

Madagascar - April 2012

Trip report



6 to 22 April 2012



A few Malagasy Phrases

Salama – Greetings

Mora mora – Take it easy, (doing things at Malagasy speed, which is rather slow even for us Africans from the main-land)

Malaky – Fast (get going mate, speed it up generally doing things at double speed/time in Madagascar which is basically unknown to the lovely and friendly Malagasy people)

Zebu – Malagasy beef

Vorona – Bird

Misaotra (Misoocha) – Thank you

Azafady – Please

Group participants

- John - Local Madagasy guide, jrazafy@writeme.com
- Neil - Safariwise tour leader, neil@safariwise.com.na
- Robbie - Safariwise tour leader, robbie@safariwise.com.na
- Mantsika - mantsika@gmail.com
- Cedi - mrosterg@gmail.com
- Wendy - sierra3063@yahoo.com
- Adam and Jane - adamandjane@mac.com
- Arthur and Lucy - acn1@cam.ac.uk and lucy@codemist.co.uk
- Bill and Kaye - kayecenters@yahoo.com
- Dafydd and Heather - heatherfrichards@hotmail.com

6 April

We met up with 9 people, all arriving on different flights from all corners of the world. How great it is to meet people/friends that you know, that have travelled with you before or has booked some sort of safari with you before. All well and we are all excited by going to the 4'th largest island in the world and trying to catch up with news and stories as we have not seen one another for some years. We flew from JHB to Tana and arrived at Tana at 14:20. We met up with John our local guide that would accompany us for our entire stay in Madagascar. After the airport procedures we exchanged money into local currency, Ariary. We drove to our hotel, Palissandre Hotel and Spa and arrived at 16:30. On the way some people saw Madagascar Kingfisher, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Fody, Sooty Falcon, Black Egret. Madagascar Bulbul, Madagascar White-eye was also seen around the lodge gardens which is a very small pocket of green belt within the heart of the city.

We finally meet up with Dafydd and Heather that flew into Tana two days prior to our arrival and they were well acquainted with many of the local birds already. We had a lovely Zebu dinner at 7pm.

7 April

Pre breakfast we saw Madagascar Fody, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Bulbul as well Soimanga Sunbird in the hotel gardens. Breakfast at 8am and we are all set, packed and ready to go at 10. Drive to the airport for our flight at 13:25 to Morondava. We booked in at the airport and then drove to a very nice pizza venue for lunch where we saw Madagascar Mannikin. Our flight of 55 minutes was delayed by half an hour. We arrived at Morondava and went straight to the alley of Baobabs. Along the route we saw Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Buzzard, Madagascar Coucal, Great white Egret, Cattle Egret, Little Egret, Sooty Falcon, Sakalava Weaver, Madagascar Bee-eater and Black Egret. We arrived at our lodge at 6pm. We all met at 7pm to do our checklist and enjoyed a delightful dinner with a local band entertaining in the background. Quite humid but no rain.

8 April

Wake-up call at 5am and breakfast at 5:30. We leave the lodge shortly after 6 am and drive via the alley of Baobabs towards Bekopaka. A very long bumpy track that takes us North. Lunch at Karibo Hotel in the town of Belo. The local people pronounce this with an “a” at the end, **Beloa**. The journey up until lunch took us just under 6 hours which included a ferry crossing of 45 minutes and travelled 120 km's.

We continue after lunch and eventually could not cross a stream/River at the village of Lonohena so had to spend the night at the village after getting permission from the local chief. They opened the local shop and we could purchase water, beer and soft drinks. Birds en route were Greater and Lesser Vasa parrot, Madagascar Sandrouse, Grey headed Lovebird, Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Lark, Madagascar Harrier Hawk, Sakalava Weaver, Humblot's heron, Grey Heron, Little, Cattle and Great white Egrets, Common Jerry, Black and Yellow-billed Kites, Madagascar Buzzard, Henst's Goshawk, Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Paradise flycatcher. We hear Madagascar nightjar during the night. Mammals seen were : Verraux's Safika and Indri Mongoose.

