

Madagascar's Lemurs

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 September - 5 October 2018



Diademed Sifaka



Indri



Ring-tailed Lemur



Long-tailed Ground Roller

Report and images by Cathy Harlow



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With nine Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 21st September

UK to Paris

Mark, Wendy, Fiona, Matt, Paul, Pam and Michael met up with Cathy at London Heathrow for the short afternoon flight to Paris. We took the free rail shuttle to the Ibis Hotel, where we had dinner and discovered that while some of our group were seasoned Naturetrek travellers, for others this was a first trip. Later we later met up with Derek and Pam, who had flown in from Manchester on a much-delayed flight.

Day 2

Saturday 22nd September

Paris to Antananarivo

We made our way back to the airport and checked in for our flight to Madagascar. Once past the hurdles of passport control and security, we settled down to breakfast before boarding the flight. The 10-hour flight was uneventful and we arrived on time at Antananarivo. Getting through immigration is often a slow business, but this year a slightly more efficient system was in place and finally, everyone was through and thankfully, all bags were off the belt. We passed through customs to meet our local guide Parson. After changing money, we met our driver Zo and his helper Faneva for a 15-minute journey to the Combava Hotel, where we stayed overnight.

Day 3

Sunday 23rd September

Tana to Antsirabe with a visit to the Lemurs' Park

Today we had a cloudy start, before the weather became fine and sunny. After a good night's sleep and a copious breakfast, Parson and Cathy held a short briefing on the holiday. While the drivers were loading the luggage on the roof of the bus, we watched a Red Fody perched in a tree overhead. We set off for the Lemurs' Park, a private zoo for rescued lemurs, west of Antananarivo. We skirted Madagascar's colourful and chaotic capital, a city of almost two million. The capital is sprawled over a chain of hills, rising from a patchwork of rice paddies where Great Egret and Dimorphic Egret were foraging. Dressed in Sunday best, throngs of Malagasy were out and about, lining the streets. Beyond the city limits we noticed the yellow flowers of Popcorn Senna *Senna didymobotrya*, Crown of Thorns *Euphorbia millii*, Flame Vine *Pyrostegia venusta* and Bottlebrush *Callistemon* sp. in bloom.

Arriving at the Lemurs' Park, the reserve guide Toanna explained the role it plays in introducing local schoolchildren to the island's lemurs. Mostly containing animals rescued from the pet trade, Lemurs' Park's diurnal lemurs roam freely, as the five-hectare reserve is bounded by a river along one side. As we wandered along the wooded trails we saw some of Madagascar's common birds: Madagascan Wagtail, Souimanga Sunbird and Madagascan Magpie-Robin. A Common Myna, an introduced species, had taken over a Hamerkop's nest, a huge structure wedged in the fork of a tree. Near the river we met a Crowned Sifaka, a species from the north-west of Madagascar, feeding on the leaves of a Dragon Tree *Dracaena marginata*. While we were watching Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs resting nearby, a lively Coquerel's Sifaka 'danced' along the path amongst us. This family group had a very active 12-week-old baby, who was leaping among the stems of Common Bamboo

Bambusa vulgaris. Dropping to the ground, the youngster was joined by the rest of the group in an entertaining rough-and-tumble session. We also observed a group of Ring-tailed Lemurs with their babies and an Olive Bee-eater sallying from a perch over the river.

As tortoises are hard to observe in the wild, we were pleased to see two native captive species here: the large Radiated Tortoise and smaller Spider Tortoise. We also observed two Oustalet's Chameleons and two Spiny-tailed Iguanids. Several butterflies were admired and photographed: Citrus Swallowtail, Brilliant Blue, Grass Yellow and Brown Pansy, and a native Silk Worm in a Madagascar Almond tree *Terminalia mantaly*.

After lunch at the Lemurs' Park, we set off back towards the capital to join the RN7, the main road winding south through Madagascar's mountainous interior, known as the Hauts Plateaux. South of the capital, we observed a large flock of Red-billed Teal on a small lake. Soon, we were enjoying the sweeping vistas of the mountains and their smooth granite inselbergs, forming a scenic backdrop to the fertile rice paddies, where Cattle Egret, Dimorphic Egret and Great Egret were foraging. Common Myna and Feral Pigeon were ubiquitous, especially around habitation. Introduced Mexican Weeping Pine *Pinus patula* and Khasi Pine *Pinus kesiya* were the most abundant trees along the wayside. We passed roadside stalls where locals sell wooden toy lorries, rabbits, and hats and bags skillfully crocheted from the fallen leaves of Raffia Palms. We arrived just after dark at Antsirabe the 'Place of Big Salt', where we checked into Café Couleur, a small hotel set in lovely gardens with lawns tended by some very cute rabbits. After dinner, most of the group opted for an early night.

Day 4

Monday 24th September

Antsirabe to Ranomafana

We awoke to a fine morning of a warm, sunny day and, before breakfast, some of the group explored the gardens, where a native Traveller's Palm *Ravenala madagascariensis* was in bloom, beside introduced plants such as Indian Clock Vine *Thunbergia mysorensis*, an *Azalea* sp. and Bird-of-Paradise Flower *Strelitzia reginae*. We got good views of a pair of Madagascan Wagtails and a Red Fody.

After stocking up with drinking water we were on the road at 7.30am to continue the drive south. The mountains and rice paddies glowed in the morning sun as we watched changing scenes from village life unfold. Zebu cattle, important symbols of wealth, were ploughing and softening the hard-baked clay of the rice paddies, prior to the planting out of rice seedlings. This is women's work and we observed rows of ladies planting since whole communities join together to work in the paddies collectively. The Indonesian origin of Madagascar's highland people is evident in the way the paddies are stacked up the hillsides in terraces. We stopped by a pond where we found a Malagasy White-eye and were joined by a gaggle of children, who came to check out the 'vazaha', the Malagasy name for foreigners. Pam pointed out a Malagasy Kestrel and Mascarene Martins in flight and we noted a Souimanga Sunbird feeding on a Bottlebrush.

We passed a patch of forest of native Tapia trees *Uapaca bojeri*. Madagascar's native silk worm feeds on the leaves of this fire-resistant tree, which also produces an edible fruit being sold by the roadside. Mostly, however, we were seeing Mexican Weeping Pines and Eucalyptus, both important fuel species. We broke the journey again by a road cutting, pitted with Olive Bee-eater nests but the birds were not in evidence. We photographed Souimanga Sunbird and Malagasy Green Sunbird, enjoying flashes of iridescent plumage as they flitted from branch to branch. A Malagasy Kestrel was hunting overhead. This was also a good spot for butterflies and we

observed Citrus Swallowtail, Brilliant Blue, Grass Yellow, African Migrant and a Skipper, and a male Scarlet Darter dragonfly posed for photographs.

A little further on we ground to a halt with a flat tyre. While our driver and helper swiftly changed the tyre, we observed Mascarene Martin, Pied Crow, Malagasy Kestrel, a Grass Yellow butterfly and a female Scarlet Darter dragonfly. Back on the road again, Parson pointed out a Hamerkop in flight.

Arriving at Ambositra, a town known for its wood carving tradition, we collected our packed lunch and several of the group bought souvenirs.

Still journeying south, we stopped by a fragment of rainforest and a small pond and marsh, now a community-run nature reserve. We found a shady spot for our picnic lunch of sandwiches, crisps and fresh fruit. After lunch we watched Whirligig Beetles and an *Anax tumorifer* dragonfly patrolling the pond, where African Water-lilies *Nymphaea nouchali* were growing. We found two Jewel Chameleons in the surrounding undergrowth, along with a Mascarene Ridged Frog. There was a moment of great excitement when four Red-fronted Brown Lemurs appeared at the edge of the forest and we watched them leap from branch to branch before disappearing from view. On the opposite side of the road, a pair of Madagascar Snipe flew up and we watched a Grandidier's Madagascar Swift, an iguanid, basking on a granite boulder. Great Egret and Souimanga Sunbird were also present, and a Violet Dropwing dragonfly.

Continuing the journey, we passed Ambohimahaso (meaning: the place that brings good things), where we watched hundreds of Dimorphic Egret, Cattle Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron roosting and nesting in a Monkey Puzzle tree. Along the next stretch of road Parson found a Malagasy Kingfisher perched over a rice paddy.

The last stage of the journey brought us into the rainforest where we dropped down the escarpment to the village of Ranomafana and the Centrest Hotel. After dinner, some of the group went straight to bed, while Cathy and others went in search of the hotel garden's nightlife. We found a pair of Starry-night Reed Frogs among the leaves of a *Strelitzia*. Larger than the male, the female has stunning pale dots on a dark background.

