



**TROPICAL
BIRDING** 

Worldwide Birding & Photography Tours

MADAGASCAR

Phototour

6th - 25th October 2018

There is nowhere, on this planet, like Madagascar. A little African, a little Asian, and a lot unique, the so-called 8th continent has earned this title and more so with its bounty of endemic wildlife. From large lemurs and long boas, to tiny chameleons and miniature insects, there is a never ending supply of photographic subjects. The key beauty of this country? Nearly everything you point your camera at is endemic to Madagascar and found nowhere else on Earth, guaranteeing every first-time visitor a huge portfolio of species photographed for the first time.

Verreaux's Sifaka can be very curious. This photo is uncropped from a 35mm f2 lens on a full frame sensor!





Our tour this year followed our tried and tested route, taking in four main bases: Berenty, Andasibe-Mantadia, Kirindy and Ankarafantsika. Each area held a different set of wildlife, and often starkly different habitats, ensuring a wide variety of shots new to each location. We photographed everything from Ring-tailed Lemur at Berenty, to Fossa at Kirindy, by way of Indri at Andasibe and Schlegel's Asity at Ankarafantsika.

The legendary Fossa

The whole premise of our 'photojourney' concept is to travel with cameras in hand, photographing in a variety of situations. This often means we, as experienced field naturalists, use our field skills to put you in a position to photograph a much wider variety of species than often encountered on a standard photography tour.

To show you the results of this type of photography tour, I want to focus not so much on words, but on the images achieved, over the next few dozen pages. So, grab a cup of coffee or a cold beer, and get just a taste of what we experienced over 21 days.

- Lisle Gwynn (Co-tour Leader)

Giraffe-necked Weevils have an instantly recognisable silhouette





Berenty Nature Reserve
Madagascar's Arid South



Berenty Nature Reserve in Madagascar's arid south is famous for several reasons, and a deserved stop on our tour. Primary among these claims to fame is the reserve's wild but habituated troops of Ring-tailed Lemurs. Familiar to all from zoos worldwide, and of course the Disney film 'Madagascar', these animals lose none of their charm through their instant recognisability. As usual, one of these large family groups met us in the car park of Berenty, which created the dilemma - do we shoot the Ring-tails first, or the pallidly beautiful Verraux's Sifakas behind us?

Ring-tailed Lemur

Another claim to fame, and reason enough alone to visit Berenty, is that it is one of the most accessible areas of 'spiny forest' in Madagascar, and indeed the world. This habitat is wholly unique and incredibly impressive with the towering Octopus Trees and Baobabs dating back many hundreds of years. Of course, this habitat holds many special animals and during the course of our time in this habitat we photographed such charmers as Madagascar Scops Owl, Madagascar Nightjar, Subdesert Brush Warbler, Three-eyed Lizard and the minuscule Grey-brown Mouse Lemur.