“Our adventure continues we were supposed to spend three nights at Olympe de Bemaraha at Bepkopaka. Because of the river that we could not cross we exchanged our lodge accommodation for a night in the vehicles without food but with water, beer and Cola as well as armed gaurds to keep us safe from whatever could do us any harm during the night. The village did however offer us fresh duck with rice. The second night was exchanged with a very interesting sleep at Kirindy Camp which in itself was an experience not to be forgotten. The wildlife however is great in this area. So, we now have three extra nights to spend somewhere as our pre-paid and planned accommodation was now in a mess confusion. As the Malagasy people say, “mora mora”! So, to cut quite a long story and adventure short, we opted to head to Morondava and to stay at the Pallisandre cote Oust for three consecutive nights beds, good food, cold beverages, air-conditioned rooms and very friendly staff.”

9 April

We were all up very early from the uncomfortable sleep in the vehicles. We went and checked on the water level in the river and decided to not proceed to Tsingy and started the long route back towards Morondava. We had lunch at Karibo again. Birds spotted were Kittlit's Plover, Madagascar pond Heron, Squako Heron, Grey and Humblot's Herons, Greater and Lesser Vasa Parrots, Madagascar harrier Hawk, Madagascar Buzzard, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Sparrowhawk, White faced whistling Duck, Comb billed Duck, Red billed Teal, Glossy Ibis, Hammerkop, Madagascar Hoopoe, Green backed Heron, Madagascar Fody, Crested Drongo, Common Mynah, Madagascar black Swift, African palm Swift, Plain Martin, Common Jery. Namaqua Dove, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Harlequin Quail, Madagascar Buttonquail. We arrived at Kirindy Reserve at around 5pm. Settled into our accommodation and did an evening walk with the local guides. We saw Madagascar Magpie Robin, Madagascar Nightjar as well as Madagascar Scops Owl. The following mammals were seen, Grey Mouse Lemur, Bertha's Mouse Lemur, Fat tailed Dwarf Lemur, Western fork-marked Lemur, Red tailed Sportive Lemur and Verraux's Safika. Also stunning views of Madagascar Ground Boa, Madagascar Speckled Hognose snake, Panther Chameleon.

10 April

We decided to have a bit of a sleep in and had breakfast at 8am. We then did a very productive walk that delivered, Collared Iguana, Madagascar Speckled Hognose Snake, Verraux's Sifaka, Red-fronted common Brown Lemur, Common Newtonia, Common Jery, Crested and Giant Coua, Madagascar Cuckoo Roller, Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo, Greater and Lesser Vasa Parrots, Chaberts Vanga, Madagascar Kingfisher, Grey headed Lovebird, Henst's Goshawk, Madagascar bulbul, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Pond Heron.

We returned to the camp for lunch and set off to Camp Amore for the night. (Camp Amore was not quite ready for us as we arrived a day earlier than they expected, so we had to make an immediate decision to drive to Morondava to stay at the Palissandre cote Oust. We arrived just after 5pm. We all booked into our very comfortable rooms and had dinner after we did our checklist at 7pm.

11 April

Pre-breakfast walk along the beachfront delivered Rock dove, Madagascar Fody, Madagascar Bee eater, Common Mynah, Pied Crow. Breakfast at seven and we left the hotel just after 8 to do a very nice and relaxing canoe trip with 4 local "dows" to an area with Mangrove swamps where we saw : Curlew Sandpipers, Madagascar Kingfisher, Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Grey Plover, Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Peregrine Falcon, Sanderling, Grey Heron, Dimorphic Egret, Cattle egret. We also visited a fishing village and watched the local people pull out their nets with the daily catch. We returned to the lodge for a very interesting lunch with options for Goat Curry, which I was assured of by Dafydd that it was very good but not quite curry, Pork chops with vegetables and a vegetarian option, followed by desert.

