



*The incomparable Helmet Vanga was seen very well during the Masoala extension. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

# THE COMOROS & NORTHERN MADAGASCAR

**20/25 SEPTEMBER – 16 OCTOBER 2014**

**LEADER: DANI LOPEZ-VELASCO**

This was our third tour to explore some of the more remote areas of Northern Madagascar and the Comoro Islands, and although logistics (the number of broken vehicles during the tour was probably a Birdquest record!), including a major Air France strike, didn't work as smoothly as we would have hoped, we put up with all hardships, in part thanks to an excellent and understanding group. And the result was a hugely successful tour, basically enjoying excellent views of every single Comoro endemic species and future split candidates, as well as almost all key northern Madagascar targets.

Highlights on Madagascar included excellent views of (Madagascar) Red Owl – our bird of the trip, and one of 8 species of owls recorded during the tour-, the recently rediscovered Madagascan Pochard, one of the rarest birds in the world, mega views of the out-of-this-world Helmet Vanga, definitely a must-see bird, as well as Bernier's and Van Dam's Vangas, the little known Sakalava Rail, which has been seen by only a handful of birders, and the ultra elusive Slender-billed Flufftail. Other notables species such as stunning Scaly, Pitta-like and Short-legged Ground-Rollers, shy White-breasted and Brown Mesites and the unique Schlegel's Asity, to name a few, were seen well too. On the Comoro Islands, the clean-sweep of all of the endemics was very pleasing. Getting all four of the endemic scops owls was quite rewarding (with Moheli Scops Owl being a tour favourite by some!), while species such as the scarce Comoros Green Pigeon, the electric-blue Comoro Blue Vanga, the rare Grand Comoro Drongo, the stunning Comoro Blue Pigeon and the hard-to-get Karthala White-eye were also most welcome. We saw plenty of other great wildlife too, including many fabulous species of lemurs, and an incredible selection of reptiles (notably so chameleons) and amphibians – Madagascar is surely THE reptile capital of the world!



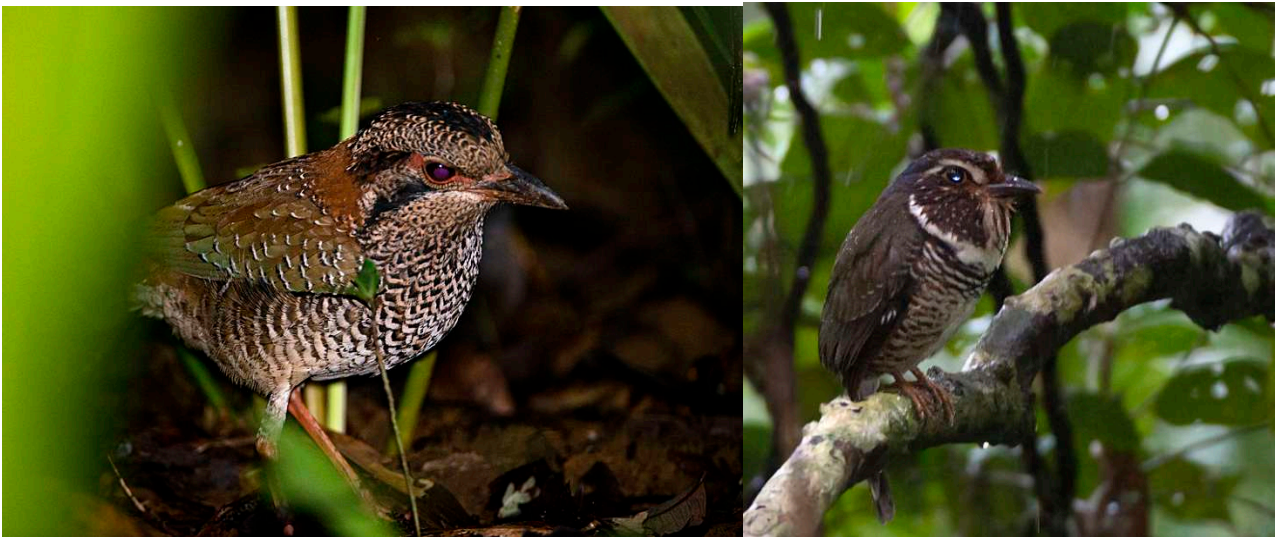
*The stunning (Madagascar) Red Owl was voted bird of the trip. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

We began the tour in Tana a day later than expected, due to an inconvenient Air France strike. Luckily, this didn't really interfere with our plans, and on our first morning we enjoyed a few hours of pleasant birding at Lac Alarobia, near Tana. Large numbers of waterbirds were present, including some real goodies such as breeding plumaged Madagascan Pond-Herons – getting rare these days-, as well as several rare Meller's Ducks. Other highlights included a pair of confiding White-throated Rails and close up views of Malagasy Kingfisher.

Afterwards we embarked in a flight to Maroantsetra. An afternoon boat trip along the estuary produced a few waders and herons, and afterwards we headed to our hotel. Just after dawn we boarded our speedboats and were soon heading out across the Bay of Antongil to our destination, the forested foothills of the mighty Masoala Peninsula. The sea was very calm, although few birds were seen. We had little in the peninsula, and lots of birds to find here, so as soon as we left our luggage in our cabins, we headed straight for the

forest. Quite unbelievably, the very first bird we saw was a stunning Helmet Vanga, our top target. What a start! This bird— an immature—, was the first of at least 5 – the rest being adults with incredibly bright blue bills— to be seen during the morning. With great relief we continued our exploration of this magnificent area. During our two days stay, we experienced some rain, but nevertheless we managed to catch up with our main targets.

The elusive Bernier's Vanga, the other vanga speciality of the peninsula, eventually showed well, after some work, as did both Short-legged Ground-Roller -of which a calling pair gave great views in the rain-, and a very tame Scaly Ground-Roller. The supporting cast was pretty good too and included a pair of Madagascar Crested Ibis walking ahead of us in the trail, a pair of Brown Mesites, several Madagascar Pratincoles, showy Rainforest Scops Owls, superb Red-breasted Couas in the open, displaying Madagascar Cuckoo-Rollers, an excellent selection of other vangas including Rufous, Blue and Hook-billed Vangas, and our first Madagascar Blue and Green Pigeons. We saw a number of other interesting creatures too, including an impressive Leaf-tailed Gecko, a few chameleons, some stunning Red Ruffed Lemurs as well as White-fronted Brown Lemurs and a delightful Lowland Streaked Tenrec. At night we enjoyed great views of Eastern Avahis (the form occurring on the Masoala might be a new, undescribed form), Grey Bamboo Lemur, Brown Mouse Lemur and Greater Dwarf Lemurs, all seen very close to the camp. It had surely been a perfect start to the trip, and very pleased with our success, we headed back to Tana.



