



Field Guides Tour Report

Madagascar, Mauritius & Reunion 2014

Nov 8, 2014 to Dec 4, 2014

Phil Gregory & local guides

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.

This was my fifth run-through for Field Guides of this comprehensive tour of Madagascar, which Field Guides has been running since 1986, this year in a reconfigured smaller group context that worked very nicely. We again had a great tour of this fascinating country, albeit with lots of traveling on slow roads and the worse than usual vagaries of Air Madagascar, which made significant late changes to 5 out of 6 flights, costing us an afternoon at Ifaty and our morning boat trip from Mahajunga as a result.

For the fourth time in recent years we offered an extension to the Masoala Peninsula in quest of some of the most charismatic Madagascar species. This is not for the faint-hearted -- though this year we had good calm sea crossings both ways, and that overnight in Maroantsetra was a great innovation. The walking on the extension is up and down on rough and sometimes slippery trails, so moderate fitness is required. The trek for the Helmet Vanga on the first afternoon was amazingly hot and humid, everyone was soaked with sweat -- BUT you get to see some wonderful birds! The Helmet Vanga had a new nest site which took about 90 minutes of rough walking but paid off nicely. Red-ruffed Lemurs were very vocal and showed well, and we had great looks at both the elusive Red-breasted and the striking Blue Coua, Madagascar Pratincole, a couple of great sightings of obliging Short-legged Ground-Rollers, plus an amazing four Scaly Ground-Rollers on one day! Brown Mesite was again very obliging, with good close views thanks to the local guides; getting this one anywhere can be a real challenge. We also got to see Madagascar Ibis at a nest after a glimpse of one alongside a trail for a few. Masoala for this group proved to be one of the major tour highlights, which was gratifying.

Hubbing back to Tana and meeting up with more of the group for the main tour, we then set off for Andasibe/Perinet where a brilliant Madagascar Flufftail at a small marsh was exciting. I love that lodge where you can hear the Indri from your room (be sure to listen to the audio clip in the list below alongside the Indri entry--what a great sound!), though this year a termite hatch made the first evening memorable for some of us as well! The road up to Mantadia is now really bad, but on this trip we had two 4WD vehicles for this section so it worked out fine. Small bird numbers seemed down again this year, but nonetheless we got great looks at the rare Nuthatch Vanga, plus Blue, White-headed, and Red-tailed vangas, and Ward's Flycatcher (Vanga).



*The amazing male Schlegel's Asity, a star of this year's tour
(Photo by guide Phil Gregory)*

A very wet morning saw some of the group get a brief look at Madagascar Rail, and Indri Ridge gave soggy Diademed Sifakas and a morose Indri, but that afternoon it cleared off and Nestor, (actually on this way home), gave an amazing performance, walking away then repeatedly calling us along to come see Giant Leaf-tailed Gecko, then a chameleon, next an adult Madagascar Long-eared Owl, then Red-fronted Coua followed by Indri, with an extraordinary interaction with a delightful group of Goodman's Mouse Lemurs that were in the road in daylight. Gerard thinks their nest had come down so they were disoriented, scurrying about under a bus and across the road, with one individual coming out and climbing up my left leg! Wonderful, cute little creatures -- we spent about half an hour trying to shoo them off the road and watching the goings-on, it was just a magic afternoon.

Madagascar Long-eared Owl had two fine, white fluffy babies with dark face masks that sat in pine trees by the road, and with the adult female there next day for good measure. Madagascar Scops-Owl also showed beautifully at roost in a cypress just at head height.

Lemurs were excellent, with great looks and sounds from Indri, standing right by a pair that gave a truly wonderful heart-stopping noise, and nice views of Diademed Sifaka in the rain, plus Crossley's Dwarf Lemur (Furry-eared on our checklist) congregating at a fruiting tree at the lodge and running down the power lines. A lucky sighting was Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur up at Mantadia, with lovely looks at several of these striking animals in the forest there, complete with their loud vocalizations.

Next we flew down from Tana to Fort Dauphin for the Berenty section, arriving mid-day and braving the still-rough 97km drive over the worst road of the trip, though thankfully the bridges are now all fixed up and the first 10km of road has been redone. Berenty is always a winner for the wonderful tame Ring-tailed lemurs and dancing Verreaux's Sifakas, and this year again they lived up to expectations, with some great interactions here. The night walk here got us Madagascar Nightjar and Torotoroka Scops-Owl seen very well as it called, and Madagascar Sandgrouse eventually cooperated next morning, as did Giant Coua and a wonderful daylight roosting Torotoroka Scops-Owl as well as both Barn and White-browed owls. Back at Fort Dauphin our flight to Tana was delayed, but thankfully the flight to Tulcar was not cancelled (as it had been for some tours recently), and we left Tana at 7pm for Tulcar.

This year we had two nights at Ifaty, which was just as well as Air Mad did not get us into Tulcar until 8pm and we had to drive up in the dark. Once again the local guides here were great, and we duly notched Gray-headed Lovebird, Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Sickle-billed and Lafresnaye's vangas at nests, Long-tailed Ground-Roller, the bizarre Subdesert Mesite, Thamnornis, Running and Green-capped couas, Banded Kestrel, and Archbold's

Newtonia. The rare Madagascar Plover showed very well nearby as did (Madagascar) Three-banded Plover en route back to Tulear for two nights.

The boat ride across to Nosy Ve next day was, as ever with boat rides, not without its challenges, with a slightly bumpy crossing. Still, we got beautiful Red-tailed Tropicbirds very well, and Littoral Rock-Thrush and Subdesert Brush-Warber were very obliging, making the crossing well worthwhile.

A late afternoon foray to La Table netted us Verreaux's Coua nicely, and Mosa was star as he knew where the nest of the rare Red-shouldered Vanga was located, and we had great looks at a female sat on it, maybe the first time the nest has been seen? A Lafresnaye's Vanga was also a good pick-up here as we had only seen a nesting bird at Parc Mosa.

Driving up to Ranohira we spent a couple of hours at Zombitse Forest, where it was mercifully overcast and for once not baking hot. Appert's Greenbul was seen quickly and well, what looked to be an Eleonora's Falcon was at the car park briefly, and both Coquerel's and Giant couas showed very well, with a large Oustalet's Chameleon for good measure and a Zombitse Sportive-Lemur, (formerly Hubbard's but now seemingly rebranded) as well as an engaging troop of Verreaux's Sifakas, with one hanging at full stretch upside-down for ages.

The lovely sandstone hotel at Ranohira is always a pleasure, with great rooms and beautiful surroundings as well as nice food, a welcome break in the long haul north, and with Benson's Rock-Thrush thrown in as well as a bonus Madagascar Pond-Heron and an unexpected Nile Crocodile.

We then journeyed north with a long travel day to Ranomafana for three nights, and a whole swag of exciting rainforest specialties -- Rufous-headed and Pitta-like ground-rollers, Sunbird Asity and even better a pair of Yellow-bellied Asities at the nest, a good view of the rare Henst's Goshawk, Cryptic Warbler and the very hard to see Brown Emutail at a nest, plus a Madagascar Yellowbrow calling and circling around us as it gave tantalizing glimpses, these last two species being amongst the hardest to see on a tour. Meller's Duck and Gray Emutail showed briefly up at the marsh. Lemurs were also great, with lovely looks at the last surviving male Greater Bamboo Lemur here, plus Red-fronted Brown Lemurs, and the diminutive Brown Mouse-Lemur and a lucky encounter with a troupe of the very elusive Milne-Edwards Sifakas one morning before we left.

We drove back via Ambositre, and did some cultural sightseeing there and at Antsirabe, with visits to the woodcarvers, embroidery works, and zebu horn workers shops, which helped break up the journey. We tried for Madagascar Snipe at one spot, even hiring a couple of what I termed "snipeurs" to go walk through the wet vegetation, all to no avail. Happily next day we got three at a site not too far out of Tana, with very nice flight views. An unexpected Marsh Owl right by the road was also a treat; we watched it perched for some time.