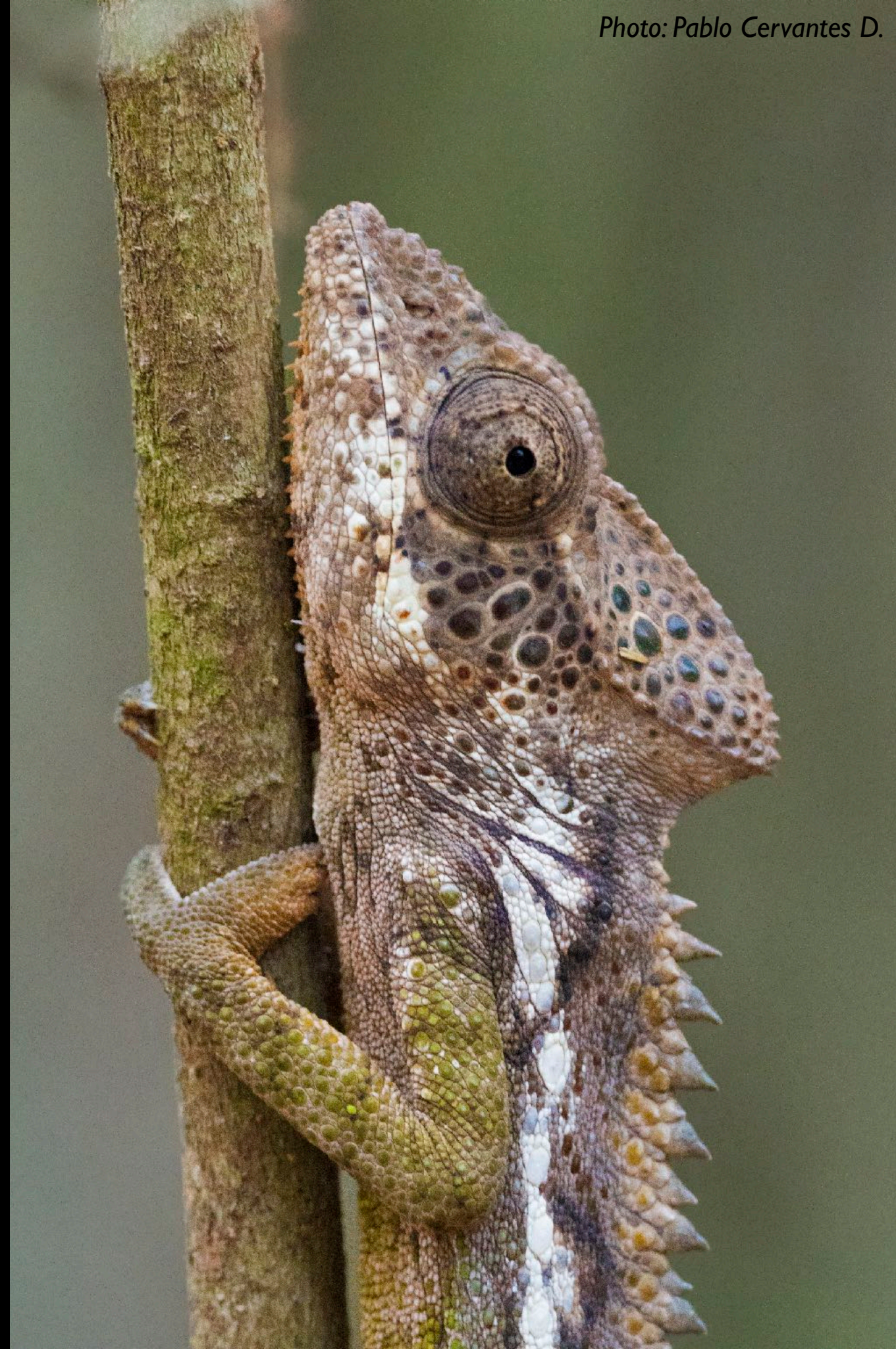
c.500 year old Baobab in Berenty Spiny Forest



The gallery forest that surrounds our very comfortable accommodation at Berenty is home to myriad curious and endemic creatures and numerous gentle walks through the forest ensure we have plenty to photograph. Aside from the stunning Ring-tailed Lemurs and Verraux's Sifakas, Red-fronted Brown Lemurs are abundant and careful searching reveals undeniably 'cute' White-handed Sportive Lemurs.

We spent 3 wonderful nights at Berenty, shooting an abundance of subjects. The bird highlights were many but included great encounters with the likes of White-headed and Hook-billed Vangas, Crested and Giant Couas, a surprisingly high number of White-browed and Madagascar Scops Owls, Madagascar Hoopoe, Frances's Sparrowhawk, Lesser Vasa Parrot and Grey-headed Lovebirds. The areas immediately around the accommodation kept us occupied with Sakalava Weaver colonies, Madagascar Bulbuls, Madagascar Bee-eaters, as well as chances to try our hands at flight photography with Yellow-billed Kites, Madagascar Kestrels, Madagascar Spinetail and Madagascar Black Swift.

Warty Chameleon





As the first stop on this phototour to one of the world's premier natural history destinations, it offered an immersive and well-rounded introduction to the '8th continent'. I am sure that no-one will quickly, or indeed ever, forget our near-continuous encounters with the iconic and delightfully inquisitive Verraux's Sifakas and Ring-tailed Lemurs.

Verraux's Sifaka showing why a wide-angle lens is a must on this tour!