*Both Scaly and Short-legged Ground-Rollers performed on the Masoala. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

The following day we took an early flight to Antsiranana (Diego Suarez) at the northern tip of the island, and made our way from here to Joffreville, where we stayed at a quite incredible hotel! We had that afternoon to explore the delightful Montagne d'Ambre National Park, and one of the first birds we saw as we entered the park was already our main target, the attractive and highly localized Amber Mountain Rock Thrush, which gave terrific views. Lemurs were also in evidence, with both Sanfords's Brown and Crowned Lemurs all putting on a great show, as did a very tame Ring-tailed Mongoose. We also found a number of other interesting birds, which included a very responsive Pitta-like Ground-Roller – a cracker!-, some confiding Dark Newtonias, the distinctive local *fulvenscens* form of Spectacled Tetraka and a brief Forest Fody, amongst others. We were also privileged to see one of the world's smallest chameleons, the amazing *Brookesia tuberculata* and spent some time trying (successfully for some!) finding our own! After dark, our nightwalk was very rewarding, seeing Amber Mountain Mouse Lemurs, Greater Dwarf Lemurs, as well as a selection of chameleons and geckos, including the incredible 'Satanic' Leaf-tailed Gecko.





*The highly localized Amber Mountain Rock-Thrush (lumped in Forest Rock-Thrush by some) showed this well. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

Next day we embarked upon the very long journey to Antsohihy. A quick stop at Ankarana National Park, proved to be productive, highlighted by a responsive pair of White-breasted Mesites, and on the drive south Suzanne spotted a Madagascan Tree Boa. After spending the night at Antsohihy, we left early the following morning in our Landcruisers. The journey to Bemanevika, - the Madagascan Pochard site- was surely one to forget. It took almost twice the normal time to reach the camp due to 2 of our 3 vehicles breaking down on the horrendous path, which meant we had to stay up in the camp area, without our tents and bags, until late in the evening, when miraculously one of the vehicles appeared. Thankfully, the local guys shared their dinner with us while waiting in the cold, which was much appreciated.

The main reason for our visit to this remote area was to see the critically endangered and recently rediscovered (as recently as 2006) Madagascan Pochard. We had an early breakfast and all very excited were soon on our way to the crater lake where the miracle had happened. And within seconds of arriving we had already seen the holy grail of all ducks, the mythical, thought to be extinct for decades, Madagascan Pochard. We enjoyed great views of at least 17 adults (almost 75 per cent of the world population!), with both males and females showing nicely. A few Meller's Ducks were around, and there were good numbers of Madagascan Little Grebes out in the lake too. In the marshy areas we were also pleased to see a couple of Madagascan Rails, furtive Grey Emutails and a few Madagascan Swamp Warblers, while a Malagasy Harrier put on a great aerial display above us. The biggest surprise of the day and possibly of the whole tour, came in form of the ultra rare and elusive Slender-billed Flufftail. While looking for the emutail we heard the characteristic song of one of these mega skulkers, and after a lot of time trying to lure the bird into view, a male gave a brief appearance, although unfortunately not everyone got to see it. Other good birds seen in the area included Grey-crowned Tetrakas and a couple of showy Common Sunbird-Asities. After lunch we set off to a nearby patch of forest where after some good work by our guides we were eventually lead to a roosting Red Owl. What a bird! We enjoyed stonking views of this very elusive and beautiful owl (best owl ever for a couple of participants, who had seen a very good percentage of the world's owls, so that must mean something... And not forgetting it made it to bird of the tour!). Very pleased with the day, especially after all the hassle of the previous day, we went back to camp to enjoy a well deserved dinner and rest.



*The recently rediscovered Madagascar Pochard, one of the rarest birds in the world; one of the trip highlights. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

We left early the following day, after making a generous donation to the local village as well as to the Peregrine Fund -It is hoped that revenue raised for the community through ecotourism can help convince the villagers to conserve the habitat-, and once again spent most of the day in our vehicles. One of the landcruisers again broke down (!) and we had to get another vehicle from Antsohihi, which caused some delay. This was a very slow vehicle, so we decided to leave the bags there and try to squeeze in the remaining 4x4. That was a good decision, but after a couple of hours the gear stopped working (only going from 2nd to 5th...). Anyway, thanks to our skilled driver we somehow made it to our accommodation at Ankarafantsika National Park, where we rolled into Ampijoroa Forest Station, well after dinner. A quick outing around the cabins gave us excellent views of a confiding Totoroka Scops Owl .

We were up early – it gets hot quickly here-, and headed to a nearby patch of forest, where it didn't take long before we found an amazing male Schlegel's Asity. What a stunning bird! We enjoyed terrific views of a male and a female, and also saw another White-breasted Mesite in the area. We then continued to another block of forest, where targets fell one after the other. A Coquerel's Coua was coaxed out of the dense cover where it was singing from, allowing mega views. Then, a pair of Red-capped Couas, which crossed the track in front of us and showed really well. A few mixed flocks were encountered; containing Rufous Vangas, exquisite Malagasy Paradise Flycatchers and some Long-billed Bernierias, and then we finally found our top target, the extremely localized Van Dam's Vanga. A pair was found in a mixed flock and we had great views of this rare bird. Mammals were also obvious, with delightful Coquerel's Sifakas, Western Avahis and a single Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur being the pick of the bunch. We then moved on to explore the nearby lake. Here, we managed some excellent views of a pair of critically endangered Madagascar Fish Eagles, as well as a stunning Humblot's Heron. Cold drinks and lunch were next, after which we made the drive on to Majunga, where we arrived in good time.





*Three of the star birds of Ampijoroa: Schlegel's Asity, Van Dam's Vanga and Red-capped Coua. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*



The next part of our tour took us to the remote Lac Kinkony in order to look for the rare Sakalava Rail. The ferry crossing across the estuary was uneventful; the three vehicles worked just fine and the journey to the camp wasn't as bad as expected - with a welcome stop at Katsepy lighthouse where we enjoyed great views of the endemic Crowned Sifaka -. Upon arrival at the camp we were greeted with cold beer and a BBQ, so our moods were high! Then, all of a sudden, loud music started nearby, and we were told that a respected old villager had died a couple days ago and some sort of big celebration was going on (apparently with the poor man "sitting" in the middle of the square. Given the heat, we were lucky the smell didn't reach us...!). For that reason, we didn't really get much sleep, as it was almost like being in a disco, but after coffee early

next morning we were out in pirogues, quickly forgetting about the horrible night as we watched the numerous waterbirds present in the lake. Madagascan Jacanas and Little Bitterns were much in evidence, but it was obviously the Sakalava Rails that really stole the show, giving absolutely point blank views. With such a successful morning trip, we were able to relax for much of the day, adding a couple of species from the camp in the form of Yellow-billed Stork and an unexpected Malagasy Sacred Ibis. In the late afternoon we went for a night walk – mostly to avoid the infamously loud music!! -, and enjoyed magnificent views of Madagascan Nightjar and Grey Mouse Lemur.