Our flight to Mahajunga was in late afternoon this year, so we had time to go to Lac Alarobia as usual and this was excellent, with our first Humblot's Heron, an unexpected Meller's Duck, Hottentot Teal, and Madagascar Pond-Heron, plus nice looks at the nesting Squaccos and Black Herons. Driving out from Mahajunga we made reasonable time to Ampijoroa at Ankarafantsika NP, arriving not too long after dark.

Next day here was terrific; they had had heavy rain the day before and activity was really sparked up, plus the excellent local guides really knew what we wanted to find. We began before breakfast, unusually this year up on the sandy plateau first, and in the relative cool for a change. Here we scored big- time with a family group of 3 Van Dam's Vangas -- Gerard had recently spent 5 days here and heard it just once, so we were really lucky to latch onto this easily missed species. Red-capped Coua showed nicely, then after breakfast we had two sets of amazing encounters with Schlegel's Asity, with two very obliging pairs giving fantastic views, we walked away and left the second pair eventually, definitely one of the birds of the trip. White-breasted Mesite also performed well and was encountered twice. Madagascar Jacana was seen at two sites, we got onto Allen's Gallinule too, then the guides found us Madagascar Fish-Eagle sitting in a gum by the road just as we finished lunch, all in all a terrific visit here and with Coquerel's Sifakas showing off as we were leaving.

Air Mad did their thing and wrecked our chances for the Betsiboka boat trip next day, with a 10:00 a.m. departure meaning we had no time to catch the low tide. Still, back in Tana we went to Tsimbazaza Zoo, where we saw some lovely lemurs and some forlorn Fossas in cramped cages, plus an unexpected Madagascar Pond-Heron at what used to be a major breeding site for this species.

Mauritius reverted to type and gave us a foul, wet foggy early morning. Rather to my surprise we got great looks at Mauritius Fody and some Pink Pigeons and later when it had cleared up a very responsive male Mauritius Cuckooshrike, whilst the Mauritius Bulbul also eventually showed well at the third site we tried. Our site for the major non-passerine rarities came good for Pink Pigeon, and some superb Mauritius Parakeets which were calling really well. The Mauritius Kestrel was at one of the customary nest boxes, and we had great looks at a male coming in and out and a female tearing up a nestling bird to feed the chicks, a much better set of circumstances than the more usual ones sitting in the nest box.

Our final late-afternoon trip was down to La Roche qui Pleure for a seawatch (aka staring at distant dots), which gave us a few Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, plus several Barau's Petrel and a far-distant Pterodroma that was probably "Round Island" Petrel, but which we lost too soon to confirm.

Departure next day to Reunion was straightforward, and for once we had time to make a scenic circuit of much of the spectacular island, seeing the lava flows en route, before views of Barau's Petrel coming in by the river mouth before dusk. Our final morning birding in the lovely native forest at La Roche Ecrite got us more or less everything, though sadly being denied playback again cost us the Reunion Cuckooshrike with one calling very briefly some way away. Still, a fine male and then a female plumage Reunion Harrier were great, and the eponymous Stonechat, Gray White-eye, Olive White-eye, Bulbul, and Paradise-Flycatcher all performed nicely.

Star experiences of our trip were:

--Helmet Vanga as always, one of the planet's great species.

--I can't pick between the ground-rollers, they are all charismatic and exciting to track down.

--Schlegel's Asity was wonderful this year, and we met the man who was the star of a famous twitch here many years back, when the group missed it but he stayed on and saw it, going back to Tana via bush taxi (15 hours). He was here cleaning up the various species that have now become available since that time; Madagascar is one of those places where it is better to have come later than done it years back!

--That nest of Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity was fantastic and we saw both sexes nicely.

--The Madagascar Yellowbrow leading us such a dance.

--All 3 mesites once again, just such odd birds.

--The 6 species of owl we saw in daylight, just amazing.

--I must also include the Goodman's Mouse-Lemur experience, which was just incredible, and those extraordinary Uroplatus leaf-tailed geckoes.

My thanks to a very pleasant and good-humored group; it was fun taking you all round on what is quite a long and taxing trip. Particular thanks to the brilliant Gerard, our long-time local fixer and birder, to the various skilled and entertaining local guides Nestor and Laurent, Benoit, Mosa, Jean-Chris, Ndrema, and Jean-Claude, and to Sharon in the Field Guides office for good logistics on a complex and difficult itinerary. I enjoyed sharing all these wonderful sightings in Madagascar and the Mascarenes with you, and we look forward to another chance to do the same in another part of the world. Safe travels, good birding, and Happy New Year to you all!

--Phil

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*) – About 50 at Lac Alarobia, a couple at Masoala and a couple near Berenty, not a big trip for ducks this year.

MELLER'S DUCK (*Anas melleri*) – A flighty group of 5 of this rare duck on the river at Ambotipahena marsh above Vohiparara, they took off very soon after we found them, then a couple more came into view but the light was poor. Thus, finding one sat on a small islet at Lac Alarobia was a good bonus there, and it allowed much better looks. [E]

RED-BILLED DUCK (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) – Just a few at Lac Alarobia and the marsh at Ranomafana.

HOTTENTOT TEAL (*Anas hottentota*) – Just 4 at Lac Alarobia this trip.

Numididae (Guineafowl)

HELMETED GUINEAFOWL (*Numida meleagris*) – A few from Berenty and Isalo only. [I]

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GRAY FRANCOLIN (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – Good views at Bel Ombre on Mauritius, we saw about 5 of them here, plus Ring-necked Pheasant which might get established as well. [I]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

MADAGASCAR GREBE (*Tachybaptus pelzelinii*) – The pair on the pond at Mantadia again had 3 stripey juveniles, when this pair disappear we are in trouble as we don't see it elsewhere these days! [E]

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

BARAU'S PETREL (*Pterodroma baraui*) – Good views of them coming in high over the estuary late afternoon, with maybe a couple of hundred massing offshore by this their primary breeding ground.

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus pacificus*) – Just a few off La Roche Qui Pleure, and none off Reunion this trip which was unusual.

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD (INDIAN OCEAN) (*Phaethon lepturus lepturus*) – Very nice ones on Reunion over St Denis, and then en route to La Roche Ecrite.

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon rubricauda rubricauda*) – Great views as always on Nosy Ve where they were flying about and calling nicely.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

LONG-TAILED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax africanus pictilis*) – Only seen at Maroantsetra in the river there, with just one individual this year.

Scopidae (Hamerkop)

HAMERKOP (*Scopus umbretta umbretta*) – Small numbers in the interminable rice paddies, and a few of the huge untidy nests seen.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

HUMBLLOT'S HERON (*Ardea humbloti*) – Late in coming along this year, the first was a dark billed immature bird at Lac Alarobia, the first time I've seen it here. We also had a couple at Lac Ravelobe near the end of the main tour. [E]

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea madagascariensis*) – 5 in the marshes as we came by boat out of Maroantsetra. then 4 day records with 3 at Ranomafana and 3 at Lac Ravelobe the maximum.

GREAT EGRET (AFRICAN) (*Ardea alba melanorhynchos*) – 10 day records, with 10 at Lac Ravelobe the maximum.

LITTLE EGRET (DIMORPHIC) (*Egretta garzetta dimorpha*) – Quite distinct from Little Egret, being dimorphic, sometimes having pale legs and a longer heavier bill. White birds seemed much commoner but both morphs were widespread in small numbers. We saw over 100 in the colony at Lac Alarobia.

BLACK HERON (*Egretta ardesiaca*) – Very uncommon, we saw a few around Tana and had about 20 in the colony at Lac Alarobia, with a few doing the wing-shading hunting technique there.

CATTLE EGRET (IBIS) (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – Small numbers were widespread, this is the Western taxon, split by the IOC.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – Small numbers were widespread in the paddies, but overall scarce given the massive amount of habitat available. About 70 at the colony at Lac Alarobia included many well grown nestlings.

