



**MADAGASCAR: THE BEST OF MADAGASCAR, BIRDS AND
WILDLIFE SET DEPARTURE TRIP REPORT**

17-31 October 2019



The Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher was a special bird on this tour; it was our local guide's favorite bird of all times!

Itinerary at a glance**Overnight**

Day 1, 17 Oct – Arrival day and local birding	Antananarivo
Day 2, 18 Oct – Travel to and birding at Andasibe	Andasibe
Day 3, 19 Oct – Andasibe-Mantadia National Park	Andasibe
Day 4, 20 Oct – Analamazoatra Special Reserve	Andasibe
Day 5, 21 Oct – Travel to Antsirabe	Antsirabe
Day 6, 22 Oct – Antsirabe to Ranomafana National Park	Ranomafana
Day 7, 23 Oct – Ranomafana National Park	Ranomafana
Day 8, 24 Oct – Ranomafana National Park	Ranomafana
Day 9, 25 Oct – Isalo National Park	Isalo
Day 10, 26 Oct – Isalo to Zombitse-Vohibasia to Ifaty	Ifaty
Day 11, 27 Oct – Spiny Forest	Ifaty
Day 12, 28 Oct – Nose Ve boat trip, then transfer to Toliara	Toliara
Day 13, 29 Oct – Birding around Toliara, flight to Antananarivo	Antananarivo
Day 14, 30 Oct – Antananarivo	Antananarivo
Day 15, 31 Oct – International flights home	

Overview

The wonderful world that is Madagascar, the Eighth Continent! It's easy to see why the world's fourth-largest island has been given this name. There is a strong African influence in both Madagascar's fauna and flora, but certainly there also is enough unique wildlife to justify a nickname such as this.

We started the tour at two premier rainforest sites, first Andasibe-Mantadia National Park and then Ranomafana National Park. Both sites produced incredible sightings of various ground rollers, vangas, tetrakas, asities, **Cuckoo Roller**, and **Brown Mesite**. Night walks produced incredible close-up sightings of many chameleons, frogs, and of course nocturnal lemurs such as the cute **Rufous Mouse Lemur**. The central plateau region on the way to the south-western coastal sites was incredibly scenic, and the birding en route in Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park was special. Here we had our first taste of the terrestrial couas as we encountered both **Coquerel's** and **Giant Couas**, and **White-browed Owl** was also a treat. Toliara and Ifaty were next on the itinerary, and the Spiny Forest was fascinating. **Long-tailed Ground Roller** and **Sickle-billed Vanga** certainly stole the show, but we also enjoyed many coua species as well as the weird **Subdesert Mesite**. A boat trip to the tiny island of Nosy Ve was eventful and produced the expected **Red-tailed Tropicbird** and the unexpected **Great Frigatebird**.

Detailed Itinerary

Day 1, 17th October 2019 – Arrival day and local birding in Antananarivo

Our whole group arrived safely the previous day, some of the group from a successful pre-tour to the Masoala Peninsula and others from the main Johannesburg connection. It was to be a very relaxed “catch-up” day today, but even so most of the group opted to join a morning birding session at the well-known Parc Tsarasaotra. The small lake here, surrounded by scrub and various larger trees, is a great introductory birding locality. Hundreds of **Red-billed Teals** and **White-faced Whistling Ducks** overwhelm you as you enter the gates, while a few pairs of the endemic **Meller’s Duck** can be picked out among them. We loved watching a pair of **Madagascar Hoopoes** drop in alongside us to feed a chick in a cavity in a tree. **Red Fody** occurred in good numbers, while **Common Jery** and **Malagasy Brush Warbler** were less common. The small island in the middle of the lake has a host of various egrets and herons, many in full display and others with chicks: **Great Egret**, **Dimorphic Egret**, **Western Cattle Egret**, **Squacco Heron**, **Black Heron**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, and, most notably, **Malagasy Pond Heron**. A few **Madagascar Mannikins** were flitting over the footpath, and a pair of **Madagascar Swamp Warblers** showed well in the reedbed. Another highlight was finding a **White-throated Rail**, which responded incredibly well to a burst of playback. It sauntered up the small bank and crossed the open path. **Malagasy Kestrel** and **Mascarene** and **Brown-throated Martins** as well as a few **Malagasy Kingfishers** were some of the last species that we added for the day. We rested up after lunch and prepared for our journey to Andasibe the following day.



