represented by *Scott’s Sportive Lemur* and *White-fronted Brown Lemur*. On our final day the boat trip back to Maroansetra went smoothly and our luxurious charter flight deposited us back in Antananarivo in time for lunch.

In all, Madagascar had treated us royally. Not only had we found all reasonably hoped-for bird species, but also logged 25 species of lemur, plus seen an array of other incredible critters such as leaf-tailed geckos, *Mantella* frogs and Giraffe-necked Weevils, thanks in large part to our erudite local guides. This all while enjoying a lot of good (some might say cringe worthy) humour and banter, a handful of lovely umbrellas and a noteworthy scarcity in cases of DB!

## BIRD SPECIES LIST

### Ducks, Geese & Swans Family Anatidae

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*: Seen a few times

African Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus*: Seen and photographed by Albert at Maroansetra

Meller's Duck *Anas melleri*: First seen as we approached Antananarivo on our way back from Mahajanga, with excellent views at Lac Alarobia the next day

Bernier's Teal *Anas bernieri*: Seen well at the Betsiboka Delta

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha*: Most numerous at Lac Alarobia

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*: Seen well at Lac Alarobia

### Guineafowl Family Numididae

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*: Seen well at Isalo and Masoala (*mitratus*, introduced)

### Pheasants, Fowl & Allies Family Phasianidae

Madagascar Partridge *Margaroperdix madagarensis*: Good flight views north of Antananarivo, reasonable flight views near Antsirabe and good views on the ground during our Sandgrouse expedition

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*: Seen briefly near Antsirabe (*africana*)

### Grebes Family Podicipedidae

Madagascar Grebe *Tachybaptus pelzelinii*: Great views of a pair at the nest at Mantadia

### Flamingos Family Phoenicopteridae

Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*: A small flock seen at the Betsiboka Delta

### Tropicbirds Family Phaethontidae

Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*: Many on Nosy Ve (*rubricauda*)

### Ibises, Spoonbills Family Threskiornithidae

Malagasy Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis bernieri*: Good views of at least five at the Betsiboka Delta (*bernieri*, endemic)

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*: Seen at Ampijoroa

Madagascar Ibis *Lophotibis cristata*: Seen well at the nest at Andasibe (*cristata*) and Ampijoroa (*urschi*)

### Herons, Bitterns Family Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Seen a few times (*nycticorax*)

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*: Several sightings (*rutenbergi*, regional endemic)

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: Most common at Lake Alarobia

Malagasy Pond Heron *Ardeola idae*: Seen well at Lake Alarobia and Ampijoroa; also seen at Anja Lemur Reserve and Isalo, where not normally observed

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: Common and widespread

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Seen well at Nosy Ve (*firasa*, region endemic)

Humblot's Heron *Ardea humbloti*: Good views at Ampijoroa of just a single bird

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Most common at Ampijoroa (*madagascariensis*, endemic)

Great Egret *Ardea alba*: Widespread sightings, especially in highland rice paddies (*melanorhynchos*)

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*: Our best views were at Lake Alarobia

Dimorphic Egret *Egretta dimorpha*: Widespread and common, with white morph bird dominating inland and black morph birds along the coast

#### **Hamerkop Family Scopidae**

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*: Several sightings around wetlands and rice paddies (*umbretta*)

#### **Cormorants, shags Family Phalacrocoracidae**

Reed Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus*: Seen at Maroansetra (*pictilis*, endemic)

#### **Kites, Hawks & Eagles Family Accipitridae**

Madagascan Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides radiatus*: Seen well at the nest at Ranomafana and Ifaty

Madagascan Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda madagascariensis*: Fantastic views of a pair in a small patch of Eucalyptus as we neared Ranomafana, and seen also at Ranomafana and Ifaty

Frances's Sparrowhawk *Accipiter francesiae*: Great looks at a female at Andasibe (*francesiae*)

Madagascan Sparrowhawk *Accipiter madagascariensis*: Brilliant views at both Andasibe and Ifaty

Henst's Goshawk *Accipiter henstii*: An excellent encounter at Ranomafana, where perched

Malagasy Harrier *Circus macrosceles*: Good and very welcome views of a male north of Antananarivo

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*: Fairly common and widespread (*parasitus*)

Madagascan Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vociferoides*: Fantastic views of a pair at Ampijoroa

