



MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

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Greetings from Karen & Gareth

As Christmas approaches congratulations go to Madagascar's President Marc Ravalomanana who has officially won the Madagascar general election for the second time. The country had been holding its breath, as the elections in December 2001 were followed by a period of civil unrest. Except for a failed attempted coup in December, the current elections have essentially passed peacefully.

Locally, it is litchi season again. Many of Tamatave's larger warehouses have been converted into litchi packing stations and the roads are packed with all kinds of vehicles transporting the

fruit. Unfortunately, this year the litchis have ripened late so local producers have missed much of the Christmas export market, resulting in an abundance of litchis and low market prices. Life never seems to be easy for Tamatave's farmers.

There have been no fewer than 16 visitors either from overseas or from within Madagascar working at Ivoloina and Betampona these past few weeks. Their work is described below. Rather than thanking each of them individually I would like to thank them all collectively for their brilliant work and the contributions that each of them has made to the MFG projects.

Betampona Reserve

Butterflies & Moths

Betampona has an amazingly rich diversity of flora and fauna. Scientists often visit to study various aspects of this. Most recently, we were visited by Dr. David Lees from the Natural History Museum, London. David is a Madagascar butterfly and moth expert and has been spending the past couple of months with Malagasy students Mamy and Ravo surveying different areas of Madagascar for butterflies and moths. Unfortunately, he was



Tim L. Tetzlaff and lemur



Photos: Dr. Karen Freeman
Programme Manager

Text: Gareth Kett
Ivoloina Forest Manager

Produced by Tim L. Tetzlaff
MFG Public Awareness Advisor

Ever since I started writing these updates back in August 2004, Tim Tetzlaff, Director of Conservation and Communications for Naples Zoo, Florida, and MFG Public Awareness Advisor, has been the unsung hero – turning a few paragraphs of scrawl and some (albeit great) photos from Karen into the polished finished product that goes out onto the server.

Tim also raises a substantial amount of money for the MFG through his selfless work – all done in his own time. I know that he will protest, but we would like to take the opportunity in this longer than normal Christmas update to thank Tim for all his great work. We will continue to acknowledge his work from this update onwards by adding Tim's name below the update titles. Many thanks, Tim.

only able to spend three days at Betampona and these were rain affected, meaning that while moths were plentiful, relatively few species of butterflies were seen. Nonetheless, David and his team did find the butterfly *Ploetzia amygdalis*. This is only the second record of this species within Madagascar's eastern rainforest and is the first record during daylight hours. The moth results will be processed upon David's return to the UK later this month. Before leaving the Tamatave area to continue his work David spent a morning at Ivoloina surveying secondary forest butterflies and found the species *Malaza carmides*,



a species whose biology is unknown. Naturally we will be following this up.

David & team sorting moths.

Births Coming Back

Last year we were concerned that there had been few baby lemurs seen at Betampona. This year things are back to normal. Two diademed sifakas (*Propithecus diadema*) have been seen with infants, two brown lemurs (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) have been seen with babies and an eastern woolly lemur (*Avahi laniger*) has also been spotted carrying a young infant. In addition to this, Georges has seen a group of ringed-tailed mongooses (*Gallidia elegans elegans*) with a new baby and a pair of green pigeons (*Treron australis*) have built a nest near Rendrirendry at the entrance to the reserve.

Village Education

The Ivoloina education team, led by Randria, often carry out tournés of the Betampona border area to educate villagers and farmers in sustainable land-use techniques. Sometimes, as was the case late last month in the village of Sahambala, they are joined by the MFG Betampona agents and some of the ANGAP (Malagasy National Parks authority) agents. Sometimes these tournés take in a number of villages and involve a lot of hiking between villages with little time spent at each village, and sometimes only one village is involved with

more comprehensive training being given. Four days were given to Sahambala which is a relatively large village very close to Betampona and poses a threat to the forest through tavy (slash and burn agriculture) and the theft of forest products. Through these training sessions the combined MFG teams of Betampona and Ivoloina explain the benefits of the forest to local communities, the importance of protecting it, and the means by which the productivity of land currently in crude crop systems can be sustainably maximized in hopes of minimizing tavy such as this.



Sightings Continue!

It's strange how things work. For years we've failed to see a single white-breasted mesite (*Mesitornis variegata*) and then within the space of two months two of them turn up. In October Jean-

Noel stumbled upon a white-breasted mesite just outside the southwestern reserve limit (see November 2006 update). Then last month, Arsene came across one of the birds in the eastern part of the reserve. The initial sighting was

in degraded forest and the latest in primary forest. This is exciting news and it is hoped that Birdlife International will send a team of experts to Betampona next year in an effort to improve our knowledge of this elusive endangered mesite.

Parc Ivoloina

Rare Birth

The amazing news from Ivoloina this month is that Corinne, one of Ivoloina's three greater bamboo lemurs (*Prolemur simus*), gave birth to a healthy baby on 19 November.

Greater bamboo lemurs are notoriously difficult to breed outside the wild. The last to be born at Ivoloina was six years ago. Mother and baby, who are being kept under close surveillance, are both in very good health.

Prize greater bamboo lemur baby and mother.



Including the baby greater bamboo lemur, the tally of baby lemurs around the zoo at Ivoloina has risen to an amazing 15. In the zoo collection, we now have 5 baby black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*), 2 baby red-bellied lemurs (*Eulemur rubriventer*), the baby greater bamboo lemur (*Prolemur simus*) and a baby lesser bamboo lemur (*Haplemur griseus*). Free ranging, we have 4 baby white-fronted brown lemurs, 2 baby black and white ruffed lemurs, and a baby red-bellied lemur.