*We couldn't have asked for better views of the very rare Sakalava Rail! (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

The journey back to civilization went smoothly, and we even saw a Giant Coua as a bonus. Once we got back to Majunga we still had a couple of hours of daylight left, so we went to explore a small wetland near to town. Here we found more jacanas, delightful African Pygmy Geese, and best of all, a single cryptic White-backed Duck, found by Yvon, of the rare endemic race, skulking in the lilies.

The following morning we made our final excursion of the Madagascar leg of the tour: a boat trip out into the Betsiboka Estuary. On arrival at the site, the tide was just right, and we soon found good numbers of the main target, the endangered Bernier's (or Madagascar) Teal, which showed nicely. Malagasy Sacred Ibis were present in numbers, a single Saunders's Tern was seen roosting on a sandbar, several White-throated Rails were feeding in the open and a flock of Lesser Flamingos was watched at close quarters. We then had a sumptuous seafood and lobster lunch by the sea, and headed to the airport for our flight back to Tana.





*A few Bernier's Teals were seen very well at the Betsiboka river mouth. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

And now the Comoros lay ahead! The original idea was to do Mayotte first and then the other three islands, but the usual cancelled flights meant a change of plans, so Grand Comoro became our first destination. We arrived to Moroni on Grand Comoro in the afternoon, and after negotiating the rather tedious immigration we were transferred to our pleasant hotel.

Next morning we birded a forest patch not far from the hotel, where our first bunch of Comoro endemics were logged. Surprisingly, the endangered and usually difficult Grand Comoro Drongo, our main target here, was the first bird to be seen! More endemics came in form of Comoros Olive Pigeon, spotted by Pirjo, the stunning Comoro Blue Pigeon, Humblot's and Comoro Green Sunbirds and Kirk's White-eyes. We were also greeted by the endemic forms of Frances's Sparrowhawk, Madagascan Turtle Dove (already split by some) and Greater and Lesser Vasa Parrots, and we also found a few distinctive Comoro Cuckoo-Rollers. After such a successful morning outing we returned to the hotel, and in the afternoon decided to do some exploration in the southern part of the island. We quickly understood why the Comoros aren't a very popular touristic destination, as there were masses of rubbish all over the place, and very few birds (or anything of note, to be fair). A few waders were seen, as well as lots of impressive Seychelles Flying Foxes and the local race of Striated Heron. We retraced our steps and headed back to the hotel for an early dinner, as the following day was a big one: we were to make our attempt on Mount Karthala!





*Grand Comoro Drongo and the local Grand Comoro form of Frances's Sparrowhawk. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

We set off early the following day to embark upon the long trek up Mount Karthala. It wasn't especially steep, but it was long, and frequently on rock. We climbed from c360m all the way to just over 1900m and back down to the camp (which we missed on the way up due to some incompetent porters!). That's quite a long way, but the whole group did very well and we succeeded in seeing all possible endemics. As we reached good forest after a couple of hours walking, -seeing Comoro Bulbul on the way-, we started looking for the delightful Humblot's Flycatcher, and after some time we found a pair and enjoyed brilliant views of this scarce endemics. A Comoro Cuckoo-Shrike then showed very well, as did a showy Grand Comoro Brush-Warbler. Where the forest thinned out, we began to see the local endemic form of African Stonechat. It took some time (and money!) to convince the two porters who remained with us to accompany us higher up, but eventually they agreed. As we got higher still, we were thrilled and relieved to soon find the endemic Karthala White-eye, the main reason for us to climb so high up! We spent some time watching these lively birds, and after some rest, turned back and headed down to the camp, where we enjoyed a most welcome dinner. At dusk we wandered down a little way and soon had fantastic views of the cute Grand Comoro (or Karthala) Scops Owl in the spotlight. It had been quite a day, and we all happily went back to our tents for a well-deserved rest.





*A very happy group after seeing Karthala White-eye (above left). Humblot's Flycatcher also obliged (above right). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

The walk down next day was uneventful, and before lunch we were already at the hotel. In the afternoon we made another short excursion to a nearby crater lake, where as expected, there were no birds – but little rubbish for a change! Some seawatching along the coast produced good views of a female Humpback Whale with her calf fairly close to shore.

The flight to Fomboni on the small island of Moheli was rather bumpy, but we survived. By the time we arrived it was lunch time and we enjoyed some of the best lobster I've ever had in my life! With no time to lose, we then headed up to a small patch of forest above Fomboni. And despite being mid afternoon, we soon found the cracking and critically endangered Moheli Scops Owl. The beautiful cinnamon plumage and pearly white eyes give this species a highly distinctive look! Also in the area we found plenty of the different-looking local form of the Comoro Thrush, a pair of brightly coloured Comoro (Blue) Vanga, a single Moheli Bulbul (split from Comoro Bulbul), and several cooperative Moheli (or Benson's) Brush-Warblers.

There was only one Moheli endemic left, the usually difficult Comoros Green Pigeon, so next morning we visited a patch of forest which was supposed to be good for the bird. Upon arrival our spirits weren't really high, as the place didn't seem high enough for our target, but we were pleased to be proven wrong when a very cooperative green pigeon was found sitting on a tree! We admired the bird for some time, and took some good photos. We walked around for a while, seeing a couple more pigeons, and then retraced our steps.





*Critically Endangered Moheli Scops Owl was seen exceedingly well in broad daylight. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

Having cleaned up we decided to explore the coast in the afternoon. This island was definitely better looking and preserved than Grand Comoro (and Anjouan) and we enjoyed our time here. We had good views of a colony of spectacular White-tailed Tropicbirds, as well as a distant colony of Masked Boobies. Some seawatching from the hotel garden in the late afternoon was very productive, with quite a few Persian Shearwaters of the local *temptator* race seen close to shore, as well as Lesser Frigatebirds, more Masked Boobies and a few terns.

The flight to Anjouan was surprisingly almost on time, and half an hour later we arrived to the island and quickly headed to the hotel. Anjouan Sunbirds and Anjouan Brush-Warblers were present in the hotel garden, and after lunch, we made the drive to the traditional site of Lac Dzianlandzé in the highlands. On the walk to the lake we saw good numbers of the local form of Madagascan White-eye (surely a good species?) and scaly Comoro Thrushes (another distinctive endemic form), as well as a very confiding Malagasy Harrier. At dusk the owls started calling but, as Pete experienced last time, for some reason they were extremely elusive, and refused to come to the tape. We put some considerable effort, even climbing up a very steep slope from where an owl was calling, to no avail. But we don't give up that easily, and after a lot of trying, by 10 pm all of us had managed to get a decent view of the bird. What a relief! We slowly made it back to the road and eventually made it to the hotel, where a (very) late dinner was awaiting!