Some people met at 4pm and did a sunset walk on the beach along the warm waters of the Mozambique current. We saw Lesser Sand Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Lesser Crested Tern, Sanderling, Madagascar Kestrel, Diamorphic Egret before a Peregrine Falcon swept down on the waders and all flew off. Some great photo opportunities as the sun sets over the ocean but we were all back at the lodge enjoying our different comforts. We did the list in record time as very little was seen on our "relaxed" day and had a great dinner. We all had an early evening in anticipation of the "big bird and photo day" that awaited us. News also came to us about a Tsunami warning for the Indian Ocean islands and Madagascar "Mora Mora".

12 April

Mantsika sadly leaves to head back to her very busy schedule in South Africa. A very early morning start for 8 people with breakfast at 4.30am and departure at 5am to drive 2 hours North past the alley of Baobabs and onto a marsh and forest area. Birds seen: Malgasy Pond Heron, Red billed Teal, Cattle and Great white Egret, Madagascar Kestrel, Sooty Falcon, Madagascar Buzzard, France's Sparrowhawk, Red shouldered, Sickle-billed, White headed and Chabert's Vangas. Stripe throated and Common Jerry's. Crested Coua, Crested Drongo, Madagascar green Sunbird, Sakalava Weaver, Namamaqua Dove, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Madagascar Coucal, Madagascar harrier Hawk. This was also a great opportunity for people to catch up on previous bird species.

Some people opted for a more gentle wake-up call and had breakfast at 7:00 and departed on a very pleasant canoe excursion to the fishing village for some excellent photographic opportunities.

All groups were back for lunch at the lodge at 13:00. A rather delightful lunch of calamari and carrot starter, grilled fish and vegetables done in a pastry with a banana and chocolate desert. Some of the group meet at 4pm to venture into town to see the local markets and do some shopping with the local rickshaw taxis. The rest of the afternoon is siesta time and we meet at 6.30 to do the checklist and have dinner. Dinner comprised of a vegetable soup starter, large prawns, rice, vegetables, tomato based sauce and glazed fruit for desert.

13 April

Wake up and we have breakfast at 6am ready to depart to the airport for our flight to Toliara (Tulear) at 6:45. Once at the airport we checked in and then had to check in again after we had to loose some excess weight. This unfortunately then caused us to loose our friend and guide John, as he was the exact weight that we needed to shed. We would meet up with John again in Tulear in two days time. Loosing John was the bad news, but the good news was that we did not have to part with any of our luggage. A quick walk at the airport produced Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Mannikin, Common Mynah, Madagascar Bee eater, Crested Drongo . One hour 15 minutes flight to Tulear. From Tulear airport we drive via town and do some curio shopping before we have our lunch at "Mr Italia's Pizzeria." It is 26km North to our accommodation, Le Paradisier and this takes us an hour and a half on a quite usual Malagasy road. Once checked in to our rooms, we all met at 4pm to do a nature walk which delivered Grey Brown Mouse Lemur, Madagascar Turtle Dove, Madagascar Bulbul, Common Newtonia, Common Jery, Sakalava Weaver, Three banded Plover, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Peregrine Falcon and Madagascar Kestrel. En route to our hotel we saw Kitlitz Plover, Madagascar Fody, Madagascar Lark and Madagascar Cisticola as well as Namaqua Dove and Sakalava Weaver.

We meet at 6.30pm to do our checklist and followed by dinner. The hotel has a great setting with good views over the Mozambique Channel.

14 April

Wake up and we have breakfast at 4:30am ready to depart to Reniala Reserve at 5am and arrive there at 5:20am. Birds seen included: Sub-desert Mesite, Long-tailed Ground Roller, Hook-billed, Sickle-billed, White-headed and Chabert's Vangas. Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Madagascar Hoopoe, Madagascar Starling, Common and Archbold's Newtonia, Common and Stripe Throated Jerry, Madagascar Coucal, Running, Crested and Green-capped Couas, Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo, Grey-headed Lovebird, Common Mynah, Sooty Falcon, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Buzzard, Blackwinged Stilt, Kitlitz's Plover. We also saw a Greater Hedgehog Tenrec. We returned to our lodge at 10:30 quite exhausted after bulldozing through the Spiny forest. For those of us that are not used to, but familiar with the term "twitching", this was probably just that! We had an early lunch at twelve o'clock. After lunch some people opted to do snorkelling in the afternoon as an extra activity at the nearby coral reef. Some went to look for the Madagascar Plover @ 4pm. We met at 6pm to do our checklist and have dinner.

