

## MADAGASCAR 2014 (October 9th-November 11th)

I did my first trip in Madagascar in October 1996. For the last few years I got different informations where to have a good chance to see a Fosa: KIRINDY FOREST. I had to go back to this country. After the very good trip report of Carmen and Torbjörn LUNDQVIST (see Mammal Watching) I was decided to go in October 2014. But I chose to travel all the time by taxi brousse. It is long, tiring, but you can go nearly everywhere in the country and it is cheap. Domestic flights are expensive and unreliable. I used a hired car only to go to the Tsingy de Bemaraha. But even here you can do it (during the dry season) by taxi-brousse. It was a special Sifakas and Fosa trip. In 2006 Madagascar Pochard has been rediscovered in a remote place. But before 2014 I never found informations where it was. Of course there were very expensive trips to see this species (See Birquest or Rpcjumper). In July 2014 my trip itinerary was ready. August 2014 I check again on the web where to see the Pochard and finally found 2 trips reports of birdwatchers who reached the place (Bemanevika) by 4X4. One of them even got a breakdown in Baelanana and finally reached Bemanevika by motorbike. I decided to try reach this place. But I had to cancel a detour to see Perrier's Sifaka in the north.

Day 1: I arrive and sleep in Antananarivo.

Day 2: travel by luxurious taxi-brousse to Majunga.

Day 3: day trip to Katsepy. By 7am I catch a navette to cross the bay and reach Katsepy. Then I walk fast to the lighthouse, then meet the lightkeeper who shows me a group of 4 Crowned Sifakas and a group of 4 Mongoose Lemurs. Both are tame and hang in the forest close to the lighthouse. Plenty of evidence of Bushpigs. Then I rush back to Katsepy to catch a ferry back to Majunga (there are very few boats operating in the afternoon). It would have been better to sleep in Katsepy like Jon Hall did. In Katsepy I have been told they are tame Sifakas at 1 or 2 hotels next to the beach.

Day 4: day trip to lake Mourmalan looking for ducks. One Bernier's teal among a group of Red billed teals.

Day 5: taxi brousse from Majunga to Antsohihy

Day 6: Antsohihy to Baelanana by taxi brousse. Then I look for a motorbike. I get 3 offers. The last one is the best, because I meet Lukman who works at Bemanevika camp. He accepts to guide me. It takes 1h and a half on a trail bike to reach Bemanevika. The road, no the trail is surely the worst I did on a motorbike. I arrive exhausted at the basic camp. I pitch up my tent. Then after dinner I ask Lukman to look for lemurs by night: We see 2 Mouse lemurs (*sambiranensis* or unknown species) and 4 Greater dwarf lemurs.

Day 7: Morning and afternoon hikes in the forests and visit of the different lakes. Birds are plentiful, including a lot of Meller's ducks, at least 70 Madagascar grebes.... And best of all: 11 adults Madagascar Pochards including a pair with 2 chicks and a pair with 1 chick. Lukman shows me a Red Owl, 2 groups of Common Brown Lemurs and a group of 3 Sportive Lemurs below dead leaves (Anjamangirana Sportive Lemurs apparently). Evidence of Bushpigs.

Day 8: Morning visit of the forests and lakes. As we are sitting on the ground trying to see a Pitta-like Ground-roller I see next to me a Hova Mole Tenrec foraging at ground level using muzzle to probe beneath leaf-litter and humus (exactly as says Nick Garbutt).

Afternoon begins with the moto ride to Baelanana, then the taxi brousse to Antsohihy.

Day 9: Taxi brousse to Ambanja

Day 10: Taxi brousse to Daraina by the worst National Road I have ever seen. Arrival at Fanamby office. Ask for a guide. Get Amidou who will guide me and drive me with his motorbike to 2 different forests.

Day 11: Drive to Bekaraoka forest. We meet 3 Fanamby guides coming back from the forest where they spent 2 nights with 12 Spanish tourists looking unsuccessfully for Aye Aye.

The forest is in very bad state due to the work of gold-miners. We nevertheless see a lot of Golden Crowned Lemurs (as they are taboo people respect them and they are very easy to approach) and several groups of Crowned lemurs. We find a lot of evidence of Aye Aye on the trees+ may-be 15 nests including one with a fresh branch with green leaves. We decide to camp there. But no Aye Aye. Fork-marked lemurs (Amber Mountain or a new species: Amidou calls it Fanamby Fork marked lemur; Carmen and Torbjörn Lundqvist say in their trip report that Mittermeier call it Head-bobbing Lemur.) call from everywhere at dusk: we see several and also several Mouse lemurs (Northern rufous or an undescribed or unnamed new species ) and Daraina Sportive Lemurs.

Day 12: We move to a less disturbed part of the forest where we see fresh work of Aye Aye. We camp there and see the same species, again without Aye Aye. But by night as Amidou has left to try to look for one I find a Fanaloka hanging not far from our tents.

Day 13: With Amidou's motorbike we move to another forest (Binara), but wetter, 17km from Daraina. We stop at a village where we take a second compulsory guide. He does speak French. Amidou tells me he doesn't know anything. In fact he proved to be a very knowledgeable guide, finding Crowned lemurs, Sanford's Brown Lemurs, Golden-Crowned Sifaka (this one is rare here-it was common in the drier and open forest of Bekaraoka), an Eastern Ring-tailed Mongoose and a Madagascar Ibis. After that we return to Daraina where I spent most of the night...