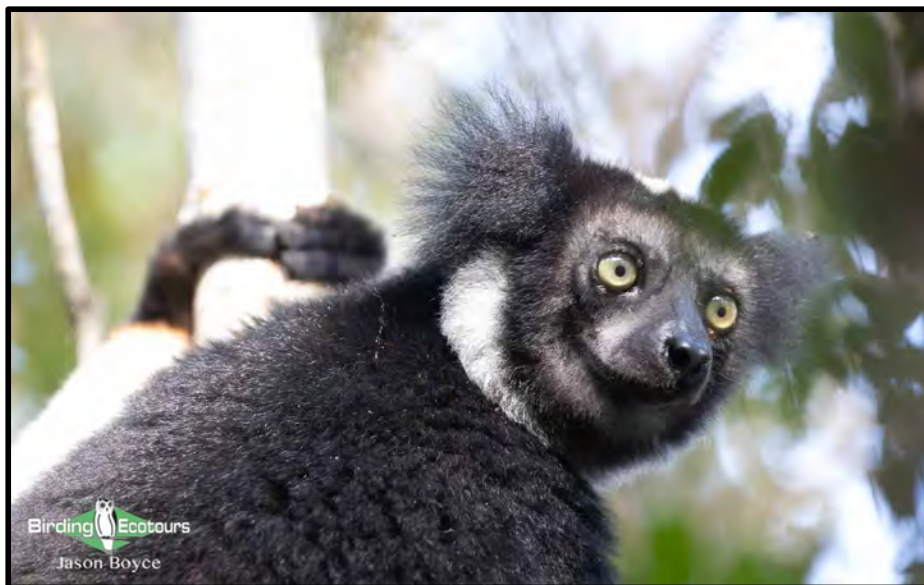
*Certainly one the most enjoyable sightings of the first day was watching this **Madagascar Hoopoe** feeding it's chicks.*

Day 2, 18th October 2019 – Drive to Andasibe, birding Analamazoatra Special Reserve

We had a 6 a.m. breakfast in “Tana”, and by 7 a.m. we were on the way to one of Madagascar’s premier rainforest birding sites, Andasibe-Mantadia National Park. One or two brief stops en route produced sightings of the bizarre **Hamerkop**, **Striated Heron**, **Three-banded Plover**, **Brown-throated Martin**, **African Palm Swift**, and a couple of **Common Sandpipers**. One of the regular **Madagascan Pratincole** sites produced a single bird perched up on the rocks in the middle of the river.

After a long drive on a road that is unfortunately getting worse we enjoyed a much-needed lunch and rest. At the lunch stop we picked up a few great birds; here we had our first vanga sighting, that of **Chabert Vanga**. We also encountered some **Broad-billed Rollers**, **Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher**, **Greater Vasa Parrot**, and **Ward’s Flycatcher**.

Then we met our site guide and headed into the forest. After starting with a lovely little **Rainforest Scops Owl** at a day roost we soon bumped into a mixed-species flock, which included **Madagascan Cuckooshrike**, **Blue Vanga**, **Crested Drongo**, **Forest Fody**, and **Stripe-throated Jery**. **Madagascan Wood Rail** was also a real treat; a single bird was moving slowly, fairly unphased by our presence, on the forest floor. The site guides in Madagascar are the unsung heroes; they spend much time staking out birds and communicating with each other by sharing locations of tricky species in order to show their groups as much as possible. Our guide took us to a roosting **Collared Nightjar** next, what a bird! **Nuthatch Vanga** was also stunning; a single bird was seen on the nest. We also thoroughly enjoyed spending some time with a couple of lemur species here; a small group of **Brown Lemurs** was indeed fun to watch. But most of us were unsurprisingly more impressed by the family group of **Indris** nearby. The **Indri** mother, with an incredibly cute baby attached to its side, was unphased by our presence and continued with her day-to-day activities. We also heard a couple calling over the course of the next few days, their vocalization can give you goosebumps! The next animal we saw, we almost didn’t see; it took us a while to spot the master of camouflage, a **Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko**. The way these creatures wrap themselves around a mossy tree trunk and blend in is just incredible. Our first coua was the arboreal **Blue Coua**, hopping through the trees in a similar way to African turacos. We went out for a night walk later that evening.



*One of the most iconic lemurs in Madagascar is the **Indri**.*

Andasibe Night Walk: Our second **Short-horned Chameleon** and our first **Nose-horned Chameleon** were seen. The latter is incredible small, one of the smallest chameleon species on the island. We also thoroughly enjoyed our first mouse lemur in the form of **Goodman's Mouse Lemur** and also found a couple of **Geoffroy's Dwarf Lemurs** moving around the mid-strata of the forest.

Day 3, 19th October 2019 – Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

We left fairly early for Mantadia National Park – the meaning of “mantadia” is best described by some local people as “not-made-well road”; we can confirm that the road definitely needs an upgrade. Nevertheless we arrived after picking up **Blue Coua**, **Rand's Warbler**, **Madagascan Blue Pigeon** and a few **Olive Bee-eaters** and headed straight into the mature forest on the hunt for ground rollers. Unfortunately, try as we might, we could only hear the likes of **Scaly** and **Short-legged Ground Rollers**, but we did have a superb sighting of **Pitta-like Ground Roller** a couple of hours into our forest walk. We watched the bird call a number of times; the way in which it tilts its head downward and puffs up its whole throat to call was interesting to observe. **Long-billed Bernieria** and **Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher** were showing pretty well in some nearby thick forest.



