



Madagascar Comprehensive Birding Tour Trip Description and Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival Day and PM Birding Start at Lac Alarobia

- No matter your arrival plans, you will be met by the trip leader and driver. The group will leave from the airport straight to their nearby hotel to spend the night. If you arrive before 1:00 PM, your guide will take you birding in the afternoon in locations near the city. The plan is to bird Lac Alarobia (see details below) until about 6:00 PM, and then go back to the hotel for supper (at around 6:30 PM/7:00 PM).
- Lac Alarobia, a private sanctuary set within the city, protects large numbers of ducks and egrets. Numerous endemics and near-endemics are reported here on a regular basis. This is a great spot for the group to pull far ahead on their list of bird sightings. We should see large numbers of White-faced Whistling Ducks and Red-billed Teal. The group should also be able to identify Hottentot Teal, Knob-billed Duck and more. The Lac also supports a fantastic assortment of egrets that roost or breed in the sanctuary, including a few splendidly adorned Malagasy Pond Herons and Dimorphic Egrets.
- As evening sets, Lac Alarobia can literally fill with waterfowl. Mascarene Martin is common overhead, and we will be watching in adjacent areas for more Madagascar endemics and near endemics (which may include Malagasy Kestrel, Malagasy Coucal, Malagasy Kingfisher, Malagasy Black Swift, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar White-eye, Madagascar Mannikin and Red Fody).

Before 6:00 PM, we will begin the drive back to the San Cristobal Hotel (which can be as long as one hour away with traffic from Lac Alarobia). We will likely begin supper between 6:30 and 7:00 PM.

At supper, your guide will conduct a tour orientation. During the orientation, the group should feel free to raise any questions that they have about the tour.

Before going to bed, we will review our daily bird findings on the daily bird checklist. We will also review plans for flights and the morning (including breakfast time and plans, and early airport transfer plans). We will want to be sure to have everything packed for air travel in the morning.

Note: Madagascar flight times and plans are famous for changing; so, please be patient with confirmations on flights and airport transfer plans. We will try to minimize impact on critical birding in the event of changes, recognizing sometimes these changes play to our favor.

Overnight in Tana.



Day 2: Fly to Tulear and Drive to Ifaty; and Late PM Start Birding in Thorn Forest and/or Nearby Areas

This morning we will have breakfast as a group sometime between 7 and 7:30 AM. At breakfast you might talk your guide into birding around the hotel grounds, where you might pick up the first trip sunbird species and maybe some other common species.

Everyone will need to be packed and ready to go to the airport. Please have your bags ready for loading the van as we will want to start the drive to the airport promptly.

Once at the airport, we will check in for our flight. We should have a stop in Fort Dauphin on our way to Tulear. Tulear (or Toliara) is in the southwestern corner of the island, and upon arrival we will drive about one hour to Ifaty. Ifaty is a small resort town, which lies on the coastline just to the north of Tulear.

We have about a one-hour drive to Ifaty, but we will likely make two short stops on the way there (depending upon the heat of the day) for some birding.

Upon arrival at our hotel, we will check in for a two-night stay and have lunch.

In the late afternoon, we will continue to bird around Ifaty. Perhaps the best plan here would be to try for the Madagascar Plover and some birding in the nearby wetland areas. You can truly trust in the guide good judgment on the best way to use the afternoon and time before supper for birding.

In the evening, we will have dinner and fill out the bird and wildlife checklists, as well as review plans for the next day. Morning breakfast and wake up plans will also be affirmed with Solohery.

Overnight in Ifaty.



Day 3: Birding Full Day in Ifaty: AM Didierea Woodland and PM Wetlands Birding

Today we will have an early breakfast to allow for morning birding.

Much has been written about the strange Didierea woodland, or “Spiny Forest”, around Ifaty, but this in no way lessens the feeling of awe that overcomes one as we set foot in this botanical wonderland. Venturing out at dawn, before the day’s heat, we will stroll amongst the myriad multi-stemmed succulents, squat baobab trees and thorny scrub in search of such spectacular endemics as Banded Kestrel, Running Coua, Red-capped Coua, Archbold’s Newtonia, Thamnornis, Subdesert Brush Warbler and Lafresnaye’s Vanga. Two very special birds here are the near mythical Subdesert Mesite, which we may find adopting its strange, cryptic posture on a thorny branch, and Long-tailed Ground Roller, an elusive ground dweller best located by its low, hooting call. Flocks of

noisy Sickle-billed Vangas are another feature of this bizarre, Tolkienesque landscape. We should also see numerous Three-eyed Lizards as the day heats up, and we may be lucky enough to find a beautiful Spider Tortoise or a rare Dumeril's Boa.

