



Field Guides Tour Report

Madagascar, Mauritius & Reunion

Nov 8, 2011 to Dec 4, 2011

Phil Gregory and Megan Crewe

(This list also includes the Masoala Peninsula pretour which began on Nov 4th)

This was the second time for both Megan and I on the Madagascar tour, and boy was it terrific. Despite bouts of tummy troubles we had a marvellous time, not just with the many endemic birds, but also the lemurs, chameleons, geckoes and other herps, and the amazing vegetation. For the first time in many years we offered an extension to the Masoala Peninsula in quest of the great Madagascar icon bird, the Helmet Vanga, and boy did that pay off, with amazing views of one sat on a nest more or less at eye level. Bernier's Vanga was less forthcoming but we snatched a late sighting just as we had given up, and the trip there also included Madagascar Ibis, Collared Nightjar, Short-legged Ground Roller, Red-breasted Coua, (Red Ruffed) Variegated Lemur, (White-fronted) Brown Lemur and Weasel (Sportive) Lemur, all from a rustic but perfectly adequate lodge set right by the forest. Sure hope to run this again next time, and maybe even add a trip in search of the legendary Aye-Aye which is a fair prospect nearby.

The main trip saw us head south to Berenty, on a circuitous flight courtesy of Air Mad that saw us overfly the famous Baobab Avenue at Morondava en route. I like starting here, the lemurs are fantastic and we had wonderful encounters with Verreaux's Sifakas, Red-fronted Brown Lemurs and the charismatic Ring-tailed Lemurs, which briefly led the tour for us as they escorted us down a trail one morning. Berenty also gave us White-browed Owl and Totoroka Scops Owl, Giant Coua, Madagascar Sandgrouse, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk, Madagascar Buttonquail and Malagasy Kingfisher amongst others. A night walk in the spiny forest gave us heaps of Grey-brown Mouse Lemurs and also White-footed Sportive Lemur, not forgetting the eyeshine of Madagascar Nightjar.

Ifaty and the spiny forest was next, and boy do those guides here have it down! In just three outings we had Banded Kestrel, Madagascar Plover, Subdesert Mesite motionless on a spiny branch, Crested, Green-capped and Running couas, Long-tailed Ground-Roller, Lafresnaye's, White-headed and Sickle-billed vangas, Thamnornis, and Sakalava Weaver.

A morning boat trip out to Nosy Ve saw us get Red-tailed Tropicbird, Crab Plover, Marsh Owl and Littoral Rock Thrush nearby, and that afternoon we knocked off the rare and only recently-described Red-shouldered Vanga in the dry coral rag scrub near Tulear, with Verreaux's Coua on the way through next morning. Zombitse gave us the restricted range Appert's Tetraka despite our being here in the heat of the day, as well as some gorgeous Cuckoo-Rollers.

Isalo sees us staying at a really nice hotel with fantastic stonework, set amidst the curious and very scenic sandstone outcrops of the local hills, with Benson's Rock Thrush on the buildings and White-throated Rail in the grounds, with Madagascar Partridge nearby.

On then to the great humid forest national park at Ranomafana, where very dry conditions made things tougher than usual but our guides were experts and did really well. Lemurs were great, with wonderful looks at Milne-Edwards Sifaka, and two species of the rare bamboo lemurs, the Golden and the Greater (the latter with just 2 individuals left in the park!). Chameleons also came good and we were lucky enough to see one of the tiny and rarely encountered Brookesias, plus the positively psychedelic O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon, the latter unfortunately coinciding with our successful effort at luring Rufous-headed Ground-Roller so I was unable to pay it the attention it deserved! Pitta-like Ground-Roller was relatively



People are usually surprised to learn that the iconic Ring-tailed Lemur has a quite restricted range, and is found only in the country's far south; this lemur seems a bit astonished itself. (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)

easy, but the blue ribbon award must go to Brown Mesite, which had not been vocal of late. Our guide knew a likely spot, and we got a response, enough to suddenly have 3 people appear out of nowhere and start to herd the birds up towards us on the steep and heavily vegetated slopes. Some of us got onto them, quite a challenge on the steep slope and thick plant cover, and luckily enough mesites seem to be somewhat stupid as the trackers (Rabbateurs or animal spotters as their T-shirts proclaimed) were able to follow them and get them to come back across the track right in front of the group- simply amazing.

A particular want here was the rare and seldom-seen Yellow-bellied Asity, which fortunately for us had a newly-built nest on a steep ridge slope. Getting a view of the very active tiny bird was interesting to say the least, but I think most folks managed it. A Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher was an excellent find in some thickets near the road, with a Forest Fody nearby for some and Pollen's Vanga not far away. More enigmatic species included Cryptic Warbler, Rand's Warber (which sings antiphonally with Stripe-throated Jery!), Wedge-tailed (not a) Jery and White-throated Oxylabes, whilst the rare Meller's Duck showed well at the marsh and we had a fly-by of Henst's Goshawk after quite some effort to get to a nesting area.

Heading north once more we got to hot and dry Ankarafantsika, where one of the world's rarest raptors, Madagascar Fish-Eagle showed really well, with Madagascar Jacana and Humblot's Heron close by. Lemurs here were the very photogenic Coquerel's Sifaka and Brown Lemur, whilst two species of hog-nose snake gave great looks. Major targets here are Schlegel's Asity, (we got both sexes near a nest), the rare and restricted range Van Dam's Vanga, which ultimately came really good, and White-breasted Mesite, which crossed the track several times for us, not forgetting Red-capped and Coquerel's couas. A boat trip out to the Betsiboka estuary gave us the two big wants, both very rare species, the Madagascar Sacred Ibis and Bernier's Teal, well worth the time it took.

Back to Tana and the finale at Andisibe-Mantadia (Perinet), staying at a delightful lodge where the calls of the Indri are your pre-dawn wake up call- my kind of place! Here both Scaly and Short-legged ground-rollers were well seen, Collared Nightjar was found on a nest in a tree fern again, Madagascar Grebes had 3 juveniles and a companion Meller's Duck, and we found daytime roosting juvenile Madagascar Long-eared Owls twice. A mixed vanga flock gave us fabulous looks at Blue, the rare Nuthatch, and White-headed and Tylas vangas, amongst others. Lemurs were again tremendous, our finale saw us tackle Indri Ridge for great views and sounds of this amazing creature, plus the beautiful Diademed Sifakas, a huddle of Woolly Lemurs and Grey Bamboo Lemur munching bamboo as we left. Oh, and a Uroplatus giant leaf-tailed gecko and a Lowland Streaked Tenrec, it was quite a morning and rounded off a memorable trip in excellent style.

A couple of folks and Megan went home from Tana, whilst Phil and the rest of the group went over to Reunion, where we did a scenic tour of the island to see the lava flows in the south, and had several views of Reunion Harrier, whilst the afternoon at the river mouth saw literally hundreds of Barau's Petrel offshore, wheeling and arcing about before setting off inland to the mountains where they nest; an amazing sight and far more than I've seen here before on my two previous visits. Next day we did the quite steep and rather muddy trail up to the montane forest, where Reunion Bulbul, the two endemic white-eyes and Reunion Stonechat showed well, but the cuckooshrike played hard to get and was only heard calling near a nest site.

Off then to Mauritius, and after an early start in the first poor weather of the trip, we were soon looking at the rare Mauritius Fody and Mauritius Bulbul. Now last year I had a real sense of optimism here, as numbers of the ultra-rare species had risen significantly and good measures seemed to be in place to keep it that way. Sadly, this year our guide from Mauritius Wildlife was distressed, as some animal rights group has persuaded the government that trapping the introduced and very destructive macaques is cruel and should be stopped. At a stroke 30 years and millions of dollars of conservation efforts is suddenly reduced to monkey food; the lack of common sense is beyond belief! Anyway, for the time being the main efforts of so many conservation initiatives are still easily seen by their breeding sites, and we had wonderful looks in natural surroundings at Mauritius Kestrel, Mauritius Parakeet and Pink Pigeon. Let's hope this woefully ill-informed policy can be overturned before too much havoc is wrought and the numbers of macaques get out of control.

That was basically it for the trip, an amazing tour and one I shall long remember. My thanks to Sharon at FG HQ for very good and very complex logistics, to the estimable Gerard who multi-skilled throughout, constantly made sure everyone was OK, ran the ground logistics beautifully and even looked after me very well when I was sick; also to Alain the bus boy who greatly exceeded his job description, and the various excellent drivers who kept us safe on the slow roads of this great island. Also to Megan as co-leader (and water and bus rotation person), this one was quite an experience for sure. Finally of course to the group for coming, being good humored and accommodating, and also giving me the chance to get to Masoala.

Why not join us for 2012? It should be another fantastic trip.

--Phil @ Kuranda, Queensland Dec 2012

For more information on this tour and future departures, please visit our website at www.fieldguides.com

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

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

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

WHITE-FACED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna viduata*) – Good looks at this striking bird near Tulear, then near Ankarafantsika, on the Betsiboka estuary and at Lac Alarobia.

COMB DUCK (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*) – Two fine males at Lac Alarobia, and a female at Ankarafantsika. Note the IOC split this as Knob-billed Duck, distinct from Comb Duck of South America.