How's this for a bird? The Pitta-like Ground Roller.

We birded near a small forest lake for a while and were excited to find **Red-fronted Coua** nearby. A single **Madagascan Spinetail** cruised overhead, while more **Olive Bee-eaters** were hawking insects here too. The little lake held **Red-billed Teal**, **Meller's Duck**, **Madagascan Grebe**, **Broad-billed Roller**, and **Madagascan Magpie-Robin**, as well as a pair of breeding **Madagascan Wagtails**. On the track back toward Andasibe town we stopped to try for **Madagascan Flufftail**, which we heard calling but did not see. **Madagascan Mannikin** and **Madagascan Cisticola** did show nicely, though. Probably the best surprise of the day came after we got back to the lodge, where we found a single **Madagascan Buttonquail** feeding on

the open sandy section alongside a path. What a striking bird, and amazing to see for an extended period of time!



*The cracking **Madagascar Buttonquail** was happy to walk out in the open with a couple of onlookers.*

Day 4, 20th October 2019 – Analamazoatra Special Reserve and surroundings

Well, we had a remarkable morning in terms of finding birds nesting or breeding. We entered the special reserve at opening time, and within our first three hundred meters we had both **Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher** and **Crossley's Vanga** on nests. What was really interesting is that these birds were breeding within twenty meters from each other. The **Crossley's Vanga** was a pretty special sighting, both the male and the female birds coming back a couple of times with worms for the chick. A little further along we encountered a pair of **White-throated Oxylabes** building a nest about one meter off the ground. **Madagascar Flufftail**, like all flufftails, can be really tough; we heard a bird calling nearby and tried to get visuals in the undergrowth. Further on we encountered a few **Common** and **Green Jeries** as well as a breeding pair of **Nelicourvi Weavers**. The reserve holds some spectacular vegetation, and the hiking through the forest is beautiful. "Bird's nest ferns" as well as different forms of *Euphorbia* are interesting to see up-close. We were shown where a **Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko** was roosting, and once again it took some of us a good few minutes to actually see it, even though it was at eye level and within one meter from us. Other species we encountered that morning included **Tylas Vanga** (also breeding), **Hook-billed Vanga**, **Common Newtonia**, and **Malagasy Kingfisher**.



A female Nelicourvi Weaver

We headed back to the lodge, enjoyed a good meal, and were informed that the local guides had managed to find a **Madagascan Owl**. We went to find this bird in one of its usual day roosts. Later that afternoon we gave **Madagascan Rail** a try; we only caught glimpses but did not manage any really good visuals. We were, however, rewarded for our efforts as we found **Madagascan Buzzard**, one bird eating a prey item in a large tree and another seen in flight, calling. **Western Barn Owl** was also a nice find; a single bird appeared a good half hour before sunset, an unusual occurrence. Last but not least was an enjoyable sighting of **Madagascan Nightjar** that gave great fly-by views at almost exactly 6:30 p.m., the same time that it had started calling the night before.

Day 5, 21st October 2019 – Travel day south to Antsirabe

We started our journey to Tana, where we stopped for lunch before heading south to Antsirabe. We stopped a few times between the rice fields, where a **Striated Heron** stop soon turned into a reptile stop, and we managed to see **Lateral Water Snake** and a beautiful male **Carpet Chameleon**. Some avian species we picked up en route were **Malagasy Kestrel**, **Mascarene** and **Brown-throated Martins**, **Dimorphic Egret**, and **Black Heron**. We arrived safely in Antsirabe late in the afternoon and used the opportunity to stock up on supplies and run a few errands before another fairly long day's travel tomorrow.



A beautiful Carpet Chameleon that we found en route.

Day 6, 22nd October 2019 – Antsirabe to Ranomafana

We started the day by checking the gardens for bird activity, but except for **Malagasy Green Sunbird** and a few **Red Fodies** we didn't manage to find much exciting on the avian front. A large **Oustalet's Chameleon** grabbed the spotlight, however – it was great to watch it move slowly up a small tree in the gardens. The many sights along the windy road to Ranomafana certainly kept us entertained. It was interesting to see how the Malagasy people go about their day-to-day activities in the many small villages en route. Rice paddies dominate much of the landscape in the central regions, and getting an opportunity to see the incredibly labor-intensive work of planting and re-planting serves as quite an eye-opener. Our lunch spot produced **Yellow-billed Kite**, **Malagasy Kingfisher**, and a few **Madagascan Snipes**. Some car trouble later that afternoon delayed us slightly, but before long we arrived in Ranomafana, enjoyed a meal, and got set for a long day tomorrow in the magnificent Ranomafana forest.

