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Madagascar

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Tour Report by Tour Leader Michael Mills

Photograph by Bernadette Kolb taken on this tour

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Our comprehensive 2015 Madagascar Tour once again showcased Madagascar's best birds and wildlife in just 16 days, with an optional five days spent at Masoala at the end. We enjoyed excellent views of almost all available endemic birds, including all vangas, mesites, ground rollers, couas and asities, plus 25 lemur species and lots of other great critters.

We commenced with a brief visit to Lake Alarobia in 'Tana, already having seen **Sooty Falcon** in the hotel garden. Here highlights were some lovely **Malagasy Pond Herons** in breeding plumage and a pair of **Madagascan Grebe**, with **Madagascan Pratincole** seen later in the day.

An introductory day around Andasibe got us off to a good start on forest birds with **Red-breasted Coua**, **Madagascan Flufftail**, **Madagascan Wood Rail**, **White-throated Oxylabes**, **Nuthatch Vanga**, **Madagascan Ibis**, **Madagascan Owl**, **Rainforest Scops Owl** on a day roost and **Collared Nightjar** on a nest. At Mantadia we fairly quickly managed to track down **Short-legged Ground Roller** and **Scaly Ground Roller**, before turning our attention to **Meller's Duck**. Before commencing the long trip to Ranomafana we also enjoyed terrific views of **Madagascan Cuckoo-Hawk** and repeat views of **Nuthatch Vanga**. Excellent views of the giant Indri were a highlight.

En route to Ranomafana we did well to find **Madagascan Buttonquail**, **Madagascan Snipe** and **Madagascan Partridge**. Sunny weather at Ranomafana gave us perfect conditions, and we all saw **Brown Mesite**, **Pitta-like Ground Roller**, **Pollen's Vanga**, **Common Sunbird-Asity**, **Henst's Goshawk**, **Rufous-headed Ground Roller**, **Brown Emutail**, **Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity**, **Velvet Asity**, **Madagascan Rail** and **Grey Emutail**, as well as some excellent lemurs.

From here we continued to the more arid south-west of the country, the highlight along the way being fantastic views of a lovely male **Madagascan Harrier**. We also added to our lists **White-browed Hawk-Owl**, **Torotoroka Scops Owl** and **Madagascan Partridge** at Isalo, and **Rufous Vanga**, **Appert's Tetraka** and **Giant Coua** at Zombitse.

Nearing Toliara we enjoyed some close-up views of the localised **Red-shouldered Vanga**, before continuing on to Ifaty with **Madagascan Plover** on arrival. Good rains in the area before our visit meant that just about all spiny forest specials were on the nest, and we had no trouble in seeing **Long-tailed Ground Roller**, **Green-capped Coua**, **Thamnornis**, **Archbold's Newtonia**, **Banded Kestrel**, **Sickle-billed Vanga**, **Madagascan Sparrowhawk**, **Lafresnaye's Vanga**, **Running Coua**

and **Subdesert Mesite**. Back at Tulear we easily found **Verreaux's Coua**, before taking a boat trip to Anakao for **Littoral Rock Thrush** and Nosy Ve for **Red-tailed Tropicbird**. [Here we had to step into the water for a scope view of Crab Plover!](#) (see photo)

In the north-west the Betsiboka Delta quickly produced several **Malagasy Sacred Ibis**, before we moved on to Ampijoroa forest station in Ankarafantsika National Park. Here **White-breasted Mesite**, **Schlegel's Asity** and **Van Dam's Vanga** came with ease, with other noteworthy sightings including **Madagascan Fish Eagle**, **Madagascan Jacana**, **Humblot's Heron**, **Sickle-billed Vanga** and **Allen's Gallinule**. This was also an excellent site for lemurs as the Coquerel's Sifaka stole the show.

On the final portion of the trip Air Madagascar seemed determined to make our lives difficult, but in the end we chartered our own flight to Masoala and lost no birding time and twice found **Bernier's Vanga** and **Helmet Vanga**, as well as the superb Red-ruffed Lemur.