15 April

Breakfast at 6am and we are on the road at 7 towards Tuleur where we meet up with our local guide John. We are all very, very happy to see John. We return to town to the ATM and to buy water for the road before we continue on our 4 hour journey to Isalo Rock Lodge. Arrive at Isalo Rock Lodge for a late lunch and then go to see the Window of Isalo at 4pm. We all enjoyed a very, very good dinner accompanied with good service and good friends. We celebrate Arthur and Lucy's 40'th wedding anniversary and they very kindly provide the table with excellent South African Pinotage good choice. Congratulations!

Birds seen along the way included : Cattle and Dimorphic Egret, Kitlitz's and Three-banded Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Lesser Crested and Greater Crested Terns, Madagascar Hoopoe, Madagascar Buzzard, Madagascar Kestrel, Grey-headed Lovebird, Madagascar Bee-eater, Madagascar Lark, Madagascar Coucal, Red Fody, Sakalava Weaver, Common Jerry, Madagascar Kingfisher, Madagascar Swift, Namaqua Dove, Madagascar Bulbul, Madagascar Cisticola, Madagascar Brush-Wabler, Madagascar magpie-Robin.

16 April

Breakfast at 6am and we depart to the park at 06:45. We drive to the town of Ranohira to get our park permit and also use the opportunity to stock up on our water supply. We leave the bus at the park reception and take a very nice walk down the canyon/valley amongst the transitional forest and meet a family of Ring tailed Lemurs and spend about half an hour photographing them before we continue on our "circular" walk of another 3 hours. We see Forest Rock Thrush, Madagascar Cuckoo Shrike, Madagascar Fody, Magpie Robin, Pied Crow, Madagascar Wagtail, Grey headed Lovebird, Thamnornis Warbler, Common Jery, Madagascar Kestrel, Madagascar Bulbul before we returned to the campsite and had another opportunity to photograph the Ring tailed lemurs. Just as we were about to leave the area someone pointed out that the Red fronted Brown Lemurs had just been noticed. We spent quite some time looking and photographing the group before we took the last 1,6km walk back to the bus.

We had lunch at the Rock Lodge and had a siesta before we met at 4pm to do another nature walk and ended up on the sandstone massif for sunset close to the lodge. Magnificent views of the surrounding Isalo Park and area from the sunset window. We managed to add African Palm Swift, Madagascar Coucal, Helmeted Guinefowl, Madagascar Hoopoe and Namaqua Dove to our list for the day. We all met at 6:45 to do our list and dinner was served at 7pm. Madagascar Nightjar and Madagascar Scops Owl was heard.

17 April

Breakfast at 6am and we are ready for our journey at 6:45. We drive North towards Ranomofana and visit Anja Park before lunch and have more great views of Ring Tailed Lemurs. Birds seen along the way included, Madagascar Bulbul, Malagasy Kingfisher, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar Kestrel, Pied Crow, Grey headed Lovebird, Red-billed Teal, Crested Coua, Humblot's Heron, Purple Heron, Great White Egret, Squaco heron, Madagascar Pond Heron, Cattle Egret, Striated Heron, Hamerkop, Rock Dove, Namaqua Dove, African Palm Swift, Madagascar Hoopoe, Madagascar Lark, Madagascar Cisticola, Crested Drongo, Common Mynah and Madagascar Fody. We arrived at our lodge, Setam Lodge just before 6pm. We all look at the menu for the evening and order our food as we have discovered that

this saves us a lot of time. Some people opted to do a quick night walk with John, Robbie and a local guide. Dinner is at 7pm.

