



Field Guides Tour Report

Madagascar, Mauritius & Reunion 2016

Nov 5, 2016 to Dec 1, 2016

Phil Gregory & local guide

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



This juvenile Ring-tailed Lemur was absolutely adorable and possibly the inspiration for Yoda. Photo by participant Sheila Vince.

This was my seventh Field Guides Madagascar tour, and ninth overall. This time round, with mercifully few Madagascar Air flights, we enjoyed close to an ideal itinerary. Very dry conditions certainly depressed some small bird activity, and both chameleons and snakes were remarkably scarce. It was a vintage trip for lemurs however, with a very good range of species and great views of some very special ones, like sifakas, Indri, mouse-lemurs, bamboo-lemurs, and woolly lemurs.

We began by driving up to Ankarafantsika, meeting up with our excellent local guide and his wife, and staying at the park. A Torotoroka Scops-Owl roosting under a hut roof right by the park entrance was a bonus, and both White-headed and Sickle-billed vangas showed, as did the first of many wonderful lemurs, in this case Coquerel's Sifaka. A short night walk got us Golden-brown Mouse-Lemur and Oustalet's Chameleon, and a brief view of Western Tuft-tailed Rat.

The following day, we had a mission to see all of the special species. We began very well with a newly discovered nest of Schlegel's Asity, soon followed by White-breasted Mesite and eventually (after breakfast) a splendid Van Dam's Vanga -- a rare species that is easily missed. Coquerel's and Red-capped couas showed well. Western Woolly Lemur was a good find, as was Mongoose Lemur, whilst a nesting pair of Banded Kestrels was a major surprise and my first sighting in the park.

A perched-up Humblot's Heron was spotted in the forest near Lac Ravelobe, and what proved to be our only Madagascar Pond-Heron was seen nearby. Madagascar Jacana showed well, and then we found a lovely Madagascar Fish-Eagle sitting right by the track, so we had cleaned up nicely and set off very happily for Mahajunga.

The Betsiboka estuary boat trip worked like a charm this year, with calm seas, the tide rising and just right for great looks at seven Bernier's Teal and a couple of the rare and very distinctive "Malagasy" Sacred Ibis (currently considered to be a subspecies by some taxonomists), plus a bonus of two Crab Plovers. If only it could always be this easy!

Then came Feon 'Ny Ala ("Song of the Forest"), one of my favorite little lodges right by the forest at Andasibe, where we had the most wonderful encounter with a troop of Indri right in the hotel grounds at very close range, and heard them singing their haunting evocative song each morning at first light, just magical. Our guides Nestor and Laurent worked hard for us and dug out both Scaly and Short-legged ground-rollers for excellent views, and had an incredible Collared Nightjar lined up sitting as always atop a bird's nest fern. The roosting Malagasy Scops-Owl was in the same cypress tree for

the third year running, and there were two lovely baby Madagascar Long-eared Owls available in a village forest reserve, with Madagascar Wood Rail for good measure. Gray Bamboo-Lemur, Eastern Woolly Lemur, the rare Diademed Sifaka, and Brown Lemurs all showed very well, whilst Crossley's Dwarf Lemurs were stars each night feeding on bananas at the lodge. A Southern Leaf-tailed Gecko was a good find, and getting views of a Madagascar Ibis foraging on the ground was quite something.

Then we were off to Berenty on the still dire 90 km remains of the road, reputedly about to be refurbished but don't hold your breath. Four hours later we were there, to find the rooms had been refurbished and were now really nice, and we had already seen Ring-tailed Lemurs en route. The night walk was good as ever, with Madagascar Nightjar, White-footed Sportive-Lemur, Gray-brown (=Reddish-gray) Mouse-Lemur and sleeping Ring-tails and Verreaux's Sifaka, pretty good for 30 minutes in the spiny forest, and narrowly beating a rainstorm.

Birding next day drew a blank for Madagascar Sandgrouse again this year, but Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Giant Coua and White-browed Owl were terrific sightings, and the dancing Verreaux's Sifakas put on a great show a couple of times, as did the cheeky Ring-tailed Lemurs by the dining area. It made the four-hour bumpy ride back worth it, and next day we got an on-time flight. Even better, the road to the Bamboo Club had been rebuilt, so instead of three hours we did it in one, and had great encounters with Gray Mouse-Lemurs at dinner.

The spiny forest next day is one of the highlights of the trip, with the local lads acting like beagles in the forest to find us the birds, so we were done and dusted before it got too hot. Subdesert Mesite frozen on a branch, Madagascar Sparrowhawk at nest, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk a new species for me here and at nest too, great looks at the sometimes tricky Running and Green-capped couas, Thamnornis, Gray-headed Lovebird, Lafresnaye's Vanga on a nest, great Sickle-billed Vangas perched atop octopus trees, and the star of the show perhaps, a confiding Long-tailed Ground-Roller near its nest hole were the highlights. We then chilled out for a while, and did the Madagascar Plover site late afternoon when it was cooler, getting excellent views of two of this rare bird at the only place I have ever seen it.

Next morning in the spiny forest we were lucky to have the lads find us a special request, this being a Madagascar Buttonquail, with a male sitting on a nest. Back then to Tulear and a late afternoon foray out to the extremely dry thorn-scrub at La Table. Mosa and Dedi worked really hard and got us a Verreaux's Coua, but the Red-shouldered Vanga was tough and came late in the day after a quick trek down a rough track to get it, well done to them for finding it and then keeping it in play until we got there!

The boat trip to Nosy Ve was actually quite eventful -- why are boat trips almost never straightforward? After seeing Red-tailed Tropicbirds and some 37 Crab Plovers, we chugged across using the small outboard to Anakau, and had cool drinks and saw Littoral Rock-Thrush and Subdesert Brush-Warbler whilst a new boat was organized. This was a bigger and more powerful beast with a higher freeboard, so we kept dry, and even had the excitement of making a rescue at sea when a small fishing boat was disabled in a bad area of rough sea near the reef. Our boat gave them a tow to calmer and much safer waters, and then some fuel for the engine so they could putter back to land, it was lucky we were out there!

The drive to Isalo was easy enough, going through the sapphire towns and with us making a stop at the very hot Zombitse Forest. Here we made a longer than usual trek to go see a marvelous adult Madagascar Long-eared Owl with 2 babies, the adult right by the track and permitting amazing photos. Appert's Tetraka also showed well, as did Blue Vanga and Cuckoo-Roller, and the likely-split inceleber form of Long-billed Tetraka, whilst a Hubbard's Sportive-Lemur peered out at us from a tree hole.

The lovely hotel at Jardin du Roy did not disappoint, and most of us got great looks at the Benson's subspecies of Forest Rock-Thrush right by the pool, with me seeing one from the bus next day just as we were leaving the habitat and so getting everyone to see it.

A long and tedious drive to Fianarantsoa seemed to take forever, but once there we got to the park at Ranomafana quite quickly and prepared for the trek up the ridge next day. Jean-Chris is the local expert here, and he took us to a newly built nest of the rare and very localized Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity. This was all very well, but a 45-minute wait only gave some hearing records of the quarry with no nest visit, but then Gerard got us into a pair which we saw mating and then the male sitting and preening and calling, just great. Brown Emutail showed for some, likewise Pitta-like Ground-Roller, but small bird activity was very limited. Lemurs however proved diverting, with wonderful close Red-bellied, then a splendid Milne-Edwards Sifaka.

That afternoon we decided to forgo the long trek for Gray Emu-tail and instead had a diverting time with group of youngsters whom we hired to help us see Madagascar Snipe, which worked a treat! We followed this up with Madagascar Flufftail calling and showing intermittently, (having failed three times at Andasibe), then a great Forest Rock-Thrush sat up singing very late in the day before a close look at Brown Mouse-lemurs taking bananas put out by the road, which is now a big tourist attraction.

