



PropiTrek to Northern Madagascar

21 days circuit – Bird and Mammal Trip Report

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Introduction

Like many people interested in zoology, Madagascar has been a dream-destination since I was old enough to think about it. The combination of endemism, proximity with the wildlife and affordability is hard to equal. Its dire conservation situation is also something I had in mind and that pushed Madagascar even higher in my wish-list. The day I got the green light from my girlfriend to do a three-weeks wildlife-oriented trip, I immediately thought about Madagascar and started to look for companions. Raphael Lambert immediately joined in as he promised himself that he will come back in «less than 10 years » after his internship there, a promise he only broke for a few weeks. We later got joined by Anne-Sophie Magnan, also genuinely interested in all forms of wildlife. None of us is a strict mammal or birdwatcher but rather generally interested in animals and ecosystems. 2 out of 3 are also working in zoos (and I have visited a lot myself) so the conservation-related side was also very appealing to us.

When planning, it quickly became obvious that difficult choices would have to be made about the itinerary. We did not want neither to multiply internal flights in



Madagascar for ecological motivations, nor to rush our experience. After much back and forth, we decided that Northern Madagascar, with 3 sifakas and the best site for aye-aye was a must-do and we therefore decided to focus on this part of the country. Our itinerary would give us the opportunity to observe 6 out of the 9 existing sifakas species for which the name in French is « propithèque ». That's how the PropiTrek was born ☺



Our itinerary is quite unconventional as it totally ignores some important habitats such as the spiny forest from the South and its cohort of endemic birds and herps, or some of the best national parks and reserves like Ranomafana. Therefore, we have no excuse not to come back to clean up the South and West of Madagascar!

Another reason why reading this report might be interesting: we succeeded in respecting our budget of 2,500€ for the whole trip, flights included. To do this, we only did one leg of the trip with a driver/guide and did the rest by ourselves. We also asked to pay restaurants and hotels ourselves so that we keep control on the type of food and accommodation. You can eat for very cheap in Malagasy towns, but drivers will usually plan a more expensive, diversified (and safe-for your stomach) restaurant. Eating in the street for breakfast or lunch, we saved quite a lot compared

to the average international traveller and even more by doing some transportation in the local transportation : the infamous taxi-brousse!



Logistics and itinerary

Our itinerary could be split in 4 parts :

1. Self-organised leg towards North-West and Majunga region. We booked through Cotisse, the best-reputed taxi-brousse company of the country, to and from Majunga. On the way back, they picked us up at Ankarafantsika headquarters. In Majunga, we booked with [Tongava Ecotours](#) our stay at Andafiroi Ecolodge, the transfer on the other side of the river and our excursions.
2. Self-organised leg towards Andasibe. Unfortunately, Cotisse taxi brousse was fully booked so we had to go by taxi but we came back with them to Tana.
3. Northern leg of the trip was organised with Naivo (andnaivo@gmail.com or +261 32 04 749 20). We initially contacted Brian from Madacartour (brilland@madacartour.com or +261 34 10 294 94) who gave us a very good impression and a lot of feedback on the intended itinerary. Once our itinerary was defined, he redirected us to Naivo who is his « associate » for the North. Naivo was very nice, helpful and talkative. He knows his region very well and drives safely. We had some small communications issues, probably due to the



#	Location
1	Antananarivo – Ivato Airport
2	Majunga and Katsepy
3	Ankarafantsika NP
4	Andasibe area
5	Marojejy NP
6	Daraina (Loki Manambato)
7	Anjahakely (Andriafamena)
8	Ankarana NP
9	Ambanja area
10	Maromandia
11	Nosy Be

fact that we were doing it in an unusual way. Despite this, we recommend him as well and he is quite competitive.

4. Nosy Be leg of the trip starting from Ambanja

Cotisse was very reliable and felt safe. Despite 2/3 of the trip being self-organised, we managed to follow our program as expected which is an accomplishment we are quite proud of.

Day	Description
1	Arrival to Tana
2	Tana to Majunga by taxi-brousse, night chez Tranquille in Majunga
3	Departure to Katsepy, night at Andafiroi
4	Return to Katsepy and road to Ankarafantsika
5	Ankarafantsika
6	Taxi brousse in the morning toward Tana
7	Road to Andasibe area, afternoon visit to Mitsinjo
8	Maromizaha
9	Maromizaha
10	Morning at Anamalazaotra before return to Ivato for the night
11	Early morning flight from Ivato to Sambava - Road to Marojejy
12	Hike in Marojejy
13	Hike in Marojejy
14	Leave Marojejy for night-walk at Daraina, night at le Lémurien Blanc
15	Daraina, night at le Lémurien Blanc
16	Departure for Anjahakely, night at Akiba Lodge
17	Anjahakely, night at Akiba Lodge
18	Morning visit to Ankarana NP and road to Ambanja, night at Khaire Lodge
19	Day visit to Maromandia area, night at Khaire Lodge
20	Morning departure to Nosy Be, afternoon visit to Lokobe, night at Beluga
21	Full-day cruise looking for whale-shark, night at Beluga
22	Full-day cruise to Nosy Komba and Nosy Iranja, evening flight to Tana
23	Morning at Alarobia Lake, return flight evening end of the afternoon

Budget and Payments

If you are adventurous enough to travel independently in Madagascar (it is far from undoable), just make sure you always have enough cash with you. There are very few cash points outside of major cities and even there it is sometimes tricky to retrieve enough cash. In Western countries, we tend to develop adversity to holding cash and in foreign countries, you might have concerns travelling with a lot of cash on you but the probability you run out of cash in the middle of nowhere is actually much higher than being robbed I would say.



Before travelling, download « Orange Money » or « Mvola » so that you can transfer money by phone. It saved us more than once because we did not have enough cash. This is the system most people use in rural areas when they want to deposit or retrieve huge piles of bank notes.



Detailed account

Katsepy

How to get there: We were picked up by Tongava Ecotour at our hotel and then dropped to the harbour where we took a speedboat until Andafiroi Ecolodge

Accommodation: Bungalows were nice and clean and the environment of the lodge very nice. It is not luxury but still very comfortable with a pool to refresh and nice isolation from the civilization despite being only a short trip from Majunga.



A long and exhausting drive led us to Majunga and then a short boat trip to reach Katsepy on the other side of the delta



Day 3

Our first destination did not feel like the wildest one but it could bring us 3 species of lemurs. We started quite late as Tongava Ecotours did not seem to be used to bring hardcore naturalists. Then we had to go first to the local *tsingy* formations and walk around quite a lot before reaching the lighthouse that borders a few remnants of forests. There, we met very quickly and easily **Northern red-fronted lemur** (*Eulemur rufus*) and then **Crowned sifaka** (*Propithecus coronatus*). While the sighting of brown lemurs is very close to the experience you would have in a free-ranging enclosure in a zoo (lemurs are fed banana and climb on local guide shoulders), we had a wonderful time with the family of sifakas minding their own business and watching at a newborn. Because we arrived there so late, we missed the mongoose lemur (*Eulemur mongoz*) which will also be a dip later at Ankarafantsika.

On the bird's front, we started to get a few common savannah birds and a nice encounter with **the crested coua** (*Coua cristata*). At



night, we saw very well **Madagascar nightjar** (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*) hunting in front of the lights of the restaurant.

Katsepy is usually reached through the ferry boat that runs only once a day making it impossible to go for less than 2 days. Honestly, it seems totally doable to leave Majunga early and to be back in the middle of the afternoon if you're in a rush by using a private boat.



Day 4



The second day, we opted for a cruise on the pink waters of the Betsiboaka river delta. On top of the avifauna, it is a good way to discover how local fishermen live in the mangrove and the estuary. Of course, **dwarf flamingos** (*Phoeniconaias minor*) flocks are the highlight for general tourists, but ornithologists will take a close look for Bernier sacred ibis, Bernier's teal, Madagascar fishing-eagle or Humboldt heron which are all local specialties, but we did not see any of these. You would probably need more time and our guide and boatmen did not seem experienced enough as well to guarantee sightings of those rarer birds. By 11:30 a.m. we arrived at Majunga, got cash and lunch, and started our journey to Ankarafantsika.