Day 5

Tuesday 25th September

Ranomafana National Park

It was another fine, sunny day and, after an early breakfast, we gathered in the hotel car park where African Palm Swifts were flying overhead. A 15-minute drive brought us to the Talatakely entrance to the National Park, where we were joined by National Park guide Jean-Chrys, co-guide Derek and spotters Sylvia and Bako, who went ahead to look for lemurs. While we waited for park permits to be issued, we took advantage of the open views around the car park watching Malagasy Bulbul, Malagasy White-eye, Souimanga Sunbird and Malagasy Green Sunbird flitting among the foliage of a White Ball tree *Dombeya lucida*. Jean-Chrys pointed out a pair of Madagascan Starlings perched on a Traveller's Palm *Ravenala madagascariensis* and a Crested Drongo.

We descended on a steep trail to the Namorona River, and crossed the torrent by a footbridge. Here we found a Nose-horned Chameleon, a diminutive species, a Clearwing butterfly, a spectacular orchid *Oenea rosea*, a *Bulbophyllum* sp. orchid and a native white Lily *Crinum firmifolium*. Waiting for the lemur spotters to report, Jean-

Chrys showed us a Madagascar Giant Bamboo *Cathariostachys madagascariensis* that Greater Bamboo Lemurs feed on. We also admired a large Bird's-nest Fern *Asplenium nidus* and a Green Bright-eyed Frog, pale green with small red spots.

Now news came in from the lemur spotters and we veered off the path to where three Golden Bamboo Lemurs were resting in a tree fork. The National Park was created to protect these lemurs, when they were recognised as a separate species in 1986. After a while, the lemurs stirred, and one by one moved off to forage, giving us excellent views and photo opportunities. We watched as they fed on the cyanide-rich shoots of the Giant Bamboo *Cephalostachyum viguieri*, that other species cannot tolerate. In a day, they can consume enough cyanide to kill three men, a fairly radical strategy to avoid sharing your dinner with other species! They have been witnessed ingesting soil to counteract the toxins. Nearby, we found a group of three Ranomafana Grey Bamboo Lemurs, which have a more varied diet, including other plants than bamboo. Our next encounter was with a group of six Red-fronted Brown Lemurs moving at speed through the canopy, taking well-judged leaps from bough to bough. We observed one of the group pause to eat the fruits of a Screw Pine *Pandanus sp.*

Jean-Chrys and Derek pointed out a diminutive green tree frog with orange markings, identified as a Bott's Bright-eyed Frog. As word came in that our lemur spotters had also found a family of Milne-Edwards' Sifaka we were on the move again along Ranomafana's roller-coaster trails to where the two adults and a very bouncy youngster were feeding in the canopy. With their red eyes, dark fur and pale rump, these striking sifakas are among the largest of the lemurs. We watched the baby leaping from branch to branch, then retreating to the safety of the adults who were always watchful for aerial predators, such as Henst's Goshawk.

Soon we were on the move again as our spotters had located Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs, a canopy-feeding species that is often hard to find in Ranomafana's steep, densely forested mountain terrain. The guides rely on knowing where their preferred food trees are, in this case a *Symphonia verrucosa* in bloom. This pair were on the move but, with a fair amount of neck-craning, we got glimpses as they moved in and out of view.

Parson, meanwhile had spotted a Madagascan Cuckoo perched high on a broad branch – we'd been hearing its signature call all morning. We also got good views of Nuthatch Vanga, a striking bluish bird with an orange bill that shuffles up tree trunks, Tylas Vanga and pair of Madagascan Magpie-Robins.

By now we were feeling somewhat smug with the five different lemur species we'd seen, but the morning was not over and soon we were crouched down eye-to-eye with a Ring-tailed Mongoose, sniffing its way through the undergrowth. With a glossy chestnut body and splendid tail embellished with darker rings, this is the most readily observed of Madagascar's eight carnivores as it is active during the day. We then found a splendid Madagascar Tree Boa coiled around a branch at eye level and two further species of frog: a bright green and red-eyed Ankafana Bright-eyed Frog and two brownish-coloured Madagascar Bright-eyed Frogs.

To round off this outstanding morning of lemur sightings, we enjoyed the spectacle of four Red-bellied Lemurs feasting on clusters of figs, pollinated by wasps and fruiting on the trunk of the tree. This was a spell-binding sight made all the more interesting because one of the four, a very pregnant female, was markedly paler in colour than normal. Our guides were interested in what colour her offspring might turn out to be.

Returning to the hotel, we had lunch on the terrace and then a short rest. Before setting off again we photographed a *Nephilingis livida* Hermit Spider, with a pale oval body and dark legs, in the hotel gardens and a Madagascar Golden-orb Web Spider *Nephila madagascariensis*.

After a very active morning we settled for a more relaxed afternoon, driving first to the waterfall on the Namorona River at the edge of the escarpment where we looked at plants growing on a damp cliff-face: a native *Kalanchoe peltata*, Dancing Ladies Orchid *Cynorkis purpurescens*, a purple-flowering *Streptocarpus hilsenbergii*, and a Madagascar Sundew *Drosera madagascariensis*. Here too we found several very vocal Madagascar Bright-eyed Frogs. Suspended above the road was a Mistletoe Cactus *Rhipsalis baccifera*, Madagascar's only native cactus. On the foliage of a *Dichaetanthera cordifolia* Bako and Sylvia had located male and female Giraffe-necked weevils. Further along the road, our guides showed us a beautiful brightly coloured Baron's Painted Mantella frog found in a damp spot at the edge of the rainforest. Here we also observed three Red-fronted Brown Lemurs.

As dusk fell we made our way downhill to look for nocturnal Rufous Mouse Lemurs by torchlight. These tiny tea-cup sized primates are among the smallest on earth and they are Madagascar's most abundant lemurs. Yet, they can be difficult to observe as they scurry at speed along the branches of the understorey and are capable of spectacular leaps. After a peek at a Rufous Mouse Lemur, we wondered if chameleons might be easier to see – at night some species sleep on spindly branches overhanging the road, where they roll up their tails and turn ghostly pale. Unfortunately for us, the foliage either side of the road had recently been cut back so there were few chameleons around but we did find a Glaw's Flap-necked Chameleon, a Nose-horned Chameleon and a Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog.

Over dinner we took time to go over all we had seen during this fantastic first day in Ranomafana's forests.

Day 6

Wednesday 26th September

Ranomafana National Park

After breakfast, on another fine, sunny day, we decided to head for the Vohiparara section of the National Park, where the terrain is easier and there are fewer visitors. Along the way, we stopped to look at a very colourful Parson's Chameleon, a shrub with both purple and white flowers known as Yesterday-today-and-tomorrow *Brunfelsia pauciflora*. We also noted the Sensitive Plant *Mimosa pudica*, whose leaves fold when touched.

At the park entrance we found a Madagascar Tree Boa on the ground by the road and a Mascarene Ridged Frog. Inside the forest the canopy is lower due to the altitude and there is correspondingly more growth on the forest floor. We marvelled at the clear-running streams, lined with Screw-pines *Pandanus* of which Madagascar has 26 species. Here we found a Lined Emerald Day Gecko playing 'hide-and-seek' among the saw-toothed leaves. In a slow-flowing stretch of water, a large brown Ivohimanita Madagascar Frog *Mantidactylus majori* was well-camouflaged and in the leaf litter nearby a tiny Brown Mantella *Mantella betsileo* was hiding.

We enjoyed some rewarding bird sightings this morning with a Rand's Warbler singing from a perch, two Madagascar Buzzards in flight, spotted by Matt, a Blue Coua seen by Paul, a Madagascan Harrier-Hawk in flight, a male Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, a Common Jery spotted by Pam, a Madagascan Magpie-Robin and a Malagasy Brush Warbler.

We also saw three butterflies, Clouded Mother-of-Pearl, Madagascar Dotted Border and Indian Ocean Satyr, as well as Giraffe-necked Weevil, a Stick Insect, a splendid green caterpillar, a black ladybird with green spots and an iridescent purple beetle.

It did seem that the lemurs were on strike this morning and in spite of the best efforts of our guides and lemur spotters we failed to find them.

After lunch and a short rest, we drove to Talatakelly to explore further the main section of the park. At the park entrance we saw a Madagascan Mannikin and a Common Jery. Pam spotted a pale-brown Collared Bright Snake by the path. Our lemur spotters were working their magic and found a group of six Milne-Edwards' Sifakas with a young baby. In contrast to yesterday when there were plenty of other visitors in the park, we had this encounter to ourselves and felt privileged to quietly watch the lemurs feed, groom and socialise.

