

Madagascar

2 Weeks in Nov-Dec 2025



I have been planning to visit Madagascar for a very long time now but somehow the trip never came to fruition as there was always a reason not to go: cumbersome flights, arduous road journeys, terrible roads etc. When I floated the idea of a two-week long trip to some friends there was great enthusiasm, although their primary interests were herpetological rather than mammalian. Patrick put together an itinerary that would start at the beginning of the rainy season, just when the hibernating mammals get active again and when the frogs are in full chorus – the best of both worlds.

Trip Overview

Eastern Highlands (EH)

- Andasibe Mantadia National Park (Analamazaotra, VOIMMA Community Reserve, Mitsinjo Special Reserve, Maromizaha Special Reserve)
- Vohimana Reserve

Central Highlands (CH)

- Ranomafana (Headquarters, Sahamalaotra)

Southwest (S)

- Anja Special Reserve
- Isalo National Park
- Zombitse National Park
- Ches les ZA Private Reserve

Eastern Highlands



From the comfortable accommodation at Feon 'ny ala, **common brown lemurs** and **diademed sifakas** could be seen at the boundaries of the Andasibe-Mantadia National Park which the property's dining hall overlooks. Several bungalows were also directly facing the forest, and the brown lemurs coursed through some of the balconies at dusk and dawn. These visiting brown lemurs were mothers with neonates, which made for magical sightings. The proprietors run a very good outfit, and the catering options were better than expected!



We would soon realise that seeing newborn lemurs would be one huge advantage of visiting during the rainy season, if one could put up with the torrential downpour that occurred during the late afternoon during the trip.

Indris could be heard calling early in the morning, and these vocal lemurs were easy to track inside the national park. We also saw some individuals in VOIMMA but those individuals were less accustomed to human presence and tended to be shier.



The indris within the park on the other hand were habituated and hearing the loudest lemur species vocalise was unforgettable. In the thickets we spotted a **red forest rat**.



Other lemur species seen included **eastern bamboo lemurs** and **woolly lemurs**, although the latter was so well huddled up in a tree hollow we could only see the fur on their backs. Night drives were particularly productive for the **Goodman's mouse lemur** and **furry-eared dwarf lemur**, both of which could be observed from the road. The downpour was so heavy one evening that I decided to sit out on a night walk – the herp enthusiasts went ahead of course and had great sightings of a juvenile parson's chameleon and satanic leaf-tailed gecko.

Fortunately, the woolly lemurs were spotted again during our stay at Vohimana Special Reserve. I reckon this reserve is primarily a herping destination, promising sightings of the world's largest chameleon (Parson's chameleon) and fantastically colourful *Mantella pulchra*. NGOs fund and operate the station, and accommodation was basic – in fact to reach base we had an army of porters help carry our luggage up a 30-minute trek along a functional railway track!

Central Highlands



From one ecosystem to another, Ranomafana National Park is one of the largest national parks in the country with a river running through it in a series of cascading waterfalls. The areas that are accessible to most guests are the secondary forests from the headquarters and Sahamalaotra.



The first full day was spent around the headquarters, where our tracker found a small family of **golden bamboo lemurs**. There were mothers with neonates again and they were foraging on bamboo leaves in the morning mist. We were also fortunate to see the only **greater bamboo lemur** remaining in the park, Simone. Efforts to increase the population in the past with introduced conspecifics have not been successful as she was keener to defend her territory. **Red fronted lemurs** were also active high in the canopy. Despite efforts of tracking the black and white ruffed lemur from their calls, we were not able to locate any. Ring-tailed vonsira were also missed, purportedly better seen during the dry winter.

The incredibly acrobatic **Milne-Edwards's sifaka** was seen around the headquarters and also in Sahamalaotra the next day. This section of the park is less visited by general tourists although we

hear it is a birding hotspot – we saw a pitta-like ground roller and hook-billed vanga, which like many other species of animals found in Madagascar are endemic to the country.