During the hot part of the day (and completely at your own risk), you can enjoy the optional dip into the tropical ocean. The marine life off of Ifaty is abundant, and we will have some time to don masks and snorkels and appreciate the myriad colors of a coral reef just in front of our hotel. You may also choose to rest during the hot part of the day here.

This afternoon, we will search the surrounding fields for the uncommon and range-restricted Madagascar Plover. Amongst the wetlands and salt pans, we may find good numbers of Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Kittlitz's Plover and assorted migratory waders. With some luck and hardy searching, we may also find Malagasy Harrier, Greater Painted Snipe, Little Bittern, White-throated Rail and Baillon's Crake.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day. Breakfast plans and morning start times will also be confirmed by the guide.

Overnight at Bamboo Hotel in Ifaty.



Day 4: Ifaty to Tulear: Key Birding Trip by Boat to Nosy Ve and San Augustin, and Birding to La Table Mountain

We will again have an early breakfast to support whatever critical birding we have left in the Ifaty area. We will focus our morning bird-finding on any species we may have missed.

After the final birding in the Ifaty area, we will make our way back southwards to Tulear, which is only about one hour away.

A stop at a reliable spot for Red-shouldered Vanga and a few more goodies will be in order for this morning, as we head to Tulear. There are very few individuals of this species at this site, so there is a chance the bird can no longer be found here. The habitat of this desolate area is known as coral rag scrub and consists of dense thorny scrubs, Euphorbias and twisted Baobabs. Our target birds in this area include two species with highly restricted ranges: Verreaux's Coua and the recently discovered Red-shouldered Vanga. Reptile life here is particularly rich and we should find large, sleek Zonosaurus plated lizards and, if very lucky, the stunning Dumeril's Boa and endangered Radiated Tortoise.

Around mid-early morning, we will board a speedboat for an excursion to the small uninhabited islet of Nosy Ve, to the south of Tulear. The main attraction of Nosy Ve is its colony of Red-tailed Tropicbirds, which allow close approach as they are left unmolested by local people due to a taboo. We may also find Crab Plovers roosting on the sandbars here, as well as good numbers of other migrant waders. The large gull and tern roosts are also worth checking out. Another key target species, which we hope to find here, is the Littoral Rock Thrush.

We will have some time to return to the hotel before heading out to a nearby, flat-topped mountain at the edge of town, aptly named La Table.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day.

Overnight in Tulear.





Day 5: AM Very Early Start for Full Day Birding: Zombitse Forest and then Isalo National Park

Today, expect an early morning departure (maybe 4 AM/5 AM). We will likely have a packed breakfast, which we can eat after traveling some distance along the road. We have about three hours to cover this morning.

After our early morning departure and three-hour drive, we will arrive in the Zombitse Forest. The Zombitse Forest is the only place to search for the dainty Appert's Tetraka. This species is listed as Vulnerable by Birdlife International and is restricted to two forest sites in southwestern Madagascar (only 500 square kilometers). A variety of other interesting species are resident in the dry, deciduous forest, and we may find Madagascar Ibis, Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, Giant Coua and Crested Coua. We will likely hear and see the raucous Cuckoo Roller, displaying high overhead. We should also find Madagascar Cuckooshrike, Long-billed Bernieria, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Rufous Vanga, Blue Vanga, Red-tailed Vanga and Madagascar Starling. The highly elusive Fosa also occurs here, though a sighting of Madagascar's largest predator will take some real fortune.

Next will be the long drive across the Central Plateau (another 1.5 to 2 hours), to the isolated limestone massif of Isalo. The arid grasslands en route are generally fairly unproductive for birds, but we will nonetheless stop to scan for Madagascar Partridge, Madagascar Buttonquail, Madagascar Sandgrouse, the elegant Namaqua Dove, Madagascar Lark and the attractive Malagasy Harrier, now split from the Reunion species. Watercourses through the bizarre sandstone formations of the Isalo National Park act as a magnet to the birds of this dry area and we may find Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, White-throated Rail, small flocks of Grey-headed Lovebird, Stripe-throated Jery and the region's special bird, Benson's Rock Thrush.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day.

Overnight in Isalo.



