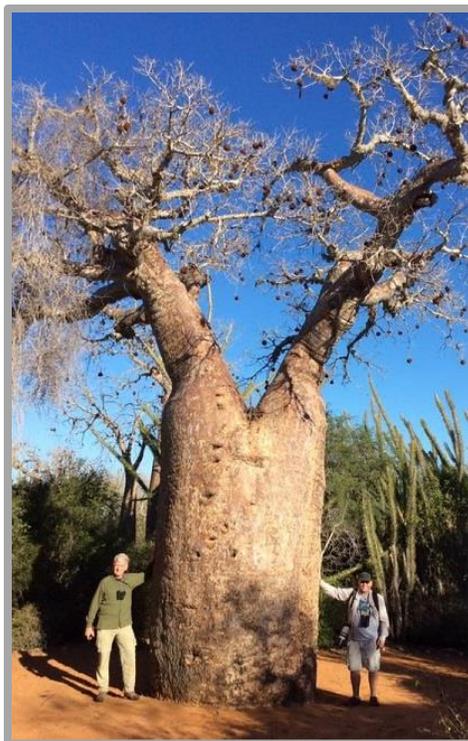


Madagascar – 27 June-4 July 2016



Peter and I next to a large baobab tree (left) and Olivier (far right) with our Long-tailed Ground-Roller crew near Ifaty (right).

Peter Wolter and I joined forces with Olivier Sam for a quick summer trip to Madagascar. The purpose of the trip was to scout for a future Iowa State University Study Abroad course we hope to offer in spring 2018 emphasizing Madagascar's diverse ecosystems, lemurs, and birds. This trip offered us a chance to visit the main sites in person to assess their suitability for a class trip.

27-28 June

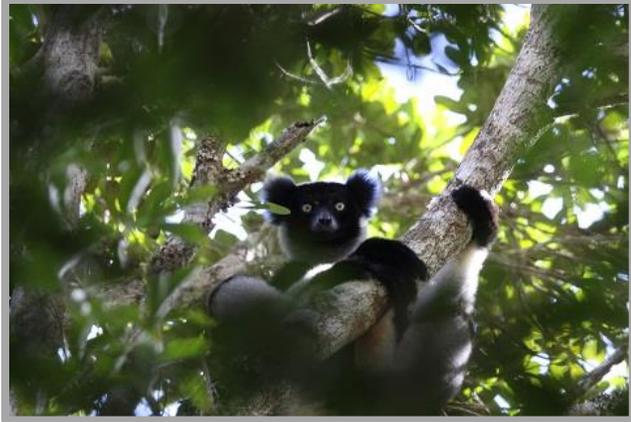
This was our travel day to Madagascar. I picked up Olivier and Peter at 8 a.m. in Ames and we were at the airport by 9:30 a.m. We checked in and the flight to Atlanta departed on time at 11:50 a.m. Our connection in Atlanta went smoothly and at 5:50 p.m. we departed for Paris where we arrived at 8 a.m. local time on the 28th. We had a couple of hours to kill before our scheduled departure to Antananarivo, Madagascar at 11:35 a.m. Unfortunately, we were delayed almost 3 hours for no apparent reason, meaning that we didn't arrive in Madagascar until a little after 2 a.m. local time. By the time we got Olivier's bag, found our driver, and were shuttled to the hotel it was 3 a.m. We managed to get a couple of hours of sleep after a very long day and a half of travel!

29 June

We arose a bit late to catch up on sleep and met for breakfast at 7 a.m. (bread and croissants with butter and jelly, juice, and coffee). After eating we checked out of the hotel and headed east towards Andasibe, arriving there at 12:10 p.m. En route we got an introduction to some of the common birds including Great, Little, and Cattle egrets, Striated Heron, Rock Pigeon, and Common Myna. In addition we saw Madagascar Buzzard, Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher, Cuckoo-roller, African Stonechat, Madagascar Munia, and Madagascar Fody. We also made a quick stop to exchange some money and buy water. Our first stop was Mitsinjo Park in Andasibe where we had some quick introductions, met our guide Pierre, and bought park passes for the day and night hikes. On the grounds of the headquarters we saw many Madagascar Bee-eaters overhead, a cooperative Short-horned Chameleon, and Peacock and Lined day geckos. We left on our hike at 12:30 p.m. and our first task was to track down a family group of Indri that the guides had been watching for us all day. We eventually got right under the group of five as they began to get active. After about a half an hour they began to call from a few meters away – this was definitely one of the most haunting wildlife vocalizations I've ever heard! We also managed to find a pair of Eastern Woolly Lemurs at their daytime roost, two Greater Dwarf Lemurs roosting in a hollow tree with their bottom fur just visible, and a group of seven Eastern Brown Lemurs that were quite photogenic. Another spectacular highlight was finding a Leaf-tailed Gecko. It took Peter and me a couple of minutes to spot the critter, even after it was pointed out to us! I was stunned at how laterally compressed it was on the tree branch. The birding was good and we managed to find Madagascar Blue-Pigeon, Blue Coua, Madagascar Coucal, Souimanga Sunbird, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Madagascar Brush-Warbler, Chabert's Vanga, Hook-billed Vanga, Madagascar Paradise-Flycatcher, and Crested Drongo. It was also fun to see what Olivier called a "Madagascar Giraffe", which was really a small horned beetle.