The lemur spotters had also located Greater Bamboo Lemur, the species we missed yesterday and though it was quite a long walk to reach them, this was our only chance. In this part of the park there are now only two left and they are not a viable breeding pair. Attempts have been made to introduce another female but so far without success. We got great views of them feeding on bamboo, dextrously stripping the outer sheath to reach the inner pith. The light was now fading and we began to head back, stopping to admire a Lesser Vasa Parrot in flight, a Giraffe-necked Weevil mimic, and a Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko, so perfectly camouflaged we could only wonder how our guides had spotted it. A bonus to the end of the day were a Ring-tailed Mongoose by the path and several Red Forest Rats scuttling through the undergrowth.

Day 7

Thursday 27th September

Ranomafana to Isalo

Another early rise this morning though we're getting used to dawn starts. It was rather hazy this morning, becoming cloudy, muggy and windy. Leaving the rainforest, we saw evidence of *Tavy* – the slash and burn that is fragmenting Madagascar's forests at an unsustainable rate. *Tavy* is most evident bordering the roads as this is where local people want to farm, to be able to sell any surplus produce for cash to passing traffic. As we drove back up the hill, our driver's helper Faneva spotted two Milne-Edwards' Sifakas feeding in the canopy across the river. Nearby, we got great views of a Malagasy Coucal and a pair of Blue Couas as they flew from tree to tree. Mascarene Martins were perched on a wire and Malagasy Bulbuls were chattering loudly in a nearby tree.

At Madagascar's second highland city Fianarantsoa, we took on fuel. We passed the taxi brousse (bush taxi) station, where throngs of overladen minibuses were preparing to depart, their roof racks piled high with anything from bicycles and sofas to hens and ducks. Leaving the city, many of the rice paddies had been turned to brickworks, and huge smoking brick kilns lined the road. We passed herds of Zebu cattle on a long slow march north to the capital to be sold – in some parts of Madagascar a family's wealth is measured by the size of their herd and Zebu take the place of money.

We passed fields of *Artemesia*, a plant used to treat fever and malaria, but also grown as bio-fuel. In the rice paddies we photographed a dark-phase Dimorphic Egret. Arriving at the town of Ambalavao, we visited the Antaimoro paper workshop, where beautiful flower-impregnated paper is made by hand from the pulp of the

Avoha shrub *Trilepisium madagascariensis*, following a technique developed by Arab settlers on the coast. Several of our group bought beautiful sets of greetings cards and other souvenirs.

We collected our picnic lunch and drove the short distance to the community reserve at Anja, where a lush forest pocket is sited among granite boulders at the foot of monumental granite domes. Anja is a community reserve, set up by local villagers and benefiting local communities. The village now has its own school and health post and provides employment to many people. For our visit to the reserve we were joined by local guide Victor, who explained that the forest supports a healthy population of 360 Ring-tailed Lemurs and at this time of year they are easy to find as they feed on the flowers of Indian Lilac *Melia azedarach*, whose heady scent was in the air. Victor brought us to the first of two groups of Ring-tailed Lemur, where we enjoyed quietly observing them at rest in the boughs of a Fig Tree *Ficus* sp. These are social lemurs and grooming and scent marking to define their territory and leave messages to one another are all part of the daily routine. Unlike most of the lemur species we'd observed in Ranomafana, Ring-tails form larger groups and here we were seeing up to 15 adults and juveniles headed by a dominant female. There were also several new babies, the youngest clinging to their mother's belly, older ones riding pillion. What makes Anja a particularly rewarding place to see the Ring-tails are the large granite boulders that form a natural adventure playground for these agile and acrobatic lemurs, who are as comfortable on the ground as they are in trees. One of the youngsters was especially playful, venturing ever further from its mother, yet jumping back to safety at the slightest hint of danger.

We photographed two Oustalet's Chameleons, whose down-turned mouth gives them a grumpy look – the males are grey-brown but the females more colourful. A Malagasy Bulbul and Malagasy Magpie-Robin were perched in the shade and a female Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher posed for the cameras. Butterflies were abundant and we recorded Blue Pansy, Grass Yellow, Madagascar Dotted Border, African Monarch and Spotted Blue Swallowtail.

Once we'd all reassembled, we enjoyed our picnic lunch under a shady straw canopy, but all too soon, it was time to move on with still several hours drive ahead of us. Around us, the coarse dry grass, which Zebu find unpalatable, had been burned off to encourage new shoots – this introduced grass has largely replaced the original savannah. Along the road side Cattle Egret, Dimorphic Egret and Great Egret were present in the rice paddies in small numbers, while Yellow-billed Kites, African Palm Swifts, Malagasy Black Swifts and a stream of Pied Crows were spotted in flight. We also passed a Malagasy Kestrel, numerous Bush Larks and Common Mynas.

After a short stop at Ihosy, the centre for the Bara people, we tackled the long climb to the Horombe Plateau. Eventually, Isalo's sandstone massif appeared ahead of us in the fading evening light. We stopped to look at a Rainforest Scops Owl, spotted by Parson perched in a tree by the roadside. We arrived at the well-appointed Hotel Jardin du Roi, where we checked into spacious rooms and enjoyed an excellent choice on the dinner menu.

Day 8

Friday 28th September

Isalo National Park

Today was hot, sunny and breezy. After the long hot drive yesterday, some of the group opted for a lie in. Pam, Wendy and Mark joined Parson and Cathy at dawn to look for birds around the hotel. Fragrant lawned gardens

lead from the hotel buildings to a lush forest of locally endemic *Dypsis isaloensis* Feathery Palms and *Pandanus pulcher* Screw-pines, through which a clear stream flows. It is magical to be here at sunrise, watching the sandstone change from purple to pink and orange. A Madagascan Hoopoe was perched in a tree preening itself while a pair of White-headed Vanga were collecting nesting material. A Souimanga Sunbird pair were feeding, joined by a Malagasy Green Sunbird. A Crested Drongo was calling from its perch on a dead branch and Olive Bee-eaters and African Palm Swifts were observed in flight. A Yellow-billed Kite was beautifully lit up by the early rays of sunshine. A White-throated Rail was calling from the undergrowth but we did not succeed in spotting it. We saw trunks of *Albizia gummifera* plastered with Plataspid Shield Bugs feeding on the tree sap. On our return to the hotel we found a Evening Brown butterfly looking for a safe spot to roost.

After a copious breakfast we set off for the town of Ranohira, meaning 'watering place for Ring-tailed Lemurs', which sounded promising. There we picked up our National Park guide Rolland and drove to the foot of Isalo's sandstone cliffs. Rolland explained the complex but fascinating geological history of the area, spanning millions of years and producing today's eroded sandstones interspersed with layers of rounded pebbles. We passed fire-resistant *Medemea nobilis* Palms and bright pink flowering shrubs *Pemphis madagascariensis*. Many of the termite mounds had had their tops removed and Rolland explained that locals feed termites to the hens and use them as fishing bait.

We were doubly lucky this morning as Parson is also an expert in the nature of Isalo as this is his home patch! Thanks to Rolland and Parson we had a very rewarding morning, focused on the Namaza Canyon. Setting off from the car park on foot Rolland pointed out Flatid Leaf Bugs *Phromnia rosea*, that come in candy colours – the juveniles are green and adults pink, while the nymphs are clad in fluffy-white secretions. We admired a Snout Bug, a Stink Bug, a Stick Insect, a Cicada, a splendid Huntsman Spider with orange markings on its abdomen, a Net-throwing Spider that hides in cracks in tree bark and three different Praying Mantises: a Marbled Mantis, a Ground Mantis and a Twig Mantis. One of the many remarkable things about Madagascar is the lack of harmful species – exceptions being some plants, a spider and scorpions. Looking under a rock, Parson found a scorpion but had no issues with handling it to show us!

Isalo's prolific insect life is mirrored by its flora with over 1200 plant species found there, of which 15% are endemic to the park and 40% are medicinal. Among the species Rolland identified for us were a Laurel Dodder *Cassytha filiformis*; a *Lycopodium* sp Clubmoss; an *Adina assisina* shrub whose branches are used by local people as an egg beater; an orange-flowered endemic shrub *Crotolaria grevei* attracting Souimanga Sunbirds to its nectar; a *Hibiscus ferrugineus*; an orange-flowering *Buddleja madagascariensis*; and a *Dalbergia purpurascens*, a type of Rosewood. In the warm sunshine, numerous butterflies were flitting to and fro, a Brilliant Blue, a Madagascar Giant Swallowtail - the island's largest butterfly, Madagascar Beauty, Green Lady, African Monarch, Madagascar Sailer, Small Grass Yellow and Yellow Pansy. We also noted some stunning dragonflies: *Palpopleura portia*, *Palpopleura vestita*, *Anax tumorifer* and two species of Dropwing – Magenta Dropwing and Crimson Dropwing.