Giant Coua is the largest member of this endemic group of odd cuckoos



White-browed Owl is fairly easily found with the help of skilled local guides



Verraux's Sifaka leap spectacularly from tree to tree when they're not 'dancing' along the tracks



Walking the red roads at Berenty looking for lemurs



Post-breakfast Ring-tailed Lemur photoshoot



Madagascar Scops Owl; another day roosting owl found with the help of excellent local guides



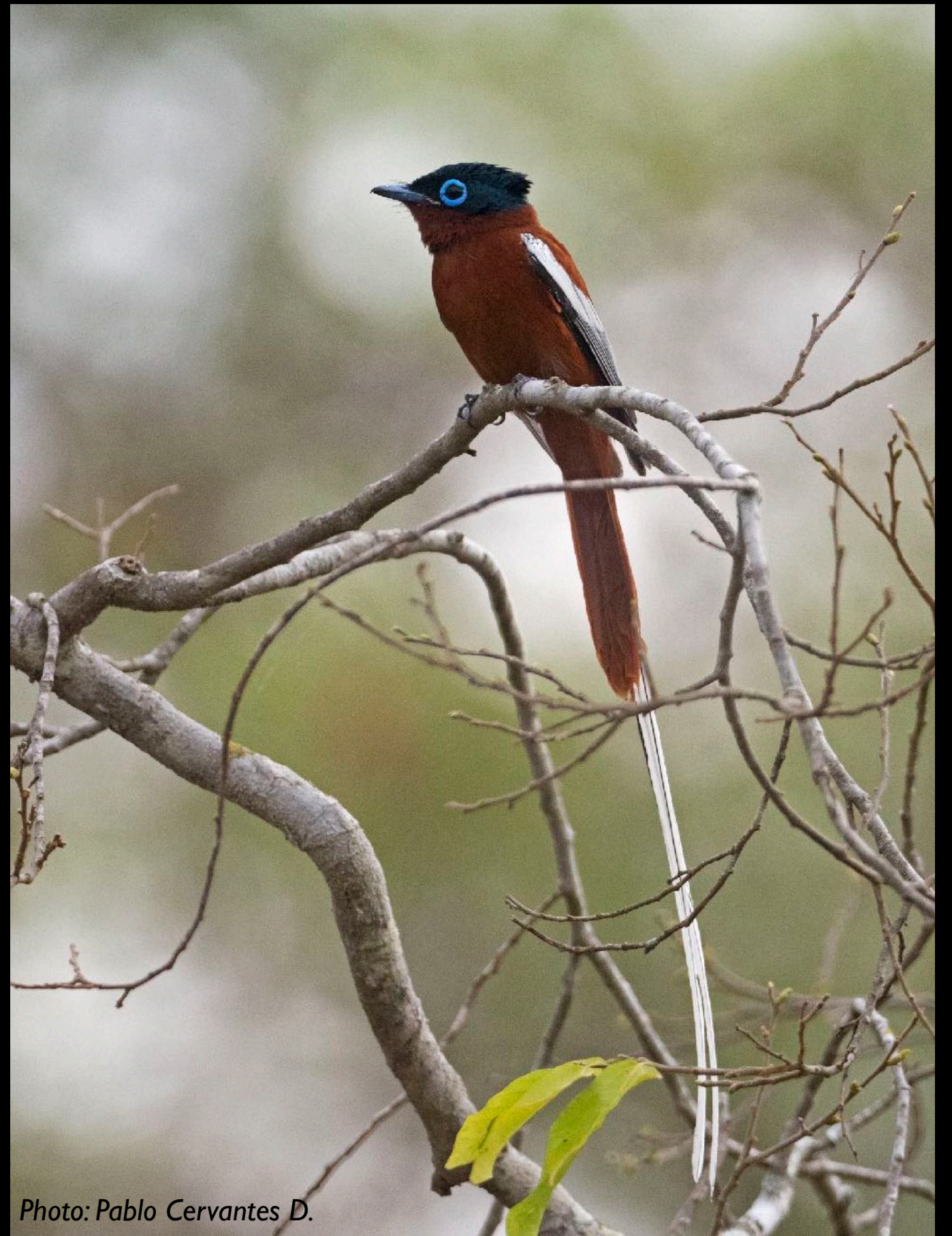
Frances's Sparrowhawk is the more regularly encountered sparrowhawk species at Berenty



Madagascar Nightjar roosting cryptically in the Spiny Forest



Warty Chameleon is the most common chameleon in this area



The paradise flycatchers must be among the world's best birds, and the endemic Madagascan species is no exception. It even comes in two colour morphs: the classic red with white and the stunning white and black.



Sifakas regularly 'dance' to cross open ground.



Crested Coua is just one of a good looking bunch of odd, endemic, and intriguing cuckoos.



This Duméril's Ground Boa was found by staff in the reserve museum, so we released it outside.



It was with great lament that we left Berenty, though the vivid memories of our special final encounter with the hyper-curious Verraux's Sifaka will long live in our minds.