MADAGASCAR POND-HERON (*Ardeola idae*) – We had 4 day records of single breeding dress adults, starting at Jardin du Roy then at

Tsimbazzaze Zoo and Lac Alarobia before the last at Lac Ravelobe. I think the Squacco is out-competing it and it is on the way out. [E]
STRIATED HERON (OLD WORLD) (*Butorides striata rutenbergi*) – 8 day records, with a couple seen near Maroantsetra then singles in various rice paddies before singles in Mauritius and Reunion.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A couple at Berenty then about 30 at Lac Alarobia and 4 at Tsimbazzaze zoo.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – About a dozen at Lac Ravelobe were all we saw.

MADAGASCAR IBIS (*Lophotibis cristata*) – This can be a tricky one, we flushed one off a trail at Masoala which most folks missed, then had brief views of one on a nest there (before our noise scared it off, very embarrassing!) Happily we were lucky and got another nest up at Ankarafantsika, with nice scope views of a sitting bird that remained sat. We saw both nominate and the western taxon uschi. [E]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

MADAGASCAR HARRIER-HAWK (*Polyboroides radiatus*) – One at Masoala, some folks saw one at Andasibe, then great views of 2 fine adults at Ifaty spiny forest. The birds facial skin blushed from yellow to pinkish, which is the first time I'd seen this in this species. [E]

REUNION HARRIER (REUNION) (*Circus maillardi maillardi*) – A fine male was soaring along the ridge lines at La Roche Ecrite, with a female plumage bird later; there are about 200 pairs on the island it seems, perhaps more than the totals for the congener on Madagascar which is now very rare. [E]

FRANCES'S GOSHAWK (*Accipiter francesiae*) – Sandra got us one male sitting up a tree in the Andasibe car park, and we had a fine dark barred female next day, with another at Berenty complete with mesial stripe. A scarce species. [E]

MADAGASCAR SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter madagascariensis*) – This was a lifer for me last trip, and this time we were shown a nest at the spiny forest with a fine female sat atop it, quite close to where I saw a nest late last year. Another very scarce and little-known bird, with much confusion over the field characters. [E]

HENST'S GOSHAWK (*Accipiter henstii*) – This was fabulous, Jean-Chris knows where the nest is and by waiting nearby we heard the bird calling loudly, then got the female sat buried deep in foliage, some great spotting by Sandra here! A rare and little-known species. [E]

BLACK KITE (YELLOW-BILLED) (*Milvus migrans parasitus*) – Widespread but very local with no big numbers seen. Yellow-billed Kite was split by the South Africans decades back and most other authorities are now adopting this treatment.

MADAGASCAR FISH-EAGLE (*Haliaeetus vociferoides*) – Once again this year I heard it calling at dawn, but we did not get to see it despite a careful check of the lake. However just as we finished lunch, Ndrema came and told us of a fine adult sat in a huge gum by the lake, and we had amazing views of this mega-rare species. [E]

MADAGASCAR BUZZARD (*Buteo brachypterus*) – A good trip for them, with 10 day records, max 3 birds, the first up at Masoala. [E]

Mesitornithidae (Mesites)

WHITE-BREASTED MESITE (*Mesitornis variegatus*) – Great up at Ankarafantsika again, the guide got most of us onto one early on, then ferreted out a pair later which showed more readily for all, walking along the ground and scurrying over the track. Also heard from the park restaurant, a first for me! [E]

BROWN MESITE (*Mesitornis unicolor*) – Two fine birds at Masoala, lured in and seen nicely in thick forest cover. This is the toughest to see of this ancient family, a species that saw the late Phoebe Snetsinger make 5 trips before she nailed it. [E]

SUBDESERT MESITE (*Monias benschi*) – Great looks at a female frozen on a branch at Parc Mosa, the lads had been tracking them for ages and finally got one to perform. I've never actually seen this species doing anything other than sit frozen, such a bizarre behaviour! [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

MADAGASCAR WOOD-RAIL (*Canirallus kioloides kioloides*) – Heard at Masoala where some appalling inconsiderate behaviour from one of our competitors scuppered our chances (but they did get their Scaly Ground Roller so that's OK-not). However, we got 2 lovely birds at Andasibe from right by the road, then another at Ranomafana, also seen well. [E]

MADAGASCAR RAIL (*Rallus madagascariensis*) – Tough this year, we heard it and some folks got a glimpse at the third site we tried, one almost-but not quite- crossed the track at another place, and on the third morning it poured with rain and only a few well positioned folks got brief looks at one. [E]

WHITE-THROATED RAIL (*Dryolimnas cuvieri cuvieri*) – Great looks at Feon N'y ala where they were quite obliging, it's a spectacular species. Also seen at Lac Alarobia by many.

ALLEN'S GALLINULE (*Porphyrio alleni*) – Two at Lac Ravelobe were a good trip bird, the bluish frontal shield is very distinctive as are the red legs.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorhoa*) – 2 near Maroantsetra, 1 at Lac Alarobia, 1 near Lac Ravelobe, 1 at Bassin Blanc on Mauritius and a single at Etang du Gol on Reunion. Birds of this race on the Comoros had the most extraordinary loud bugling calls!

Sarothruridae (Flufftails)

MADAGASCAR FLUFFTAIL (*Sarothrura insularis*) – A star, (and a new family for many) a male came right in at a marsh near Ambositre and showed very close by, a fabulous look. Heard at Andasibe and also heard at Ranomafana. [E]

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – I think John saw one fly over the bus in some rice paddies near Ambositre, but that was it for this tour.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A single down near Ifaty and 2 at Tulear mudflats.

KITTLITZ'S PLOVER (*Charadrius pecuarius*) – 3 one day and 5 the next at Ifaty.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – A single near Ifaty.

MADAGASCAR PLOVER (*Charadrius thoracicus*) – This rare bird was again at the saltflats at Ifaty, still the only site where I have seen it. Great views, I wonder if Kittlitz's Plover is displacing it? [E]

THREE-BANDED PLOVER (*Charadrius tricollaris bifrontatus*) – A single on a pond not far from Ifaty, and then 2 at a small wetland en route to Ambositre. They have a shrill "swit" callnote, repeated twice. Interestingly this taxon is rather different to African birds, with a greyish not white forehead and it is split by the latest HBW/BirdLife review as Madagascar Three-banded Plover *C. bifrontatus*. Note the Sinclair guide depicts the African race.....

WHITE-FRONTED PLOVER (*Charadrius marginatus tenellus*) – Two on Nosy Ve showed very well.

Jacaniidae (Jacanas)

MADAGASCAR JACANA (*Actophilornis albinucha*) – A tough bird to get, we had 2 on a small pond not too far from Ankarafantsika Park, and then a single on Lac Ravelobe. Curious how it is so rare yet there is so much habitat, I guess disturbance is a key factor. [E]

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

TEREK SANDPIPER (*Xenus cinereus*) – Marilynne thought she saw one at Ifaty.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – One at Maroantsetra and one at Masoala, then a single on Reunion at the petrel site.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – One near Ifaty and 5 at Tulear mudflats.

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – One at Maroantsetra, 2 near Ifaty and about 100 on the flats at Tulear, then a single on Reunion.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – 2 on a sandbank in the river at Maroantsetra were actually my first from Madagascar! It was my only Madagascan addition from the tour.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – Singles at Ifaty and on a pond nearby.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*) – Two birds on the saltflats, and 2 on ponds near Ifaty.

MADAGASCAR SNIPE (*Gallinago macrodactyla*) – A major coup, we hired a snipeur to go beat the marsh for us near Ambositre, where he had seen it that morning, but all to no avail, but happily our site from last year came good and we got 3 birds there, I could even have taped the call had I been prepared! [E]

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

MADAGASCAR PRATINCOLE (*Glareola ocularis*) – Great look at a couple on rocks off Masoala, and also flying over the forest clearing, then 2 on the river near Andasibe on the main tour. This species winters in East Africa, mainly in coastal Kenya. [E]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

ROSEATE TERN (*Sterna dougallii arideensis*) – Marilynne saw one on the way back from Masoala, but terns were scarce throughout the tour this year.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii enigma*) – Three day records from Masoala and Tulear, very few.

LESSER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bengalensis bengalensis*) – 10 off Masoala one afternoon were the only sighting.

Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)

MADAGASCAR SANDGROUSE (*Pterocles personatus*) – 8 at Berenty after an increasingly nerve-wracking morning walk, I heard them calling so I knew they were going to fly up, which they duly did. A hard species to get, this is the best spot for us. [E]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – A few seen in Tana and on Reunion. [I]

PINK PIGEON (*Nesoenas mayeri*) – A very good trip for them, seen at Pigeon Wood and then at Bel Ombre, a total of about 15 including 3 flying overhead at the former site on our second visit. Nice not to see them tied to feeders, the numbers look to be increasing from a historic low of >10 in the wild. [E]

MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia picturata picturata*) – Small numbers, starting with 1 at Masoala then seen well at Berenty and Andasibe. Introduced birds seen on Mauritius and Reunion.

SPOTTED DOVE (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – A couple on Mauritius and 1 on Reunion. [I]

NAMAQUA DOVE (*Oena capensis aliena*) – Small numbers from Berenty and the spiny forest.

ZEBRA DOVE (*Geopelia striata*) – Quite common on Mauritius and Reunion. [I]

MADAGASCAR GREEN-PIGEON (*Treron australis*) – 4 at Masoala, then one at Ranomafana. [E]

MADAGASCAR BLUE-PIGEON (*Alectroenas madagascariensis*) – 7 day records, the first from Masoala, seen as two birds or singles, quite a striking species. [E]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO (*Cuculus rochii*) – Heard most days away from Masoala, seen well at Andasibe and then on the way back to Tana sat on a power line at Ambatofotsy, the same spot as in 2013. [E]

GIANT COUA (*Coua gigas*) – Great views at Berenty and then again at Zombitse, a spectacular bird. [E]

COQUEREL'S COUA (*Coua coquereli*) – One at Zombitse then seen nicely at Ankarafantsika, where one had a nest. [E]

RED-BREASTED COUA (*Coua serriana*) – This is one of the hard to see couas, so we did well getting 4 in one day at Masoala Nov 9, with a single next day. [E]

RED-FRONTED COUA (*Coua reynaudii*) – Some folks got a quick look at Masoala, then Nestor got us a great one along the road at Andasibe on that memorable afternoon there. Also heard at Ranomafana. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (*Coua ruficeps*) – 2 seen well at Ankarafantsika, now split by both Sinclair and Lynx/BirdLife which makes good sense as they differ in both calls and plumage from Green-capped. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (GREEN-CAPPED) (*Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps*) – The spiny forest was the site where we heard them, but only got glimpses of 2, but happily Mosa got us a beauty at La Table, what a shame I missed the photo. Split from Red-capped by Sinclair and Lynx/BirdLife. [E]

RUNNING COUA (*Coua cursor*) – This is one of the more elusive ones, but we got 2 very well at Parc Mosa, complete with lilac cheek patch. [E]

CRESTED COUA (*Coua cristata*) – Five day records and some good looks, the best at Berenty where we saw 4 birds. [E]

VERREAUX'S COUA (*Coua verreauxi*) – A rather rare, restricted range dry country small coua, I think we were lucky to get it as it was barely vocalizing at La Table, where we eventually got good looks late one afternoon. Lacks any colour below and has a thinner more vertical crest than Crested Coua. [E]

BLUE COUA (*Coua caerulea*) – This is one striking bird and was quite widespread and vocal in all the wet forest zones, we had at least 7 sightings and several more heard only. [E]

MADAGASCAR COUCAL (*Centropus toulou*) – This small coucal was widespread and showed nicely, also very vocal, I got a nice tape of the duet at Berenty which is posted on the Internet Bird Collection (IBC). [E]

Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)

BARN OWL (*Tyto alba*) – One roosting at Berenty was a nice trip bird. The whole complex is being broken up so this is now Western Barn Owl, distinct from both North American and Australian birds. This taxon is hypermetra, endemic to Madagascar and the Comoros.

Strigidae (Owls)

MALAGASY SCOPS-OWL (*Otus rutilus*) – Many folks saw this at Masoala where it was quite vocal at dusk. The rest of us saw a beautiful roosting bird at Andasibe, sat low down in a thick cypress. Photo on IBC. [E]

TOROTOROKA SCOPS-OWL (*Otus madagascariensis*) – The guides at Berenty showed us a beauty roosting low down in a spiny quite open tree, and we had a calling bird show very well the night before on our night walk. Photo on IBC. Oddly not split in the Sinclair guide update, weird as everyone else splits the two taxa and he is an arch-splitter! [E]

MADAGASCAR LONG-EARED OWL (*Asio madagascariensis*) – A great experience with 2 calling white fluffy black masked juveniles near the road at Andasibe, with the huge female seen there the next day. [E]

MARSH OWL (*Asio capensis*) – Many folks saw this as they were getting off the plane from Paris, and luckily for the rest of us we got one flying near the road then perched out on some rocks 55 km south of Andriambilany, as we were coming back to Tana. It seemed to have a damaged right eye. This is a hard bird to get in Madagascar, Jay Vandergaast did 8 trips here without seeing it!

WHITE-BROWED OWL (*Ninox superciliaris*) – Rick found us one perched up high in the forest at Masoala, which got my heart racing for a bit when he said he'd found an owl, the first time I've seen this up here. Then great views in daylight at Berenty as usual, we had 6 species of owl in daylight this trip. [E]

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COLLARED NIGHTJAR (*Gactornis enarratus*) – One of the most striking of all nightjars, and still vocally undescribed. We saw a beauty roosting or maybe nesting atop a small pandan at Andasibe, they seem to really like this plant for this purpose. [E]

MADAGASCAR NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*) – Heard at Sambava, seen at Andasibe by the lodge at dusk, and then seen nicely at Berenty with 1 at Ifaty as the final record. [E]

Apodidae (Swifts)

MALAGASY SPINETAIL (*Zoonavena grandidieri*) – Described as common in Sinclair which is always way too sanguine with its abundance estimates, as we saw the bird only at Masoala max. 4 birds, some saw singles at Andasibe and then a single at Zombitse. [E]

MASCARENE SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus francicus*) – A few on Reunion and Mauritius, decidedly uncommon too.

MADAGASCAR SWIFT (*Apus balstoni*) – Only seen at Ranomafana this trip with about 20 birds late in the afternoon. [E]

AFRICAN PALM-SWIFT (MADAGASCAR) (*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*) – Widespread in small numbers.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

MALAGASY KINGFISHER (*Corythornis vintsioides*) – 6 day records of this diminutive kingfisher, the first from Mantadia, and some good views, this taxon seems to like to be near water. [E]

MADAGASCAR PYGMY-KINGFISHER (*Corythornis madagascariensis*) – A tough one, but Nestor and Laurent got us onto them at Mantadia, where there may have been up to 3 birds at the one site, which showed nicely. It's a species that is easily missed on a tour. [E]

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

MADAGASCAR BEE-EATER (*Merops superciliosus*) – Widespread in small numbers.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

BROAD-BILLED ROLLER (MADAGASCAR) (*Eurystomus glaucurus glaucurus*) – Widespread in small numbers, and very vocal, showed well at Masoala, Berenty and Ampijoroa, this race is really quite purple below. It winters in East Africa.