MELLER'S DUCK (*Anas melleri*) – Great views of 2 on a river at the marsh at Vohiparara, with a few Red-billed Teal for comparison. Meller's is a big duck with a rather long grey bill, and it is classified as Endangered. We amazingly saw another on the little pond at Mantadia, then an odd looking creature on a pond at Bel Ombre in Mauritius that sure looked quite like a Meller's Duck, even if it was consorting with what was once a Mallard. [E]

RED-BILLED DUCK (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) – Four day records with sightings from Vohiparara marsh (8), Lac Alarobia (4) and Lake Amboromalandy (6) at Ankarafantsika.

BERNIER'S TEAL (*Anas bernieri*) – After something of a marathon search of the nooks and crannies of the Betsiboka estuary we finally (actually just as we were about to give it up) found 2 of this Endangered species, with a global population estimated at 1500. The white wing patch shows up well, and we got some pretty good looks at them, one of the main targets for the outing on the estuary. [E]

Numididae (Guineafowl)

HELMETED GUINEAFOWL (*Numida meleagris*) – A few at Berenty, this is an introduction from Africa. [I]

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

MADAGASCAR PARTRIDGE (*Margaroperdix madagascarensis*) –

Tough this year, we had two go across the road near Isalo as we were leaving, then saw one female on the track back from Mantadia before a final brief flight view of a female at the start of the Indri Trail. [E]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (LITTLE) (*Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis*) – About 40 on the lake near Tulear, seemingly a fairly recent colonist in Madagascar and displacing the two resident endemic small grebes, one of which is now extinct.

MADAGASCAR GREBE (*Tachybaptus pelzelni*) – Gerard did an amazing spot of 2 on the river as we came into Ranomafana late in the afternoon, and we had pretty good views as they drifted downstream. Later we had a pair and 3 juvs on the small pond at Mantadia. It is classified as Vulnerable with a population of >5000, under threat from habitat loss and hybridizing with Little Grebe. [E]

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopus roseus*) – There were 14 of this showy species in the estuary at St. Augustin.



Though a nocturnal species, the beautiful White-browed Owl is pretty easily found during the daytime at Berenty. (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

BARAU'S PETREL (*Pterodroma baraui*) – A banner year for them, we had hundreds off the mouth of the Gol River on Reunion, I estimated over 500 which must be 10% of the world population. Great views of them wheeling and arcing offshore with some heading inland up the river valley. Reunion is the only breeding site.

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus pacificus*) – A few off offshore at the R. Gol.

TROPICAL SHEARWATER (*Puffinus bailloni*) – One or two offshore at the River Gol estuary, but hard to get onto amongst all the Barau's. This is split from Audubon's Shearwater. Note that Mascarene Shearwater (*P. atrodorsalis* of the FG) is actually just the juv. plumage of Tropical Shearwater, it was described in error as a new species.

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD (INDIAN OCEAN) (*Phaethon lepturus lepturus*) – A few rather distantly on Reunion, then great looks on Mauritius at Bassin Blanc and also Bel Ombre.

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon rubricauda rubricauda*) – One of the stars of our trip to Nosy Ve, where they were nesting. We had terrific looks at a few adults flying, and a couple of juvs. sat under the bushes.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

LONG-TAILED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax africanus pictilis*) – Two on the way out and 3 on the way back at Masoala, this is an endemic race and clearly pretty scarce.

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

AFRICAN DARTER (*Anhinga rufa vulsini*) – Just one at the lake at Ankarafantsika, of the endemic race.

Scopidae (Hamerkop)

HAMERKOP (*Scopus umbretta umbretta*) – Three day records with a couple of singles in rice paddies, then 3 on the way back from Perinet to Tana. A couple of the big untidy nests were also seen on this trip but overall it was very scarce.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

LITTLE BITTERN (*Ixobrychus minutus podiceps*) – A juv. was flushed when we were trying for Mad Rail at a marshy spot en route to Mantadia, and we then had an adult male flush there next day which sat up for nice looks. This is an endemic race and pretty scarce.

GRAY HERON (GRAY) (*Ardea cinerea firsasa*) – A small scattering of records starting at Ifaty, seen well at the Betsiboka estuary too.

HUMBLLOT'S HERON (*Ardea humbloti*) – This is a tough species to get, so when Jim spotted one flying as we were coming back from St Augustin there was much relief. We happily saw another at Ankarafantsika and a third at the Betsiboka estuary. They remind me of Great-billed Heron and seem to be similarly intolerant of disturbance. [E]

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea madagascariensis*) – A couple at Maroantsetra, then two near Ambositre and one at the Betsiboka estuary. This is another endemic race too.

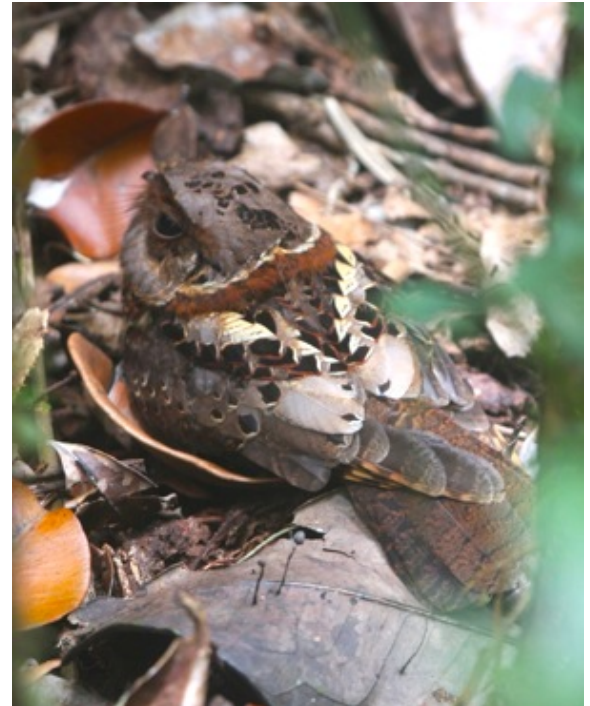
GREAT EGRET (AFRICAN) (*Ardea alba melanorhyncha*) – A scattering of records from the various wetlands, with most at Ankarafantsika.

LITTLE EGRET (DIMORPHIC) (*Egretta garzetta dimorpha*) – This interesting albeit taxonomically challenged rather long billed bird was widely distributed in small numbers, the most at Lac Alarobia. Both morphs occur, with the black being the commonest and an odd grey form being presumably an intermediate. They are nothing like Little Egret, links to Reef Heron seem more likely. The IOC split it, which seems like a sensible thing to do.

BLACK HERON (*Egretta ardesiaca*) – Seen in Tana, where we had about 20 at Lac Alarobia, and then about 25 on wetlands near Ankarafantsika, some doing the classic umbrella wing-shading pose.

CATTLE EGRET (IBIS) (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – Widespread in small numbers, this is the western nominate form.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – One at Maroantsetra, then 120 or so at Lac Alarobia where they are breeding and look to be displacing the Madagascar Pond Heron which used to dominate there. About 70 on wetlands near



The song of the lovely Collared Nightjar is still unknown, so we're reliant on finding birds on day roosts, never an easy task despite their boldly-patterned plumage. (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)

Ankarantsika also and odd birds in paddies at Tana.

MADAGASCAR POND-HERON (*Ardeola idae*) – Now an Endangered species with a population estimated at 2000-6000, declining due to hunting, wetland loss and competition with Squacco Heron which seems to have largely displaced it at the former strongholds of Lac Alarobia and Tana zoo. We saw just two breeding dress adults, one at Berenty and one at Lac Alarobia. I think there is reason to be very concerned about this species. [E]

STRIATED HERON (OLD WORLD) (*Butorides striata rutenbergi*) – Odd singles at various sites with 4 at Ankarafantsika, then one at the Gol R. on Reunion and one at Bassin Blanc on Mauritius.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A few at Berenty and again at Ankarafantsika and Lac Alarobia.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – Fifteen in paddies near Ankarafantsika.

MADAGASCAR IBIS (*Lophotibis cristata*) – Those who did the Masoala extension saw one twice, flushed from a forest track in a flurry of white wings and rusty back but disappearing at once. Sadly there were no nests this year at sites on the main tour. [E]

SACRED IBIS (MALAGASY) (*Threskiornis aethiopicus bernieri*) – Two singles of this distinctive white winged blue-eyed taxon on the Betsiboka estuary, split by the IOC as it is quite distinct to Sacred Ibis. [E]

AFRICAN SPOONBILL (*Platalea alba*) – One was seen snoozing beside the Betsiboka River by those in the small boat; it woke up, stretched and yawned with that enormous bill and flapped off over the mangroves before the big boat was in position!

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO-HAWK (*Aviceda madagascariensis*) – Two seen at Berenty, with one going onto a nest and showing quite well, unlike last year when we could hardly see it! [E]

BLACK KITE (YELLOW-BILLED) (*Milvus migrans parasitus*) – Widespread, and yet another taxonomically challenged species which was split by the South Africans decades ago, then by Ferguson-Lees and Christie in *Raptors of the World*. I don't know why all the major checklists ignore all this as it seems very unlike Black Kite and they don't intergrade.