The bamboo-lemur walk next day was a great success, with tremendous views of both Golden Bamboo and the rare Greater Bamboo-Lemur, both showing really well. Pitta-like Ground-Roller came good for everyone, as did a gorgeous male Velvet Asity, and Pollen's Vanga on its nest was a good sighting of a rare bird. Red-fronted Coua and Wedge-tailed Tetraka (Jery) also showed nicely, as did a Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, but perhaps the highlight of the morning was the discovery of a Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko near the bridge, a totally astonishing creature which was very hard to puzzle out as to what was where, and aptly named *Uroplatus phantasticus*.

That afternoon we returned to the quest for the always tricky Rufous-headed Ground-Roller, eventually coming good very late in the day and showing for us all. Nests of both Velvet and Sunbird Asity were also seen, with us hearing the latter but not getting a view.

During the entire tour we had heard Red-tailed Vanga at various forest sites, and some of us had brief views at Zombitse and Andasibe, but oddly we were in the unique situation where we'd seen Red-shouldered Vanga but most had not seen Red-tailed! Happily that last morning we found a nest by the road at the very last stop as we left Ranomafana, and all came good with one of the most widespread vangas. Then it was up to Ambositre, arriving in the only downpour of the entire trip, and enjoying the fantastic local musicians the Marolafy family who played for us at dinner, as is now something of a tradition.

The last day was a travel day back to Tana, where the Francophone summit meant we could not get into the Carlton Hotel but instead went to a lovely new one, which has a marsh right by the dining area, and will I hope be a keeper for us. Departure on Air Mauritius was uneventful and we got to our hotel at Flic en Flac around 10 pm, where they had kindly kept the buffet for us.

Our day around Mauritius was good, with decent weather, and we picked up the big three very quickly, with great views of Mauritius Parakeet, Pink Pigeon, and Mauritius Kestrel at our usual site. Trying for Mauritius Cuckooshrike proved hopeless, but we did jam a very close Mauritius Olive White-eye, and a Mauritius Bulbul not far away was a valuable addition of a sometimes tough species. The short boat trip to Ile aux Aigrettes sanctuary went

well, but for some reason the tour was somewhat rushed (I complained about this afterwards), but we did enjoy great looks at Mauritius Fody, more Mauritius Olive White-eyes and a wonderful 150-year-old adult male Aldabra Giant Tortoise that looked so much like a model it was accidentally kicked by one of us who thought it wasn't real (no worries, it's huge with a hard shell)!

We got into Reunion late afternoon and dashed straight down to a site near St Denis to get great looks at Barau's Petrel, (which you can actually see off the seawall right by our hotel as I saw 131 there on Dec 1 as well as an odd dark petrel). The walk up at La Roche Ecrite gets into beautiful native forest, and we quickly saw Reunion Stonechat, Reunion Bulbul, Mascarene (Reunion) Paradise Flycatcher and the two endemic white-eyes. Some found the muddy and quite slippery trail hard going, but all the usual suspects were found except the Harrier in the somewhat misty conditions. Some of us went right up and heard Reunion Cuckooshrike, with a brief flyover from this rare species too as the finale, before back to day rooms at St Denis and an unexpected departure by taxi to the airport when our bus driver failed to turn up! In 2017 and 2018 we are doing Seychelles as an extension instead of Mauritius and Reunion, so that will be a nice contrast.

Itinerary 2016

Tue Nov 8 Group arrives Tana in the small hours from Paris, and we leave for Ankarafantsika by road at 0600, overnight at the National Park

Wed Nov 9 Ankarafantsika area and Lac Ravelobe then to Mahajunga.

Thu Nov 10 Mahajunga and Betsiboka estuary early am leave 0730 and back by 1100; airport ponds pm.

Fri Nov 11 Mahajunga area and then long delays from the inimitable Air Madagascar, eventually getting back to the Carlton in Tana at midnight after some 5 hours of delays, all par for the course.

Sat Nov 12 Lac Alarobia then Tana to Andasibe arrive late pm

Sun Nov 13 Mantadia NP am on atrocious road, then pm roadside near Feon 'Ny Ala.

Mon Nov 14 Andasibe Indri Ridge and roadsides

Tues Nov 15 Tana to Fort Dauphin (Tolagnaro) and then 4 hours by atrocious road the 90 km to Berenty, where the rooms had been renovated and were now very nice.

Wed Nov 16 Berenty am, then back to Tolagnaro

Thu Nov 17 Tolagnaro to Tulear (Toliara) via Air Mad at 1400, then new highway to Ifaty so arrived at the Bamboo Club by 1700

Fri Nov 18 Parc Mosa at 0545 till 0930, then Mangily salines 1545-1645.

Sat Nov 19 Parc Mosa early morning, then to Tulear and late pm to La Table.

Sun Nov 20 Nosy Ve and Anakau, then Toliara markets

Mon Nov 21 Toliara via Zombitse to Isalo and Jardin du Roy

Tue Nov 22 Jardin du Roy/ Fianarantsoa/ Ranomafana late pm

Wed Nov 23 Ranomafana Vohiparara Trail and marsh

Thu Nov 24 Ranomafana Park HQ trails and Vohiparara pm

Fri Nov 25 Ranomafana to Ambositre, arrive 1500

Sat Nov 26 Ambositre/Antsirabe/Antananarivo

Sun Nov 27 Departure pm for Mauritius

Mon Nov 28 Mauritius Black River Gorges area and Ile aux Aigrettes pm

Tue Nov 29 Mauritius to Reunion

Wed Nov 30 La Roche Ecrite trail, Reunion, then assorted departures home late pm.

Particular thanks to the brilliant Gerard, our long-time local fixer and birder, and to the various skilled and entertaining local guides: Ndrema and his wife, Nestor and Laurent, Benoit at Berenty, Freddy, Dedi and Rofia the beagles at the spiny forest, Mosa and Dedi at La Table, Jean-Chris at Ranomafana, plus Jean-Claude on Mauritius and Frederic on Reunion. Special thanks to Sharon in the Field Guides office for good logistics on such a complex and difficult itinerary.

I enjoyed sharing all these wonderful sightings in Madagascar and the Mascarenes with you, and look forward to another chance to do the same in another part of the world. Safe travels, good birding, and the best for 2017 to you all!

-- Phil from St Denis, Perth, and Kuranda

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 =

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

WHITE-FACED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna viduata*) – 6 day records, with 15 on the Betsiboka River and 40 at Lac Alarobia the most.

MELLER'S DUCK (*Anas melleri*) – Two birds at Lac Alarobia were a good find, then there were two on the pond at Mantadia, this is a rare species. [E]

RED-BILLED DUCK (*Anas erythrorhynchos*) – 150 at Lac Alarobia then 5 near Isalo, with about 40 at the Tamboho Hotel lake.

HOTTENTOT TEAL (*Anas hottentota*) – 8 at Lac Alarobia, and 3 at the Tamboho Hotel lake.

BERNIER'S TEAL (*Anas bernieri*) – The Betsiboka boat trip came good with 7 of this rare bird on a mud bank, showing very nicely. Odd to see a teal out on this habitat, and at the only reliable site for bird tour sightings. [E]

Numididae (Guineafowl)

HELMETED GUINEAFOWL (*Numida meleagris*) – Half a dozen at Berenty and a couple at the Jardin du Roy. [I]

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GRAY FRANCOLIN (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – A pair with 5 chicks at Bel Ombre, and another pair with chicks near Mahebourg. [I]

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

MADAGASCAR GREBE (*Tachybaptus pelzelni*) – The pair on the pond at Mantadia were as usual the only sighting; I got a good recording of them calling this year too. [E]

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

BARAU'S PETREL (*Pterodroma barau*) – Great views of about 40 off La Possession late afternoon on Nov 29, you can even see this one from the highway. I saw 131 from off the seawall by the hotel in St Denis next day too, which is worth knowing about, though none early the following day so this must be the evening flyby as they go to nest or roost sites.