Madagascan Buzzard *Buteo brachypterus*: Seen regularly throughout the tour

#### **Mesites Family Mesitornithidae**

White-breasted Mesite *Mesitornis variegatus*: Amazing views at Ampijoroa

Brown Mesite *Mesitornis unicolor*: Close views at Ranomafana, and good views also at Masoala

Subdesert Mesite *Monias benschi*: Seen well on the nest at Ifaty

#### **Flufftails Family Sarothruridae**

Madagascan Wood Rail *Canirallus kiolooides*: Great views at Andasibe where Pat's 5000th bird, and also seen well at Ranomafana and Masoala (*kiolooides*)

Madagascan Flufftail *Sarothrura insularis*: Great views of a male at Mantadia

#### **Rails, Crakes & Coots Family Rallidae**

Madagascan Rail *Rallus madagascariensis*: Seen at close range near Mantadia

White-throated Rail *Dryolimnas cuvieri*: Seen well a few times (*cuvieri*)

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*: Brilliant views at our lunch-time stop en route to Ranomafana

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni*: Good views at Maroansetra

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A few good sightings (*pyrrhorhoa*, regional endemic)

#### **Buttonquail Family Turnicidae**

Madagascan Buttonquail *Turnix nigricollis*: First seen north of Antananarivo, with better views to follow near Ansirabe and at Ifaty

#### **Crab-plover Family Dromadidae**

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola*: A flock of 50+ were seen well at Nosy Ve

#### **Stilts, Avocets Family Recurvirostridae**

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: Seen in the Ifaty area

#### **Plovers Family Charadriidae**

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: Seen along the coast

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: Seen a couple of times

Madagascan Plover *Charadrius thoracicus*: Seen at close range at Ifaty

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*: Seen near Isalo and the south-west

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*: Seen at Ampijoroa and Toliara (*bifrontatus*, endemic and split by BirdLife)

White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*: Good views at Nosy Ve (*tenellus*, endemic)

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*: One at the Betsiboka Delta alongside several Greater Sand Plovers

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*: Several seen at the Betsiboka Delta

#### **Jacanas Family Jacanidae**

Madagascan Jacana *Actophilornis albinucha*: A single bird was seen well at Ampijoroa

#### **Sandpipers, Snipes Family Scolopacidae**

Madagascan Snipe *Gallinago macrodactyla*: Seen well en route from Antsirabe to Ranomafana

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: Seen along the coast

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Seen mostly along the coast

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*: Quite numerous at the Betsiboka Delta

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Several sightings

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Seen along the coast

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: Seen at Nosy Ve

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: Seen along the coast

#### **Couriers, Pratincoles Family Glareolidae**

Madagascan Pratincole *Glareola ocularis*: Fantastic views between Mahajanga and Antananarivo, and seen again at Masoala

#### **Gulls, Terns & Skimmers Family Laridae**

Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*: A single bird was seen on the crossing to Masoala Peninsula; the only write-in for the tour

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*: One en route to Nosy Ve

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*: Seen at Nosy Ve

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis*: The most numerous tern

Saunders's Tern *Sternula saundersi*: A couple seen quite well at the Betsiboka Delta

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*: Several birds in breeding plumage at Masoala

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Seen at Nosy Ve

#### **Sandgrouse Family Pteroclididae**

Madagascan Sandgrouse *Pterocles personatus*: Good views of a male on the ground during the expedition from Toliara

#### **Pigeons, Doves Family Columbidae**

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Feral Pigeon was common in towns and villages

Malagasy Turtle Dove *Nesoenas picturatus*: Several good sightings (*picturata*)

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*: Most numerous in the Toliara area (*aliena*, endemic)

Madagascan Green Pigeon *Treron australis*: Seen at Masoala (*australis*) and Ampijoroa (*xenius*)

Madagascan Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas madagascariensis*: Good views at Andasibe, Mantadia, Ranomafana and Masoala

#### **Cuckoos Family Cuculidae**

Malagasy Coucal *Centropus toulou*: Heard and seen almost daily

Crested Coua *Coua cristata*: Seen at Zombitse and Ifaty (*pyropyga*, split as Chestnut-vented Coua by BirdLife), Ampijoroa (*dumonti*) and Masoala (*cristata*)