18 April

An early breakfast we are all used to the schedule by now! (6am breakfast and ready for departure for 6:45.) We drive to the Ranamofana National Park which is only 10 minutes away from the lodge. We do a very pleasant walk into the secondary rainforest and see Golden Bamboo Lemur, Red Bellied Lemur and Red Fronted Brown Lemurs, birds included: Blue Vanga, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Velvet Asity, White Throated Oxylabes, Spectacled Greenbul, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Common Jery, Common Newtonia, Souimanga Sunbird, Madagascar White Eye, Crested Drongo, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar Hoopoe, Lesser Vasa Parrot, Nelicourvi Weaver and Mascarene Martin. We depart from Ranomafana at around 11:00 am. We have lunch in Ambositra which is local Malagasy style and also have the local village musical band and dancers for entertainment before we head towards Antsirabe where we overnight at the very interesting Camelia Lodge that has very attractive decor from a bygone era. We arrive rather late at 6:45 and meet for the checklist at 7:30pm and have our dinner. On route we saw Humblot's Heron, Purple Heron, Great White Egret, Cattle Egret, Madagascar Buzzard, Madagascar Kestrel, Common Mynah, Madagascar Fody and a few more common species.

19 April

We have breakfast at 7am and am ready for departure at 8:00. We continue our drive to Tana where we have lunch. After lunch we continue our very long drive to Vakona Lodge, Antisabe. En-route we visit the exotic park of Marozevo where we have excellent opportunities to get close and personal with many of the Madagascar reptiles. Really good to see some species one would otherwise not see at all. Plastic but fantastic as our guide John says. We arrive rather "latish" and have a splendid dinner and retire to our accommodation as we have yet another early rise awaiting.

20 April

Breakfast at 6 and we depart to Andisabe Park at 6:45, arriving at the park at around 7:15. We do an incredible walk of 5 hours, seeing, Indri, Common Brown

Lemurs, Golden Sifaka, we spent an hour and a half watching the Indri feed, jump from tree to tree and also do their eeri call. Birds included, Nuthatch Vanga, Red tailed Vanga, Madagascar Blue Vanga, Tylas, Madagascar Cuckoo Shrike, Nelicourvi Weaver, Souimanga Sunbird, Madagascar Green Sunbird, Velvet Asity, Crested Drongo, Spectacled and Long-Billed Greenbuls, White Throated Oxylabes, Madagascr Wagtail, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Common Newtonia, Common Jery, Madagascar Brush Warbler, Madagascar White eye, Madagascar Bulbul. We return to Vacona Lodge for lunch and visit the Lemur Park at 3:30. We do a night walk at 6:30 followed by the list and dinner.

A splendid day in the rainforest without any rain.

21 April

Our last full day on safari we have breakfast at 6:00 am and some people opt to go to the Andisabe park, some opt for a pre-breakfast bird walk and some opt to relax and have a later breakfast. The group going to Andasibe park saw Indri and Golden Sifaka. Birds seen : Red fronted Coua, Blue Coua, Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Madagascar Bulbul, Madagascar White eye, Longbilled Greenbul, Spectacled Greenbul, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, Common Jery, Common Newtonia, Souimanga Sunbird, Nelicourvi Weaver, Madagascar Kingfisher, Madagascar Wagtail, Madagascar Brush Warbler.

Lunch is served at 13:00 and we all have the afternoon off to recuperate for our long flights home. Dinner is at 6pm and we do our final list checklist.

22 April

The usual early breakfast and we set out to Tana just after 7am. We arrive in Tana for lunch at the pizza place that we got accustomed to over the last two weeks. After lunch we set out to the airport and say our good bye's to Dafydd and Heather as they stay behind to catch the midnight flight with Air France whilst the rest of the group all fly onward to Johannesburg. The usual birds seen along the way: Great White Egret, Black Heron, Cattle Egret, Madagascar Buzzard, Madagascar Kestrel, Common Mynah, Madagascar Fody.

“No road is long with good company!” Turkish proverb