TROPICAL SHEARWATER (*Puffinus bailloni*) – Two distant birds off La Possession which I don't think anyone else got. I saw 2 next day as well from off the seawall opposite the hotel in St Denis.

Phaethontidae (Tropicbirds)

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD (INDIAN OCEAN) (*Phaethon lepturus lepturus*) – A lovely look at one flying by Bassin Blanc, with Joyce seeing one earlier, then one near our hotel in St Denis, though I am sure all the cliff works must be impacting them here.

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD (*Phaethon rubricauda rubricauda*) – Half a dozen seen well flying over on Nosy Ve, but no sign of any nearby nests this time.

Scopidae (Hamerkop)

HAMERKOP (*Scopus umbretta umbretta*) – Very few this tour, just a handful of singles and one or two huge untidy nests seen.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

LITTLE BITTERN (MALAGASY) (*Ixobrychus minutus podiceps*) – One male flushed and flew upstream as we crossed a bridge by the Vakona Hotel at Mantadia, but only couple of folks got a glimpse.

GRAY HERON (MALAGASY) (*Ardea cinerea firsae*) – Just one of this brightly coloured endemic race on the Betsiboka River, the only record.

HUMBLLOT'S HERON (*Ardea humbloti*) – One at Lac Ravelobe at Ankarafantsika was a good find, perched up in a forest tree, and the only one of the trip. [E]

PURPLE HERON (PURPLE) (*Ardea purpurea madagascariensis*) – 2 at Lac Ravelobe, and a single near Vohiparara.

GREAT EGRET (AFRICAN) (*Ardea alba melanorhynchos*) – Just 5 day records of one or two birds, very scarce as always.

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 very much commoner again this year but both morphs were widespread in small numbers. We saw over 100 in the colony at Lac Alarobia and 90 or so dark morph birds on the Betsiboka River.

BLACK HERON (*Egretta ardesiaca*) – Very uncommon, a single at Lake Ravelobe, and then we saw just 8 in the colony at Lac Alarobia and one doing the wing-shading hunting technique at the Tamboho Hotel lake. I get the feeling this bird is in decline here.

CATTLE EGRET (WESTERN) (*Bubulcus ibis ibis*) – A noisy colony at Berenty and also at Lac Alarobia, but very few otherwise.

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*) – Small numbers 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 just one record of a single breeding dress adult 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*) – Four sightings of singles in Madagascar, and one at Bel Ombre on Mauritius with another at Ile aux Aigrettes.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A few at Lac Alarobia and one at the lake at the Tamboho Hotel.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – 5 one day and 2 the next at Lac Ravelobe at the very start of the tour.

MADAGASCAR IBIS (*Lophotibis cristata*) – Nestor did well with this at Andasibe, finding a bird late one afternoon in the orchid garden area which showed very nicely as it poked about on the ground. An old nest was also seen. [E]

SACRED IBIS (MALAGASY) (*Threskiornis aethiopicus bernieri*) – One of the prizes on the Betsiboka boat trip, we had a good view of 2 on a mudbank. A rare and endangered species, split by many checklists as the plumage is quite distinct, with white wing tips and a pale blue eye. [E]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

MADAGASCAR HARRIER-HAWK (*Polyboroides radiatus*) – Three singles, with one over the Betsiboka river the first, then 2 singles at the spiny forest, one of them on a large stick nest. [E]

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO-HAWK (*Aviceda madagascariensis*) – Benoit showed us a nest at Berenty that had an adult sat on it, and we had another nest at the spiny forest with an adult giving great views, my first record from here. We have sometimes missed this on tours so it was good to get it again. [E]

FRANCES'S GOSHAWK (*Accipiter francesiae*) – A fine small male at Berenty, then one at Zombitse and another seen from Bellevue. Being so small, Frances's Sparrowhawk is a much more appropriate name than goshawk. [E]

MADAGASCAR SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter madagascariensis*) – A fine female by a nest at Parc Mosa, clearly showing the lack of mesial stripe on the throat and the heavier legs and build than Frances's with which it is so often confused. It is quite a rare bird overall, and I was able to get a brief recording this year, now on the IBC and XC. [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*) – A great sighting from Lac Ravelobe of a fine adult at close range. Another CR Critically Endangered status species, with maybe 150 pairs in existence. [E]

MADAGASCAR BUZZARD (*Buteo brachypterus*) – Six day records, mostly singles, quite vocal but hard to see well. [E]

Mesitornithidae (Mesites)

WHITE-BREASTED MESITE (*Mesitornis variegatus*) – Good looks at two vocal groups of 2 at Ankarafantsika, they were herded towards us by the guides and showed quite well. [E]

SUBDESERT MESITE (*Monias benschi*) – A fine adult female frozen on a branch at the spiny forest, but yet again I did not get to see it move. I have an ambition to see one do something other than blink! [E]

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

MADAGASCAR RAIL (*Rallus madagascariensis*) – Called briefly en route to Mantadia, and ran over the road when the group was looking the other way! A couple of our former sites are now rice paddies. [E*]

WHITE-THROATED RAIL (*Dryolimnas cuvieri cuvieri*) – Heard at various wetland sites, 2 birds showed really well at Lac Alarobia, a big and striking species.

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus pyrrhorhoa*) – 4 including a juvenile at Lac Alarobia, and 7 at Tamboho marsh, with one on Mauritius at Bel Ombre.

RED-KNOBBED COOT (*Fulica cristata*) – A single at Lac Alarobia was very unexpected and a Madagascar tick for Phil, it showed the red knobs very well and had a patch of dull red on the upper mandible too.

Sarothruridae (Flufftails)

MADAGASCAR WOOD-RAIL (*Canirallus kioloides kioloides*) – Seen nicely at Andasibe, and now placed in the flufftail family. I got quite a good recording of it.

MADAGASCAR FLUFFTAIL (*Sarothrura insularis*) – We made 3 unsuccessful attempts to see calling birds at Andasibe, but came good with a quite responsive albeit very wary bird at Ranomafana. Rick finally nailed a flufftail! [E]

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – 2 at Mahajunga sacred lake, and a pair with 3 juvs on the Spirulina saltflats south of Mangily, with singles on the salines near there too.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Just two on the mudflats at Tulear.

GREATER SAND-PLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii scythicus*) – 50 at Betsiboka and 6 at Tulear mudflats.

KITTLITZ'S PLOVER (*Charadrius pecuarius*) – 4 at the salt pans near Tulear, and 5 at the Mangily pans with Madagascar Plover nearby.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – 10 at Betsiboka, 3 at Tulear and 1 at Mangily salt pans.

MADAGASCAR PLOVER (*Charadrius thoracicus*) – This rare bird was again at the saltflats at Mangily, still the only site where I have ever seen it, and just 2 birds. Great views, I wonder if Kittlitz's Plover is displacing it? [E]

THREE-BANDED PLOVER (*Charadrius tricollaris bifrontatus*) – Two at Lac Ravelobe and one at the sacred lake at Mahajunga. 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 & Langrand guide depicts the white forehead of the African race.....

WHITE-FRONTED PLOVER (*Charadrius marginatus tenellus*) – One at the salines at Mangily and 4 on Nosy Ve.

Jacaniidae (Jacanas)

MADAGASCAR JACANA (*Actophilornis albinucha*) – One fine sub-adult showed very well at Lac Ravelobe, another CR status species and one I always fret we could miss! [E]

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (EUROPEAN) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*) – 7 day records, with 25 on the Betsiboka estuary and 45 at Tulear mudflats which looks to be a significant wintering area. There were 8 on Nosy Ve as well.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – 7 at Mangily salt pans, 2 on Nosy Ve and 6 at Tulear mudflats.

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*) – 10 at Betsiboka, 7 on the salines at Mangily and 10 at Tulear.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Half a dozen on the mudflats at Toliara, all first winter birds with the black shoulder mark.

