

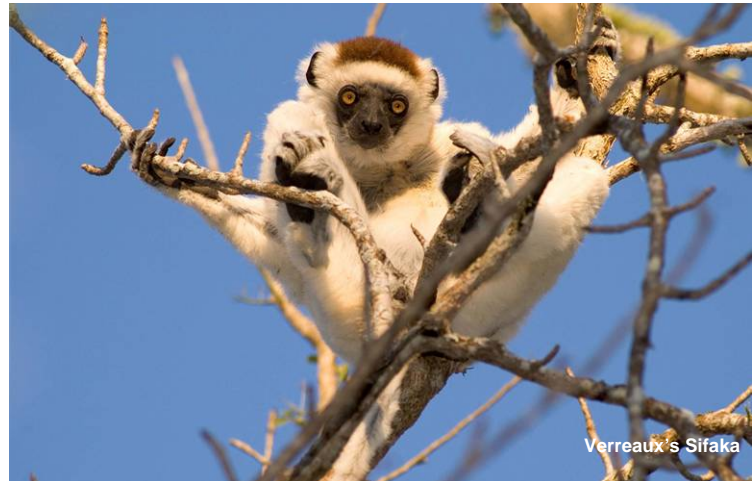
Madagascar's Lemurs

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

2009 & 2010

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Tana
Day 2/3	Berenty
Day 4	Fort Dauphin
Day 5/6	Isalo
Day 7/9	Ranomafana
Day 10	Antsirabe
Day 11/13	Andasibe (Périnet)
Day 14	Depart Tana
Day 15	Arrive London



Verreaux's Sifaka

Paul Stanbury

Dates

Wednesday 14th October - Wednesday 28th October 2009

Wednesday 29th September - Wednesday 13th October 2010

Wednesday 13th October - Wednesday 27th October 2010

Cost

£3,495 (London/London); £2,895 (Tana/Tana)

Single room supplement

£795

Grading

Grade B. Easy to moderate day walks only

Focus

Lemurs, other mammals and birds



Indri

Nick Garbutt



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

The island of Madagascar is truly a lost world, an experiment in evolution that pushed forward in complete isolation from the rest of the natural world for 165 million years. Today, over 80% of all life here is endemic, occurring nowhere else on Earth, its uniqueness and ecological importance cannot be overstated. Although these unique ecosystems have suffered badly from the march of humankind, Madagascar still retains a wonderful network of national parks and other protected areas home to a wealth of birds, reptiles and, of course, lemurs. Following on from the great success of our existing 23-day tour, we are delighted now to offer an alternative itinerary; a 15-day dedicated lemur-watching holiday that visits four of Madagascar's very best wildlife reserves, Berenty, Ranomafana, Isalo and Andasibe (Périnet). Here we will spend our time in search of these most endearing of primates whilst enjoying the wealth of other animal and plantlife that calls this unique island home.

NB: Please note that the following itinerary is based on Air Madagascar's current internal flight schedule. Should they change their flight timings, or days of travel, over the next few months we may need to amend our itinerary accordingly.

Day 1

Wednesday

Antananarivo

We depart Heathrow (or regional airport) early morning on an Air France flight to Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport. We then connect with a mid-morning flight to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, arriving around 2230 hours. On arriving at Madagascar's international airport we will clear immigration and customs and transfer to a comfortable hotel, your base for the first night of the tour.

Day 2

Thursday

Berenty

An early morning flight from Tana to Fort Dauphin gives plenty of time for the drive out to the Berenty reserve, a journey of around 4-5 hours. Although the road is bad, the scenery is varied and dramatic from the cultivated paddies and fields around Fort Dauphin to the transitional and Spiny Forests of Andohahela National Park. As we near Berenty the landscape flattens out and we will start to pass through the endless tracks of Sisal, a crop which has blighted this area of Madagascar and led to the destruction of so much of the native habitat.

Berenty private reserve is set besides the Mandrare River amid Tamarind gallery forest and spiny forest. There is an extensive network of easy-to-walk paths which makes wildlife viewing straightforward and as such Berenty is an excellent introduction to Madagascar's varied animal and plantlife. Berenty is world famous, however, for its confiding lemurs and the familiarity of the animals to humans makes observation endlessly rewarding with many wonderful photo opportunities. Here we will see the first members of this endearing family of primates and

spend much of our time watching and studying the behaviour of the resident Ring-tailed Lemur and Verreaux's Sifaka troops.

