



Field Guides Tour Report

Madagascar with Mauritius & Reunion Extension 2018

Nov 3, 2018 to Nov 29, 2018

Phil Gregory & local guide

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



The Long-tailed Ground-Roller is quite rare, but our local guide, Fredi, and his crew, were able to find this one and carefully move it towards us, so we got amazing views. Photo by participant Linda Nuttall.

This was my ninth Field Guides Madagascar tour (eleventh overall), and was again a terrific trip with a very congenial fit group who were also very good at spotting. I have gradually fine-tuned this tour to eliminate as many Madagascar Air flights as possible, and we enjoyed close to an ideal itinerary this year. Very dry conditions at Ranomafana certainly depressed some small bird activity, but we had a very good range of species overall and great views of some very special mammals like sifakas, Indri, mouse-lemurs, bamboo-lemurs and woolly lemurs, not to forget non-venomous snakes, day-geckoes, skinks and chameleons as well.

We drove to Ambositre on the first day, stopping at a small marsh where Madagascar Snipe and a bonus Painted Snipe showed well and a Baillon's Crake made a fleeting appearance. Next day was across to Ranomafana, seeing Madagascar Flufftail at a marsh stop en route and getting to the lodge in time for a late lunch. This park is always a highlight but is also the most physically demanding part of the tour, with a couple of hikes that can take most of the morning and involve a bit of up and down, though nothing too strenuous. The rewards are great, with Pitta-like Ground-Roller showing amazingly well, and Velvet Asity seen a couple of times. Rufous-headed Ground-Roller was eventually heard and seen briefly by some, we saw the rare Pollen's Vanga, good looks at Crossley's Vanga and a lucky pick-up of both Madagascar Yellowbrow and Brown Emutail late one afternoon, the first couas in Red-fronted and Blue, and the introduction to the wonderful lemurs, with Golden Bamboo Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur and Milne-Edward's Sifaka.

After Ranomafana we headed south, stopping at the Ambalavao artisan silk making co-operative and the local paper-making enterprise before our new site for Ring-tailed Lemur. This proved to be great; the animals are in very fine condition and we encountered some 3 large groups for great looks. This site is looked after by the local villages, so the money goes back to the community not so some expatriate overlord as at Berenty. Arrival at the beautiful Jardin du Roy was at dusk and we had the next day to explore the attractive sandstone and grassland surroundings, seeing Benson's Rock-thrush, Madagascar Hoopoe and a brief encounter with Madagascar Partridge.

Suitably rested, we drove two hours south to the precious forest fragment at Zombitse in the sapphire mining area, where Giant Coua and Cuckoo-Roller showed beautifully, two White-browed Owls were surprised to see us, and the attractive Verreaux's Sifaka and Zombitse Sportive-Lemur showed well. The local guides came up with the rare Appert's Tetraka too, one of the most range restricted species on earth.

On then via Tulear to the coast at Ifaty, seeing some migrant shorebirds en route as well as the Madagascar form of Three-banded Plover and Kittlitz's Plover with a juvenile. Our time in Ifaty was focused on the legendary spiny forest, and we spent most of our birding time in the eponymous Parc Mosa. Our guides here were Mosa's son Fredi, and his nephews Dedi and Rofia, and they were fantastic at pulling every last bird out of the inhospitable-looking spiny forest, from megas like Long-tailed Ground-Roller, and Subdesert Mesite, to the tricky and secretive Thamnornis, and even a bonus Madagascar Sparrowhawk nest. The forest also produced Archbold's Newtonia, Lafresnaye's Vanga, and both Crested and Running Couas.

Nearby, we had good looks at Madagascar Plover with a juvenile, and a surprise Caspian Tern. The Bamboo Club itself was good for some dusk views of Madagascar Nightjar feeding or drinking over the pool. Our second afternoon was set aside for a targeted visit to the amazing arid dense thorny vegetation at La Table, where we were able to track down both Green-capped and the rare Verreaux's Coua, and where Fredi did an amazing job of finding an astonishingly confiding male Red-shouldered Vanga. Both of these latter species have tiny worldwide ranges, and it was great to connect with them both.

Our boat trip out to Nosy Ve took place in thankfully calm conditions, with wonderful views of Crab-plover and the gorgeous Red-tailed Tropicbird, which was new for most folks, and Littoral Rock-thrush at Anakau also showed nicely, even with a female this year. We got back in good time for lunch then our flight to Tana was uneventful; having just two Mad Air flights on the tour is such a relief after the tribulations of previous years!

Driving up to Ankarafantsika, we encountered a bonus Malagasy Harrier and our first Madagascar Pratincoles on the Betsiboka River. We were based at the park, and met up with our excellent local guide, arriving just before a heavy storm hit. A short night walk dodged the tempest and got us Golden-brown Mouse-Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf-Lemur and Oustalet's Chameleon, plus several of the scarce Rhinoceros Chameleons.

The following day, we had a mission to see all of the local special species. We began very well with a newly discovered nest of Schlegel's Asity, then after breakfast some first-rate spectacular views of duetting White-breasted Mesite, and eventually 2 separate splendid Van Dam's Vanga -- a rare species that is easily missed. Coquerel's and Red-capped couas showed well too, as did Madagascar Green Pigeon. Milne-Edward's Sportive-Lemur was a good find, peeking out of a crack in a hollow tree, then we managed two Madagascar Fish-Eagles soaring over the lake. The Madagascar Jacana was proving recalcitrant this year, but our guide knew of a site and we backtracked to a marsh where we found this rare species plus our first Humblot's Heron and a bonus of Harlequin Quail.

The Betsiboka estuary boat trip worked like a charm this year with a foray out at first light and back by 0930, with calm seas, the tide rising and just right for great looks at a couple of the rare and very distinctive "Malagasy" Sacred Ibis (split by the IOC and HBW/BirdLife checklists), plus a bonus of 7 Crab-plovers. Back then on an uneventful lunch time flight to Tana, with a night at the Tamboho before splitting up into two SUVs for the eastern leg of the tour.

As we drove east, we stopped for good views of Madagascar Pratincole once more. World famous Andasibe (also known as Perinet in the old days) was the focal destination, and our hotel for some 4 nights was the incomparable Feon N'y Ala (which translates to "song of the forest", referring to the haunting vocalizations of the Indri) nestled in at the very edge of this wonderful native forest. True to its name our home base gave us daily hearings of their wonderful calls, one of the most evocative of all Madagascar sounds.

We had a full morning each at the Mantadia and Andasibe units of the National Park, and we experienced some truly special birds- Scaly Ground-Roller, Short-legged Ground-Roller, Nuthatch Vanga, Malagasy Spinetail, Madagascar Wood-Rail and Madagascar Long-eared and Madagascar Scops Owl. In addition to Indri, our other non-birds included some Common Brown Lemurs and an amazing Giant Leaf-tailed Gecko plus an assortment of chameleons.

We then packed up and headed east, with our next target being the legendary Aye-Aye, a bizarre creature that makes you wonder if it was George Lucas's inspiration for Yoda. A half-day drive to the coast included a couple of rest stops, and during both of these we had the phenomenon of very vocal Madagascar Pratincoles flying around these small towns, right over our heads, and then landing on top of buildings. They were apparently nesting on some of the nearby roofs, and we got to see some of their excellent display flights.

We eventually made it to the coast, and got on our boat. Our boat ride took us through the Canal of Pangalanes, and to the resort, where we had a delightful lunch, followed by an interesting walk around the island with our resort guide. We also got a great rundown on how vanilla is produced on such a grand scale in Madagascar (it's exceptionally labor intensive). Many of the tame lemurs came and had a look at us and we got climbed on by Black Lemurs and hybrid Red-fronted Brown x Black lemurs. They are amazingly well-mannered (totally unlike monkeys which I definitely would not have climbing on me!), have very soft paws, and weigh less than 4 kg (10 lbs), a nice encounter. We then headed out to see the Aye-Aye, seeing one as soon as we got into the forest whilst it was still quite light, and eventually had encounters with some four individuals at the viewing site. Watching these pre-historic looking mammals devour coconuts with the help of their long, thin middle fingers was a huge highlight for everyone.