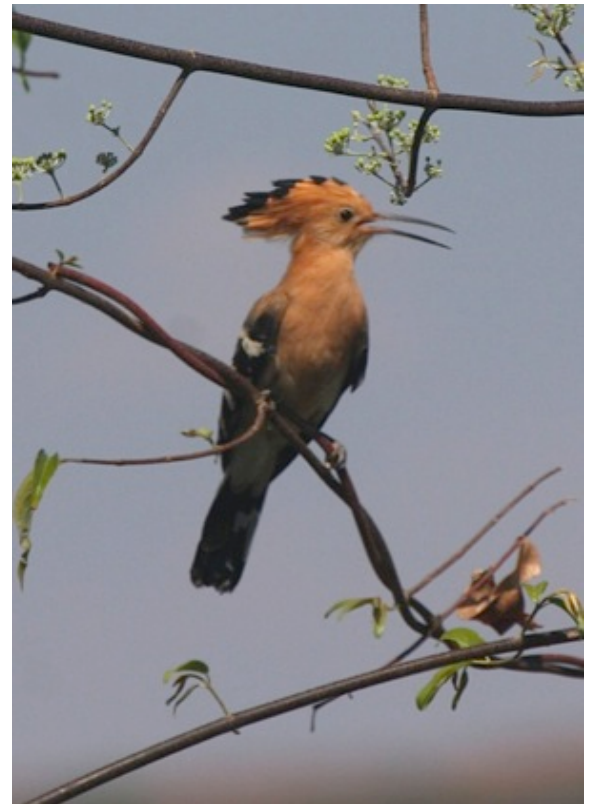
MADAGASCAR FISH-EAGLE (*Haliaeetus vociferoides*) – This Critically Endangered species has a population of about 120 pairs and is one of the world's rarest raptors. We had a terrific look at one sat beside the marsh at Ankarafantsika, but I missed my flight shot! [E]

REUNION HARRIER (REUNION) (*Circus maillardi maillardi*) – A distinctive insular taxon that resembles male Papuan Harrier more than anything else, and is split by Ferguson-Lees and Christie and the IOC. We saw a couple of female plumaged birds and a brief adult male on the first day, then had a female and a striking male at La Roche Ecrite on the second day. [E]

REUNION HARRIER (MALAGASY) (*Circus maillardi macrosceles*) – Sadly just a very brief view of one disappearing over a hill near Ambositre late one afternoon, a BVD for sure. Split by Ferguson-Lees and Christie and the IOC, Clements as ever woefully out of date. [E]

MADAGASCAR HARRIER-HAWK (*Polyboroides radiatus*) – Seen at Ifaty in the spiny forest, with 2 adults calling as they displayed over the spiny forest, rising and falling like riders on a roller coaster. They also had a heavily barred youngster. [E]

FRANCES'S GOSHAWK (*Accipiter francesii*) – We struggled for this



Once treated as a subspecies of African Hoopoe, the Madagascar Hoopoe now is considered a good species. African Hoopoe, meanwhile, is now treated as a subspecies of Eurasian Hoopoe. Result: another endemic species for Madagascar! (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)

and finally got one in slow wing flapping display at Mantadia. I am puzzled as to why accipiters are so scarce here in Madagascar, they are usually a pretty adaptable group. The bird photographed by Betsy at Lac Alarobia pre-trip does look like an imm. Madagascar Sparrowhawk as it has wide dark tail bands, a pity it wasn't there for our tour visit! [E]

HENST'S GOSHAWK (*Accipiter henstii*) – The Ranomafana guides took us on a hike to get to a nest area, and we heard the birds calling, with one shooting through sub-canopy and giving a very brief flight view, a BVD but hey I'll take it! [E]

MADAGASCAR BUZZARD (*Buteo brachypterus*) – Surprisingly scarce, we saw a handful of singles with one at Masoala, then again at Ifaty and Zombitse, though it was heard at Ranomafana and Andisibe as well. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MADAGASCAR KESTREL (*Falco newtoni*) – Quite common, the first by the Carlton Hotel, seems to have adapted to urban habitats luckily for it. [E]

MAURITIUS KESTREL (*Falco punctatus*) – Great looks at a female that came out of her nestbox and sat on a branch for some super natural background shots. This was formerly one of the world's rarest birds with just a handful of individuals left in the 1980's. Habitat conservation, predator control and captive breeding built up to over 1000 birds quite recently, now down to around 600-700, and sadly now likely to decline fast as the recent cessation of macaque control means more birds become monkey prey. [E]



*The only ground-roller species that doesn't occur in the rainforest regions, the Long-tailed Ground-Roller's pale plumage allows it to blend in perfectly with the sandy soil of its preferred habitat: the spiny forest of the dry southwest.
(Photo by guide Phil Gregory)*

BANDED KESTREL (*Falco zoniventris*) – Great looks at a pair of this rare species with a nest at Mangily, the photos look really good and I wish Dana and I had been able to get out to see them! First the group saw the female's head bobbing and weaving on the nest; the male brought her a snake which they quickly gobbled down. He also snatched several tardy Madagascar hissing cockroaches off the ground just yards from where the group stood, which was really cool! [E]

SOOTY FALCON (*Falco concolor*) – Seen twice at Masoala by a couple of us, then a great spot by Meegs of one at Tana airport, with another sat obligingly atop the terminal the day we flew to Reunion. Once again, no sign of Eleonora's Falcon which we have only seen once on this tour, they must be very thinly spread indeed.

PEREGRINE FALCON (EURASIAN) (*Falco peregrinus radama*) – One along the cliffs at St Augustin, and another in a town en route back to Tana from Andisibe. This is an endemic race and they can look quite buffy beneath.

Mesitornithidae (Mesites)

WHITE-BREASTED MESITE (*Mesitornis variegatus*) – Amazing looks at two calling birds at Ankarafantsika, herded into view by the guides and crossing the trail a couple of times, just fantastic. A 3 species of mesite trip is just great. [E]

BROWN MESITE (*Mesitornis unicolor*) – One of the highlights of the trip, I had not expected to see this as they did not seem to be calling at Ranomafana, though we had heard them up at Masoala. Anyway, our guide took us to a likely spot, we played tape and got a response, and they slowly came closer. The guide vanished and a couple of helpers appeared out of nowhere, and suddenly the mesites were being shepherded up the steep slope towards us. A few folks got quick looks, and they came in really close, but you had to be in the right spot to catch the movement. About half of us got them, and some went off up the slope after them with me bringing up the rear when I realised the guides had the birds again and they were coming back. We beat a hasty retreat and had more views, then everyone else reappeared and the herders did the job again, getting the mesites to cross the track just in front so everyone got good views in the end. One bird was much smaller than the other and quite rich chestnut color, I wonder if it was an immature? Anyway, it was great job from the guides and a real test of patience, you had to keep your nerve and get the right spot. It's a good job mesites seem to be kind of dumb, I can't imagine any New Guinea species behaving like this! [E]

SUBDESERT MESITE (*Monias benschi*) – This one was herded up by the young guides and froze in position on a spiny branch, an astonishing behavior but very fortunate from our perspective. The tail was held high in the typical mesite pose, and only a rapidly blinking eye betrayed its presence. [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

MADAGASCAR FLUFFTAIL (*Sarothrura insularis*) – This was frustrating as we heard it at various forest sites, but never managed to lure one out, despite multiple attempts from us and the local guides. The bit when Nestor got a huge long

pole and began thwacking the bushes as we played tape was surreal. I think the dry conditions made things harder this year. [E*]

MADAGASCAR WOOD-RAIL (*Canirallus kiolooides kiolooides*) – We saw 3 briefly on the Masoala extension, some better than others, then had good looks at Ranomafana. Here we lured one past a couple of times, then had amazing looks at one feeding quietly without us having to harass it. I saw the small white throat for the very first time.

WHITE-THROATED RAIL (*Dryolimnas cuvieri cuvieri*) – Great looks at Isalo in the hotel grounds, walking about like chooks in the pasture, then another up at Lac Ravelobe at Ankarafantsika and heard at Andisibe.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorhoa*) – Seen at Lac Alarobia and Lac Ravelobe, also on Reunion.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Singles seen near Tulear.

GREATER SAND-PLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii crassirostris*) – A few at Tulear and on Nosy Ve, also seen at Maroantsetra and Betsiboka.

KITTLITZ'S PLOVER (*Charadrius pecuarius*) – Good views near Tulear.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – Seen near Tulear with up to 4 birds.

MADAGASCAR PLOVER (*Charadrius thoracicus*) – Meegs and the group got to see this rather rare bird near the Nautilus at Ifaty, a regular site for it. They were resting on a sand ridge on a sun-baked plain, once they got close enough to identify them through the heat haze! [E]

WHITE-FRONTED PLOVER (*Charadrius marginatus tenellus*) – Great views on Nosy Ve, and again at the Betsiboka estuary.