Brachypteraciidae (Ground-Rollers)

SHORT-LEGGED GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias leptosomus*) – Marvellous looks at Masoala, with a single on one day and then 2 birds next day, sat motionless on branches for ages. [E]

SCALY GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias squamiger*) – A vintage trip for this elusive species, we saw some 4 individuals in one day in the forest at Masoala. Again very dry at Mantadia and we did not really try there. [E]

PITTA-LIKE GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis pittoides*) – The easiest of the family though oddly we left it late this trip, seen very well at Ranomafana and Mantadia with a nest hole at the former site. [E]

RUFUS-HEADED GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis crossleyi*) – I always regards this one as the most challenging of the family, and again this year we had quite a duel with it at Ranomafana. Everyone eventually got decent views but it took a while, they call from one spot and you have to locate them in the undergrowth. A terrific bird, and one I still have not been able to photograph properly. [E]

LONG-TAILED GROUND-ROLLER (*Uratelornis chimaera*) – One of the great charisma birds, endemic to the spiny forest and now thankfully kind of nailed down at Parc Mosa, where the lads herded a fine adult into view for us. We saw another later plus one next day for good measure. Again we got all 5 ground-roller species on the tour, something unheard of just a few years back. [E]

Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-Roller)

CUCKOO-ROLLER (*Leptosomus discolor*) – That call is one of the great sounds of the less dry Madagascan forests, we saw one flying over the airport at Sambava of all places, heard it at Masoala and had brilliant views at Zombitse. An endemic family, and one of the most ancient of all bird lineages. They dine mainly on chameleons it seems.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

MADAGASCAR HOOPOE (*Upupa marginata*) – Relatively few this tour, seen at Jardin du Roy, Parc Mosa and Ampijoroa. The call is quite distinct to those of the other hoopoes. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MADAGASCAR KESTREL (*Falco newtoni*) – Seen on many days starting at the Carlton Hotel in Tana, this species seems to be quite adaptable. Also seen feeding around floodlights at Tana airport after dark, a new behaviour for me. [E]

MAURITIUS KESTREL (*Falco punctatus*) – A good year this time, with great views of a pair coming and going to a nest box. Great to see the small

size and rather short relatively broad wings of this forest adapted species, once down to just 4 in the wild but doing better now with intensive management of predators. [E]

BANDED KESTREL (*Falco zoniventris*) – Two at a nest in the spiny forest, and a single next day, a rare species that is easily missed. [E]

ELEONORA'S FALCON (*Falco eleonora*) – A long winged bird seen sitting as we were in the car park at Zombitse was thought to be this species.

SOOTY FALCON (*Falco concolor*) – My first dip this year, with none at the usual Tana airport site, but a few folks got to see one at Masoala.

Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

GREATER VASA-PARROT (*Mascarinus vasa*) – This proved hard this tour, we had a brief look up at Masoala and had 2 flying at Ranomafana, much scarcer than usual. [E]

LESSER VASA-PARROT (*Mascarinus niger*) – Quite common and very vocal in all the wet forest areas, seen nicely at Masoala, Andasibe, Ranomafana and Ankarafantsika. [E]

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*) – 3 seen on Mauritius, smaller and more lightly built than Mauritius Parakeet. [H]

ECHO PARAKEET (*Psittacula eques*) – Excellent this year, with 6+ seen, including a fine male and 2 females coming in by the feeders but staying mainly up in the palms. The females are readily told by their dark bills but the males are more problematic, call is actually one of the best ways, with this species having a harsh quacking call not a shrill screech like Ring-necked. At one time there were >10 birds left in the wild.

GRAY-HEADED LOVEBIRD (*Agapornis canus*) – Nice looks at Parc Mosa, also at Berenty and again at Ampijoroa, though only small numbers. [E]

Philepittidae (Asities)

VELVET ASITY (*Philepitta castanea*) – Very few again this trip, two fine males at Ranomafana were seen nicely but that was it. I love that emerald green facial wattle. [E]

SCHLEGEL'S ASITY (*Philepitta schlegeli*) – Wow, this was one of the birds of the trip for sure, we once again had brilliant views of a male and a female near their nest, only this time we had two different pairs and we walked away and left the second birds just sat there. What an amazing creature it is, that warty psychedelic facial skin is just extraordinary. The guides know of just 5 territories here, it's a pretty rare bird and great to see it so well. [E]

SUNBIRD ASITY (*Neodrepanis coruscans*) – Again this year we had just one sighting from Ranomafana. I always seem to struggle for this species, though this one did sit for ages, in fairly poor light unfortunately. [E]

YELLOW-BELLIED ASITY (*Neodrepanis hypoxantha*) – The trek up to the usual ridge got us to the nest site, where the nest was a new one, for once located quite low down. We had good looks at both the male and the female of this very rare species of the higher elevations, always a big challenge. Photo on IBC. [E]

Vangidae (Vangas, Helmetshrikes, and Allies)

ARCHBOLD'S NEWTONIA (*Newtonia archboldi*) – Good views and vocals at Parc Mosa. [E]

COMMON NEWTONIA (*Newtonia brunneicauda*) – Widespread, the clicking call is a typical sound of the forests. [E]

DARK NEWTONIA (*Newtonia amphichroa*) – Nice looks and good vocals at Mantadia and then Ranomafana, an uncommon and quite elusive bird. [E]

TYLAS VANGA (*Tylas eduardi*) – Seen at Masoala, Ranomafana and Andasibe, usually as singles, and mimicked by the cuckooshrike here. [E]

RED-TAILED VANGA (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*) – This chickadee-like bird was seen and heard well in the wet forest zones, more often heard than seen. [E]

RED-SHOULDERED VANGA (*Calicalicus rufocarpalis*) – Only described in 1997 and restricted to that horrid dry scrub habitat in the SW, it's always a relief to find this. This year Mosa led us way off the track into the dense scrub, basically to show us a female sat on a nest! The dark eye is good enough to identify it, we saw her very close and did not do playback as she was incubating. I can find no reference to nests of this species so certainly very few have ever been found. [E]

NUTHATCH-VANGA (*Hypositta corallirostris*) – This is always a difficult one, but this year we had a very good pair seen from the road at Andasibe, I even got a photo- see the FG Madagascar gallery. [E]

CHABERT VANGA (*Leptopterus chabert*) – 8 day records in ones and twos, the commonest vanga. [E]

CROSSLEY'S VANGA (*Mystacornis crossleyi*) – We heard this several times before we finally got onto one skulking on the forest floor at Ranomafana, they did not seem very responsive this year. Curious that this is now in the vanga family. [E]

BLUE VANGA (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*) – Widespread this trip, the first heard at Masoala then seen well at Andasibe but with no really vivid blue ones this year. [E]

HOOK-BILLED VANGA (*Vanga curvirostris*) – Seen well at Masoala, Ampijoroa and Berenty, a strange convergence here as they remind me so much of Butcherbirds from Australia. [E]

WARD'S FLYCATCHER (*Pseudobias wardi*) – A good trip for them, seen very well at Ranomafana and Andasibe, they look remarkably like a Batis but have a dry trilling call. Now classed as a Vanga, should be renamed Ward's Vanga I suppose. [E]

RUFOUS VANGA (*Schetba rufa*) – A fine nesting pair at Masoala, and seen again at Ampijoroa, also nesting at Zombitse as well. [E]

HELMET VANGA (*Euryceros prevostii*) – THE star of the show, the guides had another nest site this year near that of 2011, and after an amazingly hot and humid trek we got on site and saw a bird sat close to the track. We waited for the bird to come back to the large mossy cup nest and had great views, when it flies it goes straight and fast with that huge blue bill stuck out, very odd. There were 2 nestlings that would crane up begging with big fat wide bills, an extraordinary species. We saw another on one other day too. A megatick for sure. [E]

BERNIER'S VANGA (*Oriolia bernieri*) – Boy this was again hard, we had a male fly through then quite good looks at a female in the forest above the lodge. It is clearly a very low density rather rare species; we saw another female next day at the clearing area but she was very flighty and did not settle for long. This was in the same area as in 2012, the forest here is a bit different with more vines and ferns, maybe a microhabitat niche is required? [E]

SICKLE-BILLED VANGA (*Falcula palliata*) – A trip favourite being showy, noisy and quite confiding, we saw them at a nest at Ifaty and again at Ampijoroa, a great bird. [E]

WHITE-HEADED VANGA (*Artamella viridis*) – Widespread and seen at all the wet forest sites, often in pairs. [E]

POLLEN'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris polleni*) – These big *Xenopirostris* vangas are hard, it was a great relief to get this one at Ranomafana, the big thick pale bill is diagnostic but it is otherwise very like *Tylas Vanga*. [E]

LAFRESNAYE'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris xenopirostris*) – Another tough one, this time we had one on a nest at Ifaty, then we again had one out in the

dry scrub at La Table, calling quite well and sitting up nicely. [E]