Day 7, 23rd October 2019 – Birding Ranomafana National Park

Ranomafana literally means “hot water” in Malagasy, due to the hot springs that occur in the area. The springs aren't the only thing that's hot, though: We had some of our best birding and animal sightings over the next two days here. Our morning started with a slightly unexpected sighting of a small flock of **Helmeted Guineafowl** moving along the side of the road. We spent a full morning in Ranomafana National Park and were rewarded with some great birding. The entrance to the trailhead produced **African Palm Swift** as well as **Malagasy Black Swift**, **Rand's Warbler**, **Chabert Vanga**, and **Malagasy Green Sunbird**. The forest seemed more active than usual, and we soon picked up a party including **Red-tailed**, **White-headed**, **Tylas**, and **Blue Vangas**. **Madagascan Cuckooshrike** as well as **Common Newtonia** also showed well. We found a **Pitta-like Ground Roller** and had some good visuals. Soon afterwards a single male **Milne-Edwards's Sifaka** came by for a visit. A small group of tetrakas included **Spectacled** and **Grey-crowned Tetrakas** and a single **Wedge-tailed Jery**. After having heard **Madagascan Cuckoo** for a few days without visuals we finally were able to see it. The

highlight of our morning, though, was surely the pair of **Brown Mesites** that we managed to track down; we had great visuals of an incredibly tough-to-see bird! This was one of those trips where we managed to find many species breeding; we picked up both **Pollen's Vanga** and **Rufous Vanga** on nests – certainly great to see for many reasons. We also encountered a few other interesting creatures. A couple of reptiles kept us entertained; **Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko** as well as **Brown Leaf Chameleon** put on a nice display. A few **Lowland Red Forest Rats** (always said by rolling the “R’s” intensely) were also around skulking through the undergrowth.



*In my opinion the **Brown Mesite** is one of the tougher birds to locate in Ranomafana National Park. We did well to locate a pair on call and then had good visuals of both birds.*

We had lunch back at the lodge and made our way out again in the afternoon. Another **Madagascan Owl** was found at one of its roosting sites, perched very low down to the ground in comparison to our previous sighting. Our afternoon session was spent walking one of the trails to the north of the main road. A rather flat (in comparison) trail is known for the likes of **Velvet Asity** as well as the tricky **Rufous-headed Ground Roller**. We certainly hadn't expected to pick up two of our main targets so quickly, but soon we had quick looks at **Velvet Asity**, and a **Common Sunbird-Asity** also put in a quick show before we were startled by the call of **Rufous-headed Ground Roller** calling very nearby. We turned our attention to this beauty, gave it a burst of playback, and were very soon looking at this stunning endemic that had come to inspect.



*Certainly one of the more striking-looking vangas is **Pollen's Vanga**.*

Ranomafana Night Walk: Ranomafana is well known for night walks, and we had a productive evening: **O'Shaughnessy's** and **Blue-legged Chameleons** were showing well, males and females of both species. The incredibly cute (and, inside joke – “so annoying”) **Rufous Mouse Lemur** was curious and came right near to where we were standing. Eventually we saw a **Geoffroy's Dwarf Lemur** as well – a super evening!

Day 8, 24th October 2019 – Ranomafana National Park

Our second full day at Ranomafana National Park was also a good one. We started on the northern trailhead, where we had found the Rufous-headed Ground Roller. Here we did well to find male and female **Velvet Asities**. Asities and Sunbird-Asities form a family of their own (Philepittidae) and are certainly some of the “odder” species to be found on the island. A small flock of **Spectacled** and **Grey-crowned Tetrakas** entertained us for a few minutes on the main trail. **Brown Emutail** was heard nearby, and so we did our best to get visuals of this mouse-like warbler. Our first bird was not very cooperative, but the second bird we found gave some nice visuals (with some effort). **Red-fronted Coua** was also hanging around here, and we had a nice look at it too. Thanks to our sharp-eyed local guide we also picked up a brilliant male **O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon** in this area. A mammalian highlight of the morning was **Ring-tailed Vontsira** (Ring-tailed Mongoose) – a pair of these interesting mongoose-like animals rushed out on the path in front of us as we headed back to the vehicle.



Velvet Asity put on a great show for us.

Later in the afternoon we headed to some marsh areas to give **Grey Emutail**, among other things, a try. The emutail played hard to get, but we had great visuals on our second attempt. We were incredibly surprised when we noticed another **Western Barn Owl** cruising during daylight hours over some of the indigenous woodland.

