



BEST OF MADAGASCAR: 15-DAY BIRDING AND WILDLIFE TOUR

17 – 31 OCTOBER 2020



Rufous-breasted Ground Roller is a member of one of the five endemic avian families of Madagascar. We will be looking for it on this tour.

Madagascar! Our world's fourth-largest island is, quite simply, unique. Five bird families and five mammal families (including the lemurs) are endemic to this massive island, and half the world's chameleons, weird and wonderful endemic plant families, and tons of other wildlife can be found here. An astonishing 120 bird species are endemic – including such exotic groups as vangas, ground rollers, cuckoo roller, couas, asities, and mesites. Lemurs vie for attention, from the tiny mouse-lemurs to the marvelous sifakas and the amazing indri with its calls that resound through the forest. Our tour visits a range of habitats: grasslands, dry deciduous woodland, the bizarre spiny forest with its odd octopus trees (*Didiera madagascariensis*) and elephant's foot trees (*Pachypodium rosulatum*), lush eastern rainforest, as well as lagoons and mudflats. The birds that we'll look for include the roadrunner-like **Long-tailed Ground Roller** and the stunning **Pitta-like, Scaly, and Rufous-headed Ground Rollers**, as well as the highly-prized **Subdesert Mesite**, the unforgettable **Giant Coua**, the astounding **Velvet Asity**, and **Madagascan Ibis**, to name just a handful. We invite you to join us on a special tour to an amazing island!

We offer the following pre-tours and extension to this tour, which all can also be booked as a stand-alone tour:

7-day Northwest (Ankarafantsika/Betsiboka Delta) Pre-pre-tour, 6 – 12 October 2020

One hundred and twenty nine species of birds have been recorded in the north-western Ankarafantsika National Park, more than half of them endemic to Madagascar. They include **Van Dam's Vanga**, **Rufous Vanga**, the elusive **Banded Kestrel**, and the more easily observed **Madagascan Fish Eagle**, which can often be seen at Ravelobe Lake. The endangered **Humblot's Heron** can also be seen at Lake Ravelobe.

6-day Masoala Peninsula Pre-tour, 12 – 17 October 2020

The Masoala Peninsula extension can generate the unbelievable **Helmet Vanga**, **Brown Mesite**, and **Short-legged Ground Roller**, as well as the largest – and most bizarre – nocturnal lemur, the aye-aye, and a stack more.

6-day Berenty Reserve Extension, 31 October – 5 November 2020

Although most famous for its dense lemur population, with hundred of individuals per square kilometer (research on lemurs has been continuing here for more than three decades), Berenty Reserve is also a haven for birdwatchers, boasting a high number of endemic species. With luck we might be able to find **Madagascan Sandgrouse**, **Madagascan Green Pigeon**, **Torotoroka Scops Owl**, and perhaps even **Madagascan Cuckoo-Hawk** here.

Itinerary (15 days/14 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Antananarivo

Your international flight, or domestic flight if you have joined our Masoala extension, arrives in Antananarivo (shortened to “Tana” by most people). After arrival, you will be transferred to your hotel.

Overnight: Relais des Plateaux, Antananarivo

Day 2. Drive to Andasibe, afternoon birding Analamazoatra Special Reserve

Early today we embark on a three-to-four-hour drive to Andasibe, one of Madagascar's premier rainforest sites. Here the unforgettable call of the indri resounds through the beautiful Andasibe-

Mantadia National Park. In the afternoon we will visit its Analamazoatra section. We find the indri with ease, along with other spectacularly beautiful species such as ruffed lemur. Birding is unbelievable, with four different ground rollers possible, along with two nightjars, including the bizarre **Collared Nightjar** at its daytime roosts. **Madagascan Owl**, **Rainforest Scops Owl**, and a suite of nocturnal lemurs and chameleons await us on a night walk in the area.

Overnight: Andasibe Hotel, Andasibe

Days 3 – 4. Andasibe-Mantadia National Park

We spend two more nights in Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, birding the beautiful primary and secondary forests of the area. We spend the whole day on Day 2 and the morning of Day 3 in the Mantadia National Park section, while returning to the Analamazoatra section in the afternoon of Day 3. We should find **Velvet Asity**, **Common Sunbird-Asity**, **Benson's Rock Thrush** (Forest Rock Thrush), **Madagascan Flufftail**, many vangas including **Blue Vanga** and **Nuthatch Vanga**, **Madagascan Blue Pigeon**, **Madagascan Cuckooshrike**, several endemic warblers such as **Rand's Warbler**, and more. We have stakeouts for **Madagascan Grebe**, the rare **Meller's Duck**, and **Madagascan Rail**. We expect our first couas, **Red-fronted Coua** being a likely candidate. We should also see a few new lemurs such as ruffed lemur. We certainly don't ignore other non-avian wildlife and often see giraffe weevil, tree boa, and many chameleons.

Overnight: Andasibe Hotel, Andasibe

Day 5. Drive to Antsirabe, birding on the way

We embark on a long and scenic road trip, breaking the journey to amazing Ranomafana National Park in the south-east of the island with one night in Madagascar's second largest city, Antsirabe.