Even if Tongava Ecotours is not used to serious naturalists, we recommend their services as they are rather punctual and serious. Just do not hesitate to repeat your expectations, what matters to you and what does not. From Andafiroi Ecolodge, you're very close to Katsepy lighthouse and their easy lemurs. You could also go to Antrema Reserve for a wilder experience as this used to be the main study site for crowned sifakas. They also offer longer excursions to Namoroka Tsingy, Baie de Baly NP or Kinkony Lake for several bird specialties (and Decken's sifaka).





Ankarafantsika

Getting there: Ankarafantsika headquarters are along the main road going from Tana to Majunga. From Majunga, it was almost a 3 hours journey as the road is very bad but road conditions vary from one season to the other.

Accommodation: There are simple bungalows that offer all the necessary comfort plus a small restaurant with affordable prices and good meals. Breakfast at the restaurant does not seem worth it, and you could easily go to the village to buy a few Malagasy donuts for 200 or 300 Ariaries per piece compared to 20,000 AR breakfast at the restaurant. It is not easy to reach Ankarafantsika staff to enquire and book a bungalow beforehand, so if





you have a local contact, do not hesitate to ask them to do it for you as it worked much better than my several email attempts.

Ankarafantsika is a very well-known spot for naturalists, so I won't cover too much why it deserves to be visited. We arrived in the afternoon, and nobody was available at the ticket office. We chose our dinner and were taken in charge by an accredited guide who tried to help us by buying tickets and enquiring about possible night walks. She later came back saying she got the authorization to lead a short night walk in the park as we had no car to go to the normal location for night walk. While we were waiting for the night to fall, we quickly detected a family of **Coquerel sifaka** (*Propithecus coquereli*) eating mango above headquarters. During the walk we found a

few mouse lemurs that were all identified as **Grey mouse lemurs** (*Microcebus murinus*) and of course chameleons. While going to sleep in our bungalow on the bank of Ravelobe lake, I searched a few metres of forest with my headlamp and found a group of mouse lemurs. They seemed more brownish and being sighted only a few metres from the lake, I concluded they should be **Golden-brown mouse lemur** (*Microcebus ravelobensis*). That was a good start on the mammal side.



Day 5

The full day was mainly dedicated to finding birds as we already had most of our diurnal mammals' targets. The guide suggested doing the Retendrika circuit first and then going around the lake and if time allowed, finish with the baobab circuit or the boat on the lake. In the afternoon, we would focus on the Coquereli circuit for dry sandy forest specialties. We got rapidly

disappointed by spotting abilities to find hard bird of our guide as we spotted ourselves most of the tough ones like **White-breasted mesite** (*Mesitornis variegatus*) and **Madagascar pygmy kingfisher** (*Corythornis madagascariensis*). Going around the lake, we only spotted a few common forest or water birds. While coming back to headquarters, we went to check one more time the lake while the guide was walking in front of us on the road and we found out a **Malagasy**





fish eagle (*Haliaeetus vociferoides*), one of the rarest raptor in the world and therefore very high on the list. We then had to hitchhike to the closest village as we had poorly estimated our cash needs and were running out of currencies. There is no ATM and it took us more than 2 hours and considerable palaver to succeed in sending money by phone and getting cash in return. We hitchhiked as well on the return to get a well-deserved lunch back at headquarters. In the afternoon, the sandy forest was totally silent and very hot. No couas, Schlegel asity or Van Dam's vangas as hoped nor mongoose lemurs. While preparing I had already heard about this phenomenon in dry forests, and I noted it as well in the Brazilian cerrado. Was it due to the day's weather, being there too early in the season, a wrong timing during the day or simply bad luck? We will never know. At least, we got consolation prize with Coquerel's sifaka showing very well again on the edge of the camping area and a





roosting **Madagascar scops owl** (*Otus rutilus*) of the western type.

At night, we did not have the opportunity to go for a night walk as we were still without a vehicle so we just checked the camping area and found nothing worth mentioning. The taxi brousse was supposed to pick us up by 9.00 a.m. (and sure it did!) so no time to do a guided walk but sifakas were still around the camp and gave enjoyable time in the morning. **Madagascar cuckoo-hawk** (*Aviceda madagascariensis*) in the sky was a nice addition to the list just before leaving.





Andasibe area

Getting there: Andasibe city is situated around 10 km from the national road leading to Tamatave, the second biggest city of the country and the main port of the country. The road is normally good as it is a vital artery for the country, but the mountainous part was being redone and we therefore lost at least an hour on the normally four-hour drive. The road to Andasibe has Analamazaotra National Park on the east, and Mitsinjo reserve on the other side. North of the city is Mantadia, the bigger of the national park. Maromizaha entry is south-east of the national road, some 6 km from the crossroad.



Accommodation: There is ample accommodation available, and it is easy to book through the Internet for international travellers. Hotel Feon' ny Ala is well-established and for good reasons. The small bungalows have a balcony overlooking the border of the national park. They have all the necessary comfort in our opinion, including a warm shower, and it was nice to sleep with cold temperatures. The restaurant was good with the largest choice of food options on offer during the trip, a nice way to get something other than rice with zebu meat, including vegetarian options. Prices are reasonable for a touristy place. We would highly recommend the hostel, especially for people coming with taxi-brousse as you only need to walk 300 metres from the dropping point.

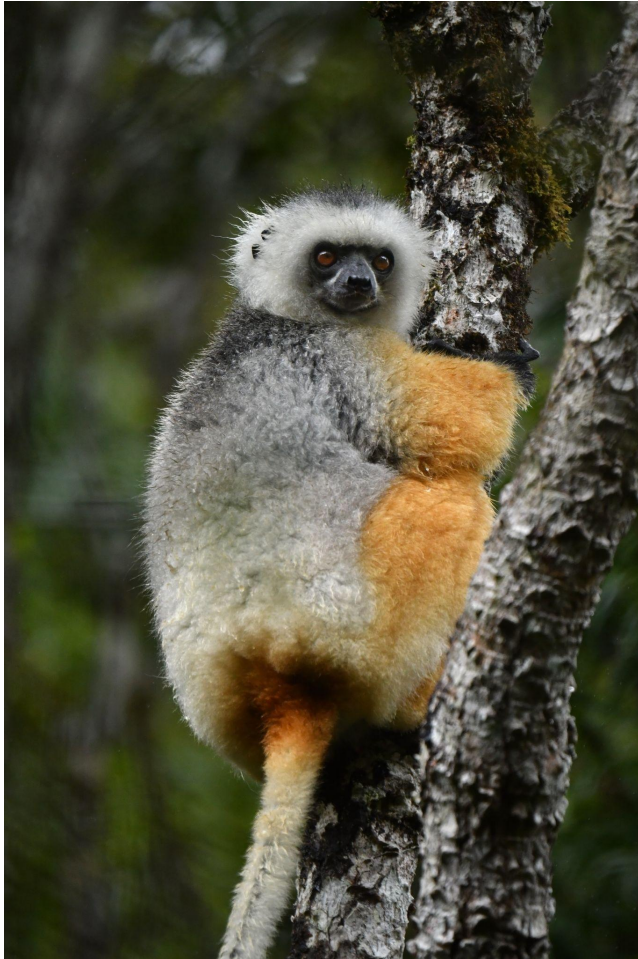


Day 7

The journey back from Ankarafantsika to Tana was uneventful and we went back to our hostel, Madagascar Underground. The Cotisse bus to Tamatave was not available anymore to be booked when we arrived so we had to go to Andasibe with a private taxi to avoid losing the afternoon. It took us almost 6 hours to arrive as the driver was very cautious with his rusty vehicle. He was also not authorised to leave the city so he had to pay policemen several “fines”.