VAN DAM'S VANGA (*Xenopirostris damii*) – The hardest and certainly the rarest of the 3 big *Xenopirostris*, the guides at Ampijoroa knew of an old nest which had been recently vacated, but luckily the family group of two adults and one juvenile were still about, and responded very nicely. Gerard had recently spent 5 days here and heard it just once, so we were lucky, this is an easy one to dip. [E]

Campephagidae (Cuckooshrikes)

ASHY CUCKOOSHRIKE (*Coracina cinerea*) – A handful of sightings at Masoala, Ranomafana and Andasibe, this striking bird is a mimic of *Tylas Vanga* for some strange reason. [E]

REUNION CUCKOOSHRIKE (*Lalage newtoni*) – Hmm, this bird called briefly and distantly twice, but we are not supposed to use playback and being law-abiding citizens we didn't and dipped again. There are about 34 pairs left, restricted to a very small area, rat predation seems to be the big issue. [E*]

MAURITIUS CUCKOOSHRIKE (*Lalage typica*) – Much better, no sign in the morning but some playback after lunch in good conditions got a response. It flew out and came across to sit up right by us for fantastic views and photos. A very rare species, I am not optimistic that this one will survive given the predation levels in Mauritius. They have big white wing patches and white tail tips, not shown or mentioned in the Sinclair guide for some bizarre reason. [E]

Dicruridae (Drongos)

CRESTED DRONGO (*Dicrurus forficatus*) – Widespread in small numbers in the forest regions. [E]

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone mutata*) – Also widespread in the forests and a couple of lovely small cup nests seen, plus striking black-and-white or rusty plumaged long-tailed males. The females are none too shabby either, being russet with black caps. [E]

MASCARENE PARADISE-FLYCATCHER (*Terpsiphone bourbonensis bourbonensis*) – Nice looks at this very scarce species along the Roche Ecroute trail, the male lacks any long tail and has a smart black cap. Proposed as a split from the brighter plumaged and much rarer Mauritius bird on genetic grounds. [E]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

HOUSE CROW (*Corvus splendens*) – We had a brief look at one from the bus on Mauritius en route to the airport. It is thankfully very localised here, let's hope it does not get established. [I]

PIED CROW (*Corvus albus*) – Seen on most days in the drier areas, with 10 in the sisal nursery at Berenty the most.

Alaudidae (Larks)

MADAGASCAR LARK (*Mirafraga hova*) – Good views at the Maroantsetra airport, then on the tracks at La Table and near Ranohira, also seen at the sisal nursery and en route back to Tana. Oddly genetic studies indicate this should be placed in *Eremopterix* with the sparrow-larks, which is very bizarre as it nothing like them. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

PLAIN MARTIN (MADAGASCAR) (*Riparia paludicola cowani*) – Seen at the marsh en route to Mantadia, then at the wetlands around Ambositre, quite local and an endemic taxon.

MASCARENE MARTIN (*Phedina borbonica madagascariensis*) – Small numbers in Madagascar, especially at Tana airport. Seen by a few on Mauritius where it seems very scarce.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – A couple were seen over the marshes as we neared Tulear, also a single at La Table and one at Zombitse, it a rare but regular migrant in Madagascar.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

RED-WHISKERED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) – A common invasive in the Mascarenes. [I]

MADAGASCAR BULBUL (*Hypsipetes madagascariensis*) – Quite common in the Madagascan forests, a large untidy looking bird with dark cap and red bill. [E]

REUNION BULBUL (*Hypsipetes borbonicus*) – Uncommon along the Roche Ecroute Trail but seen nicely and also taped. The pale eye is very distinctive. [E]

MAURITIUS BULBUL (*Hypsipetes olivaceus*) – Very sparse and difficult this year, we tried several sites in poor conditions but eventually got one at a roadside site near Pigeon Wood that has been good in the past as well. [E]

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

MADAGASCAR BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas typica*) – Nice looks at the flufftail marsh near Ambositre and at Lac Alarobia and Andasibe, odd to see it in forest there. [E]

SUBDESERT BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas lantzii*) – Great views at La Table, then at Anakau for a few. [E]

MADAGASCAR SWAMP-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus newtoni*) – Seen well at Mantadia where it was evidently nesting by the pond, and then at a marsh near Ambositre and Lac Alarobia. [E]

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

BROWN EMU-TAIL (*Bradypterus brunneus*) – We heard this very well at Vohiparara, and the guides knew of a nest near the trail, where some judicious waiting got us quite good looks at this very difficult skulking species, one of the hardest to see passerines on the tour. [E]

GRAY EMU-TAIL (*Amphispalis seelohmi*) – Tough this trip, we got them calling at Vohiparara Marsh and got quick looks at one that came up and down several times. [E]

Bernieridae (Malagasy Warblers)

WHITE-THROATED OXYLABES (*Oxylabes madagascariensis*) – Seen very well at Andasibe where we eventually got everyone onto them coming in quite high in the subcanopy, an odd behaviour for what is more usually a lower level species. It was also seen at Ranomafana by most of us. [E]

LONG-BILLED BERNIERIA (*Bernieria madagascariensis*) – The scolding call is a useful pointer, and that amazing long beak really shows up, we saw them well at Masoala, Zombitse, Ranomafana and Andasibe this trip. [E]

CRYPTIC WARBLER (*Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*) – We seem to get on this at Ranomafana and nowhere else, this year again being no

exception. A nice view was had of one at Vohiparara on the second attempt, this being a species discovered by our very own Bret Whitney and Jan Pierson of Field Guides, picked up on the different call. Aptly named. [E]

WEDGE-TAILED JERY (*Hartertula flavoviridis*) – I think a couple of folks got a glimpse of one in the mixed flock along the Vohiparara Trail, we usually encounter them a couple of times, but not this year. I like to name it the Wedge-tailed Not-a-Jery, it's now been allocated to Malagasy warblers (tetrakas). [E]

THAMNORNIS (*Thamnornis chloropetoides*) – This Bernieridae grouping has lots of oddities, here's another one, the Thamnornis or Subdesert Tetraka of Sinclair's book. Seen and heard very well at Parc Mosa, the pale tip to the tail is very striking and it's really quite large. [E]

YELLOW-BROWED OXYLABES (*Crossleyia xanthophrys*) – An interesting performance from this very quiet skulker along the Vohiparara Trail, where a responsive bird flew across the track several times and showed briefly in the dense thickets. This and the Brown Emutail are the hardest to see of the regular forest passerines, one that is very easily missed. [E]

SPECTACLED TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis zosterops*) – Good looks at them in the wet forests, especially at Andasibe where we saw a nest. They have a quiet ticking call. [E]

APPERT'S TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis apperti*) – A great bird, restricted to just two small forest sites, the Zombitse guides know exactly how to find them and they did well again this year, getting us terrific close views. [E]

GRAY-CROWNED TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis cinereiceps*) – Two fine birds at Ranomafana creeping along mossy trunks, the most difficult of the former greenbuls that we regularly see. [E]

RAND'S WARBLER (*Randia pseudozosterops*) – The first was at Ranomafana where one was sat up singing. The big wide supercilium and foraging habits tell it from a jery. [E]

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

COMMON JERY (*Neomixis tenella*) – Often heard, a quiet sibilant call, and seen at most forest sites. [E]

GREEN JERY (*Neomixis viridis*) – A good trip for them, one was singing right by Chez Aroll each morning, and we had them at both Ranomafana and then Andasibe, working in flocks of 4 or 5 at the latter site, a bit like *Phylloscopus* warblers. [E]

STRIPE-THROATED JERY (*Neomixis striatigula*) – Good looks and very vocal at Ranomafana and Andasibe, and also the dry country form out at Ifaty and Berenty which has different vocals and is a potential split. [E]

MADAGASCAR CISTICOLA (*Cisticola cherina*) – Widespread, often heard, seen well at Jardin du Roy where they were displaying. [E]

Zosteropidae (White-eyes, Yuhinas, and Allies)