Verreaux's Coua *Coua verreauxi*: Good views near Toliara

Blue Coua *Coua caerulea*: Observed regularly in the eastern forests

Red-capped Coua *Coua ruficeps*: Good views at Ampijoroa

Green-capped Coua *Coua [ruficeps] oliveiceps*: Excellent views near Toliara

Red-fronted Coua *Coua reynaudii*: Seen at all eastern forest sites, with the best views at Andasibe

Coquerel's Coua *Coua coquereli*: Nice looks at Ampijoroa and Zombitse

Running Coua *Coua cursor*: Seen well at Ifaty and near Toliara

Giant Coua *Coua gigas*: Quite exceptional views at Zombitse

Red-breasted Coua *Coua serriana*: Seen at Mantadia, but our best views were at Masoala

Madagascan Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*: Several good sightings and heard almost daily

#### **Barn Owls Family Tytonidae**

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: Brilliant views at night at Ampijoroa, and also seen in Antananarivo (*hypermetra*, regional endemic)

#### Owls Family Strigidae

Torotoroka Scops Owl *Otus madagascariensis*: Brilliant views at night at Ampijoroa, and seen well also at Isalo

Rainforest Scops Owl *Otus rutilus*: Seen on the day roost at Andasibe, heard elsewhere

White-browed Hawk-Owl *Ninox supercilialis*: Great views at night at Isalo, and seen on a day roost at Zombitse

Madagascan Owl *Asio madagascariensis*: Great day-time views at Andasibe

Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*: Excellent day-time views near Antsirabe (*hova*, endemic)

#### Nightjars Family Caprimulgidae

Collared Nightjar *Gactornis enarratus*: Excellent views on the nest at Mantadia

Madagascan Nightjar *Caprimulgus madagascariensis*: Seen a few times, although our best views were of a bird on a day roost in Antananarivo

#### Swifts Family Apodidae

Madagascan Spinetail *Zoonavena grandidieri*: Seen well at Mantadia and Masoala

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*: Seen regularly in the lowlands (*gracilis*)

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*: Seen north of Antananarivo

Malagasy Black Swift *Apus balstoni*: Several excellent sightings (*balstoni*, endemic)

Little Swift *Apus affinis*: Seen briefly in Antananarivo

#### Cuckoo Roller Family Leptosomidae

Cuckoo Roller *Leptosomus discolor*: We enjoyed some excellent views, including of perched birds (*discolor*, endemic)

#### Rollers Family Coraciidae

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*: Several good sightings (*glaucus*, endemic breeder)

#### Ground Rollers Family Brachypteraciidae

Short-legged Ground Roller *Brachypteracias leptosomus*: Excellent views at Mantadia after considerable effort, and another excellent encounter at Masoala

Scaly Ground Roller *Geobiastes squamiger*: A fantastic encounter at Mantadia, where this year seen with great ease

Pitta-like Ground Roller *Atelornis pittoides*: Excellent views at Mantadia and Ranomafana

Rufous-headed Ground Roller *Atelornis crossleyi*: Seen well at Vohiparara on two occasions

Long-tailed Ground Roller *Uratelornis chimaera*: One was ushered into view for us at Ifaty, but the chance encounter of two sun bathing in the track a little later was much more memorable

#### Kingfishers Family Alcedinidae

Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher *Corythornis madagascariensis*: Two good encounters at Mantadia, and excellent views on a night roost at Masoala

Malagasy Kingfisher *Corythornis vintsioides*: Seen regularly around wetlands (*vintsioides*, endemic)

#### Bee-eaters Family Meropidae

Olive Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*: Seen regularly (*superciliosus*)

#### Hoopoes Family Upupidae

Madagascan Hoopoe *Upupa marginata*: Several good sightings in the west

#### Falcons Family Falconidae

Malagasy Kestrel *Falco newtoni*: Seen regularly throughout the tour (*newtoni*)

Banded Kestrel *Falco zoniventris*: Good views of a perched bird at Ampijoroa, the significance of which was only realised when we arrived at Ifaty where no nest was known this year

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*: Good views of one bird alongside six Sooty Falcon hunting mid-morning over Ampijoroa

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*: Good views of several at Ampijoroa, including one perched bird

#### Old World Parrots Family Psittaculidae

Greater Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis vasa*: Our best views were at Ampijoroa (*drouhardi*), but also seen widely in the east (*vasa*)