Day 14: Early departure (4h30) to Vohemar (still very bad road) and Sambava (good road!). I buy food for my mini expedition in Marojejy NP.

Day 15: Taxi-brousse to Manantenina and arrival to the National Park Headquarters. I try to get Moses as guide but he is not here. I get Léon, sympathetic but not very knowledgeable. Now if you want to see Silky Sifaka you are asked to get a special guide who look only for this species. I decide to skip camp 1 and to spend 2 nights at camp 2 where there is more wildlife. Between the 2 camps we see 4 Northern Bamboo lemurs

Mid afternoon before arrival at camp 2 the special guide calls us to show a group of White fronted Lemurs and a family of 4 adults and a baby Silky Sifakas. But no sign of the promised Ring-tailed Mongoose near the kitchen. By night I find a lemur unfortunately disturbed by my guide who has no experience.

Day 16: Same species, including the Sifakas. But the special guide sees the Mongoose at 5am. Later no mongoose. We can't find any Red Bellied Lemurs (hopefully seen easily in the past at Ranomafana).

Day 17: By 5h15am the Mongoose is near the kitchen, appearing several time until 5h30am. After breakfast hike back to the road. Two groups of Northern Bamboo Lemurs and 3 of White fronted brown lemurs, plus several Helmet Vangas .

Then taxi-brousse to Sambava.

Day 18: Flight to Antananarivo.

Day 19: By 5pm long taxi-brousse drive to Morondava, arriving on day 20 by midday. Afternoon visit of Kirindy office, phone call with Christian (guide at Kirindy) and book a 4x4 to the Tsingy de Bemaraha for after my 3 days stay at Kirindy Forest.

Day 21: taxi brousse to Kirindy Forest. I arrive by 10am. It is already very hot. Christian advises me to stay the afternoon at the camp to see the Fosa (nearly guaranteed). After 1hour I see several tourists with cameras following a guide. I understand there is something interesting, I do the same. When I arrive near an old bungalow the guide explains a Fosa has just killed a Red fronted Brown lemur and has disappeared in the forest. I check below the bungalow and find the Fosa with the dead lemur. I wait for 1 hour, but the Fosa doesn't move.

From or in the camp I see Verreaux's Sifakas, Red fronted Brown lemurs and 3 Narrow striped mongooses.

Then I go for a night walk with Christian and see: 1 Cocquerel's giant dwarf lemur(what a name!!) sucking the sap of a tree, several Red-tailed Sportive Lemurs and Grey Mouse Lemurs and Pale Fork Marked Lemurs, but no Madame Berthe's Mouse Lemur. Christian explained me that the best place to see this species is at the moment closed to tourist because researchers do some trapping.

Back at the camp, by 10pm as I get water from the tap near the "shower place" I see something approaching next to me: a Fosa coming to drink.

Day 22: Early morning I see a female Fosa crossing the camp, then going in the forest and rubbing her neck on branches. After that a male (the young one) follows and sniffs the branches.

Then morning day hike with Christian. Several groups of Sifakas and 1 Narrow striped mongoose.

During the rest of the day I stay at the camp and see several times 2 males Fosas(1 old big one and a younger smaller) together. Once I see them at the rubbish dump, disappearing under a wooden platform. Then the big one reappears with a rat in the mouth.

I see several times Narrow striped Mongooses, once 5 together at the rubbish dump.

At 6 pm night walk with Christian. Same species as yesterday, plus a Western tuft-tailed rat and a Fat-tailed dwarf lemur emerging after a short rain (this last species hibernates during the dry season).

By midnight Christian calls me to show me a Giant Jumping Rat in the camp.

Day 23: Early morning the female Fosa mews at the top of a tall tree to call the males. Then hike in the forest: same species, plus 3 White Breasted Mesites.

Several sightings of the 2 males Fosas.

Late afternoon , the female mews from the top of a tall different tree.

By night Christian takes me to the place where the researchers trap mouse lemurs. After checking may-be 30 traps empty or often with a Grey Mouse Lemur we find a Madame Berthe's Mouse Lemur. Christian tells me that the proportion is 50 Grey Mouse Lemur for 1 Madame Berthe's.

Day 24: The female Fosa mews from the top of a new tree. Kirindy is a very interesting place, but very dirty. But it attracts animals. I leave by 8h30 to the Tsingy de Bemaraha with an American that I met before. After crossing 2 rivers with ferries we arrive in the afternoon at Bekopaka. We arrange for a guide and sleep at Tanankoay. A quiet, cheap place.

Day 25: Canoe ride on the Manambolo river: 2 Humblot's Herons and a colony of Madagascar Straw-Coloured Fruit Bats between rocks above the river. Then hike in the Petit Tsingy: not very spectacular (and not worthwhile if you are short in time), 1 group of Rufous Brown lemurs and a family of 5 Decken's Sifakas.

Before dinner I looked in the property of our hotel and find 2 Western Rufous Lemurs.

Day 26: Visit of the Grand Tsingy starting at 5h30 from Bekopaka (it takes 1 hour to reach the place). Only a group of 3 Decken's Sifakas, 2 Randrianosolo's Sportive Lemurs and 2 Tsingy Rails. Our guide didn't know a place to see Cleese's Avahi. I find 2 nest apparently of Aye Aye.

Afternoon drive to Belo sur de Tsiribihina.

Day 27: Drive to Morondava. A Black Rat seen in the town.

Day 28: Drive Morondava-Antananarivo.

Day 29: Flight back home.

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