A close-up photograph of a green lizard's skin, showing a detailed pattern of small, overlapping scales. The scales are primarily green with yellowish-brown borders. A prominent white patch is visible on the right side of the image. The text "Mantadia National Park" and "Eastern Escarpment Rainforest" is overlaid in white serif font in the upper center.

Mantadia National Park

Eastern Escarpment Rainforest



From dry gallery forest, to damp and humid eastern escarpment rainforest, Andasibe-Mantadia is a stark change from the arid south and Berenty. Our focus changed here to forest critters and denizens of the night. Stand-out highlight was the legendary Indri, whose wailing and melancholic calls were heard near-constantly throughout our stay.

Indri

An afternoon visit to a nearby lemur reserve produced incredible up-close and personal encounters with a number of lemurs including Black-and-white Ruffed, Red Ruffed, Grey Bamboo, Common Brown and Diademed Sifakas. Once again this proved that wide-angle and macro lenses are essential tools on this island!

Grey Bamboo Lemur





A stop en-route to Andasibe also allowed us time with a number of reptiles at a well set-up ranch. Here we photographed dream-calibre animals like Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko, numerous chameleon species including some giant Parson's, and even a few tiny Leaf Chameleons.

Common Brown Lemur getting up close and personal



Focussing on the smaller details of large chameleons can reveal fantastic shapes and patterns



This Panther Chameleon was one of the most amazing looking beasts I have ever come across



Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko is fantastically named, and absolutely stunning



Giraffe-necked Weevil is one of the most iconic species in Madagascar, and proof that a macro is essential here



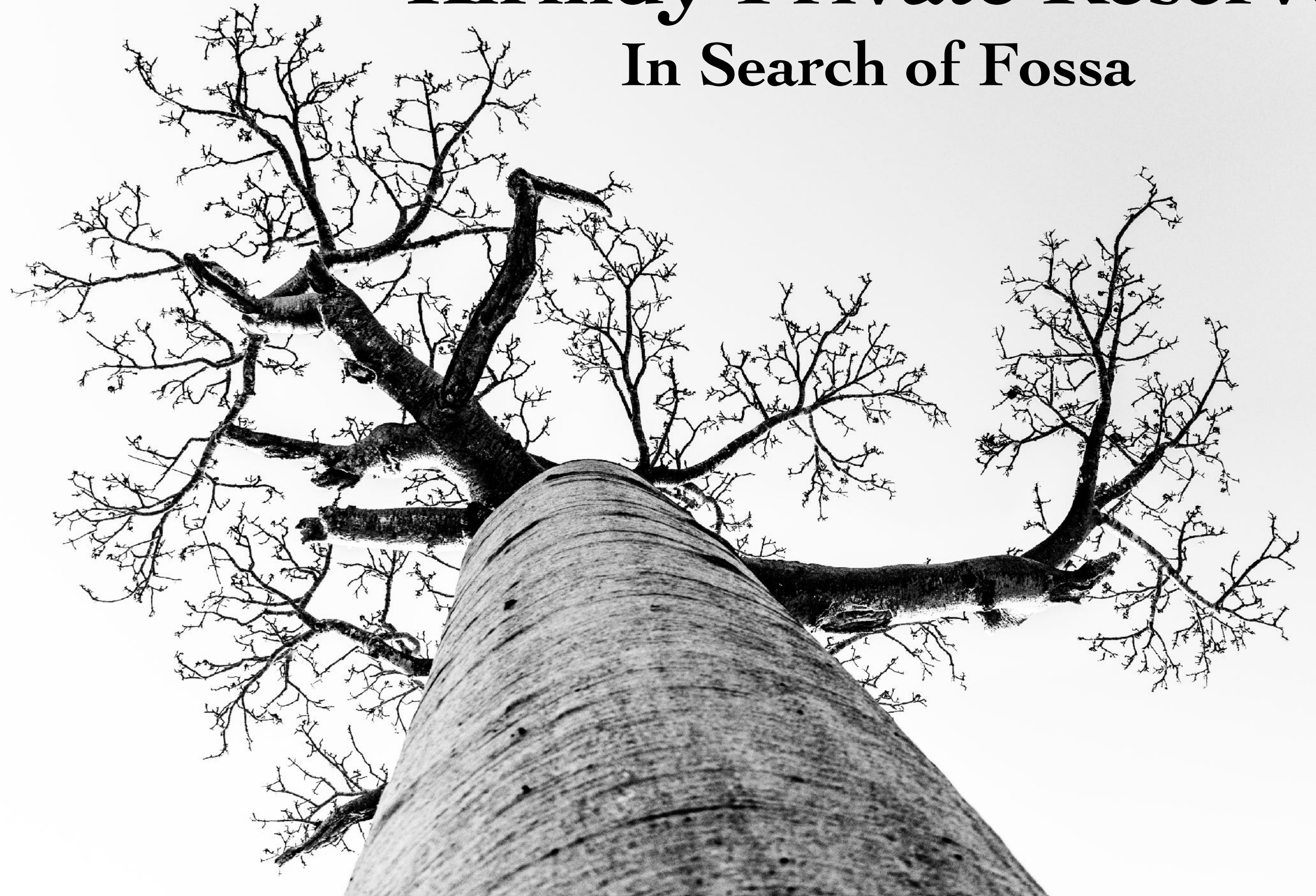
The vangas, like this Chabert's, are an endemic Malagasy region endemic & feature high on our list of bird targets