Day 6: Bit of Birding on Long Drive to Ranomafana National Park

Today we embark on the long drive from Isalo to Ranomafana. Most of the scenery will be characterized by grassland and dramatic rocky hills. This is a long drive (nearly seven hours), but we will have some birding stops along the way.

Our main target on this drive will be Malagasy Harrier, which can sometimes be seen quartering over the vast grasslands we bisect.

One major birding stop to break up this long drive will be at the Anja Community Reserve, and other birding stops will be considered as well.

The long drive is worth it, as you will see when we arrive in Ranomafana National Park. Ranomafana is situated on the eastern slope of Madagascar's mountainous backbone, and this national park is massive, spanning a wide range of elevations and forest types.

Depending upon actual drive times and birding stops, we may have some time for late afternoon birding in the area. We may start with some lower elevation forest, but we may only have time for some birding around the lodge before or just after supper.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day.

Overnight at Soa Lodge.



Day 7 & 8: Two Full Days Birding (and Wildlife-Watching) at Ranomafana National Park

Ranomafana National Park was originally created to protect its population of Golden Bamboo Lemurs, a smart animal first described to science in 1987. Besides the birding here, Ranomafana National Park is fantastic for finding mammals, and the park's importance for conservation cannot be underestimated. We will spend two full days here, birding and wildlife watching.

In the lower elevation forest near our lodging, we hope to find Henst's Goshawk, the elusive Brown Mesite, with its strange duetting call, Grey-crowned Tetraka, Forest Rock Thrush, Wedge-tailed Jery, Rufous Vanga and Pollen's Vanga. The delightful Pitta-like Ground Roller is also fairly common here.

The higher elevation forests and swamps around the village of Vohiparara are home to some birds that we would not yet have encountered on our trip. Foremost among these is the highly localized Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity. This is the most accessible place to see this endangered and very elusive species. We will concentrate our searches in some stunted ridge-top forest where we may also locate the scarce Madagascar Yellowbrow, Red-fronted Coua, the elegant Rufous-headed Ground Roller, the creeping Brown Emu-tail, Rand's Warbler, the recently discovered Cryptic Warbler, Common Sunbird-Asity, Pollen's Vanga and, if we are lucky, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk.

We should find several species of lemurs, including Greater Bamboo Lemur, Grey Bamboo Lemur, Red-fronted Brown Lemur, Red-bellied Lemur and Small-toothed Sportive Lemur. We may also find the impressive Milne-Edwards's Sifaka and other mammals, such as Common Tenrec and the handsome Ring-tailed Mongoose.

Night walks in this area are especially rewarding owing to the high concentration of "herps" here, and we should find a range of fascinating chameleons and other reptiles. (This park is particularly well endowed with frogs, with over 100 species recorded; however, finding a single frog species will prove difficult).

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day.

Overnight at a hotel in Ranomafana.



Day 9: Another Bonus Full Day Birding (and Wildlife-Watching) at Ranomafana National Park

Today, we will have another early start and focus on any bird species we may have missed.

The rest of the morning will be spent enjoying birding and wildlife watching at Ranomafana, and other nearby areas. There are a few other sites nearby that can add some additional species, and you can rely on the guide good judgment on the best way to utilize this extra day of birding.

After lunch, we will again focus on any species we may have missed in the area.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklists, as well as review plans for the next day. We will have to agree on a very early start the next morning.

Overnight at a hotel in Ranomafana.



Day 10: Long Day in Vehicle Driving from Ranomafana to Antananarivo

An early start will be in order, as we will have about ten to fourteen hours in the car today. Time in the car depends upon speed of vehicle and traffic, and there is not much we can do to shorten this long day in the car.

As a note, there are no quick ways (such as train or airplane flights) to get in and out of Ranomafana; so, this long day in the car is necessary. There is no real birding (besides from the vehicle windows) along this drive.

We will take breaks along the drive for bathroom stops and for stretching our legs. We will try to push along one and a half to three hours at a time. Be sure to let your guide know if you need a break. Your guide does have some favorite stops along the way for shopping (a nice spot for buying gifts), for ice cream and snacks, and for a photographer's studio (a worthwhile stop to see what this photographic artist has to offer).

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist (this will likely go quickly), as well as review plans for the next day. We will have much to discuss about the next day, as we have a flight to catch to Majunga.

Overnight in Tana.



Day 11: Sleep In in Antananarivo; Mid-Day Flight to Majunga and Start Birding Ankarafantsika Reserve and Ampijoroa

If flight plans remain at mid-day, this will be an excellent morning to sleep in, as we do not need to get to the airport until about 11:00 AM.