In the evening we will take a nocturnal walk looking for Grey Mouse Lemur and White-footed Sportive Lemur. We also hope to see a few nocturnal birds including Madagascar Nightjar and Torotoroka Scops Owl and maybe another mammal or two such as Small Indian Civet or Lesser Hedgehog Tenrec. We will spend the next two nights in comfortable bungalow accommodation.

Days 3 & 4

Friday - Saturday

Berenty / Fort Dauphin

We now have two days to enjoy the lemurs and birds of Berenty. The reserve belongs to Jean D'Heulme, whose father established sisal plantations in the region in the 1930's. Some small pockets of spiny desert and gallery forest were saved from plantation, and the gallery forest harbours dense populations of Ring-tailed Lemurs, Verreaux's Sifakas and the (introduced) Red-fronted Brown Lemur. It is also good for birds and we hope to see to see such species as Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, Sickle-billed and White-headed Vangas, Giant Coua, Broad-billed Roller, Souimanga Sunbird and many others. But above all the joy of Berenty is observing the troops of Ring-tailed Lemurs either high in the tamarind trees or as they move along the ground. At this time of year the females will be carrying young on their backs and during breakfast we may well get to see the celebrated 'dancing lemurs', the Sifakas of Berenty which untypically come down to the ground to cross in crab-wise hops between the trees.

As well as lemurs, Berenty protects a wide range of other animals. We should find Australati Chameleon and Jewel Chameleon and, if fortunate, the large Ground Boa. The reserve also has a protected area for Radiated and Spider tortoises confiscated from smugglers and kept before being returned to the wild. We will spend the night of Day 3 at the Berenty Bungalows and the night of Day 4 at a comfortable hotel in Fort Dauphin

Day 5

Sunday

Isalo National Park

This morning we will transfer back to Fort Dauphin Airport for the short flight to Tulear (also known as Toliara) on Madagascar's south-western coastline. On arrival we will head out of the town and begin our drive to Isalo National Park (good tarmac all the way!), our stepping-stone to Ranomafana National Park. Our journey takes us through a gently undulating landscape of dry semi-desert habitat dotted with baobabs and herds of Zebu cattle. After a couple of hours the dry grasslands suddenly give way to a patch of verdant forest. This is the Zombitse reserve, a protected fragment of dry western transitional forest that is soon to be declared a National Park. Depending on the time we may have the opportunity for a brief stop here, but please be aware that we are liable to be passing through Zombitse during the heat of the day and the wildlife is unlikely to be very obliging!

It is another hour and a half or so to Isalo National Park, but the nearer we get the more spectacular the scenery becomes. En route we will pass through the sprawling community of Ilakaka. Almost overnight this small village swelled from a population of only 200 people to over 20,000 people with the discovery of sapphires. Sadly crime is now rife and with no provision for fuel, the miners have all but cleared-felled the trees. It is an interesting but disturbing sight! Nearing our destination we will start to see the first rocky outcrops and

monoliths that mark the southern edge of the Isalo Massif. We aim to arrive at our very comfortable lodge, set amongst a myriad of rocky pinnacles, by late afternoon or early evening.

Day 6

Monday

Isalo National Park

The Isalo massif is a huge area of Jurassic sandstone that has been calved by the wind and rain into spectacular gorges and gullies. For those who wish, we will start our day with an early morning bird walk around the lodge grounds in search of such colourful species as Benson's Rock Thrush, Madagascar Bee-eater, Broad-billed Roller, Madagascar Hoopoe, Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher and Grey-headed Lovebird. We will then collect our park guide and drive into the park itself. We are likely to undertake two walks today, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. There are a variety of interesting walks to choose from such as the Piscine Naturelle, which leads to a refreshing dip in a natural freshwater spring and the Canyon de Singe, at the entrance of which there are often a troop of Verreaux's Sifaka. The grasslands bordering the massif are full of Madagascar Larks and Madagascar Cisticola and we will also look out for some of the plant life endemic to this special biotype including the strange Elephant's Foot (*pachypodium Roselatum*) and the Isalo Aloe. It is likely to be very hot here so we will return to the lodge for a drink and siesta in the heat of the early afternoon.

Day 7

Tuesday

Ranomafana

Today we must complete the long drive our next destination, the Ranomafana National Park. Today's drive is longer (around 7 hours or more), but rewarding nevertheless. Leaving the Isalo Massif behind we continue on Route National 7 which climbs onto the Horocombe Plateau, a barren treeless area dominated by coarse grasses and dotted with hundreds of red termite hills. The endless grasslands here are home to Madagascar Bush Lark, Pied Crows, Yellow-billed Kites, but little else, although they are the best place to scan the horizons for the localised Reunion Harrier. As we near Ambalavao the scenery becomes even more imposing as the road passes through vast grassy plains flanked by huge domes of granite (known as inselbergs), the most striking of which has twin towers of rock called the 'Door to the South' (Varavarana Ny Atsimo).