Having seen all endemics on our first day, we decided it to take it easy the following day. We had a lay in morning, and in the afternoon we visited a mangrove area in the south, where few birds were seen, including a Peregrine.

Next morning we headed towards our last bit of the tour, the island of Mayotte. And what a change compared to the other islands! It was clean, there were birds around, and even supermarkets! A breaching Humpback Whale just below the aircraft highlighted the flight to the island, as we were taking off (WOW!), and once we arrived, we picked up our transport and took the ferry across to the main island, seeing a few White-tailed Tropicbirds as we went. We then headed to our rural accommodation, and after checking in we

headed straight into the forest. In just a couple of hours we had all endemics on the bag! local Frances's Sparrowhawk of the local form was one of the first birds seen from the veranda, and we easily found the four endemics around our hotel: Mayotte Scops Owls in broad daylight, the striking Mayotte Drongo, the beautiful Mayotte Sunbird and the gregarious Mayotte White-eye. Comoro Blue and Comoro Olive Pigeons gave excellent photo opportunities too, so after such a successful outing it was time to put our feet up and enjoy dinner!



*All five Mayotte endemics were seen on our first afternoon, including Mayotte Scops Owl and Mayotte Drongo. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

With almost two more full days on the island, and having seen all endemics, we decided to try something different and embarked on a very pleasant, all day-long, whale-watching trip the following morning. A number of seabirds were seen, highlighted by great views of a Bulwer's Petrel – a very rare bird around here- , and a feeding frenzy containing large numbers of Brown Noddies, Greater and Lesser Crested Terns and Bridled and Common Terns. However, the real prize came in form of an unforgettable and lengthy encounter with two Humpback Whales –a mum and her calf – which stayed around the boat for as long as we wanted. We witnessed a very strange behaviour, with the females fluke sticking out of the water for more than 10 minutes at a time, and the whale itself hanging upside down, as if resting, while the calf simply swam around. Marvellous stuff! A pod of Spinner Dolphins also delighted us, and we enjoyed a great picnic lunch in a remote and pristine beach. Some of us also tried some snorkelling, and the coral reef – and its fish – was definitely world class. It had been a very enjoyable day out in the calm seas off Mayotte, and after a welcome ice-cream in the harbour, we returned to the hotel.

On our last day of the tour we took it easy and did a bit of birding on the lagoon at Petit Terre, the small island where the airport is located. On the way to the ferry we stopped at the botanical gardens, where we quickly saw the local Mayotte form of Comoro Fody. We also managed to add a new bird to our list, the cracking Crab Plover, amongst numbers of other common waders, before going to the airport. And then it was all over, and after a smooth flight to Tana, where we had what must have been our 10th meal at the only restaurant on the airport, we all headed home.





*Our close and lengthy encounter with a mum and a calf Humpback Whale off Mayotte was unforgettable. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

It had been a tough trip in some respects, but fortunately we were all up for it and sailed through it with good humour and, importantly, saw pretty much all the hoped-for birds!



*A pair of Madagascan Pratincoles with the turquoise waters of the Masoala in the background. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*





*Two endemic pigeons from the Comoros: Comoros Green Pigeon (above) and Comoro Blue Pigeon (below). (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*







*A "flying" Decken's Sifaka and the amazing Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*



## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

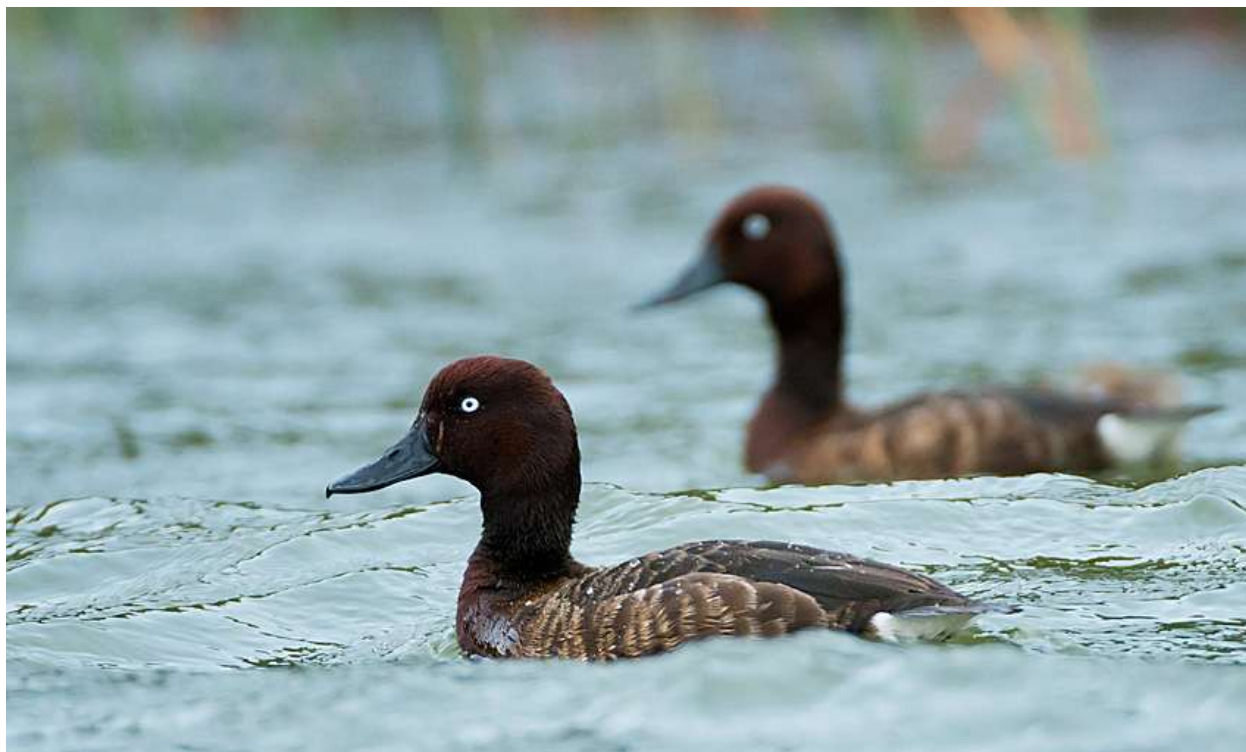
Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

**CR** = Critically Endangered, **EN** = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened, **DD** = Data Deficient.