We may also be able to talk the guide into a morning excursion to Lac Alarobia (but this really will not be productive at this point in the tour).

No matter our morning plans, we will want to leave for the airport, so that we can check in to our flight to Majunga.

After arrival into Majunga, we will drive to Ankarafantsika Reserve and Ampijoroa.

We may make a quick stop on the way at a reliable spot for Malagasy Pond Heron, if we have not already had good looks at this species.

Late in the afternoon, we will arrive at the forest station situated in the extensive deciduous forests of the Ankarafantsika Reserve. Ampijoroa is famous as the home of World Wildlife Fund's Plough-shear Tortoise captive breeding program and is an ideal base from which to search for the numerous endemic birds of the region. We will also do some birding around the lodge. The forest station is good for several key species or "campsite residents", including Broad-billed Roller, Lesser Vasa Parrot, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascar Hoopoe, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Green Pigeon and Malagasy Turtle Dove. The camp trails also lead into the dry forest for additional birding as well.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day.

We may embark on a night walk as the sun sets, searching for the large range of chameleons and mammals that call these woodlands home.

Overnight at the Gite Ampijoroa (at the edge of the national park). This place is a bit basic but allows for some fun casual birding and mammal watching most anytime during the day (and night). Food here is excellent.



Day 12: Ampijoroa Dry Forest: Birding for Key Endemics and More (Including Lemurs and Reptiles), and PM Birding Wetlands/Lake (and After Dark: More Lemurs)

We will likely have another early start to support our birding here.

We have a full day to explore the network of trails through the dry forest around Ampijoroa, in search of the many birds restricted to this region. Foremost among these are the secretive White-breasted Mesite, and the jewel-like Schlegel's Asity, which recalls a miniature Bird-of-paradise. We will also concentrate on finding the highly localized Van Dam's Vanga. We will look for two species of coua that are restricted to these deciduous forests: Red-capped Coua and Coquerel's Coua. Other birds we hope to see include Madagascar Ibis, Madagascar Buttonquail, France's Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher and more. We may also find another five species of vanga here, including Rufous Vanga, Hook-billed Vanga, White-headed Vanga, Chabert's Vanga and Red-tailed Vanga.

No less than eight species of lemurs occur in the vicinity of the camp, and we will search for these species here during the day, as well as at night. The comical Coquerel's Sifaka, Common Brown Lemur and the rare Mongoose Lemur can usually be found while birding during the day. At night, we will go out to find the Western Avahi (Woolly Lemur), Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur, Fat-tailed Dwarf Lemur and Grey Mouse Lemurs. If we are lucky, we may also find the recently described (1998) Golden-

brown Mouse Lemur, one of the world's smallest primates and only known from around Lac Ravelobe (hence its scientific name *Microcebus ravelobensis*.)

Reptiles are plentiful along the trails and we hope to see the impressive Giant Hog-nosed Snake, as well as several smaller species of snake (all harmless – amazingly, there are no venomous snakes in Madagascar!), Oustalet's Chameleon (the world's largest species) and the aptly named Rhinoceros Chameleon, with its enlarged nasal protuberance. Impressively spiky Cuvier's Iguanids scurry around the campsite.

Based upon bird-finding on the previous day, we may spend some time birding around the lodge and/or other nearby dry forest trails. We should also consider birding at the nearby Lac Revelobe.



We will spend some of the afternoon birding along the edge of the adjacent Lac Ravelobe, where we hope to find the critically endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle, a pair of which is resident here. Wintering Sooty Falcons and Eleonora's Falcons are sometimes seen hunting overhead here, but that is mostly an August event. We will look for the White-throated Rail along the waterside vegetation, and we should find noisy groups of Sickle-billed Vangas and Blue Vangas moving along the forest fringe.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day.

Note: Again, morning birding and breakfast plans will be tied to flight plans. Given the possibility of changed flight plans, this is worth another review with your guide.

We may well have a chance to go out again for some night birding, chameleon-watching and other wildlife watching.

Overnight at the Gite Ampijoroa (at the edge of the national park). This place is a bit basic, but allows for some fun casual birding and mammal watching most anytime during the day (and night). Food here is excellent.