Day 9, 25th October 2019 – Travel to Isalo National Park

We had an early breakfast and left Ranomafana behind after some great birding and wildlife sightings. Our first stop would be the Anja Reserve run by local communities in the area. Having as few as forty a few decades ago, Anja is now home to over four hundred Ring-tailed Lemurs. It was in fact National Lemur day today, and perhaps that brought us the luck we needed as we enjoyed a once-in-a-lifetime experience with a few different groups of **Ring-tailed Lemurs**, three-week-old youngsters as well. We continued south toward Isalo National Park, picking up **Madagascan Lark** at a few roadside locations. We did enjoy watching flocks of **Yellow-billed Kites** feeding on grasshoppers that were escaping some grassland fires. **Forest Rock Thrush** of the *bensoni* subspecies was also found not long before we arrived at Isalo. The incredible sandstone rock formations behind the lodge make for a beautiful setting! Once again **Madagascan Nightjar** was very active at dusk in the hotel grounds.

Day 10, 26th October 2019 – Isalo to Ifaty via Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park

A morning walk around the grounds of the lodge was beautiful. The riverine woodland, small agricultural fields, and some fantastic rocky landscapes produced a few nice bird species, which included **Broad-billed Roller**, **Pied Crow**, **Olive Bee-eater**, **Namaqua Dove**, **Madagascan Cisticola**, **Malagasy Kestrel**, and a pair of **Madagascan Hoopoe**. We made sure to arrive in Zombitse-Vohibasia National Park before things started to get too hot and spent a good three hours in the reserve. **Appert's Tetraka** was one of our first targets, and we got great visuals

of a pair moving low across the forest floor. **Long-billed Bernieria** and **Common Newtonia** were also in attendance. The bizarre **Cuckoo Roller** was literally all over, with birds displaying on the wing above the forest canopy all morning. We also had a few visuals of this species perched. It wasn't long before we found both **Coquerel's** and **Giant Couas**, both ground-dwelling coua species that we were able to follow until we managed to get good visuals through some dense foliage. We also went to see a **White-browed Owl** that the local guides had found for us, a fantastic way to end the morning. Madagascar is known for hosting six species of baobab trees, and today we saw our first species of the trip, *Adansonia za*, known as **Bozy** in Malagasy, one of two baobab species endemic to Madagascar.



*Once you locate a **Giant Coua** it can be incredibly confiding.*

From Zombitse-Vohibasia we continued south toward Toliara. En route we stopped for a couple of key species, but a few more common birds were encountered first, namely **Madagascan Lark**, **Namaqua Dove**, and **Crested Drongo**. After quite a search we did pick up both **Verreaux's Coua** and a cooperative **Red-shouldered Vanga**! We knew that we would not have the chance to find these two species at the Spiny Forest near Ifaty. The day was coming to an end, so we checked in and enjoyed a fantastic meal and a couple of drinks.

Day 11, 27th October 2019 – Birding the Spiny Forest

We were on the road by 4:50 a.m., and before sunrise we had begun our walk in one of Madagascar's most extraordinary habitats, the Spiny Forest. The flora here is so different from other areas of Madagascar, certainly worth a walk just for the exciting plants. In terms of birds we had a great morning as well. Our first sightings were of two coua species, a **Running Coua** and the "green-capped" *oliveiceps* subspecies of **Red-capped Coua**. **Common** and **Stripe-throated Jery** were calling all over the place, while small flocks of **Grey-headed Lovebirds** came cruising by a few times. More common species here included **Crested Drongo** and **Souimanga Sunbird**. We were very fortunate to see **Subdesert Mesite** on a nest that the local

guides had managed to stake out for us; we had great visuals of this member of one of Madagascar's endemic families. Surely a candidate for "bird of the trip" (let alone bird of the morning) was the stunning **Long-tailed Ground Roller** which, even though it shows a bright azure-blue in its plumage, can blend in pretty well with its surroundings. A pair of **Archbold's Newtonias** was the center of attention for a few minutes as they came into some small, scrubby bushes right between members of our group. Our next specials were a couple of very sought-after vangas. **Lafresnaye's Vanga** called while we were still taking pictures of the **Long-tailed Ground Roller** – we turned our attention to it and were incredibly lucky to see it perched right on top of one of the larger surrounding **Octopus Trees** (*Didierea madagascariensis*) – a great sighting of a fairly tough-to-see bird. Next was **Sickle-billed Vanga**, but this species was certainly more difficult to find. Luckily its call carried quite a distance through the vegetation, and after a couple of kilometers of walking through its known haunts we found a pair and had great visuals of a male bird sitting up, calling rather loudly.



A distant Sickle-billed Vanga was a real treat!