Dromadidae (Crab Plover)

CRAB PLOVER (*Dromas ardeola*) – Well, our luck was in and there was a flock of about 40 standing with the Lesser Crested Terns on Nosy Ve, a great bird to get as they are somewhat erratic in occurrence. A monotypic family too.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – A few near Tulear and one at Lac Ravelobe.

Jacanidae (Jacanas)

MADAGASCAR JACANA (*Actophilornis albinucha*) – The very dry conditions had us worried, but the local guides knew where a couple still lingered at Lac Ravelobe and we got great looks at what is quite a rare bird. [E]

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

TEREK SANDPIPER (*Xenus cinereus*) – Nice looks near Tulear and again at Betsiboka, the short orange legs and upturned bill are very distinctive, and they run about like they are toppling forwards.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Scattered records from the wetland sites.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – Likewise, a few were seen at the wetland sites.

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – Meegs and her boat folks saw a flock of some 20 on the mud at Betsiboka, an odd habitat for them, and our boat saw one.

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – The nominate race, now split from Hudsonian Whimbrel by most, was widespread in small numbers and we had some 120 on the mud at Tulear.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – One at Maroantsetra and a few seen around Tulear.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Up to 8 birds were seen around Tulear on the sandflats there.

LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*) – One was seen by the lake near Tulear, I think Gary and I may have been the only ones who saw it?

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*) – A few on the sandflats near Tulear.

Turnicidae (Buttonquail)



The spectacular Helmet Vanga is all the reason anyone should need to take the Masaola pre-tour! (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)

MADAGASCAR BUTTONQUAIL (*Turnix nigricollis*) – An amazing tour for them, we had incredible views of a pair at Berenty, with 2 females next day, then one at La Table, one in the forest at Ranomafana (!), one near Ambositre and a fine male at Ankarafantsika. Great to see both sexes so well. [E]

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

MADAGASCAR PRATINCOLE (*Glareola ocularis*) – We saw a single and then some 4 birds over the forest at Masoala, and found one on a rock at the river near Andisibe, not sure how much longer this site will be good as it looks very disturbed. [E]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BROWN NODDY (*Anous stolidus pileatus*) – A few off the Gol estuary on Reunion.

SAUNDERS'S TERN (*Sternula saundersi*) – A few were seen in the Betsiboka estuary, the grey rump and tail are distinctive if seen well.

ROSEATE TERN (*Sterna dougallii arideensis*) – The boat trip across to Masoala gave us sightings of at least 6 of this rare species, they look very white and spiky in flight.

COMMON TERN (COMMON) (*Sterna hirundo hirundo*) – This was the common tern in the Antongil Bay at Masoala, and we had a few at Tulear on the sandspit.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii enigmus*) – Unexpectedly sparse, 3 on the trip to Nosy Ve was it.

LESSER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bengalensis bengalensis*) – A couple at Masoala, then 32 on Nosy Ve and a few in the Betsiboka estuary.

Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)

MADAGASCAR SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles personatus*) – Our initial check at Berenty drew a blank, but we lucked in next morning and had good flight views of up to 6 birds along the river. Jim broke his sandgrouse jinx at last. [E]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Feral Pigeons were seen in many of the larger cities and towns. [I]

PINK PIGEON (*Nesoenas mayeri*) – Great looks at 3 of this large pinkish pigeon at Bel Ombre, back from the brink of extinction for the time being. [E]

MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia picturata picturata*) – Widespread on Madagascar, and also seen on Reunion and Mauritius.

SPOTTED DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – A few seen on Mauritius. [I]

LAUGHING DOVE (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) – Betsy and I saw a couple near the Manisa Hotel when we were looking for Scaly-breasted Mannikin on the departure day morning; it is possible this is a newly established introduction here. [I]

NAMAQUA DOVE (*Oena capensis aliena*) – This was quite common in the dry areas of the south and north west, and we had some great views of this pretty little long tailed dove.

ZEBRA DOVE (*Geopelia striata*) – Common on Mauritius and a few on Reunion. [I]

MADAGASCAR GREEN-PIGEON (*Treron australis*) – Uncommon, we saw a couple at Masoala, a few at Ifaty and singles at Ankarafantsika and Andisibe. [E]

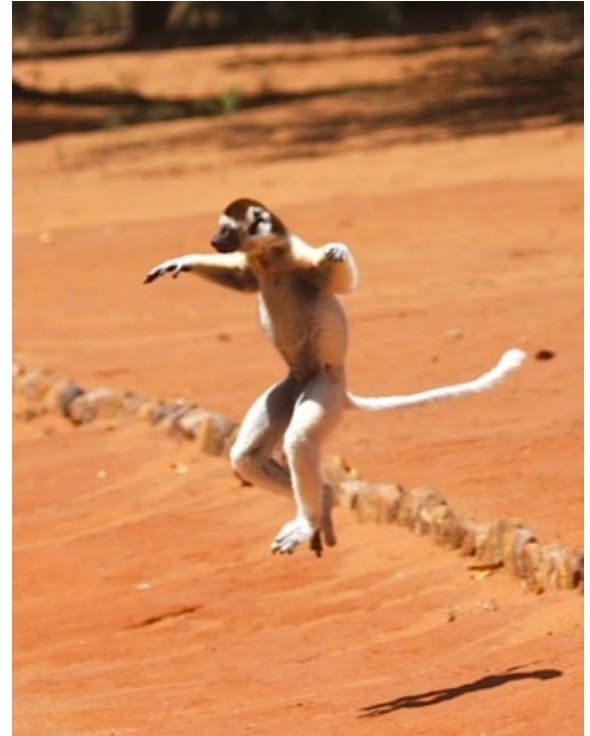
MADAGASCAR BLUE-PIGEON (*Alectroenas madagascariensis*) – Seemed commoner than the Green Pigeon this trip, we had good looks at Masoala, then Ranomafana and Andisibe-Mantadia. The red tail is quite striking. [E]

Psittacidae (Parrots)

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*) – A few seen in flight on Mauritius. [I]

MAURITIUS PARAKEET (*Psittacula echo*) – Fantastic views of 2 males and 2 females at the feeding site at Bel Ombre, the black beak of the female is quite distinctive and the call is quite different to that of Ring-necked Parakeet. This bird has come back from a low of >10 wild birds but is again threatened by monkey predation.

GRAY-HEADED LOVEBIRD (*Agapornis canus*) – We did well for them with great looks at Berenty, then at Ifaty where



Leaping lemurs! A Verreaux's Sifaka looks to stick the landing. Berenty is one of the best places to see these lovely lemurs dancing across the ground in their endearingly unique manner. (Photo by guide Phil Gregory)

we saw up to 50. [E]

VASA PARROT (*Coracopsis vasa*) – They seemed scarce this trip, we heard it at Masoala, then it was seen at Ifaty and then Isalo, where one flew by with the bare facial skin very obvious. [E]

BLACK PARROT (*Coracopsis nigra*) – This was widespread and very vocal this trip, we had them at all the wetter forest sites, with some feeding at fruiting trees at Masoala and Mangily. Best called the Lesser Vasa as the Black Parrot is a Seychelles endemic cf. IOC, the Sinclair field guide etc. [E]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO (*Cuculus rochii*) – Very vocal but can be hard to see, we got a beauty at Isalo pre-breakfast one morning and a lot of folks saw one in forest at Mantadia later. [E]

GIANT COUA (*Coua gigas*) – Confiding and easy to see at Berenty, also at Zombitse this year, the largest of the genus and a striking bird. [E]

COQUEREL'S COUA (*Coua coquereli*) – We saw a nest at Berenty but no birds, then nailed a fine adult at Ankarafantsika. [E]

RED-BREASTED COUA (*Coua serriana*) – Our guide showed us a nest where the bird sat amazingly tight at Masoala, then we taped one to walk right by us next day. Then Nestor somehow managed to coax one across the track in front of us at Andisibe for a wonderful look at what is a tough species to get, easily missed. [E]

RED-FRONTED COUA (*Coua reynaudii*) – Just one at Ranomafana this year, I guess it depended on your angle as some folks saw it well, others not so much. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (*Coua ruficeps*) – Great looks at Ankarafantsika, where one even sunned on the track in front of us. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (GREEN-CAPPED) (*Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps*) – We got a good view of one in the spiny forest at Ifaty, likely a good split from Red-capped too. [E]

RUNNING COUA (*Coua cursor*) – After hearing lots calling in the spiny forest at Mangily, we finally found one perched up high in a bush as we worked back towards the entrance late in the afternoon. [E]

CRESTED COUA (*Coua cristata*) – Great looks at this striking bird at Berenty, then Ifaty, Zombitse and Ankarafantsika. [E]

VERREAUX'S COUA (*Coua verreauxi*) – This can be a tricky one, found only in the very dry coral rag scrub around La Table and elusive there. Luckily we got a great view of one as we were leaving for Isalo. [E]

BLUE COUA (*Coua caerulea*) – This lovely bird is quite widespread and vocal in the wet forests, we saw it at Masoala then at Ranomafana and Andisibe. [E]

MADAGASCAR COUCAL (*Centropus toulou*) – Widespread and fairly common, we saw them quite a bit and heard them most days. [E]

Strigidae (Owls)

MALAGASY SCOPS-OWL (*Otus rutilus*) – Great views of one by the lodge at Masoala, then efforts on two nights at Andisibe gave us one by the roadside on the last night there, which was seen by quite a few. [E]

TOROTOROKA SCOPS-OWL (*Otus madagascariensis*) – A nice look at this relatively recently split species at Berenty. [E]

MADAGASCAR LONG-EARED OWL (*Asio madagascariensis*) – Our guide knew that a pair had young in a pine plantation near Perinet, but an early morning check drew a blank. We came back late morning, and amazingly enough stopped on the trail at the one place where two juvs could be seen- Ann-Charlotte said she was looking at two babies and sure enough, there they were! Lovely white fluffy things with ear tufts, brown chequered wings and dark face masks. Later that day Ann-Charlotte then repeated her feat and found another near the orchid garden! We could find no sign of the adults, but boy did we do well with the juvs. this year. [E]

MARSH OWL (*Asio capensis*) – One flushed up from the dry scrub on Nosy Ve and gave good flight views, a species that is rarely recorded on these tours.