Day 13: Early AM Start for Key Wetlands Birding and Betsiboka Delta Birding; Likely Late PM Birding and/or Bit of Relaxation

After a very early breakfast, we will return to Mahajanga, searching for water birds along the way. We will stop at Lac Amboromalandy to look for the striking Madagascar Jacanas, which are sometimes seen as they strut through lily-covered lakeshore vegetation (this birding does depend upon water levels). We will also look for Humblot's Heron, Madagascar Grebe, African Pygmy Goose and Allen's Gallinule.

We next take a boat launch to the Betsiboka Delta. This will likely be the best time to fit in our motorized boat trip on the Betsiboka Delta. This seldom-visited region is home to two of Madagascar's rarest and most endangered birds, Bernier's Teal and Malagasy Sacred Ibis. Other birds we may record on this epic journey are Humblot's Heron, African Openbill, Greater Flamingo, African Spoonbill (a very rare bird in Madagascar), Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, Terek Sandpiper, Crab Plover, Lesser Crested Tern and perhaps Saunders' Tern.

We may make a quick stop on the way back at a reliable spot for Malagasy Pond Heron, if we have not already had good looks at this species.

We will focus late afternoon birding on any species we may have missed, and the guide may offer up a more relaxing alternative.

At supper, we will again complete our bird checklists. The guide will review morning birding and airport departure plans.

Overnight at the Gite Ampijoroa (at the edge of the national park). This place is a bit basic but allows for some fun casual birding and mammal watching most anytime during the day (and night).



Day 14: AM Final Birding around Ankarafantsika National Park; Drive to Airport in Majunga; Driving from Antananarivo (Tana) to Perinet for Most of Afternoon

We will have some time for some morning birding around Majunga, and we will focus on whatever species we have left to find here. This may also be a great morning to sleep in and rest.

By about 9:00 AM, we will need to head to the airport.

Once at Tana airport, a driver will take us to Perinet.

Most of the rest of the day will be spent on our four-hour drive eastwards across the Highland Plateau to the famous reserve of Perinet (otherwise known as Analamazaotra).

Along the way to Perinet, we should stop to confirm sightings of the Brown-throated Martin and the Madagascar Cisticola (both regularly encountered en route). We will also keep a look out for the delightful Madagascar Pratincole but will be very lucky if we find this sought-after beauty.

We will arrive around supper time (likely around 7 PM/7:30 PM).

Our accommodation for the next three nights is a comfortable hotel, ideally located outside the reserve entrance. Being so close to the reserve means that wildlife is often right on our doorstep. Look for the fluorescent green day geckos, as they scuttle on the outside walls. Madagascar Wagtails will flit along the paved walkways, and we may be serenaded by the beautiful songs of the world's largest extant species of lemur, the handsome Indri. At night, a family of Furry-eared Dwarf Lemurs are sometimes seen in the gardens of the hotel as they forage through the trees.

Besides enjoying our hotel, we should have several hours to start our Perinet birding and wildlife watching this afternoon.

In the evening, we will have dinner and complete the bird checklist, as well as review plans for the next day.

Overnight in Perinet.



Day 15 & 16: Perinet Special Reserve and Mantadia National Park

The moist rainforest cloaking Madagascar's eastern escarpment protects the richest assemblage of birds on the island, including many that are rare or poorly known. Over 100 of these have been recorded from within the small reserve of Perinet, and we will search for such specials as Madagascar Flufftail, the elusive Madagascar Wood Rail, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Greater Vasa Parrot, Madagascar Cuckoo, Madagascar Spinetail, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Cuckooshrike, Ward's Flycatcher, Tylas Vanga, Madagascar Starling, Long-billed Bernieria, Spectacled Tetraka, White-throated Oxylabes, Nelicourvi Weaver and Souimanga Sunbird.

Amongst the most sought-after of Madagascar's birds are those of the five families endemic to the Malagasy region: the peculiar mesites, exquisite ground rollers, Cuckoo Roller, Malagasy warblers and the vangas. Some of these, such as the ubiquitous Cuckoo Roller, Pitta-like Ground Roller, Common Sunbird-Asity and a number of the vangas, are reasonably common and regularly encountered, while most of the others remain rare, local or elusive. We will make a special effort to locate as many

representatives of these charismatic families as possible, as well as those of the endemic sub-family, the couas.

In the forested hills around Perinet, we hope to find the localized Red-fronted Coua, Blue Coua, Velvet Asity, and flocks of vangas that may include White-headed, Chabert's, Blue, Red-tailed, Hook-billed or the bizarre Nuthatch Vanga. If we are lucky, we may locate some of Perinet's forest rarities such as Madagascar Serpent Eagle.

