

Birds and Reptiles of Kokoa Park and Kokoa Sands Lodge

Ankasy, Atsimo-Andrefana Region, southwest Madagascar

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Kokoa Park is a recently established private protected area, associated with the Kokoa Sands Lodge (see maps at the end of the report). It protects several square kilometers of nearly pristine spiny forest, which are part of what is broadly known as the Mikea Forest, one of Madagascar's largest and least fragmented forest blocks. The Kokoa Park is just west of the Mikea Forest National Park, part of the Madagascar National Parks system. Local people report that from Kokoa Park, there is good forest for at least another 10km to the east, which is consistent with satellite imagery.

The spiny forest at Kokoa Park is similar to that found in the frequently visited Ifaty area, growing on loose red sand. It averages 5-10m tall, and the dominant tree species include *Didierea madagascariensis*, *Euphorbia* sp., *Adansonia rubrostipa*, *Combretum* sp., *Moringa* sp., and *Givotia madagascariensis*. The area immediately along the coast, and ~500m inland, including around Kokoa Sands lodge, is spiny forest of a very different character. It is dominated by *Euphorbia stenoclada*, is only 2-5m tall, and grows on a white sand substrate. The transition between these two habitat types is striking. The coastal forest seemed to



Long-tailed Ground-Roller is only found in a small portion of southwest Madagascar's spiny forest, from just north of Tulear to well south of Morondava. It's a "must-see" bird for visiting birders and many general naturalists.

hold nothing distinctive in terms of its bird community, but rather a much-reduced subset of the birds of the taller, red-sand spiny forest. Just southeast of Kokoa Park proper is an open area featuring grassland, and a large seasonally flooded pan that is bordered by a series of small ponds and reedbeds that seem to hold at least a little water year-round. This very different habitat suite considerably adds to the area's avian diversity.

This area is virtually unknown and unvisited by travelling birders, but holds a full suite of spiny forest birds, including the localized Subdesert Mesite and Long-tailed Ground-Roller, along with some other sought-after species such as Banded Kestrel, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk, and Madagascar Sandgrouse. The extent and condition of the forest are far superior to those of the small forest patches in the Ifaty / Mangily vicinity. This site is only 1.5-2 hours north of Ifaty, and is easily accessible with a 4x4 vehicle. The lodge is just off the main coastal track, and the park's access point is 4km (a 15-minute drive) from the lodge.

After the bird list is a short list of endemic bird species that were not detected, but which are likely to occur. Further observations along the ocean and in the lakes vicinity are also likely to add many non-endemic waterbird species to the overall list.

Although survey efforts for reptiles were incidental, involved little nocturnal effort, and were made during the dry season, they suggested the presence of a rich set of reptiles, including localized spiny forest species.

One group that was surprisingly absent was mammals, namely lemurs. Forest-dwelling local people report that both Verreaux's Sifaka and Ring-tailed Lemur are present, and fairly common. But despite spending dozens of hours in the forest, and covering a lot of ground, I never sighted or even heard either. I expected better luck with nocturnal lemur species, and thought at the very least I would encounter Gray-brown Mouse Lemur and a Sportive-Lemur. But about 1.5 hours of nocturnal searching failed to turn up a lemur by sight or sound. Local people report that Fosa is present, especially in the lakes vicinity.

Annotated List of the Bird Species Recorded:

Endemic	Status	Common Name / Family	Scientific Name	KS	KP	Notes
		Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)				
		Red-billed Duck (Teal)	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>		x	Multiple sightings of two pairs on the lakes.
		Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)				
RE / Essp		Madagascar Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia p. picturata</i>		x	Uncommon and shy in spiny forest.
Essp		Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis aliena</i>	x	x	Common throughout, visiting lakes in moderate numbers to drink.
E		Madagascar Green-Pigeon	<i>Treron australis</i>		x	One sighting, a high flyover. Perhaps common when there are more fruiting trees in the area.
		Mesitornithidae (Mesites)				
SFE	VU	Subdesert Mesite	<i>Monias benschi</i>		x	Uncommon, with pairs or family groups heard in four different places. Present both in pristine and partially degraded spiny forest.
		Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)				
E		Madagascar Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles personatus</i>		x	About 45 seen arriving at the lakes between 5pm and 6pm. Visited water to drink first, then flew into open fields, seemingly with the intention of sleeping there.
		Cuculidae (Cuckoos)				
SFE		"Chestnut-vented" Crested Coua	<i>Coua cristata pyropyga</i>	x	x	Fairly common. Southwestern subspecies sometime split as a full species.
SFE		"Green-capped" Red-capped Coua	<i>Coua ruficeps olivaceiceps</i>		x	Fairly common by voice, though shy. Seen more frequently than Running Coua, especially along the entrance road.
SFE		Running Coua	<i>Coua cursor</i>	x	x	Common by voice, though very shy. Perhaps heavily hunted? Only seen once, walking on the entrance road.
RE / Essp		Madagascar Coucal	<i>Centropus t. toulou</i>	x	x	Common by voice, including at the lodge.
BE		Madagascar (Lesser) Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus rochii</i>		x	Fairly common by voice.

		Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and allies)				
RE / Essp		Madagascar Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus m. madagascariensis</i>	x	x	Common by voice, especially at the lakes and around the lodge.
		Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)				
RE / Essp		White-throated Rail	<i>Dryolimnas c. cuvieri</i>		x	A few present in the small reedbeds along the western edge of the lakes.
		Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)				
		Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		x	Common, several pairs at the lakes.
		Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)				
		Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>		x	Common at the lakes. Witnessed antagonistic interactions with closely related Madagascar Plover
E	VU	Madagascar Plover	<i>Charadrius thoracicus</i>		x	Common at the lakes. 4-6 pairs present. Also fairly common around small lakes and on open fields during the drive to the lodge from Ifaty.
Essp		(Madagascar) Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris bifrontatus</i>		x	Fairly common at the lakes. 2-3 pairs.
Essp		White-fronted Plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus tenellus</i>	x		At least one pair on the beach, just north of the lodge.
		Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)				
NBM		Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	x		Flybys from the lodge.
NBM		Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	x		Small group on the beach.
		Turnicidae (Buttonquail)				
E		Madagascar Buttonquail	<i>Turnix nigricollis</i>	x	x	Once at the lodge, and several encounters in the forest, including one singing bird the morning after a light nighttime rain.

		Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)				
REssp		Little (Dimorphic) Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta dimorpha</i>	x	x	About 12 seen at the lakes in the late evening. Roosting in a dead tree, then moved to roost in the spiny forest when disturbed.
		Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		x	Once at the water point / guardian houses.
		Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)				
E	NT	Madagascar (Crested) Ibis	<i>Lophotibis cristata</i>		x	Several birds heard just after sunset. Mikea Forest is the farthest south known locality for this species in western Madagascar. It doesn't seem to occur in most of the southwestern spiny forest.
		Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)				
E		Madagascar Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides radiatus</i>		x	Fairly common; regularly seen in small numbers. Found the feathers of a immature bird that appeared to have been hunted and eaten by local people
E		Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk	<i>Aviceda madagascariensis</i>		x	Uncommon. A couple sightings of birds in flight over the forest. Never seen perched or at close range.
NBM		Black (Yellow-billed) Kite	<i>Milvus migrans (parasitus)</i>	x	x	Uncommon; seen in flight at the lakes.
E		Madagascar Buzzard	<i>Buteo brachypterus</i>		x	Common in small numbers. Vocal.
		Strigidae (Owls)				
E		Torotoroka Scops-Owl	<i>Otus madagascariensis</i>		x	Fairly common by voice at night. Highly punctuated song, slightly different from birds in Isalo area.
		Upupidae (Hoopoes)				
E		Madagascar Hoopoe	<i>Upupa marginata</i>	x	x	Fairly common in spiny forest. Perhaps more common in degraded forest and scrub.
		Meropidae (Bee-eaters)				
		Madagascar Bee-eater	<i>Merops superciliosus</i>	x	x	Common in degraded areas and around the lake.