After our hike we were fortunate to receive a guided tour of the amphibian breeding facility in Andasibe. The director, Justin Claude, showed us the insect (frog food) breeding facility as well as the frogs themselves – mostly Golden Frogs but also other threatened species. We then drove a short distance to our hotel (actually, Olivier's brothers' guest house) where we checked into our rooms and had dinner (grilled chicken, rice, fresh vegetables, oranges, and Coca Cola).

After dinner we relaxed for a short time before heading back to the park at 6 p.m. for a night hike. The weather was great with calm and warm conditions. We hiked the main trail through the park and then walked back along the road. At the start it was somewhat slow, although we did find several small chameleons (Big-nosed, Perinet, and Brown Leaf) and tree frogs. But things quickly improved and we saw 3 Eastern Brown Mouse Lemurs and a lone Greater Dwarf Lemur in the last hour. One of the mouse lemurs was within a couple of meters of the ground and offered fantastic photo opportunities! We also saw a lot of insects including several large moths, many spiders (some large black ones were especially creepy), leaf butterflies, and several others. We finally called it a day at 8 p.m. and returned to the hotel for a couple of glasses of red wine before bed. [clear becoming partly cloudy, temperature 49-72°F, winds calm]



Clockwise from upper left: Eastern Woolly Lemur, Indri, Short-horned Chameleon, Lined Day Gecko, Leaf-tailed Gecko (can you find it?), Greater Dwarf Lemur, and Madagascar Malachite Kingfisher.

30 June

Today was primarily a travel day from the rainforest to the spiny forest. We left the guest house at 6 a.m. for a short morning hike in the Special Reserve of Madagascar National Park, but had to depart by 8 a.m. to make our flight. While waiting for the park to open we found a cooperative Parson's Chameleon that posed for photographs. On our hike with guide Etienne we saw a few birds including Madagascar Turtle-Dove, Red-breasted and Red-capped couas, Madagascar White-eye, and Tylas Vanga, although overall the forest was very quiet. We were a little late returning from our hike, but were headed towards Antananarivo with our driver, Tina, by 8:15 a.m. In some rice fields west of Moramanga we saw a couple of Hamerkops, but otherwise the drive was uneventful until reaching Antananarivo. The traffic was horrible and we took a "shortcut" on a rough gravel road that bisected some wetlands near the airport. There were lots of wading birds, including Black Heron, and I wished we could have spent time birding this area. We arrived at the airport at 12:10 p.m. with plenty of time to make our 1:40 p.m. flight. We did not eat lunch.

We left for Antananarivo at 1:40 p.m., stopped for an hour in Tolagnaro, and then continued on to Toliara where we arrived at 4:15 p.m. We had a driver waiting and stopped in Toliara to get some cash and wine before continuing on to Ifaty. The road to Ifaty is gravel, well-traveled, and extremely dusty and we were glad to arrive at the hotel! We settled into our rooms at Ikotel and then met for dinner at the bar (fresh grilled fish with rice and vegetables, orange Fanta to drink). After dinner we enjoyed a bottle of red wine before retiring to our rooms a little after 8 p.m. [partly cloudy, temperature 60-83°F, winds SE 5-10 mph]