This year we reverted to our usual Mauritius and Reunion extension. The afternoon departure from Tana on Air Mauritius was uneventful and we got to our hotel at Flic en Flac around 0930 pm, where they had kindly kept the buffet for us.

Our day around Mauritius was excellent despite some heavy showers which we dodged very nicely. We picked up the big three very quickly, with great views of Mauritius Parakeet, Pink Pigeon, and Mauritius Kestrel at our usual site. Trying for Mauritius Cuckooshrike proved hopeless, but we saw Mauritius Bulbul at 3 sites, a valuable addition of a sometimes tough species. The short boat trip to Ile aux Aigrettes sanctuary was really good this time, and we enjoyed great looks at Mauritius Fody, close Mauritius Olive White-eyes and a wonderful 105-year-old 200 kg adult male Aldabra Giant Tortoise, plus some of the rare Telfair's Skinks. A fine addition to the trip and well worth the effort.

Reunion this year proved problematic due to riots over fuel prices and the cost of living; we got caught up in traffic so could not make a sortie up into the hills, but did manage an excellent sea-watch near St Denis which gave great looks at Barau's Petrels and Tropical Shearwater, plus what proved to be a pale morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater flying like a Pterodroma! Next day we were advised to leave at 0430 for the airport due to likely roadblocks, so our birding on this sector was very curtailed, though everyone took it in good part and was happy to make their rescheduled and now much earlier flights!

Itinerary 2018

Nov 5 Group arrives Tana

Nov 6 Tana to Ambositre via Ambatofotsy and Antsirabe.
Nov 7 Ambositre to Ranomafana, roadside birding pm.
Nov 8 Ranomafana Bamboo lemur circuit and Bellevue, pm Vohiparara and mouse-lemurs.
Nov 9 Vohiparara Trail am and pm.
Nov 10 Ranomafana to Finanarantsoa, Ambalavaosilk making then then Ring-tailed lemur reserve and early evening at Jardin du Roy at Isalo.
Nov 11 Isalo area
Nov 12 Isalo to Zombitse then Tulear and Ifaty
Nov 13 Parc Mosa 0545-0930, and Mangily salines, spiny forest 1600-1800.
Nov 14 Ifaty to Tulear depart 1400, La Table 1545-1745.
Nov 15 Boat trip to Nosy Ve and Anakau, before pm flight to Tana
Nov 16 Leave for Ankarafantsika by road at 0730, overnight at the National Park.
Sun Nov 17 Ankarafantsika area and Lac Ravelobe then to Mahajunga.
Nov 18 Mahajunga and Betsiboka estuary early am leave 0730 and back by 0900. Flight to Tana mid-day.
Nov 19 Lac Alarobia and then Andasibe
Nov 20 Mantadia and Andasibe roadside pm
Nov 21 Indri Circuit and roadside pm
Nov 22 Mantadia and roadsides pm
Nov 23 To Pangalanes
Nov 24 Pangalanes then to Feon N'y Ala and Antananarivo
Sun Nov 25 Departure pm for Mauritius
Mon Nov 26 Mauritius Black River Gorges area and Ile aux Aigrettes pm
Tue Nov 27 Mauritius to Reunion, sea-watch off St Denis late pm
Wed Nov 28 Early departure to airport on Reunion, then assorted departures home.

Particular thanks to the brilliant Gerard, our long-time local fixer and birder, and to the various hard-working, skilled and entertaining local guides: Jean-Cris, Zo and Baku at Ranomafana, Randria and Andry at Zombitse, Fredi, Dedi and Rofia the 3 beagles at the spiny forest, Fredi at La Table, Ndrema at Ankarafantsika and the incomparable Nestor at Andasibe. For the extension there was also Jean-Claude on Mauritius and Fred (albeit briefly!) on Reunion. Special thanks to Sharon in the Field Guides office for good logistics on such a complex and difficult itinerary.

I enjoyed sharing all these wonderful sightings in Madagascar and the Mascarenes with you, and look forward to another chance to do the same in another part of the world. Safe travels, good birding, and the best for 2019 to you all!

Phil Gregory Kuranda Dec 2018

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

WHITE-FACED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna viduata*) – Small numbers at several sites, with most at Lac Alarobia.

COMB DUCK (OLD WORLD) (*Sarkidiornis melanotos melanotos*) – A single male at Lac Alarobia was a good trip tick; this species is rare on the tour.

AFRICAN PYGMY-GOOSE (*Nettapus auritus*) – The last species of waterfowl that we added to the trip list. We had 11 of these charismatic birds at the extensive marsh at Ambondromamy, for excellent scope views.

HOTTENTOT TEAL (*Spatula hottentota*) – Just two at the Tamboho marsh this year, and half a dozen at Lac Alarobia, less than usual.

MELLER'S DUCK (*Anas melleri*) – Just 2 of this scarce, large, marsh-loving duck at Lac Alarobia, one at Mantadia and a completely unexpected group of 6 on the Pangalanes canal later. Two dark ducks flying over at Andasibe looked like this species too. [E]

RED-BILLED DUCK (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) – Small numbers at most wetlands, with a big flock of 150 at Ambatofotsy on the first day.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

HARLEQUIN QUAIL (*Coturnix delegorguei*) – Our foray after Madagascar Jacana saw us also tramp through the rough grass nearby, flushing some 4 Harlequin Quail as our reward. This looks to be a regular site for it, one we found just last year.

MADAGASCAR PARTRIDGE (*Margaroperdix madagarensis*) – One furtive bird at Isalo showed all too briefly, always elusive. [E]

GRAY FRANCOLIN (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – A covey of 6 in grassland at Bel Ombre, where the newly introduced population of Ring-necked Pheasant might be competing for food resources. [I]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

MADAGASCAR GREBE (*Tachybaptus pelzelni*) – A pair with 2 juveniles on the small pond at Mantadia, our usual site for it. [E]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – A few seen in Tana and then common on Mauritius and Reunion, just about all the others were racing or domestic pigeons. [I]

PINK PIGEON (*Nesoenas mayeri*) – Great views at Bel Ombre and then at the reintroduction site at Petrin. Still a very rare species with about 450 birds in the wild, up from just 10 in 1988. The Durrell Foundation played a big part in saving this species from extinction, see "Golden Bats and Pink Pigeons" by Gerald Durrell. [E]

MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia picturata*) – Small numbers in Madagascar, and better views and totals on Mauritius, where it is introduced. [I]

SPOTTED DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – A few around Bel Ombre and Flic en Flac on Mauritius. [I]

NAMAQUA DOVE (*Oena capensis aliena*) – Good views of the drier areas, starting at Isalo.

ZEBRA DOVE (*Geopelia striata*) – Small numbers of this diminutive introduced bird around Flic en Flac and Bel Ombre on Mauritius. [I]

MADAGASCAR GREEN-PIGEON (*Treron australis*) – One seen well at Ankarafantsika, and a brief flyby from Andasibe was it for the trip. [E]

MADAGASCAR BLUE-PIGEON (*Alectroenas madagascariensis*) – Just a single from Andasibe was it for the trip, unusually scarce this time. [E]

Mesitornithidae (Mesites)

WHITE-BREASTED MESITE (*Mesitornis variegatus*) – An unforgettable sighting of a duetting pair at Ankarafantsika, my video is posted on the IBC and the Smugmug site and this was one of my best ever experiences with this rare bird. [E]

SUBDESERT MESITE (*Monias benschi*) – A fine adult female marshalled by the local lads and frozen on a branch at the spiny forest, but yet again I did not get to see it move. I still have an ambition to see one do something other than blink! [E]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

CRESTED COUA (CRESTED) (*Coua cristata cristata*) – This white-vented form was seen at Ankarafantsika. [E]

CRESTED COUA (CHESTNUT-VENTED) (*Coua cristata pyropyga*) – Good views at the spiny forest; this chestnut-vented race is split by HBW/BirdLife. [E]

VERREAUX'S COUA (*Coua verreauxi*) – As usual, skulking and elusive at La Table but eventually gave fairly good views; sat on a nest hidden in a thorn bush. [E]

