

Madagascar: Unique Birds, Lemurs, and Baobabs
Sept 23-Oct 15, 2024
With Johnny Wilson and local guides

Brief itinerary*

If you didn't do the Masoala extension, you may wish to arrive in Antananarivo the day before to rest before the tour starts. Just let us know your flight plans and whether you will need an extra night in Antananarivo.

Day 1: Mon, Sept 23 - Arrival in Antananarivo

After arrival, you will be transferred to our hotel for the night. Here, we will have a short briefing by our local guides before settling down for the night. ***Overnight in Antananarivo.***

Day 2: Tue, Sept 24 - Lac Tsarasaotra

We start the morning at Lac Tsarasaotra, a RAMSAR wetland because of its international importance for hosting healthy populations of several waterbirds. Among the endemic species to be seen here are Malagasy Kingfisher, Madagascar Munia, and Madagascar Wagtail. But waterbirds are the real show, with at least four Endangered birds (Humboldt's Heron, Meller's Duck, Madagascar Pond Heron, Madagascar Grebe) possible, while Dimorphic and Black Egrets, Red-billed Teal, Blue-billed Teal, and Knob-billed Duck are all also usually present. Flocks of swifts are also common here, and we will scan the skies for Malagasy Swift and Malagasy Palm-Swift among Little Swifts and Mascarene Martins. We will stay at the wetland until it's time to head back to the airport from where we will catch a local flight to Tulear in southwestern Madagascar. Once in Tulear, we will head straight to Arboretum d'Antsokay to look for Madagascar Buttonquail, Chabert's Vanga, Subdesert Brush-Warbler, and the local green-capped subspecies of the Red-capped Coua. If there's time, we may make a quick visit to nearby Belalanda Wetland for Madagascar Plover, White-throated Rail, Baillon's Crake, and Great Painted-Snipe. Then it's off to dinner, which will hopefully be interrupted by Madagascar Nightjars calling overhead. ***Overnight in Tulear.***

Day 3: Wed, Sept 25 - Andatabo Forest; Tsimanampetsotsa National Park

Early in the morning we'll head to Le Table/Andatabo Forest where our main targets will be the Red-shouldered Vanga and Verreaux's Coua, while Lafresnaye's Vanga and Stripe-throated Jery are also possible. Then it's off to the Tulear harbor from where we will board a ferry to touristy Anakoa. We'll spend a short amount of time around Anakoa to search for Littoral Rock-Thrush before starting our drive to Tsimanampetsotsa National Park to look for Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk, Madagascar Sandgrouse, and Madagascar Buttonquail. There is also a huge moderately alkaline lake to the west of the park which can be particularly birdy, and we'll spend some time here looking for Madagascar Plover, and both Lesser and Greater Flamingo, among others. In the late afternoon, we will drive back to Anakao, where we will spend the night overlooking a beautiful sandy beach. ***Overnight at Anakao.***

Day 4: Thu, Sept 26 - Nose Ve; Ifaty Spiny Forest

We will start today very early (around 5am) with a relaxing boat ride to Nosy Ve, an uninhabited islet near Anakao known for a colony of Red-tailed Tropicbirds. While enjoying the tropicbirds, we'll should also see a range of shorebirds, most notably Crab-Plover, but Greater Sand-Plover, White-fronted Plover, Common Greenshank, and Saunder's Tern are also possible. Once we're done here, we'll catch a motorized boat

back to Tulear, from where we will drive to the bizarre and unique spiny forests around Ifaty. Because we'll make some sporadic birding stops along the way, we anticipate arriving in Ifaty in the early afternoon, giving us enough time for some birding before sunset. Ifaty has an arid landscape with spiny Octopus Trees, bottle-shaped Baobabs, and Elephant's Foot Plants. Among the key birds we'll look for here are Running Coua, Thamnornis Warbler, Archbold's Newtonia, Subdesert Brush-Warbler, and Lafresnaye's Vanga. We'll also try our best to see a skulky Subdesert Mesite (a member of a bizarre ground-dwelling bird family which has an unknown taxonomic affinity) and a Long-tailed Ground-Roller which will remind us of a colorful Roadrunner. ***Overnight in Ifaty.***

Day 5: Fri, Sept 27 - Ifaty Spiny Forest

We continue our search for the amazing variety of birds that live in the mangily spiny forests around Ifaty. As the day heats, up we'll also pay special attention to non-feathered folk such as Three-eyed Lizards, while we may also be lucky to see the Critically Endangered Radiated Tortoise. We'll also do a night walk in the spiny forest to look for a Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec (a member of the world's most primitive mammal group), Madagascar (Totoroka) Scops-Owl, and White-footed Sportive Lemur. ***Overnight in Ifaty.***