While in the Perinet area, we will make a special effort to see the reserve's most famous residents: the huge, singing lemurs known as the Indri. A journey in search of these magnificent creatures is an incredible experience, and if we are fortunate we will be treated to a close encounter with a family group, and hear their eerie, whale-like howling echoing through the forest. Other lemurs we hope to see include Common Brown Lemur and Grey Bamboo Lemur, while we will also search known roosting sites for the nocturnal but inquisitive Weasel Sportive Lemur. Another "must see" member of the island's fauna is the Giraffe-necked Weevil, a tiny red and black insect named for its unusually proportioned neck!

In the evenings, we will embark on night walks. Nocturnal outings are a thrilling and, indeed, essential part of any trip to Madagascar, and Perinet is one of the best sites to search for the island's night birds. Specialties here include Madagascar Owl, Rainforest Scops Owl and both Madagascar Nightjar and the rare and little-known Collared Nightjar. While seeing these birds will be the focus of our walks, we will not neglect the immense variety of non-avian life that emerges after dark. Although Madagascar is famous for the spectacular lemurs that have adapted to a daytime existence, a number of species of these primitive primates remain, like their African cousins the galagos, denizens of the night. We will search for and should find Eastern Woolly Lemur, Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur and the diminutive Goodman's Mouse Lemur and may also encounter some of Madagascar's other evolutionary masterpieces such as the bizarre Lowland Streaked Tenrec. The island's reptile and amphibian ("herp") fauna is equally fascinating, and even the most hardened birder would not fail to be impressed by the plethora of colorful and bizarre frogs, chameleons and geckos to be seen on an evening's stroll through the rainforest. In particular, we will search for the giant Parson's Chameleon and two species of eccentric leaf-tailed geckos: the huge *Uroplatus fimbriatus* and the aptly named *Uroplatus phantasticus*.



Mantadia National Park lies a short distance from Perinet, protecting a large expanse of primary forest at a somewhat higher altitude. Though it has only recently been opened to the public, Mantadia is now an essential destination on any birding trip to Madagascar, having rapidly gained a reputation as an excellent site for a handful of highly sought-after forest birds. Not least amongst these are a number of species formerly considered to be restricted to the poorly accessible rainforests of the far northeast, such as Red-breasted Coua and Scaly Ground Roller. We will concentrate on finding these specials, also watching for more widespread, yet no less desirable, forest birds, including Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Rufous-headed Ground Roller, Short-legged Ground Roller, Crossley's Babbler (recent DNA-analysis suggests this species is an aberrant terrestrial vanga!), Common Newtonia, Dark Newtonia, Wedge-tailed Jery, Green Jery, Stripe-throated Jery, Common Jery, the newly described Cryptic Warbler and Forest Fody.

Other attractions in this scenically beautiful park include the vocal Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur, the elusive Diademed Sifaka (considered by many to be the world's most beautiful lemur) and Baron's Mantella, a spectacularly colored forest frog. Much of the birding in Mantadia National Park can be enjoyed from the wide road that runs up into the reserve, although seeing the skulkers of the forest understory will require that we take to the steep, and at times slippery, trails into the rainforest.

Each evening, as usual, we will have dinner and complete the checklist, as well as review plans for the next day (including a decision to go for the Helmet Vanga).

Both nights, we overnight in Perinet.





Day 17: AM Final Perinet Birding and Wildlife Watching or Try for Helmet Vanga; PM Back to Tana

This will likely be the best chance for the group to go for the Helmet Vanga at Andasibe. This will require an early morning start (and the group will need to be packed and ready to go at about 5:00 AM and maybe earlier). ***The hike is long and hard, and this bird species is tough to find (and can be missed).***

Note: We can try the Helmet Vanga but the visit will depend on weather and road conditions. The drivers and the lead guide will discuss road conditions and the safety of the clients, and they will determine if we can safely reach the spot to start this long hike. You will also need to be fit to make this trek.

So in the morning, the group will leave early to find the Helmet Vanga at Andasibe or continue to bird at Perinet.

After birding at Andasibe or wrapping up in Perinet, the group will have to spend most of the afternoon returning to Antananarivo. This afternoon, we will travel back to Antananarivo, arriving back at about 4 PM/5 PM.

This evening, we will all want to thank the guide for his excellent guiding. The guide will review the final bird checklist, and he will confirm transfer plans for tomorrow.

Day 18: Departure Summary

No matter your plans, you should plan to be back at the hotel to pick up your bags about four hours before your international departure flight.