**White-faced Whistling Duck (W-f Duck)** *Dendrocygna viduata* Common at Lac Alarobia.

**White-backed Duck** *Thalassornis leuconotus* A single bird seen well near to Majunga.

**Knob-billed Duck (Comb D)** *Sarkidiornis melanotos* Seen at various wetlands in the northwest.



*Madagascar Pochard. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*





*Bulwer's Petrel, Bridled Tern and White-tailed Tropicbirds off Mayotte. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

**African Pygmy Goose (Pygmy G) *Nettapus auritus*** Seen well near to Majunga.

**Meller's Duck** ♦ *Anas melleri* (EN) Seen at Lac Alarobia and at the pochard site.

**Bernier's Teal** ♦ (Madagascar T) *Anas bernierii* (EN) Great views in the Betsiboka estuary.

**Red-billed Teal** *Anas erythrorhyncha* Fairly common.

**Hottentot Teal** *Anas hottentota* Seen well at Lac Alarobia.

**Madagascan Pochard** ♦ *Aythya innotata* (CR) One of the tour highlights. At least 17 counted at Lac Matsiborimena.

**Helmeted Guineafowl (introduced) *Numida meleagris*** A couple of feral individuals seen.

**Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* (H) Heard at Mt Karthala.

**Bulwer's Petrel** *Bulweria bulwerii* One bird seen very well and photographed on a boat trip off Mayotte.

**Persian Shearwater** ♦ (Arabian S) *Puffinus persicus* Several seen well off Moheli. Subspecies *temptator*.

**Little Grebe (Dabchick)** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Small numbers recorded.

**Madagascan Grebe** ♦ *Tachybaptus pelzelinii* (V) At least 25 seen well at the pochard lake.

**Lesser Flamingo** *Phoeniconaias minor* Several seen in the Betsiboka estuary.

**White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus* Great views in Anjouan and Mayotte (nominate).

**Yellow-billed Stork** *Mycteria ibis* A single bird in flight over Lac Kinkony.

**African Openbill (A O Stork)** *Anastomus lamelligerus* Seen near Lac Kinkony (*madagascariensis*).

**Malagasy Sacred Ibis** ♦ (M White I) *Threskiornis bernieri* (EN) One at Lac Kinkony and several in the Betsiboka.

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Fairly common in northern Madagascar.

**Madagascan Ibis** ♦ (M Crested I, White-winged I) *Lophotibis cristata* (NT) Two showed well on the Masoala.

**African Spoonbill** *Platalea alba* Four seen at Lac Kinkony.

**Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* Several seen at Lac Kinkony (*podiceps*).

**Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* Nominate form noted at various wetlands.

**Striated Heron (Green-backed H)** *Butorides striata* Ssp. *rutbergi* in Madagascar, *rhizopherae* in the Comoros.

**Squacco Heron (Common S H)** *Ardeola ralloides* Fairly common.

**Malagasy Pond Heron** ♦ (Madagascar P H) *Ardeola idae* (EN) Great views at Lac Alarobia.

**Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Common and widespread.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* Recorded at several wetlands (*firasa*).

**Humblot's Heron** ♦ *Ardea humbloti* (EN) Seen well at Ampijoroa and the Betsiboka estuary.

**Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Fairly common (*madagascariensis*).

**Great Egret (G White E)** *Ardea alba* Common and widespread (*melanorhynchos*).

**Black Heron (B Egret)** *Egretta ardesiaca* Fairly common in northern Madagascar.

**Dimorphic Egret** ♦ *Egretta dimorpha* Many seen, both dark and white morphs.

**Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel* Several seen off Moheli.

**Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra* Several off Moheli, including 80+ at a breeding colony.

**Reed Cormorant (Long-tailed C)** *Microcarbo africanus* Seen in northern Madagascar.

**African Darter** *Anhinga rufa* Seen at Lac Kinkony.

**Madagascan Harrier-Hawk** ♦ *Polyboroides radiatus* Several birds showed well during the tour.

**Frances's Sparrowhawk** ♦ *Accipiter francesiae* Nominate (Madagascar), *griveaudi* (Grand Comoro), *brutus* Mayotte.

**Malagasy Harrier** ♦ (Madagascar H) *Circus macroscleles* (V) Seen in the Comoros and at the pochard site.

**Yellow-billed Kite** *Milvus aegyptius* Common and widespread in Madagascar.

**Madagascan Fish-Eagle** ♦ *Haliaeetus vociferoides* (CR) Great views of the usual pair at Ampijoroa.

**Madagascan Buzzard** ♦ *Buteo brachypterus* Fairly common in Madagascar.

**White-breasted Mesite** ♦ *Mesitornis variegatus* (V) Excellent views at Ankarana and at Ampijoroa. A cracker!

**Brown Mesite** ♦ *Mesitornis unicolor* (V) Good views of a pair on the Masoala.

**Madagascan Flufftail** ♦ *Sarothrura insularis* (H) Heard only near the pochard lake.

**Slender-billed Flufftail** ♦ *Sarothrura watersi* One of the tour highlights. One seen by some of us at the pochard site.

**Madagascan Wood Rail\*** ♦ *Canirallus kioloides* Seen on the Masoala.

**Madagascan Rail** ♦ *Rallus madagascariensis* (V) Seen very well at the pochard lake.

**White-throated Rail** ♦ *Dryolimnas cuvieri* Great views at several locations.

**Sakalava Rail** ♦ *Amaurornis olivieri* (EN) A tour highlight, with many close up encounters at Lac Kinkony.

Two good birds seen at Ampijoroa Lake: Humblot's Heron and Madagascan Fish-Eagle. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)







Malagasy Sacred Ibis and Meller's Duck. (Dani Lopez-Velasco and Ian Lewis)

**African Swampphen** *Porphyrio madagascariensis* A single at Lac Kinkony.

**Allen's Gallinule (Lesser G)** *Porphyrio alleni* Seen well at Lac Kinkony.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* Several seen (*pyrrhorhoa*).

**Red-knobbed Coot (Crested C)** *Fulica cristata* A single seen at Alarobia.

**Madagascan Buttonquail** ♦ *Turnix nigricollis* Several seen.

**Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola* Several seen in Mayotte.

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* Small numbers recorded.

**Grey Plover (Black-bellied P)** *Pluvialis squatarola* Small numbers seen.

**Common Ringed Plover (R P)** *Charadrius hiaticula* Seen near Maroantsetra.

**Kittlitz's Plover** *Charadrius pecuarius* A few noted.

**White-fronted Plover** *Charadrius marginatus* Seen in Maroantsetra (*tenellus*).

**Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* Good numbers in the Betsiboka estuary.

**Madagascan Jacana** ♦ *Actophilornis albinucha* (NT) Seen well at Lac Kinkony and near to Majunga.

**Madagascan Snipe** ♦ *Gallinago macrodactyla* One flushed at the pochard lake.

**Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* Several birds seen.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Small numbers recorded.

**Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Good numbers in the Betsiboka estuary.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Small numbers noted at several localities.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* A few seen.

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba* Seen in Moheli.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* A single seen in Maroantsetra.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* Good numbers in the Betsiboka estuary.

