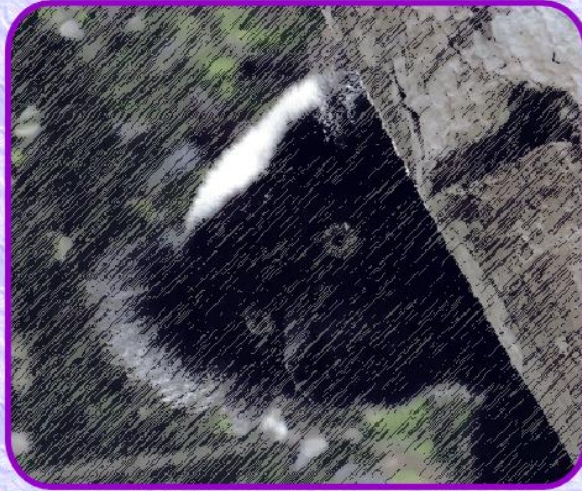


Madagascar



4th to 12th October, 2013



Sunday, 6 th Oct	Nocturnal walk, Andisibe	18.30 – 19.30
Monday, 7 th Oct	Andasibe Reserve Nocturnal walk, Andisibe	8.30 – 13.00 18.15 – 19.45
Tuesday, 8 th Oct	Mantadia reserve	8.30 – 14.30
Thurs, 10 th to Fri, 11 th Oct	Palmarium, Ankanin'ny Nofy	

MADAGASCAR

5th to 12th October, 2013

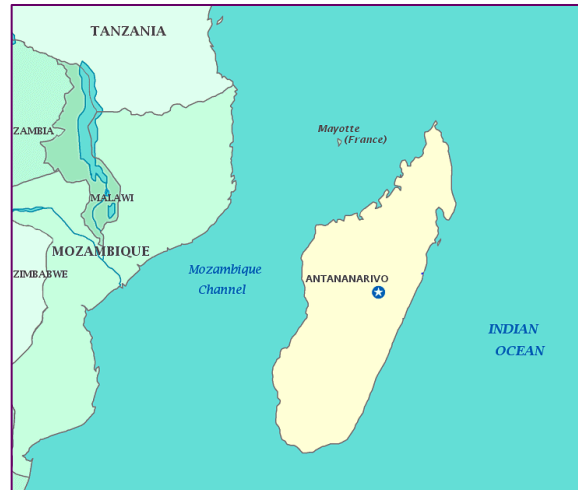
Introduction

Lemurs were definitely on the list of animals to see before old age managed to dissuade further wildlife watching, and of course there is only one place to see this enigmatic family - Madagascar. One major problem when planning a two week (only) trip to this very large island is that they are distributed widely, and so a certain amount of planning needs to be had just to narrow down the few locations which can be covered. A known concern within the island is the amount of logging which has taken place, leaving more and more remnants only for the wildlife to live within.

A close look at distribution maps for many of the species is frightening and worrying. There is a patchwork distribution for many of the 100+ species to begin with, since they do have many varied and specific habitats, with a general divide of wet and hot forests in the East, and dry in the West. The removal of the majority of the forests has further exacerbated this, leaving numerous species with remnant and localised distributions.

Another concern we had was the unstable nature of the country, specifically since the coup of 2009. Two of the main outcomes of this were the lack of control on illegal logging, which had been bad before this anyway, and the presence of some now much more dangerous areas. We checked up on the FCO website when planning, and found that this was mainly in specific locations in the South, which we would be avoiding. However, it is worth noting that the capital of Tana remains volatile, particularly at night, when apparently it is even dangerous for many of the locals to wander about.

We had an idea of where we wanted to head by looking at one or two of the travel sites. This seemed to include the Andasibe/Mantadia location as a must, and this was certainly borne out, and then to move further East to a place called Ankanin'ny Nofy, staying at the Palmarium Hotel which can only be reached by boat. We enlisted the employ of Gane & Marshall, since they seemed to have a lot of experience in organising tailor made holidays, and also Madagascar "experts" in their staff. All seemed very well organised until we reached the Palmarium. Andasibe and its environs (the Andasibe Hotel was excellent in all respects, with a brilliant offering of lemurs, birds, reptiles and even insects on the doorstep) were superb, but we had left much of the description of the latter hotel to the travel company. Highlighted was the lemurs being "not tame", but in



