

# MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

## Monthly from MADAGASCAR



### December 2005/January 2006

By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

Happy New Year! It's a hot humid one on the Madagascar east coast as we wait for the rainy season to really take hold. The litchi season has come and gone. This year the crop was bountiful, but supply was so much greater than demand that the prices fell dramatically -- once again leaving local farmers on the losing end. It has been another busy month for the MFG staff -- particularly for the Ivoloina education team.

### Betampona Reserve

St. Louis University PhD student Nick Lang spent two weeks carrying out a fish inventory of some of the streams and rivers in Betampona and the Fontsimavo River. He was joined for weekly periods by two pairs of students from GRENE (College for the Management of Natural Resources) in Tamatave. The students learnt fish trapping and identification skills. The water systems at Betampona are the headwaters of the Ivoloina and Ifontsy rivers and are separated from lower elevation waters by a series of waterfalls and so, as expected, fish species density was low, but fortunately no exotic introduced fish were found.

Prior to his trip to Betampona, Nick stayed at Ivoloina conducting a fish survey of the Parc Ivoloina water systems and the Ivoloina River mouth. He was assisted by and trained GRENE students during the survey. Despite the presence of some exotic tilapia (*Tilapia sp.*), snakeheads (*Channa cf. striata*) and a few other exotics at Ivoloina, Nick found a pleasing number of native species. Uninhibited by his lack of French, Nick had no trouble transmitting his enthusiasm for fish to the Malagasy students. Nick also gave a talk (using an interpreter) at a fish conference at GRENE.



**Nick and students.**

### Sustainable Agriculture Near Betampona

Inbetween training Chef ZAPs and Mayors at Ivoloina, Randria (Ivoloina Education Officer) and Jacques (Ivoloina Agro-forestry Model Station Manager) found time to conduct villager training in sustainable agriculture at Sahambala and Ambodiriana - key villages near Betampona. The training was a joint effort between MFG and ANGAP (Malagasy protected areas authority).



**Villager training at Sahambala. Photo: Randria**

### Potential New Species Discoveries!

Congratulations to a group of scientists from the California Academy of Science (CAS) who spent five days at Betampona looking for ant species as part of an Indian Ocean ant survey. They believe that they may have found four new species of ant! We eagerly await confirmation.

### Swiss Scientists Study Sapindaceae

As a strict nature reserve, Betampona is not open to the general public. This allows for special study of this area. Botanist Sven Buerki from the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland visited Betampona for a few days surveying plants of the *Sapindaceae* family. This family includes the popular litchi tree mentioned in the introduction above.

## Rendriendry Rebuilt

As reported in the October 2005 update, a fire destroyed a number of buildings in the village of Rendriendry. We are happy to report that the buildings destroyed in the October fire have all been rebuilt. Our agents were all given a couple of days off to help Justin with the repairs and the MFG provided financial assistance. With home restored, Justin is currently helping a University of Tana student in Betampona (see below). A grateful thanks to those who made special donations online toward the rebuilding effort!

## Guerilla Ginger and Guava

There can be little doubt that invasive species pose a significant threat to Betampona. Deforestation up to the reserve limit has allowed invasive colonisers to become established adjacent to Betampona's primary forest. Whenever gaps appear or the sharp forest edge is pushed back by cyclones, the invasive weeds advance.

Two of the most serious of these invasive species are wild ginger (*Aframomum augustifolium*) and Chinese guava (*Psidium cattleianum*). The guava, originally introduced as a food plant, has quickly become established. The IUCN identified it as one of the top 100 of the world's worst invasives. The density of its stem and root-mass suppresses regeneration of most native species. Lemurs, wild pigs, parrots and other species eat the fruit and spread the seed.

In the first step to address this invasive plant problem, MFG Programme Manager Dr. Karen Freeman has brought in student Yedidya Ratovonamana from the University of Tana. Yedidya is plotting the current distribution of guava and wild ginger in and around the reserve. We will then be able to monitor the spread of the weeds over time whilst seeking ways to control/remove it. For evidence of the potentially catastrophic ecological threat posed by guava, one need look no further than our Indian Ocean neighbour, Mauritius.



**Yedidya (right) at work with the ever-resourceful Justin.**

## Ivoloina Park

In late November, a British film company 'Tiger Aspects' visited Ivoloina and the neighbouring village of Ambonivato to film an episode for their series *Last Chance to Save* - a documentary focusing on the aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*), slash and burn agriculture, and traditional rural life on the east coast of Madagascar. The program is presented by actress Miranda Richardson and includes interviews with Dr. Freeman, Ivoloina Zoo Manager Bernard Lambana, and a number of Ambonivato villagers. We thank Tiger Aspects for their generous donations to the MFG projects and to the village of Ambonivato.