Once we arrived, we checked in and had a quick lunch at Hotel Feon' ny Ala after which we went walking to the office of the association Mitsinjo. It was already late when, led by Victor, we got the opportunity to set our eyes on a couple of **Indri** (*Indri indri*) that were already ready to sleep. We were also shown some chameleons and a leaf-tailed gecko. On the way back, we were introduced to Victor's associate: Etienne. With the previous disappointment I checked with him chances to see a few hard





target birds. Etienne was not accredited as a guide in the national park and was instead suggesting visiting Maromizaha Reserve. We initially planned to spend a day at Mantadia but it was costly as it meant booking a driver for the day and the park only open at 8:00. Convinced by the guide's skills and what he told us, we went for Maromizaha the next morning by 5:30 a.m. in tuk-tuk. It was raining heavily but we got a productive morning with **Madagascar flufftail** (*Sarothrura insularis*), **rufous-headed ground roller** (*Atelornis crossleyi*), **red-fronted coua** (*Coua reynaudii*) even though we only managed pictures of the latter. On the lemur's side, we had a very close look with a family of **diademed sifaka** (*Propithecus diadema*), an indri family and more importantly a small group of **variegated ruffed lemur** (*Varecia variegata*). Unfortunately, they were sleeping, and Etienne deemed it appropriate to shake the tree where they were so that we could see them better. The encounter only lasted a few seconds and we did not get any good looks as the ruffed lemurs fled (understandably!).

Soaked by a full-day of rain, we got back to the lodge in early afternoon for



a quick lunch after what we went with Etienne to V.O.I M.N.A, the villager's reserve to look for crested ibis (*Threskiornis cristatus*). It was in vain despite the bird being there, but we got at least **Eastern lesser bamboo lemur** (*Haplemur griseus*), **Madagascar Forest Rail** (*Mentocrex kioloides*) and roosting **Madagascar scops owl** (*Otus rutilus*) of the rainforest type.

At night, our motivation could not cope with more rain and we retreated for a well-deserved sleep.





Day 8

We set-off again for a full day at Maromizaha with Etienne in the hope to get more difficult birds and better views of the ruffed lemurs. We did see the flufftail, indris, sifakas again but failed to get even a glimpse of ruffed lemurs. At least, we managed a few new and highly sought after birds at a slow pace: **pitta-like ground roller** (*Atelornis pittoides*), **Madagascar blue pigeon**





(*Alectroenas madagascariensis*), **Common Sunbird-Asity** (*Neodrepanis coruscans*), **brown emutail** (*Bradypterus brunneus*), **tylas vanga** (*Tylas eduardi*), and **Nuthatch Vanga** (*Hypositta corallirostris*). Birding can be slow in Madagascar forest but provide a punctual big rush of adrenaline when an encounter occurs with mixed flocks mainly made of various vangas and bernierids, 2 endemic families. Usual suspects commonly encountered are **Red-tailed Vanga** (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*), **Madagascar Blue Vanga** (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*), **Madagascar White-eye** (*Zosterops maderaspatanus*), **Long-billed Greenbul** (*Bernieria madagascariensis*) and **Madagascar cuckooshrike**

(*Ceblepyris cinereus*) but it does not mean it is easy to photograph them. We thank very much Etienne that we recommend highly. You can contact him also at etiennemiantdriarison@gmail.com. Maromizaha not being a National Park, it also seems to be a good place for extensive night-walks (accounts of the *Allocebus* among others) .

We rushed to Anamalazaotra before it closed to buy tickets for our last morning and try to get in the park before the crowds. We succeeded to make it on time and book a visit for tomorrow so we got back to the hotel and rest a bit before going out again for a night walk on the main road between Andasibe and the RN2. There was numerous groups, most of them with local guides, looking for wildlife on the edges of the road. We got a few herps and only one good look at a nocturnal lemur, a **Crossley's dwarf lemur** (*Cheirogalus crossleyi*) during our 90 minutes' walk.

Day 9

We booked a three-hour itinerary with Roger in Anamalazaotra National Park. He was skilled and calm, and we enjoyed our morning, alone in the park, especially a moment with **blue coua** (*Coua caerulea*). This is the easiest area to access around Andasibe and the most



frequented national park in the country with Isalo. Only at the end of our morning, the path started to get a bit crowded until we found a couple of indri with a young baby. Very quickly several big groups of tourists rushed through the thickets and gathered a few metres above totally unconcerned lemurs. When one of them started to defecate the whole crowd started to scream, laugh and yell jokes that a 5-years old kid would not deny. We decided it was enough for us and we quickly left, realising how lucky we had been to have prolonged sightings just for us at Mitsinjo and especially at Maromizaha that sounds a lot wilder. Back at the hotel, we packed our backpacks and got ready for the journey back to the capital but before that, I manage

to get excellent views of resident

White-throated Rail (*Dryolimnas cuvieri*) and **Nelicourvi weaver** (*Ploceus nelicourvi*) on the lodge grounds.





Marojejy

Getting there: Marojejy National Park is reached through the city of Sambava, the vanilla capital from which it is roughly a one-hour drive. Once at the headquarters, there are 5 additional kilometres of dirt road that can be done by vehicle if your driver can drop you there, otherwise you need to walk. From the last village, there is 5 km to the entry of the park and some 4 more in the park to reach Camp Mantella, the first of the three camps.

Logistics: In France we are used to pack lightly and bring our own food and clothes when hiking. In



Madagascar, it is quite different: it is common to have a cook, a guide, and at least a porter per person if not more. The good point is that it makes the national park a good provider of jobs despite being visited by only 9,000 persons per year. We were a bit scarred by the total



opacity of the cost during the preparation stage. According to our guide, it seems we will have to hire an army of people to carry our stuff. On top of this, one of us was a strict vegetarian so we opted for taking the control by bringing our own food. This is rather uncommon apparently. Usually, the cook buys everything in advance and you pay him directly. Some other clients had amazing breakfast with eggs, fruits, various kinds of jams etc... and good dinners with huge portions. Malagasy people are rather small but eat amazing quantities of rice. When we showed the guide our provisions for 4 days, he did not believe we would hold with only this amount of food. Actually, it was exactly enough even though we did not have the same food diversity. One important thing to bring (and that we forgot) is tea. It is a good way to stay hydrated



without bringing 3 litres of water per person and per day. We only paid the cook for charcoal and oil that we did not buy ourselves at the supermarket in Sambava. If you are on a budget, bringing your food will save you a bit of

money as quantities are much smaller (I suspect that you pay to feed the whole crew) and you therefore save also on the number of porters. But if you do not want to sacrifice food quality or bother with organisation, just rely on the cook, they will make wonders.



Accommodation: There are 3 camps along the summit trail recently renovated by Lemurs Conservation Network NGO, (see the [map](#)). They are basic but worked well for us. What they lack in comfort, they compensate by immersion and wonderful sights over the forest and cliffs.

Day 11

We took an early flight from Tana to Sambava airport via Diego Suarez. We were picked up by Naivo our driver for the next 9 days at the small airport. Arrived at the ticket office around noon at Manantenina, we packed our bags and paid everything we had to for the next 4 days and then got in the car with our assigned guide





Lewis to reach Mandena, the last village. We started the hike around 1 p.m. crossing rice paddies and meeting a few herps like giant Malagasy hognose snake (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*). After one hour more or less of walking we reached the border of the park, and I realised I had taken with me the 70-200mm instead of the 500mm. I called the driver to see if he was still around the car but he had already started to climb behind us. For me it was a no brainer, I will not miss silky sifaka or helmet vanga pictures because of a few kilometres! I started to run all the way back with my heavy bag to meet the porters and the driver halfway. I continued back to the ticket office to exchange my lens and

started all the way again my climb with the youngest of the porters that had been assigned to me. On the way, all the villagers were laughing at me while kids were surprised and screaming “Salut vaza!” (“Hi whitemen” would be the best translation). There was still a long way to go to reach the camp before nightfall, so we hiked at full speed and without breaks. Totally exhausted, I had my first encounter with **Western bamboo lemur** (*Hapalemur occidentalis*) but the light was already too weak in the forest for good shots. I caught up with the rest of my group in the last hundred metres before the camp where we settled for the night. A short night walk yielded mainly frogs and insects and no lemur unfortunately. My travel companions had a brief encounter with **white-fronted lemur** (*Eulemur albifrons*) on the way up. Gripping.

Day 12



The next morning, after a frugal breakfast, we started to hike early in the direction of Camp 2 under pouring rain. Only a few metres after the camp, we saw a group of western bamboo lemurs very well, offering this time great photo opportunities. A few moments later, I spotted a big bird, sitting still in the understory. I quickly recognized the unmistakable shape of what must be the most-sought after bird of the island, the **helmet-vanga** (*Euryceros prevosti*). We quickly found its partner and had good views. After that we saw another bird quite easily. Progressively, we felt the change in the vegetation structure, from lowland rainforest to montane rainforest.