**Madagascan Pratincole** ♦ *Glareola ocularis* (V) A few on the Masoala and at Lac Kinkony.

**Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* Good numbers recorded on the boat trip off Mayotte.

**Greater Crested Tern (Swift T)** *Thalasseus bergii* A few noted.

**Lesser Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bengalensis* Seen in Maroantsetra and off Mayotte.

**Saunders's Tern** ♦ *Sternula saundersi* A single seen in the Betsiboka estuary.

**Bridled Tern** *Onychoprion anaethetus* Great views of two birds on our boat trip off Mayotte.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* A single juvenile off Mayotte.

**Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* Seen at Lac Kinkony.

**Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon) (introduced)** *Columba livia*

**Comoros Olive Pigeon** ♦ (Comoro P) *Columba polleni* Fairly common in the Comoros.

**Malagasy Turtle Dove** ♦ *Nesoenas picturata* Nominate in Madagascar, *comorensis* in the Comoros. See Note.

**Ring-necked Dove (introduced) (Cape Turtle D)** *Streptopelia capicola* Introduced to the Comoros.

**Tambourine Dove (introduced)** *Turtur tympanistria* A couple seen in the Comoros.

**Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* Fairly common in the dry northern Madagascar (*aliena*).

**Madagascan Green Pigeon** ♦ *Treron australis* Seen at several places in Madagascar (nominate and *xenius*)

**Comoros Green Pigeon** ♦ *Treron griveaudi* Excellent views of this hard-to-get endemic in Moheli.

**Madagascan Blue Pigeon** ♦ *Alectroenas madagascariensis* A few seen in Madagascar.

**Comoro Blue Pigeon** ♦ *Alectroenas sganzini* Seen well on the 4 Comoros Islands.

**Malagasy Coucal** ♦ *Centropus toulou* Several birds seen well.  
**Crested Coua** ♦ *Coua cristata* Seen well at various locations.  
**Blue Coua** ♦ *Coua caerulea* Plenty seen well. A cracking endemic!  
**Giant Coua** ♦ *Coua gigas* An unexpected sighting of a bird, seen well, on the way to Lac Kinkony.  
**Red-capped Coua** ♦ *Coua ruficeps* Great views at Ampijoroa.  
**Red-fronted Coua** ♦ *Coua reynaudii* (H) Heard only at the pochard site.  
**Coquerel's Coua** ♦ *Coua coquereli* Two seen well at Ampijoroa.  
**Red-breasted Coua** ♦ *Coua serriana* Excellent views on the Masoala.  
**Madagascan Cuckoo** ♦ (M Lesser C) *Cuculus rochii* Seen at the pochard  
**Red Owl** ♦ (Madagascar R O) *Tyto soumagnei* (V) Bird of the trip. Mega views of one at the pochard site.  
**Western Barn Owl** (Common B O) *Tyto alba* Two seen in northern Madagascar (*hypermetra*).



Torotoroka Scops Owl, left, and Rainforest Scops Owl, right, were 2 of the 8 species of owls seen on the tour. (Dani L-V and Ian Lewis).

**Karthala Scops Owl** ♦ (Grand Comoro/Comoro S O) *Otus pauliani* (CR) Very good views of one at Mt Karthala.  
**Anjouan Scops Owl** ♦ *Otus capnodes* (CR) After a lot of effort, eventually seen by all.  
**Moheli Scops Owl** ♦ *Otus moheliensis* (CR) Terrific views of one on Moheli.  
**Mayotte Scops Owl** ♦ *Otus mayottensis* Great views on Mayotte.  
**Torotoroka Scops Owl** ♦ *Otus madagascariensis* Seen very well at Ampijoroa.  
**Rainforest Scops Owl** ♦ *Otus rutilus* Great views on the Masoala.  
**Madagascan Nightjar** ♦ *Caprimulgus madagascariensis* Seen well at Lac Kinkony.  
**Madagascar Spinetail** ♦ (Mad./Malagasy Spine-tailed ) *Zoonavena grandidieri* Nominate and *mariae* seen.  
**African Palm Swift** *Cypsiurus parvus* Fairly common. *Gracilis* on Madagascar and *griveaudi* on the Comoros  
**Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba* A few seen (*willsi*).  
**Little Swift** *Apus affinis* Seen at Lac Alarobia.  
**Malagasy Black Swift** ♦ (Madagascar S) *Apus balstoni* Nominate in Madagascar, *mayottensis* on the Comoros.  
**Madagascan Cuckoo-Roller** ♦ *Leptosomus discolour* Great views at several locations.  
**Comoro Cuckoo-Roller** ♦ *Leptosomus gracilis* Great views on Mt Karthala.  
**Broad-billed Roller** *Eurystomus glaucurus* Seen on the Masoala and an unexpected sighting at Mt Karthala.  
**Short-legged Ground-Roller** ♦ *Brachypteracias leptosomus* (V) Terrific views of a pair on the Masoala.





Madagascar Blue Pigeon and Comoros Blue Pigeon. (Ian Lewis and Dani Lopez-Velasco)

- Scaly Ground-Roller ♦ *Geobiastes squamiger* (V) Mega views on the Masoala.
- Pitta-like Ground-Roller ♦ *Atelornis pittoides* Excellent views at Montagne d'Ambre.
- Malagasy Kingfisher ♦ (Madagascar Malachite K) *Corythornis vintsioides* Seen in Madagascar.
- Olive Bee-eater (Madagascar B-e) *Merops superciliosus* Fairly common and widespread.
- Madagascar Hoopoe ♦ *Upupa marginata* Seen at Ampijoroa.
- Malagasy Kestrel ♦ (Madagascar K) *Falco newtoni* Widespread.
- Sooty Falcon ♦ *Falco concolor* (NL) A non-leader bird on the Masoala.
- Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Seen in Anjouan and Mayotte.
- Grey-headed Lovebird ♦ *Agapornis canus* Seen in Madagascar and the Comoros.
- Greater Vasa Parrot ♦ *Coracopsis vasa* Nominate and *drouhardi* in Madagascar, *comorensis* Comoros.
- Lesser Vasa Parrot ♦ *Coracopsis nigra* Nominate and *libs* in Madagascar, *sibilans* in the Comoros.
- Schlegel's Asity ♦ *Philepitta schlegeli* (NT) Great views of males and females in Ampijoroa.
- Common Sunbird-Asity ♦ (Wattled S-A) *Neodrepanis coruscans* Great views at the pochard site.
- Red-tailed Vanga ♦ *Calicalicus madagascariensis* A few seen well.
- Hook-billed Vanga ♦ *Vanga curvirostris* An impressive vanga seen at various locations.
- Bernier's Vanga ♦ *Oriolia bernieri* (V) After some effort, good views of a male on the Masoala.
- Van Dam's Vanga ♦ *Xenopirostris damii* (EN) After some effort, great views of a pair at Ampijoroa.
- Sickle-billed Vanga ♦ *Falculea palliate* We enjoyed this cracking vanga several times.
- White-headed Vanga ♦ *Artamella viridis* Seen at various locations.
- Chabert Vanga ♦ *Leptopterus chabert* Seen several times.
- Blue Vanga ♦ (Madagascar B V) *Cyanolanius madagascarinus* A cracker! Seen at various places.
- Comoro Vanga ♦ (C Blue V) *Cyanolanius comorensis* Great views on Moheli.
- Rufous Vanga ♦ *Schetba rufa* *Rufa* on the Masoala and *occidentalis* in the NW.
- Helmet Vanga ♦ *Euryceros prevostii* (V) WHAT A BIRD! Mega views of several birds on the Masoala.
- Tylas Vanga ♦ (Tylas) *Tylas eduardi* Several birds seen.
- Dark Newtonia ♦ *Newtonia amphichroa* Seen at Montagne d'Ambre and the pochard site.