**Karen and Miranda Richardson between takes. Photo: Tiger Aspects**

## New Species for Zoo

Early in December, a local man came into the MFG office in Tamatave saying that he wanted to donate an unusual reptile to Ivoloina Zoo that he had found in the street. The reptile turned out to be *Oplurus cuvieri* - an arboreal iguanid from the northwest region of Madagascar. *O. cuvieri* is one of six members of the *Oplurus* genus in Madagascar. They are all oviparous, active by day, and recognised by the large spiny scales on their tails (Glaw, 1994). It is likely that the individual given to the zoo had escaped from a private collection in or near to Tamatave.



**Ivoloina Zoo's first Iguanid - *Oplurus cuvieri*.**

## Focus on Education

It was a busy month at the Environmental Education Centre. Firstly, the Parc Ivoloïna education team held training sessions for 20 school district supervisors (Chef ZAPs) from the Tamatave area, in techniques for teaching environmental education. Each Chef ZAP is responsible for overseeing around 7 schools.

Secondly, a four-day training session in rural development and sustainable agriculture was held for the 17 Antsinanana regional Mayors. All 17 Mayors turned up, indicating the value that community leaders place on these training sessions. The Mayors stayed over-night in the Ivoloïna training centre. Our renewed thanks go to Bud and Onnolee Trapp without whose generous funding the Chef ZAP training programme would never have become established.



**The Mayors in the Education Centre.**

## Welcome Tourist Season!

It is the time of year that the number of visitors to Parc Ivoloïna is often boosted by cruise liners stopping at Tamatave. This year, the travel company SETAM has organised five visits to Ivoloïna. Hilary Bradt, author of leading Madagascar travel guide *Madagascar, The Bradt Travel Guide* led one of these visits. MFG was very happy to welcome Hilary back and is grateful to SETAM for organising these visits. Another was led by Eleanor Sterling, a long-time MFG colleague, now based at the American Museum of Natural History to whom we are also very grateful for the kind donation of books and equipment she brought with her for the Ivoloïna Saturday School.

## New MFG E-Newsletter

Website traffic and online donations are on the increase. To keep visitors regularly connected with our ongoing efforts, we have introduced a free online newsletter. Please pass news of this along to staff at your institutions and friends that are not on the official MFG listserv so they will be regularly reminded of the great things going on.



## Tourist Website Launched for Ivoloïna

To further aid in bringing tourists and needed funding to Parc Ivoloïna, MFG Public Awareness Advisor Tim Tetzlaff has created a new website at [www.seemadagascar.com](http://www.seemadagascar.com) which highlights the features of a visit to Parc Ivoloïna. More specifics on the individual attractions will be added in coming months. If you have any images of your visits to Ivoloïna you think would be attractive on the site, please contact him at [tim@savethelemur.org](mailto:tim@savethelemur.org).

## Limeys Leap for Lemurs

Last spring, Dudley Zoo in the UK opened Lemur Wood. These newfound favorite creatures became the personal focus of some unusual fundraising for primate keepers Sophie Cousins and Mark Dugmore. They were planning on doing some skydiving in Australia while on holiday last year. As they put it, "We thought if we are going to throw ourselves out of a perfectly good plane, then why not try and raise a bit of money at the same time." Cousins and Dugmore took sponsorship forms around to their friends, families, and colleagues, as well as collecting donations from zoo visitors totaling over one thousand US dollars! Wonderfully for lemurs and keepers, the skydive was a success. They each jumped in tandem with a parachute master. Fundraising continues at the exhibit. Bravo, Mark and Sophie!



**Mark & Sophie (below jump masters) in the air**

# Staff member of the month

## Arsene Razanadahy

### Betampona Conservation Agent

Arsene joined the Betampona team in 1998 as part of the team carrying out the black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) releases. After the intense monitoring period following the releases was over, Arsene was able to develop his interest in birds and, while too modest to admit it, he is now the Betampona authority on birds, instantly able to identify most by sound or a fleeting glimpse.



#### ***Arsene – strong and dependable.***

Strong and dependable with a good sense of humour and a serious work ethic, 39 year-old Arsene is an invaluable member of the Betampona team.

He was born in Marofatana, near Betampona, educated at Tamatave and worked as a farmer before joining the development NGO "Quatro", where he worked until he joined the MFG.

Arsene lives at Rendriendry with his wife and four children.

#### **Miss a Previous Update?**

If you missed a previous Monthly from Madagascar Update, they are archived on the Madagascar Fauna Group's website at [www.savethelemur.org](http://www.savethelemur.org).

While you're there, take the tour (now in French) and browse the online store to pick up Madagascar logo gear, mugs, posters, and more.

#### **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.

Bradt H. 2005, Madagascar, The Bradt Travel Guide. 8th edition. Bradt Publications, UK.