

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



September 2005

By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

As we enter the drier season, the temperature is warming up a bit and so are things in the animal world where it is the mating season. Both primary and secondary forests are full of birds in breeding plumage – there are even a few in Tamatave!



Male Madagascar Red Fody (*Foudia madagascariensis*) in breeding plumage. © Doug Janson

Betampona Reserve

Researcher Returns

We welcome back PhD student Amanda Hildt from the University of Virginia, who has returned to Betampona with new field assistants Chris Santijanna from Philadelphia and Tahiana Andriaharimalala from the University of Antananarivo. The team will be spending a couple of months in the forest wrapping up Amanda's study into the growth rates of some of Betampona's hardwood tree species. It is good to have Tahiana back so soon. His botanical knowledge and experience at Betampona make him an excellent assistant for Amanda. All international students working in Madagascar's protected areas are required to take on a Malagasy assistant. In this way it is hoped that Malagasy scientists will benefit from the opportunity to learn international research techniques.



Amanda, in tree-measuring stance!

New Research Equipment

To date George's micro-project – the quantification of the reserve's small mammal species - has proven to be the most difficult to get established due to the elusiveness of the study subjects. Life should be easier for George from now on, however, as we have supplied him with some small humane mammal traps authorized by ANGAP for research purposes. Regular checks are made on the traps so that no animal is trapped for long. Once morphometrics have been taken, the animals are released.

Olivier Discovers New Species

Olivier's micro-project has got off to a racing start with the discovery of a new snail species, found by placing an inverted umbrella beneath small trees to catch snails shaken loose from the trees. The snail, approximately 10mm in length, was identified as *Fauxulus sp.* by Indian Ocean snail expert Owen Griffiths. Digital photographs were forwarded electronically from the MFG to Griffiths, who is based in Mauritius.



Olivier's first new species: *Fauxulus* sp.

First Baby Indri of Season Spotted

The MFG agents have spotted the season's first baby indri (*Indri indri*). A few of Betampona's indri have been collared for research purposes but this infant, which is about a month old was born into a group of uncollared lemurs, whose presence and behaviour is monitored periodically by the agents.

Ivoloina Park

New Service Improves Visitor Experience

Good news for visitors to Ivoloina! For the first time ever we have begun serving light meals at the buvette. Park administrator Claude, who is an experienced chef, has set up a kitchen, established a menu and trained buvette staff members Ihira-Alfred, Hery-Solo, and Bruno in cooking and kitchen management. The meals, which have already proven immensely popular, are resulting in zoo visitors prolonging their stay, taking pirogue tours, and visiting the forest trails. The guys at the buvette also prepare meals at a staff discount for the MFG team working at Ivoloina.



A dream trip for these orphans.

A Rare Opportunity

A dream came true for eighty-eight street orphans from Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital, when they visited Ivoloina. The children stayed in the Peace Corps gite for three nights. The international charity *L'Association Manaoude*, which works with homeless street children in Antananarivo, organised the trip and teamed up with MFG staff to make the orphans' stay educational and memorable. This was the first time that any of the children had left Antananarivo.

Sustainable Agriculture Making Gains

Once again Jacques and the agro-forestry model station staff have been busy – this time training 38 local villagers in sustainable agricultural techniques focusing on soil preservation and composting, and in a separate session focusing on sustainable intensive rice production techniques. The initiative was carried out in partnership with the University of Tamatave. Educating locals to adopt sustainable land use techniques is a slow process, particularly when economic returns are uncertain and land tenure is insecure, but the Ivoloina team are persevering. Wonderfully, some of the new techniques are gradually being adopted locally – particularly the use of composting which increases the length of productivity of an area of land, leaving other areas fallow for longer, which in turn has soil preservation, soil enrichment, and biodiversity enhancement benefits.



Shiny new tin roof on Education Centre.

New Roof for Education Centre Extension

Congratulations to Tim Tetzlaff (Director of Conservation and Communications, Naples Zoo, Florida, USA and MFG Public Awareness Advisor) who placed donation boxes at Naples Zoo for visitors to contribute to a tin roof to replace the leaking ravimpontsy roof (layered palm leaves) on the Environmental Education Centre extension. The shallow slope of the roof has meant that we've had problems with the ravimponsty since the completion of the building last year. The tin is in place and the classroom is ready for the new Saturday school year, which begins on 14 October. Many thanks to everyone who gave so generously.

Staff member of the month

Noel Jonah

Zoo Head Keeper

Noel began working at Ivoloina zoo in 1986, a year before the MFG became involved in the project, and was promoted to head keeper a few years later. A reliable and hard working leader, with an instinctive ability with the animals, Noel, together with George (see July 2005 update), is responsible for the day-to-day running of the zoo.



Students Using MFG Resources

Your Purchases Can Benefit Education

Imagine turning your everyday purchases and especially your holiday shopping into needed resources for students in Madagascar. By starting your purchases at the MFG website at www.savethelemur.org, you can -- whether you're buying books, CDs, DVDs and daily living products from Amazon.com or household items from Target.com. Even magazine subscriptions, baby needs, and office supplies from online retailers can go to building up the MFG resource library in Madagascar.

Best of all, there's no additional cost to you. You get the same great offers and prices. These participating retailers simply donate a percentage of your transaction to the MFG. The MFG redeems these for appropriate books and resources. It all adds up. For example, last December, someone bought *The Lord of the Rings* DVD trilogy through the site, saved 35% off retail, got free shipping, and over \$4 was donated to the MFG. Over the summer, someone picked up *The Last Great Place*, saved 37% off retail, got free shipping, and nearly \$5 was donated to the MFG.

What could your personal shopping turn into this season? Better yet, how about the shopping for all the staff at your institution? More profound still, how about all the members of your institution? Please consider including information like this in your online e-mail alerts with a link to the MFG page or printed in your newsletters. Or how about added to your signature on your own e-mails? For so little effort and no money, we could greatly increase a much needed resource.

Remember, just visit the MFG website, click on the Amazon logo at the top left of the page and then click on the store you want to shop at from there. So easy, yet so important.



Noel – 19 years work at Ivoloina.

Born and educated in Antanivavaty near Vohidoatra, Noel worked for a sugar-cane co-operative at Vohidoatra until, when he was 26, he moved to Tamatave hoping for a change in career. He soon found work at Ivoloina. Noel lives with his wife and eight children at Antanabaovao about 8km from Ivoloina, cycling the rough dirt road to Ivoloina and back each day.