MADAGASCAR SNIPE (*Gallinago macrodactyla*) – Jean-Chris arranged a team of 10 child snipeurs, who had a great time running through the coarse grassland near Vohiparara and twice flushing a Madagascar Snipe, maybe the same bird. This is the first time I'd seen it at this locality. [E]

TEREK SANDPIPER (*Xenus cinereus*) – 10 on the Betsiboka were the only record.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – 5 day records, with 3 on the Betsiboka the most.

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) – Just 2 on the Betsiboka, 1 at Mangily and 7 at Tulear.

Turnicidae (Buttonquail)

MADAGASCAR BUTTONQUAIL (*Turnix nigricollis*) – A male on a nest at the spiny forest on our second visit, a great find by the beagles following a special request. Mike had seen one the day before. [E]

Dromadidae (Crab Plover)

CRAB PLOVER (*Dromas ardeola*) – A couple on the mudflats at Betsiboka, then 37 on the beach at Nosy Ve, always great to see this odd species which is a monotypic family as well. This extraordinary bird breeds in burrows on desolate islands in the Red Sea and migrates down the coast of E Africa.

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

MADAGASCAR PRATINCOLE (*Glareola ocularis*) – Two plus a chick on rocks in the Mangoro River at the usual site, nice views in the afternoon light. [E]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BROWN NODDY (*Anous stolidus pileatus*) – A couple seen off Flic en Flac, with Tim seeing many more earlier, then about 40 off La Possession on Reunion.

SAUNDERS'S TERN (*Sternula saundersi*) – 5 at the Betsiboka estuary, and 3 briefly en route to Nosy Ve.

GREAT CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bergii*) – One with Lesser Crested Terns on Nosy Ve was unexpected.

LESSER CRESTED TERN (*Thalasseus bengalensis bengalensis*) – A couple at the Betsiboka estuary, and then 5 on Nosy Ve.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – A few seen in Tana and then common on Mauritius and Reunion, just about all the others were racing or domestic pigeons. [I]

PINK PIGEON (*Nesoenas mayeri*) – Great views at Bel Ombre and then at Petrin, with some seeing a couple on Ile aux Aigrettes as well. Still a very rare species with about 350 birds in the wild, up from just 10 in 1988. [E]

MADAGASCAR TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia picturata picturata*) – Very small numbers in Madagascar, and better views and totals on Mauritius where it is introduced. A nice recording of the call is posted at the IBC from the Lac Alarobia bird hidden in the mangoes.

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

NAMAQUA DOVE (*Oena capensis aliena*) – Nice views of them in the drier areas of Madagascar.

ZEBRA DOVE (*Geopelia striata*) – Small numbers of this introduced bird around Flic en Flac and St Denis. [I]

MADAGASCAR BLUE-PIGEON (*Alectroenas madagascariensis*) – One at Andasibe late one afternoon, then 5 at Bellevue and a single in the forest that afternoon with another by the roadside at Ranomafana next day, [E]

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

CRESTED COUA (*Coua cristata*) – Seen at Ankarafantsika, this taxon has white undertail coverts. [E]

CRESTED COUA (*Coua cristata pyropyga*) – Seen well at Berenty and the spiny forest, this taxon has chestnut undertail coverts and is split by HBW/BirdLife as Chestnut-vented Coua.

VERREAUX'S COUA (*Coua verreauxi*) – As usual, skulking and elusive at La Table but eventually gave fairly good views at this, our only site for it. [E]

BLUE COUA (*Coua caerulea*) – 4 sightings of one or two birds from the wetter forests, a very striking species and quite vocal. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (*Coua ruficeps*) – Good views at Ankarafantsika. [E]

RED-CAPPED COUA (GREEN-CAPPED) (*Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps*) – Great views at the spiny forest where for once one sat up in plain view on an octopus tree- photo on IBC and the FG gallery. Split by some as Green or Olive-capped Coua. [E]

RED-FRONTED COUA (*Coua reynaudii*) – A terrific bird in the forest at Ranomafana, the only one we saw. [E]

COQUEREL'S COUA (*Coua coquereli*) – Seen well at Ankarafantsika and then at Zombitse. [E]

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

GIANT COUA (*Coua gigas*) – Great views at Berenty, a spectacular bird which has a call like that of Green Woodpecker! Also seen briefly at Zombitse. [E]

RED-BREASTED COUA (*Coua serriana*) – Heard in the forest at Indri Ridge but Nestor was unable to dig it out. [E*]

MADAGASCAR COUCAL (*Centropus toulou*) – Heard most days and some nice views on several occasions. [E]

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO (*Cuculus rochii*) – Heard most days though seemed less in evidence this year, and see at Andasibe. [E]

Strigidae (Owls)

MALAGASY SCOPS-OWL (*Otus rutilus*) – A beautiful roosting bird again at Andasibe for the third year in a row, sat low down in a thick cypress and remarkably tolerant. Photo on IBC. Heard calling quite close at Ranomafana at dusk, but stayed out of sight. [E]

TOROTOROKA SCOPS-OWL (*Otus madagascariensis*) – One bird was sat under a shelter by the park entrance at Ankarafantsika, a very odd site to see it. Oddly this is not split in the Sinclair & Langrand guide update or the new field guide, which is strange as everyone else splits the two taxa and they split just about everything else! The call is very distinct to the eastern wet forest birds and is a major specific indicator in this genus. [E]

MADAGASCAR LONG-EARED OWL (*Asio madagascariensis*) – Two fine big black-masked white fluffy juvs at the parc villageois at Andasibe, then an extraordinary close adult with 2 big chicks in the forest at Zombitse, well worth the hot trek to see it as this is one hard bird to see well. Photos on IBC. [E]

WHITE-BROWED OWL (*Ninox supercilialis*) – Seen nicely in daylight at Berenty as usual, and there was one on a chalet roof at Jardin du Roy late one night too. Not a member of *Ninox*, it may be an *Athene* it seems. [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 that was nesting atop a small bird's nest fern at Andasibe and remarkably difficult to distinguish from the dead leaves, they seem to really like this plant for this purpose. [E]

MADAGASCAR NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus madagascariensis*) – A lovely perched bird in the spiny forest on the night walk at Berenty, then up to 4 flying over and drinking from the pool at the Bamboo Club. [E]

Apodidae (Swifts)

MALAGASY SPINETAIL (*Zoonavena grandidieri*) – This very uncommon bird was seen at Mantadia, then Parc Mosa. [E]

MASCARENE SWIFTLET (*Aerodramus francicus*) – Just a handful on Mauritius, most at Bassin Blanc, then a few over La Roche Ecrue on Reunion.

ALPINE SWIFT (*Apus melba willsi*) – One over the highway as we went to Ankarafantsika, then another with the big flock of Madagascar Swifts north of Isalo. This is a small endemic race.

MADAGASCAR SWIFT (*Apus balstoni*) – Great views of dozens over the plateau near Isalo in humid conditions in the morning, you could easily see the silvery secondaries, and this was one of my best ever sightings of this species. Some of us saw about 15 shoot through at the hotel too the day before. [E]

AFRICAN PALM-SWIFT (MADAGASCAR) (*Cypsiurus parvus gracilis*) – Widespread in small numbers, the most at Ranomafana and Mahajunga. They were nesting in the palms at the Centr'est with one nest visible at the base of two leaves. I was able to record the flight call, now posted on IBC and XC.

Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-Roller)

CUCKOO-ROLLER (*Leptosomus discolor*) – Nicely seen at Ankarafantsika. that great mournful call is a typical sound of the humid forests, especially at Zombitse where we saw a subadult male and heard half a dozen calling. An endemic family and order, and one of the most ancient of all bird lineages. They dine mainly on chameleons it seems.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

MADAGASCAR HOOPOE (*Upupa marginata*) – Great views at Ankarafantsika and again at Berenty. [E]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

MALAGASY KINGFISHER (*Corythornis vintsioides*) – Remarkably few this tour, we saw them really well at Lac Ravelobe and then Lac Alarobia, but that was about it. [E]

MADAGASCAR PYGMY-KINGFISHER (*Corythornis madagascariensis*) – Heard at Ranomafana, and then tracked down quite high in the forest for most of us, and recording of the call is on IBC and XC. Chris, Sheila and Terry were very lucky when some of the local guides spotted one right by the park entrance as we were leaving, this is a species that is easily missed. [E]

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

MADAGASCAR BEE-EATER (*Merops superciliosus*) – Widespread in small numbers, with great views at Jardin du Roy.

Coraciidae (Rollers)

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

Brachypteraciidae (Ground-Rollers)

SHORT-LEGGED GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias leptosomus*) – A fine bird at Mantadia, coming in and sitting on a branch for ages. [E]

SCALY GROUND-ROLLER (*Brachypteracias squamiger*) – Nestor and Laurent got us a terrific one at Mantadia, I even managed a photo! [E]

PITTA-LIKE GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis pittoides*) – The most widespread of the family, we saw 3 at Ranomafana after a single at Vohiparara that was missed by some. I had not realized they show a huge great white wing patch in flight, seen when one was mobbing a Ring-tailed Mongoose! [E]

RUFIOUS-HEADED GROUND-ROLLER (*Atelornis crossleyi*) – The final one of the family and tough this year, we heard it up at Vohiparara but too far away to get, then Jean-Chris got one at last gasp late one afternoon, with everyone eventually getting onto it after a protracted effort. Once again all 5 ground-rollers on the trip, twenty years ago you'd be lucky to get 2, how things change! [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. [E]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MADAGASCAR KESTREL (*Falco newtoni*) – A few birds at various widespread sites, including the Carlton Hotel again. [E]

MAURITIUS KESTREL (*Falco punctatus*) – A fine female flew up by its nest box at Bel Ombre and gave great views. Once down to a mere 4 birds, they have now recovered to about 600. [E]

BANDED KESTREL (*Falco zoniventris*) – A pair nesting at Ankarafantsika were very unexpected and my first sighting from here, they were using an old nest of Frances's Sparrowhawk. I got a recording of the calls which is on IBC and XC [E]

ELEONORA'S FALCON (*Falco eleonora*) – The long winged falcon I saw during a pit-stop en route to Berenty has got to be this very scarce species, but I am not sure if anyone else got onto it? A rare bird that nests only on small islands in the Mediterranean and migrates to East Africa and Madagascar for the winter, spread out very thinly over a huge area.

SOOTY FALCON (*Falco concolor*) – One fine adult sat atop the terminal at Tana as we embarked on a duel with Air Mad, the only one we saw this trip. A rare bird that nests only on small islands in the middle-east and migrates to East Africa and Madagascar for the winter, spread out very thinly over a huge area.

Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)

GREATER VASA-PARROT (*Mascarinus vasa*) – 3 seen and heard up at Ankarafantsika but once again very scarce this tour, seems to be greatly outnumbered by Lesser Vasa. Also seen well at Parc Mosa, but can be quite hard to tell from Lesser Vasa. Often now treated as a separate family the Psittichasidae, very ancient parrot stock. [E]

LESSER VASA-PARROT (*Mascarinus niger*) – The common Vasa parrot, seen at many sites and very vocal. May also be part of a newly recognized but ancient family, the Psittichasidae. [E]

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*) – About 5 birds seen in flight near Bel Ombre on Mauritius, where it is introduced. [I]

ECHO PARAKEET (*Psittacula eues*) – Excellent again this year, with 6+ seen, including some 6 fine males and a female at Bel Ombre, 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, but now numbers are over 600. Mauritius Parakeet is a better name as the scientific name is no longer *Psittacula echo*!

GRAY-HEADED LOVEBIRD (*Agapornis canus*) – 15 at the Parc Mosa, with lovely views of them perched atop *Didieria* trees, and George saw one at Jardin du Roy. [E]

Philepittidae (Asities)

- VELVET ASITY** (*Philepitta castanea*) – A marvellous male was in the forest at Ranomafana and gave great views; we saw the curious quite large porch-roofed mossy nest that same afternoon nest, the first time I have seen one. [E]
- SCHLEGEL'S ASITY** (*Philepitta schlegeli*) – A fine pair at Ankarafantsika, Ndrema found the nest this morning on our walk and we saw both birds nicely. One of the most striking birds of the trip, and a must-see here, one of the few sites for it. [E]
- SUNBIRD ASITY** (*Neodrepanis coruscans*) – Heard along the Vohiparara Trail near a nest, but we were pushed for time with Rufous-headed Ground-roller and could not linger in hope of seeing this elusive species. [E*]
- YELLOW-BELLIED ASITY** (*Neodrepanis hypoxantha*) – A new nest was not visited in our 45 minutes sojourn, but we got really good views of a pair of this rare species nearby. Tape cut posted to IBC (also photos) and xenocanto. This is the only site where I have seen this bird, and the wait was worth it. [E]

Vangidae (Vangas, Helmetshrikes, and Allies)

- ARCHBOLD'S NEWTONIA** (*Newtonia archboldi*) – The guides at Parc Mosa corralled one for us very successfully! [E]
- COMMON NEWTONIA** (*Newtonia brunneicauda*) – Widespread and quite vocal in most forests. [E]
- DARK NEWTONIA** (*Newtonia amphichroa*) – Singing well along the lower Vohiparara Trail late afternoon and most saw one near the Sunbird Asity nest. [E]
- TYLAS VANGA** (*Tylas eduardi*) – Only seen at Andasibe and Ranomafana, it was decidedly scarce this trip. [E]
- RED-TAILED VANGA** (*Calicalicus madagascariensis*) – Vocal and heard much more than seen, some got brief looks at Zombitse but it only came generally good at the very last gasp as we left Ranomafana, when a nest was found in a gum by the road and the incubating bird showed the red tail and dark eye nicely. [E]
- RED-SHOULDERED VANGA** (*Calicalicus rufocarpalis*) – A lengthy search at La Table finally paid off, with a forced march at the end paying off with a male bird brilliantly found and kept by young Dedi in his beagle capacity. This was only described in the 1990's, is very rare and localized in this dry habitat, and was Phoebe Snetsinger's last lifer for those with long memories. [E]
- CHABERT VANGA** (*Leptopterus chabert*) – Usually the widespread vanga but numbers seemed well down on previous years and we had just 4 day records, max. a group of 8 at Andasibe. [E]
- CROSSLEY'S VANGA** (*Mystacornis crossleyi*) – One fine bird late one afternoon calling by the roadside at Ranomafana and showing quite well for most in the dull light. Formerly classed as a babbler and now the only terrestrial vanga. [E]
- BLUE VANGA** (*Cyanolanius madagascarinus*) – This beautiful species showed well at Ranomafana in a mixed flock there, also at both Andasibe and Ankarafantsika. [E]
- HOOK-BILLED VANGA** (*Vanga curvirostris*) – Seen on a nest at Andasibe, and again at Berenty, they are remarkably reminiscent of the butcherbirds of Australia. [E]
- WARD'S FLYCATCHER** (*Pseudobias wardi*) – Seen well at Andasibe and Ranomafana, this was formerly classified as a flycatcher but is now seemingly a vanga. This is not so baffling if you also include Batis in that group, to which this species bears some resemblance. [E]
- RUFIOUS VANGA** (*Schetba rufa*) – A fine vocal male and 2 females at Ankarafantsika were the only ones of the trip. [E]
- SICKLE-BILLED VANGA** (*Falcolea palliata*) – This one is a star, one of the most amazing of the vangas, and a single bird posed quite well twice atop an octopus tree at Parc Mosa. A pair were nesting at Ankarafantsika and showed very nicely too. Also 2 seen briefly at Zombitse. [E]
- WHITE-HEADED VANGA** (*Artamella viridis*) – Most folks saw it at Ankarafantsika, and oddly enough it was the only one of the entire trip. [E]
- POLLEN'S VANGA** (*Xenopirostris polleni*) – A great nesting bird at Ranomafana was a treat, sat on its lichen cup nest, this is one elusive bird and always hard to find. [E]
- LAFRESNAYE'S VANGA** (*Xenopirostris xenopirostris*) – One on a nest at Parc Mosa, the big blue-grey bill showing well, and another was at La Table, this is another rather rare and elusive vanga. [E]
- VAN DAM'S VANGA** (*Xenopirostris damii*) – A fine male at Ankarafantsika was initially hard to track down but eventually came good. Ndrema tells me there are just 4 pairs here, and it is known from very few other sites, with massive habitat damage ongoing. [E]