We are now entering some of Madagascar's most beautiful scenery, although with very little natural vegetation remaining, the wildlife interest along this stretch is limited. We will, however, stop at the newly opened reserve at Anja; set in a magnificent scenery of granitic inselbergs. Anja was protected, and is now run, by the local community and is a wonderful example of local people helping to protect their local wildlife. The reserve protects several troops of very confident Ring-tailed Lemurs and provides an interesting contrast to the Ring-tails we would have seen earlier at Berenty. There are also plenty of birds and reptiles to look for and our first opportunity to look for another bizarre Malagasy inhabitant, the bizarre pink Flatid Leaf-Bug. As we near Fianarantsoa, Madagascar's second city and centre of education (Fianarantsoa means "place of good learning"), the dry landscapes of the western region gradually gives way to the terraced hillsides and green rice fields of the Hauts Plateau.

Shortly after Fianarantsoa we must sadly leave the tarmac and turn west along the Route Nationale 25, a dirt and potholed road that will lead us to the village of Ranomafana approximately 2 hours later. A spectacular view

south over the Namorona waterfalls signals our arrival at the Ranomafana National Park where we have three nights at a basic, but comfortable, ecolodge.

Days 8 - 9

Wednesday - Thursday

Ranomafana

We have two full days to explore the Ranomafana National Park and discover the bewildering diversity of endemic plant and animal life it protects. During our stay we will take day walks into the forest where we hope to see a wide variety of lemur species including the attractive Milne-Edwards Diademed Sifaka (the heaviest lemur in the park at 6kg), plus Red Bellied Lemur, Red-Fronted Brown Lemur, Greater Bamboo Lemur, Lesser Bamboo Lemur, and the recently discovered (1986) Golden Bamboo Lemur. During one evening we will return to the 'Belle View' observation point to look for the habituated Rufous Mouse Lemurs and Fanaloka (Malagasy Striped Civet) that come here most nights in the anticipation of being fed. The feeding of the animals by park rangers was actually stopped several years ago, but the animals still stop by just in case! Whilst the spot can become quite crowded with other visitors, it does give the best opportunity to view these otherwise elusive animals and the walk up and down may yield other nocturnal inhabitants of the forests such as chameleons, frogs and perhaps one of the leaf-tailed geckos.

Ranomafana is also one of Madagascar's birdwatching hotspots and in the forest we will look out for rare and elusive species such as Brown Mesite, Madagascar WoodRail, Pollen's Vanga, Crossley's Babbler (Vanga), Pitta-like Ground Roller, Velvet Asity, White-Throated Oxylabes, Red-Fronted Coua, Grey-Crowned Greenbul and many other endemics. The forests here are dense, the trails are steep and narrow and much of the wildlife is very shy so a great deal of patience is required when searching out these mammalian and avian specialties. We will be accompanied by two of the park's top wildlife guides, however, so such effort and patience rarely goes unrewarded! For those who wish, we will also find time to visit the nearby Vohiparara site which is more marshy and where we may find Brown and Grey Emutail, Rufous-headed Ground Roller and Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity. During our walks we will also be on the lookout for a wealth of other spectacular and bizarre wildlife to be found in these lush forests. With luck these may include the beautiful Comet Moth, one of the largest in the world, Green Day Geckos and the bizarre Giraffe-necked Weevil.

Day 10

Friday

Antsirabe

We must make an early start this morning to begin the long drive to Antsirabe, our overnight stop on the way to Andasibe and Mantadia. Our journey will take us through the cool highlands of Hauts Plateaux, an attractive landscape of terraced hillsides and broad valleys cultivated by the Merina peoples. En route will pass through the town of Ambositra (pronounced 'Amb-oost') and a variety of other interesting towns and villages before arriving at Antsirabe late in the afternoon or early evening. Though the word Antsirabe actually means 'the place of much salt', the town was originally founded here due to the appealing cool climate and the presence of a hot spring. We overnight at a comfortable hotel.