WHITE-BROWED OWL (*Ninox superciliaris*) – Great views at Berenty, they sit out for ages in daylight, and some of us had another one calling and seen at dusk the night before. [E]

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

MADAGASCAR NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*) – Meegs and her crew saw one in daylight really well at Ifaty, which explains the lack of interest in the roosting bird we had up at Vohiparara marsh, sat along a branch of a small shrub and giving amazing views. [E]

COLLARED NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus enarratus*) – Amazing views at Masoala where we had an adult with a near

fledged juvenile on the track in the thick forest, what a beautiful and incredibly well camouflaged species this is. Then we were in luck at Mantadia where Nestor found us another, which was presumably nesting in the crown of a tree fern, just like last trip and indeed in the same area. [E]

Apodidae (Swifts)

MALAGASY SPINETAIL (*Zoonavena grandidieri*) – The Sinclair book describes this as common- we saw it at Masoala, then again on one day at Mantadia, and that was it! The small white rump is quite hard to see but we got some terrific views. [E]

MASCARENE SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus francicus*) – Fairly common on Reunion and Mauritius, mostly in the remnant forested areas.

ALPINE SWIFT (*Apus melba willsi*) – Great looks at one spot by a huge whaleback inselberg near Isalo, this is an endemic race.

MADAGASCAR SWIFT (*Apus balstoni*) – This split from African Black Swift was seen at Tana, then again at Ifaty and the inselberg near Isalo, where they showed very well. [E]

AFRICAN PALM-SWIFT (*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*) – A few sightings from the drier areas, starting at Masoala and then Ifaty.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

MALAGASY KINGFISHER (*Corythornis vintsioides*) – We had multiple encounters with this lovely little relative of the Malachite Kingfisher, starting at Masoala then at Berenty, paddies near Ambositre, Ankarafantsika etc. [E]

MADAGASCAR PYGMY-KINGFISHER (*Corythornis madagascariensis*) – Last tour we dipped, this year Jean-Chris got us one perched up in some bamboo for fine views at Ranomafana, it even stayed long enough for laggardly Phil to get it as his lifer, and it was the only one we saw. [E]

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

MADAGASCAR BEE-EATER (*Merops superciliosus*) – Widespread in small numbers, with some great looks at them.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

BROAD-BILLED ROLLER (*Eurystomus glaucurus glaucurus*) – Also widespread, the cackling call was a regular sound of the tour starting at Masoala and Berenty, and we saw them really well on multiple occasions. They can be amazingly falcon-like in flight!

Brachypteraciidae (Ground-Rollers)

SHORT-LEGGED GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias leptosomus*) – This is often the toughest of the family to get, but we began well with great looks at 2 up at Masoala, then followed through with a very obliging one at Mantadia. Stand here and watch said our guide, and sure enough- bang!- Meegs spotted one fly in about 5 minutes later, perching quite high up for ages. Terrific. [E]

SCALY GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias squamiger*) – Another hard one, but our guy knew where one lived and we even got it again next day for Nick. I had not realised they have a broad blue tip to the tail, it really is a stunning bird. This made the full set of 5 ground rollers for everyone once Nick got it. [E]

PITTA-LIKE GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis pittoides*) – Quite easy this year, we had fantastic looks at Ranomafana with multiple encounters, and again at Mantadia, it is one lovely looking bird. [E]

RUFOUS-HEADED GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis crossleyi*) – Another tough one and it really made us work; the first sighting was good for about half the group, but we then had to go do it all over again at another site for those who dipped. Happily the bird co-operated and sat out in full view for some time, a wonderful sighting and sighs of relief all round. [E]

LONG-TAILED GROUND-ROLLER (*Uratelornis chimaera*) – The great prize down in the spiny forest, and boy do those guys have this one tagged, they got it really well for Meegs and the group, then again for Dana and I next day with a pair and 2 juvs. showing just brilliantly. A great charisma bird, one of the Madagascar megas for sure. [E]

Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-Roller)

CUCKOO-ROLLER (*Leptosomus discolor*) – Their wonderful mournful musical cry is a typical sound of the wet forests where they can be hard to see, but in the drier areas like Zombitse and Ankarafantsika they show well and we had lovely views both at rest and in flight. The Masoala extension guys got one sat on a shrub on the beach being mobbed by a Crested Drongo.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

MADAGASCAR HOOPOE (*Upupa marginata*) – A great bird of the dry areas, starting at Berenty, then Ifaty, Zombitse

and Ankarafantsika where they gave great looks. The call is quite distinct to that of the hoopoes of Europe and Africa, which are now all treated as a single species. [E]

Philepittidae (Asities)

VELVET ASITY (*Philepitta castanea*) – Wow, this is a gem, that green facial skin just glows in the light and I love the way they sit so quietly in the dense tangles, they remind me of nothing so much as the Silktail in Fiji! We had terrific looks at several males at Ranomafana. [E]

SCHLEGEL'S ASITY (*Philepitta schlegeli*) – A great prize from Ankarafantsika, the guides knew of a nest so we were able to stake this out and see the female very nicely, with the amazing male then coming in and showing very well. We had another briefly later too, the quiet trilled call is a good indicator of its presence. [E]

SUNBIRD ASITY (*Neodrepanis coruscans*) – The amusingly named "Common" Sunbird Asity should be renamed the Elusive and Downright Rare Sunbird Asity- we heard it at Ranomafana en route to the really rare Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity, but it did not respond and we could not find it on the way back, and all our searches at Andisibe drew a blank. Darn. [E*]

YELLOW-BELLIED ASITY (*Neodrepanis hypoxantha*) – This is a mega-rare bird, but happily this year the guides had a nest, which in itself also proved quite a challenge as we had to balance on a steep slope and peer up at it whilst the tiny bird flitted in and out. Getting a decent view was problematic and I think I was one of the last to nail it as it turned out, getting pretty good views of the female. Meegs (and maybe someone else?) meantime saw the male really close whilst the rest of us had gone ahead to try and find the source of the calls! [E]

Vangidae (Vangas)

TYLAS VANGA (*Tylas eduardi*) – One was seen at Ranomafana by the Pollen's Vanga, seeming to mimic it but much smaller and with a thin bill. Everyone got great looks at Andisibe where 2 were in the mixed vanga flock by the road. [E]

DARK NEWTONIA (*Newtonia amphichroa*) – Good views at Ranomafana in the dark forest. [E]

COMMON NEWTONIA (*Newtonia brunneicauda*) – Widespread, the clicking call is a give away and we saw it at each of the wetter forest areas. [E]

ARCHBOLD'S NEWTONIA (*Newtonia archboldi*) – This was seen nicely in the spiny forest at Mangily, the only place we can see it on the tour. [E]

CHABERT VANGA (*Leptopterus chabert*) – Widespread and fairly common, we had some great looks at this stubby little vanga. [E]

BLUE VANGA (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*) – One seen at Masoala by most, then again at Ranomafana and finally in the roadside flock at Andisibe where they showed beautifully, the colour blue is really intense and the dark tip to the bill really sets it off. The immature has a grey bill and is dull above. A beautiful bird. [E]

RED-TAILED VANGA (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*) – The wolf whistle call was often heard and we had several nice looks at this chickadee-like species. The imm. is very like Common Newtonia, so similar some kind of mimicry must be involved. [E]

RED-SHOULDERED VANGA (*Calicalicus rufocarpalis*) – Only formally described in 1997, it occupies that dry coral rag scrub around La Table mesa and is a low density species, so we were very happy when the Rockjumper local guide told us where he had just shown the group one! We duly found a lovely male and had terrific views. [E]

NUTHATCH-VANGA (*Hypositta corallirostris*) – This seems to be to be a pretty scarce bird, once again the only place we saw it was at Andisibe where a beautiful oily blue adult male was foraging up trunks beside the road and gave fantastic looks. The old name of Coral-billed Nuthatch fits it quite well, but it's much longer bodied and longer tailed, altogether very odd. [E]

HOOK-BILLED VANGA (*Vanga curvirostris*) – Large and strangely reminiscent of a butcherbird, we saw them nicely at Masoala, then at Ifaty and finally Mantadia. [E]