Along the path to the canyon we found several bird species: Madagascan Stonechat, Malagasy Bulbul, Chabert Vanga, White-headed Vanga, Souimanga Sunbird and Malagasy Green Sunbird. In a damp spot by the side of the path we found a Mascarene Ridged Frog and a Warty Madagascar Frog. A Striped Madagascar Garter Snake wandered by the path.

Arriving in the shade of the forested campsite, we encountered a group of Ring-tailed Lemurs, lethargically sprawled over the tree-boughs. While we spent time watching and photographing them, Rolland took off to look for other wildlife, returning with news of a Madagascar Scops Owl roosting in a Screwpine *Pandanus pulcher*. In this shady spot, we also admired a Western Plated Lizard *Zonosaurus laticaudatus* and a Thick-tail Day Gecko. Around the campsite we found a pair of very confiding Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher and a pair of Forest Rock Thrush.

Some of the group elected to continue the walk further into the gorge, where we found a second Scops Owl roosting. Descending to a clear-running stream, we found two beautiful palms *Dyopsis onilabiensis* and *Dyopsis descipiens*. Climbing a rocky path with steps cut into the boulders, we arrived at Cascade des Nymphes and its refreshing pool. Several of us did the honours of being nymphs by taking a dip in the deliciously cool pool, fed by a small waterfall. Soon it was time to return and join the rest of the group and on the way back Rolland dived into the undergrowth and produced a Bernier's Grass Snake for us to admire. We watched a Madagascar Buzzard in flight down the canyon and unexpectedly came across a second group of Ring-tailed Lemurs who crossed the path in front of us. Among them we noted a female with a tiny baby clinging to her belly and what appeared to be an umbilical cord, making this a very recent birth.

Returning to the hotel for lunch, we then had time for a rest and a swim. Later in the afternoon we explored the network of canyons and sandstone bluffs behind the hotel. We admired the bulbous water-storing trunks of Elephant's Foot *Pachypodium rosulatum* subsp. *gracilis*, an endemic Aloe *Aloe isaloensis* and Rosy Periwinkle *Catharanthus roseus*, in which alkaloids with cancer-treating properties have been identified. We also saw Salotse *Ichnolepis graminifolia*, the plant that gives Isalo its name and an orange-flowered *Leonotis nepetifolia*. Climbing to a viewpoint, we looked out over an awe-inspiring landscape bathed in the last rays of afternoon sun. Three Madagascar Pond Herons were perched on a tree top. A pair of Madagascan Hoopoes flew over, followed by two White-headed Vangas and a Lesser Vasa Parrot. Crested Drongo, Dimorphic Egret, Madagascan Cisticola and Yellow-billed Kite were also noted.

With the light fading, we returned to the hotel and gathered for drinks before dinner. With an early rise scheduled for the morning, everyone turned in straight after dinner. Madagascan Nightjars were calling around the hotel as we returned to our rooms under a stunning star-filled sky.

Day 9

Saturday 29th September

Isalo to Zombitse National Park, Antsokay Arboretum & Ifaty

Today we had a cool start to the day, then it was hot and sunny, and humid near the coast. After breakfast in our rooms, we were on the road by 5am, enjoying sunrise over the savanna grasslands. We passed the sapphire mining town of Ilakaka, which exploded from a hamlet to a city in the early years of the recent sapphire boom. As mining operations shift to elsewhere in the region, it is beginning to take on the look of an abandoned shanty town.

We paused the journey by some rice paddies and marshland, where we spotted a Striated Heron, Three-banded Plover and Common Sandpiper. A Madagascan Cisticola and flock of Madagascar Mannikin flew over and settled on the reeds. An African Monarch butterfly flew by.

Continuing the journey, we passed stately baobabs rising from the plain, remnants of a shrinking forest. Although protected as a National Park, the forests of Zombitse and Vohibasia are vulnerable. The main road cuts through Zombitse, a dry deciduous forest, sharing some characteristics of rainforest and known as a transitional forest. Few travellers bother to stop as the park's isolation and lack of accommodation mean that most visitors arrive during the heat of the day. With an early start, we were there by 7am.

At the entrance to the park we met guides Lucien and Toussaint. While we were getting ready to start the walk, Wendy pointed out an Olive Bee-eater perched on a dead branch and Souimanga Sunbird and Common Jery were feeding in a nearby tree. The guides took us first to the south side of the park where we got good views of a Long-billed Tetraka combing the branches for insects, and a splendid White-browed Hawk-Owl. A Lesser Vasa Parrot launched into its tuneful liquid song and flew overhead, a Crested Drongo was calling from a perch and a Madagascan Hoopoe flew by.

Crossing the road to the north side of the park, we took an easy, flat trail through the forest where the guides found two Zombitse Sportive Lemurs, each safely tucked into a hollow tree trunk, with just its face peering out at us. During the day, these nocturnal lemurs rest concealed but watchful. Perfectly camouflaged in the leaf litter, a Madagascan Nightjar was invisible until the guides pointed it out to us. We admired a large Oustalet's Chameleon, skillfully mimicking a dry branch – how do the guides find them, we wondered? We heard a Cuckoo Roller calling and got good views of the female perched above us, a strange-looking bird with a very large head and thick neck. Arriving at the foot of a majestic baobab *Adansonia za*, we found a Standing's Day Gecko playing hide-and-seek between its twin trunks.

Zombitse offers good chances to observe Verreaux's Sifakas and soon we found ourselves peering up at a group of seven, draped over the branches of a bare tree, warming up in the morning sun. In amongst the muddle of dark faces and creamy-white fur, a yellow-eyed youngster gazed down at us. At this time of year before the trees are in leaf, food is in short supply and we noticed these sifakas were not in the best condition. Vertically clinging and leaping, they are sometimes called 'dancing sifakas'. Short forelimbs and long hind limbs make it impractical for them to walk on all fours so when they need to cross open ground they hop sideways in a quasi-comical 'dancing' motion.

We noted several interesting plants: a yellow-flowered *Uncarina decaryi* (Pedaliaceae) whose leaves make a natural shampoo and the seeds are used to trap mice, a tall spike of *Aloe vahombe* and a Donkey's Ears *Kalanchoe gastonis-bonnieri*, a species from the north of Madagascar. Returning to the coach, we observed a Giant Coua come out of the undergrowth and cross the path in front of us, a great opportunity for photographs.

Continuing the journey, we passed rolling hills, dotted with statuesque baobabs and the highly decorative roadside tombs of the Mahafaly people. Parson explained that the paintings and carvings on the tombs can represent the dreams and aspirations of the deceased, as well as true events from their lives. Unlike the highland tombs we saw in the early days of our tour, that house a whole family, the Mahafaly tombs are built for one individual. On the approach to Toliara, we crossed an ancient coral rag plateau, whose thorny scrub vegetation is dominated by *Alluaudia comosa*, a species endemic to the area. We were surprised to see many shrubs in flower, following heavy rainfall some weeks earlier, among them the spectacular yellow blooms of a *Euphorbia onoclada*, which photosynthesises through its sausage-shaped branches and does not produce any leaves. We observed Subdesert Brush Warbler flitting from shrub to shrub, and a Namaqua Dove in flight.

We took lunch and a guided walk at the Antsokay Arboretum, set up by a Swiss botanical enthusiast. Covering four hectares, the reserve contains 90% regional endemic species, of which 85% have medicinal properties. Strolling among these weird and wonderful trees is a lesson in the extremes to which plants will go to adapt to hostile conditions. Celia, the guide, introduced us to the specialities of the reserve: a natural bonsai *Operculicarya pachypus*; a *Delonix floribunda* which photosynthesises on the trunk and is used to make musical instruments as the timber has good resonance; *Euphorbia laro*, with a sticky white sap that can cause blindness; *Commiphora aprevalii* whose peeling bark gives it the name 'Vazaha' (foreigner) tree; *Moringa drouhardii* the false baobab, whose seeds produce an oil used against yellow fever; *Pachypodium lamerei*, whose trunk can attain a circumference of two metres; *Cyphostema montagnaci* with a flattened bulbous water-storing trunk; *Jatropha mahfalensis*, a tree whose seeds produce biodiesel and contain an antidote to the poison of some Euphorbia sap; *Alluandia montagnaci* the deciduous cactus-like 'Compass Tree' with heart-shaped leaves, whose branches lean towards the north; *Alluandia procera* in bloom, whose flowers adorn the top of its tall spikey trunk; *Cedrolopsis grevei*, with a common cure for backache and rheumatism in its leaves.

