

THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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**Bring you: a 2-week Madagascar birds, lemurs and other
wildlife extravaganza, Sep 25 – Oct 8, 2021**

And, optional Masoala Peninsula extension, Oct 8-13, 2021

*(can be combined with the GGAS/Birding Ecotours 13-day
Namibia/Botswana Birds and Wildlife tour from Sep 10-22)*

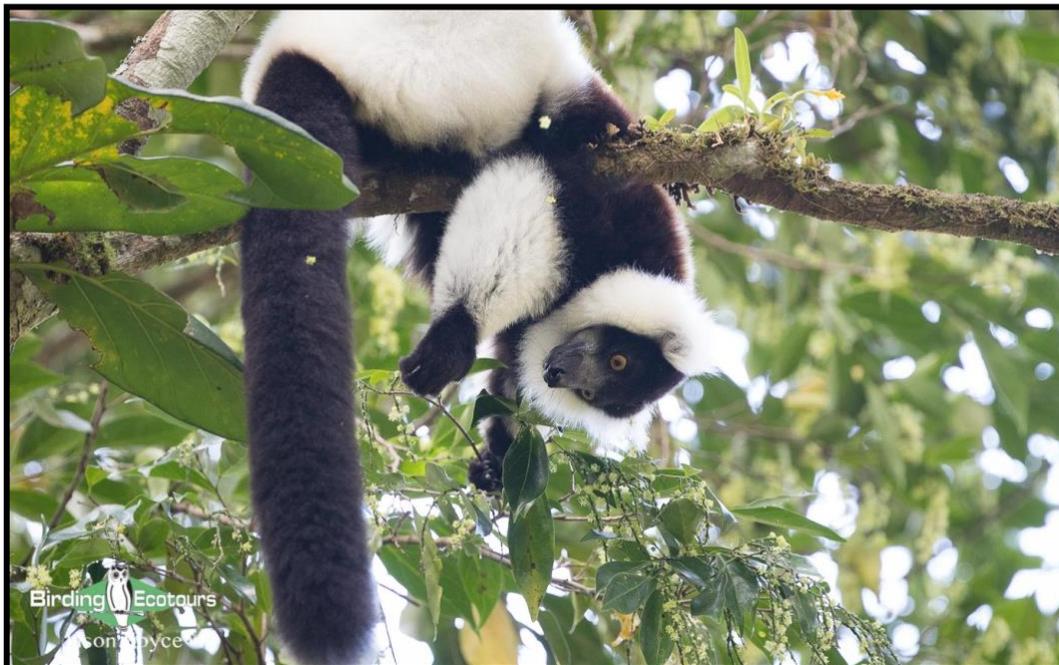


We usually see all five **Ground Rollers**, like this **Rufous-headed**, on the 14-day itinerary

The best word to describe Madagascar's wildlife is *unique*. The planet's fourth largest island, we often call it the eighth continent because it's nothing like Africa despite being so close to it. Looking at the endemic families of birds, mammals and plants, one realizes that it is actually a world away from Africa. Despite the narrow Mozambique channel being all that currently separates Madagascar from Africa, the two land masses have in reality been separated for eons; Madagascar was once part of Gondwanaland, then was connected with India before that split off and drifted into Asia, and Madagascar drifted towards Africa but never quite reached it.

Our two-week birding and wildlife tour of Madagascar involves an exciting road trip starting in Madagascar's capital city, bustling Antananarivo (shortened to Tana by those who know the island). From Tana, we head eastward to the rainforest belt where we search for **Pitta-like Ground Roller** and three of its cousins, **asities** and many other Madagascan endemics. **Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur** and **Indri** with its very loud, atmospheric call, are two of the first lemurs we expect to encounter here in the forests to the east of Tana. The call of **Cuckoo Rollers** is another of Madagascar's most characteristic sounds, and you should become well-acquainted with it as we travel southwards before crossing the island from east to west and heading to the southwest coastal area. Here we'll spend a couple of days looking for arid area birds in the strange **Spiny Forest**, including the magnificent **Long-tailed Ground Roller**, **Subdesert Mesite**, and the local mammals: semi-desert adapted **lemurs** and **tenrecs**. After two weeks, we take a flight back to Tana.