Day 6: Sat, Sept 28 - Zombitse & Isalo National Parks

We start with an early morning drive to Mahaboboka to look for Madagascar Sandgrouse. Then it's off to Zombitse National Park to look for Appert's Tetraka, while White-browed Owl at its day roost, both Giant and Coquerel's Coua, Cuckoo-roller and Long-billed Bernieria are also possible. In addition, we'll also look for Hubbard's Sportive Lemur here. We end the day with an afternoon visit to the dramatic landscape of Isalo National Park with its beautifully eroded sandstone mountains. In this scenic semi-desert landscape, we'll be looking for the attractive Verreaux's Sifaka and Red-fronted Brown Lemur, in addition to Forest (Benson's) Rock-Thrush and Madagascar Partridge. ***Overnight near Isalo National Park.***

Day 7: Sun, Sept 29 - Anja Community Reserve

We start the morning by continuing our search for wildlife in and around Isalo National Park. Then it's eastwards towards the humid forests of Ranomafana National Park. It is a rather long and uneventful drive, and if there's interest, we can stop at one or a few artisanal mineral and stone workshops along the drive. The journey to Ranomafana also takes us past the community-run reserve of Anja, where we can enjoy close-ups of Ring-tailed Lemurs. Once at Ranomafana, we'll get settled in at our lodge hopefully with plenty of time to prepare for a night walk to look for Rufous Mouse Lemur, various chameleons, and the Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko with its crazy eyes. ***Overnight in Ranomafana.***

Day 8: Mon, Sept 30 - Ranomafana National Park

We'll spend the whole day looking for birds and other wildlife in the lush rainforest of Ranomafana National Park. Several sought-after species call Ranomafana home, notably both Brown and Gray Emutail, but also Madagascar Wood-Rail, Madagascar Flufftail, Henst's Goshawk, Cryptic Warbler, Madagascar Yellowbrow (also known as the Yellow-browed Oxalybes), and both Greater and Lesser Vasa Parrot. We also hope to see the gaudy Blue Coua here. Our first day here will mostly be spent in the high-altitude forests along the Sahamalaotra Track, home to the Milne-Edwards' Sifaka, while we may also find Crossley's Vanga, Tylas Vanga, and perhaps even a pretty Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity. ***Overnight in Ranomafana.***

Day 9: Tue, Oct 1 - Ranomafana National Park

We will spend another full day in Ranomafana National Park. Depending on our successes the previous day, we'll spend much of today at mid-altitude, which is good for Pollen's Vanga and the shy Brown Mesite, while mixed flocks may contain Pitta-like Ground-Roller, Ward's Flycatcher, White-throated Oxylabes, Wedge-tailed and Green Jery, Gray-crowned Tetraka, and Rand's Warbler. At some point during the day, we'll also spend some time at a swamp off the Amboditanimena Trail to look for Madagascar Rail and Madagascar Snipe. This swamp also holds the near mythical Slender-billed Flufftail, but we'll need a healthy dose of luck to see or even hear this endangered endemic. Lemurs here are also noteworthy, with the recently described Golden Bamboo Lemur and once thought-to-be-extinct Greater Bamboo Lemur as the main drawcards, while Red-fronted Brown and Small-toothed Sportive Lemurs are also possible. Another mammal of interest here is the Ring-tailed Vontsira, a small mongoose endemic to Madagascar.

Overnight in Ranomafana.

Day 10: Wed, Oct 2 - Ranomafana National Park

Our last morning at Ranomafana is dedicated to finding any species we may have missed the previous two days. By mid-day we should start our journey to Antsirabe, roughly halfway between Ranomafana and Antananarivo, which would set us up well for the next phase of our journey, westward to the Avenue of the Baobab and Kirindy National Park. After several days of intense birding, participants may opt to take it easy in the afternoon, or we could potentially visit some of the thermal springs outside Antsirabe, the "Town of Water", to see what wildlife is around. ***Overnight in Antsirabe.***