practice they had all been imported on to the island, were then free roaming, but tended mainly to hang around the accommodation, with staff enticing them down with bananas and encouraging them to "perform", with a favourite being taking food from the mouth of the guide. For various reasons, we decided to cut the holiday short, since this was not what we had paid for, and found Gane & Marshall to be sadly abrasive, with an email which stated "We have not yet put through your card payment and we will only do so on receiving email confirmation from you that you will not be seeking any refund of these flight costs". I could NOT recommend anyone to use them based on this attitude, and also not delivering on a WILDlife experience. Even worse, there were one or two interesting birds (literally) in the area, but numbered even less than the total I enjoyed when watching from the windows of Nairobi airport. A big recommendation for binoculars here by the way, the list of birds specifically seen within the airport at the end of the report is a huge bonus, and that is not to mention the Giraffe and Zebra which can be seen from the taxiing plane and the terminal (although they are in a park and can't be counted as truly wild).



Not such a wild lemur

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Our transportation around the island was prearranged and varied. We were driven by 4x4 from Tana to Andasibe, and then to a boat dock for water transport to Ankanin'ny Nofy. The 4x4 was useful, since even the main East West road was poor in places, and the driver also a benefit since some of the directions weren't easy, and with more or less non existent road signs . . ! The people we met were as one extremely helpful and friendly, with only small signs of the dreaded tipping plague! Electricity was usually available, although there was the odd outage, and the plugs were of standard European style. We were told to take Euros as currency, but did the right thing by changing to Malagasy Ariaria the morning after we landed. Best rates are supposed to be at banks in town, but we were there on a Sunday, and worst rates at the hotels. Getting used to an exchange rate of 2850 to the £GB isn't easy - even carrying around a few £'s worth looks like a

fortune! Insect pests are also present, as is the threat of malaria, so prevention is necessary. Mosquitoes are more prevalent in the forests, and we did come across leaches in one part of Mantadia.

Daily diary

Sunday 6th – Evening walk at Andasibe

The first real wildlife excursion was to be a nocturnal jaunt near to the Andasibe Hotel, but the morning journey from Tana was punctuated by a stop at a "reserve" for reptiles. This was predictably a mini zoo, but it has to be admitted that seeing chameleons at very close quarters was something of a treat. They even had a couple of snakes to keep me happy.



The real business began with the nocturnal walk - an hour or so with the guide who was to be with us for the duration of our stay in this area. We were all loaded up with torches, and searched through the forest. Her skills at locating wildlife were excellent, shown by the first find of a tiny Short-horned Chameleon perched at the end of a branch over the path. This was quickly followed by a *Boophis* Tree Frog, and then the small and nippy Goodman's Mouse Lemur.

Picked up by eye shine, it was difficult to pin down at first, but then was followed as it zipped up and down tree trunks. Another Chameleon, a Nose-horned, followed shortly after, pale in colour for evening wear and with tail tucked in a tight spiral. A second species of Tree Frog was also found, although a calling Madagascar Scops Owl was just too far into the depth of the forest for any hope of a view. Aside from the wildlife, the still in the air, apart from the sounds of some of the nocturnal inhabitants, such as Scops Owl, was noticeable, and the number of stars in the light free sky seemed so many more than back home.



Monday 7th - Andasibe Reserve



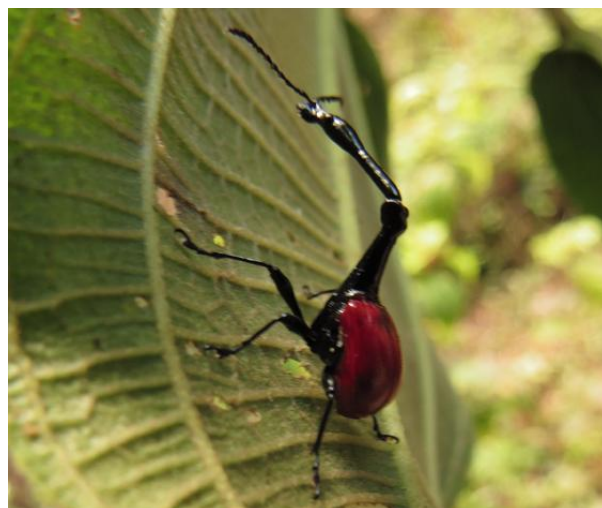
The whole of the morning and almost a couple of hours into the afternoon were all about the lemurs in the Andasibe reserve. Even as we were climbing out of the car, distant Indri could be heard over the sound of the chatter and engines. Quite a few tourist groups were assembled at the entrance, but most of the time we managed to avoid them in the forest - apart from at the occasional "lemur jam". There are three trails in the park, lasting 2, 3 and 4 hours, and our guide told us we were going to follow the latter. Excellent! The initial format seemed to be to follow the decent built trails, but much of the walking then went off piste into the thicker forest, albeit on feint trails. Three species of lemur were seen during the morning, of a potential 6 diurnal ones in the park. Not a bad return!