HELMET VANGA (*Euryceros prevostii*) – THE great Madagascar mega, one you can't see without a special effort, and even then by no means a slam dunk. We were lucky as our guide at Masoala knew of a nest, so we trekked along a rough track for an hour then he turned and said "Be quiet" We turned the corner and there not 25 yds away at eye level was the glowing black-tipped blue bill belonging to the incubating Helmet Vanga. Unbelievable, we had fantastic looks then left it in peace. We heard and glimpsed another that afternoon, and had one in tree by the camp next morning, so it's clearly a rare and low density species. One of my top ten best birds ever for sure, it's THE Madagascar charisma tick. [E]

RUFOUS VANGA (*Schetba rufa*) – I really like these smart rufous black and white birds, and we saw a pair plus a helper male with a partially black throat at Ankarafantsika, after hearing it at Masoala. They really do resemble the female Vanga Flycatcher of Central Africa in colour. [E]

SICKLE-BILLED VANGA (*Falcoelea palliata*) – Another terrific showy vanga, this one with a huge decurved bill and

white head. We saw a pair at nest at Ifaty, then had a very vocal one at Ankarafantsika probing in cracks for grubs, right by the restaurant. [E]

BERNIER'S VANGA (*Oriolia bernieri*) – Man did we struggle for this rare species at Masoala, and I had basically given up when Marlene asked what these two largish birds were up in tree backlit against the setting sun. The long slender bill was really strange looking, and when they flew one of them looked black, and we realised we had Bernier's Vanga, albeit a BVD! Talk about a back-line save, one more last minute salvation job! [E]

WHITE-HEADED VANGA (*Artamella viridis*) – Seen at Masoala, then at Ifaty and Andisibe, usually singly but once with 2 birds. [E]

LAFRESNAYE'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris xenopirostris*) – This is a special of the spiny forest, and the guides were able to show Meegs and the group a fine hunting adult with 2 attendant youngsters, one of which was pursuing it through the bushes. All these big *Xenopirostris* vangas are tough and very pleasing to find. [E]

VAN DAM'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris damii*) – The most restricted in range and one of the rarest vangas, we worked really hard at Ankarafantsika and the local guides did a great job of locating a pair and getting us onto them, the female in particular eventually showing really well. Easily missed, this was another lifer for Meegs. [E]

POLLEN'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris polleni*) – Another tough one, we eventually got one at Ranomafana by the Vohiparara track, and I think most folks got views of it. [E]

WARD'S FLYCATCHER (*Pseudobias wardi*) – This is meant to be common, but we had it briefly at Ranomafana then equally briefly at Mantadia in two areas. It looks like an odd batis, complete with black breast band, but is seemingly best allied with vangas it seems from genetic work. [E]

CROSSLEY'S BABBLER (*Mystacornis crossleyi*) – Another species now placed with vangas, it's a forest skulker which we saw really well at Masoala, then briefly for some at Ranomafana. [E]

Campephagidae (Cuckoo-shrikes)

ASHY CUCKOO-SHRIKE (*Coracina cinerea*) – This was widespread in the forest zones. [E]

MAURITIUS CUCKOO-SHRIKE (*Coracina typica*) – Bad luck here, the new policy of not controlling macaques means mayhem now rules and all the small rare forest passerines in Mauritius are now in even more trouble. Our site at Bassin Blanc is usually good for this species, but this year we could hear macaques calling, saw one sat up, and only heard a distant cuckooshrike. The prognosis is grim, hard to see how this species can be saved without feral animal control. [E*]

REUNION CUCKOO-SHRIKE (*Coracina newtoni*) – Another rare and problematic cuckooshrike, with about 30 pairs and 10 unattached males in a tiny area of higher altitude forest. At least Reunion does not have macaques and mongoose to contend with, though rats are seemingly the big issue here. We were taken to a *Cryptomeria* grove where a pair were nesting, and indeed we heard the male call a few times, but we were not allowed to use tape and sadly the nest site was unavailable to view, unlike 2010 when we got one on a nest. A brave try and a fairly hard walk, but good to see some decent habitat remains. [E*]

Dicruridae (Drongos)

CRESTED DRONGO (*Dicrurus forficatus*) – One of the most widespread Madagascar endemics, we saw it most days. [E]

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone mutata*) – Also fairly widespread, we had some great views and the black and white morph males are very striking. [E]

MASCARENE PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone bourbonnensis*) – This is a scarce one, but we saw it well at La Roche Ecrute on Reunion, and a few saw one at Bassin Blanc on Mauritius where it is now becoming even rarer.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PIED CROW (*Corvus albus*) – Small numbers in Madagascar in a variety of sites.

Alaudidae (Larks)

MADAGASCAR LARK (*Mirafraga hova*) – Great looks at this small bushlark at Berenty, then at La Table and Ankarafantsika. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

PLAIN MARTIN (*Riparia paludicola cowani*) – A few seen from the bus in the wet paddies of the highlands en route to Fianarantsoa and Ranomafana.

MASCARENE MARTIN (*Phedina borbonica madagascariensis*) – Widespread, we saw it at Tana airport, then had great looks at one on a ledge by a bridge at Ranomafana, we could clearly see the streaked underparts which are not obvious in flight. None seen on the Mascarenes this trip.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – One at the lake near Tulear, it is a rare visitor to Madagascar but this area seems to have them regularly.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

RED-WHISKERED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) – A few on Reunion and depressingly common and invasive on Mauritius. [I]

MADAGASCAR BULBUL (*Hypsipetes madagascariensis*) – Widespread, we got some great looks at this big straggly looking bulbul with the orange-red bill. [E]

REUNION BULBUL (*Hypsipetes borbonicus*) – Tough this year, we got looks at a couple on the trail up La Roche Ecrite, the white eye is very distinctive. [E]

MAURITIUS BULBUL (*Hypsipetes olivaceus*) – Another hard one, we spent a while getting great looks near Bassin Blanc, then had a lovely one at Bassin Blanc itself before a final at Bel Ombre. We did well for what is a pretty scarce species. [E]

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

MADAGASCAR BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas typica*) – Some good views of this brush skulker, takking away in the undergrowth and first seen at Ranomafana, then very nicely at the pond at Mantadia. [E]

SUBDESERT BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas lantzii*) – Nice looks down at Ifaty and Tulear. [E]

MADAGASCAR SWAMP-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus newtoni*) – Fits at the lake near Tulear where they showed well, then seen alongside the Brush Warbler at a swampy area near Ambositre. Some in the mangroves at Betsiboka were unexpected. [E]

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

BROWN EMU-TAIL (*Dromaeocercus brunneus*) – Heard in dense dark forest at Vohiparara, but it came in quickly, checked us out and left. [E*]

GRAY EMU-TAIL (*Dromaeocercus seebohmi*) – Good views in short rushes at Ranomafana, they proved quite responsive and showed pretty well. [E]

Bernieridae (Malagasy Warblers)

WHITE-THROATED OXYLABES (*Oxylabes madagascariensis*) – Seen a couple of times at Ranomafana, sometimes in the mid-stratum too [E]

LONG-BILLED BERNIERIA (*Bernieria madagascariensis*) – This is one strange bird, that great long bill is very distinctive. The ones we saw at Zombitse had grey legs, seemed smaller than the ones at Ranomafana and Ankarafantsika, and the bills appeared slightly decurved, all very odd. [E]

CRYPTIC WARBLER (*Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*) – Very good looks at Vohiparara, this is Field Guides very own discovery, first found by Bret Whitney and Jan Pierson about 20 years ago and picked up on the distinct call. We also saw one at Andisibe. [E]

WEDGE-TAILED JERY (*Hartertula flavoviridis*) – Good looks in th forest mid-storey at Ranomafana, they are quite like Spectacled Tetraka but have this graduated tail and smaller size, and these were the only ones we encountered. They need a new name as they are not a Jery any longer, but Hartertula somehow doesn't cut it! [E]

THAMNORNIS (*Thamnornis chloropetoides*) – This is one of my favorites, it's obscure, quite striking looking and little known. We saw it at Mangily on two days, the second one being very close and showing really well, even the pale tail tip. [E]

YELLOW-BROWED OXYLABES (*Crossleyia xanthophrys*) – Heard up at Vohiparara but an inveterate skulker, and no-one got onto it despite it calling as it moved around us. Shame. [E*]

SPECTACLED TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis zosterops*) – This was seen up at Masoala, then at Ranomafana on a nest, quite a delicate bird with distinct spectacles. [E]

APPERT'S TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis apperti*) – Rare and very restricted range, luckily the guides at Zombitse are onto it even in the heat of the day and we had great views of a two singles keeping low in the undergrowth, a very smart looking little bird. [E]

DUSKY TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis tenebrosa*) – This is one very poorly known seldom seen bird, but our guide at Masoala seemed pretty confident of one area in which it could be found. I managed a brief look at it low down in dense undergrowth, seeing the big yellow throat and dark underparts, and I think Gary and maybe one or two others got brief looks as it flitted about. Later joined by Spectacled Tetrakas that were much brighter yellow below.