Bird List (188 species)

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*: Seen well at Isalo (introduced)

Madagascar Partridge *Margaroperdix madagarensis*: Excellent views on the ground at Isalo, after flushing birds near Antsirabe

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*: Seen near Antsirabe (*africana*)

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*: Seen a few times

African Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus*: Seen by Mike at Maroanetra

Meller's Duck *Anas melleri*: Good views at Mantadia, and seen in flight at Ranomafana

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha*: Seen a couple of times

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*: Seen en route to Ampijoroa

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: Seen between Toliara and Ifaty

Madagascar Grebe *Tachybaptus pelzelni*: First seen at Lake Alarobia and again at Mantadia and Ampijoroa

Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*: Many on Nosy Ve (*rubricauda*)

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*: A surprise sighting at Betsiboka

Malagasy Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis bernieri*: Good views of at least 6 at the Betsiboka Delta (*bernieri*, endemic)

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*: Seen at Ampijoroa

Madagascar (Crested) Ibis *Lophotibis cristata*: Seen well at the nest at Andasibe and perched at Masoala (*cristata*)

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: One seen en route to Mantadia

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Seen a few times

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*: Several sightings

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: Most common at Lake Alarobia

Malagasy Pond Heron *Ardeola idae*: Great views at Lake Alarobia, and seen briefly at Ampijoroa

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: Common and widespread

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Seen at Nosy Ve and Betsiboka Delta (*firasa*, endemic to the Indian Ocean islands region)

Humblot's Heron *Ardea humbloti*: Good views at Ampijoroa

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Most common at Ampijoroa (*madagascariensis*, endemic)

Great Egret *Ardea alba*: Widespread sightings (*melanorhynchos*)

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*: Our best views were at Lake Alarobia

Dimorphic Egret *Egretta dimorpha*: Widespread and common

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*: Several sightings around wetlands and rice paddies (*umbretta*)

Reed Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus*: Good views at Maroansetra

Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda madagascariensis*: Fantastic views at Andasibe, where it even sat on the washing line!

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*: Common and widespread (*parasitus*)

Madagascar Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vociferoides*: Good views at Ampijoroa

Malagasy Harrier *Circus macrosceles*: Brilliant and very welcome views of a male en route to Isalo

Madagascar Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides radiatus*: Distant views at Mantadia and Betsiboka, and seen well at the nest at Ranomafana

Frances's Sparrowhawk *Accipiter francesiae*: Great looks at a female at Andasibe and a male on a night roost at Ampijoroa (*francesiae*)

Madagascar Sparrowhawk *Accipiter madagascariensis*: Brilliant views at Ifaty

Henst's Goshawk *Accipiter henstii*: Two good sightings at Ranomafana, both perched

Madagascar Buzzard *Buteo brachypterus*: Seen regularly throughout the tour

Malagasy Kestrel *Falco newtoni*: Seen regularly throughout the tour (*newtoni*)

Banded Kestrel *Falco zoniventris*: Great views at Ifaty

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*: Seen at our hotel in Tana

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: One at Mahajanga

White-breasted Mesite *Mesitornis variegatus*: Amazing views of a pair at Ampijoroa

Brown Mesite *Mesitornis unicolor*: Fantastic views of a pair at Ranomafana

Subdesert Mesite *Monias benschi*: Seen well on the nest at Ifaty

Madagascar Flufftail *Sarothrura insularis*: Great views at Andasibe

Madagascar Wood Rail *Canirallus kiolooides*: Good views at the nest at Andasibe (*kiolooides*), and seen again at Masoala

Madagascar Rail *Rallus madagascariensis*: Seen well at Ranomafana

White-throated Rail *Dryolimnas cuvieri*: Seen well a few times (*cuvieri*)

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni*: Good views on one of the boat trips at Ampijoroa

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A few good sightings (*pyrrhorrhoa*, a regional endemic)

Madagascar Buttonquail *Turnix nigricollis*: Seen brilliantly near Ansirabe, and again at Ampijoroa

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola*: A flock of 35 were seen well at Nosy Ve