1 July

This morning was our chance to explore the spiny forest. The experience, simply put, was incredible! The morning began with a light breakfast (bread with butter and strawberry jelly, juice, and coffee). We met our guide, Relatsy, at 6 a.m. and drove a short distance to the privately owned Mosa spiny forest reserve. We hiked several miles in the 60 ha preserve before finally leaving at 10 a.m. We began the experience with ground-roller hunting, group style. The guide and his three helpers (Eric, Rangan, and another young man) fanned out, looking for a Long-tailed Ground-Roller. They eventually found one, which they surrounded and proceeded to herd towards us. This bird spends a lot of time under the scrub canopy, standing still, but when it runs it reminded me of a dart – very fast! They eventually herded the bird into position for some great photos. Next up was Subdesert Mesite, which they quickly located. The bird was perched in a distinctive hind-end-up pose and offered very close looks and photos. Next up were the vangas. We located a group of Sickle-billed Vangas and followed them for a while to get good looks and photos. We also encountered a group of four White-headed Vangas, which eventually joined up with the Sickle-bills. We then had a great look at a Crested Coua, which was perched low in a tree sunning itself. Not a minute later the guide found a Running Coua, which the group surrounded and herded into the open for some great looks and photos. We then hiked further into



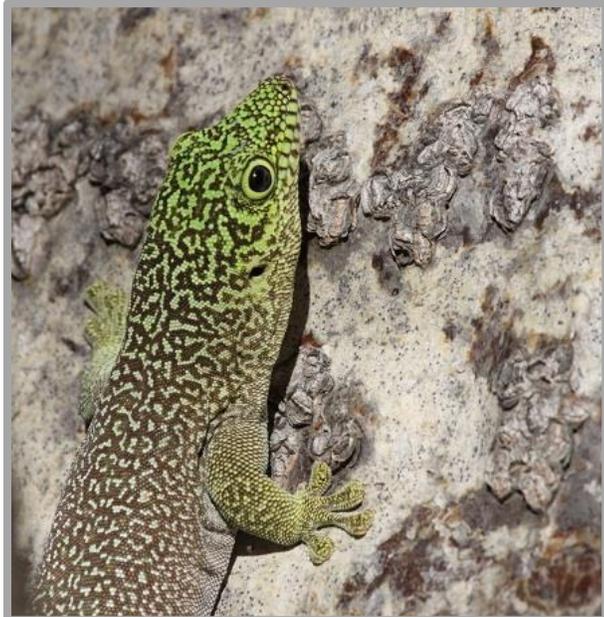
Clockwise from upper left: a sample of some of the birds of the spiny forest and vicinity including Long-tailed Ground-Roller, Madagascar Plover, Running Coua, Three-banded Plover, Sickle-billed Vanga, and Subdesert Mesite.

the preserve where the forest was a little taller and greener, with much larger baobab trees. We found a couple that were absolutely huge (2.5 m in diameter) plus several Elephant Trees, which is similar in appearance but broadens as it gets farther above ground. And we saw both species of baobab trees, one with a gray trunk and the other with a distinctly red trunk. Along the hike we saw a lone White-footed Spotted Lemur plus several Green-headed Lizards. There were several Madagascar Kestrels and we had good looks at a Madagascar Harrier-Hawk. Our vanga luck continued as we encountered a group of 3 Chabert's Vangas, soon followed by a pair of Lafresnaye's Vangas. Other birds included Thamnornis, Subdesert Brush Warbler, Common and Archbold's newtonias, and Common Jery. On our hike out we encountered another Long-tailed Ground-Roller, which was also very cooperative.

After leaving the spiny forest at 10 a.m. we drove south to Ifaty in search of other birds. Our first stop was some lagoons just south of Ifaty. After an hour of searching we finally found our target birds – Kittlitz's, Madagascar, and White-fronted plovers, all in the same flock! There were also many Madagascar Larks displaying. We then continued south on the highway where at another small pond we found a lone Three-banded Plover. We continued further south to some mangroves at the small village of Tsongeritelo. A short walk along the beach from 11:30 a.m. to noon, on an incoming tide, produced many Little Egrets, a Black-bellied (Gray) Plover, and a Ruddy Turnstone. It was time to return to the hotel for lunch, but along the way we spotted a Black Kite just south of Ifaty.

Back at the hotel we ate lunch at noon (grilled fish with rice and fresh vegetables) and then lounged at a table overlooking the ocean. It was very relaxing! We enjoyed a bottle of red wine while watching the sail boats pass back and forth. Peter couldn't resist and managed to hop on with some two young men for a quick 20-minute sail on the Mozambique Channel. When he returned I did the same thing. The boat was short and narrow with an outrigger and home-made sail, but very seaworthy. Neither of the young men spoke English, so we communicated by signals. Cost was 10,000 Real each. A great experience! One of the men wanted my quick-dry shorts in lieu of payment, which gave us all a good laugh.

