MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP
Monthly from MADAGASCAR

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By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager
Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

Unfortunately, the Tamatave area is reeling at the moment from the effects of a three-fronted attack by mosquito borne disease. The old enemy Malaria, spread by the crepuscular *Anopheles sp*. has been joined by Dengue fever and Chikungunya, both spread by the diurnal *Aedes aegyptica*. Hospital beds are full, with many patients now having to be cared for on the floor. Which disease is taking the most victims is unclear as the symptoms of all three are similar. Many of the MFG staff have been taken ill, but fortunately all have made full recoveries.

On a more positive note the Betampona projects have been visited by a number of wildlife specialists, to whom our gratitude is extended, and two voluntary rangers have begun work at Parc Ivoloina.

Betampona Reserve

New Tree IDs

The first of the recent visitors to Betampona was *Canarium* specialist Dr. Doug Daly, Curator of Amazonian Botany from New York Botanical Garden, who was hoping to discover which species of *Canarium* there are in the forest at Betampona, as part of a Madagascar-wide study to establish the *Canarium* species present here. There are known to be 80 species of *Canarium* spread from Africa to Malaysia. In Madagascar, these large, often plank buttressed trees, are distributed throughout both humid and subhumid evergreen forests, and also throughout the dry forest from south of Morondava to Antsiranana. They favour altitudes between sea-level and 1000m (Schatz 2001). Doug surpassed his most optimistic hopes as, with Bernard and Celestin as knowledgable guides, he found 6 species, one of which is possibly a new species. Until recently only 3 species of *Canarium*, which are thought to form an important part of the aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) diet, were known from Madagascar and prior to Doug's visit only two *Canarium* species were known from Betampona.

Fascinating Frog Findings

Malagasy Frog expert Dr. Franco Andreone from Italy was the next scientist to try his luck in the Betampona Forest. Accompanied by Jean-Noel, Karen, and myself, Franco camped out for a night, braving the ever-present attentions of biting-fly by day, mosquitoes by night and leeches all the time! The majority of Madagascar's rainforest frogs are nocturnal so we conducted a nocturnal search – Jean-Noel once again demonstrating his amazing ability to spot seemingly invisible animals. By the end of his short trip, Franco had confirmed the existence of a new Platypelis species. He also confirmed that other frogs that we had identified as a single species (*Mantella pulchra*), are in fact different species: *Mantella pulchra* and *Mantella baroni*.

Franco Andreone and Platypelis sp.

Nectar Seeking Mongoose

We can't seem to be able to keep the ring-tailed mongoose (*Galidia elegans*) out of the Betampona limelight at the moment. One day late in February, Arsene, Georges, and Jean-Noel were setting off up the Piste Principale to begin a days work when they spotted two ring-tailed mongoose seven metres up in the crown of a Travellers palm (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) seeking nectar. While they are known to be good climbers, to our knowledge this is the first time that they have been observed taking nectar from Travellers palm.

Ring-tailed mongoose – taking to the trees!

Dangerous Diversions

So the three agents continued on their way up Piste Principale only to see, 1,500m further on, two adult ring-tailed mongooses and a juvenile attacking/playing with an adult forest boa (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*). This seems like very odd behaviour from the mongooses, who themselves were at serious risk of becoming the boa's next meal. Ring-tailed mongooses do eat small reptiles, but a large boa would not be on the menu. A boa's diet, on the other hand, consists mainly of small mammals (Glaw and Vences 1994). This particular encounter ended without injury to any party when the mongooses decided better of it and left the boa in peace.

New Investigation Takes Flight

In early March, the latest expert to visit Betampona arrived. UK moth specialist Dr. Mary-Louisa Hartley had been invited by Karen to take a speculative look at Betampona's moths and to instruct the Betampona MFG agents and ANGAP agents in moth trapping and identification techniques. Assisted by Hannah Betts, Mary Louisa caught 31 species of moth in just one night camped out in the forest – many of them were stunning and had never before been seen by the agents. Mary Louisa left not only moth trapping equipment but also a new interest in moths amongst the Betampona and ANGAP agents.

Mary-Louisa instructing MFG and ANGAP agents.

