

## **Madagascar extension trip report – October 2012**

*By Penny Williams*

I left Peter in the Orchid Hotel in the capital, Tana. His flight was not until 1 am the following morning. Our flight to Morondava was at 12 noon so we expected to get to Morondava about 1 pm. However, when we got to the airport, the first thing we found was that our flight was via Tulear (where we had started our holiday a fortnight earlier) and secondly it was in a prop plane which took one and half times the length of time it had taken to fly to Tulear the first time in a jet. It also took off late. When we got to Tulear we all had to get off the plane in order to be handed a label called "Transit" walk around the corner and then back on to the plane! Then a fault on the plane developed so it was finally after 4 pm when we got to Morondava. Two very battered Peugeot taxis took us to a pretty basic hotel. Although I had thought from my internet search that it had a swimming pool I was obviously mistaken. However there was some air conditioning, although it kept going on and off and there was a fan (although it clicked every time it went around). However both the shower and loo worked and the beds were nice and hard. The hotel was right on the beach so we went off to explore and found a "lifer" for me being a White-fronted Plover. I checked the terns for Sooty but none appeared although the Great-Crested we saw were also Lifers. We waited for the sunset but no green flash. Then to a good meal of Tuna and chips. There was a starter which was a tomato salad which I decided to risk. It was delicious. Fruit salad for pudding.

The following morning our guide, for the next few days, Christian turned up. He appeared quite shy. Despite Gerald's teasing we did not have the battered Peugeots but a minibus. The legroom was extremely limited but with only 5 of us we just about managed.

We left Morondava to visit the Baobabs. We stopped in the town to stock up on enough water and soft drinks (to give us some sugar hits when we needed them) to keep us going for the 3 days we were due to be away. On the way we stopped at a cattle market. The number of people walking to and from along the road was just incredible. Other foodstuffs were being sold and the place was a hive of activity.

We saw quite a few Baobabs before we got to the Avenue and there were quite a few other tourists there as well. However a few good photos and some purchases of small carved Baobabs took place before we went on to Kirindy.

It was about two hours before we got to Kirindy and it was on a sandy road. We made a couple of stops to check out the birds and also saw some Verreaux's Sifakas (a type of lemur).

Kirindy however was going to be the highlight. The camp was very quiet when we got there and Christian was taking us to our cabin when he called out "Fosa" and there was one disappearing behind a cabin. I could only see the rear half but it was very clearly a male. Fortunately it appeared out the other side and we all got an opportunity to take some wonderful photos of it. Also around the cabins were Paradise Flycatchers and Weaver birds and we sat down to a lunch of (guess what) omelette rolls very happy.

The cabins were pretty basic and had a shower. However the loo was shared with others and was a hole in the ground. However there was a cistern above it so that you could flush it. Liz found one where the door did not lock, I found one where it did.

After lunch we relaxed and then I saw Nigel rushing off. He said there were some lemurs in the camp and we went to the car parking area and there were some Red-fronted Brown Lemurs raiding the rubbish bin for bananas. Unfortunately, by that time, my camera was playing up, but it was wonderful getting such close up views. A Crested

Coua also appeared and Giant Couas were walking around the campsite not worried by anyone (very different from the ones we had seen in Zombitse Forest which were wary of everyone).

It was extremely hot there and I kept cooling myself down by putting my head under the shower. About 3.30 a couple of narrow-striped Mongoose appeared. Unfortunately the camera was still not behaving and none of my photos were in focus. However I did not realise this until I downloaded them the following day. It was still baking at 4 pm when we went out for a walk away from the camp but we did see a family of Verreaux's Sifakas which included a baby plus a Red-tailed Sportive Lemur which was roosting in a hole in a tree.

Then about half an hour to relax and then off to do the night walk. However, before we started it, Gerald pointed out to the corner of the restaurant area. It was a building with open sides and a roof of reeds. There licking at some banana was a gorgeous little (dwarf) Grey Mouse Lemur. Then off into the forest to see if we could find any of the nocturnal lemurs. We had the potential to find the three species we had not yet seen. The walk was a great success with really good views of quite a few Pale Fork-crowned Lemurs which really told us that they did not like having us around. Most of the time they were very active leaping from tree to tree (rather like squirrels) but then occasionally one would come down a tree and, facing downwards, start licking at the bark. We then were very fortunate to see a Coquerel's Giant Mouse Lemur (which has a really long tail) and had good views of that too.

By now it was time to go back to the Camp and enjoy a nice meal of Spaghetti Bolognese followed by fresh Pineapple. Then a shower in order to try and cool down. I finally felt the right temperature at about 4 am and then it was time to get up at 5 am!

The early morning walk produced lots of Verreaux's Sifakas and some White-breasted Mesite – which really pleased me, but not the mammal supporters (it's a bird – *Ed*). Back for breakfast which included an omelette and then 3 of us went for another walk with Liz and Margaret staying in the camp where they were visited both by Mongoose and by a group of, apparently, very noisy Red-fronted Brown Lemurs. Liz thought that the Fosa had appeared again and was by the chickens but then discovered it was a man who was removing some of them for the cooking pot (in fact our lunch).

However, during our restful afternoon, as it was still so hot, a Fosa did appear and spent at least 20 minutes trying to get into the Chicken Coop. We noticed she was a female, a much lighter build than the one we had seen the previous day, and she was clearly hungry. She disappeared off (we did wonder why she did not try to get a Giant Coua when they were just wandering around the Camp) and we were then visited by the lemurs who were fed bananas by the kitchen staff.

No afternoon walk that day as it was so hot but at 6 pm we were about to go on our night walk when I noticed no one had fed the dwarf Grey Mouse Lemur. The kitchen staff said they had run out of bananas so I fetched one from our room and smeared the wood with bananas. Within 2 minutes two mouse lemurs were there licking up the bananas. What a treat.

Our night walk revealed our target thanks to the excellent detective work of Christian (who was brilliant). This was the smallest, and one of the rarest, primates in the world namely Madame Berthe's dwarf lemur. The first two disappeared very quickly so that not everyone got to see them but the last one sat on a branch looking at us for ages which meant lots of good photos (fortunately the camera was behaving again by then).

Back to the camp for supper but then we had to stay up until almost 11 pm in order to see our last target, the Giant Jumping Rat. I had a brief view of one (including its

jumping) but the others missed that one. Whilst we were waiting, we were treated to a Forest Scops Owl and the calls of White-browed Owls. We were all flagging but fortunately one Rat appeared for Gerald and we all (save for Liz who had given up waiting) had good views of it. Fortunately therefore we could go to bed and try to get cool in order to sleep.

As we had managed to see all of our target species we decided to go back to Morondava a day early. It meant paying for a hotel but, as we managed to get one with a lovely pool and air conditioned rooms, we thought it well worth it. It also meant that we were able to do a boat trip amongst the mangroves and had a couple of evenings watching the sun set over the sea where we tried to take "arty" photos.

I am sitting back in Tana now typing this with one last trip to come which is to the lake we visited on our first day in Tana. It is a long day as Liz and I were up at 5 am watching the sunrise which was stunning (we had gone to bed the previous night having used our waterproofs for the first time as we had a huge thunderstorm with loads of sheet lighting which lasted for about two hours). Our flight to Paris is not until 1 am.

A fantastic trip with, for me, 142 bird species seen of which 69 were Madagascan endemics. However the highlight has to be the number of lemurs seen – 23 species – and so close and also so vocal. I had known the Indris made a lot of noise (which was rather like a trumpet at times) but quite a few of the other species also made some contact noises and the mouse lemurs were just so sweet in their looks and their behaviour – especially the ones I fed with.

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