During the walk we observed two Green-capped Couas ambling along the ground, a pair of perching Malagasy Kestrels, one bringing food to the other, a Malagasy Coucal, a Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, a Gold-spotted Mabuya, several Spiny-tailed Iguanids hunting on tree trunks, a Thick-tailed Day Gecko devouring a Cockroach and an Madagascar OrangeTip butterfly.

Over lunch we watched Sakalava Weavers collecting nesting material and Olive Bee-eaters perched and in flight over the swimming pool. A Red Fody male almost in full breeding plumage posed for the cameras. We also noted Stripe-throated Jery and Madagascar Magpie-Robin.

After lunch, we entered the bustling city of Toliara, where cycle rickshaws throng the busy streets. We headed north along the coast stopping by a pond to look at Black-winged Stilt, Curlew Sandpiper, Kittlitz's Plover and Common Greenshank. Along the way we passed the fishing villages of the Vezo people, their reed huts scattered over the sand dunes. Arriving at the Hotel Paradisier, we checked into beachside bungalows and had a rest and swim. At dusk we found the eye-shine of a Grey-Brown Mouse Lemur emerging from its roost and darting from branch to branch.

Day 10

Sunday 30th September

Ifaty – Reniala Reserve

Today was hot, sunny and very breezy. We were up at first light and, after a quick cup of coffee, we set off by coach for the Reniala private reserve, a pocket of protected spiny forest, where the guides are expert at finding Long-tailed Ground Roller and Subdesert Mesite, two local rarities confined to this corner of the island. The leaf litter forms an ideal foraging ground for these ground-dwelling birds, both of which are under threat because of habitat loss.

As the forest isn't yet in leaf, birds are easier to observe and setting off from the entrance to the reserve with local guide Dabe and his helper we soon found Stripe-throated Jery, singing from its tree-top perch and a Green-capped Coua (a subspecies of Red-capped Coua) ambling through the leaf litter. Dabe also pointed out the tree-hole nest of a Malagasy Black Swift.

When news came in that a Mesite had been found we were off at a pace through the thorny scrub (long-sleeves essential). The bird, a male, was perched on a branch in defensive 'freeze' position and easy to photograph. Nearby, Dabe found another local endemic bird, *Thamnornis*, which sings from a perch on top of a *Didieraceae* but forages in the understorey. A Lesser Vasa Parrot flew overhead and numerous pairs of Malagasy Turtle Doves hurtled past at speed. Malagasy Bulbul, Common Newtonia, Souimanga Sunbird and Magpie-Robin were also present. Next it was the turn of Vangas and Couas and in quick succession we enjoyed sightings of a Crested Coua perched in a tree sunning itself and Green-capped Coua and Running Coua on the forest floor. We got great views of a pair of Sickle-billed Vanga on a tree top and White-headed Vanga in flight. From a distance, Dabe pointed out a tree-hollow nest of Hook-billed Vanga, with just the top of the head and tail showing.

We'd been rather focused on birds but now it was time to appreciate the forest itself. We picked up a balsa-like piece of *Givotia madagascariensis*, whose trunks are hollowed out to make canoes, we admired a giant tree-like *Pachypodium geayi* and majestic stands of *Alluandia* Octopus Trees. We admired numerous red-barked *Adansonia rubrostipa* baobabs. Baobabs are said to reach a thousand years or more in age and have a trunk girth of tens of metres. We put this to the test by joining hands around the circumference of Reniala's largest baobab, which must have measured close to 14 metres. We noticed how some of the trees had footholds cut into the bark so you can climb up to pick the edible fruit. There were stunning photos to be taken of these wonderful trees silhouetted at sunrise.

Now the guides had located Long-tailed Ground Roller; we sat quietly on the path to await the bird, being encouraged by the guides to head towards us. Shy, difficult to see and confined to a narrow band of forest in the south-west, this is one of Madagascar's most striking birds and it's always a privilege to observe it.

As we returned to the entrance to the reserve the guides found a scorpion under a stone and in a flurry of excitement produced a Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec from under a log, looking a little bemused and rather sluggish with this awakening from its dry-season dormancy. In the car park area we found a Grandidier's Caper White butterfly and a Clearwing, *Acraea turna*.

After a late and most welcome breakfast at the hotel, we had time to relax and watch the local fishing boats, dugout canoes with a sail and outrigger, return to shore as the wind picked up. Some of our group had hoped to take a boat trip to the reef but this was not possible because of the wind. After breakfast Derek and Pam found a Mahafaly Sand Snake, a diurnal species common in the dry south west and also found around towns and villages. Pam walked up the beach and saw a flock of Whimbrel. Mark went looking for reptiles and photographed a Peter's Keeled Cordylid, a beautiful lizard that appears to be confined to sand dunes. Three-eyed Lizards were scuttling about in the sand to either side of the path to our bungalows. The rest of the group enjoyed a potter, a rest and made good use of the hotel's lovely infinity pool. We met up for a late lunch and observed Whimbrel on the beach, doing battle with the wind, which by now was whipping up dust, staining the air with a reddish haze.

Later in the afternoon we took the coach a short way up the coast to look for birds by the salt pans. A small group of Curlew Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Kittlitz's Plover, Common Greenshank and Common Sandpiper were huddled along the bank of a salt pan and a group of Black-winged Stilts were bravely attempting to feed on the water. With the constant buffeting wind and thick dust in the air there was little joy in being there!

At nightfall, we gathered by a shed in the hotel grounds and witnessed a Grey-brown Mouse Lemur emerging from the eaves of the thatched roof. We watched as it leapt off into the branches of a nearby tree to feed. Parson heard a Malagasy Scops Owl calling nearby and found it perched in a tree. After dinner Fiona and Cathy found several more Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs in the shrubs and trees to either side of the path leading to our bungalows.

Day 11

Monday 1st October

Ifaty to Toliara and flight to Tana

We all enjoyed a lie-in and a late breakfast, awaking to a calm and sunny morning. Subdesert Brush Warbler, Madagascan Magpie-Robin, Malagasy Bulbul, Souimanga Sunbird, Crested Drongo and Red Fody were noted in the hotel gardens. With the luggage loaded, we set off for the drive to Toliara. We stopped en route by the mangrove regeneration project, where amongst stands of Mangrove *Sonneratia alba*, we spotted a Common Sandpiper on the beach and African Monarch and Citrus Swallowtail butterflies in flight. By a nearby pond we got good views of Black-winged Stilt, Common Ringed Plover and Kittlitz's Plover. We had lunch in the gardens of Victory Hotel – the service was rather slow and we were beginning to get a little concerned about getting to the airport on time, when Parson got news that the flight had been delayed to late afternoon. This was a pity as it meant we would now have to overnight in Tana instead of travelling straight to Andasibe. Air Mad lives up to its name once again!

Before heading for the airport, we visited the craft market in Toliara. We said our farewells to our very amenable and competent driver Zo and Faneva his helper, who now had a long drive back to the capital. After collecting bags at Antananarivo, we had a short drive to Hotel Combava, where luckily rooms were available at short notice.

Day 12

Tuesday 2nd October

Tana to Andasibe

Today was warm and sunny, and we were up for an early breakfast, seeing Red Fody and Madagascan Wagtail in the hotel car park. With the bags loaded onto the bus we set off at 7am, heading east on a winding road out of the capital. Parson pointed out some House Martins nesting on a building. We passed neat vegetable plots by the sides of the road as we drove through the valleys. On the hillsides, Eucalyptus groves were coppiced to produce charcoal and we saw smoke rising where charcoal ovens had been dug. We passed Squacco Heron, Great Egret and Cattle Egret feeding in the rice paddies, and Madagascan Spinetail and Malagasy Black Swift in flight. Matt pointed out a Malagasy Kestrel and Parson a Hamerkop. We noticed that some of the rice paddies were filled with a pink Water Fern *Azolla pinnata*, which Parson explained is sometimes harvested as a fertiliser.

At Mandraka Forest we began a steep and winding descent, passing many heavily-laden lorries belching out fumes as this road links the capital with the east-coast port of Toamasina. We passed a hydroelectric power station, one of several that supply Madagascar's electricity, though the island is under-powered with many areas suffering power cuts as a result. We saw a Madagascan Stonechat perched in the open. We crossed the large arterial River Mangoro and town of Moramanga, and soon reached the village of Andasibe. We met local guides Maurice and Chris, who would be showing us the area's wonderful array of wildlife, over the next days. We

picked up our packed lunch and ate at the entrance to the Andasibe Community Reserve, which lies adjacent to Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. A Rand's Warbler was singing from a high perch on a tree top.