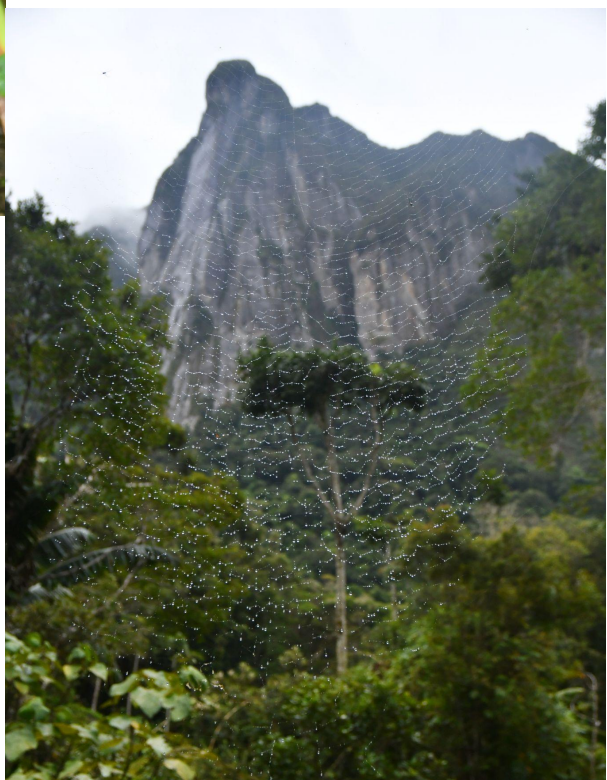
We arrived quite early to the second camp which is the best area to look for the local star, the silky sifaka. Still raining, we started to follow our guide and the trackers we had hired and who had found the primates above the camp. After a short but strenuous climb on a forested cliff, we finally found a family group of **silky sifaka** (*Propithecus candidus*) prostrated while waiting for the rain to stop. It did not but they finally moved on offering good observation opportunities. It was amazing to see them jumping from tree to tree in the shrivelled montane forest that grows on cliffs and their immaculate and thick fur dripping water and working as a raincoat.



We tried in the afternoon to go out again looking for them and red-bellied lemurs but the heavy rain that had stopped for a few minutes started again so we had to call it a day. During the long wait in the common dining-area, we had good entertainment provided by a family of **ring-tailed vontsira** (*Galidia elegans*) attracted by chunks of chicken thrown by one of the guides. They seem common around campsites and guides even said that with a sardine can, you had good chances to even attract the fossa if he manages to come before their greedy little cousins!

Day 13

It was initially planned to stay 2 nights at camp 2 and then go down the last day. Because one of the members was less rapid in steep areas due to knee





issues, we decided to only stay one night and get back to camp 1 for our last night in the park. It was less rainy, but our search for lemurs and birds remained quite unsuccessful on the trail towards camp 3 and we started to hike back in the morning and arrive for lunch.

In the afternoon, we branched off the main trail in direction of Humbert's waterfall to try our luck with the normally common white-fronted lemur that I had not yet seen but it was a failure. I only got bamboo lemurs again and a nice encounter with a low-posing **greater vaza parrot** (*Coracopsis vaza*).



Day 14

We left early in the morning of the fourth day with the hopes to get white-fronted lemur in the lowland part of the park. It was a miss again and a disappointment. As a consolation prize, we got the rarely seen **Red-breasted Coua** (*Coua serriana*) but near-impossible to photograph after it had crossed the path. I was upset to lose this opportunity as it was partly due to the guide saying initially it was a crested coua but still a very nice bird to encounter!

We reached the village around 10:30 p.m. and had time to buy spices and vanilla at unbeatable prices, purchases that are both self-interested but also increase the value

of eco-tourism.

Then, en route to our next destination...



Daraina – Loki Manambato Reserve



Getting there: It is only 200 km between Daraina and Sambava but the scenery could hardly be so different. Our guide from Marojejy asked very politely if he could come with us for the rest of the trip in the North, free of charge. We gladly accepted, maybe hoping that an additional guide might yield additional observations (it did not), but primarily seeing this as

- 1) a non-monetary tip
- 2) A good training for him is to see the Marojejy area and measure what is exceptional about the island and the national park where he works.

He could not believe his eyes with the dry forest and rivers and totally different colours which was funny to witness for us.

The road in this area used to be horrible but has now been renovated thanks (sic) to Chinese companies and it is only 6 hours from Marojejy. The goal was to arrive around 5p.m to be ready for the night-walk.



Accommodation: We settled in a very simple hotel in Daraina, called “Le lémurien blanc” before heading to the Loki Manambato special reserve with Amidou, our local guide (+261 32 51 51 920), probably the best one we had during our whole trip. The Tattersali Camp is currently out of use, but work is planned to restore it. It is still possible to camp in the hotel grounds. The hotel le Lémurien Blanc is the only other alternative and quite rustic but does not imply renting camping gear.



We started to walk to the forest toward the aye-aye nest that trackers had followed all the previous night. We arrived just at nightfall and an anxious wait started. The tree was not as small as I had expected from a dry forest and there was a lot of foliage and lianas, so I was worried of not having clear views of the mythical beast. I was also very surprised by the environment we were in. Aye-aye is notoriously difficult to see so you would expect a very well-preserved area, far from prosecution of humans. But at Daraina, the story is different. The soil contains gold and had been mined for a long time now. Hundreds of people are living in the forest and have transformed it into a Swiss gruyere. We had to be cautious not to fall into mining pits when moving around with the eyes and light focused upward. On top of this, there was plenty of noise, music, and voices of the villagers very close from the aye-aye's nest.

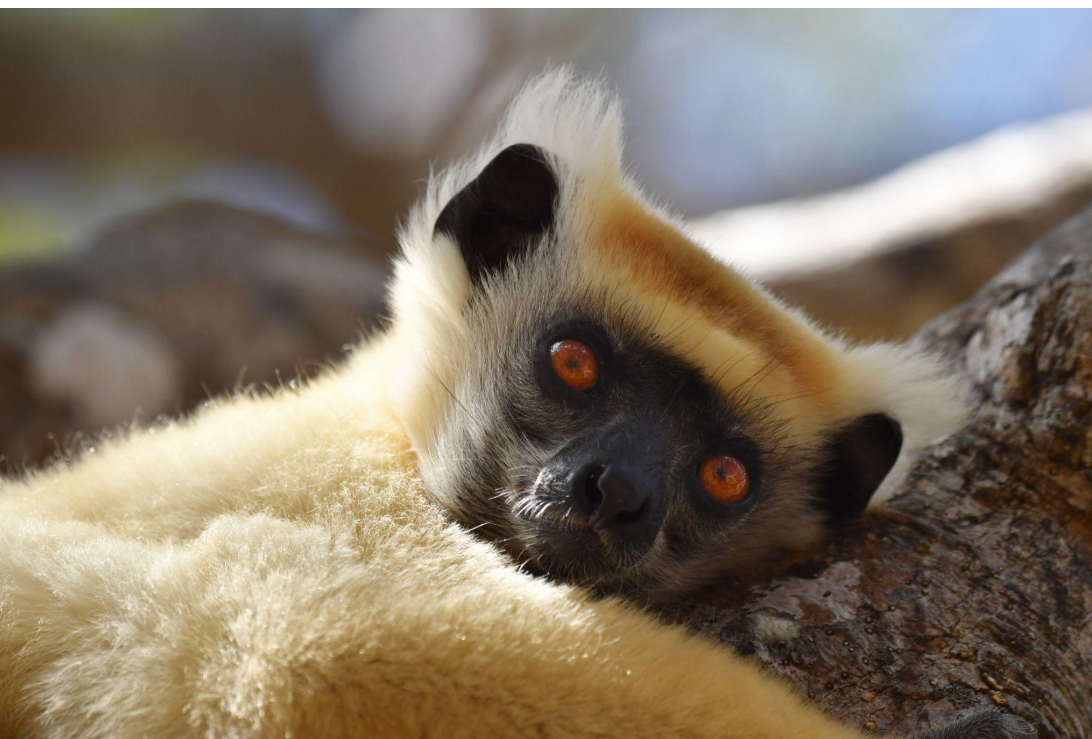
With rudimentary tools, local people dig the soil, pour the soil in bags and then in small pools where it is filtered until they can get gold flakes. They started to exploit gold well before the area was protected. Thanks to NGO Fanamby's hard work, the Special Reserve of Loki Manambato was created in 2008 to protect the area. Therefore, these activities are still tolerated in specific areas of the reserve, and it does not seem to bother lemurs.