Those who wish to can then join the 5-day Masoala National Park extension. This is the best place to find one of Madagascar's most stunning birds, **Helmet Vanga**, but the extensive lowland forests here are also the home of many other localized reptiles, mammals and birds.



Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur should be one of the first lemurs we see, probably the day after arriving in Madagascar



One of five ground roller species we hope to find, Short-legged Ground Roller

Main Trip (2 weeks):

Day 1, Sep 25, 2021. Flights arrive in Antananarivo (Tana)

After our arrival in Tana, we transfer from the airport to our hotel, and (time-permitting) we can start our birding already. Tana itself is a good site for **Malagasy Pond-heron** and several of the more common endemics such as **Madagascar Wagtail**. It's also a good place for **Sooty Falcon** and **Eleonora's Falcon**.

Overnight: Relais des Plateaux or similar, Tana

Days 2-4, Sep 26 - 28. Protected areas of the Andasibe area

On Day 2, we embark on a 5-hour drive to Andasibe, from where we spend the next couple of days looking for birds and other wildlife in two of Madagascar's best-known parks, Mantadia National Park and Analamazaotra Special Reserve (Perinet). The unforgettable call of **Indri** should resound through the forest. And **Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs** should entertain us with their antics, as we search for all the birds, chameleons and other wildlife that these parks offer. There are some real dazzlers in this area, such as **Blue Vanga**, **Nuthatch Vanga**, **Madagascan Flufftail**, **Madagascar Blue Pigeon**, four different **Ground Rollers** (all of them stunning), and luminous-colored **asities** such as **Velvet Asity**. We'll look for the beautiful **Collared Nightjar**, **Madagascan Owl** and **Rainforest Scops Owl** both at their day-time roosts and on night walks during which we also expect to see some of the smaller nocturnal **lemurs** and many other goodies.



Pitta-like Ground Roller: what a bird!

We'll also be sure to visit nearby sites in search of **Madagascan Grebe**, **Meller's Duck** (a rare bird these days but we have a good stakeout for it), **Madagascan Rail**, etc. We expect our first **couas** (strange endemic cuckoos of Madagascar that can be mainly ground birds or mainly arboreal, depending on the species). **Red-fronted Coua** is often the first one we find. Apart from birds and lemurs, we'll also look for **tenrecs**, **Giraffe Weevil**, **Madagascar Tree Boa**, and all sorts of **chameleons** (Madagascar has over half the world's chameleon species, including the largest and smallest on the planet).

Overnight: Andasibe Hotel

Day 5, Sep 29. The road trip continues: birding en route to Antsirabe

Today we need to make it to Madagascar's second largest city to break the long journey to the south, where we'll be spending a couple of days at the spectacular **Ranamafana** rainforests. We'll be sure to punctuate today's scenic journey with birding/wildlife-viewing stops.

Overnight: Couleur Café, Antsirabe



*An inquisitive **Blue Vanga**.*

Days 6-8, Sep 30 – Oct 2. Ranomafana National Park: birding the southern rainforest

We should find some of the more common Malagasy endemics as we continue our drive to this next park (Ranomafana) where we spend three nights. These common species include **Malagasy Kingfisher**, **Mascarene Martin**, and **Malagasy Bulbul**.

The real rewards start, however, only when we reach Ranomafana itself. Here, we'll look for **Cryptic Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity**, **Pollen's Vanga**, **Wedge-tailed Jery**, **Madagascan Yellowbrow**, **Grey-crowned Tetraka**, **Madagascan Snipe**, **Golden Bamboo Lemur** and numerous other birds, mammals and weird Madagascan wildlife.

Day 9, Oct 3. Scenic Isalo National Park

The road trip continues, and we start crossing the island from the forested east to the dry west, overnighing at the picturesque Isalo National Park. Here we spend a night, and we're bound to find a good number of new birds. **Madagascan Partridge** can often be seen along the roadside, and **Benson's Rock Thrush** is another of our main targets.

Overnight: Relais de la Reine, Isalo

Days 10-11, Oct 4 - 5. The Spiny Forests of Ifaty

As we head for Ifaty in the southwestern corner of Madagascar, we make a couple of stops for extremely localized birds. One species is the Critically Endangered **Appert's Tetraka** at Zombitse National Park (which also hosts several other targets) but we'll be looking for several others as well.