		Coraciidae (Rollers)				
BEssp		Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus g. glaucurus</i>	x	Heard once at sunset near the lake.	
		Brachypteraciidae (Ground-Rollers)				
SFE	VU	Long-tailed Ground-Roller	<i>Uratelornis chimaera</i>	x	Seemingly rare. Only one pair nesting along the entrance road. They seemed to stay within 50m of the nest cavity, but allowed fairly close approach in that zone.	
		Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)				
RE		Madagascar Kestrel	<i>Falco newtoni</i>	x	x	Fairly common in small numbers, including around the lodge.
E		Banded Kestrel	<i>Falco zoniventris</i>		x	Rare. One sighting in flight, near the lakes. Carrying food, probably on the way to a nest.
		Psittaculidae (Old World Parrots)				
RE / Essp		Greater Vasa-Parrot	<i>Coracopsis vasa drouhardi</i>		x	Common though shy, suggesting hunting and other forms of persecution.
RE / Essp		Lesser Vasa-Parrot	<i>Coracopsis nigra libs</i>		x	Uncommon; far less common than Greater.
E		Grey-headed Lovebird	<i>Agapornis canus ablectaneus</i>	x	x	Fairly common. Often seen near lakes, probably visiting to drink. Also around the lodge
		Campephagidae (Cuckoo-shrikes)				
E		Madagascar Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina cinerea</i>		x	Rare. Heard twice and never seen.
		Vangidae (Vangas & Helmetshrikes)				
SFE		Archbold's Newtonia	<i>Newtonia archboldi</i>		x	Common, especially by voice. Pairs highly territorial at this time of the year.
E		Common Newtonia	<i>Newtonia brunneicauda</i>		x	Common, especially by voice. Slightly more common than Archbold's, with no obvious difference in habitat preference.

E		Red-tailed Vanga	<i>Calicalicus madagascariensis</i>		x	Fairly common by voice, and highly territorial. Males conspicuous, but females virtually invisible, perhaps nesting?
E		Chabert Vanga	<i>Leptopterus chabert</i>	x	x	Fairly common in small numbers. Found one nest in an Octopus Tree.
E		Hook-billed Vanga	<i>Vanga curvirostris</i>		x	Uncommon, and in small numbers, though voice can be detected at long range.
E		Sickle-billed Vanga	<i>Falcula palliata</i>	x	x	Fairly common by voice, though weirdly elusive. Never seen at close range. Perhaps hunted?
E		White-headed Vanga	<i>Artamella (Leptopterus) viridis</i>		x	Rare. Only encountered twice: once on the entrance road and once near the guardians' houses.
SFE		Lafresnaye's Vanga	<i>Xenopirostris xenopirostris</i>	x	x	Common and very vocal, especially in the early morning.
Dicruridae (Drongos)						
RE / Essp		Crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus f. forficatus</i>	x	x	Fairly common. Pairs seen mobbing Madagascar Harrier-Hawks several times.
Monarchidae (Monarch Flycatchers)						
RE / Essp		Madagascar Paradise-Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone m. mutata</i>		x	Uncommon, only sighted a few times.
Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)						
		Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	x	x	Commonly seen in small numbers.
Alaudidae (Larks)						
E		Madagascar Lark	<i>Mirafra hova</i>		x	Abundant in the open fields around the lakes.
Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)						
E		Common Jery	<i>Neomixis tenella</i>	x	x	Fairly common in degraded areas; uncommon to rare in good forest.
SFE		"Subdesert" Stripe-throated Jery	<i>Neomixis striatigula pallidior</i>	x	x	Abundant, especially by voice, and in good forest. The southwestern subspecies is distinctive.
RE		Madagascar Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cherina</i>	x	x	Common around the lakes, and in degraded areas, including the lodge vicinity.

		Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)				
E		Subdesert Brush-Warbler	<i>Nesillas lantzi</i>	x	x	Common in scrub and degraded forest; uncommon to rare in good forest.
E		Madagascar Swamp-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus newtoni</i>		x	Uncommon; a couple of pairs live in the marshes along the western side of the lakes.
		Bernieridae (Malagasy Warblers)				
SFE		Thamnornis (Warbler)	<i>Thamnornis chloropetoides</i>		x	Fairly common by voice in good forest. Calls from the top of a tree, usually an Octopus Tree, but feeds on and near the ground. Highly territorial and vocal.
		Hirundinidae (Swallows)				
RE		Mascarene Martin	<i>Phedina borbonica</i>		x	Just a handful seen along with Barn Swallows around the lakes.
NBM		Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		x	Around 20 seen at the lakes. Some birds buffy below, and some pure white.
		Pycnonotidae (Bulbuls)				
RE / Essp		Madagascar Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes m. madagascariensis</i>	x	x	Fairly common in scrub and degraded areas, and uncommon in good forest.
		Sturnidae (Starlings)				
I		Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	x	x	Common around villages and in scrub; uncommon in the forest, mostly around the lakes.
		Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)				
E		Madagascar Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus albospecularis</i>	x	x	Fairly common.
		Nectariniidae (Sunbirds and Spiderhunters)				
RE / Essp		“White-bellied” Souimanga Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris souimanga apolis</i>	x	x	Common. White-bellied southwestern subspecies.