Anxiously, we waited until Amidou noticed some movements. There was a lot of excitement around and with all the lights, the **aye-aye** (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) seemed a bit afraid and preferred to retire a bit to his nest. We had to wait again and came the terrifying idea that it would be our only sighting of the biggest target of the trip. Fortunately, it comes back and gets accustomed progressively to torch lights. As described by previous mammal-watchers, the animal started to groom and takes special attention to clean his long and hairy tail that goes through his thin and elongated fingers and rodent-like teeth. Anxiety slowly let go in favour of simple joy to see this amazing critter I had dreamt to see in the wild, especially after reading “The aye-aye and I from Gerald Durrell” (a must-read for anyone really). The animal then went upwards in lianas, and we left the area in the search of other night crawlers. Soon after we had a cat-eyed snake and **Ankarana fork-marked lemur** (*Phaner electromontis*), if they’re not something else, yet to be described, up in trees. It was a good night, and we celebrated at the hotel with a good beer!

Day 15

We started quite late the day after, only leaving around 8:00. We first stopped at a bridge passing on top of the dried Manambato river to look for bats, but we saw none. We then reached and parked at what had been Camp Tattersalli. All the bungalows were in poor condition following the lack of repair during COVID. It also gives an idea of the durability of most constructions that are frequently exposed to strong climatic events.



Less than 3 minutes after parking, we met our first group of **golden-crowned sifaka** (*Propithecus tattersalli*). They are not shy at all, even a bit curious, and let us walk



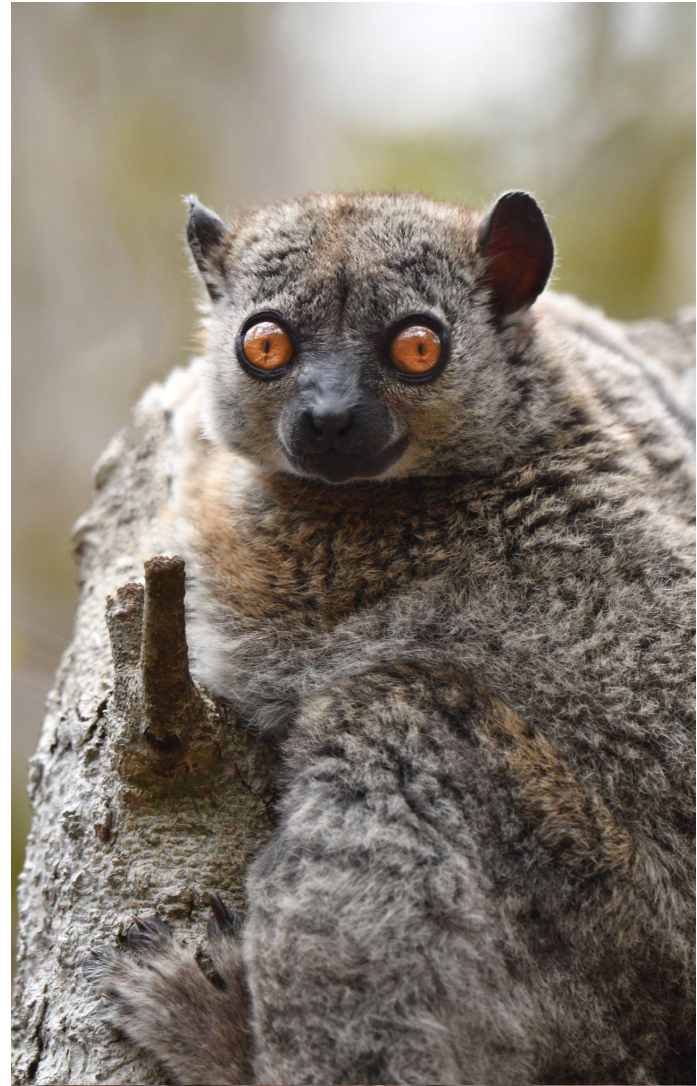
towards them, up to a few metres. We spend 20 minutes with our first group until we get our fill and start to have a nap.

We went deeper on the trail to discover the dry forest. I was delighted by this environment, very exotic, full of botanic oddities and easy to walk-through. A lot of forest birds can be seen here as well and more easily than in the rainforest as trees are smaller and leafless during the dry season. After another encounter with crowned sifaka we met a mixed flock and got some of our best sightings of **blue vanga** (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*) and **Red-tailed Vanga** (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*).

Previously, in the savannah, we had eye-level sightings with **sickle-billed vanga** (*Falculea palliata*) and **Madagascar Hoopoe** (*Upupa marginata*). But the definitive highlight of the avian reign this morning was the **Madagascar Harrier-Hawk** (*Polyboroides radiatus*) calling above us. We also had a nice sighting of a small group of **crowned lemurs** (*Eulemur coronatus*) curled up in a tree and 2 encounters with **Daraina sportive lemur** (*Lepilemur milanoii*) spotted by the guide. After this rich morning, we get back to the camp for lunch and a rest under the shade of the remaining structures. It was very hot, and our driver and guides enjoyed their nap with the dry wind. Me too, but very quickly I got my fill of sleep and got back to business. A group of **Sakalava Weaver** (*Ploceus sakalava*) entertained us a

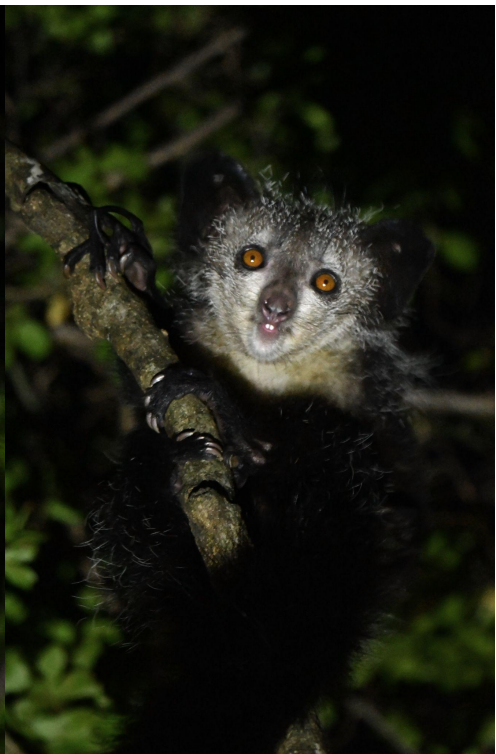
little bit before I found new groups of crowned sifakas. They appeared to be just everywhere, and I witnessed them doing the “the dancing” movements Verreaux’s sifakas from the South are famous for. They felt threatened on the ground, so I did not have good opportunities to photograph them, but I feel privileged to see them performing this behaviour that seems a lot less documented with this species.

Around 4p.m, we finally left to get back to the miner’s area and meet our trackers that will lead us again to the aye-aye’s nest. We had more sifakas and more time to look at the gold mining operations and lifestyle of the people living there. When dusk fell, we quickly listened to the high-pitched fork-marked lemurs calls. They were actually super close and when we lit the torch, we realised they were only a few metres from us. One of them finally froze and allowed good photo opportunities. We were captivated and discussing the small night critters when the guide cries out that the aye-aye is on the move. In a fragment of a second, the shape of the shaggy lemur disappears in tangles, and we curse the fork-marked lemurs. We rushed around, trying to find an opening to fire a photo but in the dark, with only one light for 3 persons at our disposal, vegetation, and deep holes everywhere, it was total chaos. Like yesterday, we wait a bit more, lights off but with attentive ears. And it reappears. Like yesterday, the aye-aye scratch copiously and give us enough time to snap portraits amidst branches. What an



animal and what a day! Our best of the trip, definitely!

Daraina or Loki Mananbato is a real gem! While now “famous” in the mammal-watching community, it is still out of the beaten path, unknown or at least not reached by birders neither Malagasy tour-operators. There seems to be also large pieces of water in the protected area, a bit farther, that offer tremendous birding (Bernier’s and crested ibis for example or pygmy goose). The reserve runs until the coast and then extends to the sea where you probably could see whales and sea turtles.

