



Zoo Zürich  
Zürichbergstrasse 221  
CH-8044 Zürich, Switzerland  
Telefon: +41 (0)44 254 25 00  
Telefax: +41 (0)44 254 25 10  
E-mail: [zoo@zoo.ch](mailto:zoo@zoo.ch)

### Press release

## **Zurich Zoo extremely concerned by illegal woodcutting in Masoala National Park**

**Zurich, March 25, 2010 - A new wave of illegal wood cutting has begun on the Eastern coast of Madagascar: The exploitation of precious woods in Masoala National Park as well as in other regions threatens to destroy the remaining intact rainforests. Zurich Zoo has been committed to preserving the rainforest on the Masoala peninsula for over 15 years now and is greatly concerned by recent developments. Because of the ruthless destruction of the forest, flora and fauna as well as drinking water reserves are also being destroyed irreversibly.**

The increasing demand for resources of China, Europe, and North America unfortunately also impacts the Madagascan National Park. The illegal exploitation of precious woods in the Masoala National Park as well as in other regions threatens to destroy the last remaining forests – even though they are under protection.

„274 containers full of rosewood are currently waiting to be exported at the Madagascan port of Voahemaro“ reports Derek Schuurman from the African and Madagascan Department of the Missouri Botanical Garden, one of the oldest botanical gardens in the U.S. In the meantime, the French shipping company, Delmas, has already shipped all of the 274 containers mentioned. The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) as well as the organization Global Witness informed Delmas of the illegal woodcutting. The corporation, however, found it sufficient to have received written confirmation of the legal origin of the woods from Madagascan rosewood barons as well as valid shipping documentation from the Madagascan custom authorities. On March 24, the Council of Ministers of the transitional government of Madagascar (HAT Haute Autorité de Transition) decreed a rosewood felling and export prohibition. The last such prohibition was issued in November 2009 but was only kept in place for a few weeks. It remains to be hoped that the new prohibition will remain valid for a longer period of time.

### **Contradictory conduct of the French government**

Illegal woodcutting has been underway in the National Parks of Masoala and Marojejy since the coup d'état in Madagascar in the spring of 2009. Derek Schuurman, who has published several articles on this topic in scientific journals, criticizes the French government that – contrary to the international community - has recognized the transitional government of Madagascar and apparently tolerates the exporting of illegally felled woods by the Delmas corporation – despite international protests. And this, although France is simultaneously

attempting to establish itself as the leading nation in the fight against deforestation and climate change. To date, the French press has hardly mentioned illegal woodcutting in Madagascar. Schuurman goes as far as to state that his co-workers were prevented from publishing corresponding information in the French media.

An article published in GEO magazine in April 2010 for which research was carried out on site describes how Madagascan wood dealers have the most precious trees in Masoala National Park felled. Ebony and rosewood from the Masoala region is mainly sold to China but also to the European and U.S. markets where it is used to build instruments such as guitars and violins – amongst others by the German wood trading company, Theodor Nagel.

### **Zurich Zoo consternated by the far-reaching consequences**

Since 1994, within the scope of a cooperation agreement with the government of Madagascar, Zurich Zoo has endeavored to contribute to the protection of the rainforest on the Masoala peninsula. With the opening of the Masoala Rainforest, a 11,000 square meter vast tropical hall based on an ecological system, Zurich Zoo has established itself as an important ambassador and partner for the preservation of Masoala National Park in Madagascar. Zurich Zoo not only supports the national park financially but also carries out partnership research projects as well as financing development projects in favor of the population living in the areas surrounding the park.

Zurich Zoo is greatly consternated by the developments of late. The felling of precious woods in the Madagascan rainforest not only deprives the globe of its most valuable and resistant trees – transporting a rosewood or ebony tree requires the cutting of five to six further, lighter trees as „floating aids“ for the heavy tropical woods that sink easily. The wood cutters who carry out this dangerous task are paid two to three Swiss Franks per day and help themselves to forest wood for burning and cooking purposes as well as cutting their way through the forest and chasing lemurs for food. The illegal cutting of precious woods thus leads to a rapid loss of the biodiversity of the national park forests. Woods thus weakened can no longer fulfill their functions to prevent erosion and serve as drinking water reservoirs.

Caption

### **The illegal felling of woods continues unabatedly**

At the port of Vohémar (Madagascar), 274 containers filled with illegally cut tropical woods are loaded on to a boat of the French shipping company DELMAS. In the meantime, the boat left Madagascar for China.

Photo: Global Witness

### **For additional information:**

Dr. Alex Rübel, Director, Zoo Zurich

Dr. Martin Bauert, Curator, Zoo Zurich

Phone: 044 254 25 00, [medien@zoo.ch](mailto:medien@zoo.ch), [www.zoo.ch](http://www.zoo.ch)

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