This section also produced great sightings of **red bellied lemurs** and a shy **small-toothed sportive lemur**. Patrick got a call that a **tailless tenrec** had been caught and sold for bushmeat – he acquired it and we released it at the viewpoint around the park headquarters. After removing the rope snares around its hindfeet, it darted off after it was put on the ground so the only picture I have is of it scurrying away.



During the night walks we saw different species of nocturnal lemurs, including the **Grove's dwarf lemur** and the **brown mouse lemur**. The most magical moment must be the sighting of a **spotted fanaloka** which stayed long enough for some eye-level photographs to be taken.

Southwest



It baffles me how all it takes it for a short drive of six hours for the landscape to change so vastly. Southwest Madagascar's landscape was characterised by large open plains and rocky outcrops. What is even more surprising to me was how very special animals that seem heavily reliant on water, like the blue-legged mantella, would also occur in the driest of places.



The long drive to Isalo National Park was broken into two parts with a visit midway to Anja Special Reserve. After hiking through the sometimes-steep rocky terrain, we found a large group of **ring-tailed lemurs** having their supper before retiring for the night. We were sat on a viewpoint looking over the canopy, which made for interesting aerial observations of the lemurs, although some of the group decided at some point to also join us on the rock we were on.

Isalo National Park was gorgeous – amidst the sandstone canyons we saw another family of ring-tailed lemurs leaving their cave, traversing the steep cliff face to begin foraging. The 14km hike

through the park would have been an easy walk in the park, but the scorching heat was unforgiving, with few areas for shelter. There were two pools fed by gentle waterfalls though that we were able to swim in, which was a much needed respite from the heat.

We were lucky that the small family of **Verreaux's sifakas** visited the camp site when we were having lunch. With the barren landscape and the well-spaced trees, there were several occasions where the sifakas had to dance across the sandy floor to get from tree to tree, a sight that has become quite iconic of these occasionally bipedal primates.



The last stop of the trip was a visit to the spiny forests of Toliara, with a stopover at Zombitse National Park on the way. It is astounding that endemism occurs also at the level of these isolated habitats, as we saw two other lemur species: the **Hubbard's sportive lemur** that is endemic to Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park and the **Petter's sportive lemur** that is endemic to the spiny forests in the Southwest.





The baobab and spiny forests were quite a sight to behold. The temperatures were scorching here so the excursions to see animals were short to avoid high noon. We were entertained by beautiful avian species like the long-tailed ground roller, and an Madagascar hoopoe eating a Madagascar three-eyed lizard. The night walk was particularly productive with a sighting of a **lesser hedgehog tenrec** and the final species of lemur for the trip, the **gray mouse lemur**.



Mammal Species List

	Common Name	Scientific Name	EH	CH	S
Primates					
1	Goodman's Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>	X		
2	Brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>		X	
3	Gray Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>			X
4	Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus crossleyi</i>	X		
5	Grove's Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus grovesi</i>		X	
6	Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>	X		
7	Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>	X		
8	Milne-Edwards's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>		X	
9	Verreaux's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>			X
10	Eastern Woolly Lemur	<i>Avahi laniger</i>	X		
11	Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>			X
12	Common Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>	X		
13	Red Fronted Lemur	<i>Eulemur rufifrons</i>		X	
14	Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur aureus</i>		X	
15	Eastern Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur griseus</i>	X		
16	Greater Bamboo Lemur	<i>Prolemur simus</i>		X	
17	Small-toothed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur microdon</i>		X	
18	Hubbard's Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur hubbardorum</i>			X
19	Petter's Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur petteri</i>			X
Carnivora					
1	Spotted Fanaloka	<i>Fossa fossana</i>		X	
Afrosoricida					
1	Tailless Tenrec	<i>Tenrec ecaudatus</i>		X	
2	Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec	<i>Echinops telfairi</i>			X
Rodentia					
1	Red Forest Rat	<i>Nesomys rufus</i>	X		
Chiroptera					
1	Peter's Sheath-tailed Bat	<i>Taphozous mauritanus</i>	X		
2	Malagasy Mouse-eared Bat	<i>Myotis goudotii</i>		X	