We relaxed at the hotel for the rest of the afternoon before our night hike in the spiny forest at 6:30 p.m. The evening weather was awesome with crystal clear skies, no wind, and a temperature in the low 70s. And there were no bothersome insects. Within a few minutes we found our first Western Brown Mouse Lemur, which was very cooperative and posed for photos. Later we found a second individual, much smaller and less cooperative than the first. One of the guides found a Hedgehog (Tenrec), which nicely posed for photos and allowed us to handle it briefly. After lots of searching we finally found a White-footed Spotted Lemur, which was sleeping and needed coaxing to become active. Surprisingly, we saw no reptiles, and only one colorful butterfly. An added bonus was a roosting Madagascar Magpie-robin and a cluster of three Common Jery. We returned to the hotel at 7:45 p.m. and enjoyed another excellent dinner in the bar (grilled lobster [caught that day] with rice, fruit crepes for dessert, and red wine). [clear, temperature 70-82°F, winds light SE]



Clockwise from upper left: White-footed Spotted Lemur, Hedgehog (Tenrec), Green-headed Lizard, Archbold's Newtonia, Peter sailing the Mozambique Channel, and Western Brown Mouse Lemur.

2 July

Today we decided to visit some coastal scrub habitat before our afternoon flight back to Antananarivo. We awoke at Ikotel to the sound of Madagascar Nightjars and enjoyed a light breakfast (bread with butter and apricot jelly, juice, and coffee) before departing a little after 6 a.m. with our guide from yesterday. On the drive south to Toliara we saw a Madagascar Grebe and a pair of Red-billed Ducks (Teal) in a roadside wetland, but little else of note. Our destination was the Table Mountain area south of Toliara, which was accessed by a rough gravel road. This is a region of low scrub with lots of cactus and scattered young baobabs. Soon after leaving the car we found our first target, a cooperative Verraux's Coua. Eventually we located at least four of these birds in a small area where we also found a single Red-capped ("Green-capped" form) Coua. In a little more than an hour of birding this area we also saw Red-shouldered Vanga and Subdesert Brush-Warbler. We left at 8:30 a.m. and headed for the Akila Be area where there are some wetlands that are occasionally visited by sandgrouse. We saw no sandgrouse but did enjoy Common Moorhen (with small young), Kittlitz's and Three-banded plovers, Madagascar Lovebird, and Madagascar Cisticola. We birded this area until 9:45 a.m. and then headed for Toliara. We dropped off our guide and then found a restaurant on the waterfront for a nice lunch (baked fish with rice, vegetables, a seafood bisque, rolls, and red wine). Our driver had us to the airport by 2 p.m., in plenty of time for our 4:40 p.m. flight back to Antananarivo. The flight went smoothly and we left the airport at 6:15 p.m. with our driver, Tina. Traffic was a mess and the highway east was extremely busy, so we didn't arrive in Andasibe until a little after 10 p.m. We quickly got our room keys and enjoyed a late dinner (baked fish with rice, vegetables, and red wine) before retiring at 11:30 p.m. It had been a very long, but productive, day! [clear, temperature 69-80°F, winds SE 5-15 mph]

3 July

This was our last full day in Madagascar. After a short night of sleep we met our guide, Roget, at the hotel. We left the hotel a little after 6 a.m. for a short drive to Mantadia National Park. Short in distance, but not time, because the 10 km dirt road into the park was terribly rutted! We finally arrived at our destination at 7:15 a.m. As we were getting ready for the hike Olivier found a Scaly Ground-Roller along the forest edge right by the parking lot. As we were struggling to relocate the bird a Pitta-like Ground-Roller appeared in the same area and we eventually had good looks at both birds. These were great finds so close to the road! Our morning schedule consisted of a long hike through the primary forest on the Taskoka Trail and lasted until 1 p.m. During this hike we saw and heard several Indri and had extended looks at a group of Diademed Safikas. The birding was excellent and we saw Madagascar Sparrowhawk, Red-fronted Coua, Malagasy Spinetail, Madagascar Cuckoo-Shrike, Gray-crowned Tetraka, Red-tailed Newtonia, Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, Blue, Tylas, and Nuthatch vangas, and Nelicourvi Weaver. At the end of the hike we made a short detour to a small impounded lake where we saw 2 Meller's Ducks (rare in the park) and 2 Madagascar Grebes. We walked along the road to get back to the truck, and just before arriving found a cooperative Eastern Bamboo



Clockwise from upper left: Eastern Bamboo Lemur, Diademed Safika, Verraux's Coua, Red-tailed Vanga, Subdesert Brush-Warbler, and Pitta-like Ground-Roller.