After we left the wonderful Spiny Forest behind, **Madagascan Plover** was next on our agenda. A known site produced one in a rather short time. The large **Humblot's Heron** was a little more challenging; we searched the mangroves that can be visible from the main road to Ifaty and found one wading pretty deep in the ocean. That was the end of a seriously productive morning; it was time for brunch and a good rest until later that afternoon, when we would "mop-up" a few things we may have missed. One of the very few species we had missed was **Thamnornis**, and we thought that it was going to be "the one that got away" until our local site guide exclaimed: "**Thamnornis!**" with some gusto. We had superb close-up looks. **Madagascan Sparrowhawk** showed briefly too. We took some time to observe the incredible flora in the forest, getting pictures of the various plants and baobabs too. We stayed in the Spiny Forest as the sun set and got our torches and night gear ready to see what nocturnal life we could find.

Spiny Forest night walk: It had been so hot today, and it didn't cool down much after sunset. Nevertheless we stayed out and were rewarded with a couple of lemurs. First was the tiny **Grey Mouse Lemur**, of which we ended up seeing another later on in the evening too. Our second lemur was **White-footed Sportive Lemur**. Last but certainly not least was a magical sighting of a **Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec** – I had previously only seen it in the small ball that they roll themselves into as a defense, but this one walked around a bit, allowing us to see it really nicely.



The cute Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec

Day 12, 28th October 2019 – Boat trip to Nose Ve

One of the more adventurous day trips on the tour is the day to the beaches of Anakao and then to the island of Nose Ve for Red-tailed Tropicbird. We started the day with an early breakfast and then made our way to the boat dock and began our journey south. We encountered a number of **Greater Crested Terns** flitting around between the many colorful local fishing vessels that were out on the water. It was a good morning to be on the ocean; the wind hadn't picked up yet, and the water was beautiful. Flying fish sightings were also fun. We arrived safely in Anakao and took a walk to look for **Littoral Rock Thrush**. For a while we were wondering if someone super-glued the rock thrush to the top of a small tree behind a lodge as we sat watching it for some time before it moved off. Here we also encountered **Sakalava Weaver**, **Red Fody**, and many **Subdesert Brush Warblers**.

After some good Madagascan coffee we jumped back into the boat and headed for Nose Ve. We stopped on the northern side of the island and took a walk south, during which we picked up **Grey Heron**, **Greater Crested Tern**, **Dimorphic Egret**, and soon **Red-tailed Tropicbird**. These tropicbirds breed on this island and are a real treat to see. They were soon considered second-best, though, as a frigatebird was spotted in the distance! Any frigatebird here is a pretty decent sighting, and eventually we got close-up looks at a female **Great Frigatebird**! Well

done, Eric! This was almost the last bit of wildlife viewing we had for the day, because the wind came up and we started our travels back to the lodge in Toliara.



*Certainly the surprise of the trip, a female **Great Frigatebird** was cruising around Nose Ve.*

Days 13-14, 29th- 30th October 2019 – Birding around Toliara and return to Antananarivo

A small wetland site called Belalanda to the north of Toliara is good for shorebirds and other waterfowl; we spent the morning here before heading back for brunch. Upon arrival a small flock of about a dozen **Lesser Flamingos** were nice to see as well as many **Kittlitz's Plovers**. Other shorebirds here included **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Common Sandpiper**, and **Whimbrel**. One of our main target birds here was **Baillon's Crake**, which we managed to hear calling in the reedbeds and with a bit of work managed to see in open sections between the reeds. **Black-winged Stilt** and **Little Grebe** were both very active and rather noisy too. A single **Malagasy Kingfisher** was around, and both **Madagascan Cisticola** and **Red Fody** were visible on the surrounding scrubby bushes. Some ducks, including **White-faced Whistling Duck** and **Red-billed Teal**, were seen before we headed back after an enjoyable morning.

This pretty much marked the end of our tour, because some flight issues (which Air Madagascar is well-known for) meant that we had to head back earlier than planned. A rest day in Antananarivo was welcomed by the group before many of them continued on to other tours in Southern Africa.

It is almost impossible to decide on the five best birds of this tour, but here are the 10 “most popular” birds and mammals of the tour as voted for by local guides, the participants, and me as the tour leader (in no particular order):

Diademed Sifaka, Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher, Brown Mesite, Rufous-headed Ground Roller, Ring-tailed Lemur, Giant Coua, Long-tailed Ground Roller, Sickle-billed Vanga, Great Frigatebird, Baillon's Crake

Bird List - Following IOC (9.2)

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen. The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened. Madagascan endemics are bolded.