Day 11

Saturday

Andasibe

This morning we will continue our journey to the rainforest reserves of Andasibe (Périnet) and Mantadia. After retracing our steps back to Tana, our route turns east through a relatively productive agricultural region with fairly typical highland scenery of terraced slopes and flooded rice paddies in the valley bottoms. Eventually, however, the road begins its winding descent to the East Coast, when we will start to see patches of rainforest on the steeper slopes. We will pass through a variety of small colourful villages, all thronging with life and many with unpronounceable names such as Ambohimanagekely, Ambohimahandry and Manjakandriana. We aim to arrive at Andasibe mid to late afternoon, and if time permits will make arrangements for a night walk to spot Small-toothed Sportive Lemur, Eastern Woolly Lemur, Lowland Streaked Tenrec and a variety of reptiles and amphibians.

In the evening we will head out into the forest on a night walk in search of Eastern Woolly Lemur and Rufous Mouse Lemurs. Although a rare sight indeed, past Naturetrek groups have been fortunate enough to find the most bizarre of the lemur family here, the Aye-Aye. Sightings of Aye-Ayes have been on the increase over the past few years and although we may be fortunate again they are still a rare treat. For our 3 nights at Andasibe we will stay at a comfortable forest lodge.

Day 12

Sunday

Andasibe

Today we rise early to visit the reserve in order to see the Indri (*Indri indri*), Madagascar's largest and most vocal lemur whose eerie cries, once heard, are never forgotten. They are also one of the world's most attractive primates and are frequently likened to large black and white teddy bears! Each year presents a different aspect of the life of this large primate. Some years we have been treated to spectacular family singing contests, whereas in other years the Indri were silent but came to the ground within a few feet to eat soil. Last year we were fortunate to be treated to wonderfully close views of this beautiful creature along with early morning singing.....who knows what this year may bring? Incidentally, the word Indri is actually Malagasy for "look!" The early French explorer and naturalist, Pierre Sonnerat, heard his local Malagasy guide point at a lemur in a tree and took the word to be the animals name. The Malagasy name for the Indri is 'Babakoto'.

After watching the Indri we will have time to take the reserve trails at a relaxed pace, watching birds and possibly catching a sight of other lemurs such as Red-bellied Lemur, Brown Lemur and Lesser Bamboo Lemur. Amongst the birdlife we will look out for are Collared Nightjar, Red-fronted Coua, Red-breasted Coua, Malagasy Pygmy Kingfisher, Blue Vanga, Nuthatch Vanga, Velvet Asity, Madagascar Starling, and the Pitta-like Ground Roller. The rainforest here is also a good site for reptiles such as the Madagascar Boa Constrictor, Parson's Chameleon and Brevicornis Chameleon. We spend our second night at the forest lodge.

Day 13

Monday

Andasibe

The Andasibe reserves complex includes two distinct protected areas. The special reserve of Analamazaotra (Périnet) is the most well know of the two and protects the Indri, whilst the lesser known Mantadia National

Park, a much larger area of primary rainforest (10,000 hectares), is also well worth exploring. Mantadia was declared a national park in 1991 and we will visit this reserve to find two lemur species not found in Analamazaotra, the Diademed Sifaka and Black and White Ruffed Lemur.

The forests of Mantadia are some of the most diverse in all of Madagascar and, although the wildlife can be difficult to see on occasion and the terrain is tough, visits here are to be treasured. There are few relatively accessible places in Madagascar that offer such a fantastic pristine rainforest experience. Grey Bamboo Lemurs are frequently seen and with a little patience we hope to find the Diademed Sifaka, widely regarded as the most beautiful of all lemur species. The Black and White Ruffed Lemur are more difficult to find, however, and are more frequently heard than seen, for whilst Périnet has numerous paths criss-crossing the forest there are relatively few in Mantadia and much of the forest here is inaccessible to visitors.

Mantadia also holds a wonderful variety of rare and endemic birds. This is the best area in which to look for two of the most elusive ground-rollers, Short-legged Ground Roller and Scaly Ground Roller along with other species such as White-throated Rail, Madagascar Crested Ibis, Pitta-like Ground Roller, Common Sunbird-Asity, Velvet Asity, Madagascar Blue Pigeon, Madagascar Partridge, Red-breasted Coua, Red-fronted Coua, Blue Coua, Nuthatch Vanga, Blue Vanga, Forest Fody and the rare Collared Nightjar whose call is still unknown. We will also try to organise a night walk at Mantadia to look for Greater Dwarf Lemur, Eastern Woolly Lemur, Rufous Mouse Lemur, Madagascar Long-eared Owl and perhaps one of the wonderfully named Satanic Leaf-tailed Geckos (*Uroplatus phantasticus*). We spend our final night at the forest lodge.

