

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



April 2005

By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

Women travelled from all over the country to Tamatave as the city hosted World Women's Day in Madagascar. The vice-president lost his job and the east coast panicked, prompting a chaotic mass evacuation as a tsunami warning was issued for Madagascar following the second earthquake off the coast of Sumatra. Fortunately for us, it turned out to be no more than a warning, although once again we are left thinking of those in Sumatra.

Betampona Reserve

A team of scientists from the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation made the short trip across the sea to Madagascar to demonstrate bird mist-netting techniques and the taking of morphometrics to the Betampona team. Fine nylon nets supported by poles were erected along trails trapping birds flying across the trail and catching them unharmed in pockets at the base of each length of netting. Despite low cloud and constant drizzle, the trip proved to be a success. Many thanks to Malcolm Burgess, Thomas Bodey, Pete Haverson, and Rosalind Trevelin for their time and persistence. Pete has stayed on for a few weeks to help out with some practical work at Ivoloina.



Pete trail-working at Ivoloina later in the month.

Following the success of the Ivoloina wildlife inventories agents Georges, Jean-Noel, and Olivier were asked to carry out a wildlife inventory of the forest at Ambalabe. While some of the species encountered by the team differed from those at Betampona and Ivoloina, they nonetheless recorded 62 species of bird, 46 species of amphibian, 24 species of reptiles, 6 species of lemur, and 4 small mammal species in just 3 days. The skill and knowledge of the Betampona conservation agents is extraordinary.

We welcome back Carl Toborowsky who has begun a behavioural study of the white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur albifrons*) at Betampona for an MSc. Once located by Carl and the Betampona agents, 15 lemurs were captured by a darting team from Ranomafana. Saint Louis Zoo director of animal health Randy Junge and assistant Fidi Rasambainarivo from the University of Tana veterinary school checked the general health of the lemurs and took biomedical samples. Randy was required to operate on one of the captured lemurs, which was found to be carrying an open wound with protruding guts thought to be the result of an attack of a large bird of prey. Once given the all-clear, the lemurs were radio collared and released.

The collared lemurs were from groups using primary and secondary forest, respectively, allowing Carl to compare behaviour in different habitats. Carl carried out preliminary research into his study species at Betampona in July and August last year. Our thanks go to the Ranomafana darters and to Dr. Pat Wright, director of the Institute for the Conservation of Tropical Environments (ICTE), working at Ranomafana.



The white-fronted brown lemur – Carl's study species.

Early in March, Arsene encountered a couple of trespassers armed with machetes only 1,500m from Rendrirendry. The pair claimed that they were searching for honey. However, collecting honey often involves the felling of ecologically valuable hardwoods. This encounter brings the total number of encounters between the Betampona agents and trespassers up to three this year involving five offenders – a worrying figure considering that only four trespassers were encountered between 2001 and 2004. Following Arsene's report to ANGAP, the pair were summoned to a local hearing and given two weeks labour clearing trails.



Felled just for honey. Jean-Noel and George inspect a felled tree inside the reserve.