Entering the rainforest reserve, we passed a stand of Elephant's Ear (Taro) *Colocasia esculenta* and our guides found a splendid nocturnal Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko upside down on a tree trunk. These amazing geckoes are masters of deception and during the day blend so perfectly with their chosen moss-clad tree trunk that their bodies don't even cast a shadow. Without the help of local guides we would have had no chance of spotting it. The same could be said for the Parson's Chameleon we admired and photographed. A Nelicourvi Weaver flew into its nest, hanging by the path – in contrast to the dry country Sakalava Weaver, Nelicourvi Weavers do not nest colonially. A Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher showed well and we also got good views of Blue Vanga, Red-tailed Vanga, Magpie Robin, Crested Drongo and Souimanga Sunbird. We watched a Killer Wasp attacking a spider and observed a beautiful Cream-lined Swallowtail butterfly, a Damsely and a yellow-flowering orchid *Bulbophyllum* sp.

What we were also hoping to find were Indri and soon we had two in sight, feeding in the canopy. Madagascar's largest living lemurs have thick, glossy black and white fur, pale-green eyes and the cutest teddy-bear faces. They also have powerful hind-limbs and are capable of amazing vertical leaps of 10 metres between tree trunks. They pair for life and cannot survive outside the forest and will pine and die in captivity. Several times a day they launch into haunting, melodic territorial calls to establish boundaries between groups. Yet sadly, there are many threats to their survival, principally habitat loss and fragmentation, capture for the illegal bush-meat trade and a low reproductive rate – just one baby every three years.

Soon we spotted two more in the same family group, one bounded to feed almost at eye level with us on the leaves of a native Laurel species *Ocotea sessiliflora*. It felt a huge privilege to be there with just our group, without the background chatter of other visitors. Not wanting to outstay our welcome, we moved further into the rainforest where we found two Common Brown Lemurs feeding. Nearby we encountered a third individual who came down to have a look at us and pose for the cameras. Next, our guides took us to a sleepy Peyrieras Woolly Lemur, the largest of the nocturnal lemurs. Perfectly hidden in a dense tangle of vegetation, we could just see its huge eyes peering down at us.

Before leaving the reserve, there was one final treat in store for us, a beautiful Pygmy Kingfisher perched on a spindly branch. It was a short drive to Vakona Lodge, where we checked into comfortable lodge-style rooms, set in lush gardens around a small lake. Parson, Cathy and some of the group elected to explore the grounds of the hotel before dinner. We started around the lake, where we found two Madagascar Bright-eyed Frogs on the leaves of a Water Banana *Typhonodorum lindleyanum*. Parson found an unidentified sleeping bird, a ball of feathery fluff on a branch. We made our way up a broad trail leading through a stand of Eucalyptus towards the rainforest. An Ant Lion, a green Stick Insect, several brown Stick Insects, a green Bush Cricket and some large moths provided a line-up of interesting insects. Eyeshine up a tree turned out to be a Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko in action and we spotted a Perinet Chameleon on a spindly branch. As we turned to walk back to the hotel, a Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur came crashing through the branches above us at speed.

After today's long journey, we were ready for an early night.

Day 13

Wednesday 3rd October

Andasibe Mantadia National Park

We woke to a fine, clear morning; it was a cool start to the day but warm and sunny later. Some of our group were out early looking at the offerings on the hotel's moth blanket, which included an impressive Emperor Moth and two Madagascar Bullseye Moths, as well as a dozen other smaller species. A pair of Chabert Vanga, Malagasy Coucal, Crested Drongo and Madagascar Wagtail were enjoying the free meal. We watched dozens of Mascarene Martins flying to and from their nests under the eaves of the hotel's restaurant. Nelicourvi Weaver, Malagasy White-eye and Souimanga Sunbird were feeding around the hotel.

After a copious breakfast, we collected packed lunches and set off in four-wheel drive vehicles on the bumpy road to Mantadia. Travelling slowly on the rutted track gave good opportunities to spot wildlife and we stopped to look at a male Velvet Asity, stunning in its black breeding plumage with a bright green caruncle above the eye. Crossing a small stream Maurice was keen to show us Pitta-like Ground Roller but though we could hear the bird call, it failed to show. Arriving at the parking area we found a Giraffe-necked Weevil and observed a Cuckoo Roller in flight. Malagasy Bulbuls were chattering in a Pink Ball Tree *Dombeya wallichii*.

From the car park we entered Mantadia's primary rainforest along a valley-floor trail, flanked by huge buttressed trees festooned with epiphytic Bird's-nest Ferns *Asplenium nidus* and orchids. Giant stands of *Pandanus*, a tangle of lianas and Tree Ferns *Cyathea madagascariensis* lined the forest floor. Mantadia, meaning 'tough walking', lives up to its name when you ascend the steep ridges on either side of the valley but fortunately the lemurs are also found in the valley. Our first lemurs of the day were three Red-bellied Lemur feeding on the red fruits of a *Symphonia verrucosa*, a tall rainforest tree with an emergent crown. Maurice remarked that we would return to this tree as he had a hunch that Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs would be at this favourite lemur 'restaurant' later on.

Continuing the walk, we enjoyed some spectacular bird sightings as a mixed flock passed over: Tylas, Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Cuckooshrike, Blue Vanga and Nuthatch Vanga. Our next lemurs were a group of four Common Brown Lemurs feeding in the canopy. Michael pointed out a splendid Fire Millipede on the path. We left the path to investigate a frog calling from a ditch and Fiona spotted four beautiful White-lipped Bright-eyed Frogs. These nocturnal frogs are one of Madagascar's largest and to see four at once was a lucky find.

When Chris brought news that a pair of Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs were indeed on their way to feed on the fruiting *Symphonia* tree, we quickly returned the way we'd come. We watched as they climbed in and out of view, feeding and then pausing to rest. In contrast to other lemurs, Black-and-white Ruffed can have two or three babies, which they park in a nest, rather than carry around with them. While we were watching the lemurs, another mixed flock of birds moved through and we got views of Long-billed Tetraka, Red-tailed Vanga, Paradise Flycatcher and Madagascar Cuckooshrike.

Continuing our forest walk, we found a group of four very acrobatic Diademed Sifakas, one with a young baby. Leaping across the path above us, they then settled to feed and we got wonderful views of them hanging upside down, drawing clusters of leaves to their mouth. You know you've witnessed something extraordinary when no one says a word. This was a fitting end to a great morning, made all the more special by the fact that there were almost no other visitors in this part of the National Park. As we emerged from the forest, Parson found a tiny Praying Mantis and Fiona had a splendid Jewel Beetle land on her.

The cars were waiting for us by the former graphite mine, where we had our picnic lunch by a secluded pond, which is home to a pair of Madagascar Grebe and their chicks and Common Moorhen. At the back of the pond we also spotted eight Red-billed Teal and two Meller's Ducks, a threatened species and usually quite shy. Madagascar Wagtail were using the Water Lily pads as stepping stones and Madagascar Swamp Warbler were sallying out from their pondside perches. We noticed a clubmoss (possibly *Lycopodium squarrosum*) and a Clouded Mother of Pearl butterfly. On our drive back some of the group got a fleeting glimpse of Diadem Sifaka by the roadside, spotted by Pam. We saw a Henst's Goshawk in flight over the forest canopy, a major predators of lemurs.

Returning to the hotel we noticed a Common Brown Lemur hanging around the hotel kitchen and car park area. We found out this was a lemur that had been taken from the wild and raised as a pet, a practice no longer permitted in Madagascar. It had been rescued and relocated to the Lemur Island, a facility for rescue lemurs near Vakona Lodge but was getting bullied by other lemurs there, so the decision was taken to allow it to roam freely in the hope (unlikely) that it might join a wild group.

There was time to rest or have a swim, before we gathered for a night walk along the road at Andasibe. Maurice showed us two Goodman's Mouse Lemurs, their jewel-like eyes darting to and fro in the understorey. We also got a better look at Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur and found a Barn Owl, two tiny Green Bright-eyed Frogs, a Scorpion and a Cricket.