BLUE COUA (*Coua caerulea*) – 4 sightings of one or two birds from the wetter forests; a very striking species and quite vocal at times. Many folks got a very fine one at Feon N'y Ala one afternoon. They look curiously like a turaco in flight. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (*Coua ruficeps*) – Good views at Ankarafantsika, our usual site. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (GREEN-CAPPED) (*Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps*) – Great views at La Table where one sat up in plain view on an octopus tree. Split by BirdLife/HBW as Green or Olive-capped Coua. [E]

RED-FRONTED COUA (*Coua reynaudii*) – One bird sans tail was at Ranomafana in the forest there, and there was a juvenile with striking rusty wing-bars in the undergrowth nearby, and puzzling us for some while as to what it really was! Also seen nicely on a track late afternoon at Andasibe. [E]

COQUEREL'S COUA (*Coua coquereli*) – Seen well at Ankarafantsika after hearing them at Zombitse. [E]

RUNNING COUA (*Coua cursor*) – This is one of the more elusive ones, but we got one very well at Parc Mosa, complete with lilac cheek patch. Photo on the IBC site. [E]

GIANT COUA (*Coua gigas*) – Very nice views at Zombitse where this very large bird showed well. [E]

RED-BREASTED COUA (*Coua serriana*) – Tough at Mantadia where a close calling bird was very hard to see, a couple of us saw the tail, basically, and that was it. Always one of the hardest of the couas. [E]

MADAGASCAR COUCAL (*Centropus toulou*) – Heard most days and some nice views on several occasions, as at the Pangalanes. [E]

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO (*Cuculus rochii*) – A fine bird on a wire at Ambatofotsy marsh, and seen once of twice later, as well as being heard on many days of the tour, the "Mad-a cuck-oo" call is very distinctive. [E]

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COLLARED NIGHTJAR (*Gactornis enarratus*) – One of the most striking of all nightjars, and still vocally undescribed. We saw a beauty that was nesting atop a small bird's nest fern at Andasibe and remarkably difficult to distinguish from the dead leaves; they seem to really like this plant for this purpose. We had missed it in 2017 due to the wasp incident en route to the site that year! [E]

MADAGASCAR NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*) – A lovely perched bird in the spiny forest at Parc Mosa, then a couple flying over and drinking from the pool at the Bamboo Club. Heard at Feon N'y Ala and the Pangalanes too. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

BAILLON'S CRAKE (*Zapornia pusilla*) – A single, skulking in the reeds at Ambatofotsy marsh, was a lucky find as we have only seen this once before on the tour.

Apodidae (Swifts)

MALAGASY SPINETAIL (*Zoonavena grandidieri*) – A couple from Zombitse, and again at Mantadia; a very local and uncommon species. [E]

MASCARENE SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus francicus*) – Good views of small numbers on Mauritius.

ALPINE SWIFT (*Apus melba willsi*) – John found us one over a small town en route to Ankarafantsika; this is an endemic race.

MADAGASCAR SWIFT (*Apus balstoni*) – Seen at Tana, and vocal at Ranomafana near the waterfall area. [E]

AFRICAN PALM-SWIFT (MADAGASCAR) (*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*) – Widespread in small numbers, the most at Ranomafana and Mahajunga. They were nesting in the palms at the Centr'est.

Sarothruridae (Flufftails)

MADAGASCAR WOOD-RAIL (*Canirallus kioloides kioloides*) – Seen briefly at Ranomafana, then much better one afternoon at Andasibe, where one flew up and perched in a tree.

MADAGASCAR FLUFFTAIL (*Sarothrura insularis*) – A lucky early find at the marsh near Ambositre, it showed quite well and close by. Heard at the usual forest sites but always hard to lure out. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

MADAGASCAR RAIL (*Rallus madagascariensis*) – Frustrating, a couple of folks saw this in a reedy stream at Andasibe, but it was a narrow window job and most of us could not see it. Also heard by a couple of folks when Gerard started going after it. [E]

WHITE-THROATED RAIL (*Dryolimnas cuvieri cuvieri*) – Heard at various wetland sites, a bird showed really well at Lac Alarobia, and another was bathing at Feon N'y Ala, this is a big and striking species.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorhoa*) – Seen at Lac Alarobia and the marsh by the Tamboho.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – A pair with a juvenile at the lagoon near Tulear, then 2 near Ifaty and 3 at Mangily later.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – 16 at Tsingotelo and 4 on Nosy Ve, then 3 on the Betsiboka boat trip.

GREATER SAND-PLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) – 2 at Tsingotelo, 5 at Betsiboka and one on a sandbar at the Pangalanes.

KITTLITZ'S PLOVER (*Charadrius pecuarius*) – 8 at the lagoon near Ifaty with a tiny juvenile seen, and a single later.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – 5 on the lagoon near Ifaty and a couple of singles later in the trip.

MADAGASCAR PLOVER (*Charadrius thoracicus*) – This rare bird was again at the saltflats at Mangily, still the only site where I have ever seen it.

This time the pair had a tiny greyish juvenile. Great views, but I wonder if Kittlitz's Plover is displacing it? [E]

THREE-BANDED PLOVER (MADAGASCAR) (*Charadrius tricollaris bifrontatus*) – One at Ambatofotsy and one at a lagoon near Ifaty, and some saw it at the Tamboho marsh. Interestingly, this taxon is rather different to African birds, with a greyish not white forehead, and it is split by the latest HBW/BirdLife review as Madagascar Three-banded Plover, *C. bifrontatus*. Note the Sinclair & Langrand guide depicts the white forehead of the African race!

WHITE-FRONTED PLOVER (*Charadrius marginatus tenellus*) – Three on a lagoon near Ifaty, one at the salines at Mangily and 2 on Nosy Ve.

Rostratulidae (Painted-Snipes)

GREATER PAINTED-SNIPE (*Rostratula benghalensis*) – A male flushed a couple of times at Ambatofotsy marsh.

Jacanidae (Jacanas)

MADAGASCAR JACANA (*Actophilornis albinucha*) – Tough again this year, Ndrema knew of a site some 45 minutes drive back towards Tana and our foray there gave us nice views of 2 of this rare bird, plus a bonus Humblot's Heron. [E]

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – Scarce this year, we saw small numbers at Tsingotelo and at Betsiboka. There were also two probable Eurasian Curlew there, I should have got the boat to go back to check properly!

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Two day records, with one at Tsingotelo and then 4 at Nosy Ve.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*) – 11 on the lagoon near Tulear and 5 closer to Ifaty, now sadly an Endangered species due to habitat loss and hunting.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – 12 at Tsingotelo and 4 on Nosy Ve; always a nice bird to see.

MADAGASCAR SNIPE (*Gallinago macrodactyla*) – Our foray out into the paddies and marsh at Ambatofotsy was rewarded with good flight view of 2 of this rare and elusive large snipe. We again employed a local herd boy as a "snipeur" and he did a good job flushing them! [E]

TEREK SANDPIPER (*Xenus cinereus*) – Just a couple on the Betsiboka boat trip, the upturned bill, orange legs and dashing behaviour very distinctive.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Small numbers, with 3 at Tsingotelo mangroves the most.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – One at Ambatofotsy, then 15 at Tsingotelo and 20 on the Betsiboka boat trip.

Turnicidae (Buttonquail)

MADAGASCAR BUTTONQUAIL (*Turnix nigricollis*) – Flushed at Isalo with two single birds, then a fine male herded for us by the lads at the spiny forest; the video is on Smugmug and the IBC. Linda found a pair with 2 juveniles at the Palmarium too, an unexpected sighting and nice to prove breeding there. [E]

Dromadidae (Crab-Plover)

CRAB-PLOVER (*Dromas ardeola*) – 27 on the beach at Nosy Ve, and 7 on the Betsiboka mudflats with 4 flying by earlier. It is always great to see this odd species, which is a monotypic family as well. This extraordinary bird breeds in burrows on desolate islands in the Red Sea and migrates down the coast of E Africa.

