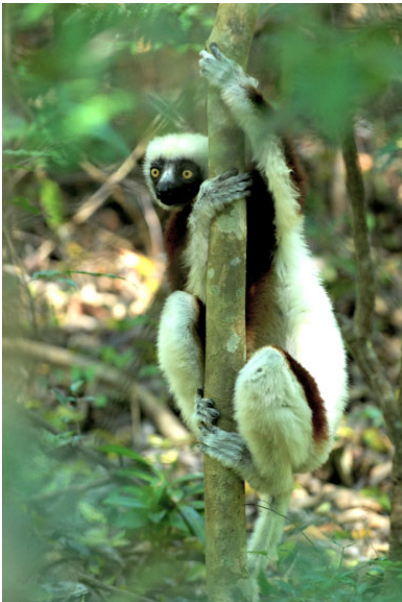


Madagascar

Naturetrek Tour Report

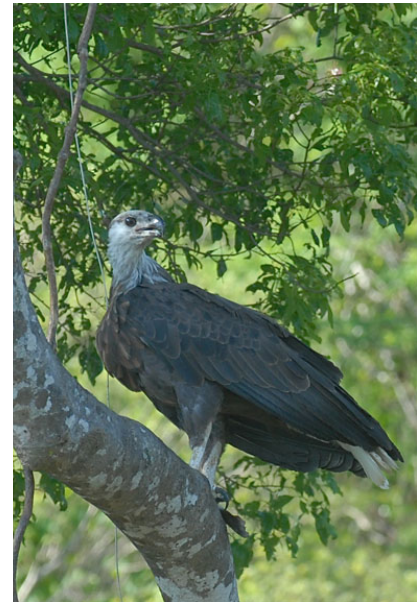
15 October - 6 November 2008



Coquerel's Sifaka



Parson's Chameleon



Fish Eagle



Indri

Report & images compiled by Cathy Harlow



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Day 1

Wednesday 15th October

Paris to Antananarivo

The group and leaders Desi and Cathy assembled in the arrivals hall at Antananarivo Airport, after the flight from Paris, which arrived a little later than scheduled. After changing money, we set off for the 30 minute transfer to the Tana Plaza Hotel in the city centre for a comfortable night's sleep.

Day 2

Thursday 16th October

Antananarivo to Antsirabe

Weather: hot and sunny

After the long flight and late arrival, we enjoyed a relative lie in and met up at breakfast. Once the coach was loaded up, we were on the road by 9 o'clock. We started with a visit to Tsimbazaza Zoo and Botanical Garden in the capital, which provides an overview of Madagascar's wildlife and a chance to see species such as Aye-Aye and Fossa that are difficult to observe in the wild. The noctarium has reverse lighting and the Aye-Ayes were especially active as our visit coincided with feeding time. The Fossa, a mostly nocturnal hunter, was resting and out of sight.

Heading out of the capital on the RN7, a twisting, traffic-clogged street flanked by vendors selling everything from sausages to phone cards, we passed the president's residence, an opulent edifice modelled on the nineteenth century Queen Ranaivalona's palace. Soon, we were enjoying the sweeping vistas typical of Madagascar's Hauts Plateaux: smooth granite inselbergs rising from the fertile rice paddies, where women were busily engaged in the back-breaking planting out of rice seedlings from the nursery paddies.

After a lunch stop at Ambatolampy at the Relais des Pecheurs, we paused by the road side, where villagers skilfully craft toys from wood. Here, brown-throated Sand Martins, Stone Chats and Bush Larks added variety to the common Mynas and Pied Crows that had dominated the birding so far.

Later, two Hammerkops were noted foraging in the rice paddies and their huge nests were spotted nearby. A number of Kestrels were also observed, both perched and in flight. We ended this day of travel arriving just before sunset in Antsirabe, where there was time for a brisk walk down the main street to the rather grand but ageing Hotel des Thermes., which overlooks a small lake. Several of the group found the chocolaterie next to Arotel hard to resist.

Day 3

Friday 17th October

Antsirabe to Ranomafana

Weather: hot and sunny

We made an early start for today's long but exciting drive along the backbone of Madagascar's mountainous interior, punctuated by ever-changing scenes from village life. Zebu cattle play a pivotal role, both in providing transport and in breaking up the hard-baked clay of the rice paddies, which we stopped to photograph. Next we were waylaid by the wonderful spectacle of at least 20 Madagascar Bee eaters nesting in a sandy cliff overlooking the road – we could see them burrowing out their nests. Arriving at the attractive historic town of Ambositra, which is known for its skilled wood carvers, we visited a workshop and several of the group bought souvenirs.

Continuing south, we paused by a fragment of native forest, where a small pond and marsh looked promising. Desi, our expert local guide soon had us searching for a Madagascar Swamp Warbler, which he had heard. Eventually it showed well enough for most to get a glimpse, as it flitted in and out of a low shrub. Stonechat, Great Egret, Madagascar White-eye, Madagascar Wagtail and a flock of Brown-throated Sand Martins contributed to making this a worthwhile stop. Multi-coloured Giant Lubber Locusts were also noted munching away at the side of the road.

After a very late lunch at Domaine Nature, we got our room keys and made our way to the bungalows 100 yards up the road, which all offered panoramic views as a reward for a rather steep climb. On the way a pair of Madagascar Cuckoo Rollers was spotted perched on a branch above a small waterfall, just yards from the road. This was a bird whose plaintive whistle was heard in many of the reserves we visited, but this sensational view of them was unrivalled.

Late afternoon, we boarded the bus again for the short ride to the entrance to Ranomafana National Park. The rainforest reserve protects important tracts of both primary and regrowth forest and was created following the discovery of the Golden Bamboo Lemur *Haplolemur aureus*, which was identified as a new species in 1985. While Desi arranged for park permits, the group were already spotting at the park entrance, where a Madagascar Buzzard was sighted on top of a tree stump across the valley – the species' colouring is highly variable and this individual's chest was very pale.

The afternoon light was mellow as we crossed the Namorona River, plunging into thicker forest on its opposite bank, where we heard rainforest Scops Owl. Souimanga Sunbird and Madagascar White eye were easily viewed here but the highlight was a male Velvet Asity, obligingly perched at eye level and its lime-green wattle clearly visible.

Progress was slow on Ranomafana's steep trails but we arrived at Belle Vue to see a pair of striped Civets, also known as Fanaloka, who regularly turn up at dusk. Though they are no longer fed they are quite unafraid of people and approached to within a few feet of us. Here too we witnessed two diminutive Brown Mouse Lemurs darting along the branches of an introduced guava thicket. Making our way back down we came across two beautiful moths, identified by Doug as Sphinx or Hawk moths.

On the way back from dinner, two Chameleons, *Calumma nasuta* and the more colourful *Calumma gallus* were spotted perched on a bush at the foot of the steps leading to our rooms. A closer look at an adjacent bush revealed several praying mantis and dozens of Stick insects.

Day 4

Saturday 18th October

Ranomafana National Park

Weather: hot and sunny

A fantastic day of wildlife with something for everyone, although a little tiring for some in the heat... Half the group were up at 5.15 for an early morning bird watch along the road with Cathy and Desi which brought a host of new species, including Madagascar Magpie Robin, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar White-eye, Souimanga Sunbird, Madagascar bulbul, Madagascar fody, crested drongo, Chabert's vanga, Madagascar Spinetail, Long-billed Green Sunbird, Madagascar Mannikin and Nelicourvi Weaver. Making our way back to Domaine Nature for breakfast, we noted that last night's Chameleons were still on their perches, *Calumma gallus* was especially colourful.

After breakfast we headed into the park with local guide Jean-Chrys and his assistant Aina. At the entrance, Rand's Warbler was noted on a tree top perch and a Forest Fody male in its red breeding plumage was also seen – a much scarcer bird than the Madagascar Fody. A four-spotted emerald Day Gecko *Phelsuma quadriocellata* was readily photographed on a banana leaf and as we crossed the river, three Madagascar Wagtails flew overhead. Soon Jean-Chrys heard the call of a Madagascar Wood Rail and lured it out so most of the group got a good view. Then Aina, our lemur spotter came back with reports of Golden Bamboo Lemur in the vicinity and within minutes we had two in sight. One came down low, jumping over the heads of some of the group before bounding off into the distant boughs.

Heading off the main trail, we then followed a ridge and dipped back down into the forest where three Greater Bamboo Lemurs *Haplemys simus* were feeding in the canopy, adeptly stripping the outer sheath off the bamboo to reach the pith inside. It was a privilege to sit quietly observing one of Madagascar's rarest lemurs, a species as scarce or even scarcer than the Golden Bamboo Lemur.. Desi, meanwhile found a Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko *Uroplatus fantasticus* mimicking a dead leaf on a bush. These nocturnal reptiles rely on camouflage to remain undetected during the day. Nearby another nocturnal species, the small-toothed Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur microdon* was resting in a cavity on top of a dead tree stump about 20ft off the ground. A frog in the leaf litter was identified as Madagascan Wood Frog *Aglyptodactylus madagascariensis*. Next we ran into a female Velvet Asity and a Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo, a species more often heard than seen and then to top it all, a Ring-tailed Mongoose *Galidia elegans* ambled down the path towards us to the delight of the photographers in the group. Unlike the Striped Civet, which we had seen last night, this is a diurnal species.