Days 14 - 15

Tuesday - Wednesday

In Flight

After lunch, we return to Tana (to arrive late afternoon) so there should be a little time for some last minute souvenir shopping. Later in the evening we will transfer to rooms at a comfortable hotel where we can repack, relax and have our evening meal before driving to Ivato International Airport for the 01.00 hrs departure of our Air France flight to Paris. On arrival at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris we connect with an early afternoon flight to London (or regional airport).

Tour grading

We have graded this tour B - easy to moderately difficult at times. There is no major trekking on tour, but there will be plenty of daytime walks in a variety of Malagasy habitat types and in some of the major forest reserves of Madagascar we will organise night-walks to see nocturnal lemurs, reptiles and birds. All walks are optional and taken at a leisurely pace, but they will often be over hilly, rocky or forested terrain, and in hot, humid conditions. Please note that since animal activity dies away quite quickly after the first few hours of daylight we will need to make full use of the early hours and so early starts will be encouraged.

Please note that the trails at Ranomafana and Mantadia are steep, narrow, covered in roots and slippery after rain. Walking here is in single file and can be very tiring. Walking boots are a must and some people may find a trekking pole useful.

It should also be noted that there are several long vehicle journeys included in this tour, especially to and from Ranomafana. Madagascar's top wildlife sites are well spread out and so one or two long drives cannot be avoided if you wish to see a good cross-section of the islands habitats and wildlife. When travelling in Madagascar it is necessary to accept that the roads may be poor on occasion, the journeys long and uncomfortable, and the internal airlines may not always leave exactly on time! Likewise, whilst we will provide comfortable lodge accommodation (with private facilities) throughout, it must be stressed that Madagascar is a very poor country and has yet to establish the same standard of tourist facilities found in other African destinations. What is needed more than anything, therefore, is a good sense of adventure and if you come with this you are sure to enjoy the fascinating animals, birds, culture and landscapes of this unique African island.

Food and accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price. All of the hotels and lodges we use have private facilities. Please note the following points with regards to accommodation:

1. Madagascar is becoming ever more popular as a holiday destination and at present there are too few beds for the number of people who wish to visit. It is getting increasingly difficult for groups to secure an allocation of rooms and, whilst we at Naturetrek always reserve our room allocation up to two years in advance of the holiday, we do occasionally find that we do not get our first choice of hotel or lodge.

This uncertainty is compounded by the fact that hotels and lodges in Madagascar are notorious for overbooking their rooms. Although we always strive to keep our groups in the same lodge whilst exploring a park, on rare occasions it may be necessary to split the stay, or group, between two. The names of the hotels and lodges will be confirmed a little closer to the departure date but if you require any additional information on accommodation please do not hesitate to call.

2. The owners of the lodge at Berenty are considering limiting the number of nights groups and individuals can stay at the lodge due to Madagascar's increasing popularity. At present we have 2-nights confirmed for our groups and will endeavour to keep the itinerary as above. Should this change at any point we will inform you as soon as possible.

Departures from regional airports

Please note that we are happy to arrange connecting flights to and from Paris from any UK airport serviced by Air France. These currently include Heathrow, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Southampton. Departures from regional airports may incur a small additional charge, however, so please call the Naturetrek office for more information and prices.

UK/Paris/Tana Connections

The airline connection time in Paris for this Madagascar holiday is tight with only an hour or so available to change aircraft. Whilst this is a valid Air France connection, past groups have, on occasion, found it difficult to make the onward flight. Whilst we have never had a group miss the Tana flight, that potential does exist and since the next flight is two days later a missed connection would seriously disrupt the tour.

We are, therefore, strongly recommending that group members fly out to Paris the afternoon or evening before the commencement of the tour and then overnight at an airport hotel a short distance from Charles de Gaulle Airport. This would allow for a more leisurely start to the holiday and negate the need for a very early start from the UK. Although you are very welcome to book your own hotel room over the internet, Naturetrek would be very happy to arrange this additional night for you. A night (room only) at the Ibis Hotel at Charles de Gaulle Airport is currently £115 per night (twin or single and subject to change).

NB: If you decide to fly out to Paris the night before - whether or not you opt to reserve your own room - please could we ask you to contact the Naturetrek office on 01962 733051 so we can amend your outbound flight.

Mammal & bird lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Madagascar. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel or telephone 0870 6060290 regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure thoroughly and complete and return the enclosed booking form, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure please give us a call on 01962 733051, and we will gladly post one to you. Alternatively, if you have access to the internet, you are very welcome to book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk.

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