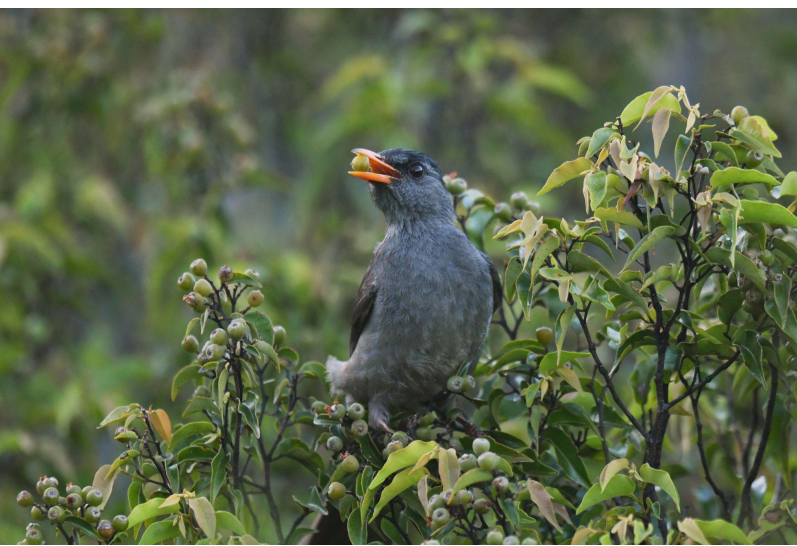




Anjahakely - Andrafiamena

Getting there: Andriafamena is reached by the RN6, which links Ambilobe with Antsiranana (or Diego Suarez). After branching off, it is 2 hours of chaotic sandy road to arrive at the lodge.

Accommodation: Renowned as Black Lemur Lodge, but rebranded Akiba Lodge Anjahakely, it was by far the most luxurious and expensive accommodation from our itinerary. Apparently, you can only book for 2 nights or more. The bungalows are progressively being renovated and ours was very nice and comfortable. Each bungalow has its own terrace with private views on the surrounding valleys.



Day 15

It took us the whole morning to drive from Daraina to Anjahakely. At the arrival, we were received with an iced tea and the amazing views from the deck commanding the valley. Our driver explained to us it is common to see lemurs around at breakfast and we already start dreaming about tomorrow. For the moment it is way too hot, so we rest a bit in the shade. The hotel owner suggests visiting a cave system in the afternoon which seems a good idea if it is so easy to see the lemurs.

Inexperienced about caves, I went with my 500mm lens which will prove itself totally useless inside the narrow caves. We found several small bats species that could be touched and that I am not able to identify. After 20-25 minutes we are out of the caves, and we come back to the hotel where we are told that the excursion is already finished. “OK... Well, I will go myself in the woods around the hotel to see what I can find by myself.” I thought in my head. The sun was already going down and the light was delightful, the temperature, still hot but decreasing. Bird activity remained very low however and I did not see anything else other than sunbirds and Madagascar bulbul. Back at the hotel, we got prepared for the night walk. I learnt that my travel companions who stayed at the hotel had **Sanford's lemur** (*Eulemur sanfordi*) on the doorsteps of the bungalow! I was a bit gripped off but since they got them easily from the bungalow and that they occur close to the camp everyday according to the lodge's staff, I try to cheer myself up.

The night walk will be slow and disappointing. Very little herps, no birds and finally, at the end of the 80 minutes in the thickets, a **Northern rufous mouse-lemur** (*Microcebus travaratra*) will be seen above the trail. It is frozen by the strong light of the torch I brought with me but stay a bit hidden. The local guides start to shake the tree to



make the mouse-lemur move. We immediately ask them to stop. We had hope to see a fanaloka but finally it was an introduced Indian small civet (*Viverricula indica*). Even though I would have gladly added it to the list despite its invasive status, we only heard rustles on the dry leaves and saw a shadow move in the darkness. Tomorrow will be better!

Day 16

At night I dream of Perrier sifaka and Sanford's lemurs. I was so excited; I woke up in the early morning. I took advantage of it to explore a bit the surroundings and see what I can find. But again, to my disappointment,



nothing very interesting apart from a few common birds. The breakfast only starts at 7:00 a.m. and the excursion only leaves the camp at 8:45. The sun is already high, light is bad and the promised lemurs are nowhere around. We walk with the local guide, a member of the local community that benefits from Fanamby NGO efforts to promote conservation through ecotourism. After walking some 30 minutes in the



forested hill, we met the second tracker who had already found a small group of **Perrier sifaka** (*Propithecus perrieri*). My anxiety to not see them disappear and I start to prepare my

photographic material.

They were quite low, and we were encouraged by the guides to get very close to them. We do not need to pet them or take selfies and the rushed behaviour of the tracker made the group flee on the other side of the ravine. We were quite upset, and I could not help to show it. “*Such a rare*



primate, living in such a tiny territory, and we only had 2 minutes to see them!”.

Our driver gets our strong disappointment and requests our guides to try again to see the group at a more relaxed pace. Otherwise, we would have gone for a waterfall! Finally, we managed prolonged views of the animals, and we even left them snoozing. We also got to see one **Ankarana sportive lemur** (*Lepilemur anakaranensis*) very well, which was a relief because we felt we did not fare very well with night lemurs roost until that moment. On the avian side, nothing particular of note. Despite being different from lush tropical forest, the dry deciduous forest of the north actually hosts

a very similar array of species and we’re in Madagascar for 2 weeks now so we have seen most common forest birds, and we did not have big targets here.

We took the packed lunch right on the trail, under a scrubby



undergrowth. After a long break, we finally walked up to the viewpoint that commands all the plain between Andriafamena and Daraina. We see a few forest remnants but mostly savannah. On the way back, we are told that we have taken too long this morning (even though we had a 45-minute nap after lunch) and we will not have time to make it to the waterfall. We arrived at the lodge at 3pm. finally... For a day-long excursion, we found it was quite disappointing. I spent the whole end of the afternoon searching for Sanford's lemurs around the camp but saw nothing else than a small and skittish group of crowned lemurs. We left early the last day for Ankarana National Park.

In conclusion, the Black Lemur Camp is really only about Black Lemur aka Perrier sifaka. If it was not for this very range-restricted species, I would have never gone there. Maybe I have been particularly unlucky with the guides or sightings and that has affected my view but when setting such prices, it also sets expectations pretty high. Of course, the accommodation and the food were nice but client reception and especially excursions were disappointing to say the least. I understand and support Fanamby's policy to train local people but there is still a lot of work to do after the COVID-related interruption. Tourism is a true profession, and despite the professionalism and sympathy of the hotel director, you do not transform cattle herders into guides and waiters with a magic wand.



Ankarana National Park

Day 17

Based on the Fanamby's website that advertises a hike through *tsingy* formation we thought we could see both this amazing geological formation and the endemic lemurs of the north without paying a visit to Ankarana NP. For some



obscure reason, the *tsingy* advertisement had disappeared and we pressed our driver to arrange a visit to Ankarana. We left early and 2 hours and a half later (it is very close but again speed average is very low), we were amongst the first visitors to enter the park to go to the *tsingys*. This visit was rather intended to view the landscape and nice viewing point rather than wildlife. Still, we witnessed a group of **crowned lemurs** (*Eulemur coronatus*) emerging from the forest and disappearing in the karst formations to find water. We also had good views of **Ankarana sportive lemur** (*Lepilemur ankaranensis*) and common forest birds, with good eye-level sightings of some

vangas. Landscape views were amazing and definitely worth the few hours and the price.



Ambanja

A bit before lunch time, we left Ankarana, stopping in Ambilobe for a quick lunch and then the slow drive towards Ambanja. This city is the capital of pepper and cocoa production in Madagascar but of course we were not here for this reason.



Accommodation: We checked in Khaire lodge, situated on the verge of the city. The small bungalows are comfortable, and the food is rather good even if a bit expensive by Malagasy standards.

After settling in, we left the hotel towards cocoa and banana plantations on the road going south. The initial location where we were supposed to go had apparently been burnt so we visited this place close to the city ($13^{\circ}42'27.4''\text{S}$, $48^{\circ}28'56.1''\text{E}$). I do not think it is possible to visit by yourself but maybe you can hire the guy in charge of guarding the plantation as he was part of the team set by our local guide.