Campephagidae (Cuckooshrikes)

- ASHY CUCKOOSHRIKE** (*Coracina cinerea*) – Only seen at Ankarafantsika this trip, unusually sparse. Madagascar Cuckooshrike is a much better name too. This seems to be a mimic of Tylas Vanga for some strange reason. [E]
- REUNION CUCKOOSHRIKE** (*Lalage newtoni*) – A brief flyover of a male up at La Roche Ecrite at the higher levels, where it called and I recorded it. I heard it in 2011 and 2013 and saw it last year, so any view at all was good! A rare and problematic cuckooshrike, with about 30 pairs and 10 unattached males in a tiny area of higher altitude forest on the Plaine des Chicots at La Roche Ecrite, so we were very lucky to get this as the final endemic of the trip, a neat finale. At least Reunion does not have macaques and mongoose to contend with, though rats and cats are seemingly the big issue here. [E]

Dicruridae (Drongos)

- CRESTED DRONGO** (*Dicrurus forficatus*) – Widespread in small numbers in the forest regions, a striking bird. [E]

Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)

- MASCARENE PARADISE-FLYCATCHER** (*Terpsiphone bourbonnensis bourbonnensis*) – Seen at La Roche Ecrite, and showing very nicely. Usually split as an endemic these days, pity we did not find the Mauritius one which is a much harder prospect and a very rare bird indeed. [E]
- MADAGASCAR PARADISE-FLYCATCHER** (*Terpsiphone mutata*) – Just small numbers in the wetter 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 a black cap. [E]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

- HOUSE CROW** (*Corvus splendens*) – Regrettably we saw this species by Ile aux Aigrettes, and one flying over on the island itself, as well as one at Flic en Flac. They try to control the numbers as this has the potential to be a major pest species. [I]
- PIED CROW** (*Corvus albus*) – Seen on most days in the drier areas but only in small numbers.

Alaudidae (Larks)

- MADAGASCAR LARK** (*Eremopterix hova*) – Seen well at La Table and briefly near Berenty. Genetic studies indicate this should be placed in *Eremopterix* with the sparrowlarks, which is very bizarre as it nothing like them and I am sure it is not right. I recorded one in song flight at the

Mangily salines, now on IBC and XC as the song might give some clue to its relationships.. [E]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

PLAIN MARTIN (MADAGASCAR) (*Riparia paludicola cowani*) – Some good views at Ranomafana this year and also at the Tamboho Hotel, it is an uncommon species.

MASCARENE MARTIN (*Phedina borbonica madagascariensis*) – Small numbers in Madagascar, especially at Tana airport and then at Ranomafana where we saw them perched. Seen by some on Mauritius, where it seems very scarce.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – One was flying over at Zombitse as we were driving out, quite scarce in Madagascar.

Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)

RED-WHISKERED BULBUL (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) – All too common on the Mascarenes where it is a competitor with native species for food and nest sites. A shame as it's an attractive species, just in the wrong place! [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*) – Seen well at La Roche Ecrite, the white eye is quite striking and they were vocal at the higher levels today. [E]

MAURITIUS BULBUL (*Hypsipetes olivaceus*) – One seen well not far from Pigeon Wood, one of our usual sites, this can be a difficult one to find and I was glad Jean-Claude spotted it! [E]

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

MADAGASCAR BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas typica*) – Nice looks at Lac Alarobia and Andasibe, a very long-tailed species with a distinctive dry takking call. [E]

SUBDESERT BRUSH-WARBLER (*Nesillas lantzii*) – Very nice views at Anakau, then at La Table on both days, we stopped again there to get this for a couple of folks who had not done the first trek. [E]

MADAGASCAR SWAMP-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus newtoni*) – Seen very nicely at Lac Alarobia and at the Tamboho Hotel marsh, and heard at most wetlands. [E]

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

BROWN EMU-TAIL (*Bradypterus brunneus*) – One calling well at Vohiparara and a few folks got to see it sneaking silently through the undergrowth; it shot across the track as well, this is one of the hardest to see birds on the tour. Now placed in *Bradypterus* brush warblers, which is a bit of a surprise. [E]

Bernieridae (Malagasy Warblers)

WHITE-THROATED OXYLABES (*Oxylabes madagascariensis*) – Heard briefly at Ranomafana but very quiet this year, too dry i think. [E*]

LONG-BILLED BERNIERIA (*Bernieria madagascariensis*) – Seen at Ankarafantsika, Andasibe and finally at Zombitse where one was mobbing a snake and we saw two others later. The northern and western taxon inceleber is a likely split as Pale Tetraka. [E]

CRYPTIC WARBLER (*Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi*) – Heard along the Vohiparara Trail but unresponsive, and also heard briefly next day from the road with the same result. This is a species that was first discovered by Bret Whitney & Jan Pierson who realised the call was something distinct. [E*]

WEDGE-TAILED JERY (*Hartertula flavoviridis*) – Great views of 2 at Ranomafana. Now placed in Bernieridae and not a jery at all, the narrow yellow supercilium is a useful field character. They are much more like tetrakas than a jery and the new field guide calls it Wedge-tailed Tetraka. [E]

THAMNORNIS (*Thamnornis chloropetoides*) – Now boringly named Subdesert Tetraka in the field guide, but *Thamnornis* is far more memorable! We got one singing and perching up for scope views early on at Parc Mosa, the only place we get to see it. [E]

YELLOW-BROWED OXYLABES (*Crossleyia xanthophrys*) – Heard one afternoon on the lower Vohiparara Trail, but unresponsive and always the very devil to see, one of the hardest birds of the tour to actually sight. [E*]

SPECTACLED TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis zosterops*) – Quite a good tour for them with birds seen at Mantadia, Andasibe and Ranomafana. [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 of 2 birds at the end of our long hot walk. [E]

GRAY-CROWNED TETRAKA (*Xanthomixis cinereiceps*) – Frustratingly only heard on the lower Vohiparara Trail, this is always a tough one which we see once or twice only if we are lucky. [E*]

RAND'S WARBLER (*Randia pseudozosterops*) – Seen well at Andasibe and Ranomafana, they perch up and countersing with Stripe-throated Jery, quite why I know not! [E]

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

COMMON JERY (*Neomixis tenella*) – Four day records, the first from Ankarafantsika and last at Zombitse. [E]

GREEN JERY (*Neomixis viridis*) – Seen nicely at Andasibe, a very warbler-like species of the lower canopy, best picked by the call. [E]

STRIPE-THROATED JERY (*Neomixis striatigula*) – Good looks and very vocal at Ranomafana and Andasibe, and also the dry country form out at Zombitse, 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 and Berenty where they were displaying. [E]

Zosteropidae (White-eyes, Yuhinas, and Allies)

REUNION WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops olivaceus*) – The Reunion Olive White-eye was quite vocal at La Roche Ecrite and we got some good views, they seemed very active this year and some had juveniles. [E]