Leaf chameleons are absolutely tiny. If you're into night creatures, a macro is essential for this tour.

Kirindy Private Reserve

In Search of Fossa





Kirindy brought us out of the rainforest and into the dry forest once more. Our key target, and main reason for visiting, is of course the elusive Fossa. This year we were incredibly fortunate with three individuals photographed, including one absurdly accommodating animal that at one point actually had to be encouraged to back off from our wide-angle lenses.

Fossa has one of the most pensive gazes of any animal

Photographic subjects here are, as with everywhere else on this tour, endless. A couple of Madagascar Ground Boas were the first of the season and sluggish enough for good photos, whilst a whole host of birds livened our days, including superb encounters with Coquerel's and Giant Couas as well as a particularly photogenic Sakalava Weaver colony.



Madagascar Ground Boa just coming out of hibernation



Here in the south-west the scenery is at its most 'Madagascan'. After an evening spent in the ocean, swimming in the sunset, we made an early morning visit to the famous Allée des Baobabs, escaping the evening crowds, and giving us free reign over this natural masterpiece. We also spent a mind-blowing evening with a particularly photogenic stand of Grandidier's Baobabs which gave us all the baobab photographs we could possibly desire.

These Grandidier's Baobabs have seen many centuries come and go



The famous Allée des Baobabs is even more stunning than it appears in the many photos across the internet



Creeping through the undergrowth with a tense quiet, this Fossa was happy for us to join him on a ramble. Taken with a 35mm f2 lens.



Fossa is one of Madagascar's most rarely seen mammals and a sought after target for any keen naturalist



Crested Coua is 'shootable' at several of our destinations on this tour. It is never easy, but it is worth the effort.



A Sakalava Weaver colony (left) gave plenty of interesting opportunities as birds came and went. An obliging Giant Coua (right) eventually gave us a stoic headshot.



Night forays into the dry forest around Kirindy can produce some fascinating creatures. Madagascar Scops Owl and a bevy of mouse lemurs were among our rewards on this evening.



Sometimes a surprise is thrown our way too, like this group of roosting White-breasted Mesites.



Ankarafantsika
The North-west Oasis



Ankarafantsika is hot. Both in terms of heat, and the scorching photography it provides, the site is absolutely the hottest around. We started our stay here with a search for the incomparable Schlegel's Asity, which we duly and rather quickly racked up nice images of. Then, it was time to head further into the forest for Madagascar Cuckoo-Roller, Madagascar Buzzard, White-breasted Mesite, Coquerel's and Crested Couas, Red-capped Coua, and the stunning Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher.

Schlegel's Asity

One particularly golden morning we took a boat trip on the local lake. A serene morning spent gliding along shooting Cattle Egrets, Malachite Kingfishers, Squacco Herons, Allen's Gallinule, and the highlights of the morning: an obliging Humblot's Heron, and several giant Madagascar Fish Eagles.



Humblot's Heron



Once we'd had our fill of Ankarafantsika, ending with a beautiful session with the Coquerel's Sifakas, we had to make our way to the coast. A short drive took us to a stunning ocean-side resort where we wallowed our final evening away with cocktails by, and in, the pool. Could it end any more perfectly? Well, perhaps, with a morning of shopping for unique take-home gifts and bargain-priced jewels in Antananarivo after our final internal flight of the tour.

If you have ever considered coming to Madagascar, now is the time to come. The infrastructure is improving exponentially, all lodges are of a comfortable and enjoyable standard, and the wildlife is absolutely absurd. The opportunities for developing your portfolio, and increasing the photographic techniques and skills in your quiver, are never ending, and we as guides are here to help you achieve whatever images you can dream up.

