

Madagascar: Enigmatic Birds Extension: Pochard, Serpent Eagle, and Red Owl
Oct 13-23, 2024

Brief itinerary*

Note this extension splits from the main tour on Day 21 in Mahajanga. This extension will skip the Betsiboka Delta, instead visiting Ampitsopitsoka Wetland which is better for Bernier's Teal and Madagascar Sacred Ibis

Day 1: Sun, Oct 13 - Transfer to Kinkony Lake

We start the morning in Mahajanga from where we catch a ferry ride across Katsepy Bay to the town of Katsepy. Once on land again we will drive straight to Mitsinjo, stopping briefly at the Mahavavy River bridge to see what's around; the pretty Von der Decken's Sifaka and Crowned Sifaka are at times present at this stop. Then it's onward along a dusty road to the remote Makary Village on the eastern shore of fabulous Lake Konkony. Depending on road conditions and ferry crossing times, our journey will likely take most of the day, but there should be some time before dinner for a shower and rest. Note tonight's accommodation will be tented. ***Overnight in Makary Village.***

Day 2: Mon, Oct 14 - Kinkony Lake

We start our birding today with a lovely ride in dugout canoes on Kinkony Lake, arguably the best location in the world to look for Sakalava Rail and Madagascar Jacana; if we're lucky, we might even see a Madagascar Pond Heron. Once done on the lake, probably around late morning, we will take the dusty road back to Mitsinjo for lunch, followed by an afternoon drive and boat trip to the Ampitsopitsoka Wetland, situated at the estuary of Madagascar's largest river. We'll overnight in simple bungalows in Namakai, an ideal base for our exploration of the wetland the next morning. ***Overnight in Namakai.***

Day 3: Tue, Oct 15 - Ampitsopitsoka Wetland

Our key target birds for today are two highly endangered birds, Bernier's Teal and Malagasy Sacred Ibis, while we also have another chance for the endangered Madagascar Jacana. We'll look for these species at the amazing Ampitsopitsoka Wetland, which we'll explore by boat. The teal can sometimes be seen right from the port, but the ibis usually requires a bit more effort scanning the sandy banks along the river, which should also produce the unmistakable Crab-Plover, Lesser Flamingo, and perhaps even Madagascar Plover. After we find our targets, we'll drive back to Katsepy where we'll catch a ferry back to Mahajanga. With not enough time left in the day to get to Antsohihy, we'll pay another visit to Ankarafantsika National Park for another opportunity to see the Critically Endangered Madagascar Fish-Eagle and the Endangered Madagascar Grebe, this time via a lovely afternoon boat ride. ***Overnight in Ampijoroa.***

Day 4: Wed, Oct 16 - Ankarafantsika National Park

We start the morning in the dry and sandy forests of Ankarafantsika National Park to have another chance to see and photograph the highly restricted Schlegel's Asity, White-breasted Mesite, and Red-capped Couas, amongst others. Once wildlife activity starts quieting down, it'll finally be time to hit the road for a long drive across several mountains and valleys to the town of Antsohihy, which we should reach by early afternoon. ***Overnight in Antsohihy.***

Day 5: Thu, Oct 17 - Bemanevika Forest

Today we continue our journey north, first to the town of Beleanana, and then to Bemanevika Lake and Forest, our destination for this extension. Depending on road conditions, the last stretch of road to our base in Bemanevika Forest (which we'll do in off-road vehicles) can be difficult, but the beautiful countryside and landscapes should serve as a welcome distraction. We should arrive at our tented camp with enough time for our camp crew to set up our tents. While our chef will be preparing our dinner, we will also do an exciting night walk to look for the enigmatic Madagascar Red Owl, in addition to Madagascar Nightjars, Madagascar Owl, and nocturnal lemurs such as the Critically Endangered Sambirano Woolly Lemur. ***Overnight in Bemanevika Forest.***

Day 6: Fri, Oct 18 - Matsaborimena Lake; Marotaolana Swamp

We start the morning with mounting excitement as we visit a palm tree where Red Owls are known to roost. Then it's off to Matsaborimena Lake, where we'll do a pirogue (a Malagasy dug-out canoe) trip to look for the Critically Endangered Madagascar Pochard. We'll also spend some time at the nearby Marotaolana Swamp to look for enigmatic Slender-billed Flufftails; this location also offers an additional opportunity to see the elusive Madagascar Harrier, while Malagasy Coucal, Madagascar Flufftail, and Gray Emutail are usually also present. We follow the excitement on the lake with an afternoon walk in the forest for more opportunities to see Madagascar Crested Ibis, Cuckoo-Rollers, Spectacled Tetrakas, and a variety of Vangas, while another night walk will hopefully produce more Red Owls. ***Overnight in Bemanevika Forest.***

Day 7: Sat, Oct 19 - Bemanevika Forest

We spend the entire day in Bemanevika Forest. An early start gives us our best chance to see Madagascar Serpent Eagle. The international conservation nonprofit Peregrine Fund (which also manages our camp site) monitors nest building by this secretive species, and this knowledge will give us our best chance at finding them; we will of course be quiet around the nest and appreciate it from an appropriate distance. Depending on the nest's location, our hike through the magnificent forest may be long, but it also gives us more opportunities to see wildlife characteristic of this area. ***Overnight in Bemanevika Forest.***

Day 8: Sun, Oct 20 - Bemanevika Forest

We start the early active hours of the morning in Bemanevika Forest looking for any species we may have missed the previous day. Once birding quiets down, it's time to start our journey back to Antananarivo. This journey starts by retracing our steps back to Antsohihy. Because of the patience required to navigate the road away from Bemanevika Forest, we'll probably not make it much further than Antsohihy, which also offers suitable accommodation for the night. ***Overnight in Antsohihy.***

Day 9: Mon, Oct 21 - Amber Mountain National Park

After breakfast we leave Antsohihy for a long 10-hour drive to Amber Mountain National Park in the north of Madagascar. We'll arrive at Amber Mountain around sunset, just in time for an exciting night walk to look for reptiles, amphibians, and a good variety of mouse lemurs. Our rather luxurious hotel for the night is situated right inside the lush forests on the lower slopes of the mountain overlooking the scenic Bay of Diego in the Indian Ocean. ***Overnight in Joffreville.***

Day 10: Tue, Oct 22 - Amber Mountain National Park

Our main target today is the Amber Mountain Rock Thrush, globally restricted to the Amber Mountains, while we'll also look for the local distinct subspecies of the Spectacled Tetraka (more work will almost certainly recognize it as distinct) and some of the lemur species restricted to this site like Crowned Lemur and Sanford Brown Lemur. The day will include some chill time at the hotel during midday, while we'll enjoy another nightwalk. ***Overnight in Joffreville.***

Day 11: Wed, Oct 23 - Return Flights

After breakfast we'll transfer to the local airport for flights back to Tana. We should reach Antananarivo by midday when the tour ends. Once in Tana, participants are free to enjoy the sights and sounds of Antananarivo until it is time to head to the airport for their homebound flights, transfer to Sakamanga Hotel (a mid-range day-use hotel in the city center) until it's time to head to the airport, or head to an overnight hotel if their flights only leave the next day.

***Order of days and accommodation may change if logistically necessary.**