MAURITIUS WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops chloronothos*) – Great looks at one that snuck in at Bassin Blanc, this is one rare bird, one of the rarest *Zosterops*, and usually called the Mauritius Olive White-eye to pair with the commoner sibling on Reunion. We also saw them very well on Ile aux Aigrettes which has about 30 birds, some 30% of the total remaining population! [E]

REUNION GRAY WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops borbonicus*) – Common at La Roche Ecrite, they have rufous flanks and white rumps, an attractive little bird which was very vocal later in the morning. [E]

MAURITIUS GRAY WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops mauritanus*) – Quite common, the only common Mauritius endemic in fact, we even saw it by our hotel but the best were at Bel Ombre. [E]

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

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-BELLIED) (*Copsychus albospecularis inexpectatus*) – The eastern birds from Andasibe and Ranomafana have white bellies and black tails, with small white wing-bars, and are almost certain to be split from the western birds [E]

MADAGASCAR MAGPIE-ROBIN (WHITE-WINGED) (*Copsychus albospecularis pica*) – Birds at Berenty, the spiny forest and Zombitse have big white outer tail feathers and large white wing patches, almost certainly a distinct species to the eastern taxa. [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola sharpei*) – A good view in the late afternoon of one perched up near the road at Ranomafana, much darker grey above and darker rufous below than Benson's Rock-thrush. [E]

FOREST ROCK-THRUSH (BENSON'S) (*Monticola sharpei bensoni*) – Great looks at this odd taxon at Jardin du Roy, a male was singing by the pool, and we jammed another next day in some dry bush just as we left the Isalo NP for those who did not see the first. I can't believe this is the same species as the Forest Rock Thrush, I made some recordings and I hope the group will be re-evaluated at some point, the habitat is just so different as is the plumage. [E]

LITTORAL ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola imerina*) – Great looks at Anakau where we saw a male of this quite restricted range species, and the untidy cup nest was again 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 this as Madagascar Stonechat. [E]

REUNION STONECHAT (*Saxicola tectes*) – Great looks at males and females up at La Roche Ecrite, and a nest right by the trail had one egg I was told. Males seem to vary a bit as well, some with dark heads and others striped, see my photos of the latter on the FG site and the IBC. [E]

Sturnidae (Starlings)

COMMON MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*) – Common invasive in the dry areas and a major pest in the Mascarenes, but at least Joyce loves them! [I]

MADAGASCAR STARLING (*Hartlaubius auratus*) – Just two sightings of singles, with one at Andasibe then a nice one perched up at Mantadia. A monotypic genus too. [E]

Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)

SOUIMANGA SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris sovimanga*) – The common Madagascar sunbird, seen well at many sites. [E]

MADAGASCAR SUNBIRD (*Cinnyris notatus*) – Far less common, but seen nicely in the wet forest zones at Andasibe and Ranomafana, just single males for the most part. Madagascar Green Sunbird is a much better name for it, as per the new field guide. [E]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

MADAGASCAR WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flaviventris*) – The first endemic for many, seen in Tana and then tame at Ranomafana and Feon' Ny Ala. [E]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen in Mahajunga which is quite a new site for them, with a male near Edena Kely Hotel and 4 at the port later, then common in the Mascarenes. [I]

Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)

VILLAGE WEAVER (*Ploceus cucullatus*) – The black masked and yellow crowned southern African race *splendens* is quite common on Mauritius, and may be a problem for the endemic Mauritius Fody. [I]

NELICOURVI WEAVER (*Ploceus nelicourvi*) – We just saw the curious Malimbe-like pendulous spouted nests at Andasibe, but had no sign of the birds themselves this trip. [E]

SAKALAVA WEAVER (*Ploceus sakalava*) – Common in the dry SW at La Table, Ifaty and Berenty and also at Ankarafantsika. 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. The birds on Reunion are a brilliant vermilion red or orange-red, much brighter than the Madagascar ones! [E]

MAURITIUS FODY (*Foudia rubra*) – Great views of several males and females on Ile aux Aigrettes, an important predator-free refuge for them. A rare bird overall with competition from non-native species an issue as well as the usual mammalian predators. [E]

Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)

COMMON WAXBILL (*Estrilda astrild*) – Small numbers on Mauritius, including by our hotel at Flic en Flac. Probably a harmless introduction. [I]

MADAGASCAR MUNIA (*Lonchura nana*) – Now placed in a monotypic genus *Lemuresthes*, and sometimes called Madagascar Bibfinch as it is not congeneric or closely related to the *Lonchura* munias/mannikins. Small numbers and good views were had in Ranomafana and Andasibe, and we saw juveniles at Chez Karon in Mahajunga. I posted some tape of the calls to IBC and XC, they looked to be nesting at the Centr'est. [E]

SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA (*Lonchura punctulata*) – Seen around the hotel at Flic en Flac, one came and landed on my balcony on the last morning! Uncommon here and a fairly new introduction from Asia. [I]

MAMMALS

MAURITIUS FRUIT BAT (*Pteropus subniger*) – A few at Bassin Blanc, apparently now the government wants to control this rare species as it damages fruit crops.....

MADAGASCAR FRUIT BAT (*Pteropus rufus*) – The colony at Berenty was as usual the only place we saw this species.

GRAY MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus murinus*) – A fabulous show again by several of these endearing creatures at the Bamboo Club restaurant during our dinner there.

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

REDDISH-GRAY MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus griseorufus*) – The Grey-brown Mouse Lemur (see the scientific name) was seen well on the night walk in the spiny forest at Berenty.

GOLDEN-BROWN MOUSE LEMUR (*Microcebus ravelobensis*) – The first *Microcebus* we saw, this one at Ankarafantsika on the night walk there.

FURRY-EARED DWARF LEMUR (*Cheirogaleus crossleyi*) – Great looks at one at Feon' Ny Ala, where they are now staked out with banana baits on the Ravenala palms there.

COMMON BROWN LEMUR (*Eulemur fulvus*) – Seen well at Andasibe after 2 at Ankarafantsika.

RED-FRONTED LEMUR (*Eulemur rufifrons*) – Great looks at the introduced ones at Berenty, which are quite vocal, and then again at Ranomafana where they are indigenous.

MONGOOSE LEMUR (*Eulemur mongoz*) – 3 in mangoes at Ankarafantsika were a lucky find as this is one of the more elusive species.

RED-BELLIED LEMUR (*Eulemur rubriventer*) – Great views at Vohiparara where one looked like it was about to climb onto Tim! Also seen next day lower down for Sheila who had not done that first hike.

RING-TAILED LEMUR (*Lemur catta*) – The other star at Berenty, and with the cessation of providing water points the introduced Red-fronted Brown seems less obvious. We also saw a couple en route to Berenty in the Andohahela area, and some at night in the spiny forest, before beating them off the dining tables next day!

EASTERN LESSER BAMBOO LEMUR (*Haplemur griseus*) – The Grey Bamboo Lemur was seen really well twice at Andasibe, i even got a nice photo this year.

GOLDEN BAMBOO LEMUR (*Haplemur aureus*) – Very good views of 6 at Ranomafana this year, this rare species was the main reason the park was established. I even got some quite clear photos for a change, usually they keep in cover.

GREATER BAMBOO LEMUR (*Prolemur simus*) – We did really well here to be shown the two surviving animals at Ranomafana which had been found by our trainee guide, another rare species and one we do not always see.

BLACK-AND-WHITE RUFFED LEMUR (*Varecia variegata*) – Heard at Ranomafana but quite far off, they sound quite like chimps! [*]

MILNE-EDWARDS' SPORTIVE LEMUR (*Lepilemur edwardsi*) – Very vocal this year by our cabins at Ankarafantsika, and then seen in daylight next day.

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*) – One peeking out of a tree cavity Zombitse, apparently now split as Zombitse Sportive-lemur, but there has been gross over-splitting in the genus! We dipped on another such novelty at Ranomafana where something called James's Sportive Lemur has now been named by a scientist called James- we saw the cavity it lives in, but no animal today. One way to get immortality I suppose.....