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

MADAGASCAR PRATINCOLE (*Glareola ocularis*) – The first were two on rocks in the Betsiboka River en route to Ankarafantsika, the first time we have seen it here. Then two pairs plus a chick on rocks in the Mangoro River at the usual site, with nice views in the afternoon light, and 5 on rooftops at Brickaville and 5 on a small island in the Pangalanes. A good trip for them. [E]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BRIDLED TERN (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) – Small numbers off Flic en Flac on Mauritius.

SAUNDERS'S TERN (*Sternula saundersi*) – A couple seen in the Betsiboka estuary, tiny and with a grey rump and tail.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A single over a saltpan at Mangily was a surprise, this is not seen on most tours.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – Small numbers at Tsingotelo near Ifaty.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii*) – A couple at Tsingotelo near Ifaty, with the typical greenish-yellow bill, and 6 at Betsiboka.

LESSER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bengalensis*) – Good looks at 20 at Nosy Ve; the orange bill is quite distinctive and reminiscent of Elegant Tern.

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD (INDIAN OCEAN) (*Phaethon lepturus lepturus*) – Nice looks at Bel Ombre on Mauritius with 4 birds hawking over the cane fields.

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon rubricauda rubricauda*) – A trip highlight was the visit to the small nesting colony on Nosy Ve, where we had lovely looks at them in flight and saw one come in to land and go to its nest under a dense bush. A terrific experience.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

BARAU'S PETREL (*Pterodroma barau*) – A great save in the little time we had for birding on Reunion, where the jetty I wanted at Barachois was blocked off by protesters so we watched from a small park nearby. This was well worthwhile with good views of Barau's Petrels, with over 50 seen and some nice and close. [E]

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Ardenna pacifica*) – Good looks at some dark morph birds off Flic en Flac beach, then a striking pale morph bird off Barachois on Reunion that was flying quite like a *Pterodroma* some of the time!

TROPICAL SHEARWATER (MASCARENE) (*Puffinus bailloni bailloni*) – My best ever views of this small black and white shearwater, with at least 10 seen off Barachois, some quite close in for once so we could see the white undertail coverts. A lifer for most folks and a nice save given our lack of birding time on Reunion this year.

Scopidae (Hamerkop)

HAMERKOP (*Scopus umbretta umbretta*) – Very few again this trip, all singles out in rice paddies with just 4 day records.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (MALAGASY) (*Ardea cinerea firsas*) – Two at Tsingotelo and one there next day; this is an endemic race and is quite scarce.

HUMBLLOT'S HERON (*Ardea humbloti*) – One at Ambomdromamy marsh was a nice find, then we had two on the Betsiboka boat trip, one of which showed very well. [E]

PURPLE HERON (PURPLE) (*Ardea purpurea madagascariensis*) – 5 day records of singles, the first being from Tsingotelo, another scarce endemic race.

GREAT EGRET (AFRICAN) (*Ardea alba melanorhynchos*) – Widespread in very small numbers.

LITTLE EGRET (DIMORPHIC) (*Egretta garzetta dimorpha*) – Also widespread in small numbers, with a breeding colony en route to Ranomafana. Around 70 dark morph birds were seen on the Betsiboka boat trip, then about 130 white morph at Lac Alarobia where they are nesting. IOC split this as Dimorphic Egret but the taxonomy remains vexed.

BLACK HERON (*Egretta ardesiaca*) – Worryingly scarce, we saw one wing-spreading at Ankarafantsika, then just a single at Lac Alarobia.

CATTLE EGRET (WESTERN) (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – Very small numbers, the only concentration being the colony at Lac Alarobia.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – A very good count of 180+ at Lac Alarobia where they are nesting, with begging juveniles harassing the parents. Also 10 at Ankarafantsika and 20 at Ambomdromamy marsh.

MADAGASCAR POND-HERON (*Ardeola idae*) – I was getting anxious as we had not encountered any till we finally got 3 in breeding dress at Lac Alarobia, the blue bill base very conspicuous. Looked to have a nest there too, which is good as the Squacco Heron seems to be replacing it. [E]

STRIATED HERON (OLD WORLD) (*Butorides striata rutenbergi*) – Widespread in very small numbers, with a single also being seen on Mauritius near Ile aux aigrettes.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – 20 at Lac Alarobia and odd sightings at other wetlands late in the day.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Just 3 at the lake at Ankarafantsika.

SACRED IBIS (MALAGASY) (*Threskiornis aethiopicus bernieri*) – This rare bird was one of the prizes on the Betsiboka boat trip; we had a good view of a total of 9 on the mudbanks. A rare and endangered species, split by the IOC and HBW/BirdLife checklists as the plumage is quite distinct, with white wing tips and a pale yellow eye. [E]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

MADAGASCAR HARRIER-HAWK (*Polyboroides radiatus*) – Six day records was more than usual, the first near Ambositre then 2 birds at Ifaty, Betsiboka and Mantadia [E]

REUNION HARRIER (MALAGASY) (*Circus maillardi macroceles*) – This was a good find on the way north to Ankarafantsika, in a grassy upland area that still has pair or two of this rare bird. We then saw an immature plumage bird at Lac Alarobia, it stopped low over the herons and caused a panic, a very unexpected sighting. Split by most checklists as Madagascar Harrier. [E]

FRANCES'S SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter francesiae*) – A lucky pick up as we were leaving the Pangalanes, the only small accipiter in such open country and the final tick of the trip. [E]

MADAGASCAR SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter madagascariensis*) – Great views of female by her nest at Parc Mosa again this year; this is quite a rare species. [E]

HENST'S GOSHAWK (*Accipiter henstii*) – Heard quite close-by over the tall forest at Vohiparara, but not visible; a pity as this is a rare bird we seldom get. [E*]

BLACK KITE (YELLOW-BILLED) (*Milvus migrans parasitus*) – Widespread in small numbers, many checklists split this as Yellow-billed Kite.

MADAGASCAR FISH-EAGLE (*Haliaeetus vociferoides*) – Nice flight views of two adults high over the lake at Ampijoroa, great to see them in flight with the white tail very visible. A Critically Endangered species and one of the rarest eagles in the world. [E]

MADAGASCAR BUZZARD (*Buteo brachypterus*) – More than usual with some 11 records, the first near Ambositre, and ending with a couple from Mantadia. [E]

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (*Tyto alba*) – Linda and Mark saw one fly past at the Carlton one night, and what sounds like it could be another on a verge near Isalo at dusk.

Strigidae (Owls)

MALAGASY SCOPS-OWL (*Otus rutilus*) – Heard at Ranomafana, then a lovely bird roosting in a thicket at Andasibe (Perinet) village, not at the usual park site this year. Unluckily a big storm meant the roosting Torotoroka Scops at Zombitse had moved, which was a pity. [E]

WHITE-BROWED OWL (*Athene superciliaris*) – I taped one in at the Jardin Du Roy for nice views of it sat on a chalet roof, then the guides at Zombitse had a beautiful pair at a day roost. We also heard a single call at the Pangalanes hotel. [E]

MADAGASCAR OWL (*Asio madagascariensis*) – Nestor was on point for this one and the very first afternoon we trekked up into the pine forest to see a fine adult preening at its roost. Video on the Smugmug site. [E]

Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-roller)

CUCKOO-ROLLER (*Leptosomus discolor*) – This is a very special bird, a very ancient lineage with no known close relatives, comprising its very own order and monotypic family, Leptosomidae! The call is one of the great sounds of the Madagascar forests. We had great looks at Zombitse and Mantadia in particular, and this was a trip favourite.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

MADAGASCAR HOOPOE (*Upupa marginata*) – A group of 6 at Jardin du Roy, and odd birds from Parc Mosa. [E]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

MALAGASY KINGFISHER (*Corythornis vintsioides*) – Another trip favourite, widespread and seen especially well at Lac Alarobia. [E]

MADAGASCAR PYGMY-KINGFISHER (*Corythornis madagascariensis*) – A good trip for this easily missed species, with one at Ampijoroa and then another by the road at Andasibe. Video on the Smugmug site. [E]

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

MADAGASCAR BEE-EATER (*Merops superciliosus*) – Widespread in small numbers.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

BROAD-BILLED ROLLER (MADAGASCAR) (*Eurystomus glaucurus glaucurus*) – Likewise widespread in small numbers and with a great quacking call.