One of Madagascar's most characteristic birds, **Cuckoo Roller**, should be seen en route to Ifaty

The real prize for the next couple of days will, however, be the *Didiera* and Baobab dominated Spiny Forests, where we should very quickly add a stack of incredible localized birds. **Long-tailed Ground Roller**, which resembles a colorful roadrunner, is one of the most unbelievable species. But it vies for attention with so many others, including the bizarre **Subdesert Mesite**, **Banded Kestrel**, **Thamnornis**, **Archbold's Newtonia**, **Running Coua** and another of Madagascar's iconic birds, **Sickle-billed Vanga**. We'll be sure to look for **Madagascan Plover** (partly from the comfort of our vehicle) once the heat reduces most of the other birds' activity to a standstill.

Overnight: Les Dunes, Ifaty



Sickle-billed Vanga!

Day 12, Oct 6. Ifaty to Toliara via La Table

Today we'll bird "coral rag scrub" habitat for two spectacularly localized birds, the nicely crested **Verreaux's Coua**, and **Red-shouldered Vanga**. We should also see other good birds, e.g. **Lafresnaye's Vanga**, not to mention mammals etc.

Overnight: Hotel Victory, Toliara

Day 13, Oct 7. Final birding before we fly back to Tana

We take a flight back to Tana. Here we can bird Tsarasaotra Lake and other sites.

Overnight: Relais des Plateaux, Antananarivo

Day 14, Oct 8. Flight home, or start of the Masoala extension

We fly back home, or we start the extension. Time permitting, we can bird sites around this fascinating capital city for **Sooty Falcon**, **Eleonora's Falcon**, **Malagasy Pond Heron**, and various other birds.

Masoala Extension (an extra 5 days):

Day 14, Oct 8. Flight to Maroentseta

After flying to this town in north-eastern Madagascar, we transfer to our accommodation, where we can check in and already start looking for birds, not to mention other amazing animals such as **Tomato Frog** and **Lowland Streaked Tenrec**.

Days 15-17, Oct 9-11. Masoala National Park!

We cross Madagascar's largest bay, the Bay of Antongil, by boat, passing the island of Nosy Mangabe en route, before reaching the vast lowland forests of the Masoala Peninsula. Here, arguably the most desirable of all the targets, is **Helmet Vanga**, but there are plenty of other spectacular birds, mammals, etc., to look at as well. **Brown Mesite** is easier to find here than elsewhere in Madagascar, and we should also find **Blue Coua**, **Short-legged Ground Roller**, **White-browed Hawk-Owl** and many others. We'll also visit a site along the coast for **Madagascar Pratincole**.

Red-ruffed Lemur and **Red-fronted Lemur** are two of several new mammals that we hope to find.

Overnight: Ecolodge Chez Arol, Masoala



Brown Mesite tends to be a skulker

Day 18, Oct 12. Boat Back to Maroentsetra then flight back to Tana

We return to Tana, allowing enough buffer time in case of flight problems.

Overnight: Relais des Plateaux, Tana

Day 19, Oct 13. Tana birding and departure

Today you sadly leave Madagascar.



Helmet Vanga, one of Madagascar's most marvelous birds, is usually seen on the Masoala extension

Price of main trip (14 days):

5400 euros per person sharing, **which includes a \$300 donation to the GGAS**. Single supplement 695 euros.

Price of Masoala extension (5 additional nights):

2402 euros per person sharing, single supplement 250 euros.

These prices assume a group of 6-9 participants for the main trip, and 4-9 participants for the Masoala extension.

The prices include transport, guide fees, accommodation, meals, unlimited bottled water in the vehicle, and entrance fees.

The prices exclude flights (there is a domestic flight at the end of the main trip that we'll purchase for you, at an estimated additional cost of about 420 euros, and there is a round trip flight on the Masoala extension that usually costs around 760 euros), drinks (including more expensive bottled water purchased at restaurants but you're welcome to take water from the vehicle), laundry, tips (see <https://www.birdingecotours.com/tipping-guidelines/>), gifts and other items of a personal nature.

*Please note that the itineraries above are guides, and we may change them a bit depending on recent knowledge, accommodation management changes or availability issues, and various other factors. **Please also note that tweaks may result from the 2021 Air Madagascar flight schedule which is unknown at the time this itinerary was developed.***