Common Name	Scientific name
Guineafowl (Numididae)	
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>
Hottentot Teal	<i>Spatula hottentota</i>
Meller's Duck - EN	<i>Anas melleri</i>
Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>
Nightjars (Caprimulgidae)	
Collared Nightjar	<i>Gactornis enarratus</i>
Madagascan Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Madagascan Spinetail	<i>Zoonavena grandidieri</i>
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>
Malagasy Black Swift	<i>Apus balstoni</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Malagasy Coucal	<i>Centropus toulou</i>
Crested Coua	<i>Coua cristata</i>
Verreaux's Coua	<i>Coua verreauxi</i>
Blue Coua	<i>Coua caerulea</i>
Red-capped Coua	<i>Coua ruficeps</i>
Red-fronted Coua	<i>Coua reynaudii</i>
Coquerel's Coua	<i>Coua coquereli</i>
Running Coua	<i>Coua cursor</i>
Giant Coua	<i>Coua gigas</i>
Red-breasted Coua (H)	<i>Coua serriana</i>
Madagascan Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>

Common Name	Scientific name
Mesites (Mesitornithidae)	
Brown Mesite - VU	<i>Mesitornis unicolor</i>
Subdesert Mesite - VU	<i>Monias benschi</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Malagasy Turtle Dove	<i>Nesoenas picturatus</i>
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>
Madagascan Blue Pigeon	<i>Alectroenas madagascariensis</i>
Flufftails (Sarothruridae)	
Madagascan Wood Rail	<i>Mentocrex kioloides</i>
Madagascan Flufftail	<i>Sarothrura insularis</i>
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
Madagascan Rail - VU	<i>Rallus madagascariensis</i>
White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>
Baillon's Crake	<i>Porzana pusilla</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Madagascan Grebe - EN	<i>Tachybaptus pelzelni</i>
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Flamingos (Phoenicopteridae)	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Lesser Flamingo - NT	<i>Phoeniconaias minor</i>
Buttonquail (Turnicidae)	
Madagascan Buttonquail	<i>Turnix nigricollis</i>
Stilts, Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Madagascan Plover - VU	<i>Charadrius thoracicus</i>
Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>
Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>

Common Name	Scientific name
White-fronted Plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Curlew Sandpiper - NT	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Madagascan Snipe - VU	<i>Gallinago macrodactyla</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Courasers, Pratincoles (Glareolidae)	
Madagascan Pratincole - VU	<i>Glareola ocularis</i>
Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)	
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
Tropicbirds (Phaethontidae)	
Red-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>
Frigatebirds (Fregatidae)	
Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>
Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	
Madagascan Ibis	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Malagasy Pond Heron - EN	<i>Ardeola idae</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Humblot's Heron - EN	<i>Ardea humbloti</i>
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
Dimorphic Egret	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>
Hamerkop (Scopidae)	
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>

Common Name	Scientific name
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Frances's Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter francesiae</i>
Madagascan Sparrowhawk - NT	<i>Accipiter madagascariensis</i>
Henst's Goshawk - NT (H)	<i>Accipiter henstii</i>
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
Madagascan Buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>
Barn Owls (Tytonidae)	
Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Rainforest Scops Owl	<i>Otus rutilus</i>
White-browed Owl	<i>Athene superciliaris</i>
Madagascan Owl	<i>Asio madagascariensis</i>
Cuckoo Roller (Leptosomidae)	
Cuckoo Roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>
Hoopoes (Upupidae)	
Madagascan Hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>
Rollers (Coraciidae)	
Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>
Ground Rollers (Brachypteraciidae)	
Short-legged Ground Roller - VU (H)	<i>Brachypteracias leptosomus</i>
Scaly Ground Roller - VU (H)	<i>Geobiastes squamiger</i>
Pitta-like Ground Roller	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>
Rufous-headed Ground Roller - NT	<i>Atelornis crossleyi</i>
Long-tailed Ground Roller - VU	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	
Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis madagascariensis</i>
Malagasy Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis vintsioides</i>
Bee-eaters (Meropidae)	
Olive Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Malagasy Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>

Common Name	Scientific name
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Old World Parrots (Psittaculidae)	
Greater Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>
Lesser Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>
Grey-headed Lovebird	<i>Agapornis canus</i>
Asities (Philepittidae)	
Velvet Asity	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>
Common Sunbird-Asity	<i>Neodrepanis coruscans</i>
Vangas & Allies (Vangidae)	
Red-tailed Vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>
Red-shouldered Vanga - VU	<i>Calicalicus rufocarpalis</i>
Hook-billed Vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>
Lafresnaye's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris xenopirostris</i>
Pollen's Vanga - NT	<i>Xenopirostris polleni</i>
Sickle-billed Vanga	<i>Falculea palliata</i>
White-headed Vanga	<i>Artamella viridis</i>
Chabert Vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>
Blue Vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>
Rufous Vanga	<i>Schetba rufa</i>
Tylas Vanga	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>
Nuthatch Vanga	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>
Dark Newtonia	<i>Newtonia amphichroa</i>
Common Newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>
Archbold's Newtonia	<i>Newtonia archboldi</i>
Ward's Flycatcher	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>
Crossley's Vanga	<i>Mystacornis crossleyi</i>
Cuckooshrikes (Campephagidae)	
Madagascan Cuckooshrike	<i>Ceblepyris cinereus</i>
Drongos (Dicuridae)	
Crested Drongo	<i>Dicurus forficatus</i>
Monarchs (Monarchidae)	
Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	

