



MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

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Greetings from Karen & Gareth

The MFG Programme Manager, Dr. Freeman, and I have been away from Madagascar for much of the time since the previous update was completed.

Firstly, we were in the UK for our annual vacation and immediately after that we attended the African Zoo Association (PAAZAB) conference at Monkeyland near Plettenberg Bay in South Africa, where firm friendships were made and MFG's position as an active member of PAAZAB was reinforced. MFG rejoined PAAZAB last year at the invitation of PAAZAB director Dave Morgan following his visit

to the MFG projects during the MFG annual meeting last July.

We were very grateful to MFG vice-chair Ingrid Porton who extended her stay in Madagascar to work with the MFG staff during our absence.

Dave Morgan addresses delegates at Plettenberg Bay.



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Betampona Reserve

Sarph Thrives!

Sarph was one of the group of black and white ruffed lemurs (*Varecia variegata variagata*) released back in 1997. Since then there have been a lot of changes in group dynamics, but now Sarph has formed a group with two wild black and white ruffed lemur females and within the last couple of months the Betampona agents have noticed a baby with one of the females. Without genetic testing it is impossible to be sure that Sarph is the father, but it is very probable. It is a further success linked to the black and white lemur

releases which were carried out in 1997, 1998 and 2001 with the intention of increasing the Betampona black and white lemur gene pool following concern from scientists that the population was bottlenecking.



Introduced ruffed lemurs have increased the gene pool.



2007

So Long for Now, Carl & Haja

We temporarily bid farewell to St Louis post-graduate Carl Toborowsky and his Malagasy assistant from the University of Antananarivo, Hajanarina Rakotondrainibe (Haja for short). Carl and Haja have just completed the initial stage of a study of Betampona's white-fronted brown lemur (*Eulemur albifrons*) population to look at home range and diet. Carl hopes that the study will form part of a PhD which he plans to begin next year. MFG guide, Justin, will continue the research for a year to gather important baseline data on this species.

New Field Training

Carl and Haja were able to tag some of the brown lemurs late in April when St. Louis Zoo vet Randy Junge arrived at Betampona to instruct the Betampona agents in lemur darting and capture techniques, accompanied by University of Antananarivo veterinary student Fidi Rasambainarivo, a regular MFG visitor. It is sometimes necessary to

research and welfare purposes, which up until now has meant waiting for a team of darters from Ranomafana National Park to make their way to Betampona.

However, the decision was made at the MFG AGM last year to train two of the Betampona agents to use a dart gun and that all the agents would be trained in the pursuit and safe capture of darted animals using a net. Randy, an experienced darter, emphasized the importance of minimising the risk of injury to the animals both from the darting and subsequent capture so on this preliminary training session the MFG agents simply assisted the captures but did no darting themselves.

A second trip is planned for August to continue the long and slow training process. Randy took DNA and biomedical samples for scientific purposes from the lemurs which were darted.



Georges

Update: Georges Mammal Study

Over the past eighteen months Betampona agent Georges has been conducting a study of the micro-mammals of the Betampona forest. It is a project that requires a lot of patience as most small mammals are shy, secretive, alert and well hidden. Georges uses live traps as well as general observation techniques and is slowly succeeding in putting together a picture of Betampona's largely unresearched micro-mammals. Recently, he has been comparing the ecology of the rare brown-tailed mongoose (*Salanoia concolor*) and the more common ring-tailed mongoose (*Galidia elegans*). One pair of brown-tailed mongooses that he has been following recently had young with them. Incidentally, Georges has reported seeing far more lowland streaked tenrecs (*Hemicentetes semispinosus*) than in recent years.

Ring-tailed mongoose



Parc Ivoloïna

Bat Research

In mid-May, University of Antananarivo student Beza Ramasindrazana concluded the first stage of a project to discover what species of bat are present at Parc Ivoloïna. Using an ultra-sound detector, nets, and a harp-trap, Beza caught five sucker-footed bats (*Myzopoda aurita*) which are thought to be rare throughout their east coast range (Garbutt, 1999) and two mouse-eared bats (*Myotis goudoti*) and saw five flying foxes (*Pteropus rufus*).