This memorable morning also brought half a dozen Red Forest Rats scurrying about on the forest floor- most of them too quick to photograph. Descending to a beautiful stream with a small waterfall, some of the group paused to examine and photograph two interesting frogs - the larger one in the water was later identified as a *Mantidactylus grandidieri*. Then we had news of eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs *Hapalemur griseus* nearby – exceptional luck to find all three species in one morning! They were feeding in the canopy so photographing them proved quite challenging.

We returned for lunch and a rest at Domaine Nature before boarding the coach again 3.30 for the short drive to the Namorona Falls, where the river drops off the eastern escarpment in a series of cataracts. Here we found several interesting frogs Madagascan Treefrog *Boophis madagascariensis* clinging to the rock face and a Six-lined Snake *Liopholidophis sexlineatus* which likes damp habitat and was clearly in its element in the ditch at the side of the road. A few Dancing Ladies Orchids *Cynorchis* sp. were still in bloom on the cliff, along with purple-flowering *Streptocarpus* sp. A beautiful Blue-nosed Chameleon *Calumma boettgeri* was spotted by the waterfall in a Palisander (rosewood) tree.

We continued further along the road in search of Baron's Painted Mantella *Mantella baroni* cleverly spotted in a stream by our guides and much admired and photographed. Here a new section of the National Park is being opened up and trails and facilities are still under construction. A 20-minute walk brought us to a viewpoint overlooking a small lake, where five of the endangered Meller's Duck were seen on the water, along with 20 or so Red-billed Teal. This open terrain is also perfect habitat the Grey Emutail, a warbler-like bird inhabiting marshy ground and in response to Jean-Chrys' tape, four of these secretive birds were flushed out of hiding and showed well.

As daylight was now fading, it was time to head back, the sun briefly glowing red on a horizon misted over by smoke from slash and burn. But this memorable day held yet one more surprise in store for us – a Hensts' Goshawk briefly spotted in flight.

Day 5

Sunday 19th October

Ranomafana

Weather: hot and sunny

With some a little stiff from the steep trails yesterday, we divided into two groups for this morning's exploration of the high altitude montane rainforest at Vohiparara, Jean-Chrys and Cathy taking the 'sprinters', while Desi and Fidy accompanied those who were happier at a more leisurely pace.

Today's challenge was to find some of the rare birds that are a speciality of Ranomafana, as well as search out lemur species we had missed yesterday. On the bird front we did rather well, with Pitta-like Ground Roller, Madagascar Brush Warbler, Common Jery, Rand's Warbler, Souimanga Sunbird, Blue Coua, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Crested Drongo, Brown Emu tail Cuckoo Roller and blue, red-tailed and Pollen's Vangas all observed. Climbing to a high ridge, Jean-Chrys' group heard the Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity call but this tiny though strikingly coloured bird did not show willingly! We were just about to give up, when a pair finally perched readily on a branch above us and most got a reasonable view of them. Rufous-headed Ground Roller was heard but not seen.

Further photo opportunities were provided by Velvet Asity, a splendid O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon spotted by Alison and several *Mantidactylus* frogs: *M. opiparus*, *M. asper* and *M. pulcher*. Giraffe-necked Weevils were spotted on their preferred habitat of *Melastoma* shrubs – the male sporting an outrageously long neck, which it uses to roll the female's eggs into a leaf-parcel.

Mammal sightings were also rewarding this morning and both groups encountered a family of Red-bellied Lemurs, with a tiny baby, clinging precariously to its mother's lower abdomen. The male in the group was clearly distinguished by his white eye patches. Lemurs in this part of the park are less habituated and generally quite shy but we got excellent views of this group as they crossed our path. Cathy and Jean-Chry's group were also lucky to find a Milne-Edwards Sifaka at rest in the boughs of a tree at almost eye level. Several spectacular butterflies were spotted by both groups this morning. On our return to the hotel, a Tree Boa *Sanzinia madagascariensis* was detected in a hole in the stone wall opposite.

After a copious lunch at Domaine Nature and a chance to taste local specialities crayfish and stewed taro leaves (rather too closely resembling a cow pat!), some of the group opted to return to the main part of the park to look for Bamboo Lemurs again. The rest of the group went by coach to Andafangina, where Fidy's father has a small-holding. Here we were able to view and photograph at close quarters both male and female Parson's Chameleons, among the largest and most brightly coloured of all chameleons. Along the way, we stopped to photograph the disturbing evidence of slash and burn agriculture.

Day 6

Monday 20th October

Ranomafana to Isalo

Weather: misty at first, then hot and sunny

The birders were up before dawn for a pre-breakfast visit to Vohiparara and a second attempt to find Rufous-headed and Pitta-like Ground-rollers. An early morning mist lingered over the rainforest, keeping temperatures down to a comfortable 12 Celsius. Repeated efforts at several locations failed to entice the Rufous-headed to show itself but the splendid view of the Pitta-like, perched on a branch at eye level more than made up for this. Moreover, we were able to observe the curious head and tail bobbing, each time it called – a real treat for the photographers.

After breakfast it was time to move on again and the coach was loaded up for the long journey to Isalo. The recently re-surfaced road made for a comfortable ride and early arrival in Fianarantsoa, where several of the group indulged in patisserie and coffee at the Soafia Hotel, while the bus took on fuel. Continuing south through the island's main wine-producing region, the scenery became ever more spectacular, with distant views of the Andringitra range on the approach to the cattle-market town of Ambalavao. Here we paused to visit the paper factory, whose flower-impregnated paper is hand-made following a tradition introduced by Arab traders in the Antaimoro region. Julia M. spotted a dark plumaged raptor perched in a tree, which was presumed to have been the rare Bat Hawk.

South of Ambalavao, we soon reached the community reserve of Anja, where a surprisingly lush pocket of gallery forest sits at the foot of a granite massif in a very spectacular setting. The forest is linked by a corridor to other such pockets, so ensuring genetic diversity for a healthy population of around 1000 ring-tailed lemurs.

In the company of several enthusiastic local guides, we soon had them in sight and enjoyed a good 30 minutes quietly observing these very social lemurs going about the all important business of scent marking using wrist and anal glands, to define their territory. At least 15 adults and juveniles headed by the dominant female made up this group but being spring, there were also five very young babies to be seen, still clinging to their mother's belly. What makes Anja a particularly rewarding place to see the Ring-tails is the presence of large granite boulders forming a kind of giant adventure playground for these naturally agile and acrobatic lemurs, who are as comfortable on the ground as they are in trees. Needless to say, the photo opportunities were superb.

Anja proved to be something of a reptile hot spot too and here we encountered two dry forest Chameleons – a superb Jewel Chameleon *Furcifer lateralis* and the first of many huge Oustalet's Chameleons *Furcifer oustaleti*, and three other new reptiles, Grandidier's Madagascar Swift *Oplurus grandidieri*, Three-eyed Lizard *Chalarodon madagascariensis* and Lined Plated Lizard *Zonosaurus laticaudatus*.

Our packed lunch was relished under a shady canopy at the entrance to the reserve but all too soon it was time to get back on the bus for the rest of the journey. There was hardly a dull moment with a succession of Kestrels, Common Mynas, Bush Larks, Bee-eaters, Yellow-billed Kites and Cattle and Dimorphic Egrets, not forgetting the Pied Crows, of which we counted 127.

Climbing in a series of hair-pin bends to the Horombe Plateau, the last hours of the journey passed in quiet contemplation of how impossibly hard it must be to eke out a living in this barren and inhospitable place. The light had all but gone by the time we arrived at very luxurious Jardin du Roi Hotel, on the edge of Isalo National Park, where we settled in to comfortable and spacious rooms.

Day 7

Tuesday 21st October

Isalo National Park

Weather: very hot and sunny

Half the group were up for an early morning bird walk in the grounds of the hotel with Desi and Cathy. Already Madagascar Hoopoes were up and about probing the soil for insects. A couple of Coucals came out of the undergrowth in a flurry of activity that was suggestive of mating, while the hoped-for Benson's Rock Thrush sang repeatedly from its sentinel post on a sandstone outcrop above the hotel. Both Souimanga and Madagascar Long-billed Green Sunbird were beautifully lit up by the first rays of sun as they perched on a dead branch. The White-throated Rail could be heard calling from the pandanus forest along the banks of the stream, but it failed to show. Namaqua Dove, Grey-headed Love bird, Bee eater, Common Jery, Palm Swift, Bulbul and Greater Vasa Parrot added further variety to a rewarding session.