Day 14

Thursday 4th October

Andasibe Mantadia National Park

It was another early rise to make the most of our warm and sunny, last morning, which we planned to spend in the Analamazaotra Indri Reserve. Once the bags were loaded on the coach, we were off. The topography consists of flat areas bordering the river and several small lakes with a 50-metre rise to a plateau. Several habituated Indri family groups are found in the most accessible part of the reserve and we were lucky to find two of them foraging at eye level. We sat and quietly watched them feed and move every so often to grasp a new bunch of leaves. In the distance we heard other Indri groups calling and soon with a signature roar to kick off, our two Indri launched into song. What you can't appreciate from afar is just how deafening the calls are when you are stood close by. It seemed to go on for ages, though in fact most calling bouts last less than a minute. Everyone agreed this was a fitting climax to our Lemurs' Tour!

The morning's sightings also took in a pair of Madagascar Green Pigeon perched on top of a Eucalyptus, a glimpse of a shy but very vocal Madagascar Flufftail, Greater Vasa Parrot, Madagascar Spinetail, Madagascar Buzzard, Malagasy Turtle Dove, Rand's Warbler, Cuckoo Roller, Malagasy Kingfisher, Olive Bee-eater, Greater Vasa Parrot, Red-tailed Vanga, Chabert Vanga, Nuthatch Vanga, Crested Drongo, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Common Jerry, Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Malagasy White-eye and Souimanga Sunbird. We also found Giraffe-necked Weevil and one of its egg packets, intricately bound together in a leaf case and then snipped to fall to the ground. Maurice showed us a pretty orange daisy flower *Emilia humifuga*, and pointed out a tree trunk with curious circular holes in it that he explained were the work of an Aye-aye, extracting grubs with its elongated digit.

Once we were out of the park, we made our way to Feony Ala Restaurant, where we had a table on the terrace overlooking the forest and a pond. Over lunch, we spotted an Indri in the top of a tree across the water and a Chabert Vanga. All too soon it was time to drive back to Tana.

We checked into rooms at Hotel Combava and had a shower and a rest before the short transfer to the airport. Then it was time to say 'Veloma' to Parson, who'd worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth-running of the tour, and generously shared so much of his knowledge and passion for Madagascar's wildlife. Thank you so much Parson!

Day 15

Friday 5th October

Flying home

Check in at the airport was straightforward and once we were through immigration, we met up again before boarding the flight, which left on time. Arriving at Paris we now separated to board our onward flights to different UK airports.

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Species Lists

Lemurs

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October												
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	
1	Grey-brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus griseorufus</i>								1	3				
2	Rufous Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>			1										
3	Goodman's Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>												2	
4	Crossley's (Furry-eared) Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogalus crossleyi</i>											1	2	
5	Zombitse Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur hubbardorum</i>								2					
6	Ranomafana Grey Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur griseus ranomafanensis</i>			3										
7	Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur aureus</i>			3										
8	Greater Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur simus</i>				2									
9	Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>					22	30							
10	Common Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>											3	4	
11	Red-fronted Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur rufifrons</i>		6	6										
12	Red-bellied Lemur	<i>Eulemur rubriventer</i>			4									3	
13	Southern Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata editorum</i>			2									2	
14	Peyrieras' Woolly Lemur (Avahi)	<i>Avahi peyrierasi</i>											1		
15	Verreaux's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi</i>								7					
16	Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>												5	
17	Milne-Edwards' Sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>			2	6	2								
18	Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>											4		2

Other Mammals:

1	Ring-tailed Mongoose	<i>Galidia elegans</i>			1	1									
2	Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec	<i>Echinops telfairi</i>								1					
3	Eastern Red Forest Rat	<i>Nesomys rufus</i>				4									
4	A Bat	<i>unidentified</i>											1		

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

1	Meller's Duck	<i>Anas melleri</i>													2
2	Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>	50+											8	

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
3	Madagascan Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus pelzelinii</i>											2	
4	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		10										
5	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>							1					
6	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>									2			
7	Malagasy Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola idae</i>						3						
8	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓			✓	1	✓		2	✓		✓
9	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>											1	
10	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓			✓					✓		✓
11	Dimorphic Egret	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>	✓	✓	3		✓	1	✓			✓		✓
12	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	1	1								1		
13	Madagascan Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides radiatus</i>				1								
14	Henst's Goshawk	<i>Accipiter henstii</i>											1	
15	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>		5			✓	6	✓	1		2		
16	Madagascan Buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>		1		3		1				1		1
17	Subdesert Mesite	<i>Monias benschi</i>								1				
18	Madagascan Flufftail	<i>Sarothrura insularis</i>												1
19	White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>						H	H			H		
20	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>											2	
21	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>							12	12	6			
22	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>									1			
23	Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>							8		3			
24	Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>							1					
25	Madagascan Snipe	<i>Gallinago macrodactyla</i>		2										
26	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>								8				
27	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>							1	1				
28	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>							1	1	1			
29	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>								4				
30	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>								5	8			
31	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>												
32	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Malagasy Turtle Dove	<i>Nesoenas picturatus</i>	2						H	10				1
34	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>							2	6	4			

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
35	Madagascar Green Pigeon	<i>Treron australis</i>												2
36	Malagasy Coucal	<i>Centropus toulou</i>		H	H	H	1	1	1		1		1	
37	Crested Coua	<i>Coua cristata</i>								1				
38	Blue Coua	<i>Coua caerulea</i>			H	1	2							H
39	Red-capped (Green-capped) Coua	<i>Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps</i>								2	2			
40	Running Coua	<i>Coua cursor</i>								1				
41	Giant Coua	<i>Coua gigas</i>								1				
42	Madagascar Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>			1	H								H
43	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>												1
44	Malagasy Scops Owl	<i>Otus rutilus</i>					1	2		1				H
45	White-browed Hawk-Owl	<i>Ninox supercilialis</i>								1				
46	Madagascar Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>						H	1					
47	Madagascar Spinetail	<i>Zonavena grandidieri</i>											✓	✓
48	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
49	Malagasy Black Swift	<i>Apus balstoni</i>					✓						✓	
50	Cuckoo Roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>			H	H				2				1 1
51	Pitta-like Ground Roller	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>				1								
52	Long-tailed Ground Roller	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>								1				
53	Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis madagascariensis</i>											1	
54	Malagasy Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis vintsioides</i>		2										1
55	Olive Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>	1	1				2	4					1
56	Madagascar Hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>						6	1	2				
57	Malagasy Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>		6	1	1	1	4	2				1	2
58	Greater Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>												1
59	Lesser Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>				1		1	1	2				1
60	Velvet Asity	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>												1
61	Red-tailed Vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>			H	H							1	2 1
62	Hook-billed Vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>								1				H
63	Sickle-billed Vanga	<i>Falculea palliata</i>								3				
64	White-headed Vanga	<i>Artamella viridis</i>						6		2		H		
65	Chabert Vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>						2						2 4
66	Blue Vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>											1	1

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			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
67	Tylas Vanga	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>			1								1	
68	Nuthatch Vanga	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>			2								1	1
69	Common Newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>				H			H	4				H
70	Archbold's Newtonia	<i>Newtonia archboldi</i>								H				
71	Madagascar Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>											2	
72	Crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>						10	2	4	6	1	4	2
73	Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>				2	1	2	1			2	2	4
74	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2		✓
75	Madagascar Lark	<i>Eremopterix hova</i>					✓	✓	✓					
76	Malagasy Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	2		2	2	1	10	4	4	2	4	4	8
77	Mascarene Martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>		10	4		5					✓	✓	✓
78	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>										3		
79	Malagasy Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>	H	H	H	2						H	H	
80	Subdesert Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas lantzii</i>							1	6	10			
81	Madagascar Swamp Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>											2	
82	Long-billed Bernieria	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>							1				1	
83	Thamnornis	<i>Thamnornis chloropetoides</i>								1				
84	Rand's Warbler	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>			1							1		1
85	Common Jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>		1		1		1	8	2		✓	✓	2
86	Stripe-throated Jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>							1	10				
87	Madagascar Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>		1				4	6					1
88	Malagasy White-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>		1	4								✓	✓
89	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Madagascar Starling	<i>Hartlaubius auratus</i>			3									
91	Madagascar Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus albospectularis</i>	2		2	2	1	1	2	4	2		1	1
92	Forest Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>						2						
93	Madagascar Stonechat	<i>Saxicola sibilla</i>		2				2				1		
94	Souimanga Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris sovimanga</i>	3	4	2	4		2	4	4	2	8	6	4
95	Malagasy Green Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris notatus</i>		1		H		1						
96	Nelicourvi Weaver	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>										1	1	2
97	Sakalava Weaver	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>							✓					
98	Red Fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	✓	✓					✓	2	1	✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
99	Madagascan Mannikin	<i>Lepidopygia nana</i>				1			✓					
100	Madagascan Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>	4	2		1	1					1	4	3