GRAY-CROWNED TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis cinereiceps*) – One was seen with a mixed flock as we left the Vohiparara

Trail but only a few folks got onto it; it was calling and we heard another earlier too but this is always an elusive species. [E]

RAND'S WARBLER (*Randia pseudozosterops*) – Seen at Ranomafana where one was singing by the entry track, and then at Andisibe where they showed well in the mixed vanga flock by the road. One curious feature was hearing the rising song phrase of Stripe-throated Jery, which would be answered two seconds later by the downslurred deeper song phrase of this species, almost as if the two species are singing antiphonally. What is going on here? [E]

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

COMMON JERY (*Neomixis tenella*) – Widespread and fairly common, our first were up at Masoala and the grey nape is a very good field character. [E]

GREEN JERY (*Neomixis viridis*) – Not as common, we saw this at Ranomafana and then at Andisibe, and it was more often heard than seen; it's smaller than the other jeries and lacks a grey nape or throat stripes. [E]

STRIPE-THROATED JERY (*Neomixis striatigula*) – Seen at Berenty where they do have striped throats and no grey nape, and then at Ifaty, Ranomafana and Andisibe where there seems to be a strong association with Rand's Warbler, the two singing often from the same perch and the jery singing the first phrase with Rand's Warbler replying! A jery at Ankarafantsika was controversial, to me the lack of grey nape indicated this species and the lack of throat stripes does not mean much, but we never heard it call and the local guides split one each way on which it was! [E]

MADAGASCAR CISTICOLA (*Cisticola cherina*) – Quite common in the swampy parts of Ranomafana, and again at Andisibe, the "chik chik" call was often heard. [E]

Zosteropidae (Yuhinas, White-eyes, and Allies)

MADAGASCAR WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops maderaspatanus*) – Widespread and fairly common in the forested areas, quite a nice looking white-eye. [E]

MASCARENE WHITE-EYE (REUNION) (*Zosterops borbonicus borbonicus*) – The Reunion Grey White-eye was quite common and has well marked pinkish flanks, quite different to the Mauritius birds. [E]

MASCARENE WHITE-EYE (MAURITIUS) (*Zosterops borbonicus mauritanus*) – The Mauritius Grey White-eye looks pretty different to the Reunion one and is split by the IOC, it was about the only endemic bird that was fairly widespread. The white rump is an unusual field character in this family, [E]

REUNION WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops olivaceus*) – A striking white-eye with a dark face and slightly decurved bill, and olive back, it was quite vocal and widespread up the trail at La Roche Ecrute. [E]

MAURITIUS WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops chloronothos*) – This one is much rarer than the Reunion sibling, and destined to become more so now that the macaque menace is unchecked. We heard one at Bassin Blanc and twice had it fly by below us, really a BVD but better than nothing. I wonder how tough this will be in 2012? [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (*Copsychus albospecularis*) – Quite widespread in the forests and gave some nice views. [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola sharpei*) – This was a good pick up, the guides at Ranomafana knew of a nest in a culvert, and we saw two speckly juvs. there. Then a fine adult was spotlighted in the gathering dusk sat on a branch nearby. One that is easily missed. [E]

BENSON'S ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola bensoni*) – This is a dry rocky country taxon of uncertain status, one study lumps it with Forest Rock Thrush but seemingly the birds surveyed were not actually this taxon at all! The IOC has lumped them but Clements for once has the more radical (or outdated....) position. Anyway, we had nice looks at this bird at our beautiful hotel at Isalo. [E]

LITTORAL ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola imerina*) – Found only in the coastal zone of the far south, we found it easily once again near Anakau (much as we did last year), and saw an adult feeding a juv. It was a lifer for Meegs too. [E]

STONECHAT (MADAGASCAR) (*Saxicola torquatus sibilla*) – Widespread in upland open habitats, this taxon is actually now split by the IOC as Madagascar Stonechat (from African Stonechat). [E]

REUNION STONECHAT (*Saxicola tectes*) – This was quite common and nesting at La Roche Ecrute, it's a Reunion endemic too. [E]

Sturnidae (Starlings)

MADAGASCAR STARLING (*Saroglossa aurata*) – Low density and uncommon, we saw this long-billed fork-tailed species at Masoala, Ranomafana (where one was feeding in the road!), near Ambositre in degraded forest, and at Andisibe. [E]

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Distressingly common throughout, the ultimate social gaffe was to be caught looking at one..... [I]

Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)

SOUIMANGA SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris souimanga*) – Common in the forested areas of Madagascar, its voice is a characteristic sound of the forest. [E]

MADAGASCAR SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris notatus*) – The Madagascar Green Sunbird was much less common in the forested areas. [E]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

MADAGASCAR WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flaviventris*) – This was first seen at Tana airport and was common along the main road at Ranomafana, it's an attractive wagtail too. [E]

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

YELLOW-FRONTED CANARY (*Serinus mozambicus*) – Some folks saw this on Mauritius at Flic en Flac. [I]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – None on Madagascar, but common on the Mascarenes. [I]

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

VILLAGE WEAVER (*Ploceus cucullatus*) – A few on Reunion and various nesting colonies on Mauritius, with some breeding dress males on the beach at Flic en Flac. [I]

NELICOURVI WEAVER (*Ploceus nelicourvi*) – Uncommon and low density in forests, we saw it at Masoala, Ranomafana and Andisibe and saw several of the nests which have distinctive long elongated spouts. [E]

SAKALAVA WEAVER (*Ploceus sakalava*) – Common in the dry country around Berenty and Ifaty, with various communal nesting colonies seen in villages. [E]

RED FODY (*Foudia madagascariensis*) – Widespread, the male is a an eye-catching red bird and the females look remarkably sparrow-like. Also common on the Mascarenes where it is meant to be an introduction. [E]

FOREST FODY (*Foudia omissa*) – This is a tricky one, easily missed, though this year we had one quick sighting of a fine adult in a mixed flock in the forest mid-storey, as we came near the end of the Vohiparara Track. Some moulting Red Fodies have pale bellies but the division between them and the red chest is always ragged, not neatly defined. [E]

MAURITIUS FODY (*Foudia rubra*) – This is a rare bird, now destined to get rarer, but happily they were still at the site we had them last year and we had very good looks at the striking red-headed male, with a female nearby. We also saw a subadult male along the main road there, good that they are hanging on here. [E]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

COMMON WAXBILL (*Estrilda astrild*) – Common on Mauritius and a few seen on Reunion. [I]

MADAGASCAR MUNIA (*Lonchura nana*) – This small, stubby finch was seen a few times, starting at Masoala, with some nesting at Ranomafana by our hotel. It is now moved out of *Lonchura* into a new genus *Lemuresthes* if you are collecting genera. [E]

NUTMEG MANNIKIN (*Lonchura punctulata*) – I finally got to see this at Flic en Flac near our hotel and got most folks out to see it on departure day. It was an addition to my African continent list even if it is just an introduction! [I]

MAMMALS

LOWLAND STREAKED TENREC (*Hemicentetes semispinosus*) – Marlene and Gary had one by their cabin at Masoala, then we had one in a culvert at Indri Ridge, caught by our local guide and then almost running up Betsy's trouser leg! A fantastic little creature.

MAURITIUS FRUIT BAT (*Pteropus subniger*) – One flying over Bassin Blanc was a good mammal tick, as like everything else on Mauritius it's rare and hard to find.

MADAGASCAR FRUIT BAT (*Pteropus rufus*) – A colony at Berenty was well worth a visit, and they were the only ones we saw.

GRAY MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus murinus*) – Cynthia had one by her cabin at the Bamboo Club at Ifaty.

EASTERN RUFOUS MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus rufus*) – Called Brown Mouse Lemur in the two mammal field guides, we saw this at Ranomafana, where they come to honey and fruit smeared on roadside trees. This is the one where the large umbrella-wielding German calmly stepped straight in front us and had to be persuaded of the error of his ways!