Overnight: Couleur Café, Antsirabe

Day 6. Transfer to Ranomafana National Park

We hope to see many of Madagascar and its neighboring islands' common endemics en route to the national park, including species such as **Madagascan Wagtail**, **Malagasy Kingfisher**, **Mascarene Martin**, **Malagasy Kestrel**, **Malagasy Bulbul**, and many others. Overnight: Setam Lodge, Ranomafana

Days 7 – 8. Birding Ranomafana National Park

At the magnificent Ranomafana National Park we are in for a real treat. The rainforest here is similar to that at Andasibe, but it is a better place for several species we won't yet have seen, such as the rare **Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity**, the recently described **Cryptic Warbler**, **Madagascan Yellowbrow**, **Grey-crowned Tetraka**, **Pollen's Vanga**, **Grey Emutail**, **Wedge-tailed Jery**, **Madagascan Snipe**, and numerous others. As always in a new part of the island we expect new lemurs, such as golden bamboo lemur. The reptiles here include leaf-tailed gecko.

Overnight: Setam Lodge, Ranomafana

Day 9. Isalo National Park

After some final birding at Ranomafana while hoping to clean up there, we begin another scenic road trip across the island, with the possibility to stop shortly at Anja Community Reserve. Today we start heading westwards, to much drier parts. We'll spend one night in the beautifully picturesque Isalo National Park. Here we'll search for some more star birds, such as **Benson's Rock Thrush** (Forest Rock Thrush) and the attractively-patterned **Madagascan Partridge**.

Overnight: Relais de la Reine, Isalo

Day 10. Transfer westwards to Ifaty, birding en route

We head towards the spiny forests of the southwest. This will be like entering a completely new world, and there is nothing else like this weird landscape anywhere in the world – Africa, although geographically close by, is nothing like Madagascar in landscape or wildlife. However, before reaching these spiny forests we first have another fascinating drive that should generate some of Madagascar's most localized birds. On our drive westwards towards the spiny forests we stop at a unique dry deciduous forest at Zombitse National Park, inhabited by the critically endangered **Appert's Tetraka**, **Coquerel's Coua**, the incomparable **Cuckoo Roller**, which we often see displaying, and various other goodies. Then we bird a coastal site further west for two incredibly localized species endemic to "coral rag scrub", **Verreaux's Coua** and **Red-shouldered Vanga**. We should also start finding our first of more widespread dry area birds, including **Subdesert Brush Warbler** and others. Overnight: Les Dunes d'Ifaty, Ifaty

Day 11. Birding the spiny forests near Ifaty

A world away from the eastern rainforests, after much anticipation we now bird the spiny forests near Ifaty, where baobabs and *Didiera* trees provide an absolutely unique habitat for a host of sought-after Madagascar endemics, among them such incredible birds as **Long-tailed Ground Roller**, **Subdesert Mesite**, **Sickle-billed Vanga**, **Archbold's Newtonia**, **Banded Kestrel**, **Thamnornis**, **Lafresnaye's Vanga**, **Red-capped Coua** (the local *olivaceus* subspecies, "Green-capped Coua"), **Running Coua**, and others. We also visit a site for **Madagascan Plover**.

Overnight: Les Dunes d'Ifaty, Ifaty

Day 12. Drive from Ifaty to La Table near Toliara

Today we will explore, on our drive to Toliara, a small hill reminiscent of Table Mountain in Cape Town, here called La Table. Behind it is a small area of scrubby forest, where we will search for the now famous **Red-shouldered Vanga**, the last lifer Phoebe Snetsinger saw before she was killed in a car accident – while birding!, and the localized **Verreaux's Coua**. We hope to locate both, as well as possibly **Lafresnaye's Vanga**.

Overnight: Hotel Victory, Toliara

Day 13. Boat trip to Nosy Ve and Anakao Village

Today in the morning we do a boat trip to the island of Nosy Ve, where we look at breeding **Red-tailed Tropicbird** and may find **Crab-plover** as well as multiple terns and waders. Across the island on the mainland the small fishing village of Anakao, where we have lunch, contains our site for **Littoral Rock Thrush**. Here we'll also look for **Sakalava Weaver**, **Madagascan**

Buttonquail, and Subdesert Brush Warbler. We should see various other new trip birds as well.

Overnight: Hotel Victory, Toliara

Day 14. Flight to Tana, birding the city

We fly back to Tana and bird sites around the fascinating capital city for **Sooty Falcon, Eleonora's Falcon, Malagasy Pond Heron,** and many other birds.

Overnight: Relais des Plateaux, Tana

Day 15. Departure

After some final birding in the city, either your international flight leaves Tana for home, or we will fly out to Fort Dauphin for the Berenty extension.

ADDITIONAL EXTENSIONS:

Please note that Madagascar is a huge island, and we offer remote extensions for some of Madagascar's toughest endemics, including **Madagascan Serpent Eagle, Red Owl, Madagascan Pochard, and Sakalava Rail.**

Duration: 15 days
Limit: 6 – 8
Date: 17 – 31 October 2020
Start: Antananarivo (Tana)
End: Antananarivo (Tana)

Price: €5541 per person sharing, assuming 6-8 participants, plus €344 for the domestic flight, which we will book for you

Single supplement: €724

Price includes: Meals

Accommodation

Guiding fees

Entrance fees

All transport while on tour

Bottled water throughout the tour

Price excludes:

International flights

Flight back to Tana at the end of the tour

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts

Drinks

Laundry

Personal insurance

Gratuities

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.