Common Name	Scientific name
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
Larks (Alaudidae)	
Madagascan Lark	<i>Eremopterix hova</i>
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	
Malagasy Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Mascarene Martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>
Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
Reed Warblers & Allies (Acrocephalidae)	
Malagasy Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>
Subdesert Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas lantzii</i>
Madagascan Swamp Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>
Grassbirds & Allies (Locustellidae)	
Grey Emutail	<i>Bradypterus seebohmi</i>
Brown Emutail	<i>Bradypterus brunneus</i>
Madagascan Warblers (Bernieridae)	
White-throated Oxylabes	<i>Oxylabes madagascariensis</i>
Long-billed Bernieria	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>
Cryptic Warbler (H)	<i>Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi</i>
Wedge-tailed Jery - NT	<i>Hartertula flavoviridis</i>
Thamnornis	<i>Thamnornis chloropetoides</i>
Spectacled Tetraka	<i>Xanthomixis zosterops</i>
Appert's Tetraka - VU	<i>Xanthomixis apperti</i>
Grey-crowned Tetraka - NT	<i>Xanthomixis cinereiceps</i>
Madagascan Yellowbrow - NT (H)	<i>Crossleyia xanthophrys</i>
Rand's Warbler	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>
Cisticolas & Allies (Cisticolidae)	
Common Jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>
Green Jery	<i>Neomixis viridis</i>
Stripe-throated Jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>
Madagascan Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>
White-eyes (Zosteropidae)	

Common Name	Scientific name
Malagasy White-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Madagascan Starling	<i>Hartlaubius auratus</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
Madagascan Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus albospectularis</i>
Littoral Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola imerina</i>
Forest Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>
Madagascan Stonechat	<i>Saxicola sibilla</i>
Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)	
Souimanga Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris sovimanga</i>
Malagasy Green Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris notatus</i>
Weavers, Widowbirds (Ploceidae)	
Nelicourvi Weaver	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>
Sakalava Weaver	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>
Red Fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>
Forest Fody	<i>Foudia omissa</i>
Waxbills, Munias & Allies (Estrildidae)	
Madagascan Mannikin	<i>Lepidopygia nana</i>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Madagascan Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>
Total seen	149
Total heard only	6
Total recorded	155

Mammal List

Common name	Scientific name
Tenrecs (Tenrecidae)	
Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec	<i>Echinops telfairi</i>
Dwarf and Mouse Lemurs (Cheirogaleidae)	
Geoffroy's Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogaleus major</i>
Goodman's Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus lehilahytsara</i>
Grey Mouse-lemur	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>
Rufous Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>
True Lemurs (Lemuridae)	
Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus</i>
Red-bellied Lemur	<i>Eulemur rubriventer</i>
Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Hapalemur aureus</i>
Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>
Red Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata</i>
Sportive Lemurs (Lepilemuridae)	
White-footed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur leucopus</i>
Indriids (Indriidae)	
Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>
Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema</i>
Milne-Edward's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus edwardsi</i>
African and Malagasy Rats (Nesomyidae)	
Lowland Red Forest Rat	<i>Nesomys audeberti</i>
Malagasy Mongooses (Eupleridae)	
Ring-tailed Vontsira	<i>Galidia elegans</i>
Total	16

Reptile and Amphibian List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Chameleons (Chamaeleonidae)	
Short-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma brevicorne</i>
Cryptic Chameleon	<i>Calumma crypticum</i>
Deceptive Chameleon	<i>Calumma fallax</i>
Short-nosed Chameleon	<i>Calumma gastrotaenia</i>
Nose-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma nasutum</i>
O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>
Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsoni</i>
Carpet Chameleon	<i>Furcifer lateralis</i>
Oustalet's Chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>
Geckos (Gekkonidae)	
Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikorae</i>
Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>
Peacock Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>
Madagascar Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma madagascariensis</i>
Standing's Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma standingi</i>
Lined Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata</i>
Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
Skinks (Scincidae)	
Common Madagascar Skink	<i>Madascincus melanopleura</i>
Madagascan Iguanas (Opluridae)	
Madagascar Iguana	<i>Chalarodon madagascariensis</i>
Boas (Boidae)	
Madagascar Tree Boa	<i>Sanzinia madagascariensis</i>
Madagascan Lamprophiid Snakes (Pseudoxyrhopiidae)	
Blonde Hognose Snake	<i>Leioheterodon modestus</i>
Colubrid Snakes (Colubridae)	
Lateral Water Snake	<i>Thamnosophis lateralis</i>
Mahafaly Sand Snake	<i>Mimophis mahfalensis</i>
Grassland Frogs (Ptychadenidae)	
Mascarene Grass Frog	<i>Ptychadena mascareniensis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Mantellids (Mantellidae)	
Madagascar Bright-eyed Frog	<i>Boophis madagascariensis</i>
Total	24