Indri were heard regularly, and often sounded close, although the sound is loud and carries far in the forest. The beauty of searching for these is that they have small well defined territories, so can be located by the guides, who are essential in the park, quite easily. We were shown to both of the groups which were allowed to be found (many others are off limits for conservation reasons). The first were right over our heads on a decent trail, and lounged for some time quite contentedly. Then for some reason they started to call - this was as loud as a claxon - seriously! We watched them for some time, along with a group of mixed lemur watchers, before we were ushered by our guide to find the other group. A deal of wading through denser vegetation ensued, but was well worth the effort, with a group of 4 adults and a playful youngster, which didn't stray far from mother.

By the time we saw the Indri, we had already chalked up two other species of lemur. The Grey Bamboo Lemur was not far along the track from the entrance, and in a dense bamboo thicket beside the track. It took some time to get good views, but was worth the effort. A pair of Red-bellied Lemurs had to be worked for. They were down a muddy trail in the forest, and above us in thicker canopy. One was glimpsed regularly for some time, before the pair were located and seen snuggling up for a kip.

Birds were seen at regular intervals, the main obstacle being the thick vegetation. A pair of mating Coucals, Blue Pigeons at the top of trees, and a Turtle Dove on the track were early and easy. Later in the morning, a mixed flock of Paradise Flycatchers, Red-tailed Vanga, and White-eyes were in the lower trees around us. Harder birds to pin down were Blue Coua flying through, Spectacled Tetraka and 2 separate Common Newtonias

keeping to the foliage, and a Blue Vanga showing briefly but well. Thankfully, at the end of the walk, Souimanga Sunbird and Crested Drongo were much easier. In addition to the birds, our guide pointed out some incredible Giraffe-necked Weevils on their favourite type of tree, and a nocturnal Tree Boa lazing beside a wall.



After a well earned lunch at a restaurant overlooking the river, we were taken to Lemur Island, which is a private "reserve" owned by the Vakona Lodge, the usual accommodation for tour groups visiting the area. I am usually very anti any captive animals, and this visit had been laid on by the tour company, but I stretched this for our visit, since the animals present had once been captive in homes across the island, and then shipped here, where they roam free on a small water locked enclave. While still not free in the true sense of the word, the small group of mixed Lemurs (we saw Black and White Ruffed, Grey Bamboo, Red-fronted and Common Brown), were not only apparently content with their lot, but you had to question who was playing with who as they voluntarily clambered over various types of foreigner eager to take their souvenir pics (ok, a couple also snapped by yours truly, but only because the Lemurs made me!). If you can put up with a group of tourists cooing and salivating over some conversely terrific animals up close for an hour or so, it's not such a bad place should your itinerary bring you here, although it adds nothing to the wild experience we were after for the most of the trip.



The second nocturnal walk seemed at first to potentially look much poorer than the previous evening. It was to be along the main road, which was busy with traffic, and also busy with quite a few tour groups intent on the same idea as us. However, the flip side of many eyes worked, with an even better array of wildlife than the previous evening. Three species of lemur were spotted, with a Hairy-eared Dwarf Lemur busily scurrying amongst fruits, preceding a much more somnolescent and obliging Goodman's Mouse Lemur. A trio of Eastern Woolly Lemurs, one carrying a baby, were darting around further along the road, with a second Hairy-eared Dwarf Lemur in tow.

Only one chameleon tonight, another Nose-horned, but pride of place amongst the reptiles was a Malagasy Cat Snake, showing off its arboreal prowess in the same tree. Green tree frogs were again present and numerous, with a couple of stick insects and one or two other insects for backing to the show.



Tuesday, 8th - Mantadia

Just when you thought you had had the best day for wildlife the day before - granted it was the first day with no yardstick for comparison - along comes another one to challenge the notion. The second of the two full days in the Andasibe area was planned to be a morning at Mantadia. This is a huge reserve, dwarfing Andasibe by many fold. It is also more difficult to see the wildlife here, due to the size and spread of the groups. The drive from Andasibe takes well over an hour, due in whole to the very rough road linking the two. We were lucky to be in a 4x4, which soaked up some of the ruts. When we arrived at the entrance, there were a couple of mini buses pulled up alongside deep mud with a job on of turning. The "facilities" are also interesting, consisting of no more than a hole in the wall for a toilet surrounded by three walls and a roof. No door of course.