Brachypteraciidae (Ground-Rollers)

SHORT-LEGGED GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias leptosomus*) – We dipped utterly at Andasibe, but got back in the game next day with a fine bird perched at Mantadia. These are the largest of the ground-roller family. Despite this family being endemic to Madagascar, this particular species bears an incredible resemblance, in both appearance and behavior, to the puffbirds of Central and South America, an excellent example of convergent evolution filling similar niches in very disparate places. [E]

SCALY GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias squamiger*) – No sign of it on our first Mantadia visit, but a return match a couple of days later came good with fine views of a bird on the forest floor, with a lovely backdrop of indri calls- see the video on Smugmug. [E]

PITTA-LIKE GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis pittoides*) – Exceptional views this trip with very obliging birds from Ranomafana, feeding right out in the open, a lovely bird from a remarkable family. We even briefly saw one by the road from the bus one afternoon! Twenty years ago you were lucky to see two or 3 of the 5 species, this being the most widespread, [E]

RUFIOUS-HEADED GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis crossleyi*) – Very hard again this year, we tried up at Vohiparara three times and got a partial result late one afternoon when we got one calling fairly close. Some of us got brief looks at it perched up, but it soon slunk away and that was it; this is always the hardest of the family to get. [E]

LONG-TAILED GROUND-ROLLER (*Uratelornis chimaera*) – We watched Fredi and his crew herd a pair of these towards us at Parc Mosa, providing us with great views of this exceptionally rare bird (which used to be so hard to find). This species is restricted to the spiny forest in the Ifaty area, so it has an extremely small population, and its habitat is being steadily degraded, making it likely that it will only get rarer. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MADAGASCAR KESTREL (*Falco newtoni*) – Widespread throughout with up to 5 in day. [E]

MAURITIUS KESTREL (*Falco punctatus*) – Wonderful views of a pair near their nest box at Bel Ombre, calling and flying as well as sitting. Once down to a mere 4 birds, they have now recovered to about 450 and are in 3 main sites. [E]

ELEONORA'S FALCON (*Falco eleonora*) – One of the birds of the trip, this beauty was flying over the sea quite close inshore as we approached our boat at Chez Karon at Mahajunga. A very good find as they seem to winter more in the north and we rarely see them on the tour.

SOOTY FALCON (*Falco concolor*) – Just a single at Tana airport, it gave good views both perched and in flight. Linda and Mark also saw one at the Carlton Hotel; like Eleonora's Falcon it has a restricted breeding range and the few thousand pairs winter over a vast area of Madagascar and East Africa.

Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

GREATER VASA PARROT (*Coracopsis vasa*) – Seen very well at Ampijoroa and also at Mantadia/Andasibe. Not easy to tell from Lesser Vasa, though bigger and with a different head pattern. The vasa-parrots are among the most primitive of all extant parrots, and as such they have several unique attributes, the most striking of which are related to their reproductive cycles. The females are larger and dominant, and they often live in loose polygynandrous groups, with a single female having anywhere from 3 to 8 sexual partners, and courtship and single copulations often lasting over an hour. Both vasa parrots are also known to use tools, especially for grinding calcium out of seashells, perhaps to help make stronger eggs come breeding season. [E]

LESSER VASA PARROT (*Coracopsis nigra*) – Relatively few this trip, the best being from Zombitse where we had a perched flock of 11. [E]

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*) – Just two birds flying by near Bel Ombre. [I]

ECHO PARAKEET (*Psittacula eques*) – Lovely views from Bel Ombre with 5 of them near the feeding site, including several dark-billed females.

GRAY-HEADED LOVEBIRD (*Agapornis canus*) – Just 4 day records, from Isalo, Parc Mosa, La Table and Ampijoroa. Nice looks at them perched on several occasions but no big flocks this year. [E]

Philepittidae (Asities)

VELVET ASITY (*Philepitta castanea*) – Tricky this year, we saw a couple of females in Ranomafana but had no luck with any male. [E]

SCHLEGEL'S ASITY (*Philepitta schlegeli*) – Our guides knew of a nest, so we went straight there and had great views of a male of this bizarre and very rare species with the strikingly colored facial skin. There was a female seen later as well, and this is the only site we get this bird. [E]

COMMON SUNBIRD-ASITY (*Neodrepanis coruscans*) – Very hard this year with no sign at all at Ranomafana despite lots of flowering Bakerella. I asked Nestor if he ever got it, and luckily he had a site up at Mantadia with lots of pink flowers. Linda spotted a quite close Sunbird Asity male and we were greatly relieved to get nice views plus a good recording. Common is a serious misnomer here..... [E]

Vangidae (Vangas, Helmetshrikes, and Allies).

CHABERT VANGA (CHABERT) (*Leptopterus chabert chabert*) – Nominally dark-tailed birds showed well at Andasibe, with a nest with chicks there, amazingly inconspicuous as it was so small and tucked away on a branch node at the Parc Villageois. The species was also seen at the Pangalanes.

CHABERT VANGA (WHITE-TAILED) (*Leptopterus chabert schistocercus*) – This white-tailed taxon was seen at the spiny forest.

ARCHBOLD'S NEWTONIA (*Newtonia archboldi*) – Good views of 2 calling birds at the spiny forest, the only place we usually see this species. [E]

COMMON NEWTONIA (*Newtonia brunneicauda*) – Widespread in the forests in the east, and encountered regularly in appropriate habitat. Especially conspicuous by their loud simple two-noted song, which was a frequent sound at the forest sites. [E]

DARK NEWTONIA (*Newtonia amphichroa*) – On our morning hike on the trail towards Vohiparara (at Ranomafana NP), we found a vocal bird which turned out to be quite obliging, giving good views for flitting about in the understorey. This is rather well-named, as it's the *Newtonia* with the dark eye and bill, and is overall fairly dusky gray. There may also be two species, involved but they look pretty much alike so if adopted it's one of these dodgy genetic splits. [E]

TYLAS VANGA (*Tylas eduardi*) – Seen at Ranomafana and Andasibe, some good views. [E]

RED-TAILED VANGA (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*) – Vocal in the wet forests and often heard, with nice views from Ranomafana and Andasibe.

The males have a very striking chickadee/tit-like facial pattern, in addition to the obvious red tail and shoulders. [E]

RED-SHOULDERED VANGA (*Calicalicus rufocarpalis*) – Fredi did very well to find one of these, a male that began responding just as I was thinking we might be in for a dip. One of the rarest endemic birds of Madagascar, there are likely fewer, perhaps far fewer, than a thousand individuals. It was first collected in 1947, but not described until 1997. It is restricted to a few known sites along the exceptionally arid Mahafaly plateau near Tulear, whose harsh landscape it inhabits in lower densities than you would expect. [E]

NUTHATCH-VANGA (*Hypositta corallirostris*) – Always a real challenge, and usually a species we encounter just one time, as was the case at the eleventh hour this year, when we had two spotted by Mark at the Parc Villageois at Andasibe. This is one of the most unique species within the diverse Vangidae family. It truly lives up to its name, behaving like a nuthatch and was formerly assumed to be one, being called "Coral-billed Nuthatch" for many years. [E]

CROSSLEY'S VANGA (*Mystacornis crossleyi*) – Calling well at Ranomafana, and our second encounter on the main trail got a fine pair to show very well. Formerly called Crossley's Babbler, but now shown to be an odd terrestrial vanga! [E]

BLUE VANGA (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*) – Unusually widespread this trip, we had multiple encounters and the call was often heard; when seen in good light this is a pretty stunning species. [E]

HOOK-BILLED VANGA (*Vanga curvirostris*) – Seen at the spiny forest, then at Ampijoroa, and heard at Andasibe. It is very reminiscent of a Butcherbird in Australia in both coloration and shape, a curious convergence. [E]

WARD'S FLYCATCHER (*Pseudobias wardi*) – Quite vocal in the wet forests with its characteristic dry trill, we saw them at Ranomafana and Andasibe. Formerly placed with flycatchers but another one that is now placed with vangas. [E]