RE / Essp		Madagascar (Green) Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris n. notatus</i>		x	Uncommon and inconspicuous. Mostly along the edge of good forest near the lakes and the guardians' houses.
Ploceidae (Weavers and Allies)						
E		Sakalava Weaver	<i>Ploceus sakalava</i>	x	x	Abundant around the lodge, and also present in the forest.
RE		Red (Magagascar) Fody	<i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	x	x	Strangely uncommon, just a couple sightings, including one associating with a Sakalava Weaver at the lodge

Other Endemic Bird Species That are Highly Likely to Occur:

Apodidae (Swifts)						
RE / Essp		Malagasy Spinetail (Madagascar Spinetailed-Swift)	<i>Zoonavena g. grandidieri</i>			
Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)						
BE	VU	Madagascar Pratincole	<i>Glareola ocularis</i>			
Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)						
RE / Essp		Frances's Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter f. francesiae</i>			
E	NT	Madagascar Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter madagascariensis</i>			
Leptosomidae (Cuckoo-Roller)						
RE		(Madagascar) Cuckoo-Roller	<i>Leptosomus discolor</i>			
Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)						
E		Madagascar Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis vintsioides</i>			

Zosteropidae (White-eyes)			
RE / Essp		Madagascar White-eye	<i>Zosterops maderaspatanus</i>
Estrildidae (Waxbills and Allies)			
E		Madagascar Munia (Mannikin)	<i>Lonchura nana</i>

Reptile Species Recorded:

Opluridae			
E		Three-eyed Lizard	<i>Chalarodon madagascariensis</i>
E		Merrem's Madagascar Swift	<i>Oplurus cyclurus</i>
Gekkonidae			
E		Thicktail Day Gecko	<i>Phelsuma mutabilis</i>
Gerrhosauridae			
E		Malagasy Keeled Plated Lizard	<i>Tracheloptychus madagascarensis</i>
E		Peter's Keeled Plated Lizard	<i>Tracheloptychus petersi</i>
SFE	VU	Four-lined Plated Lizard	<i>Zonosaurus quadrilineatus</i>
Scincidae			
E		Elegant Skink	<i>Trachylepis elegans</i>
Colubridae			
E		Bernier's Striped Snake	<i>Dromicodryas bernieri</i>
E		Mahafaly Sand Snake	<i>Mimophis mahafalensis</i>