Day 11: Thu, Oct 3 - Avenue of Baobabs

We leave Antsirabe early for a full day's drive to Morondava on Madagascar's west coast. As the drive will be long, we will make several stops along the road for sightseeing and photography. We'll break for lunch in the small town of Miandrivazo on the banks of the Mahajilo River, which should provide some more opportunities for water birding along the journey. We aim to arrive in Morondava well before sunset, which should give us time to get settled in at our charming hotel before ending the day enjoying the sunset along the world-famous Avenue of the Baobabs. ***Overnight in Morondava.***

Day 12: Fri, Oct 4 - Kirindy Reserve

We start the day early to enjoy the Avenue of the Baobabs in the magical golden morning glow. Then it's off to Kirindy Reserve where we will have the best chance to see Fossas (Madagascar's largest carnivore) in the wild. Apart from the Fossa, we'll also spend some time enjoying the area's birdlife, which includes White-breasted Mesite and another chance for Giant Coua, while possible lemurs include Red-tailed Sportive Lemur, Red-fronted Brown Lemur, and Verreaux's Sifaka. We will also do a guided night walk with the main drawcard being the Critically Endangered Madame Berthe's Mouse Lemur (the world's smallest primate) while Pale Fork-marked Lemur and Malagasy Giant Jumping Rat are also possible.

Overnight at Kirindy.

Day 13: Sat, Oct 5 - Kirindy Reserve; Avenue of Baobabs

We start the morning in Kirindy Reserve which should give us more opportunities to find birds and lemurs we may have missed the previous day; this extra backup day will also be critical to give us our best chance to see a Fossa. Towards the afternoon, we will head back to Morondava, timing it such a way that we can visit the Avenue of the Baobabs one last time, again during sunset. ***Overnight in Morondava.***

Day 14: Sun, Oct 6 - Mantadia National Park

After breakfast we transfer to Morondava Airport from where we catch a local back flight to Antananarivo. Once in Antananarivo, we make shortish drive eastward towards Analamazoatra Reserve (also known as Perinet Reserve) on Madagascar's eastern escarpment. Our accommodation for the next three nights is right on the edge of the Analamazoatra Forest, giving us opportunities to hear the eerie, whale-like singing of the magnificent Indri, the world's largest lemur, echoing through the forest. We'll also have some opportunities to see some amazing forest creatures venturing onto the hotel's grounds as we take the afternoon a bit more relaxed before ending the day with a thrilling nocturnal walk inside Analamazoatra Reserve to look for Collared Nightjar, Madagascar Owl, and Madagascar Scops-Owl, as well as nocturnal lemurs (e.g., Gmelin's Woolly, Furry-eared Dwarf, Goodman's Mouse; Weasel Sportive), Madagascar Flying Fox, Madagascar Tree Boa, Parson's and Short-horned Chameleons, Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko, and the eccentric Giraffe-necked Weevil, a tiny red and black insect with a disproportionally long neck. ***Overnight near Andasibe.***

Day 15: Mon, Oct 7 - Mantadia National Park

We start the day with a rather bumpy but short drive we will reach Mantadia National Park, which protects a larger expanse of forest than Analamazoatra Reserve, also at higher latitude. Among the most sought-after rainforest-dependent birds easier at Mantadia than elsewhere is the Red-breasted Coua and Scaly Ground Roller. While concentrating on finding these two species, we'll almost certainly see a range of other fascinating species, such as Short-legged Ground Roller, Red-fronted Coua, Velvet Asity, Common Sunbird-Asity, Nuthatch-Vanga, Ward's Vanga, and Nelicourvi Weaver, in addition to Rufous-headed Ground Roller, Crossley's Vanga, Cryptic Warbler, and Green Jery. We end the day with afternoon birding at the V.O.I.M.M.A. Community Reserve, which is very good for the Endangered Madagascar Grebe, as well as Madagascar Ibis, Madagascar Flufftail, White-throated Rail, Madagascar Wood-Rail, and Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher. ***Overnight near Andasibe.***

Day 16: Tue, Oct 8 - Mantadia National Park

We will spend a second morning in Mantadia National Park. The park is also rich in lemurs, and we'll have fun seeing the pretty Diademed Sifaka, Common Brown Lemur, Eastern Lesser Bamboo Lemur, Red-bellied Lemur, and Black-and-White Ruffed Lemur while looking for the remaining endemic birds. Also worth looking out for is the insectivorous Lowland Streaked Tenrec. We end the day with afternoon birding at the Torotorofotsy Marsh west of town where we will look for Gray Emutail, Madagascar Rail, Madagascar Snipe, and Madagascar Coucal. ***Overnight near Andasibe.***