RUFOUS VANGA (*Schetba rufa*) – Just a single male this trip from Zombitse. [E]

SICKLE-BILLED VANGA (*Falcula palliata*) – They had a nest at the spiny forest and we saw 2 birds nicely here, with another nest at Ampijoroa, a very striking species. [E]

WHITE-HEADED VANGA (*Artamella viridis*) – Most folks saw it by the sifakas at Ranomafana, but the species was hard this year and I only got a view of a male at Ampijoroa when no-one else was around. [E]

POLLEN'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris polleni*) – Another rare large-billed *Xenopirostris* vanga, this elusive bird came good at Ranomafana with a fine pair on the last day as we were leaving, having heard it the two days previously with only one or two getting glimpses. [E]

LAFRESNAYE'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris xenopirostris*) – Good views of a female near a nest, and later a male at the spiny forest, and heard out at La Table. [E]

VAN DAM'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris damii*) – Considered the rarest and most threatened of all the vangas, this species is only known from two locales, and it's no picnic to track down even at those two sites. Luckily, after an hour or so in the forest above the lodge at Ankarafantsika, and despite the deafening cicada noise and complete lack of vocalization from these birds, Ndrema tracked down a wonderfully obliging male for us. We actually saw another later on the way back to the lodge, but this rare bird is easily missed on a tour. [E]

Campephagidae (Cuckooshrikes).

ASHY CUCKOOSHRIKE (*Coracina cinerea*) – Four day records from Ranomafana, Andasibe and Ampijoroa, where a bird had very white underparts. A nest was also seen at Zombitse but no birds were near it. [E]

Dicruridae (Drongos).

CRESTED DRONGO (*Dicrurus forficatus*) – Small numbers at most sites, and a very odd bird with a white face at the Jardin du Roy. I just missed getting a photo, a shame as plumage anomalies are rare in Madagascar species. [E]

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers).

MADAGASCAR PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone mutata*) – Lovely views from all the forested habitats, though we seemed to see more females this time, and the white morph males did not flaunt themselves. [E]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

HOUSE CROW (*Corvus splendens*) – Singles seen a couple of times on Mauritius. an invasive that needs to be shot out PDQ. [I]

PIED CROW (*Corvus albus*) – A very smart-looking large crow, with a very raven-like flight style. It was fairly widespread in the open country around Madagascar, mostly during our drives. Despite the frequency of our sightings, the most we saw at any one time was 10.

Alaudidae (Larks).

MADAGASCAR LARK (*Eremopterix hova*) – Nice views as we left Ambositre, and quite a few by the roads around the Isalo region. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

- MASCARENE MARTIN** (*Phedina borbonica borbonica*) – I think perhaps only Mark and Linda saw this race on Mauritius, where it is uncommon.
- PLAIN MARTIN (MADAGASCAR)** (*Riparia paludicola cowani*) – An unusually good trip for them, we saw them in small numbers at Ambatofotsy marsh and then around Ranomafana, Isalo and Andasibe. This race is also a likely split from the African taxa, looking much paler bellied.
- MASCARENE MARTIN** (*Phedina borbonica madagascariensis*) – The widespread and common swallow in Madagascar, we saw them at the airport then at the Tamboho in Tana, and continuing on to Ranomafana, Ampijoroa and Andasibe, where they look to be nesting in Perinet railway station. I think only Mark and Linda saw one on Mauritius where it is much scarcer.
- BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – Two over the big reedbeds near the dry river at Tulear; it is rare in Madagascar but this region is now known to be a regular wintering site.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

- RED-WHISKERED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) – Depressingly common on Mauritius where it is an invasive species. [I]
- MADAGASCAR BULBUL** (*Hypsipetes madagascariensis*) – Common and widespread in forested areas (even dry ones) throughout, it is actually a really nice looking bird, with its deep olive coloration, black cap and bright orange bill. [E]
- MAURITIUS BULBUL** (*Hypsipetes olivaceus*) – Lucky this year, we found them 3 times, with good views at Bel Ombre and the picnic site. [E]

Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers and Allies)

- MADAGASCAR BRUSH-WARBLER** (*Nesillas typica*) – A commonly encountered chattering voice throughout our travels away from the dry country, where it is replaced by the following species. The first surprisingly came in the grounds of the Carlton Hotel in Tana where John discovered them in a hedgerow. [E]
- SUBDESERT BRUSH-WARBLER** (*Nesillas lantzii*) – We picked these up easily at La Table, perching out in the open quite well and from very close range. [E]
- MADAGASCAR SWAMP WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus newtoni*) – Nice views at a marsh between Ambositre and Ranomafana, also at Lac Alarobia and the Tamboho Hotel marsh. [E]

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

- BROWN EMUTAIL** (*Bradypterus brunneus*) – A good pick up in the forest at Vohiparara, this is one of the megaskulkers and I think most folks got reasonable looks at it late one afternoon. [E]

Bernieridae (Malagasy Warblers)

- WHITE-THROATED OXYLABES** (*Oxylabes madagascariensis*) – Seen quite well at Mantadia skulking in the undergrowth, and then at Andasibe next day. [E]
- LONG-BILLED BERNIERIA** (*Bernieria madagascariensis*) – Known by most authorities as Long-billed Tetraka rather than the hideous Bernieria construction, this was a fairly common sight in the primary forests of Zombitse, Ranomafana and Ankarafantsika. The dry country taxon inceleber is actually a good bet as a split in due course. [E]
- CRYPTIC WARBLER** (*Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*) – We dipped at Ranomafana, but luckily got one perched up singing one morning at Andasibe. This was the species discovered by Bret Whitney and Jan Pierson back in the 1980's on a FG tour, when they recognised the voice as not belonging to a Jery. [E]
- WEDGE-TAILED JERY** (*Hartertula flavoviridis*) – Frustrating, Linda and Mark were with Gerard who saw 3 flit across the track at Mantadia, but they then vanished and no-one got a proper view. I also think they were in with the tetraka flock there earlier, but proved elusive and no-one really got onto it. [E]
- THAMNORNIS** (*Thamnornis chloropetoides*) – Now boringly renamed the Subdesert Tetraka, this is a specialty from Parc Mosa where we had good views of 3 eventually, and heard them calling very well. [E]
- YELLOW-BROWED OXYLABES** (*Crossleyia xanthophrys*) – Another lucky pick-up from Vohiparara late afternoon after no sign on the previous day. I think some rain had sparked activity and we encountered two birds deep in the undergrowth on the forest floor. They were as ever ultra-skulking, but I think we all managed to get them in the end. I regard this and the Brown Emutail as among the hardest to see forest birds in Madagascar. [E]
- SPECTACLED TETRAKA** (*Xanthomixis zosterops*) – Seen nicely at Ranomafana, and then again at Mantadia. [E]
- APPERT'S TETRAKA** (*Xanthomixis apperti*) – This one of the rarest birds in Madagascar, inhabiting just two patches of transitional forest between the central plateau and the arid west. The easiest place to see it is at Zombitse, and our guides again did a great job finding a couple, and then managing to maneuver everything and everyone into position. They ensured that everybody got more than satisfactory views of these shy and skulking birds, as they foraged on and near the ground just off the edges of a trail. There are around 1,000 Appert's Tetrakas in the entire world, according to IUCN population estimates, so seeing one is a big project. [E]
- GRAY-CROWNED TETRAKA** (*Xanthomixis cinereiceps*) – Another difficult tetraka, living at low density in dense forest; we saw one bird very nicely up at Vohiparara and I was able to record it. See the iBC site for the recording. [E]
- RAND'S WARBLER** (*Randia pseudozosterops*) – A couple were singing and perching up conspicuously as soon as we arrived at Ranomafana on our first visit. We continued to see, and especially hear, them whilst birding there, and then again at Andasibe. [E]