REUNION WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops olivaceus*) – Quite vocal in the forest with a clipped call, and the dark face and big white eye-ring easily tell it from Reunion Grey White-eye. [E]

MAURITIUS WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops chloronothos*) – Heard only this year, it was not responsive sadly but conditions were poor at that time. [E*]

REUNION GRAY WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops borbonicus*) – Reunion Grey White-eye was common in the forest there, with pinkish flanks and a different voice to those on Mauritius, obviously a different species and split by most, now at last including Clements! [E]

MAURITIUS GRAY WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops mauritanus*) – The only fairly common Mauritius endemic, lacks the pink flanks of the Reunion birds and sounds different, and neither have a white eye-ring. Sadly I missed a great photo op! Again, split by most, which now at last includes Clements! [E]

MADAGASCAR WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops maderaspatanus*) – Widespread and vocal in the wet forests, the first being up at Masoala. [E]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (*Copsychus albospectularis*) – Quite common, all we saw had white bellies, and they have a nice musical song. [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola sharpei*) – A single male was found in the forest at Vohiparara, a good pick up as this can be a tough one. Everyone then got one singing along the road late afternoon. The taxonomy of this species is a real mess, with a couple of distinct forms subsumed into what is clearly not the same species..... [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (BENSON'S) (*Monticola sharpei bensoni*) – Great looks at this odd taxon at Jardin du Roy, a male was singing on a rooftop and up on the cliff there, and a female came into the restaurant at one point. I can't believe this is the same species as the Forest Rock Thrush, I made some tape and I hope the group will be re-evaluated at some point, the habitat is just so different. [E]

LITTORAL ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola imerina*) – Great looks at Anakau where we saw a nesting pair of this quite restricted range species, the untidy cup nest was on the rafters inside the bar! Gerard thinks they are declining, maybe due to Myna predation. [E]

AFRICAN STONECHAT (MADAGASCAR) (*Saxicola torquatus sibilla*) – Widespread in small numbers, this group is being split out and the IOC now separate them as Madagascar Stonechat, with more to come! [E]

REUNION STONECHAT (*Saxicola tectes*) – Good looks along the trail at La Roche Ecrite. [E]

Sturnidae (Starlings)

MADAGASCAR STARLING (*Saroglossa aurata*) – A good trip for them, we saw them daily at Masoala, then at Andasibe and Ranomafana, usually in singles or pairs but with 5 at the latter site. [E]

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Common invasive in the dry areas and a major pest in the Mascarenes. [I]

Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)

SOUIMANGA SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris souimanga*) – The common Madagascar sunbird. [E]

MADAGASCAR SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris notatus*) – Far less common, but seen nicely in the wet forest zones, just single males for the most part. [E]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

MADAGASCAR WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flaviventris*) – The first endemic for most, seen in Tana and then tame at Ranomafana and Feon N'y ala. [E]

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

YELLOW-FRONTED CANARY (*Serinus mozambicus*) – A couple at Bel Ombre on Mauritius, probably a harmless introduction. [I]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – None in Madagascar, but common in the urban area of the Mascarenes. [I]

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

VILLAGE WEAVER (*Ploceus cucullatus*) – One of the black masked southern African races is quite common on Mauritius, and may be a problem for the endemic Mauritius Fody. [I]

NELICOURVI WEAVER (*Ploceus nelicourvi*) – Small numbers in the wet forest zones, they make a solitary nest amazingly like that of a malimbe, with long pendulous spouts. A striking bird. [E]

SAKALAVA WEAVER (*Ploceus sakalava*) – Common in the dry SW at La Table, Ifaty and Berenty and also at Ampijoroa. They nest colonially in villages like regular weavers, not solitarily like the Nelicourvi. [E]

RED FODY (*Foudia madagascariensis*) – Common in Madagascar, the incisive voice is a typical sound even in the towns, and also common in the Mascarenes where it is introduced. [E]

FOREST FODY (*Foudia omissa*) – A couple of sightings of good males in forest at Ranomafana, this can be an elusive one. [E]

MAURITIUS FODY (*Foudia rubra*) – A rare and declining bird, the Village Weaver now seems to be a problem for them. Happily we got a nice male at Pigeon Wood despite the dreadful conditions of rain and fog. [E]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

COMMON WAXBILL (*Estrilda astrild*) – Common on Mauritius, and probably harmless as in rubbish modified habitats. [I]

MADAGASCAR MUNIA (*Lonchura nana*) – Now placed in a monotypic genus *Lemuresthes*, and sometimes called Madagascar Bibfinch as it is not congeneric with the *Lonchura munias/mannikins*. Small numbers and good views were had in Masoala, Ranomafana and Andasibe, it is a tiny bird. [E]

MAMMALS

TENREC (*Tenrec ecaudatus*) – One at Bel Ombre in daylight, a good find of quite a large and very edible species, introduced here. [I]

LOWLAND STREAKED TENREC (*Hemicentetes semispinosus*) – Great views of one at Masoala on the trail in the camp, a very striking animal with its yellow erectile spiny crest. [E]

MAURITIUS FRUIT BAT (*Pteropus subniger*) – Great looks at one at Bassin Blanc in daylight, and then 15+ at lychee trees near Flic en Flac at dusk. [E]

MADAGASCAR FRUIT BAT (*Pteropus rufus*) – Seen at Berenty as usual, the only site we get it. [E]

GRAY MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus murinus*) – Some folks saw them at the Bamboo Club by the restaurant. [E]

BROWN MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus rufus*) – This was the cute little guy licking honey by the roadside at Andasibe, and beset by hordes of lemur tourists each night. [E]

REDDISH-GRAY MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus griseorufus*) – The Gray-brown Mouse Lemur (see the scientific name) was seen very well on the night walk at Berenty. [E]

GOODMAN'S MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus lehilahytsara*) – A trip highlight, Nestor got us onto a group of them in daylight, coming out of the herbage and onto the road, where one took shelter under a bus, and then came out only to climb up Phil's left leg- that's the trouble with wearing green! There were maybe up to 10 of them here, Gerard thinks a nest had fallen down and they were suddenly homeless. Amazingly cute and a great experience. [E]

FURRY-EARED DWARF LEMUR (*Cheirogaleus crossleyi*) – Usually called Crossley's Dwarf Lemur, I don't know why the FG mammal checklist is so confusing. Anyway, this newly split species is the common one at Feon N'y ala, we had a couple here in the fruiting tree, they run down the power lines to get there! [E]

FAT-TAILED DWARF LEMUR (*Cheirogaleus medius*) – One seen on the night walk at Masoala.

COMMON BROWN LEMUR (*Eulemur fulvus*) – Seen at Ankarafantsika where they were right by the restaurant, then at Andasibe, where we had some good viewing of them right by the road. [E]

WHITE-FRONTED BROWN LEMUR (*Eulemur albifrons*) – This is restricted to the NE and we had very good looks in the forest at Masoala. [E]

RED-FRONTED LEMUR (*Eulemur rufifrons*) – Usually called Red-fronted Brown Lemur, they are the introduced one at Berenty, and we saw wild ones at Ranomafana. [E]

RED-BELLIED LEMUR (*Eulemur rubriventer*) – Nice looks at Mantadia, the males have white spots by the eyes and dark tails.

RING-TAILED LEMUR (*Lemur catta*) – The other star at Berenty, and with the cessation of providing water points the introduced Red-fronted Brown Lemurs seem to have declined and the Ring-tails are looking healthier. They raid the restaurant and the staff have to be vigilant! A delightful animal, worth the horrible road trip for this one alone.

EASTERN LESSER BAMBOO LEMUR (*Hapalemur griseus*) – Usually called Grey Bamboo Lemur as per the scientific name, we saw it briefly at the rail marsh at Andasibe.

GREATER BAMBOO LEMUR (*Prolemur simus*) – Amazing good views this year of the remaining male at Ranomafana, a very rare species. They can eat bamboo shoots that contain high levels of cyanide it seems!

BLACK-AND-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR (*Varecia variegata*) – Seen really nicely up at Mantadia, one spectacular animal and a hard one to actually see, we hear them but don't often see them. Also heard at Ranomafana.