Cattle Egrets



Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher is sure to delight in the forest



Female Madagascar Buttonquails, pictured here, are even better looking than the males.



There are few birds that can match the sublime Blue Vanga.



*The regal and intimidating
Madagascar Fish Eagle
often gives good profile
shot opportunities*



A session spent at a nearby marsh often gives ample opportunity for flight shots. Targeted here are Madagascar Jacana (left) and African Pygmy Goose (right).



Madagascar Jacana is a dapper, masked denizen of the northern swamps.

The following lists are birds, mammals and reptiles that were not only encountered along the way but also presented good photo opportunities. Animals simply seen briefly, without photographic opportunity, are not listed.

Meller's Duck	Madagascar Buttonquail
Helmeted Guineafowl	Lesser Crested Tern
Harlequin Quail	Rock Pigeon (Dove)
Madagascar Grebe	Madagascar Turtle-Dove
African Pygmy Goose	Namaqua Dove
Hamerkop	Crested Coua
Humblot's Heron	Verreaux's Coua
Purple Heron	Blue Coua
Great (White) Egret	Red-capped Coua
Little (Dimorphic) Egret	Red-fronted Coua
Black Heron (Egret)	Running Coua
Cattle Egret	Coquerel's Coua
Squacco Heron	Giant Coua
Striated Heron	Madagascar Coucal
Madagascar Fish Eagle	Madagascar (Lesser) Cuckoo
Frances's Goshawk	Barn Owl
Madagascar Sparrowhawk	Malagasy Scops-Owl
Henst's Goshawk	White-browed Owl
Yellow-billed Kite	Madagascar Long-eared Owl
Madagascar Buzzard	Madagascar Nightjar
White-breasted Mesite	Malagasy Spinetail
White-throated Rail	Madagascar (Black) Swift
Allen's Gallinule	African Palm-Swift
Common Moorhen	(Madagascar) Cuckoo-Roller
Madagascar Jacana	Madagascar Hoopoe





Madagascar Kingfisher
Madagascar Pygmy-Kingfisher
Madagascar Bee-eater
Broad-billed Roller
Scaly Ground-Roller
Madagascar Kestrel
Greater Vasa Parrot
Lesser Vasa Parrot
Grey-headed Lovebird
Schlegel's Asity
Common Newtonia
Red-tailed Vanga
Nuthatch Vanga
Chabert Vanga
(Madagascar) Blue Vanga
Hook-billed Vanga
Ward's Flycatcher
Rufous Vanga
Sickle-billed Vanga
White-headed Vanga
Madagascar Cuckoo-shrike
Crested Drongo
Madagascar Paradise-Flycatcher
Pied Crow
Brown-throated Martin

Mascarene Martin
Madagascar Bulbul
Madagascar Brush-Warbler
Madagascar Swamp-Warbler
Long-billed Tetraka
Spectacled Tetraka
Common Jery
Green Jery
Stripe-throated Jery
Madagascar Cisticola
Madagascar White-eye
Madagascar Magpie-Robin
African Stonechat
Common Myna
Madagascar Starling
Souimanga Sunbird
Madagascar (Green) Sunbird
Madagascar Wagtail
Nelicourvi Weaver
Sakalava Weaver
Red (Magagascar) Fody

Mammals

Gray-brown Mouse Lemur
Gray Mouse Lemur
Goodman's Mouse Lemur
Red-tailed Sportive Lemur
White-footed Sportive Lemur
Eastern Lesser (Gray) Bamboo Lemur
Common Brown Lemur
Red-fronted Brown Lemur
Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur
Ring-tailed Lemur
Pale Fork-marked Lemur
Eastern Woolly Lemur (Avahi)
Verreaux's Sifaka
Diademed Sifaka
Coquerel's Sifaka
Indri
Narrow-striped Mongoose
Fosa
Madagascar Flying Fox

Reptiles

Spider Tortoise
Brown Leaf Chameleon
Short-horned Chameleon
Parson's (Giant) Chameleon
Panther Chameleon
Horn Nose Chameleon
Oustalet's Chameleon
Warty Chameleon
Three-eyed Lizard
Merrem's Madagascar Swift
Curvier's Madagascar Swift
Satanic Leaf-tailed Gecko
Thicktail Day Gecko
Madagascar Plated Lizard
Madagascar Ground Boa
Duméril's Ground Boa





MERCI DE VOTRE VISITE
ET BONNE ROUTE

