

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



October 2005

By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

There are political problems in the Tamatave area as the government attempts to evict squatters from Tamatave airport land, the President of the Republic had a narrow escape when his helicopter crashed shortly after take-off, and the Peace Corps held a 100km bike race between Fenerive and Tamatave as an awareness raising event for sexually transmitted diseases. In the animal world, it is the time once again for parents to face the challenge of successfully raising their offspring.

Betampona Reserve

There was high drama at Rendrirendry when a kitchen fire got out of control, destroying two houses and three other buildings. At the time the fire started the only people in the village were Anastasie, Amanda, Chris, and Tahiana. While Amanda ran into the forest in search of the agents and guide Justin, whose house was ablaze, Anastasia, Chris, and Tahiana fought the fire, carrying water from the stream 60m below. As the fire began to get away from them, they concentrated on getting all belongings out of the buildings and preventing the spread of the fire. With the arrival of Justin and help from the forest, nearby buildings were dismantled and the fire, which had also engulfed a huge dead eucalyptus tree, was eventually extinguished. Thanks to the quick thinking and bravery of those who fought the fire, the incident was no worse. The MFG is assisting financially with the reconstruction of the buildings. Please consider an online donation to assist in these efforts.



The Sorry Remains of Justin's House

Jean-Noel's "Handy" Work Reveals New Species at Betampona

It is ironic perhaps that while last month we supplied the Betampona agents with ten small mammal traps, this month Jean-Noel, with a remarkably athletic move, caught a tenrec by hand – somehow without getting bitten! What was more amazing was that the tenrec turned out to be a species not yet recorded at Betampona – a lowland streaked tenrec (*Hemicentetes semipinosus*).

These diurnal eastern rainforest tenrecs, which live in multi-generational groups, forage for soft-bodied invertebrates amongst the forest leaf-litter, their colouration and pattern providing them with some degree of camouflage. They excavate and live in burrows up to 150cm in length, giving birth to litters of 5-8 offspring, which become sexually mature in just 30-35 days. Like all tenrecs the lowland streaked tenrec has many predators, but attempts to defend itself by erecting a crest of detachable barbed spines (nuchal crest) and bucking its head violently in an effort to dislodge the quills into the snout of its attacker (Garbutt, 1999).



Lowland streaked tenrec. Photo by: Gerald and Buff Corsi © California Academy of Sciences.

The aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) is a rare, elusive, almost mystical, nocturnal lemur, so Arsene and Jean-Noel were more than a little surprised when one crossed the path less than 10m in front of them during a nocturnal fauna survey. The team have four transects spread around the primary forest of the southern part of the reserve and one transect in a secondary forest area. Daytime surveys of each transect are carried out weekly and a nocturnal survey of each transect is carried out every month. The unique, highly specialized, solitary aye-aye is the sole remaining species of its family. It is separated from

other lemurs by its continuously growing incisor teeth, its large ears probably used for locating insect larvae in dead wood, and its long almost skeletal middle finger, which it uses to extract larvae from holes. While its preferred habitat is thought to be the eastern rainforest, the aye-aye has also been reported recently in the dry forests of the north and west. Adult females are thought to give birth every 2-3 years. Although believed to be lucky in some areas, historically the aye-aye was killed in others because it was thought to be a harbinger of evil. Nowadays habitat destruction is its greatest threat (Mittermeier et al., 1994).



The highly specialized aye-aye. © DUPC

Ivoloina Park

Following an invitation from the Tamatave provincial PDS (President of the Special Delegation), President Tsizariana, agro-forestry experts Dr. Gene Garrett from the University of Missouri, Columbia and Dr. Christof den Biggelaar from the Appalachian State University visited agricultural areas throughout the Tamatave province with a view to advising local government bodies, educational institutes, and villagers on possible ways of improving sustainable land use in the province. The forest station at Ivoloina and the new training centre are seen as focal points with which to begin practical and theoretical training in sustainable agricultural and agro-forestry techniques. As part of a new collaboration with the Ivoloina border village of Ambonivato, Gene and Christof spent half a day talking to villagers about simple ways of improving short and long-term sustainable agricultural productivity. Zoo manager Bernard Lambana did a fine job as translator.

Saturday School Update

Such is demand for places in the Ivoloina Saturday school supplementary classes, that prior to the beginning of the Saturday school year potential pupils must take an entrance exam. Despite the recently constructed US Embassy funded extension to the Environmental Education Centre (EEC), which brought the EEC capacity up, competition



Gene & Christof talking to Ambonivato villagers.

for places remains high. This year 218 children were vying for the 160 available places. The pre-secondary school Saturday classes, which incorporate mathematics, French, and environmental studies dramatically improve pupils' chances of gaining entry into secondary school. A sister MFG funded Saturday school is run at Ambodriana, near Betampona.

Lemur Babies

It's that time of year again! Already our free ranging white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) have produced two babies while a free-ranging red-bellied lemur (*E. rubriventer*) female has added a baby of her own. The ease with which Ivoloina's free-ranging lemurs are able to breed indicates that they are well adapted to living in the secondary/plantation forest surrounding the zoo. While there is plenty of food available to them naturally, the free-ranging lemurs' diets are supplemented daily with fruit given to them on hanging baskets. This encourages them to remain in the immediate vicinity of the zoo, allowing MFG staff to keep an eye on them and increasing the likelihood of zoo visitors seeing our free-ranging lemurs.



Baby red-bellied lemur

Adieu for Now

We bid farewell this month to French university placement student Stephanie Gillard who has been working on a project investigating the traditional use of medicinal plants in the Ivoloïna area, and her Malagasy assistant Landry Harison Donatien. They also assisted Jacques and the agro-forestry model station team in the development of the model station medicinal garden.

Increasing Awareness

Visitors to the MFG website have increased dramatically. The number of daily visitors this October was more than double that of October 2004. Likewise, our list of individuals who have made a one-time donation or committed to ongoing monthly or quarterly donations continues to grow. When asked about their connection to Madagascar, donors often share an experience with a lemur seen at a zoo and a desire to help in Madagascar. They find out about the MFG from searching the web. Please let your staff know about individual giving like this. A free t-shirt or bumper sticker is sent out depending on the donation amount. More info at www.savethemur.org/helping-main.htm



Madagascar Gifts

The MFG store has been expanded to include numerous new designs including the Parc Ivoloïna logo, Betampona Reserve items, and more. More will be added in coming weeks. Just click www.savethemur.org and click on the online store. Proceeds directly benefit the MFG.

References:

Garbutt N. 1999., Mammals of Madagascar. Pica Press, East Sussex, England.

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

Staff Members of the Month Hery-Solo and Ihira-Alfred Buvette Team

When you arrive at Ivoloïna it will be Hery-Solo or Ihira-Alfred who will welcome you to the park from the buvette. Both friendly, happy-go-lucky guys, they are responsible for running the buvette, selling tickets and merchandise, welcoming visitors, preparing meals for visitors and Ivoloïna staff, and the maintenance of the area immediately around the buvette.



Hery-Solo and Ihira-Alfred

34 year-old Hery-Solo was born and raised in Ambonivato just outside Ivoloïna and worked as a crop farmer before joining MFG in 1993. He lives in the village of College, bordering Ivoloïna with his life and 3 children.

Ihira-Alfred was born in 1969 in Maromiandra, Tamatatave and worked for the Department of Water and Forests before joining MFG in 1998. He lives with his wife in College.

