



MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

Vol: 3 Issue: 5 Month: July 2006

Greetings from Karen & Gareth

After a long, hot summer the Madagascar nights are beginning to draw in and the repressive temperatures to dip once more to more comfortable levels. Mercifully the Dengue/Chikungunga/Malaria disease problems that have plagued us over the last few months are also subsiding in the Tamatave area.

We thank all those linked to MFG

in any way for their generous donations and support during this difficult period.

Karen and I have just returned from a month's break in the UK and have returned to find that, as expected, the MFG staff have continued running both Betampona and Ivoloina projects smoothly. They are a credit to the organisation.



Photos: Dr. Karen Freeman
Programme Manager

Text: Gareth Kett
Ivoloina Forest Manager

Betampona Reserve



Members of Tanu and Masoandro's Group

Recently, there have been some interesting changing group dynamics amongst the Betampona groups of black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) involving some of the released lemurs. Tany and Masoandro, 6-year-old twin brothers born at the Duke Lemur Center in North Carolina and released at Betampona in January 2001, have been found after a period of absence, with

three other lemurs – probably two females and one of their young sons. The discovery was made following an intensification of the Betampona agents efforts to locate Tany and Masoandro. The released lemurs are continuously monitored but the intensity of the monitoring has been reduced in the past couple of years as the MFG agents have diversified their research into other aspects of Betampona's ecology.

Micro-Project Updates

The Betampona micro-projects which have now been being implemented for more than a year are continuing to be a success and our knowledge of the bird, amphibian, small mammal and snail fauna is constantly increasing with the occasional discovery of a new species thrown in for good measure!

University of Tana student Aldine Andrianandraina has completed the first stage of a study into natural regeneration following the removal of the invasive woody shrub guava (*Psidium cattleianum*) from an area of the Betampona Zone of Protection. Using plots dense in guava just outside the reserve boundary, Aline recorded

the species composition before the removal of the guava. Regular future studies will be carried out to help assess the long-term effects of localised guava clearance. A team of local workers used a hand-winch and machetes to remove the guava causing as little damage as possible to the other vegetation in the plots. ■

Micro-Project Updates Continued

Some of Arsene's chickens had a narrow escape at Rendriendry last month when a Madagascar sparrowhawk (*Accipter madagascariensis*) tried to add a couple of chicks to its menu.

The endemic Madagascar Sparrowhawk is the rarer of the two Malagasy sparrowhawks. It is distributed thinly in all regions of Madagascar except the central

strip, while the more common Frances sparrowhawk (*Accipter francesii*) can be found throughout Madagascar and the Comoros.

The diet of both species of sparrowhawk consists of insects, batrachians, reptiles and birds (Langrand, 1990). This time Arsene's chicks managed to scamper to cover under his house.



Madagascar Sparrowhawk
Photo: Internet

Parc Ivoloïna



We welcomed St. Louis vet Randy Junge and Tana veterinary student Fidi Rasambainarivo back to Ivoloïna. We were fortunate that the pair were able to spend a few days at the zoo working with the staff in animal veterinary care and supervision techniques, biological sampling, animal micro-chipping, and post-

mortem techniques. With a lack of veterinary expertise in the Tamatave area, especially for wild animals, it is a huge bonus for MFG that Randy and Fidi are able to visit and offer veterinary advice. Prior to his Ivoloïna visit, Randy had spent some time in Tana working with the University of Tana veterinary department.

Sadly, during Randy and Fidi's visit, Ivoloïna's male Aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*), Davy, died. One positive thing was that Randy was on hand to carry out the post-mortem. The testicles of the animal were abnormally small and he was underweight, but otherwise the post-mortem proved inconclusive. Randy has taken tissue samples for further analysis. The unfortunate death of this lemur at least afforded Randy the opportunity to demonstrate/reinforce correct lemur post-mortem procedures for the Ivoloïna zoo staff.

Construction Updates

The construction of the new environmental training centre dormitory is continuing at full pace. A car parking area below the training centre is also under construction and a new wooden bridge has been built from the car park, linking the training centre and the Environmental Education Centre. The new bridge is situated on the site of an old bridge, which disappeared long ago, and forms an attractive park feature in its own right.



Eco-Tourism Classes

Numerous requests have been made by Tamatave tour operators over the past year or so for classes in eco-tourism. In response to these requests, Randria (MFG Education Officer) has launched a course in basic ecology and the principles of eco-tourism. The classes, which are held weekly at the Ivoloina environmental education centre, have been an instant success.

Thanks, Volunteer Rangers!