*Rufous Vanga and Blue Vanga. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*

- Common Newtonia** ♦ *Newtonia brunneicauda* Common.
- Madagascan Cuckoo-Shrike** ♦ (Ashy C-S) *Coracina cinerea* A few seen.
- Comoros Cuckoo-Shrike** ♦ *Coracina cucullata* Seen well on Mt Karthala.
- Grand Comoro Drongo** ♦ *Dicrurus fuscipennis* (EN) Great views close to Moroni.
- Crested Drongo** ♦ *Dicrurus forficatus* Common and widespread.
- Mayotte Drongo** ♦ *Dicrurus waldenii* Seen well on Mayotte. What a tail!
- Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher** ♦ *Terpsiphone mutata* Widespread, several subspecies noted.
- Pied Crow** *Corvus albus* Common.
- House Crow** *Corvus splendens* A bird was seen by some on Anjouan. A first for the Comoros?
- Madagascan Lark** ♦ (M Bush L) *Eremopterix hova* Fairly common in dry areas.
- Malagasy Bulbul** ♦ *Hypsipetes madagascariensis* Common.
- Grand Comoro Bulbul** ♦ *Hypsipetes parvirostris* Common on Mt Karthala.
- Moheli Bulbul** ♦ *Hypsipetes moheliensis* Seen on Moheli.
- Mascarene Martin** ♦ *Phedina borbonica* Nominate on Madagascar.
- Brown-throated Martin (Plain M)** *Riparia paludicola* A few seen.
- Malagasy Brush Warbler** ♦ *Nesillas typica* Seen at several locations.
- Anjouan Brush Warbler** ♦ *Nesillas longicaudata* Common on Anjouan, first seen in the hotel garden.
- Grand Comoro Brush Warbler** ♦ (Comoro B W) *Nesillas brevicaudata* Seen very well on Mt Karthala.
- Moheli Brush Warbler** ♦ (Benson's B W) *Nesillas mariae* Seen very well on Moheli.
- Madagascan Swamp Warbler** ♦ *Acrocephalus newtoni* Seen at various locations.
- Grey Emutail** ♦ *Amphilais seebohmi* Seen well at the pochard site.





Mayotte Scops Owl and the Grand Comoro form of Comoros Thrush. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

- Long-billed Bernieria ♦ *Bernieria madagascariensis* Nominated in the wet zone, *inceleber* in the west.
- Spectacled Tetraka ♦ *Xanthomixis zosterops* Three subspecies noted.
- Grey-crowned Tetraka ♦ *Xanthomixis cinereiceps* (NT) Seen very well at the pochard site.
- Rand's Warbler ♦ *Randia pseudozosterops* Good views at the pochard site.
- Common Jery ♦ *Neomixis tenella* Common and widespread.
- Green Jery ♦ *Neomixis viridis* First seen on the Masoala.
- Stripe-throated Jery ♦ *Neomixis striatigula* Seen well at the pochard site (*sclateri*).
- Madagascan Cisticola ♦ *Cisticola cherina* Common.
- Madagascan Starling ♦ *Hartlaubius auratus* First seen on the Masoala.
- Comoros Thrush ♦ *Turdus bewsheri* See Note.
- Madagascan Magpie-Robin ♦ *Copsychus albospecularis* Seen well, inc. the dark morph on the Masoala.
- Amber Mountain Rock Thrush ♦ *Monticola erythronotus* Seen very well. Now often re-lumped.
- Madagascan Stonechat *Saxicola sibilla* Common at the pochard site.
- African Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* See Note.
- Humblot's Flycatcher ♦ (Grand Comoro F) *Humblotia flavirostris* (E) Excellent views on Mt Karthala.
- Souimanga Sunbird ♦ *Cinnyris souimanga* Common in Madagascar.
- Comoro Green Sunbird ♦ *Cinnyris moebii* Seen in the Comoros.
- Malagasy Green Sunbird ♦ (Long-billed G S) *Cinnyris notata* Seen well on Madagascar.

Grand Comoro Brush Warbler, left, and Anjouan Brush Warbler, right. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)





Mayotte Sunbird, top left, Anjouan Sunbird, top right, and Humblot's Sunbird, bottom. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

**Humblot's Sunbird** ♦ *Cinnyris humbloti* Nominant on Grand Comoro and *mohelicus* on Moheli.

**Anjouan Sunbird** ♦ *Cinnyris comorensis* Common on Anjouan.

**Mayotte Sunbird** ♦ *Cinnyris coquerellii* Common on Mayotte.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* Introduced in the Comoros and Madagascar.