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: Seen in the Ifaty area

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: Seen along the coast

Madagascar Plover *Charadrius thoracicus*: Seen at close range at Ifaty

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*: Seen in Isalo and the south-west

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*: Seen at Ifaty and Tulear (*bifrontatus*, endemic and split by BirdLife)

White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*: Good views at Ifaty (*tenellus*, endemic)

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*: Many seen at the Betsiboka Delta

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*: A nice surprise was seeing two at Toliara

Madagascar Jacana *Actophilornis albinucha*: Good views of a pair at Ampijoroa

Madagascar Snipe *Gallinago macrodactyla*: Seen well en route from Ansirabe to Ranomafana

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: Seen along the coast

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Seen mostly along the coast

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*: Quite numerous at the Betsiboka Delta, and also seen at Maroanetra

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Several sightings

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Seen along the coast

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: Seen at Nosy Ve

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: Seen along the coast

Madagascar Pratincole *Glareola ocularis*: Good views between Tana and Andasibe, and again at Masoala

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*: Seen at Nosy Ve

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis*: The most common tern

Saunders's Tern *Sternula saundersi*: Great views of two at Nosy Ve, and a large flock seen at Betsiboka Delta

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*: Several birds in breeding plumage at Masoala

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: Fairly numerous at Masoala

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*: One in breeding plumage at Ampijoroa

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*: Common

Malagasy Turtle Dove *Nesoenas picturata*: Seen regularly (*picturata*)

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*: Regular in the west (*aliena*, endemic)

Madagascar Green Pigeon *Treron australis*: Seen at Andasibe and Masoala (*australis*), and Zombitse and Ifaty (*xenius*)

Madagascar Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas madagascariensis*: Good views at Andasibe, Mantadia and Ranomafana

Grey-headed Lovebird *Agapornis canus*: Seen at Ifaty and Toliara (*ablectaneus*), and Ampijoroa (*canus*)

Greater Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis vasa*: Our best views were at Ampijoroa (*drouhardi*), but some seen in flight in the east too (*vasa*)

Lesser Vasa Parrot *Coracopsis nigra*: Widespread and more common than the previous species (western *libs* and eastern *nigra*)

Malagasy Coucal *Centropus toulou*: Heard and seen almost daily

Crested Coua *Coua cristata*: Seen at Ifaty (*pyropyga*, split by BirdLife), Ampijoroa (*dumonti*) and Masoala (*cristata*)

Verreaux's Coua *Coua verreauxi*: Good views near Toliara

Blue Coua *Coua caerulea*: Regular in the eastern forests

Red-capped Coua *Coua ruficeps*: Excellent views at Ampijoroa

Green-capped Coua *Coua [ruficeps] oliveiceps*: Seen very well at Ifaty and near Toliara

Red-fronted Coua *Coua reynaudii*: Seen at all eastern forest sites

Coquerel's Coua *Coua coquereli*: Nice looks at Ampijoroa and Zombitse

Running Coua *Coua cursor*: Seen well at Ifaty

Giant Coua *Coua gigas*: Fantastic views at Zombitse

Red-breasted Coua *Coua serriana*: Seen well at Andasibe and Masoala

Madagascar Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*: Several good sightings and heard almost daily

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba*: One at night between Ampijoroa and Mahajanga, and again in Tana (*hypermetra*, regional endemic)

Torotoroka Scops Owl *Otus madagascariensis*: Seen at night at Isalo

Rainforest Scops Owl *Otus rutilus*: Seen on the day roost at Andasibe

White-browed Hawk-Owl *Ninox superciliaris*: Seen at night at Isalo and at day at Zombitse and Masoala

Madagascar [Long-eared] Owl *Asio madagascariensis*: Seen on a day roost near Andasibe

Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*: Seen near Antsirabe (*hova*, endemic)

Madagascar Nightjar *Caprimulgus madagascariensis*: Several good sightings, including during the day at Zombitse

Collared Nightjar *Caprimulgus enarratus*: Excellent views on the nest at Andasibe and on the ground at Ranomafana

Madagascar Spinetail *Zoonavena grandidieri*: Seen well at Mantadia and Masoala

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*: Seen regularly in the lowlands (*gracilis*)