We bid fairwell to Parc Ivoloina's first voluntary rangers Daniel Cossins and Mathew Myers who have finished a very productive couple of months' work in the Parc Ivoloina forest.

Exceptionally hard working, they have allowed us to keep pace with the practical management and development of the forest trails and facilities. They also

contributed to conservation and education initiatives, assisted in reforestation activities, and provided an invaluable presence in the park forest which remains under constant pressure from bordering villages. Many thanks, lads.

*I owe Matt an apology for failing to recognise his photograph of the chameleon *Calumma nasuta* in the April update. Thanks, Matt!*



Staff Member of the Month



Fidy Jean-Francois Solofoniaina Ivoloina Agro-Forestry Model Station Nursery Manager

35-year-old Jean-Francois' career with MFG began back in 1998 when he left the local government agricultural research team "Fofifa" to join the Ivoloina planting team during the 1998-2001 Rotary Club reforestation project.

Following that he was made responsible for the field phase of the Endangered Palm Project, implemented in collaboration with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England.

The Kew project ended last year but Jean-Francois impressed so much that he was kept on as Ivoloina Nursery Manager. He

will soon play a leading role in an endangered plants collaboration with Missouri Botanical Gardens, USA.

Jean-Francois is also a prominent figure locally. For the last four years, he has been the president of the Ambonivato Fokantany, or local council. He was born in Ambonivato and educated in Tamatave. He lives with his wife, son, and three daughters in Ambonivato.

References: Langrand O., 1990. Guide to the Birds of Madagascar. Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York.

Madagascar Fauna Group
c/o St. Louis Zoo
1 Government Drive
St. Louis MO 63110 USA

www.savethemur.org

More News from the Public Awareness Advisor

MFG on SKY ONE in the UK

If you recall from previous posts, Miranda Richardson from Tiger Aspect productions filmed an episode of *Final Chance to Save* in Madagascar. The episode airs on SKY ONE on July 21st at 8 p.m. Below is the info from the website about the episode. Type in this URL and click forward a few episodes to see it online. <http://www.skyone.co.uk/programme/pgfeature.aspx?pid=54&fid=701>

Miranda Richardson, one of Britain's best-loved actresses, embarks on a journey to one of the world's most mysterious countries to unearth the mysteries behind the endangered lemur, the Aye-Aye. Madagascar, one of the world's last great wildernesses and home to 530 of the world's most endangered species, is home to the Aye-Aye, a creature that famously inspired Tolkien's Gollum from the Lord of the Ring's trilogy. Thought to be extinct in 1961, the Aye-Aye, a primate like us and a close evolutionary relative, was rediscovered and for the last four decades it has been on the world's most endangered list. If we don't act now, we could lose the species Miranda describes as the 'underdog' of the natural world.



But why is this genteel creature so endangered? Miranda discovers that the harmless creature is universally feared as it only ventures out at night and is thought to possess evil spirits which are meant to harbour death and misfortune – locals believe that if you see one you will die. Miranda journeys the length and breadth of this remote tropical island to find out what can be done to save the Aye-Aye, working alongside the Madagascar Fauna Group and the Rainforest Conservation Fund trying to save the species and achieves a world-first; to film the Aye-Aye asleep in its nest. Richardson says: "The word lemur means ghost and that's just what these creatures will be if we don't act soon. Our adorable cousins will become nothing more than spirits in the forest who need to be remembered through legends. Every living thing should have a chance and through the continued work of the people involved in this programme and every individual, we may not lose one of the world's most important areas of biodiversity...we may save the Aye-Aye."

Eat to Help the MFG

For a couple years now, every time you bought books, CDs, DVDs, office supplies, baby clothes, and appliances, you could have helped the MFG at no cost to yourself.

How you ask? Just by clicking on the AMAZON.COM logo on the top left at www.savethemur.org. Just choose which search box is appropriate for your region. We have affiliations in

North America, the UK, and Germany. So whenever you want to make a purchase, go to the MFG site and start. More details on the website. Free for you. Priceless for wildlife!

Now, what's this about eating? Amazon.com is now offering non-perishable grocery items. Looking for fair-trade coffee, organic sugar, cup-of-soup, or diapers? It's all there.

Great prices, free delivery on many items, and all of it helps benefit MFG programs.

This affiliate program has tremendous potential to benefit our conservation work. Give it a try. It's as easy as regular ordering. Then please, help spread the word to your friends, staffs, members, and volunteers! Many thanks!

Free E-Newsletter

Wondering what's happening on your favorite island beyond the specific updates from Ivoloina and Betampona? Sign up for the free e-newsletter for info from around Madagascar at www.savethemur.org.

Questions or comments on the newsletter? E-mail tim@savethemur.org