Lesser Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis nigra*: First seen at Ampijoroa (*libs*) and then regularly in the eastern forests (*nigra*)

Grey-headed Lovebird *Agapornis canus*: Seen at Ifaty and Toliara (*ablectaneus*), and Ampijoroa (*canus*)

### **Broadbills Family Eurylaimidae**

Velvet Asity *Philepitta castanea*: Incredible views of a few males at Ranomafana

Schlegel's Asity *Philepitta schlegeli*: Unbeatable views of a pair at Ampijoroa, where nest building

Common Sunbird-Asity *Neodrepanis coruscans*: Superb views on two occasions at Ranomafana

Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity *Neodrepanis hypoxantha*: Good views of a male perched near the nest at Vohiparara

### **Vangas Family Vangidae**

Red-tailed Vanga *Calicalicus madagascariensis*: Several good sightings

Red-shouldered Vanga *Calicalicus rufocarpalis*: Great views of a pair near Toliara

Hook-billed Vanga *Vanga curvirostris*: Great views of a pair at Ampijoroa (*curvirostris*) and seen again at Ifaty (*cetera*)

Bernier's Vanga *Oriolia bernieri*: Good views of a female feeding in pandanus palms at Masoala, with the male being more elusive and seen only briefly

Lafresnaye's Vanga *Xenopirostris xenopirostris*: A great sighting of a pair near Toliara

Van Dam's Vanga *Xenopirostris damii*: Great views at Ampijoroa

Pollen's Vanga *Xenopirostris polleni*: Seen well at Ranomafana

Sickle-billed Vanga *Falcula palliata*: Super views at Ampijoroa, and also seen at Ifaty

White-headed Vanga *Artamella viridis*: Several good sightings, the best at Ampijoroa (*annae*) and Masoala (*viridis*)

Chabert Vanga *Leptopterus chabert*: Seen several times in the east (*chabert*), but our best sightings were at Ifaty where the white base to the outer-tail feathers was noted (*schistocercus*)

Blue Vanga *Cyanolanius madagascarinus*: Several good sightings (*madagascarinus*, endemic)

Rufous Vanga *Schetba rufa*: Seen at Ampijoroa (*occidentalis*), and Ranomafana and Masoala (*rufa*)

Helmet Vanga *Euryceros prevostii*: Incredible views at Masoala where two nests were still active

Tylas Vanga *Tylas eduardi*: Several in the eastern forests (*eduardi*)

Nuthatch Vanga *Hypositta corallirostris*: Great views at Mantadia and Andasibe

Dark Newtonia *Newtonia amphichroa*: Seen well at Vohiparara

Common Newtonia *Newtonia brunneicauda*: Seen regularly (*brunneicauda*)

Archbold's Newtonia *Newtonia archboldi*: Good looks at Ifaty

Ward's Flycatcher *Pseudobias wardi*: Our best views were at Mantadia

Crossley's Vanga *Mystacornis crossleyi*: Point-blank views of this great bird at Vohiparara

### **Cuckooshrikes Family Campephagidae**

Madagascan Cuckooshrike *Coracina cinerea*: Several good sightings in the east (*cinerea*) and west (*pallida*)

### **Drongos Family Dicruridae**

Crested Drongo *Dicrurus forficatus*: Common and widespread (*forficatus*, endemic)

### **Monarchs Family Monarchidae**

Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone mutata*: Common and widespread, with white-backed white morph, black-backed white morph and rufous morph males seen (apparently there is no basis for recognising multiple subspecies on Madagascar)

### **Crows Family Corvidae**

Pied Crow *Corvus albus*: Common and widespread

### **Larks Family Alaudidae**

Madagascan Lark *Eremopterix hova*: Seen very well in open habitats

### **Bulbuls Family Pycnonotidae**

Malagasy Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*: Common and widespread (*madagascariensis*)

### **Swallows, martins Family Hirundinidae**

Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica*: Seen regularly, with a fantastic encounter at Ranomafana around a breeding colony (*madagascariensis*)

Brown-throated Martin *Riparia paludicola*: Regular around wetlands in the highlands (*cowani*, endemic)

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Seen briefly between Toliara and Ifaty