There are some well laid out tracks to follow from here, but as with yesterday, some of the wildlife had to be searched for off piste. The forest is fairly thick, but not impenetrable, which leads to some interesting detours. Things started well, after finally pinning down a Cuckoo-roller through a window in the canopy, and a Tylas Vanga while waiting for the guide to return from searching for a nightjar. Thus led to a small climb and the reward of a small group of Common Brown Lemurs. They were unperturbed by our presence, feeding peacefully on the trees in front of us.

We descended back down to the main track, with the guide hoping for a glimpse of Sifakas. These are also quite difficult to track down, but progress was good with various good birds in the menu. A Pygmy Kingfisher was at eye height for some time over the main track, and a short diversion found a stunning Blue Coua. The only real bird party we came across was predictably led by White-eyes, but added Paradise-flycatchers and a couple of Nuthatch Vangas which had been missed yesterday. A white male Paradise-flycatcher was seen much later in the morning. Before reaching an open track and direct sunlight, a small group of Lesser Vasa Parrots was generally very approachable. The open track passed almost hidden Brush Warblers in the undergrowth, and ended at a small pool, which had a pair of Madagascar Grebes at the rear. A single Common Brown Lemur was in trees to the side, and Madagascar Spine-tailed Swifts and single Madagascar Bee-eater over head.

Returning to the forest was a brilliant move. We should have been heading for the vehicle by now, but we then came across another guide who had seen Sifaka further down the tracks. Passing a Blue Vanga on the way, we went up smaller tracks and were lucky enough to find the small group of 8 Diademed Sifakas. We were the only observers in the half an hour or so that we followed them in the forest, even coming across our first few leaches. A dose of 50% deet soon sorted them out! The Sifakas entertained throughout, including a very young baby trying its climbing skills. They were often either just above us or only metres away. A real treat.

The return to the vehicle found a few Magpie Robins, a Long-billed Bernieria, and finally a Madagascar Cuckoo which could be located finally. They had been calling regularly throughout the trek, and only poked out of the canopy this once. When near the entrance, the guide spotted a Fosa just off the track. A little too quick for me at the back, but seen briefly by my wife. She now has the stick to beat me with!

The Palmarium



The second part of the trip was disappointing in many ways. We had an extended stay from 3 to 4 nights at the hotel, which is on the island of Ankanin'ny Nofy in Lake Ampetabe, with the plan of looking for more lemurs, and some birding in the down time. The bad news was that the lemurs on the island had all been imported from elsewhere on the island, and while now free roaming on the "reserve", they were anything but the WILDLIFE we were looking for. It was so bad that the staff would coerce them down with bananas, and even on to people's shoulders and arms. In addition, the close community

of different species, which would normally occupy different habitats and usually not meet, had even interbred to form hybrids. Pretty, but not natural. For anyone who wants down time with some touchable lemurs thrown in, this would be as well accepted as with the tourists around who seemed to lap it up.



Some birding should have compensated to a degree, but was also disappointing. The hotel is backed by a small and fairly thick forest, with some more open land once out of the tree boundary. There were some birds present, but not in the numbers which could have been expected. The most common species by sight and sound was Sourimanga Sunbird, with lesser numbers of Madagascar Bulbul. Outside of these, birds were hard to come by. Madagascar Coucals could often be heard, but were seen only once when venturing beyond the forest. 2 separate Crested Coucals were seen well, one in the vicinity of the accommodation, the other within the forest. Separate Madagascar Green Sunbirds were seen on the last morning, but pride of place for experience must go to the France's Sparrowhawk. It was spotted by one of the staff who saw it land on a branch to take a chameleon almost above us. It



was hanging upside down in the air for some time, with one foot grasping the stricken reptile, with the prey clinging on to the branch. Once standing, the tugging and probing with the hooked beak went on for several minutes, before the bird flew off with its prize. The exit from here was by boat, on a 3 hour long journey across the lake to Tamatave. This was on both open water and through channels. There were surprisingly few water birds during the whole journey, with only Madagascar Bee-eaters and Crested Drongos for much of the way. Nearing Tamatave, there were many more channels, with the additional bonus of 6 Madagascar Kingfishers perched occasionally. An even bigger surprise was the sound of Madagascar Nightjars around the airport, with one on the ground in front of the perimeter fence.