**Nelicourvi Weaver** ♦ *Ploceus nelicourvi* A few seen in the forest.

**Sakalava Weaver** ♦ *Ploceus sakalava* Widespread.

**Red Fody** ♦ (Madagascar R F) *Foudia madagascariensis* Common and widespread.

**Comoros Fody** ♦ (Red-headed F) *Foudia eminentissima* See Note.

**Forest Fody** ♦ *Foudia omissa* Seen at Montagne d'Ambre.

**Madagascan Mannikin** ♦ (M Munia) *Lemuresthes nana* Widespread.

**Bronze Mannikin (introduced)** *Lonchura cucullata* Seen in the Comoros.

**Madagascan Wagtail** ♦ *Motacilla flaviventris* A few seen.



## MAMMALS

**Lowland Streaked Tenrec** *Hemicentetes semispinosus* One on the Masoala. A cracker!

**Comoro Black Flying Fox† (Livingstone's F F)** *Pteropus livingstoni* A huge bat seen in Anjouan.

**Seychelles Flying Fox†** *Pteropus seychellensis* Seen many times in the Comoros.

**Grey Mouse Lemur** *Microcebus murinus* Seen near Lac Kinkony.

**Brown Mouse-Lemur** *Microcebus rufus* Seen on the Masoala.

**Amber Mountain Mouse Lemur** *Microcebus arnholdi* Seen well during our nightwalk at Montagne d'Ambre.

**Greater Dwarf Lemur** *Cheirogaleus major* Seen a few times.

**Milne-Edward's Sportive Lemur** *Lepilemur edwardsi* Seen well at Ampijoroa.

**Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur** *Hapalemur griseus* Seen very well on the Masoala.

**Mongoose Lemur** *Eulemur mongoz* Seen near Lac Kinkony and at Anjouan- where introduced.

**Crowned Lemur** *Eulemur coronatus* Seen well at Montagne d'Ambre.

**Common Brown Lemur** *Eulemur fulvus* Seen on Mayotte and Ampijoroa.

**Sanford's Brown Lemur** *Eulemur sanfordi* Good looks at Montagne d'Ambre.

**White-fronted Brown Lemur** *Eulemur albifrons* Great views on the Masoala.

**Red Ruffed Lemur** *Varecia rubra* Seen well on the Masoala. A stunner!

**Eastern Avahi (Eastern Woolly Lemur)** *Avahi laniger* The Masoala one seen may be split as Moore's Avahi.

**Western Avahi (Western Woolly Lemur)** *Avahi occidentalis* Seen at Ampijoroa.

**Coquerel's Sifaka** *Propithecus coquereli* Seen at Ampijoroa.

**Decken's Sifaka** *Propithecus deckeni* Seen near Lac Kinkony.

**Crowned Sifaka** *Propithecus coronatus* Seen at the Katsepy lighthouse.

**Small Indian Mongoose† (introduced)** *Herpestes auropunctatus* One seen in Grand Comoro.

**Ring-tailed Mongoose** *Galidia elegans* Seen well at Montagne d'Ambre.

**Lowland Red Forest Rat** *Nesomys audeberti* Seen on the Masoala.

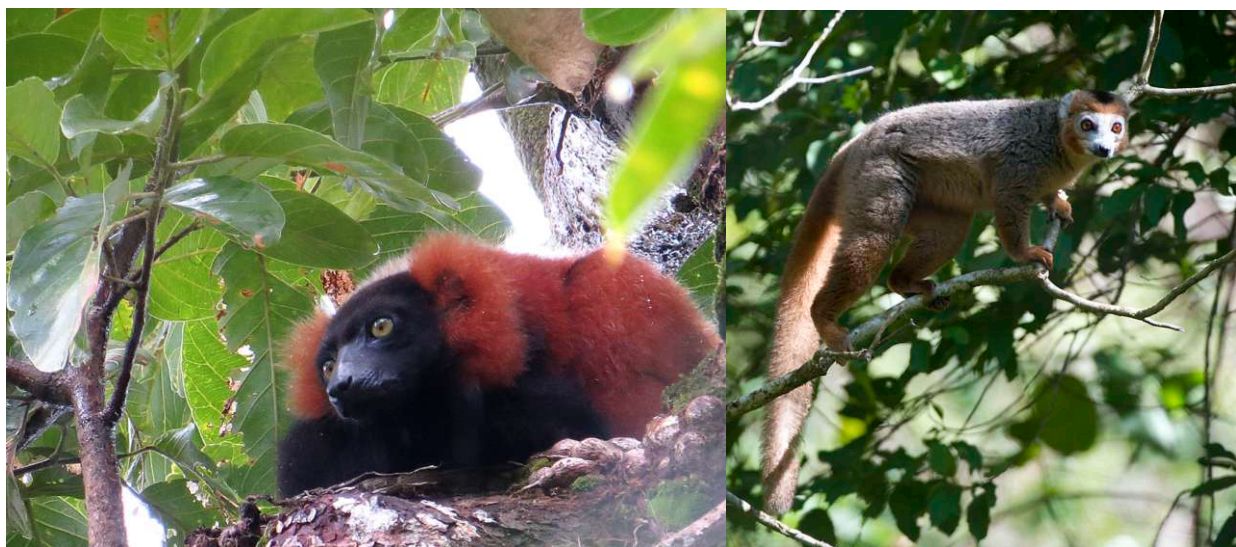
**Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus* Introduced.

**House Mouse** *Mus musculus* Seen once.

**Humpback Whale** *Megaptera novaeangliae* Outstanding encounter with a mum and a calf off Mayotte.

**Spinner Dolphin** *Stenella longirostris* Seen well on the boat trip off Mayotte.

**Bush Pig (introduced)** *Potamochoerus larvatus* One on Mt Karthala.



The beautiful Red-ruffed Lemur, left, and the localized Crowned Lemur. (Ian Lewis and Dani Lopez-Velasco)



*Crowned Sifaka, Humpback Whales and Brown Mouse Lemur. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*







*The tiny Dwarf Chameleon delighted us at Montagne D'Ambre National Park (Dani Lopez-Velasco).*

**Madagascar Tree Boa Constrictor** *Acrantophis madagascariensis*

**Madagascar Giant Hognose Snake** *Leioheterodon madagascariensis*

**Giant Chameleon** *Furcifer oustaleti*

**Panther Chameleon** *Furcifer pardalis*

**Petter's Chameleon** *Furcifer petteri*

**Big-nosed Chameleon** *Calumma nasuta*

**Parson's Chameleon** *Caluma parsoni*

**Amber Mountain Chameleon** *Calumma amber*

**Elephant Chameleon** *Calumma brevicollis*

**Blue-nosed Chameleon** *Calumma boettgeri*

**Dwarf Chameleon** *Brookesia tuberculata*

**Spiny-tailed Iguanid** *Oplurus cuvieri*

**Western Girdled Lizard** *Zonosaurus laticaudatus*

**Lined Day Gecko** *Phelsuma lineata*

**Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko** *Uroplatus sikorae*

**Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko** *Uroplatus phantasticus*

**Nile River Crocodile** *Crocodylus niloticus*

**Hawkesbill Turtle** *Eretmochelys imbricate*

**Tomato frog** *Dyscophus antongilii*







The stunningly coloured *Phelsuma lineata* (Dani Lopez-Velasco).

## NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

### **Malagasy Turtle Dove** *Nesoenas picturata*

The endemic form seen in the Comoros, *comorensis*, is split by some authorities as Comoros Turtle Dove.

### **Comoros Thrush** *Turdus bewsheri*

The three forms that we saw are all very different and probably should be regarded as three species: Grand Comoro Thrush *T. comorensis*; Moheli Thrush *T. moheliensis* and Anjouan Thrush *T. bewsheri*. All three forms were seen very well during the tour.

### **African Stonechat** *Saxicola torquatus*

The form that we saw well on Mt Karthala, *voeltzkowi*, is included in this species by the IOC. Surely it is better treated as part of Madagascar Stonechat or as a full species in its own right?!

### **Comoros (or Red-headed ) Fody** *Foudia eminentissima*

Four fairly different forms were seen. The form on Grand Comoro in particular, which lacks the red rump, is very distinct. The forms are: *consobrina* (Grand Comoro), *anjouanensis* (Anjouan), *algondae* (Mayotte) and nominate (Moheli).



*Some breathtaking scenery from the tour. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)*