Following breakfast, a short drive brought us to the town of Ranohira (meaning ring-tail lemurs' watering hole!) where we met our very personable and communicative reserve guide Nirina and picked up park permits. Today's plan was to focus on the Namaza area of the park, which offers the greatest variety of accessible fauna and flora, with the least effort – which was an important consideration given the expected high temperatures. Walking along the easy and mostly level trail into the Namaza canyon, Nirina introduced us to some of Isalo's unusual flora, including the pink-flowered *Pemphis madagascariensis*, *Pandanus ancathostila*, *Turia sp.* a red-flowering shrub and a *Licpodium* Club Moss.

As the heat was already mounting, the bird life was predictably subdued but we were treated to a Bee-eater feasting on a newly snatched dragonfly. Madagascar Fody, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Kestrel and three Benson's Rock Thrush were also noted during the morning. Nirina had warned us that lemurs were often difficult to find here but reaching the campsite, we were disappointed to learn that the Ring-tailed Lemurs had apparently moved higher up the slopes to feed on tapia fruit.

At this point some of the group elected to stay around the campsite to search out chameleons, while others continued deeper into the canyon to visit the waterfall Cascade des Nymphes. Along the way we were lucky to stumble on a family group of three Verreaux's Sifaka, including a very playful juvenile, who amused us by clowning around on the ground. Nirina informed us that encounters such as this were unusual because normally the Sifaka here are shy. The trail then crossed the stream and steadily mounted steps cut out of the rock until the canyon narrowed to a slit. Here a deep-turquoise pool fed by a chute of refreshingly cool water proved too much of a temptation to Cathy, who jumped in clothes and all. Surprisingly no-one elected to follow the leader at this point!

Returning to the camp ground we learned that the rest of the group had also had a rewarding time, having seen Ring-tailed Lemurs and for Frank, who had wandered further up the path, some Red-fronted Brown Lemurs as well. Isalo provided some interesting invertebrates and we observed Flatid Leaf-bug nymphs *Phromnia rosea* which excrete a white waxy substance giving them a curious feathery appearance but providing a valuable defence against predators. Yellow and black Ladybugs were seen clustered on a branch and Madagascar's largest Swallowtail Butterfly, the bird-wing like Crimson Rose *Atrophaneura anterior* kept the photographers busy, when we encountered a mating pair.

After an eventful morning in the dramatic sandstone scenery of Isalo we returned to the hotel for a late lunch and time to relax and enjoy the swimming pool. Late in the afternoon, we walked behind the hotel to a small lake, where numerous Red-billed Teal and White-faced Whistling Duck were spotted. Crossing the small stream we climbed through the sandstone to view the sunset and some more unusual flora, including the Elephant's Foot plant *Pachypodium rosulatum*, its fragile yellow blooms and tender rosette of leaves protected by a spiny stem. Here too we found *Aloe isaloensis*, *Kalanchoe* and *Salotse*, after which Isalo is named. An early supper was called for in preparation for a very early rise tomorrow.

Day 8

Wednesday 22nd October

Isalo to Toliara (Tulear)

Weather: very hot and sunny

We left at 4.30 in order to arrive before sunrise at Zombitse National Park. This is a transitional forest with elements of both dry deciduous and southern Euphorbia scrub and a rare fragment of native forest in an otherwise denuded landscape. Here we combed the undergrowth for Appert's Tetraka without success but David's keen eyes spotted a resting Hubbard's Sportive Lemur in a tree hollow, which obligingly posed for the cameras.

Later a group of around 10 red-fronted Brown Lemurs were glimpsed briefly but as this reserve gets relatively few visitors, they were predictably shy.

Lesser Vasa Parrot, Running Coua, Crested Coua, Madagascar Magpie Robin, Madagascar Coucal, Crested Drongo, Common Jery and plenty of both Souiamanga and Long-billed Green Sunbirds and White-eyes headed a slightly disappointing bird count for this normally very productive reserve.

Continuing the journey we traversed a barren landscape punctuated with Baobabs to reach the market town of Sakaraha, which like the mining town of Ilakaka we had driven through earlier, has been scarred by sapphire 'fever'. At this point Gill discovered that her foot was becoming increasingly painful following a fall by the roadside earlier. Arriving at the botanical garden at Tulear, the rest of the group stayed with Desi for a tour of the gardens, while Cathy continued with Gill to the clinic St Luc to get her foot seen by a doctor. Following lunch at the Paille en Queue Hotel, the rest of the afternoon was at leisure, in preparation for another early start.

Day 9

Thursday 23rd October

Tulear to Anakao

Weather: hot and sunny; windy in the afternoon

After breakfast, we made our way to the mudflats where low tide meant that a 'flotilla' of zebu carts were lined up to transport us a hundred yards or so out to sea to our boat moored offshore. A delay for refuelling left us with time to get a scope out and soon we had checked off a flock of Curlew, several Greenshank, Turnstone and a single Grey Plover. High winds were forecast for later in the morning so we made our way directly to Anakao, instead of following the coast. Already the breeze was picking up and this made for a rather bumpy if exhilarating ride, which took just over an hour. On arrival we checked into the Safari Vezo Hotel, located on a glorious sandy beach overlooking the island of Nosy Ve and barrier reef beyond. Accommodation is in individual bungalows, all with wonderful sea views and recent improvements in the rooms mean that they are now very comfortable.

We decided to head straight for Nosy Ve, a coral cay sited a few miles offshore and a nesting ground for several hundred Red-tailed Tropic birds. After a 20 minute boat ride, the captain moored on the leeward side of the island, and we jumped into the shallows heading up the beach to look for the Tropicbirds. The nesting sites – in the sand under bushes - were plentiful and we encountered several older chicks as well as adults, presumably still incubating. Anything up to a dozen of these graceful birds were in the air at a time, flying over and around us, but tantalisingly difficult to photograph. Along the shore, several rare endemic Madagascar Plovers were observed.

By late-morning the heat was intense and it was time for a quick dip in the sea before returning to the hotel for lunch. Over lunch we had the company of several subdesert Brush Warblers who clearly considered the restaurant their territory. We also spotted a Littoral Rock Thrush nest, cleverly concealed in a Silver Thicket *Euphorbia stenoclada* right by the restaurant. The female was sitting on the nest, while to our surprise we discovered that evening that the male had made his roost on a beam in the restaurant. Sakalava Weavers were also nesting around the hotel.

Late afternoon we took a walk in the euphorbia scrub behind the hotel, which yielded sightings of Common Jery, Madagascar Cisticola, Sub-desert Brush Warbler, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Bulbul, Common Myna, Pied Crow and Madagascar Bee-eater. Three-eyed Lizards were also abundant in this dry rocky habitat.

Most of the group gathered for a drink in the bar at sunset, watching the pirogues returning to the beach, where they were hauled up onto shore. Not surprisingly, fresh fish was a popular item on the evening menu. Later that evening a Madagascar Nightjar was heard and spotted by the hotel.

Day 10

Friday 24th October

Anakao to Ifaty

Weather: very hot and sunny

Because of limited space on the boat we were asked to split the group for the return transfer to Tulear and Barbara nobly offered to go in the advance party with Desi, while the rest of the group took a stroll along the beach to the Vezo fishing village of Anakao. Everything seems to happen on the beach and most of it revolving round the brightly painted pirogues that are used for transport as well as for fishing. We observed outrigger canoes being skilfully hollowed out from tree trunks, a tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. Many of the local women use a face mask made from the pulp of a tree, designed to soften and protect the skin.

Soon it was time for the rest of the group to board the boat and with the wind behind us we enjoyed a slightly smoother ride back to Tulear, made all the more exciting when two Humpback Whales were spotted by Gill along the way. The captain slowed the boat down so we could observe what was most likely to be a mother and calf pair travelling south to Antarctica after spending the austral winter around Madagascar.

Back in Tulear, we lunched on the terrace of a very pleasant Italian restaurant recommended by Desi, which offered a huge selection and fast service. After lunch it was back on the bus to head north to Ifaty on the RN5, the main coast road but one, we were warned, where we might get bogged down in drifting sand. Thanks to the skill of our driver Lalah, we sailed through without a hitch though made a stop at the mangroves, where a huge flock of White-faced Whistling Ducks were gathered on a sandbank. Also spotted along the shore were a number of Whimbrel, Black-winged Stilt, Grey and Kittlitz Plovers, while five Greater Crested Terns battled with the wind.