Sucker-footed and mouse-eared bats are insectivorous and navigate by echolocation, while the frugivorous flying fox uses only its excellent eyesight for navigation. Beza also recorded an ultra-sound frequency inconsistent with sucker-footed or mouse-eared bats and is currently trying to determine its source. He intends to return to continue his work at Ivoloïna later this year.



New Education & Training Officer

Congratulations to Lalatahiana Davy Randriatavy (Lala for short) who has been promoted to MFG education and training officer (subject to the completion of a three month trial period) following the departure of Randria the previous education officer.

Lala only joined the MFG team full-time in October last year as the MFG/Missouri Botanical Gardens project Parc Ivoloïna field manager (see December 2006 update), but has been promoted due to the exceptional promise and excellent work ethic that he has shown.

He will work on both projects until the end of his contract with MBG. Lala had previously studied at Betampona for his Master's project and then, on graduating in 2004 conducted a field project on bird diets in the Ivoloïna forest.



Agro-Progress

After six months of hard work on the agro-forestry programme at and around Ivoloina and with the University of Tamatave, Professor Christof den Biggelaar has returned home to North Carolina to resume work at Appalachian State University. Christof's work has been exceptionally valuable and has changed the face of agro-forestry at Ivoloina, bringing the approach to a more practical, farmer-orientated level. He has kindly donated his mode of transport – a small motorbike to the project, too. Many thanks Christof!

More details of Christof's work can be found in the January/February and March/April 2007 updates. Christof has signed a protocol of collaboration with the University of Tamatave and will try to come back on an annual basis to help further develop the MFG's agro-forestry programme and develop the university's Masters programme.

Mayoral Training

Late in May Christof and Lala conducted the second environmental training session of the year for the Tamatave area's village mayors. The session, which promotes and illustrates the benefits of sustainable agriculture to the environment and villagers alike, as well as practical



Christof and Professor Eustache of Tamatave University signing the collaboration contract.

techniques, was very well received. The mayors are respected figureheads within their communes and through them many villagers practicing agriculture can be reached. Normally MFG hosts one training session per year for the mayors but due to extra available funding a second session has been possible this year.

Turtle Rescue & Relocation

Seventy-eight fresh-water turtles have been re-homed in Lake Fulgence in Parc Ivoloina. One of four species of fresh-water turtle found in Madagascar, the black turtles (*Pelusios subniger*) had been collected by ground-workers from an area of land currently being cleared for the construction of factories south of Tamatave. They are native to the central east coast area of Madagascar (Goodman and Benstead 2003) and locals say that they can occasionally be found in

the area around Parc Ivoloina and historically existed within Parc Ivoloina. They are becoming rare as they are often caught for food and for the pet trade. The habitat at Parc Ivoloina is similar to the habitat that the turtles were removed from.

The turtles were taken by pirogue to a shallow, heavily vegetated area of Lake Fulgence not used by visitors and released by MFG and Eaux et Forêts (Malagasy Ministry of Water and Forests) staff.



Ivoloina tortoise keeper Beny releases the first turtle.



Staff Members of the Month

Velosonina

Parc Ivoloïna Zookeeper and Guardian

46 year old Velosonina, older brother of Ivoloïna zookeeper Pascal (see July/August 2006 update) is both a valuable zookeeper and part of the team of park guardians.

Following in his father's footsteps he worked as a part-time zookeeper and guardian at Ivoloïna while the park was managed by the Ministry of Water and Forests and stayed on in the same capacity when MFG took over in 1990.

Velosonina – keeping Ivoloïna in the family.

Coming from a poor family who were unable to send him to school, Velosonina worked for his parents as a child, helping them to support the family, before joining the Ministry of Water and Forests.

He lives with his wife and three sons and three daughters on site at Parc Ivoloïna.



References

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