Lemur perched in the open. We discussed plans for the rest of the day and drove a short distance to another trailhead for a second hike. At the trailhead we paused for a mid-day snack of sardine sandwiches courtesy of Roget. This was the Rianaso Trail and led to a small waterfall (more like a water cascade) with a swimming hole and was quite beautiful. However, wildlife were scarce except for a single mixed-species flock that contained Malagasy Spinetail, Red-shouldered Vanga, and Madagascar Sunbird. The hike lasted from 1:20 p.m. until 3 p.m. and included a somewhat steep climb just past the waterfall.

After we finished the hike we returned to Andasibe where we dropped off Roget and continued on the hotel (we forgot to pay our bill that morning) and then to Olivier's house. At the latter stop we enjoyed sampling local fruit that included grapefruit, pibasy, and taro root. At 5:30 p.m. we began the long, slow drive to Antananarivo where we finally arrived at 9:30 p.m. [overcast with light rain, temperature 71-84°F, winds SE 5-10 mph]

4 July

This was our long travel day home! Our flight from Antananarivo to Paris departed on time at 1:45 a.m. and went smoothly; we arrived in Paris 10.5 hours later. After a short layover we caught a flight to Minneapolis, where it arrived on time 8.5 hours later. We had a 3-hour layover in Minneapolis before our last flight to Des Moines and enjoyed a nice dinner at TGI Friday's. The 1-hour flight to Des Moines went smoothly and we arrived at 8:40 p.m. and were back in Ames an hour later.

For more information, please contact: Stephen J. Dinsmore, Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management, 339 Science Hall II, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011; E-mail: cootjr@iastate.edu

Mammals (10 species)

Indri
 Eastern Woolly Lemur
 Greater Dwarf Lemur
 Eastern Brown Lemur
 Eastern Brown Mouse
 Lemur
 Western Brown Mouse
 Lemur
 White-footed Spotted
 Lemur
 Eastern Bamboo Lemur
 Diademed Safika
 Hedgehog

**Birds (83 species;
 endemics in italics)**

Meller's Duck
 Red-billed Duck
Madagascar Grebe
 Hamerkop
 Gray Heron
 Great Egret
 Little Egret
 Black Heron
 Cattle Egret
 Striated Heron
 Black Kite
*Madagascar Harrier-
 Hawk*
Madagascar Sparrowhawk
Madagascar Buzzard
Madagascar Kestrel
Subdesert Mésite
 Common Moorhen
 Black-bellied Plover
 Kittlitz's Plover
Madagascar Plover
 Three-banded Plover
 White-fronted Plover
 Ruddy Turnstone
 Rock Pigeon
 Madagascar Turtle-Dove
 Namaqua Dove
Madagascar Blue-Pigeon

Gray-headed Lovebird
 Greater Vasa Parrot
 Lesser Vasa Parrot
Red-breasted Coua
Red-fronted Coua
Red-capped Coua
[Green-capped Coua]
Running Coua
Crested Coua
Verraux's Coua
Blue Coua
 Madagascar Coucal
 Madagascar Nightjar
 Malagasy Spinetail
 Madagascar Kingfisher
 Madagascar Bee-eater
Scaly Ground-Roller
Pitta-like Ground-Roller
Long-tailed Ground-Roller
 Madagascar Cuckoo-roller
Common Sunbird Asity
Tylas Vanga
Common Newtonia
Archbold's Newtonia
Chabert's Vanga
 Blue Vanga
Red-tailed Vanga
Red-shouldered Vanga
Nuthatch Vanga
Hook-billed Vanga
Sickle-billed Vanga
White-headed Vanga
Lafresnaye's Vanga
 Madagascar Cuckoo-
 Shrike
 Crested Drongo
 Madagascar Paradise
 Flycatcher
 Pied Crow
Madagascar Lark
 Mascarene Martin
 Madagascar Bulbul
 Madagascar Brush-
 Warbler
Subdesert Brush-Warbler
Thamnornis

Gray-crowned Tetraka
Common Jery
 Madagascar Cisticola
Madagascar Magpie-robin
 African Stonechat
 Madagascar White-eye
 Common Myna
 Souimanga Sunbird
 Madagascar Sunbird
Madagascar Wagtail
Nelicourvi Weaver
Sakalava Weaver
Madagascar Fody
Madagascar Munia

**Reptiles and Amphibians
 (6 species)**

Leaf-tailed Gecko
 Lined Day Gecko
 Peacock Day Gecko
 Short-horned Chameleon
 Parson's Chameleon
 Green-headed Lizard