Arriving at the Paradisier Hotel at Ifaty, we checked into our very comfortable and luxurious beach front chalets. While Desi went to arrange our guide for the morning, Cathy and the group took a late afternoon walk through the spiny forest in the grounds of the hotel, which can be rewarding for bird watching. Numerous Sakalava Weavers, Madagascar Coucal, Madagascar Bee-eater, Madagascar Hoopoe, Madagascar Bulbul and Madagascar Magpie Robin were found with ease and a Chabert's Vanga perched obligingly on a bare tree branch, giving most an excellent view of its characteristic blue eye-ring. David took the honour of spotting the first Sickle-billed Vangas of the trip, while Doug located a Barn Owl, roosting in the shade of a euphorbia.

At nightfall, a pair of Madagascar Nightjars swooped down over the swimming pool, grabbing insects attracted to the pool lights. On our way back to the bungalows later that evening, another Nightjar was spotted on the path, together with several Geckos, which had taken up residence inside the light fittings, either side of the path.

Day 11

Saturday 25th October

Ifaty

Weather – hot, sunny and very windy

The wind had died down during the night and we rose to a cool and calm dawn. Our pre-breakfast bird watch was to take place in the Reniala private reserve, a 20 minute drive to the north. Here, adjacent to the village of Ifaty, an area of spiny forest is protected, providing a good chance to see Long-tailed Ground Roller and Sub-desert Mesite, two local rarities confined to this corner of the island and both under threat. With plenty of dry leaf litter, this is perfect habitat for these birds. Also typical of this forest are the red-barked *Adansonia fony* baobabs and we noted that several of the larger examples had hand-holds cut into their huge swollen trunks so that locals can climb up to pick the fruits. The guides soon had us picking out Archbold's Newtonia and Stripe-throated and Green Jery on the tree tops, while a Green-capped Coua came briefly into view but scuttled away before most could attempt a photograph. Then, the exquisitely coloured Running Coua was spotted perched in sunlight on a branch and everyone enjoyed good views of it.

Our guide Dabe had sent out spotters to try to round up the Long-tailed Ground-roller and soon we were heading through thorny scrub to where they had found it. This ground-dwelling species has splendid blue feathers on its incredibly long tail and is a most impressive bird to view and photograph at close quarters.

Next our attention was drawn by the plaintive mewing of the Sickle-billed Vanga quickly followed by its scolding alarm call. Suddenly, a cacophony of chortling and screeching alerted us to a group of four Sickle-billed Vangas mobbing a Madagascar Harrier Hawk. As they moved from tree to tree, we got reasonable views of what is arguably one of the island's most spectacular birds of prey. Eventually the Harrier Hawk was driven off and the Vangas settled down out of view. This eventful morning also gave us White-headed and Chabert's Vanga and many of the group got superb views of a male white-morph Paradise Flycatcher.

As the temperature began to rise, it was time to head back for breakfast. Desi then took part of the group for a further foray into the hotel grounds, spotting Hoopoe, White-headed Vanga and Sakalava Weavers and a *Mimophis mahfalensis* Snake, *Zonosaurus karsteni* Plated Lizard and Spiny-tailed Iguanid.

Cathy went with Karen and Frank on a snorkel trip by boat to an outcrop of coral bommies, protected as a reserve further up the coast. The wind was already getting up and the sea becoming choppy, though lettuce corals were abundant. The staghorn corals were in a sorry state but showing some signs of regrowth. Huge numbers of mushroom corals and sea urchins were evident, along with a surprising number of fish: spectacular and garish Parrotfish, grazing on coral algae; various Triggerfish and Wrasse, including Cleaner Wrasse, obligingly picking off parasites from larger fish; and Frank's favourite, the Chocolate Dip Chromis, darting around in small shoals.

After lunch, most had a siesta or lounged by the pool. Late afternoon Desi and Cathy accompanied the birders to the ponds and salt pans either side of the road, where Plovers proved plentiful – Madagascar Plover, Kittlitz Plover, Ringed Plover and Three banded Plover, with its prominent red eye-ring were all present, along with a dozen Black-winged Stilts, Greenshank and Whimbrel.

Day 12

Sunday 26th October

Ifaty to Tulear

Hot, sunny and windy

Some of the group were keen to return to Reniala to try again for the Sub-desert Mesite so an early start was arranged. Once located, the Mesites performed to perfection, flying onto a branch and freezing for about ten minutes. This was an action-packed morning as next up were two Kestrels mating on top of a spiny *Alluaudia* branch and a Hook-billed Vanga on its nest in a baobab. Next, Desi skilfully called in a pair of Red-tailed Vanga, whose strident contact call is reminiscent of a wolf whistle. Sickie-billed, White-headed, Lafresnaye's and Chabert's Vangas were also spotted on what turned out to be a most fruitful walk.

The rest of the morning was free to relax and enjoy the beach and pool. Unexpectedly, Doug and Elaine had to leave the tour to return home to Arizona and we were sorry to say goodbye to them – we will certainly miss Doug's expertise and enthusiasm for reptiles and amphibians. Desi accompanied them to Tulear to try and get them on the afternoon flight to Tana.

After an early lunch, we loaded the coach and set off – a little apprehensive as there were reports that the road was blocked by trucks bogged down in the sand, which had drifted onto the road in the high winds of the last days. Our driver Lalah and ever-willing assistant Kajy, knew all the tricks and we sailed through without a hitch. Along the way, we stopped by the sandbanks, where the White-faced Ducks were still gathered. Trying to hold scopes steady in the fierce wind was challenging but a single Greenshank and four Bar-tailed Godwit were detected among a flock of Whimbrel. We observed four Greater Crested Terns battling with the wind too, pausing to rest on a tree stump and allowing us to observe their prominent yellow bills. Just after setting off again, a large raptor was spotted just off the road and this turned out to be a Madagascar Harrier Hawk.

Over drinks by the pool, Madagascar Nightjars called and were observed.

Day 13

Monday 27th October

Tulear to Berenty

Weather: hot and sunny and again rather windy

We were up for 5.30 to head for the coral rag table lands south-east of Tulear, where we hoped to view Coquerel's Coua and Red-shouldered Vanga, a rare endemic possibly confined to this limited area. Stopping at a roadside pool for a flock of Great Egrets, we also noted Common Moorhen, Kittlitz Plover, Three-banded Plover and several Greater Painted Snipe.

Desi then led us into an unforgiving landscape of dense thorny scrub, dominated by euphorbiaceae, where soon we heard the Red-shouldered Vanga return his call though failed to get a glimpse of it. Crested Drongo, Souimanga Sunbird, Namaqua Dove and Madagascar Partridge were spotted and there were fine views down to the coast, where hundreds of pirogues (small flat-bottomed boats) could be seen between the shore and the barrier reef.

We returned to the hotel for breakfast and then headed into Tulear where Karen and Frank caught up with election news, while others went to the colourful local market and then to the mudflats. Here, Whimbrel and Greenshank were observed.

Then it was time to head for the airport and say goodbye to Lalah and Kajj, our drivers. During the hour-long flight to Fort Dauphin, we crossed a fire-scorched landscape and spectacular views of the coast were had as we landed. There we were met by local guide Olivier and transferred by coach along a very bumpy road to Berenty, a journey of almost four hours. Along the way a stop was made to look at the Triangle Palms *Dyopsis decaryi* in the transitional forest and in the spiny forest, where the Madagascar Ocotillo *Alluaudia procera* trees were beautifully lit up by the late afternoon sun. The tall, straight trunks of this deciduous thorny tree are used for building houses in the region and a reforestation project in this area allows for sustainable harvesting. Several of the group bought wood carvings from a roadside stall.

Arriving at Berenty, we checked in and within minutes Ring-tailed lemur, Red-fronted Brown Lemur and Verreaux's Sifaka were around us – as exciting a reception as one could wish for. As darkness fell we reassembled to head off to the spiny forest for a night walk. Night walks are often superb at Berenty and this evening we excelled with no fewer than eight White-footed Sportive Lemurs caught in our beams, peering down from the spiny boughs. Both reddish-grey and grey Mouse Lemurs were also found, but were less willing to stop still for a photograph. Several Spiny-backed Chameleons were seen, typically perched on the end of a thin branch.

Day 14

Tuesday 28th October

Berenty

Weather: hot and sunny

After a hot and sticky night, the relative cool of the morning air was a welcome respite. We assembled at dawn for an early walk into the Malaza area of Berenty's gallery forest. Within minutes we had found a Crested Coua, wings outstretched to warm up in the first rays of sun. Nearby, another was poking its beak under loose bark on a branch, presumably looking for insects. Soon after, a Giant Coua crossed the path in front of us, a chameleon in its mouth. Next, Olivier pointed out a Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher's nest, just a few feet off the ground, with two young perched beside it.