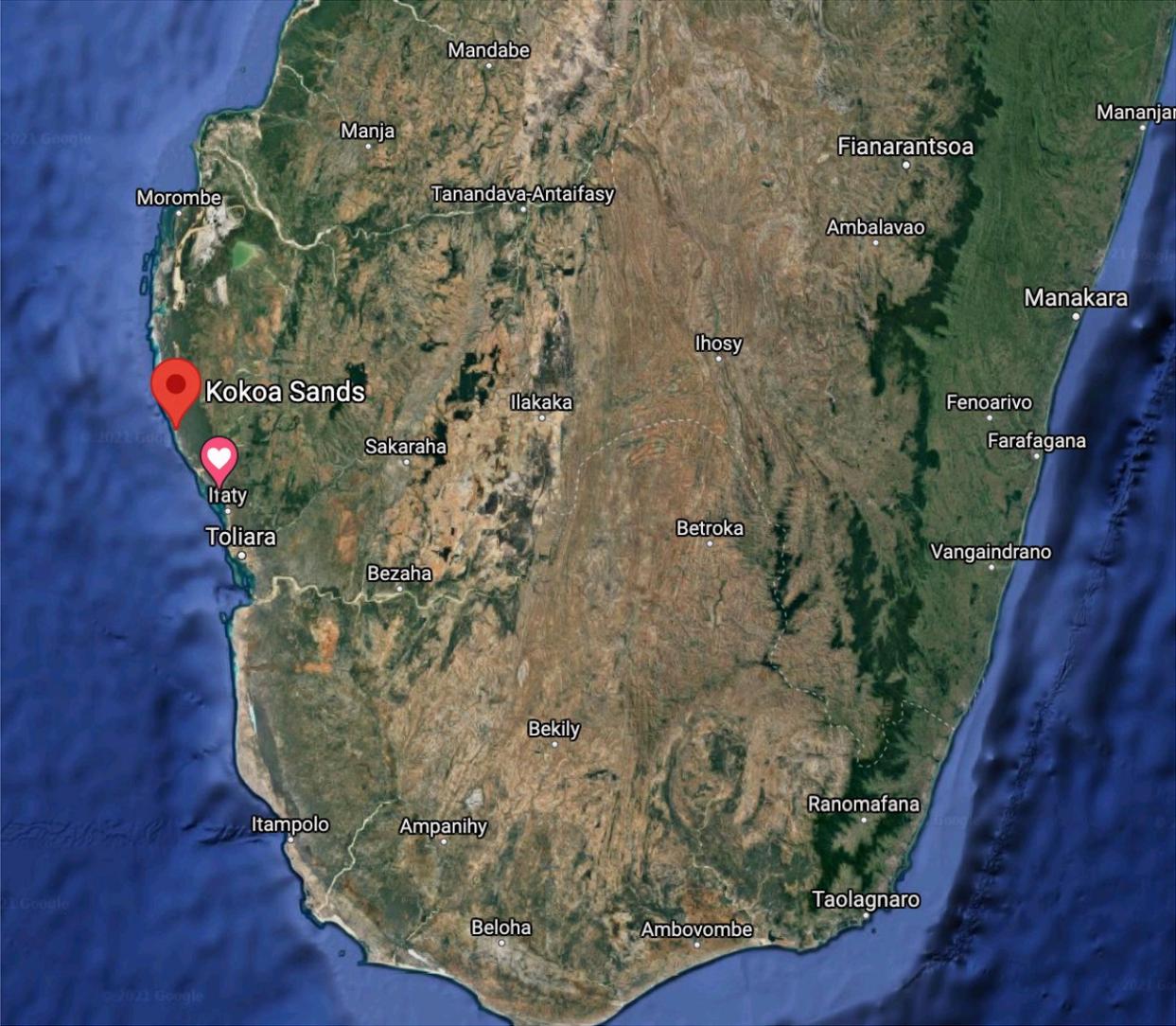
Key

Endemism / Status of Occurrence	IUCN Status
SFE - Spiny Forest Endemic (restricted to southwest Madagascar)	VU - Vulnerable
SFE - Spiny Forest between Mangoky and Fiherenana Rivers	NT - Near-threatened
E – Endemic to Madagascar	
Essp - One endemic subspecies	Area(s) Recorded
BE - Breeding endemic	KS - Kokoa Sands Lodge
BEssp - Breeding endemic subspecies	KP - Kokoa Park and surrounding area including lakes
RE - Regional endemic (shared with Mascarenes, Comoros, and/or Seychelles)	
NBM - Non-breeding migrant	
I - Introduced	

Detailed Map of Kokoa Park and Kokoa Sands Area (source: Google Maps)



Context Map of Southern Madagascar (source: Google Maps)



About Pitta Consulting

Ken Behrens is a founding member of Pitta Consulting. Pitta excels at projects in which we survey the local wildlife and create a marketing plan based on our knowledge of these species' ecotourism potential. Many lodges have no idea of the extent of major niche markets such as birders or butterfly enthusiasts, or how to start attracting them. Not only do we make recommendations and provide materials that allow effective marketing to these groups, but we also provide information about how different properties can be enhanced in order to attract more ecotourists. Niche ecotourists can provide a major addition to the clientele of almost any lodge, and have actually become the mainstay of some properties. Pitta also provides more traditional biodiversity services, including rapid biodiversity assessments, environmental impact statements, and critical habitat assessments.