Ivoloina Park

The management of Parc Ivoloina's forest has become far more pro-active in the past couple of years. The trail network has been improved and enlarged, a boardwalk put in place, interpretive panels installed, vulnerable stream banks strengthened, wildlife inventories carried out, vehicle bridges built and patrols increased, while reforestation continues. Of course, all the new forest infrastructure has to be maintained and the Ivoloina staff do not have to time to take on this work nor to patrol as widely as we would like in an effort to reduce the theft of forest products.

So, to address this problem, we have taken on two voluntary rangers from England. Daniel Cossins and Matthew Myers arrived late in February and have already contributed significantly to the management objectives of the park. They are the first of a number of voluntary rangers that will be working at Parc Ivoloina this year.

Dan and Matt putting up bamboo bird boxes.

Picnicking with Chameleons

One of Dan and Matt's first tasks was to assist me in opening up of one of Ivoloina's picnic sites. During the course of this work we were fortunate enough to find a female *Calumma nasuta*. *Calumma nasuta* is a small chameleon with a nasal appendage (smaller in females). It is one of three *Calumma* species capable of living in secondary vegetation. Generally, *Calumma sp.* prefer primary forest habitats (Glaw and Vences 1994). It has been recorded in the Ivoloina fauna inventory, but is normally hard to see. The presence of this species at Ivoloina once again highlights the park's value as a conservation refuge. The only other chameleon species known to be living wild in the Ivoloina forest is the larger, more common *Furcifer pardalis*.

The female Calumma nasuta found at Ivoloina.

Dormitories Underway

Following the strong local support for the Ivoloina Training Centre, St. Louis Zoo's Wildcare Institute has taken the decision to independently fund the construction of a dormitory, which will provide sleeping quarters for 24 people.

This in turn will make it far easier to provide longer training courses, which will be able to be attended by people who would not previously have had the means of traveling to and from Parc Ivoloina every day.

The construction phase for the dormitory, to be completed by local Malagasy Contractors "Entreprise K," is just getting underway. ***Many, many thanks St. Louis Zoo!***

Construction is underway once more at Ivoloina.

Saturday School Rice Competition Begins

The annual rice growing competition between children from different locals schools attending the supplementary Saturday classes at Parc Ivoloina has got underway.

Using the new sustainable rice production technique (système riziculture intensive, SRI) under the instruction of Jacques, the three groups of schoolchildren planted their patches of rice.

In six months time, the yield will be measured to see which group has been the most successful. The SRI system incorporates composting and intensive land management techniques, which produce significantly higher yields and prolong the productive life of the land.

Students from a previous year planting.

From Tim Tetzlaff, Public Awareness Advisor

E-Newsletter Gaining Numbers

Although just two issues old, the new e-newsletter now has nearly 200 subscribers from several continents. If you'd like to receive this monthly update with the latest news of interest on Madagascar, just click www.savethelemur.org and click on "Free Newsletter."

You'll receive additional information beyond this newsletter including valuable coupons for our online store. And if you're just reading this posted in print somewhere, signing up for the e-newsletter is a great reminder so you can download the newsletter as soon as its ready!

Help the People of Tamatave

As you read from Gareth's introduction, health related issues are particularly challenging right now. Some in the conservation community have already personally donated additional funding to assist in the purchase of medicines to help the Tamatave community including MFG staff.

Please consider how you can help as well during this time. If you like, you can make a donation to the general fund through the website to support the MFG's comprehensive efforts and receive your tax deductible benefits and MFG gifts. Thank you for your help.

References

Glaw F. and Vences M., 1994, A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar. Second edition. Moos Druck, Leverkusen and FARBO, Koln.

Schatz G.E., 2001. Generic Tree Flora of Madagascar. The Cromwell Press, Great Britain.

Staff member of the month

Rakotoarison

Zoo Keeper

Visitors to the zoo at Ivoloina often praise the condition and cleanliness of the animals. The unsung heroes are the keepers, such as Rakotoarison ('Rakot' for short), who feeds the animals, keeps a keen eye on them for any signs of health problems and diligently cleans the cages each day.

A naturally quiet man, Rakot is nonetheless always happy to assist visitors when necessary and is making good progress in the Thursday English lessons at Ivoloina.

Rakot - quiet and diligent.

36 year-old Rakot joined the Ivoloina team in 1990. Prior to this he worked on temporary contracts for the local government agricultural research team "Fofifa". He was born and raised in the village of Ambonivato, went to school in Tamatave, and now lives with his wife and son in Ambonivato.