Ranger Updates

Back in October, voluntary rangers Zanna Clay and Elijean Lama finished working in the Parc Ivoloina forest. Zanna has moved across the Mozambique Channel to South Africa to work with meerkats while Elijean continues to stay involved with the education team at Ivoloina. Zanna and Elijean have been replaced by two new voluntary rangers from England, Mike Sweet and Lucie Scriven.

In addition to the new baby lemurs mentioned earlier, a new baby wild lesser bamboo lemur was spotted by voluntary rangers Mike and Lucie. Two small groups of rescued lesser bamboo lemurs

were released into the Parc Ivoloina forest a few years ago and are now living wild and breed regularly, but seldom frequent the zoo area.

Mike and Lucie getting stuck in.



New Fish Discovered

Some of Mike and Lucie's initial work was to assist Madagascar fish expert Dr. Paul Loiselle with some survey work on Ivoloina's fish. As a result of Paul's visit from St. Louis and subsequent work from Mike and Lucie, we have found that the few *Paratilapia* caught in Lake Fulgence this year (see March and November 2006 updates) were part of a fairly substantial breeding population.

We had believed these fish to be *Paratilapia typus*, but on close examination Paul has found them to be a currently undescribed *Paratilapia* species.

New MBG/MFG Botanical Partnership

The MFG has recently entered into a partnership with Missouri Botanical Gardens (MBG), Tana with the goal of developing a gene-bank for some of Madagascar's rarest east coast plants. The project is funded by a National Geographic Society grant. MBG will collect seed, which will be propagated, planted out, and cared for at Ivoloina.

At Ivoloina, the practical aspects of the project will be managed by Lalatahiana Davy Randriatavy, assisted by model station nursery assistant Jean-Francois. We welcome Lala, who studied at Betampona for his Master's project and then, on graduating, conducted a field project on bird diets in the Ivoloina forest. He has designed and almost finished building a new nursery for the MBG project.

Lala at work on the new MBG/MFG project nursery.



Bob Merz & Invertebrates

Vet Assistance

After two months of invaluable work for the MFG at Ivoloina, Swiss vet Angie Simia has returned to Switzerland. While the Ivoloina staff always operate to a high standard, the training and advice that Angie has provided for the zoo staff has left the zoo in a very positive position as we move towards 2007. It was also fortunate that Angie was around during the time that so many baby lemurs were born. Angie was sometimes assisted in her work by University of Tana veterinary student Fidi Rasambainarivo.

New Bug Experiences

Part of Angie's work was assisting St. Louis Zoo invertebrate specialist Bob Merz. Bob came across to Madagascar to establish an invertebrate trail at the zoo. He stayed for a couple of weeks in which time he achieved a huge amount. Ivoloina zookeeper Rakotoarison (see April 2006 update) has become our insect keeper following intensive training from Bob. Beyond the trail, there will also be a smaller insect exhibit in the visitor centre.



Focus on Frogs

We were also fortunate last month to be joined by frog expert Gonçalo Rosa from Portugal. Gonçalo's time at Ivoloïna and Betampona served primarily as a reconnaissance trip, but he was still able to add three species of frog to the Ivoloïna fauna inventory and to advise on the restructuring of the zoo's tomato frog (*Dyscophus antongili*) exhibit. He will be back in January next year to begin a study of Betampona's frogs and to screen a number of frogs at Ivoloïna and Betampona for chytrid fungus, which is having catastrophic effect on some of the world's frog populations, but has not yet been found in Madagascar.

ICTC Welcomes Experts and Students

To cap a very useful few weeks at Ivoloïna, early in December we were joined by Dr. Ellen Dierenfeld from St Louis and Dr. Michel Delorme from Montreal Biodome, Canada. Ellen is an animal nutritionist and Michel is primarily a bat expert. They spent a few days working with the Ivoloïna staff and students from GRENE (Tamatave College of Natural Resource Management).

This work was significant for another reason – it was the first time that the Ivoloïna Conservation Training Centre (ICTC) laboratory had been used by students. It is the only teaching facility of its kind in Tamatave. The training session was a great success and was hopefully the first of many more to come.

Michel, Ellen and students.

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Staff Member of the Month

Todivelo "Barrière" Parc Ivoloïna Groundsman

As you enter Parc Ivoloïna, you drive or walk along an attractive track, which passes through an area of woodland before being joined by well-maintained grassy verges leading you to the car park and visitor centre. On the way you may pass Todivelo - a slim, proud looking local man, often wielding a machete, keeping the vegetation back. On another day he may be found with a rake in hand at the "Collection" (picnic area/playing field at the entrance to the park) battling against the never-ending fall of leaves, or in one of the other recreational areas, keeping the vegetation under control.

A true gentleman, Todivelo was born in 1959 to a poor family in the village of Antanyvatzy. He joined the MFG Parc Ivoloïna team in 1998, but had already worked at Ivoloïna since 1975 under the management of the Malagasy Department of Water and Forests. Todivelo lives with his wife and eight children on a rise above the second



Todivelo "Barrière" - A gentleman with a machete.

barrier on the entrance track to Ivoloïna. He is also responsible for the Ivoloïna security barrier, earning him his nickname Todivelo "Barrière" which separates him in conversation from Todivelo "Chauffeur" (see May/June 2005 update).



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

www.savethelemur.org