Down by the river, whose flow was reduced to a few stagnating pools, a flock of Madagascar Sandgrouse filed past and a few Greenshank and Helmeted Guineafowl were noted. We came across a group of six Verreaux's Sifaka, also sunning themselves on a branch and busily engaged in the important business of grooming. A squawking Drongo alerted us to the presence of a France's Sparrowhawk, which we would have liked to get a good view of but it made off as the Drongos mobbed it repeatedly. Olivier led us next to a Barn Owl and White-browed Owl's roosts and close by, a White-footed Sportive Lemur, poking its head out of the tree hollow where it rests during the day.

Over breakfast, we were entertained by the antics of a particularly determined member of the Ring-tailed Lemur group we named the 'breakfast brigade', whose business it is to clear the tables of any leftovers, especially jam.

After breakfast we were back in the forest, this time exploring the Ankoba section of gallery forest, where several different groups of Red-fronted Brown Lemurs crossed our path. Some made spectacular leaps from branch to branch, with babies clinging precariously to their mother's belly and back, while others seemed quite at home on the ground, their erect tails swaying as they ambled confidently along Berenty's broad trails. More Crested and Giant Couas gave excellent photographic opportunities. We ended the morning with a visit to the Madagascar Flying Fox colony, where a huge tamarind tree was festooned with hundreds of chattering Fruit Bats.

After lunch, there was free time to rest or for some the opportunity to try capturing a 'dancing' Sifaka on camera. Late afternoon, we took the coach to the Ramily Spiny Forest, where we saw Sifaka feeding on *Comifera simplifolia* and Ring-tailed Lemurs eating the tough-looking flower-spike of a sisal plant. Another interesting plant was Elephants Ear Kalanchoe *Kalanchoe beharensis*, whose velvety leaves are eaten by tortoises, when they fall to the ground.

The forest caretaker led us to a Madagascar Nightjar roosting on the path, its cryptic colouring making it almost impossible to distinguish from the dead leaves. Here too Olivier found a Torotoroka Scops Owl roosting in a *Euphorbia stenoclada*, a tree whose latex is used as glue in boat building. In a neighbouring tree, two reddish-grey Mouse Lemurs were beginning to stir as the light was fading, and we had a view of Green-capped Coua crossing the path. Continuing our walk with torches, we again were very lucky with the White-footed Sportive Lemurs.

Day 15

Wednesday 29th October

Berenty-Antananarivo

Weather: hot and sunny at Berenty, overcast and gloomy at Fort Dauphin and pleasantly cool in Antananarivo

Bridge repairs on the Mandrare River meant that it would be closed to traffic but by sending the bus and luggage ahead we managed a dawn walk. This yielded Green Pigeon and good views of Lesser Vasa Parrot, perched on top of a tamarind in the car park. Sunrise over the Mandrare was mesmerising and Madagascar Coucal, Bee-eater, Grey-headed Love Birds, Yellow-billed Kite and Cattle Egrets in flight detained us for a while. Both Crested Coua and Giant Coua showed well again but a highlight was two Hook-billed Vangas displaying in a tree and a pair of Greater Vasa Parrots feeding on the fruit of a *Rinoria grevei*. Barn Owl and White-browed Owl were again found roosting.

After breakfast it was time to head back to Fort Dauphin, where we found that our flight had been delayed until mid-afternoon. We took a leisurely lunch by a brackish lagoon, where *Ptychadena* and *Heterixalus* Frogs were spotted and a couple of Kelp Gulls and an unidentified Heron flew over. Some of the group took a walk to a nearby village.

Arriving at the airport, we were dismayed to learn that Air Madagascar had again rescheduled our flight to leave in the evening. That's Air Mad for you!

Day 16

Thursday 30th October

Antananarivo to Mahajanga

Weather: pleasantly warm in Antananarivo but very hot at Mahajanga

A free morning gave us time to visit Lake Alarobia, a small nature reserve in the capital, with a huge population of nesting Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black, Dimorphic and Cattle Egrets. Amongst a large flock of White faced Whistling Ducks and Red-billed Teal we observed three Knob-billed Ducks, while surprising but very welcome addition to the morning's list was a Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk.

After a light lunch at the airport, we boarded the flight to Mahajanga, which gave us an appreciation of the vastness of Madagascar's denuded landscapes. Shortly before landing, we saw below us the huge Betsiboka River, stained red with eroded soil. Met by a new coach and crew of Claude and Patrick, after a short transfer we arrived at the Piscine Hotel, where the huge swimming pool tempted some of the group in for an afternoon dip. Later, we took a stroll along the estuary of the Betsiboka but there was little in the way of bird life as the tide was in, apart from a huge flock of Madagascar Fody getting ready to roost in a tree along the waterfront.

Day 17

Friday 31st October

Mahajanga to Ampijeroa

Weather: very hot and humid

After breakfast we set off on the well-surfaced RN4 for the two and a half hour journey to Ampijeroa Forestry Station, part of the Ankarafantsika National Park. En route, we paused for a view over the Betsiboka estuary and mangroves, where several Madagascar Buzzards were circling in the distance and palm swifts flew overhead. The fire-scorched pasture here was dotted with endemic *medemea* palms.

At the village of Berivotra, interpretive panels by the side of the road described the dinosaur fossils recently found in the area, which included an herbivorous crocodile. *Oplurus cuvieri* Collared Iguanids scuttled about on the verge of the road, while a large Outstail's Chameleon was spotted in a bush. Our final stop was at Lake Ankazomborona, meaning 'tree with many birds', where a couple of Green-backed Herons, a Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher and Moorhen were observed in reed beds. On the other side of the road from the lake, the rice paddies were teeming with hundreds of Great Egret, Squacco Heron and Glossy Ibis. Black Egret were also noted here, in typical posture of wings outspread when feeding, along with black-winged stilt.

Arriving at Ampijeroa, we were allocated bungalows and reassembled for lunch shortly after. You don't even have to leave the car park such is the concentration of wildlife here – already our first Coquerel's Sifaka were located spread-eagled over the branches of a large tree in a posture that suggested total lethargy - understandable when the thermometer hits 34° Celsius. Broad-billed Rollers cackled from their perches, Grey-headed Love Birds flitted from tree to tree while a flock of White-faced Whistling Ducks lined the shore of the pond beyond the restaurant. Collared Iguanids and Lined Plated Lizards *Zonosaurus laticaudatus* were darting to and fro, in spite of the midday heat and an Emerald Day Gecko surveyed the scene from the safety of a rafter.

After lunch there was time for a siesta but by 3.30 everyone was ready to start exploring and we set off with our reserve guide Nono and Tina his assistant. Immediately, we were greeted with excellent views of a small group of six rare Mongoose Lemurs and a delightful Western Avahi or Woolly Lemur, roosting with its baby on a tree trunk. Further encounters with the stunning Coquerel's Sifaka made this a most rewarding afternoon on the mammal front. For the birders, a pair of nesting White-headed Vanga, Blue Vanga, Madagascar Crested Ibis and White-breasted Mesite made useful additions to the list. The Mesite pair were very vocal, their excited call accelerating to a frenzied climax as they approached the path, allowing for close views.

Returning at dusk, we picked up torches and took the coach to the other side of the lake for the night walk. Good views were had of Grey Mouse Lemurs on a tree trunk and a Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur showed well – at this time of year the species is just out of hibernation. Woolly Lemur were also seen, along with three Rhinoceros Chameleons and a Big Headed Gecko. For most of the group tonight's star performers were the four Common Tenrecs foraging in the leaf litter and just out of hibernation too.

Day 18

Saturday 1st November

Ampijoroa

Weather: very hot and sunny

Most were up early and the morning was fresh and pleasantly cool after a hot and sweaty night. We drove around the lake, stopping by the bridge where six Nile Crocodiles were spotted on the shore and in the water. Broad-billed Rollers were heard cackling and Glossy Ibis and Cattle Egret were abundant around the fringe of the lake. We headed into the woods to look for Schlegel's Asity, the target species for the morning.

A group of five Common Brown Lemurs delayed us for a short while but soon moved off at speed, taking spectacular leaps from branch to branch. A male Rufous Vanga gave us good photo opportunities as it paused on the V of a tree, by its nest constructed of spiders' webs. A dark phase male Paradise Flycatcher posed beautifully by the trail and two Green Pigeons were observed feeding on fruit high in the canopy. A Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemur was located in its tree-hollow roost, its head crowned by enormous ears, staring down at us nonchalantly, with a slightly frowning expression. A noisy pair of Hook-billed Vangas were cavorting in the canopy, displaying tails. Schlegel's Asity were ably spotted by our guides, flitting around but hard to get a fix on. Soon we had both in sight in a mid-storey tree, staying around long enough for everyone to get a view of them. There are only three or four pairs of this rare bird in the park, so we were lucky to find them.

This eventful morning then brought Crested Coua mating on an overhanging branch above us. Next our guides called in a pair of White-breasted Mesite, which gave us a concert of their loud and insistent whistling calls as they ambled among the leaf litter. Then, a Red-capped Coua was coaxed out onto the path, followed by a Buttonquail. After an action-packed start we were ready for breakfast and already it was beginning to get hot. Alison and Bob had found a snake by their bungalow, which was identified as a Big-eyed Snake *Mimophis mahfalensis*.