EASTERN WOOLLY LEMUR (*Avahi laniger*) – Great and for once quite open views of 2 at the parc villageois at Andasibe.

WESTERN WOOLLY LEMUR (*Avahi occidentalis*) – Seen quite well at Ankarafantsika, nice to get both eastern and western taxa this trip.

VERREAUX'S SIFAKA (*Propithecus verreauxi*) – This is the star of Berenty, that amazing sideways bounce across the tracks is fabulous. We had a great experience with them again this year, seeing several big troupes in all kinds of action. A single was at Zombitse too, bounding off through the forest.

COQUEREL'S SIFAKA (*Propithecus coquereli*) – Feeding on mangoes at Ankarafantsika and showing very nicely, a nice one to kick off the *Propithecus* lemurs. Also a very endearing troupe of 3 at Edena Kely hotel where they have been living wild for some years and are still very well behaved!

DIADEMED SIFAKA (*Propithecus diadema*) – This showed well up on Indri Ridge, where a troupe was relocated to make them more accessible to visitors, but with uncertain effects on the local Indri groups.

MILNE-EDWARDS' SIFAKA (*Propithecus edwardsi*) – A lucky find from Vohiparara, and a nicely marked one too, being dark but with a white back. A shame I did not get a photo, this is another scarce species.

INDRI (*Indri indri*) – Utterly wonderful at Feon'Ny Ala, where the early morning song is a great wake-up background, as a group of 6 came in to lick at the shoots of a small tree actually in the lodge grounds. We had a fabulous experience with them, knowing they had come by hearing the very loud songs, then going down to watch mum and baby and another couple of adults feeding at very close range for ages. One of the tour highlights.

CRAB-EATING MACAQUE (*Macaca fascicularis*) – Seen in Mauritius where this incarnation of the god Hanuman is a major pest and devastating threat to the survival of several of the endemic birds. Animal rights groups and the religious factors have seriously hampered the required controls and the long-term prospects are not good. [I]

RED FOREST RAT (*Nesomys rufus*) – One seen at Ranomafana as it ran across the trail.

WESTERN TUFT-TAILED RAT (*Eliurus myoxinus*) – One on the night walk at Ankarafantsika, but hard to see the brush tipped tail, though the grey pelage and white belly showed briefly.

BLACK RAT (*Rattus rattus*) – 3 seen in the marsh by the Hotel Tamboho, the famous plague rat is quite common in Tana.

MALAGASY RING-TAILED MONGOOSE (*Galidia elegans*) – Amazing this year at Ranomafana, where we had 3 separate encounters on the same day, with one being mobbed by Pitta-like Ground-Roller, then a very confiding one being lured in by bananas at Bellevue and showing off seriously well for the assembled groups. Not closely related to other mongoose at all, it's one of these old Malagasy radiations.

Herps

LINED DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma lineata*) – A couple of these striking mainly green herps were seen in the restaurant at Ankarafantsika and then at Ranomafana.

PEACOCK DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma quadriocellata*) – One up at Bellevue at Ranomafana.

STANDING'S DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma standingi*) – This was the one seen at the Bamboo Club.

MADAGASCAR DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma madagascariensis*) – Seen at the Tamboho Hotel.

MAURITIUS DAY GECKO (*Phelsuma cepedianana*) – A beauty seen on Ile aux Aigrettes, very nicely patterned and coloured.

MALAGASY GIANT CHAMELEON (*Furcifer oustaleti*) – Two lovely animals at Ankarafantsika on the night walk, the female was very colourful. This is usually the common dry country species and can get quite large. More usually called Oustalet's Chameleon.

MADAGASCAR GIANT CHAMELEON (*Furcifer verrucosus*) – One on the night walk at Berenty, better known as Warty Chameleon than the name used here.

SHORT-HORNED CHAMELEON (*Calumma brevicorne*) – One from Andasibe this year, the horns showing nicely.

O'SHAUGNESSY'S CHAMELEON (*Calumma oshaugnessyi*) – Seen at Ranomafana, this is a very vividly coloured psychedelic green and yellow one, an amazing creature.

PARSON'S GIANT CHAMELEON (*Calumma parsonii*) – Lucy got shown a couple of quite big ones in a tree at the Centr'est and we duly tipped the staff for showing us. They fed one with crickets on a stick, a sort of chameleon kebab, and we had great fun watching and trying to photograph the tongue shooting out.

SATANIC LEAF-TAIL GECKO (*Uroplatus phantasticus*) – Oh my, this is one of the most amazing herps of all, it is just so hard to make sense of what you are seeing, the legs look like twigs and the blade leaf tail hides the head, it is utterly bizarre. I had only seen this once before I think and it was a great find from Ranomafana, aptly named *Uroplatus phantasticus*.

SOUTHERN LEAF-TAIL GECKO (*Uroplatus sikorae*) – Nestor showed us one of these brilliantly camouflaged creatures at Ranomafana, I seriously think I could spend the rest of my life looking at not find one! One of two species this year.

AFRICAN HOUSE GECKO (*Hemidactylus mercatorius*) – Quite common in the hotels at several sites.

MADAGASCAR TREE BOA (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*) – One up a tree at Andasibe, and quite a good size one too.

COLLARED IGUANA (*Oplurus cuvieri*) – Common at Ankarafantsika, a striking creature.

GRANDIDIER'S MADAGASCAR SWIFT (LIZARD) (*Oplurus grandidieri*) – This is *Oplurus* lizard from Jardin du Roy.

MADAGASCAR ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus madagascariensis*) – One from Ranomafana.

BROAD-TAILED ZONOSAUR (*Zonosaurus laticaudatus*) – This was the big broad-backed one from Ankarafantsika, which sounds like it should be a huge dinosaur but is actually a rather modest skink!

THREE-EYED LIZARD (*Chalarodon madagascariensis*) – Common at the Parc Mosa, and odd one with that third eye on the back of the head.

NILE CROCODILE (*Crocodylus niloticus*) – One quite large one at Lac Ravelobe, where they sometimes take people in the lake!

MALAGASY GOLDEN FROG (*Mantella madagascariensis*) – Jean-Chris got us one at Vohiparara and we duly admired the amazing colours of the upper and undersides of this small forest amphibian.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

An unusually poor tour for snakes, though we did see a *Mimophis* sp. at Berenty, and a skink called *Trachylepsis madagascariensis* there.

A couple of frogs were *Glaucodactylus* sp. from Andasibe and *Mantodactylus alboguttatus* from Berenty.

OTHER CREATURES

Other oddities include the hissing cockroach we saw at Ifaty, and giant millipedes (megapedes) from Mantadia.

A striking yellow and black cicada was at Ranomafana.

An extraordinary red velvet bug was at Berenty, I should have photographed it as it was very vivid.

Giraffe-necked weevil was seen at Andasibe, as well as a freshwater crab in a forest stream there.

The Flatid leaf bug *Phromnea rosea* is a member of the planthopper family and endemic to Madagascar, we saw the extraordinary white flower-like nymphs at several dry sites, with some folks seeing the rose-colored adults too.

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

Lucy spotted some bizarre spiny backed rockskipper type fish at La Possession on Reunion and we spent some time ignoring Barau's Petrels to look at them, the local name is cabot sauteur.

BUTTERFLIES

I can still find nothing accessible in the way of books on Madagascar butterflies, and they again 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, now HBW Alive and a great database of all the world's birds). IBC 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 xeno-canto website which has cuts of almost all the world's bird species, I contribute cuts from most tours and have uploaded several from this tour, just look under my profile to see what is there.

Folks were also asking about the IOC World Checklist of Birds, a free access downloadable Excel file that gets updated every 4 months, version 6.4 has just been published. Go to worldbirdnames.org or google IOC and ignore the Olympics stuff!

Totals for the tour: 199 bird taxa and 31 mammal taxa