### **Reed warblers and allies Family Acrocephalidae**

Malagasy Brush Warbler *Nesillas typica*: Common in the highlands (*typica*)

Subdesert Brush Warbler *Nesillas lantzii*: Seen well in the Toliara area

Madagascan Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus newtoni*: A few good sightings, the first at Lac Alarobia

#### **Grassbirds and allies Family Locustellidae**

Brown Emutail *Bradypterus brunneus*: Good views of a pair at Vohiparara

Grey Emutail *Amphispalis seebohmi*: Seen very well near Ranomafana

#### **Malagasy warblers Family Bernieridae**

White-throated Oxylabes *Oxylabes madagascariensis*: Good views at Ranomafana

Long-billed Bernieria *Bernieria madagascariensis*: Seen regularly throughout the tour (*madagascariensis* in the east, *inceleber* in the west)

Cryptic Warbler *Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*: Eye-level views at Vohiparara

Wedge-tailed Jery *Hartertula flavoviridis*: Good views at Ranomafana

Thamnornis *Thamnornis chloropetoides*: Good views at Ifaty

Spectacled Tetraka *Xanthomixis zosterops*: Several good sightings; we probably saw *andapae* at Masoala and *zosterops* at Andasibe and Ranomafana

Appert's Tetraka *Xanthomixis apperti*: Close views of a pair at Zombitse

Grey-crowned Tetraka *Xanthomixis cinereiceps*: Seen well at Vohiparara, where building a nest

Madagascan Yellowbrow *Crossleyia xanthophrys*: Quite incredible views at Vohiparara

Rand's Warbler *Randia pseudozosterops*: Seen very well at Andasibe and Mantadia

#### **Cisticolas and allies Family Cisticolidae**

Common Jery *Neomixis tenella*: Common and widespread, with *tenella* at Masoala, *decaryi* at Ampijoroa, *orientalis* at Ranomafana and *debilis* at Ifaty

Green Jery *Neomixis viridis*: Seen at Antasibe and Mantadia (probably *viridis*)

Stripe-throated Jery *Neomixis striatigula*: Seen well at Andasibe (possibly *sclateri*) and Ranomafana (possibly *striatigula*); good views at Ifaty, where birds have quite a different song (*pallidior*)

Madagascan Cisticola *Cisticola cherina*: Several good sightings

#### **White-eyes Family Zosteropidae**

Malagasy White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatanus*: Seen regularly in the east (*maderaspatanus*)

#### **Starlings Family Sturnidae**

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*: Common indeed (introduced)

Madagascan Starling *Hartlaubius auratus*: Seen at Mantadia and in larger numbers at Masoala

#### **Chats, Old World Flycatchers Family Muscicapidae**

Madagascan Magpie-Robin *Copsychus albospecularis*: Common and widespread; *albospecularis* at Masoala, *pica* in the west and in Antananarivo and *inexpectatus* at Andasibe and Ranomafana

Littoral Rock Thrush *Monticola imerina*: Great looks at a male at Anakao

Forest Rock Thrush *Monticola sharpei*: This year they gave us a hard time, but we eventually had good views of a male on the road at Ranomafana (*salomonseni*) and singing from the rocks at Isalo ("Benson's Rock Thrush", *bensoni*)

Madagascan Stonechat *Saxicola sibilla*: Fairly common in the highlands (*sibilla*)

#### **Sunbirds Family Nectariniidae**

Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris sovimanga*: Many great views (*sovimanga*), with the white-bellied birds confined to the Toliara and Ifaty areas (*apolis*)

Malagasy Green Sunbird *Cinnyris notatus*: Several good sightings (*notatus*, endemic)

#### **Weavers, Widowbirds Family Ploceidae**

Nelicourvi Weaver *Ploceus nelicourvi*: Seen at all eastern forest sites

Sakalava Weaver *Ploceus sakalava*: Seen well in the west (*sakalava* at Ampijoroa, *minor* at Ifaty)

Red Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*: Common and widespread

Forest Fody *Foudia omissa*: Just one good sighting of a lovely male at Ranomafana

#### **Waxbills, Munias & Allies Family Estrildidae**

Madagascan Mannikin *Lepidopygia nana*: Several good sightings

**Wagtails, Pipits Family Motacillidae**

Madagascan Wagtail *Motacilla flaviventris*: Common and widespread