GRAY-BROWN MOUSE-LEMUR (*Microcebus griseorufus*) – These were common in the spiny forest at Berenty on our

- night walk, and they were also at the Bamboo Club.
- GREATER DWARF LEMUR** (*Cheirogaleus major*) – Two seen up at Masoala on our night walk there.
- BROWN LEMUR** (*Eulemur fulvus fulvus*) – Nice looks up at Ankarafantsika and then at Andisibe.
- RED-FRONTED BROWN LEMUR** (*Eulemur rufus*) – These are the ones introduced at Berenty and now common there, and also seen well at Ranomafana.
- RED-BELLIED LEMUR** (*Eulemur rubriventer*) – This attractive pale-bellied species was seen very nicely at both Ranomafana and Mantadia.
- RING-TAILED LEMUR** (*Lemur catta*) – These are the stars at Berenty, they even led our group down the track for a while, an amazing little animal and so photogenic.
- GRAY BAMBOO LEMUR** (*Hapalemur griseus*) – Great views of 4 of them munching on succulent bamboo at Indri Ridge on the last morning.
- GOLDEN BAMBOO LEMUR** (*Hapalemur aureus*) – This is the one whose discovery led to the creation of Ranomafana NP, and we had a nice view of one in the bamboo there.
- GREATER BAMBOO LEMUR** (*Prolemur simus*) – Amazing, this is one of the rarest of the lemurs and just 2 remain in Ranomafana NP. Much to my delight we got taken to see them this year, with nice looks at both high up in the bamboo, a mammal mega-tick. I can't understand why they are hesitating about introducing potential mates.....what have they got to lose?
- VARIEGATED (RUFFED) LEMUR** (*Varecia variegata*) – We saw the Red Ruffed Lemur *Varecia rubra* up at Masoala, where they were vocal and fairly widespread, we got some great looks in the forest. Note this is split by the 2 Madagascar Mammal guidebooks, but not by the FG checklist. The species listed here is Black and White Ruffed Lemur.
- MILNE-EDWARDS'S SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur edwardsi*) – One was seen in a hollow tree up at Ankarafantsika.
- WHITE-FOOTED SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur leucopus*) – This was quite common in the spiny forest at Berenty.
- WEASEL LEMUR** (*Lepilemur mustelinus*) – We saw Weasel Sportive Lemur on our night walk at Masoala, the grey face very distinctive.
- HUBBARD'S SPORTIVE LEMUR** (*Lepilemur hubbardi*) – This delightful little lemur was peeking out at us from a tree hole at Zombitse.
- AVAHI (WOOLLY LEMUR)** (*Avahi laniger*) – This was a classic up at Masoala, where the guides were keen to show us an Ooli lemur. I'd never heard of it and assumed it must be a new split, but going through the mammal guides it didn't exist and when I looked at the pictures i realised they meant Woolly Lemur! So, we saw Woolly Lemurs at Masoala, then Ranomafana and finally a great huddle of 4 of them at Andisibe on Indri Ridge, they looked like Picasso lemurs with eyes and ears all over the place in this big fuzzy ball. Note there has been massive splitting of Woolly Lemurs now, I think we saw Masoala or Moore's Woolly (*A. mooreorum*) at Masoala and Peyrieras's Woolly (*A. peyrierasi*) at Ranomafana and Andisibe.
- VERREAUX'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus verreauxi*) – Just the best, this is the one that bounds sideways with its arms upraised. We had a wonderful experience at Berenty with a troupe of them walking down the road towards us like a gang of ninjas, then bounding across the track in front, just magical. It's a nice looking creature too and we had some fantastic looks at them this year, one of the mammals highlights. No wonder lemur tours are now such big business.
- COQUEREL'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus coquereli*) – This is another very smart sifaka that showed very well at Ankarafantsika, where they were eating mangoes right by the restaurant area.
- DIADEMED SIFAKA** (*Propithecus diadema*) – One of the most striking of the sifakas and that is saying something, also quite a rare one. They had a troupe at Indri Ridge that showed very nicely on our finale morning up there.
- MILNE-EDWARDS'S SIFAKA** (*Propithecus edwardsi*) – A large and quite rare sifaka that showed very well at Vohiparara in Ranomafana, with a family group seen a couple of times.
- INDRI** (*Indri indri*) – Ah, the star of the show, THE iconic Madagascar mammal, largest of the extant lemurs and what a voice, hearing that pre-dawn from the cabins is just fantastic. Our final morning was designed around going to see these, and they gave a terrific show, calling and sitting out in the open close by for wonderful views, an unforgettable experience.
- CRAB-EATING MACAQUE** (*Macaca fascicularis*) – Sadly one of these menaces was seen at Bassin Blanc, now endangering all the rare birds of Mauritius thanks to the animal rights groups getting culling stopped. [I]
- RED FOREST RAT** (*Nesomys rufus*) – Great views of these at Ranomafana where they were remarkably tame.
- LOWLAND RED FOREST RAT** (*Nesomys audeberti*) – We saw this one up at Masoala on the extension, also quite tame.
- MALAGASY RING-TAILED MONGOOSE** (*Galidia elegans*) – This carnivore was seen very well at Masoala, a lucky find as it's pretty elusive and a very striking beast with a chestnut and black banded tail.

Herps

LINED DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma lineata*) – This was the green gecko at Bellevue at Ranomafana.

PEACOCK DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma quadriocellata*) – This was the beautiful green day gecko at the Centrest at Ranomafana.

STANDING'S DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma standingi*) – The large green day geckoes from the Zombitse picnic site.

MADAGASCAR DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma madagascariensis*) – Seen at Masoala and Ankarafantsika.

MALAGASY GIANT CHAMELEON (*Furcifer oustaleti*) – This was the common large chameleon of the trip, seen at Zombitse, Lac Alarobia and Ankarafantsika.

MADAGASCAR GIANT CHAMELEON (*Furcifer verrucosus*) – Known as the Spiny-backed chameleon, we saw this on the night walk at Berenty then again at Ankarafantsika.

SHORT-HORNED CHAMELEON (*Calumma brevicorne*) – This was the one we saw at Andisibe a couple of times.

MADAGASCAR GROUND BOA (*Boa manditra*) – One large fat example was by the visitor centre at Andisibe.

MALAGASY GIANT HOGNOSE SNAKE (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*) – We actually saw 2 species of Hog-nosed snake, this one being the striking large black and white one that we saw 3 times at Ankarafantsika. The single pale colored one we saw at Ankarafantsika and Berenty was *L. modestus*, the Blonde Hog-nosed snake.

COLLARED IGUANA (*Oplurus cuvieri*) – Common at Ankarafantsika, some had one black nape of neck collar, whilst some had double collars.

MADAGASCAR ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus madagascariensis*) – This was the large stripey skink we saw at Masoala.

JEWELLED ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus ornatus*) – This was seen at Isalo.

THREE-EYED LIZARD (*Chalarodon madagascariensis*) – Most of the group got to see these at Mangily in the spiny forest.

NILE CROCODILE (*Crocodylus niloticus*) – Several quite large ones were at Lac Ravelobe at Ankarafantsika.

MALAGASY GOLDEN FROG (*Mantella madagascariensis*) – This was the strikingly colored small frog the guides caught for us as we left Ranomafana.

VARIEGATED GOLDEN FROG (*Mantella baroni*) – Another strikingly colored small *Mantella* species, this was the one Nestor caught for us at Andisibe.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

More herps

Frogs

Boophis albilabris was the white-lipped green tree frog we saw at Masoala.

Tiny green frog- Masoala

Tiny red frog- Masoala. Could this be the Tomato Frog?

Tiny bluish-white frog with orange hands and feet was seen at Masoala

Snakes (or serpents....)

Antisyphus quadrilineatus was the small pinkish beneath snake with faint blotches above in the forest at Mantadia.

Acrontophis dumereli Dumerel's Ground Boa was the boa coiled up asleep in a tree at Berenty.

Leioheterodon madagascariensis was the striking large black and white hog-nosed snake at Ankarafantsika. The pale coloured one at Berenty and here is the Blonde Hog-nosed snake, *L. modestus*.

Liophodophis lateralis was the slender black and buff-lined snake at Ranomafana.

Stenophis sp. was the slender dark tree snake with a pale hindneck collar from Ranomafana.

Chameleons

Brookesia superciliaris Horned Leaf Chameleon was the tiny one Jean-Chris found for us as we came out of Ranomafana, a seldom seen species and genus I especially wanted to see.

Calumma nasutum Short-snouted Chameleon was the tiny snub-nosed one found as we were entering Ranomafana.

Calumma oshaughnessyi O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon was the amazing psychedelic green, orange and red large one that was near the first Rufous-headed Ground-Roller site.

The leaf-tailed gecko found for us as we were leaving Indri Ridge is *Uroplatus fimbriatus*, the Giant Leaf-tailed Gecko, much to Cynthia's delight. The dry conditions made finding any a real challenge.

Phelsuma metabilis seen at Berenty.

Phelsuma cepediana is the pink-blotched green day gecko we saw at Bel Ombre.

Big stripey skink 3 at Ankarafantsika

Small stripey skink one at Ankarafantsika

Small patterned dull colored day gecko one in the restaurant at Ankarafantsika.

The swollen trunk rather baobab-like trees growing on the dry hillside near Ste Augustin are *Moringa* sp. We also saw several species of the 6 endemic Baobabs, including *Adansonia za*, *A. madagascariensis* and *A. grandidieri* (Morondava, seen from the air!)

A great trip to a fantastic country, if you did the extension to Masoala then Helmet Vanga is the star bird no contest, but for the rest of the trip this would be very hard, how do you choose from all 3 species of mesite, some amazing vangas including the wonderful Blue Vanga and Nuthatch Vanga, great views of all 5 species of ground roller, the Cuckoo Roller and its marvellous evocative voice, Velvet or Schlegel's Asity, Meller's Duck and Bernier's Teal, some of the rarest ducks in the world; the list goes on, even Barau's Petrel or two species of tropicbird might figure. As for lemurs, well all the sifakas are fantastic but Verreaux's was an incredible experience, mouse lemurs are cute, the sportive lemurs have great eyes, Red Ruffed Lemur was outstanding both vocally and to look at, the bamboo lemurs were unique and rare, and the indri must have one of the greatest sounds in the animal kingdom besides being one cool looking and large animal. Lemur tourism rules.

Totals for the tour: 233 bird taxa and 29 mammal taxa