Frogs

1	Green Bright-eyed Frog	<i>Boophis viridis</i>			1								2
2	Bott's Bright-eyed Frog	<i>Boophis bottae</i>			1								
3	Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog	<i>Boophis madagascariensis</i>			7							2	
4	White-lipped Bright-eyed Frog	<i>Boophis albilabris</i>											4
5	Anfafana Bright-eyed Frog	<i>Boophis luteus</i>			1								
6	Brown Mantella	<i>Mantella betsileo</i>				1							
7	Betsileo Madagascar Frog	<i>Mantidactylus betsileanus</i>				1							
8	Warty Madagascar Frog	<i>Mantidactylus ulcerosus</i>						1					
9	Ivohimanitra Madagascar Frog	<i>Mantidactylus majori</i>				1							
10	Mascarene Ridged Frog	<i>Ptychadena mascareniensis</i>		1		1		2					
11	Starry-night Reed Frog	<i>Heterixalus alboguttatus</i>		2									

Chameleons

1	Blue-legged Chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>		1									
2	Perinet Chameleon	<i>Calumma gastrotaenia</i>			1							1	
3	Glaw's Flap-necked Chameleon	<i>Calumma glawi</i>			1								
4	Nose-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma nasuta</i>			3								
5	Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii</i>				1							
6	Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii cristifer</i>										1	
7	Jewel' Chameleon	<i>Furcifer lateralis</i>		2									
8	Oustalet's Chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>	3				2		1				

Lizards, Geckos & Skinks

1	Three-eyed Lizard	<i>Oplurus (Chalarodon) madagascariensis</i>								3	✓		
2	Spiny-tailed Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cyclurus</i>	2						6				
3	Four-lined Iguanid	<i>Oplurus quadrimaculatus</i>						✓					
4	Grandidier's Madagascar Swift (Iguanid)	<i>Oplurus grandidieri</i>		1									

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October													
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4		
5	Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>				2										
6	Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>											2			
7	Lined Emerald Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata lineata</i>		3	2	6										1
8	Peacock Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>				1										
9	Standing's Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>								1						
10	Thick-tail Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma mutabilis</i>						1	1							
11	Gray's Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus mercatorius</i>		✓	✓											
12	Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>								✓	✓					
13	Gold-spotted Mabuya	<i>Trachylepis (Mabuya) aureopunctata</i>								1						
14	Peter's Keeled Cordylid	<i>Trachyloptychus petersi</i>									1					
15	Western Plated Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus laticaudatus</i>						1								
16	Gravenhorst's Skink	<i>Trachylepis gravenhorstii</i>				1	1	1	1							

Snakes

1	Mahafaly Sand Snake	<i>Mimophis mahafalensis</i>								1						
2	Madagascar Lined Snake	<i>Thamnosophis lateralis</i>						1								
3	Collared Bright Snake	<i>Liophidium torquatum</i>				1										
4	Bernier's Grass Snake	<i>Dromicodryas bernieri</i>						1								
5	Madagascar Tree Boa	<i>Sanzinia madagascariensis</i>			1											
6	Madagascar Ground Boa	<i>Acrantophis madagascariensis</i>				1										

Butterflies

1	Madagascar Giant Swallowtail	<i>Pharmacophagus antenor</i>						1		1	1					
2	Green Lady	<i>Graphium cyrnus</i>						1								
3	Cream-lined Swallowtail	<i>Papilio delalandei</i>			1							1	2			
4	Spotted Blue Swallowtail	<i>Papilio epiphorbas</i>					2		1							8
5	Banded Blue	<i>Papilio oribazus</i>													2	
6	Citrus Swallowtail	<i>Papilio demodocus</i>	2	2	1			4		2	2					2
7	African Monarch	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>		1			1	2	1	1	2	1				
8	Madagascar Beauty	<i>Salamis anteva</i>			1			1								1
9	A Clearwing	<i>Acraea zitja</i>		1												
10	A Clearwing	<i>Acraea turna</i>								1						

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
11	Dusky-veined Acraea	<i>Acraea igola</i>			1	1								
12	Brilliant Blue	<i>Junonia rhadama</i>	1	1				1	1	1				
13	Madagascar Brown Pansy	<i>Junonia goudotii</i>	2			1	1							
14	Yellow Pansy	<i>Junonia hierta paris</i>						2						
15	Blue Pansy	<i>Junonia oenone</i>					2							
16	Madagascar Commodore	<i>Precis andremiaja</i>		1										
17	Clouded Mother-of-Pearl	<i>Protogoniomorpha anacardii</i>	1		1	1							1	
18	A Tree Nymph	<i>Sevenia sp.</i>												1
19	Madagascar Forest Nymph	<i>Aterica rabena</i>											2	
20	Madagascar Sailer	<i>Neptis kikideli</i>						1						1
21	Spotted Sailer	<i>Neptis saclava saclava</i>								1				
22	Evening Brown	<i>Melanitis leda</i>			1			1						
23	Indian Ocean Satyr	<i>Heteropsis turbans</i>			1	✓						1		✓
24	African Migrant	<i>Catopsilia florella</i>		2	✓					1		2		
25	Madagascar Orange Tip	<i>Colotis evanthe</i>							1	1				
26	Small Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema brigitta</i>	2	2		1	1	✓	2					2
27	Madagascar Dotted Border	<i>Mylothris phileris</i>				1			1		1			
28	Grandidier's Caper White	<i>Belenois grandidieri</i>								1				
29	Common Zebra Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>									1			
30	Tiny Grass Blue	<i>Zizula hylax</i>					1							
31	A hairstreak	<i>Deudorix sp.</i>				1								
32	A Skipper	<i>Coeliades ramanatek</i>		1										

Moths:

1	Emperor Moth	<i>Gonimbrasia Belina</i>											1	
2	Verdant Hawkmoth	<i>Euchloron meagaera</i>												1
3	Madagasgan Bullseye Moth	<i>Antherina suraka</i>											1	
4	Silkworm	<i>Borocera cajani</i>	1											

Other Invertebrates

1	Emperor type Dragonfly	<i>Anax tumorifer</i>		1				1						
2	Scarlet Darter	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>		2										

	Common name	Scientific name	September/October											
			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
3	Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>		1										
4	Crimson Dropwing	<i>Trithemis selika</i>						1						
5	Magenta Dropwing	<i>Trithemis persephone</i>						1						
6	Azure Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum azureum</i>										1		
7		<i>Palpopleura vestita</i>						1						
8		<i>Palpopleura portia</i>						1						
9	A Praying Mantis	<i>unidentified</i>												1
10	Marbled Mantis	<i>Polyspilota aeruginosa</i>						1						
11	Ground Mantis	<i>Tarachodes sp.</i>						1						
12	Twig Mantis	<i>Popa spurca (possibly)</i>						1						
13	Cicada	<i>Tibicinidae sp.</i>						1						
14	Bush Cricket	<i>Tettigonidae</i>										2	1	
15	Stick Insect	<i>unidentified</i>				1						4		
16	Stick insect	<i>Achrioptera impennis</i>						1						
17	Flatid Leaf-bug	<i>Phromnia rosea</i>					✓	✓	✓					
18	Plataspid Shield Bugs	<i>Libyaspis coccinelloides</i>						✓						
19	Snout Bug or Flat-backed Weevil	<i>Zana madagascariensis</i>						1						
20	Stink Bug	<i>Pentatomidae</i>					1	1						
21	Rhinoceros Beetle	<i>Oryctes sp.</i>												1
22	Jewel Beetle	<i>Polybothris auriventris</i>												
23	Long-horn Beetle	<i>Cerambycidae</i>				1								
24	A Purple Beetle	<i>Curculionidae ?</i>				1								
25	A Ladybird Beetle (black with green spots)	<i>Coccinellidae</i>				2								
26	Whirligig Beetle	<i>Gyrinidae</i>		✓				✓						✓
27	Giraffe-necked Weevil	<i>Trachelophorus giraffa</i>		4										1
28	Giraffe-necked Weevil mimic	<i>unidentified</i>												
29	Madagascar Fire Millipede	<i>Aphistogoniulus sp.</i>												1
30	A Killer Wasp	<i>Sphecius grandidieri</i>									1			
31	A Bee	<i>not identified</i>							1					
32	Madagascar Golden Orb-web Spider	<i>Nephila madagascariensis</i>			✓									
33	Hermit Spider	<i>Nephilingis livida</i>			1									
34	Thorn Spider (Orange)	<i>Gasteracanthinae sp</i>												

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			23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4
35	"Huntsman" Spider	<i>Holconia sp.</i>			1									
36	Net-throwing Spider	<i>Deinopsis sp.</i>						1						



Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher



Parson's Chameleon



Pygmy Kingfisher