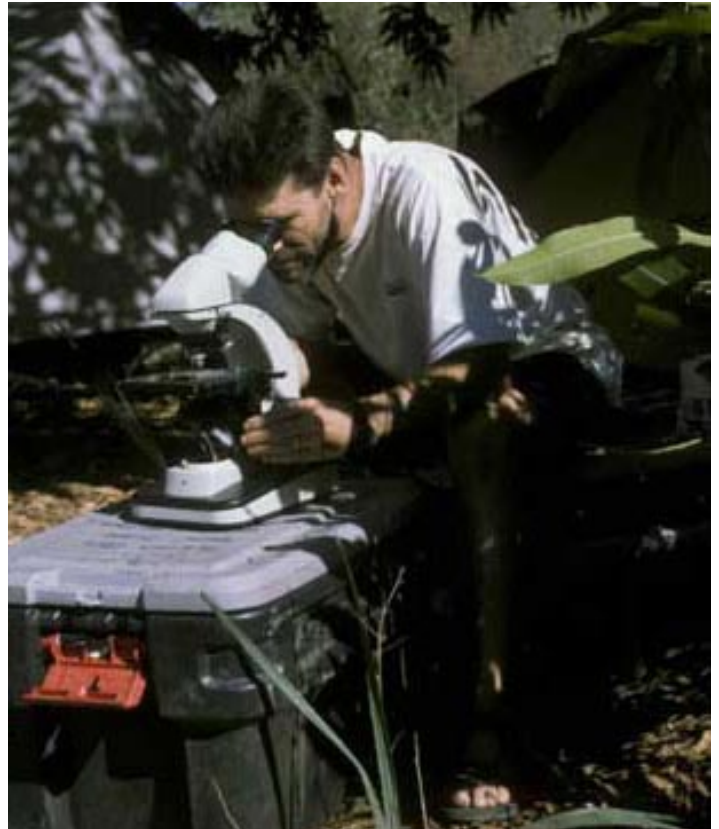
Ivoloina Park

Programme Manager Karen Freeman has swapped Madagascar for Missouri, USA for a couple of weeks as she, MFG chairman Jeff Bonner, MFG vice-chair Ingrid Porton, MFG advisor Andrea Katz, ANGAP Tamatave provincial director Christian Rasolofomanana, the President of Tamatave province Emile Tsizaraina, and representatives from the Universities of Tamatave (Madagascar), St. Louis, Missouri Columbia, Missouri St. Louis, and Washington (USA) gathered to discuss and plan the training programmes for the new Environmental Training Centre at Ivoloina. The construction phase of the project, which has benefited from an unusually dry start to the year, is well ahead of schedule.



The training centre – ahead of schedule.

Saint Louis Zoo vet Randy Junge, accompanied by assistant Fidi, spent an invaluable few days at the park with Bernard and the Ivoloina zookeepers, checking on the general health of the animals, going through post-mortem techniques and the use of microscopes in parasite detection and airing ideas for veterinary training courses at the training centre (currently under construction). On leaving Ivoloina, Randy and Fidi made the trek to Betampona to provide medical support for the team attempting to catch and collar white-fronted brown lemurs (see Betampona reserve section).



Randy at work. Photo courtesy of St. Louis Zoo.

The telephone problems at Ivoloina have finally been solved by mounting an aerial 25m high in a Eucalyptus tree next to the park office, bringing to an end a couple of years of frustration due to an unreliable phone link between the Tamatave and Ivoloina offices.

Despite a soldier falling into the lake from a temporary bridge, and a lot of rain, the national reforestation day at Ivoloina on 19 March was a great success and a tribute to a strong MFG team effort. Karen pressed lethargic authorities into action, organised an army unit to assist with ground preparation and, with Bernard, hosted political, educational, army and police representatives on the day, while Jacques and Jean-Francois (from the model-station) and myself led site preparations and renovated the Lake Trail leading to the reforestation site. The chosen site had been largely stripped of (mostly exotic) vegetation by a bush fire in early 2004, facilitating a trial reforestation area using mixed native trees. Once a canopy has become established, shade-tolerant species will be planted – again only using native trees. Many thanks to the Malagasy army for their hard work.

Staff member of the month
Onésime Ratvonandrasana

Ivoloina Assistant Education Officer



Onésime – new career in environmental education.

A change of careers brought Onésime to the education team at Ivoloina. Prior to his employment with MFG he worked for 5 years as a building technician.

The most recent addition to the MFG team, his new responsibilities involve assisting Randria (Education officer) with the education programme, manning and managing the visitor centre, guiding school groups around the park and his construction skills come in useful in the maintenance of the EEC.

Laid-back yet focused Onésime is a talented musician and on occasion organises and leads the Saturday class children in traditional dance performances

Born in and raised in Mananara Nord , 30 year old Onésime was educated Morama in the Tamatave province and now lives with his wife and 3 year-old son in Tamatave.