RED RUFFED LEMUR (*Varecia rubra*) – Fantastic up at Masoala, they are very raucous and you hear them miles away. We again got some very nice looks in the forest here.

WHITE-FOOTED SPORTIVE LEMUR (*Lepilemur leucopus*) – The common sportive lemur at Berenty, we saw them very well on the night walk and at rest next day.

HUBBARD'S SPORTIVE LEMUR (*Lepilemur hubbardorum*) – This was the fetching little guy in the tree hollow at Zombitse, now seemingly split as Zombitse Sportive Lemur. Primate splitting is rife in Madagascar, but using their criteria I wonder how many species of humans we'd get?

EASTERN WOOLLY LEMUR (*Avahi laniger*) – Two cuddling up at Andasibe, always nice to see.

MOORE'S WOOLLY LEMUR (*Avahi mooreorum*) – Two of this split up at Masoala.

VERREAUX'S SIFAKA (*Propithecus verreauxi*) – This is the star of Berenty, that amazing sideways bounce across the tracks is fabulous and we had a great experience with them again this year, seeing several big troupes in action.

COQUEREL'S SIFAKA (*Propithecus coquereli*) – Nice looks at them in the mangoes at Ampijoroa as we were about to leave, seen really well.

DIADEMED SIFAKA (*Propithecus diadema*) – Very good looks at 5 animals in the rain on Indri Ridge, their introduction here may not be such a good idea however, it will be interesting to see how it develops.

MILNE-EDWARDS' SIFAKA (*Propithecus edwardsi*) – A fantastic group of 5 of this rather rare lemur in the forest at Ranomafana, one of my best experiences with them.

INDRI (*Indri indri*) – Wonderful as ever at Andasibe, though a tad forlorn in the wet conditions on day one. We hear them daily from our lodge, one morning being at 0430. The news from Indri Ridge is not so good, as here 2 troops have moved away leaving one still there and 2 newly arrived males, one of which sang for us at ear-splitting close range. It may be that the introduction of the Diademed Sifaka here has upset the equilibrium. We got some nice looks so it's still a nice experience with a spectacular lemur.

RED FOREST RAT (*Nesomys rufus*) – A couple were seen well at Ranomafana.

LOWLAND RED FOREST RAT (*Nesomys audeberti*) – A couple seen nicely at Masoala.

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – I think Sandra saw one briefly from the boat on the way back to Tulear?

MALAGASY RING-TAILED MONGOOSE (*Galidia elegans*) – Ellen was lucky and got to see this one at Ranomafana.

Herps

LINED DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma lineata*) – Seen up at Masoala and then at Perinet.

PEACOCK DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma quadriocellata*) – Seen at Ranomafana and Andasibe, this one has black spots near the hind legs and goes darker when stressed, a bit like some tour guides.

STANDING'S DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma standingi*) – This was the very striking quite large *Phelsuma* at Ifaty and Zombitse.

MAURITIUS DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma cepedianana*) – This rather striking day gecko was seen at Bel Ombre, the blue tail is very fetching.

MALAGASY GIANT CHAMELEON (*Furcifer oustaleti*) – This is the common and often quite large chameleon in the dry areas, seen well Ifaty, Ranomafana, Ankarafantsika, and near Ranohira.

MADAGASCAR GIANT CHAMELEON (*Furcifer verrucosus*) – Seen nicely at Berenty in the spiny forest there.

HORNED LEAF CHAMELEON (*Brookesia superciliaris*) – One of these tiny guys was seen up at Masoala, this genus includes the smallest chameleons in the world, fingernail size and thus hard to find.

SHORT-HORNED CHAMELEON (*Calumma brevicorne*) – Several sightings from Andasibe.

SHORT-NOSED CHAMELEON (*Calumma nasuta*) – One at Andasibe.

PANTHER CHAMELEON (*Calumma pardalis*) – A couple seen up at Masoala.

PARSON'S GIANT CHAMELEON (*Calumma parsonii*) – Seen nicely at Andasibe.

SOUTHERN LEAF-TAIL GECKO (*Uroplatus sikorae*) – A single up at Masoala, a great find from Gerard.

GIANT LEAF-TAIL GECKO (*Uroplatus fimbriatus*) – We were lucky this trip and saw 2 at Andasibe, with one in the same place on two days, spotted by Nestor and unbelievably well-camouflaged. These *Uroplatus* are always a major herp highlight, just such extraordinary creatures.

AFRICAN HOUSE GECKO (*Hemidactylus mercatorius*) – Seen or heard at Ranohira.

MADAGASCAR TREE BOA (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*) – One in the road at Ranomafana, duly encouraged safely away.

MALAGASY GIANT HOGNOSE SNAKE (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*) – One at Zombitse on that excellent walk we did, where it was for once quite cool.

PERINET NIGHT SNAKE (*Ithycyphus perineti*) – One up at Masoala, this was the famous toilet snake in the 2 guy's chalet, quite a large specimen too. They were remarkably calm about it.

COLLARED IGUANA (*Oplurus cuvieri*) – Good looks up at Ampijoroa and also at Berenty.

GRANDIDIER'S MADAGASCAR SWIFT (LIZARD) (*Oplurus grandidieri*) – Seen at Ranohira by that lovely hotel.

MADAGASCAR ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus madagascariensis*) – Seen at Masoala and Zombitse.

BROAD-TAILED ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus laticaudatus*) – Seen at Ankarafantsika.

THREE-EYED LIZARD (*Chalarodon madagascariensis*) – This odd lizard was seen at Berenty, Ifaty and the Jardin du Roy.

NILE CROCODILE (*Crocodylus niloticus*) – One at the lake at Jardin du Roy was unexpected. Also seen at Lac Ravelobe.

MALAGASY GOLDEN FROG (*Mantella madagascariensis*) – Jean-Chris showed us 2 of these tiny gems en route to Vohiparara.

VARIEGATED GOLDEN FROG (*Mantella baroni*) – This was the beautiful multi-colored small frog at Mantadia, accounts as to whether or not they are toxic seem to differ! The local guides say non-poisonous.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

BUTTERFLIES

Papilio antenor is the large spectacular swallowtail from Parc Mosa.

HERPS

Trachylepis (*Mabuya*) was a skink we saw at Berenty.

Two mystery snakes include something called *Iphiticus miniatus* which we saw at Zombitse.

The Spider Tortoise (*Pyxis arachnoides*) is a species of tortoise in the Testudinidae family. We were lucky enough to see 3 at Ifaty spiny forest, endemic to Madagascar and one of only two species in the genus *Pyxis*. Very little is known about the life cycle of this endangered tortoise, which is believed to live for up to 70 years. The remaining tortoises are found only in south western Madagascar, where they inhabit the spiny vegetation of the sandy coastal areas. They feed on young leaves, insect larvae, and even the droppings of larger animals.

OTHER CREATURES

Other oddities include the hissing cockroach we saw at Ifaty, and the memorable kung-fu cricket that waved its limbs at us when disturbed from under some bark on a log.

Giant land snails were also seen at Ranomafana and Andasibe, native here.

BUTTERFLIES

I can find nothing accessible in the way of books on Madagascar butterflies, and they proved particularly vexatious to photograph on this trip. We did see the spectacular *Papilio antenor* at the spiny forest, and a beautiful black and blue swallowtail at puddles at Mantadia.

Many of the photos are on the Internet Bird Collection (IBC), a free access site via Lynx Edicions (publishers of the classic Handbook of Birds of World). It is a superb collection of videos, photos and sound cuts and I usually post pictures and sound cuts from the tours here, as well as on the Field Guides gallery for that particular tour.

I also recommend the xenocanto website which has cuts of almost all the world's bird species, I contribute cuts from most tours.

Folks were also asking about the IOC World Checklist of Birds, a free access downloadable Excel file that gets updated every 4 months, version 4.4 has just been published. Go to worldbirdnames.org or google IOC and ignore the Olympics stuff!

Totals for the tour: 201 bird taxa and 32 mammal taxa