At 8.30 we were out again, after enjoying sightings of Greater Vasa Parrots in the car park. This time we climbed steadily to the ridge behind the camp, where we spotted a Sunbird stealing spiders web threads to build its nest.

A male Oustalet's Chameleon in its pinkish mating colours made us tarry for a while but soon our guides had located four Coquerel's Sifaka jumping from trunk to trunk. A Red-capped Coua was drawn out onto the path in front of us, allowing some of the group the chance to photograph it. A Hog-nosed Snake *Leiobheterodon modestus* was exploring the leaf litter busily. A Lesser Cuckoo perched high in a tree allowed us a rare sighting of a bird that is more often heard than seen. Just as Cathy got out the bird book to show the photo of the Van Dam's Vanga, the bird itself appeared obligingly and everyone got very good views of it. A Long-billed Greenbul, an understory feeder, was awkward to see, but most got a glimpse of it. Next we came on a Sifaka mother and baby on the ground feeding on a rotten tree-trunk. A researcher was observing this unusual behaviour and commented that the wood may have medicinal properties.

Just as we thought the morning couldn't get better – it did! Sickle-billed put in an appearance and we spotted Rufous Vanga on its nest closely followed by Van Dam's Vanga again and Blue Vanga. On the way back to the camp, a strikingly coloured *Phelsuma madagascariensis* Emerald Day Gecko was seen lounging on a tree trunk and a pair of Crested Ibis showed again near the restaurant.

It was hard to imagine that we could keep the pace up this afternoon but after lunch, Cathy and several of the group gathered on the viewing platform overlooking the lake, where Humblot's Heron, Purple Heron, Grey Heron, Madagascar Pond Heron, Comb Duck and hundreds of Cattle Egrets, Dimorphic Egrets, Glossy Ibis and Squacco Herons were observed. Through the scope, a Fish Eagle on its nest could just be made out at the top of a tree on the opposite side of the lake. Then it was time to board the boat for a leisurely cruise on the lake. This gave everyone the chance to see the species some had observed from the watch tower as well as several Allen's Gallinule, skulking in the reed beds. The highlight of the cruise were the two Fish Eagles perched in full view on overhanging branches, offering superb photo opportunities of a rare and endangered bird.

At nightfall, our guides found a cat-eyed snake *Madagascarophis colubrinus* devouring a mouse it had just caught in the car park. A further night walk gave us good sightings of the golden-brown mouse lemur, a new species confined to the area and only recognised ten years ago, as well as fat-tailed dwarf lemur.

Day 19

Sunday 2nd November

Ampijoroa to Antananarivo

Weather: very hot and sunny, cooler in Antananarivo

After such a productive day yesterday, this morning was rather quiet but we enjoyed views of Rufous Vanga on the nest, Long-billed Greenbul, Cuckoo Roller, Common Jery, Common Newtonia, Madagascar Turtledove, Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo, Chabert's Vanga and a Crested Drongo on its nest above the path. On the mammal front, three Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemurs were found, a single Common Brown Lemur and several Sifaka sunning themselves in the canopy. Returning to the bungalows John found a snake which was identified as Madagascan opisthoglyphous snake *Ithycyphus miniatus* and like other Malagasy snakes harmless, though believed by local people to kill zebu!

Everyone was reluctant to leave the wonderful wildlife of Ampijoroa, though not the oppressive heat. Our afternoon flight back to Tana was on schedule and we enjoyed a relaxing evening at the Tana Plaza Hotel, which serves excellent draught beer in the bar!

Day 20

Monday 3rd November

Antananarivo to Andasibe

Weather: cloudy, then light rain in Andasibe

Leaving the capital we made our way east on a winding but scenic road that snaked through rice paddies and hills before plunging in a dramatic series of hairpin bends to the plain of Moramanga. Here we paused by the Mangoro River in the hope of spotting Pratincoles, though a single Common Sandpiper was all that appeared. Arriving at Vakona Lodge, we enjoyed lunch in the company of Mascarene Martins and Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher and while re-grouping by the bus, Ward's Flycatcher was picked out by Julia. From the hotel it is 20 minute drive to the entrance to Perinet reserve, where we met our guide Maurice and his assistant Lala.

The afternoon's walk brought good views of the reserve's key species: a family of Indri with a baby and four Diademed Sifakas. The Sifakas have been moved here from another area of forest, following destruction of their territory by mining operations. They live sympatric with Indri, sharing the same territory as they do not compete for food. We were also thrilled to find the reserve's top reptile, a gorgeously coloured Parson's Chameleon, subspecies *Calumma parsonii cristifer*.

Day 21

Tuesday 4th November

Mantadia National Park

Weather: cloudy, light showers then more persistent rain

After an early breakfast we set off for Mantadia National Park, a 50-minute drive from the hotel on a reasonable dirt road. We planned to search out some of the rarities of the area and in particular the Scaly Ground Roller and Black and White Ruffed Lemur. Just inside the park boundary, Barbara spotted Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemurs from the bus but they were shy and moved off when we stopped. A little further on, Julia had glimpsed a Diademed Sifaka, also from the bus. It too departed abruptly but this is expected as lemurs in Mantadia are not as habituated as those of Perinet. The walk started with a climb up a steep slope to a viewpoint, from where the undisturbed beauty of this primary rainforest could be appreciated. Then Maurice was keen to show us a Collared Nightjar's roost in a bird's nest fern – perfect camouflage.

Next we encountered a mixed feeding flock and most got a view of Nuthatch Vanga and Blue Vanga. At this point the Indri began calling and their haunting melody, strangely reminiscent of whale song, reverberated through the forest. Just as we were debating whether to look for the Indri, Lala arrived with news of Diademed Sifaka close by feeding in the canopy. We were again lucky to enjoy great views of these Black, Grey and Brown Lemurs – arguably the most beautiful of the Sifakas. Just as our necks could crane no more, we were distracted by a sound akin to fighting dogs, announcing the presence close by of Black and White Ruffed Lemur, one of the more difficult species to observe. A small family group of three were feeding on fruit high up in the canopy.

While all this was happening Maurice had in store yet another treat for us – a Scaly Ground-roller's burrow on the banks of a stream. We lined up on the opposite bank to wait for the adults to return to the nest with food for the chicks. The parents normally hunt for around 45 minutes before returning to the nest. After 40 minutes, first one, then the pair arrived, worm in mouth.

They must have detected our presence as they were quite hesitant about going into the burrow but patience paid off and in due course one came out into the open, paused momentarily, and then entered the burrow to feed the chicks. Most of the group agreed it was a true privilege to observe such a rare and secretive bird.

We returned to Vakona Lodge for lunch, then some of the group visited the lodge's Lemur Island, for the 'in your face' lemur experience, where cheeky banana-seeking Black and White Ruffed Lemurs, Red-fronted Brown Lemurs and Diademed Sifaka willingly feed from your hand.

Later in the afternoon we met up with Maurice, who was keen to show us a mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko *Uroplatus sikorika* perfectly camouflaged face down against a tree trunk. Short-horned Chameleon and Nose-horned Chameleon were also spotted as we made our way back into the forest for a night walk but the hoped for Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur and Goodman's Mouse Lemur evaded us, probably because of the rain.

Day 22

Wednesday 5th November

Andasibe to Antananarivo

Weather: cloudy and damp, clearing later

For our last morning in the reserve we split into two groups, those who were keen to search out birds and those who wanted to focus on Indri. The birders headed off with Maurice and Cathy and had good views of Lesser Vasa Parrot, Madagascar Brush Warbler, Ward's Flycatcher, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Long-billed Greenbul, Madagascar Magpie Robin, White-headed Vanga, Long-billed Green Sunbird and Madagascar White-eye. Deeper into the forest, Maurice heard the faint call of a Pygmy Kingfisher and shinning up a steep slope, he located it perched on a low branch about 15 yards away. Those who were willing to scramble up the slope got good views of it and it remained stationary while we photographed it. Another highlight was a Spectacled Greenbul on its nest, just yards from the path. Returning to the park entrance, we found two Diademed Sifaka, a Short-horned Chameleon and a Tree Boa, near the fish farm. Meanwhile, Lala and Desi's group had excellent eye-level views of a family of Indri, with a very playful baby.

We stopped for an early lunch at Feony Ala restaurant but all too soon it was time to head back to Antananarivo. Here we squeezed in a little last-minute shopping at the craft market, before checking in at the Tana Plaza Hotel. Frank and Karen wanted to share their celebration of Barack Obama's election success with the group and we gathered on the terrace of the hotel for a glass of champagne, generously provided by them and organised in advance by Shaun at Ecotour. After dinner, we said goodbye to Julia Mayne, who was staying on for a further week in Madagascar to visit an orphanage in Fianarantsoa, and load up for the short transfer to the airport. We now had to bid farewell to Desi, who had worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth-running of the tour, as well as contributing greatly with his knowledge of wildlife and how to find it! Check-in went without a hitch and then it was just a question of waiting to board the flight, which was delayed a little.