SPECIES SEEN

Meller's Duck	<i>Anas melleri</i>
2 over lake Ampisabe, on the boat transfer to Palmarium	
Madagascar Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus pelzelni</i>
2 at Mantadia, on a small lake surrounded by trees	
Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
16 Nairobi airport, most of which were in a channel and seen from the tAndesibeing plane	
Madagascar Ibis	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>
1 Andasibe, where it was startled next to a river in the forest and flew off	
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
1 Andasibe Hotel paddies	
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Fairly common in paddies on journey to Andasibe ; 2 rice paddies in Tana	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
2 from IC Hotel, Tana; fairly common in paddies on journey to Anasibe	
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Nairobi – 1 standing motionless next to runway, seen from terminal	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
1 in paddies on journey to Andasibe; 1 on boat to Tamatave	
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
5 together in paddies on outskirts of Tana, seen from car while leaving for Andesibe	
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
1 in paddies on journey to Andasibe	
Frances's Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter francesiae</i>
1 took chameleon at Palmarium. It was first seen hanging upside down clinging on to the reptile, eventually righting itself and flying off with the prize from just outside of the reception	
	
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
1 Nairobi airport	
Madagascar Buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>
1 over Andesibe forest	
Malagasy Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>
1 from IC Hotel, Tana, when it landed on a TV aerial briely	
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
1 Nairobi – perched on a post for some time before skimming off low over the scrub next to the adjacent nature park	
White-fronted Plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus</i>
1 Palmarium, on a remote beach next to the annexe	
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>
5 Nairobi airport	
Malagasy Turtle Dove	<i>Nesoenas picturata</i>
1 Andasibe	
	

Madagascar Blue Pigeon

Alectroenas madagascariensis

2, 1 Andasibe



Lesser Vasa Parrot

Coracopsis nigra

4 Mantadia

Malagasy Coucal

Centropus toulou

Pair Andasibe, 3 Palmarium. In addition, their calls were commonly heard, even at night on the nocturnal walks



Crested Coua

Coua cristata

One bird was seen each of the three days at the Palmarium - there were probably 2 individuals seen



Blue Coua

Coua caerulea

1 briefly seen flying across a clearing at Andasibe ;1 at Mantadia was seen much more clearly within the forest



Madagascar Cuckoo

Cuculus rochii

1 seen at Mantadia, many calling

Madagascar Nightjar

Caprimulgus madagascariensis

1 Tamatave airport, where at least 2 were heard calling at dusk, and then one was seen next to the runway

Madagascar Spinetail

Zonavena grandidieri

2 Andasibe; 6 Mantadia

African Palm Swift





Cypsiurus parvus

Quite common Nairobi airport

Malagasy Black Swift

Apus balstoni

2 over water at Andasibe Hotel

Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Common Nairobi airport	
Cuckoo Roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>
1 Mantadia – their call was common each morning in Andasibe and Mantadia, but they were difficult to see, keeping to the high canopy of the forests	
Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis madagascariensis</i>
1 Mantadia	
Malagasy Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis vintsioides</i>
1 Mantadia flying away from us along stream; 1 between banks in channel on boat transfer to the Palmarium; 6 in channel on boat to Tamatave	
Olive Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>
1 from IC Hotel, Tana; 1 Mantadia; 2 over channel towards Palmarium ; 2 from boat on way to Tamatave	
Red-tailed Vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>
1 Andasibe, in mixed flock consisting mainly of White-eyes	
Hook-billed Vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>
Family of about 4 Palmarium in the small forest, seen early evening next to the main track	
	
Blue Vanga	<i>Cyanolanius madagascarinus</i>
1 Andasibe; 1 Mantadia	
Tylas Vanga	<i>Tylas eduardi</i>
1 Mantadia	
Nuthatch Vanga	<i>Hypositta corallirostris</i>
2 Mantadia	
	
Common Newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>
2 separate birds Andasibe	
Madagascar Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>
1 Mantadia	
	

Crested Drongo

Dicrurus forficatus

Pair Andasibe; 1 on track to Vakona Lodge; 2 Mantadia; 4 singles from boat on way to Tamatave



Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher

Terpsiphone mutata

1 male, 2 females, and white male with female in mixed flock Andasibe; about 8 Mantadia, including white male