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

- COMMON JERY** (*Neomixis tenella*) – Common and vocal and all the wet forest sites, but by no means easy to see well, we did quite well for them this trip. [E]
- GREEN JERY** (*Neomixis viridis*) – Another inconspicuous forest jery, more often heard than seen, though we had nice looks at Ranomafana and Andasibe. [E]
- STRIPE-THROATED JERY** (*Neomixis striatigula pallidior*) – We saw this taxon of Stripe-throated Jery at Zombitse, Parc Mosa and La Table, and it was actually quite common there. The voice is different to that of the eastern taxa and it is split as Subdesert Jery by the HBW/BirdLife Checklist. [E]
- STRIPE-THROATED JERY** (*Neomixis striatigula striatigula*) – This taxon was seen (though much more often heard) mainly at Andasibe and Mantadia. [E]
- MADAGASCAR CISTICOLA** (*Cisticola cherina*) – Widespread and often heard, seen well at Ambatofotsy then around Isalo and Ambondromamy marsh in the north. [E]

Zosteropidae (White-eyes, Yuhinas, and Allies)

MAURITIUS WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops chloronothos*) – The rare Mauritian (Olive) White-eye, is luckily now breeding on Ile aux Aigrettes where we had nice looks at several birds, an important back-up site for this Critically Endangered species. [E]

MAURITIUS GRAY WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops mauritanus*) – The only fairly common endemic passerine on Mauritius, seen well at several sites. [E]

MADAGASCAR WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops maderaspatanus*) – Abundant and widespread throughout all of our forest birding with the exception of the dry country in the southwest. [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (BLACK-BELLIED) (*Copsychus albospectularis albospectularis*) – I am grateful to Linda for picking up on this one at Mantadia after I had mentioned it might be around but I'd not seen it yet. Interestingly this one had some whitish on the lower belly, and we saw the regular white-bellied taxon nearby here, so these two races do intergrade. One of my birds of the trip!

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-BELLIED) (*Copsychus albospectularis inexpectatus*) – This white-bellied taxon has a black tail, we saw them at both Ranomafana and Andasibe. Anticipated to be split from the dry country one that has more white in the wings and tail.

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-WINGED) (*Copsychus albospectularis pica*) – A couple of these white-bellied birds seen at Isalo, then commonly in the S and W, with the highest concentration being at Parc Mosa. This form has white in the tail and more white in the wings, and is a pending split.

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola sharpei*) – Great views of a male at Ranomafana, see the photos on the Smugmug site. [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (BENSON'S) (*Monticola sharpei bensoni*) – No longer found at our lovely hotel at Isalo, but we had super looks at 2 in a rocky area nearby, and saw a nest on a ledge as well. Another taxonomically challenged form with a dubious genetic study lumping it with Forest Rock -Thrush despite clear habitat and vocal distinctions. [E]

LITTORAL ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola imerina*) – Excellent at Anakau this year, I went off and found one in the dunes only to come back to the group watching a fine male singing atop a chalet by the restaurant, and with a female nearby. They had a nest on a beam by the bar too. This is a range-restricted species, only in the coastal SW. [E]

AFRICAN STONECHAT (MADAGASCAR) (*Saxicola torquatus sibilla*) – Just 5 day records, starting at Ambatofotsy marsh, and the last en route to Mantadia. Stonechat taxonomy remains vexed, IOC split this as Madagascar Stonechat, and some of the African taxa also need splitting. [E]

Sturnidae (Starlings)

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Very widespread, unfortunately. An introduced bird to the country, thankfully one of few. The densities aren't huge in most places, with the highest concentration being a couple of dozen around the lake at the Tamboho. We speculated that their ascendance in the Isalo region could be why Benson's Rock-thrush has all of a sudden become much scarcer than it was just a few years ago. Mynas do seem to be increasing within the Isalo area concurrent with the decrease in rock-thrushes, and the same may apply at Anakau with Littoral Rock-thrush, though the birds don't actually seem to use nest holes like the mynas. [I]

MADAGASCAR STARLING (*Hartlaubius auratus*) – Two singles at Ranomafana on the first morning were the only ones of the tour, they were very scarce this trip. [E]

Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)

SOUIMANGA SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris sovimanga*) – Common in all forested areas. The males are especially striking if you get one that sits still long enough, and their voice is a typical sound of the forest areas. [E]

MADAGASCAR SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris notatus*) – This large long-billed species with the green head is much less common than the Souimanga, but we had nice looks at Ranomafana, Ankarafantsika and Mantadia. [E]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

MADAGASCAR WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flaviventris*) – Scattered liberally throughout our route, with the exception of the dry forest sites in the southwest and south. There was a pair at our hotel in Ranomafana, and these were our most obliging birds of the tour. [E]

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

YELLOW-FRONTED CANARY (*Crithagra mozambica*) – Seen at Flic en Flac on Mauritius where it is introduced. [I]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen at Mahajunga, then again at Antsano en route to the Pangalanes, it is spreading slowly in this country. Common in both Mauritius and Reunion. [I]

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

VILLAGE WEAVER (SPOT-BACKED) (*Ploceus cucullatus spilonotus*) – Quite common on Mauritius, with several colonies seen on the way to the airport as well as at Flic en Flac and the picnic site. This is the southern African spot-backed black-faced taxon, which I anticipate will be split from the very different northern birds in due course.

NELICOURVI WEAVER (*Ploceus nelicourvi*) – An uncommon bird that we saw at both Ranomafana and Andasibe, with a nest at the former site. These two Madagascar weavers are about to be transferred to new genera as they are not closely allied to the Asian Ploceus species. [E]

SAKALAVA WEAVER (*Ploceus sakalava*) – Frequent in the spiny forest at Parc Mosa, and also seen at La Table. We enjoyed watching their large active nesting colony at the entrance to Parc Mosa. [E]

RED FODY (*Foudia madagascariensis*) – One of the few widespread and common endemics. Most males are stunningly red, while the females strongly resemble female House Sparrows, whose niche they somewhat fill in the cities. Also quite common as an introduction on the Mascarenes. [E]

FOREST FODY (*Foudia omissa*) – A special bird from Ranomafana, where there was initially a female which was fortunately joined by a fine male, and was Mark's #4000. We later ran into them at Mantadia and Andasibe too, an unusually good trip for a scarce species. One character we noted was that the black eye mask seems more extensive and less lozenge-shaped with this species as compared to the less robust Madagascar Red Fody. [E]

MAURITIUS FODY (*Foudia rubra*) – Our first look drew a blank as it was too rainy, but we went back later and saw a fine male, one of the wild stock. Later also seen on Ile aux Aigrettes where they are introduced and now form an important colony for this rare species. [E]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

COMMON WAXBILL (*Estrilda astrild*) – Small numbers on Mauritius. [I]

MADAGASCAR MUNIA (*Lonchura nana*) – Encountered here and there in disturbed second growth habitats and near human habitation, with the first at the Carlton and then at the C'entrest. Also known by the much more evocative name of "Madagascar Bibfinch", and moved into the genus *Lepidopygia* rather than *Lonchura* by many authorities. [E]