Day 23

Thursday 6th November

Paris and onward flights home

Arriving just a little later than scheduled, it was time to say goodbye as we made our way to our respective flights onwards to the UK.

Species Lists

Birds (H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																						
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5		
1	Madagascar Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus pelzelinii</i>	1													2									
2	Red-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>									25														
3	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>																1							
4	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	4													30+									
5	Common Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	1													20+	300+	300+	300+						
6	Madagascar Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola idae</i>																2							
7	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	100+	20			20	10	8						6		50+	50+	300+	300+	10	10			
8	Green-backed Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>	1	1			1										1	2	6	1		1			
9	Black Egret	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>														20+	200+	2	20						
10	Dimorphic Heron	<i>Egretta dimorpha</i>	100+	100+			17								10		100+	20	20	30					
11	Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	2	5											15		1	50+	10						
12	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>																1	1			1			
13	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>																	1						
14	Humblot's Heron	<i>Ardea humbloti</i>																	1						
15	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	4	4											1						4	1			
16	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>																100+	100+	20					
17	Madagascar Crested Ibis	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>																2	2						
18	White-faced Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>	20					200+			60		60				200	12	50	20					
19	Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>															3		6	1					
20	Meller's Duck	<i>Anas melleri</i>			5																				
21	Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>			25			60									50+	50+		5					
22	Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk	<i>Aviceda madagascariensis</i>															1								
23	Bat Hawk	<i>Macheiramphus alcinus</i>					1																		
24	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptus</i>	1	2			25	30	30	2	1				4	10	4	1	10	1	4	2			
25	Madagascar Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vociferoides</i>																	2						
26	Madagascar Harrier- Hawk	<i>Polyboroides radiatus</i>										2	1												
27	Henst's Goshawk	<i>Accipiter henstii</i>			1																				
28	Frances's Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter francesiae</i>													1			1							
29	Madagascar Buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>		2	1	1											1		5		1	1	2		

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																						
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5		
30	Madagascar Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>	6	5	3	1	10	4	4	1	2	1	4	3	3	2	1				3	1	1		
31	Madagascar Partridge	<i>Margaroperdix madagascariensis</i>												2											
32	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>											1												
33	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>												5	30	10				4					
34	White-breasted Mesite	<i>Mesitornis variegatus</i>																	2	2	H				
35	Subdesert Mesite	<i>Mesitornis benschi</i>												2											
36	Madagascar Buttonquail	<i>Turnix nigricollis</i>						1			3		2							1					
37	Madagascar Flufftail	<i>Sarothrura insularis</i>			H																				
38	Madagascar Wood Rail	<i>Canirallus kioloides</i>			1																				
39	White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas cuvieri</i>						H																	
40	Lesser Gallinule	<i>Porphyryla alleni</i>																		6					
41	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>												1			3	2							
42	Greater Painted Snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>													3										
43	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>							6	3	7	12+	2	4						12					
44	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>									1	1													
45	Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>									3	10		7	1										
46	Madagascar Plover	<i>Charadrius thoracicus</i>									3		6												
47	Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>										3		1						1					
48	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>									1	2	10												
49	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>												4											
50	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>										31	3	10	10			15							
51	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>										21													
52	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>										5		3	1	4	6	1							
53	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>																				1			
54	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>										5	2												
55	Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>																2							
56	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>										5		4											
57	Madagascar Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles personatus</i>														12									
58	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columbalivia</i>	40	10			4	12			20	20		10				4	2		4	2	4		
59	Madagascar Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia picturata</i>			2			2	H		4	6	6	1	3	4		4	6	6	2	4			
60	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>						3	6	1	5	2	2	10	5	4		2	1						
61	Madagascar Green Pigeon	<i>Treron australis</i>															1		2	1					

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																								
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5				
62	Madagascar Blue Pigeon	<i>Alectroenas madagascariensis</i>																				1					
63	Greater Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa</i>					1								2			2					2				
64	Lesser Vasa Parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra</i>			H	2			5			1		2	1		2			2		2	H	2			
65	Grey-headed Lovebird	<i>Agapornis canus</i>					2					2			12		2	4	4								
66	Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>		H	1	1	1				H	1		H			H	1	1	H	H	H					
67	Giant Coua	<i>Coua gigas</i>													8	4											
68	Coquerel's Coua	<i>Coua coquereli</i>															1	1									
69	Running Coua	<i>Coua cursor</i>							1			1			1												
70	Red-capped Coua	<i>Coua ruficeps</i>																	2								
71	Green-capped Coua	<i>Coua olivaceiceps</i>										1			1												
72	Crested Coua	<i>Coua cristata</i>							1				1		9	6		1	2								
73	Blue Coua	<i>Coua caerulea</i>			H	3																	1				
74	Madagascar Coucal	<i>Centropus toulou</i>			H		2	2	1		1	1	1	1	3	2		1	2	H	2	1	1				
75	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>										1				1	1										
76	Torotoroka Owl	<i>Otus madagascariensis</i>													H	1	1										
77	Rainforest Scops Owl	<i>Otus rutilus</i>		H	H	1																					
78	White-browed Owl	<i>Ninox superciliaris</i>					H	2							1	1											
79	Collared Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus enarratus</i>																					1				
80	Madagascar Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus madagascariensis</i>	H								1	3		6	H	2			H	1		1	H				
81	Madagascar Spinetail	<i>Zoonavena grandidieri</i>			10			10									2	3			3						
82	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>			10			4	2										10		4						
83	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>					1									4		1					1				
84	African Black Swift	<i>Apus barbatus</i>																				1					
85	Madagascar Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo vintsioides</i>	1				1	H											2	2		1	1				
86	Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx madagascariensis</i>																					1				
87	Madagascar Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>		20	1		20	20	12	1	3	4	4			1		1	4	1		1	1				
88	Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>					1								4	1			6	6	1	1					
89	Scaly Ground Roller	<i>Brachypteracias squamigera</i>																					2				
90	Pitta-like Ground Roller	<i>Atelornis pittoides</i>				2	1																				
91	Rufous-headed Ground Roller	<i>Atelornis crossleyi</i>				H	H																				
92	Long-tailed Ground Roller	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>										2															
93	Madagascar Cuckoo-Roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>		2		2													1	1	1		H	H			

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																						
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5		
94	Madagascar Hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>					1	3	1		1	1		2	2	2		2	2						
95	Velvet Asity	<i>Philepitta castanea</i>		1	1	3																			
96	Schlegel's Asity	<i>Philepitta schlegeli</i>																	2						
97	Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity	<i>Neodrepanis hypoxantha</i>				2																			
98	Madagascar Bush Lark	<i>Mirafra hova</i>	10	4			20		6		10	10		20	4			20		1					
99	Mascarene Martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>		4	10														2		4	20	20		
100	Brown-throated Sand Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	20	10		1																			
101	Madagascar Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flaviventris</i>	2	6	5	2	1	1									2	1			4	4	4		
102	Ashy Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>										1										1			
103	Madagascar Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>		3	10	2	4	15	10	4	6	6		4	8	6		8	10	4	4	6	6		
104	Littoral Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola imerinus</i>								4	4														
105	Forest Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola sharpei</i>				H																			
106	Benson's Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola bensoni</i>					4																		
107	Madagascar Magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus albospectularis</i>		1	6	1	1		3		4	5	2	2		2		4	4	2	1	2	1		
108	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	1	4	3																2				
109	Brown Emu-tail	<i>Dromaeocercus brunneus</i>				1																			
110	Grey Emu-tail	<i>Amphilais seebohmi</i>			4																				
111	Madagascar Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas typica</i>		H	H	3	H	1							H			H			H	H	2		
112	Subdesert Brush Warbler	<i>Nesillas lantzii</i>								10	10	1	2												
113	Madagascar Swamp Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>		1																3					
114	Thamnornis Warbler	<i>Thamnornis chloropetoides</i>												1											
115	Rand's Warbler	<i>Randia pseudozosterops</i>			2	2																			
116	Common Newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>			1	H			H			1	1		H			1	2	1	1	1			
117	Archbold's Newtonia	<i>Newtonia archboldi</i>										3	1												
118	Madagascar Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>		2	H		1	H		4	2					1				H					
119	Ward's Flycatcher	<i>Pseudobias wardi</i>																			1	1	1		
120	Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone mutata</i>			4	2		3	1			3	2		8	4		1	5	1	1	1	3		
121	Common Jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>				2		2	4	12		1	1		4	2			1	1	1		1		
122	Green Jery	<i>Neomixis viridis</i>										2													
123	Stripe-throated Jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula</i>				1						2	2										1		
124	Long-billed Greenbul	<i>Bernieria madagascariensis</i>																	1	3		2	4		
125	Spectacled Greenbul	<i>Bernieria zosterops</i>				1																	1		