As usual, we waited for the night to fall, and we then headed to the plantations. Cocoa trees need the shade of large trees above them to grow properly. Interspersed with groves of banana trees, this seems to provide a plentiful habitat for the Northern giant mouse lemur (*Mirza zaza*) that harbours higher densities there than in natural habitats. The mirza is the biggest target of the area, but our first observation was several **Sambirano fork-marked lemurs** (*Phaner parienti*), endemic to this area. We were also expecting a local *Microcebus* that could be a yet undescribed species. In our efforts, we get to see a **fat-tailed dwarf lemur**



(*Cheirogalus* sp.). The Sambirano region is a pocket of humid forest caught between dry forests of Northern and Western Madagascar due to the Tsaratsana mountains influence on winds and rainfall. Add several large rivers that separate forests, and you get all the ingredients for an important variation in primates'



species. This diversity was totally unrevealed until quite recently, but a lot remains to be clarified, especially for smaller nocturnal species. Forest fragments here are rare and small, therefore all species are very endangered. The **Northern giant mouse lemur** (*Mirza zaza*) is supposed to be the easiest of all to see but tonight, with the rain and only one fading torch, after 2 hours of searching we struggle to find only one. Finally, the guide managed to spot one that will only give good views with limited light making it challenging for photos. It was still a good night in the end and a different genus added to our trip list. The cherry on the cake was a very nice observation of Madagascar tree boa (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*). Having seen 3 new species of lemurs, we did not complain, but the price was higher than in other areas as well. We did not pay any effort to look for birds.



Maromandia – Parc villageois Mango Masa

Getting there: on the national road going south toward Majunga or the capital, the RN6, there is a small reserve that I only heard about recently thanks to the great trip report from Mogens Trolle on Mammalwatching.com (thanks mate!). It is nothing more than a forest fragment overlooking fields, but it is the easiest way to observe wild blue-eyed lemur. The private reserve is situated at 14°19'36.8"S, 48°01'45.7"E, a few hours driving from Ambanja.



Accommodation: After our visit, we went back to Ambanja for the night but there is a nice and simple hotel close to the site where you could apparently also see the blue-eyed lemur. Unfortunately, it is not yet identified on Google Maps.

Day 18

Blue-eyed lemurs (*Eulemur flavifrons*) are normally seen at Sahamalaza National Park, recently created partially thanks to the efforts of the AEECL, an association founded by European zoos. But getting there is a nightmare and requires a full day in,

and another full day out. One of our travel companions went there after our common leg of the trip and thoroughly enjoyed it but confirmed it was only for the most adventurous.



As an alternative, our driver knew this location was owned by Victor (+261 (0)33 09 59 120). The man has protected some forest on his land after he learned about the rarity of the lemur living close to him. The small private reserve has limited resources. During our walk, Victor caught one man leaving the forest with wood on his shoulder that will be enunciated to the local police office, but he can do little more. There are 9 groups of lemurs living on his property. With an average of 10 individuals per group, that's a decent population of this critically endangered species. Victor did not speak French, so we needed the driver's translation, but we understood that the National Park organisation was actually hampering his efforts to protect the forest, maybe by fear of competition and "loss of exclusivity" of this amazing animal. I think it is a very educational and interesting story about how conservation is at least as much human than biology science. There is still potential to keep the forest and the lemurs, and I hope some organisation





might step in to help structure the approach. Like Mogens Trolle, we felt the man was very authentic and invested into the conservation of the lemurs, so we highly recommend dedicating a few hours if you must pass through the area. Victor hopes to gather enough money to build basic accommodation and continue to develop ecotourism.

Our visit started after the 2 hours-drive between Ambanja and Maromandia and were welcomed by Victor. After a few exchanges, we took the direction of the forest situated on a steep hill. The path first leads through a small village and a few fields after which we enter a mixture of dry and humid forest, typical of the area, with a low canopy reaching 4 metres on average. It took us a half-an-hour climb to find the most habituated group of lemurs made of 8 adults and immatures plus 2 babies. Victor called them and they would wait expectantly for a few banana rewards that are smashed against branches. We sat there observing the dynamics of the family and trying to get pictures of them despite

the challenging lights and shadows. After 20 minutes we were asked if we wanted to go look for other groups or stay there to watch the family longer. Since we were still keeping an eye on them (and because it was very hot), we decided to stay seated, to discuss the situation of the small reserve while still being watched by the lemurs! At the end of the morning, we went back to the “headquarters” and said goodbye to Victor to be back to Ambanja as early as possible. This is the point where we also say farewell to Naivo, our driver, and Lewis, the guide from Marojejy that accompanied us.



Nosy Be



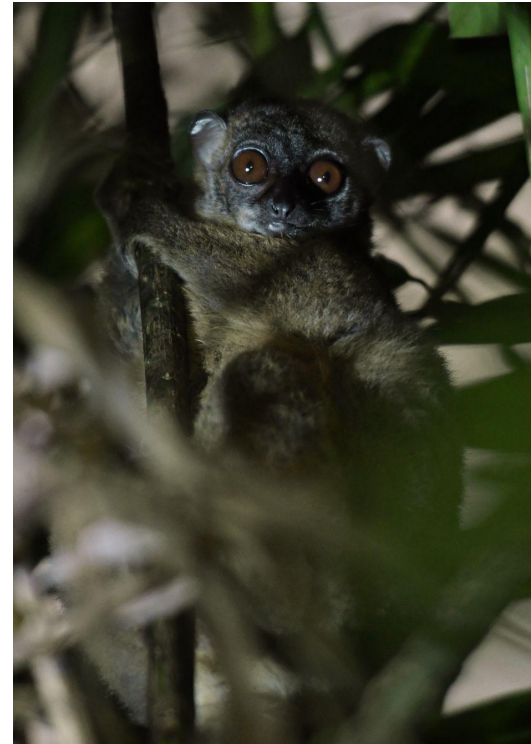
Getting there: Nosy Be is the most touristic place of the island and therefore has good infrastructure. The airport is served by various national and international connections and boats are frequently leaving from the continent at Ankify, a short trip from Ambanja.

Accommodation: There are plenty of accommodations in Nosy Be and platforms such as Booking.com are useful for finding guesthouses with good location and prices. We stayed at guesthouse Beluga, in Madirokely, one of the most central beaches for excursions, especially with the renowned “Baleines Rand’Eau”.

Day 19

There was roadworks during our visit so despite being much better than other roads on the main island, our average speed did not increase on Nosy Be. We checked in at the hotel and went for a good seafood lunch at a local restaurant (Chez Tantine). On the way to the restaurant, we had our afternoon excursions booked for Lokobe National Park. I was surprised by the timing of our meeting, 3:30 p.m. at our hotel, given the initial pace. The driver was on time, but it took ages (as it could have been expected) to reach the entry point of the national park at Ambatozavary. We paid the entry to the park and the guides and then jumped on the canoe that will take us a few kilometres further. From the beach, we enter the forest of the national park, but night is already falling and the light with it. There was still very low light when we found our first group of **black lemurs** (*Eulemur macaco*) but the encounter was too quick to get proper pictures. I swear in my beard that I might get out of Lokobe without good photos of black lemur, probably the easiest mammal of the trip.

The guides are at least skilled and quickly detect a **Nosy Be sportive lemur** (*Lepilemur tymerlachsoni*) slowly waking up in its roost of tangles and ready to start its night. The night falls quickly and we go on, hiking up the steep terrain with the light of our headlamps. We find other sportive lemurs and a group of habituated black lemurs, showing a cathemeral activity pattern, that come to check if they can get a few banana bites. That night, we saw plenty of amphibians, insects, and reptiles, including both genus of Malagasy boas and two species of *Brookesia*, the dwarf chameleons. The mouse lemur will be



searched extensively but we will not succeed in our quest for the full house of Nosy Be lemurs. Still happy about the night and the service provided by the local guides, we hop back on the boat to go back to our hotel.