MAMMALS

- BROWN MOUSE LEMUR** (*Microcebus rufus*) – One seen all too briefly at Ranomafana, where the Fat-tailed Dwarf-lemur was keeping it away.
- GOLDEN-BROWN MOUSE LEMUR** (*Microcebus ravelobensis*) – A lovely look at this relatively recently described species on the night walk at Ankarafantsika. We were so lucky the storm just missed us here for the walk.
- FAT-TAILED DWARF LEMUR** (*Cheirogaleus medius*) – Seen twice by the road at Ranomafana, but actually a bit of a nuisance as it kept the mouse-lemurs away! Also seen very nicely on the night walk at Ankarafantsika.
- COMMON BROWN LEMUR** (*Eulemur fulvus*) – Seen nicely at Feon N'y Ala and then by the road at Andasibe. We also enjoyed the various tame lemurs at the Palmarium which came and sat on us. They have amazingly soft paw-pads, and are just so well-behaved, quite unlike monkeys.
- MONGOOSE LEMUR** (*Eulemur mongoz*) – A lucky find on the night walk at Ankarafantsika, where we got to see 3 of this rare species.
- RED-BELLIED LEMUR** (*Eulemur rubriventer*) – Mark found us a beauty sat curled in tree right by where we were standing to look for the Red-breasted Coua at Mantadia.
- RING-TAILED LEMUR** (*Lemur catta*) – We went to a new site this year, and I was well impressed, the animals look healthy, far more so than the scabby looking ones at Berenty do, and they are there in good numbers. It is a village conservation area with local guides, so the money goes back to the community. They showed us about 60 of these wonderful animals and they have around 600 in the park. It is now classified as Critically Endangered with a total population > 5000 animals, all very sad.
- GOLDEN BAMBOO LEMUR** (*Haplemur aureus*) – Our first lemur was this very range restricted animal. This species was the impetus behind making Ranomafana a National Park, and we connected with one fairly atypically low and not far off the main trail on our very first morning there.
- BLACK-AND-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR** (*Varecia variegata*) – Heard calling at Ranomafana but far away, then we were dead lucky at Mantadia, where we not only heard them but saw a group of 3 at close range, then two more later. Also a distant single on the second visit here. The locals call it the Panda Lemur and it is a very handsome species, one we seldom see. Check out the video on the Smugmug site.
- MILNE-EDWARDS' SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur edwardsi*) – Fantastic at Ankarafantsika, where two were wedged into a hollow trunk and could be seen peering out at us from the crack.
- HUBBARD'S SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur hubbardorum*) – This is called Zombitse Sportive Lemur by some, restricted just to the small remnant of transitional forest in this region. Our guides here did a fantastic job of finding one of these in a day roost very close to where we saw our Appert's Tetrakas.
- WESTERN WOOLLY LEMUR** (*Avahi occidentalis*) – An endearing huddle of 3 of these at Ankarafantsika, peering down at us and like some Picasso-lemur as there seemed to be too many limbs emerging from the group. Our local guides call them "Oooli Lemurs" which at one time I took to be a newly described species until it dawned that this was the local version of "woolly!"
- VERREAUX'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus verreauxi*) – 5 at Zombitse showed well and were seen leaping from tree to tree, a spectacular lemur.
- COQUEREL'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus coquereli*) – Seen nicely at Ankarafantsika, and some endearing tame ones at Edena Kely in Mahajunga.
- DIADEMED SIFAKA** (*Propithecus diadema*) – Several of them as we came down from Indri Ridge, one of the most colorful of the genus with orange furred legs, and quite a rare one.
- MILNE-EDWARDS' SIFAKA** (*Propithecus edwardsi*) – Great views of 2 of these large dark sifakas at Ranomafana.
- INDRI** (*Indri indri*) – One of the most evocative of all Madagascar sounds, and hearing them calling pre-dawn at Feon N'y Ala is just wonderful. They were very vocal at Mantadia too this time, but the only one we saw was a single animal on Indri Ridge. The largest of the extant lemurs, and lacks a tail.
- RED FOREST RAT** (*Nesomys rufus*) – Mark saw one of these at Mantadia.

Herps

- LINED DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma lineata*) – Encountered around the hotel at Ranomafana a couple of times, and at Andasibe.
- STANDING'S DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma standingi*) – This good looking large Phelsuma was in the arid regions towards the southwest at the Bamboo Club, with a very large one on a wall there.
- MAURITIUS DAY GECKO** (*Phelsuma cepedianana*) – A couple seen well on Ile aux Aigrettes, this is endemic to Mauritius.
- MALAGASY GIANT CHAMELEON** (*Furcifer oustaleti*) – This large chameleon is known by most as Oustalet's Chameleon, we saw several of these over the course of the trip, the first on the ground walking at the Ambalavao Ring-tailed Lemur reserve.
- MADAGASCAR GIANT CHAMELEON** (*Furcifer verrucosus*) – Better known as Warty Chameleon, we saw one very nicely at Ranomafana.
- HORNED LEAF CHAMELEON** (*Brookesia superciliaris*) – One of these curious small chameleons showed well at Ranomafana.
- SHORT-HORNED CHAMELEON** (*Calumma brevicorne*) – Two at Ranomafana and one from Andasibe.
- SHORT-NOSED CHAMELEON** (*Calumma nasuta*) – One at Ranomafana, which was very good for chameleons this trip.
- PANTHER CHAMELEON** (*Calumma pardalis*) – A single at the Palmarium was the final new chameleon for the trip.
- BLUE-LEGGED CHAMELEON** (*Calumma crypticum*) – Two from Ranomafana.
- PARSON'S GIANT CHAMELEON** (*Calumma parsonii*) – One striking colourful male was on a coffee tree at Ranomafana where it is shown to passing tourists, and we had one at Andasibe and one at the Palmarium.
- SATANIC LEAF-TAIL GECKO** (*Uroplatus phantasticus*) – Great views of one of these extraordinary creatures at Ranomafana, always a very welcome addition to the trip.
- GIANT LEAF-TAIL GECKO** (*Uroplatus fimbriatus*) – Nestor had one staked out at Andasibe, another extraordinarily well-camouflaged creature, I could spend the rest of my life here and not find one I'm sure.
- AFRICAN HOUSE GECKO** (*Hemidactylus mercatorius*) – All over the restaurant walls at the hotel in Ranomafana, where they observed our dinner proceedings every night. We also saw them at various other of our establishments, often in the dining areas, but they were also sometimes our roommates.
- MADAGASCAR TREE BOA** (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*) – A fine colorful specimen was coiled around a sapling at Ranomafana.
- MALAGASY GIANT HOGNOSE SNAKE** (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*) – Great views at Ankarafantsika where we had multiple encounters with these large and striking snakes which look absolutely ferocious but are non-venomous.
- COLLARED IGUANA** (*Oplurus cuvieri*) – Great views from Ankarafantsika, a really distinctive species.

GRANDIDIER'S MADAGASCAR SWIFT (LIZARD) (*Oplurus grandidieri*) – Quite common around Isalo.

MADAGASCAR ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus madagascariensis*) – This was the skink-like lizard at the Palmarium. A very distinctive reptile, and it was also very obliging.

BROAD-TAILED ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus laticaudatus*) – We encountered several big specimens of one of these broad-backed skink relatives during our late morning walk at Ankarafantsika.

THREE-EYED LIZARD (*Chalarodon madagascariensis*) – Great looks at this distinctive lizard with a third "eye" in the center of the top of the head at Parc Mosa.

NILE CROCODILE (*Crocodylus niloticus*) – A couple at the sacred lake at Ankarafantsika.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Birds of the trip were a diverse assortment, with Red-tailed Tropicbird, Cuckoo-roller, White-breasted Mesite, Collared Nightjar, Malagasy Kingfisher and one of the ground-rollers all featuring well.

As would be expected in such a unique location, there were many other creatures of interest encountered that aren't listed above. Here is a list of some of the ones we could pin down. Butterflies account for most of these, as there are reasonable references available to aid in their identification. I'd love to know the identity of the very large bright blue dragonfly with the green head that was patrolling up and down the creek at Feon N'y Ala.

Giraffe-necked Weevil (*Trachelophorus giraffa*)- We had our first at Ranomafana, and then saw a couple of more at Mantadia.

Flatid Leaf Insect (*Phromnea rosea*)- We ran into the nymphs of these in two or three places along the way. They are truly bizarre creatures.

We had Giant Pill Millipedes in several places.

Identified butterflies were as follows:

Madagascar Commodore (*Precis andremlaja*)

Madagascar Swordtail (*Graphium evombar*)

Citrus Swallowtail (*Papilio demodocus*)

Banded Blue Swallowtail (*Papilio oribazus*)

Madagascar Giant Swallowtail (*Pharmacophagus antenor*)

Green Lady (*Graphium cyrnus*)

Madagascar Orange Tip (*Colotis evanthe*)

Madagascar Dotted Border (*Mylothris phileris*)

Yellow Pansy (*Junonia hierta* (paris))

African Monarch (*Danaus chrysippis*)

Acraea turna (this one at Ifaty)

Clouded Mother of Pearl (*Protogoniomorpha anacardii duprei*)

Madagascar Brown Pansy (*Junonia gaudotii*)

Brilliant Blue (*Junonia rhadama*)

Many skippers (*Hesperiidae*)

Assorted Satyrs, of several species.

Totals for the tour: 204 bird taxa and 18 mammal taxa