Day 17: Wed, Oct 9 - Maromizaha Reserve

Our last morning at Mantadia National Park is dedicated to finding species we may have missed the previous two days. If we've done well here, we may instead visit Maromizaha Reserve for a morning stroll. At least 12 species of lemurs live in the primary rainforest of this seldom-visited reserve, which offer more opportunities to see the Greater Bamboo Lemur, Diademed Sifaka, and Indri. The birdlife is also rich, with Red-fronted Coua and Dark Newtonia being notable possibilities, while we will also keep an eye out for the Baron's Mantella (a colorful frog) around the reserve's scenic waterfalls. Once done here, we will head back to Antananarivo, where we will spend the night. ***Overnight in Antananarivo.***

Day 18: Thu, Oct 10 - Travel to Ampijoroa

Today is mostly a driving day as we head northwest from Antananarivo towards the western deciduous forests of Ankarafantsika National Park. Because of the long drive ahead, we'll keep birding stops to a minimum, except around Ampanataovan where we'll keep an eye out for the elusive and Endangered Malagasy Harrier, of which as few as 250 individuals may remain. We'll also make a short stop at the Betsiboka Bridge to look for Madagascar Pratincole. We expect to reach our destination for the night, Ampijoroa, sometime in the afternoon which will give us enough time to end the day with a night walk to look for nocturnal lemurs such as the Western Fat-tailed Dwarf, Gray Mouse, Golden-brown Mouse, and Mongoose Lemurs, as well as the Giant Madagascan Hognose Snake and Rhinoceros Chameleon. ***Overnight in Ampijoroa.***

Day 19: Fri, Oct 11 - Ankarafantsika National Park

We will enjoy the entire day in Ankarafantsika National Park, where forest walks will lead us to several vangas, key being the hyper-localized Van Dam's Vanga, while Blue, Chabert's, Rufous, Hook-billed, and the showy Sickle-billed Vangas are also possible. So are Crested, Coquerel's and Red-capped Coua, and Schlegel's Asity. We'll also pay a visit to Ravelobe Lake inside the park where we will look for the Critically Endangered Madagascar Fish-Eagle and the Endangered Madagascar Grebe. Other more widespread but elusive raptors worth keeping an eye out include Eleonora's and Sooty Falcon. While enjoying all these birds, we have a good chance to stumble into an Oustalet's Giant Chameleon; the largest in the world, this chameleon can get up to a meter long! Lemurs are also well represented, notably Coquerel's Sifaka, Milne-Edwards Sportive Lemur, and Western Woolly Lemur. ***Overnight in Ampijoroa.***

Day 20: Sat, Oct 12 - Ankarafantsika National Park; Mahajanga

We will spend the better part of the day back at Ankarafantsika National Park to look for species we may have missed the previous day. Towards the afternoon, we will head to the coastal town of Mahajanga, where a series of productive coastal wetlands may produce Madagascar Plover and African Pygmy-Goose. The scrub and thickets adjacent to the wetlands are also worth scanning for their healthy numbers of Madagascar Cisticolas in addition to Madagascar Bee-eater, Madagascar Munia, and Red Foddy. ***Overnight in Mahajanga.***

Day 21: Sun, Oct 13 - Betsiboka Delta

Today our birding group will split into two; birders that will join our Enigmatic Birds Extension will start on day 1 of that itinerary, while birders not doing that extension will head to the Betsiboka Delta south of Mahajanga to embark on an enjoyable speedboat trip to look for a trio of Endangered birds: Bernier's Teal, Madagascar Jacana, and Malagasy Sacred Ibis. Shorebirds are also regular, with notable species including Madagascar Pratincole, Curlew Sandpiper, and Terek Sandpiper. By the afternoon we'll be back in Mahajanga for a relaxed afternoon of sightseeing around our lodge. ***Overnight in Mahajanga.***

Day 22: Mon, Oct 14 - Transfer to Antananarivo

After breakfast, our tour party will start heading back to Antananarivo, with another chance to see Malagasy Harrier en route. We should reach Antananarivo by late afternoon. Once here, participants can either be transferred to Sakamanga Hotel (a mid-range day-use hotel in the city center) until it's time to head to the airport for late-night home-bound flights, or head to an overnight hotel if their flights only leave the next day. ***Overnight in Antananarivo.***

Day 23: Tue, Oct 15 - Departures

Tour participants are free to spend time at their hotels or enjoy the sights and sounds of Antananarivo until it is time to head to the airport for their homebound flights.

***Order of days and accommodation may change if logistically necessary.**