Day 20

Today is farewell day as my 2 travel companions are embarking for a 2-day excursion to Nosy Iranja. Having my flight back to France in 2 days, I could not afford the risk and had to take the single-day version. Seeing whale-sharks was high on our list, competing with the best-looking lemurs and birds and we booked our trips



with Baleines Rand'Eau, which seem to be the reference on the matter and French-speaking on top of that. Whale shark was the main target of the morning, but our first encounter will be with an **Omura's whale** (*Balaenoptera omurai*) that we saw pretty well emerging for a breath. The modus operandi for finding whale sharks is to look for signs of fish hunts. Once detected, the pilot would use its elevated position to try to find a whale-shark hunting not too deep. If detected, the whole game is then to anticipate both the evolution of the fish school hunt and the shark's trajectory. It requires a lot of experience, skills, and a bit of luck. Once the boat is on the path, all passengers of the boat must quickly but swiftly dive in the water and hope the shark will not be spooked. We did 3 attempts where the shark quickly passed or dived a few metres below, out of reach and good sight. As often, when we



are about to give up, the best chance arises and we get the opportunity to spend several minutes swimming along the giant. It will remain a vivid memory and one highlight of the trip.

In Nosy Be waters, whale sharks are all juveniles, reaching a maximum length of 8 metres. They are studied as we still know very little about those giants. Before the whale sharks we had another amazing encounter with an Omura whale passing below our boat and allowing us to see well the difference of coloration between its 2 flanks. The afternoon will be much more chill with snorkelling on the reef around Nosy Sakatia and its impressive green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*).

Day 21

My last day on Nosy Be had remained unplanned. I received a few days ago that my flight had been delayed by a few hours so that gave me extra time to do a boat trip that would come back in the afternoon and still have time to go to the airport. I did not want to go to Nosy Komba but since I



had not obtained good pictures of black lemurs at Lokobe National Park, I thought that would be my best option. I booked one of the “commercial” tours from agencies in the street. I think they’re all pretty much the same. We left almost at 10:00 with a multi-generation and languages group. The excursion will be a nightmare, being surrounded with the cliché of global and industrial tourism we had until now not really seen.

Nosy Komba, the “lemurs’ island” literally is more a zoo than a reserve. It was worse than what I expected. I do not know how much lemurs rely on bananas feeding and how long they could cope without feeding on the island. We literally saw dozens of individuals with many babies. They come very close and would jump on you if you have any food visible. Snakes, turtles, and chameleons are manipulated all day long. If you can avoid this place, you will be better off. In the afternoon, we visited Nosy Tanikely. I hoped to get a few seabirds or fruit bats of which a colony was signed but I saw none. Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) will be a nice consolation prize.



Alarobia Lake

Day 22

My last morning in Madagascar will be spent at Tsarasaotra Park in Antananarivo, more commonly known among birders as Alarobia lake.

The entry cost 10,000 MGA. Immediately after entering the park, one can see the lake margins covered by thousands of ducks. **White-faced Whistling-Duck** (*Dendrocygna viduata*) and **Red-billed Duck** (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) were dominant. With closer inspection, I could find **Blue-billed Teal** (*Spatula hottentota*) and more importantly, the endangered and endemic **Meller's duck** (*Anas melleri*). Ardeids were also numerous and gave good flight shot opportunities. The highlight was the **Madagascar Pond-Heron** (*Ardeola idea*), not easy to distinguish from the many **squacco pond heron** (*Ardeola ralloides*). After circling twice around the lake and trying without success for rails, I at least managed to get my last lifer of the trip: **Madagascar Swamp-Warbler** (*Acrocephalus newtoni*). This site is really worth visiting, even for a short time.



Closing thoughts

National Parks Management and guiding

Apart from Andasibe-Mantadia and Lokobe NP that seems quite organised and receive a lot of tourists, there is room for improvement related to ecotourism in areas managed by National Parks. You can rarely contact anyone before getting to Madagascar, in the best case, you will manage to call someone but do not expect answers by email. It is a shame, especially when you want to book accommodation. Opening hours of ticket offices are often limited (and not even respected as seen in Ankarafantsika) so make sure you always have your tickets bought for the next day so that you can get in early.

Guides are mandatory in National Parks. I support this policy as it ensures that the local community perceives benefits from the proximity of a national park. However, I have been a bit disappointed by guiding standards.

For mammals, many guides know only how to find the sifaka or other big targets but with some diurnal lemurs of Eulemur genus, it seems only pure luck so you would not be worse walking the forest by yourself. On the contrary, guides are amazingly good at finding herps during day and night walks or maybe I am very poor and less interested in those groups so that makes the comparison more flattering for them.

The biggest disappointment was with birds. I birded extensively in Brazil and mostly had excellent guides that knew very well their sounds and how to find





difficult birds. In Madagascar, (and again apart from Andasibe area), I quite often corrected guides about the names of the birds we were seeing. It was not only a language issue but truly a lack of knowledge of local birds and even more how to find them. That's really an issue when the guide tells you he just crossed a crested coua (rather common) walking on the forest floor of a tropical forest as both the behaviour and the habitat point towards a much scarcer species, here the red-breasted coua for example.

This is the experience we had by just showing up at the national parks and being assigned a random guide. I guess tour operators have preferred contacts that are booked in advance and ensure much better quality. This

feedback is based only on a few experiences so it should be taken with a pinch of salt, but it was rather homogeneous outside of the Andasibe area. This site is an essential for any newcomers to Madagascar and that is the only place that was rather crowded. Northern Madagascar is mostly outside of the birders' route, so I think they are not used to having this type of dedicated visitors. On top of this, there are not enough visitors so a turnover is organised so that all accredited guides can share the work. The consequence is that most guides are also cattle raisers, farmers, and not full-time professional guides. If your guide was not

in the forest the last few days, you lose the benefit of the experience gathered during previous visits about where such species was found lately.

Finally, books or other resources are often expensive for Malagasy guides and it is a pity that a few copies of good guides could not be shared by the National Park for training purposes. I have advertised as much as I could about the Merlin app, which is a good way to look at local birds and to get used to their songs, but you still need a smartphone for that.



Lists

Bird list

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/170056>

Mammal list

English	Scientific	Location
Aye-aye	<i>Daubentonia madagascariensis</i>	Daraina
Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>	Andasibe
Diademed sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>	Andasibe
Silky sifaka	<i>Propithecus candidus</i>	Marojejy
Perrier sifaka	<i>Propithecus perrieri</i>	Anjahakely
Tattersal sifaka	<i>Propithecus tattersalli</i>	Daraina
Crowned sifaka	<i>Propithecus coronatus</i>	Katsepy
Coquerel sifaka	<i>Propithecus coquereli</i>	Ankarafantsika
Ankarana sportive lemur	<i>Lepilemur ankaranensis</i>	Anjahakely + Ankarana
Nosy Be sportive lemur	<i>Lepilemur tymerlachsoni</i>	Lokobe
Daraina sportive lemur	<i>Lepilemur milanoii</i>	Daraina
Crossley's dwarf lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>	Andasibe
Sheth's dwarf lemur or new species (?)	<i>Cheirogaleus shethi</i> (?)	Ambanja
Grey mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>	Ankarafantsika
Golden-brown mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus ravelobensis</i>	Ankarafantsika
Northern rufous mouse lemur	<i>Microcebus tavaratra</i>	Anjahakely
Northern giant mouse lemur	<i>Mirza zaza</i>	Ambanja
Pariante's fork-marked lemur	<i>Phaner parienti</i>	Ambanja
Amber Mountain fork-marked lemur	<i>Phaner electromontis</i>	Daraina
Common brown lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>	Ankarafantsika + Andasibe
Northern red-fronted lemur	<i>Eulemur rufus</i>	Katsepy
Black lemur	<i>Eulemur macaco</i>	Lokobe
Blue-eyed black lemur	<i>Eulemur flavifrons</i>	Maromandia
Crowned lemur	<i>Eulemur coronatus</i>	Ankarana + Anjahakely + Daraina

Black-and-white ruffed lemur

Varecia variegata

Andasibe

Eastern lesser bamboo lemur

Haplemur griseus

Andasibe

Western lesser bamboo lemur

Haplemur occidentalis

Marojejy

Omura's whale

Balaenoptera omurai

Nosy Be

Ring-tailed vongsira

Galidia elegans

Marojejy

















Many thanks to Raphaël and Anne-Sophie, my co-travellers, Jonas Livet for proofreading, Naivo, and Brian as this adventure could have not occurred.