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																						
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5		
126	Dusky Greenbul	<i>Bernieria tenebrosa</i>				1																			
127	Souimanga Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia sovimanga</i>		2	8	H		6	12	H	8	10	4	6				1	2	2	1	1	1		
128	Madagascar Green Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia notata</i>			2		1	2	2			1	1								1		1		
129	Madagascar White-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>		2	30	1			4						1	4			1		1		2		
130	Red-tailed Vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>				2							2										H		
131	Red-shouldered Vanga	<i>Calicalius rufocarpalis</i>												H											
132	Rufous Vanga	<i>Schetba rufa</i>																		3	1				
133	Hook-billed Vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>											1			3				2					
134	Van Dam's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris damii</i>																		4					
135	Lafresnaye's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris xenopirostris</i>											1												
136	Pollen's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris polleni</i>				1																			
137	Sickle-billed Vanga	<i>Falcolea palliata</i>									2	4	2												
138	White-headed Vanga	<i>Artamella viridis</i>										4	2					3	2	1			2		
139	Chabert's Vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>			1						2	1	1	1					1	4					
140	Madagascar Blue Vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>			2	1												1	1				1		
141	Nuthatch Vanga	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>																					4		
142	Tylas Vanga	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>				2	H																H		
143	Crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus forficatus</i>		1	1	2	2	5	20	1	12	8	4	10	20	10		6	6	6	6	2	2		
144	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	4		12		127	12	50+	20	6	4	10	45	20	15	20+	15	1	2	1				
145	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	200	20		1	5	6	12	50	20	30	10	40+	10	10	10	4				10			
146	Madagascar Starling	<i>Saroglossa aurata</i>			1																				
147	Nelicourvi Weaver	<i>Ploceus nelicourvi</i>			3																	1	1	2	
148	Sakalava Weaver	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>							12	2	10	20	40	30		10		20+	1						
149	Madagascar Fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>					1	2	2							1	50			2	1	1			
150	Forest Fody	<i>Foudia eminentissima</i>			1								1												
151	Madagascar Mannikin	<i>Lonchura nana</i>			4			11	8			4										8			

Common name	Scientific name	October/November																								
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5				

Lemurs

1	Indri	<i>Indri indri</i>																												3	H	8
2	Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema diadema</i>																											4	7	2	
3	Milne-Edwards Diademed Sifaka	<i>Propithecus diadema edwardsi</i>				1																										
4	Coquerel's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi coquereli</i>																25	25	10												
5	Verreaux's Sifaka	<i>Propithecus verreauxi verreauxi</i>					3						3	20+	20+																	
6	Western Woolly Lemur	<i>Avahi occidentalis</i>															5															
7	Ring-tailed Lemur	<i>Lemur catta</i>					20	2						10	30+	30+																
8	Black and White Ruffed Lemur	<i>Varecia variegata variegata</i>																												3		
9	Mongoose Lemur	<i>Eulemur mongoz</i>																5														
10	Red-bellied Lemur	<i>Eulemur rubiventer</i>				3																										
11	Common Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus fulvus</i>																	20	30	1	5	4	1								
12	Red-fronted Brown Lemur	<i>Eulemur fulvus rufus</i>			4	4		4	10					6	40+	40+																
13	Greater Bamboo Lemur	<i>Haplemur simus</i>			3																											
14	Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur	<i>Haplemur griseus griseus</i>			3																									4		
15	Golden Bamboo Lemur	<i>Haplemur aureus</i>			2	2																										
16	Grey Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus murinus</i>												1	1			2														
17	Brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus rufus</i>		2		1																										
18	Golden-brown Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus ravelobensis</i>																			3											
19	Reddish-grey Mouse Lemur	<i>Microcebus griseorufus</i>													1	5																
20	Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur	<i>Cheirogalus medius</i>																			1	2										
21	Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur edwardsi</i>																				1	3									
22	White-footed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur leucopus</i>													8	7	1															
23	Small-tooth Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur microdon</i>			1																											
24	Red-tailed Sportive Lemur	<i>Lepilemur ruficaudatus</i>							1																							

Other Mammals

1	Striped Civet (Fanaloka)	<i>Fossa Fosssana</i>		2		1																										
2	Eastern Ring-tailed Mongoose	<i>Galidia elegans</i>			1																											
3	Common Tenrec	<i>Tenrec ecaudatus</i>																		4	1	1										
4	Eastern Red Forest Rat	<i>Nesomys rufus</i>			6		1																									

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																								
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5				
5	Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>																1		1							
6	Western Forest Mouse	<i>Macrotarsomys bastardi</i>																		1							
7	Madagascar Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus rufus</i>														250											
8	Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Hipposideros commersoni</i>																		3							
9	Free-tailed bat	<i>Otomops sp. or Tadarida sp.</i>																									
10	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>														2											

Reptiles

1	Stump-tailed Chameleon	<i>Brookesia superciliaris</i>																							1
2	Short-nosed Chameleon	<i>Calumma gastrotaenia</i>																							1
3	Short-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma brevicornis</i>																						1	1
4	Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii cristifer</i>																							
5	Parson's Chameleon	<i>Calumma parsonii</i>				4																	1		
6	Nose-horned Chameleon	<i>Calumma nasuta</i>		3	2																				1
7	O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon	<i>Calumma oshaughnessyi</i>				1																			
8	Long-nosed Chameleon	<i>Calumma gallus</i>		1	1	1																			
9	Blue-nosed Chameleon	<i>Calumma boettgeri</i>			1																				
10	Oustalet's Chameleon	<i>Furcifer oustaleti</i>					1	4									1	1	1						
11	Rhinoceros Chameleon	<i>Furcifer rhinocerotus</i>																1							
12	Spiny-backed Chameleon	<i>Furcifer verrucosus</i>														4	1	4							
13	Jewel (Carpet) Chameleon	<i>Furcifer lateralis</i>					1																		
14	Lined Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma lineata bifasciata</i>				1																		1	4
15	Giant Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma madagascariensis</i>																					1		
16	Four-spotted Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma quadriocellata</i>		2		1																			
17	Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus sikoriae</i>																						1	
18	Gunther's Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus guentheri</i>																					11		
19	Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko	<i>Uroplatus phantasticus</i>				1																			
20	Sakalava Velvet Gecko	<i>Homopholis sakalava</i>																					1	1	
21	Collared Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cuvieri</i>																					2	10	
22	Spiny-tailed Iguanid	<i>Oplurus cyclurus</i>								4		1	1												
23	Grandier's Iguanid	<i>Oplurus grandidieri</i>					3																		
24	Four spotted Iguanid	<i>Oplurus quadrimaculatus</i>						2																	

	Common name	Scientific name	October/November																								
			16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5				
25	Three-eyed Lizard	<i>Chalerodon madagascariensis</i>					1				3	4				1											
26	Lined Plated Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus laticaudata</i>					1											2	2								
27	Karsten's Plated Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus karsteni</i>										1															
28	Madagascar tree Boa	<i>Sanzinia madagascariensis</i>			1	2																				1	
29	Cat-eyed snake	<i>Madagascarophis colubrinus occidentalis</i>																		1							
30	Zebu killing' snake	<i>Ithycyphus miniatus</i>																			1						
31	Brown Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Leioheterodon modestus</i>																		1							
32	Lined Snake	<i>Liopholidophis lateralis</i>				1																		1			
33	Six-banded Lined Snake	<i>Liopholidophis sexlineatus</i>			1																						
34	Big-eyed Snake	<i>Mimophis mahfalensis</i>										2		1	1												
35	Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>																		8							

Amphibians

1	Frog (Fort Dauphin restaurant)	<i>Ptychadena sp.</i>																		2							
2	Frog (Fort Dauphin restaurant)	<i>Heterixalus sp.</i>																		2							
3	Madagascar tree frog	<i>Boophis madagascariensis</i>		1		1																					
4	Grandidier's tree frog	<i>Boophis grandidieri</i>		1	1																						
5	Grandidier's stream frog	<i>Mantidactylus grandidieri</i>		1	1																						
6	Leaf frog	<i>Mantidactylus asper</i>				1																					
7	Brown ground frog	<i>Mantidactylus opiparis</i>				1																					
8	Madagascar glass frog	<i>Mantidactylus pulcher</i>				1																					
9	Chestnut-backed stream frog	<i>Mantidactylus sp.</i>			1																						
10	Frog (on Datura)	<i>Plethodontohyla inguinalis</i>				1																					
11	Painted mantella	<i>Mantella baroni</i>				1																					
12	Madagascar wood frog	<i>Aglyptodactylus madagascariensis</i>			1																						

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