Pied Crow

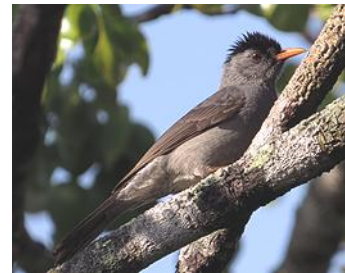
Corvus albus

Common around Nairobi airport

Malagasy Bulbul

Hypsipetes madagascariensis

1 in grounds of Andasibe Hotel; 5 Andasibe; common Mantadia; 4 Palmarium



Mascarene Martin

Phedina borbonica

At least one amongst a small number of martins from IC Hotel, Tana

Black Sawwing

Psalidoprocne pristoptera

2 Nairobi airport

Malagasy Brush Warbler

Nesillas typical

3 Mantadia, where they were skulking and very difficult to pick out

Long-billed Bernieria

Bernieria madagascariensis

1 Mantadia

Spectacled Tetraka

Xanthomixis zosterops

1 Andasibe

Rand's Warbler

Randia pseudozosterops

1 singing at the top of a high tree in the parking area at Mantadia as we arrived

Malagasy White-eye

Zosterops maderaspatanus

1 in grounds of Andasibe Hotel; quite common Andasibe; common Mantadia



Common Myna

Acridotheres tristis

About 30 from IC Hotel, Tana; regular on journey from Tana to Andasibe 1 Palmarium

Superb Starling

Lamprotornis superbus

Groups of 3 and about 8 Nairobi Airport

Red-winged Starling

Onychognathus morio

1 Nairobi airport

Madagascar Magpie-Robin

Copsychus albospectularis

2 separate birds Vakona Lodge area; 3 Mantadia



Madagascar Stonechat

Saxicola sibilla

1 from IC Hotel, Tana; 1 in grounds of Andasibe Hotel; pair Andasibe Hotel; 1 Mantadia

Souimanga Sunbird

Cinnyris sovimanga

Pair Andasibe, Pair Vakona Lodge area; 2 Mantadia; common palmarium



Malagasy Green Sunbird

Cinnyris notatus

Separate male and female Palmarium



Nelicourvi Weaver

Ploceus nelicourvi

1 male on way to Mantadia

Red Fody

Foudia madagascariensis

Females Andasibe Hotel



Forest Fody

Foudia omissa

4 Mantadia



Madagascar Wagtail

Motacilla flaviventris

1 from IC Hotel, Tana; 3 Andasibe Hotel; 1 Mantadia



African Pied Wagtail

Lamprotornis superbis

1 Nairobi airport

TOTAL SPECIES = 64

MAMMALS LIST

Hairy-eared Dwarf Lemur

Allocebus trichotis

2 night walk on second evening Andisibe. The first was one of the first finds of the evening, on its own feeding on fruits. The second was with the Woolly Lemurs on the opposite side of the road

Goodman's Mouse Lemur

Microcebus lehilahytsara

Single individuals were seen on both of the night walks at Andisibe. The first was very active and seen within the forest. The second was quite the opposite, dozing in a low bush at the side of the road, unperturbed by its human onlookers



Brown Lemur

Eulemur fulvus

3, 1 Mantadia. A group of 3 were seen early on in the morning, feeding very close to us and at eye level from a meagre track up a bank. The second was on its own, feeding half way up a tall tree next to the pond containing grebes

Red-bellied Lemur

Eulemur rubriventer

2 Andasibe. Initially very active, this pair had to be tracked down well off the track, where they were above the group and difficult to make out. They eventually moved into more open canopy, which wasn't too high, and settled down in a ball to sleep



Grey Bamboo Lemur

Haplemur griseus

1 Andasibe. This was the first of our diurnal lemurs, and was situated only a few metres from the open track. Problem was that it feeding in dense bamboo, which while not high was very dense. A bit of patience revealed the animal, but still through gaps in the bamboo

Eastern Woolly Lemur

Avahi laniger

3 Andasibe night walk. These were in a group and very busily feeding and scurrying up and down the trees from the road. One had a baby attached

Indri

Indri indri

3, 5 Andasibe. Of the 62 family groups of Indri in the Andisibe reserve, only two are allowed approach, and they are generally easy to find, sue to their small territories. We saw both groups, the second with a baby, and the first demonstrated the power in their call by opening up in the trees right above our heads



Diademed Sifaka

Propithecus diadema

8 Mantadia. This group was probably the most satisfying of all the lemurs which we saw. We had spent nearly 5 hours in the forest and came across a couple with guide who had recently seen a lone Sifaka. We tried to locate the position, which was a few hundred metres away, and on a small track, but were lucky enough to find the whole group. We stayed with them for around half an hour, where they were content to go about their business at very close quarters for the whole time. As with the Indri, there was also a baby in this group