Alpine Swift *Tachymartia melba*: Seen at Anjaha Lemur Reserve

Malagasy Black Swift *Apus balstoni*: Several sightings (*balstoni*, endemic)

Little Swift *Apus affinis*: Seen in Tana, pre-tour

Cuckoo Roller *Leptosomus discolor*: Some great views, including of perched birds (*discolor*, endemic)

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*: Most common at Ampijoroa (*glaucus*, an endemic breeder)

Short-legged Ground Roller *Brachypteracias leptosomus*: Good views at Mantadia after a bit of a chase

Scaly Ground Roller *Geobiastes squamiger*: Good views at Mantadia, and amazingly at Masoala on a night roost

Pitta-like Ground Roller *Atelornis pittoides*: Excellent views at Ranomafana

Rufous-headed Ground Roller *Atelornis crossleyi*: Seen well at Vohiparara

Long-tailed Ground Roller *Uratelornis chimaera*: Brilliant views of one at Ifaty

Malagasy Kingfisher *Corythornis vintsioides*: Regular around wetlands (*vintsioides*, endemic)

Olive Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*: Seen regularly (*superciliosus*)

Madagascar Hoopoe *Upupa marginata*: Several good sightings in the west

Velvet Asity *Philepitta castanea*: Great views of a few males at Ranomafana, a female on the nest at Mantadia, and close looks at Masoala

Schlegel's Asity *Philepitta schlegeli*: Unbeatable views of a male at Ampijoroa

Common Sunbird-Asity *Neodrepanis coruscans*: Good views of a pair at the nest and a single male at Vohiparara

Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity *Neodrepanis hypoxantha*: Quite extraordinary views of a pair at Vohiparara, approaching within 1m of some of the group!

Red-tailed Vanga *Calicalicus madagascariensis*: Several good sightings

Red-shouldered Vanga *Calicalicus rufocarpalis*: Great views of a pair near Toliara

Hook-billed Vanga *Vanga curvirostris*: Great views at the nest at Zombitse (*cetera*)

Bernier's Vanga *Oriolia bernieri*: Two encounters at Masoala, with both the male and female seen by all

Lafresnaye's Vanga *Xenopirostris xenopirostris*: A great sighting of a pair at the nest at Ifaty

Van Dam's Vanga *Xenopirostris damii*: Great views at Ampijoroa

Pollen's Vanga *Xenopirostris polleni*: Seen well at Ranomafana on a couple of occasions

Sickle-billed Vanga *Falcula palliata*: Super views at Ampijoroa and Ifaty

White-headed Vanga *Artamella viridis*: Several good looks, the best at Ampijoroa (*annae*) and Masoala (*viridis*)

Chabert Vanga *Leptopterus chabert*: Seen several times (widespread *chabert* and south-west *schistocercus*)

Blue Vanga *Cyanolanius madagascarinus*: Several sightings (*madagascarinus*, endemic)

Rufous Vanga *Schetba rufa*: Seen at Zombitse and Ampijoroa (*occidentalis*), and Ranomafana and Masoala (*rufa*)

Helmet Vanga *Euryceros prevostii*: Great views at Masoala

Tylas Vanga *Tylas eduardi*: Several in the eastern forests (*eduardi*)

Nuthatch Vanga *Hypositta corallirostris*: Great views at Andasibe

Dark Newtonia *Newtonia amphichroa*: Seen well at Vohiparara and distantly at Mantadia

Common Newtonia *Newtonia brunneicauda*: Seen regularly (*brunneicauda*)

Archbold's Newtonia *Newtonia archboldi*: Good looks at Ifaty

Ward's Flycatcher *Pseudobias wardi*: Seen at Andasibe and Ranomafana

Crossley's Vanga *Mystacornis crossleyi*: Point-blank views of this great bird at Ranomafana

Madagascar Cuckooshrike *Coracina cinerea*: Several good sightings in the east (*cinerea*) and west (*pallida*)

Crested Drongo *Dicrurus forficatus*: Common and widespread (*forficatus*, endemic)
Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone mutata*: Common and widespread (*mutata* in the east, *singetra* in the south and west)
Pied Crow *Corvus albus*: Common and widespread
Madagascar Lark *Mirafra hova*: Seen very well at Antsirabe, Ifaty and Tulear
Malagasy Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*: Common and widespread (*madagascariensis*)
Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica*: Seen regularly (*madagascariensis*)
Brown-throated [Plain] Martin *Riparia paludicola*: Regular around wetlands in the highlands (*cowani*, endemic)
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Seen between Tulear and Ifaty
Malagasy Brush Warbler *Nesillas typica*: Common in the highlands (*typica*)
Subdesert Brush Warbler *Nesillas lantzii*: Common in the south-west
Madagascar Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus newtoni*: Several good sightings
Grey Emutail *Amphilais seebohmi*: Seen well at Ranomafana
Brown Emutail *Bradypterus brunneus*: Good views of one bird at Vohiparara
White-throated Oxylabes *Oxylabes madagascariensis*: Amazing views at Andasibe, and also seen at Ranomafana and Masoala
Long-billed Bernieria *Bernieria madagascariensis*: Seen regularly throughout the tour (*madagascariensis* in the east, *inceleber* in the west)
Cryptic Warbler *Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*: Good views at Vohiparara
Wedge-tailed Jery *Hartertula flavoviridis*: Good views at Ranomafana
Thamnornis [Warbler] *Thamnornis chloropetoides*: Good views at Ifaty
Spectacled Tetraka *Xanthomixis zosterops*: Several good sightings; we probably saw *andapae* at Masoala and *zosterops* at Andasibe and Ranomafana
Appert's Tetraka *Xanthomixis apperti*: Close views of a bird on the nest at Zombitse
Grey-crowned Tetraka *Xanthomixis cinereiceps*: Seen well at Vohiparara
Madagascar Yellowbrow *Crossleyia xanthophrys*: Seen at Vohiparara, but you had to be quick
Rand's Warbler *Randia pseudozosterops*: Seen well at Andasibe
Common Jery *Neomixis tenella*: Common and widespread
Green Jery *Neomixis viridis*: Seen at Mantadia (probably *viridis*)
Stripe-throated Jery *Neomixis striatigula*: Seen well at Andasibe (possibly *sclateri*), Ranomafana (possibly *striatigula*), and at Ifaty and Tulear (*pallidior*)
Madagascar Cisticola *Cisticola cherina*: Several good sightings
Malagasy White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatanus*: Regular in the east (*maderaspatanus*)
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*: Common
Madagascar Starling *Hartlaubius auratus*: Seen at Mantadia and in larger numbers at Masoala
Madagascar Magpie-Robin *Copsychus albospectularis*: Common and widespread; *albospectularis* at Masoala, *pica* in the west and in 'Tana and *inexpectatus* at Andasibe and Ranomafana
Madagascar Stonechat *Saxicola sibilla*: Fairly common in the highlands (*sibilla*)
Littoral Rock Thrush *Monticola imerina*: Great looks at a male at Anakao
Forest Rock Thrush *Monticola sharpei*: Seen well at Ranomafana (*salomonseni*) and "Benon's Rock Thrush" (*bensoni*) was seen well at Isalo
Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris sovimanga*: Many great views (*sovimanga* throughout, *apolis* in the south-west)
Malagasy Green Sunbird *Cinnyris notatus*: Several good looks (*notatus*)
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: A surprise sighting in Mahajanga, where there seem to be no previous records
Nelicourvi Weaver *Ploceus nelicourvi*: Seen at all eastern forest sites
Sakalava Weaver *Ploceus sakalava*: Regular in the west (*sakalava* at Ampijoroa, *minor* at Ifaty)
Red Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*: Common and widespread
Forest Fody *Foudia omissa*: Initially all the birds we saw showed characters of being hybrids, but eventually we had two good sightings of pure males at Ranomafana
Madagascar Mannikin *Lemuresthes nana*: Several good looks
Madagascar Wagtail *Motacilla flaviventris*: Common and widespread.