



MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

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Greetings from Karen & Gareth

Since the last update Tamatave has endured three more cyclone scares. While each brought heavy rain and high winds, inflicting some structural damage and bringing down a number of trees, by and large the Tamatave area escaped unscathed.

(Editor's Note: As of April 29, six cyclones have now hit the island since mid-December making it the country's worst storm season on record.)

Our thoughts go to those areas that bore the brunt of the cyclones, particularly Antalaha in the northeast which was hit very hard by cyclone Indlala. Cyclones Gamede and Jaya brushed past us either side of Indlala.

On a brighter note, we were delighted to host MFG Vice-Chair Ingrid Porton who after three weeks work here reviewing the MFG projects has recently returned home to St Louis.



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Betampona Reserve

Of Cyclones & Lemurs

Rough weather during cyclones can cause groups of lemurs to become disjointed or to move away from their usual areas into other parts of the forest.

After the winds of Cyclone Indlala, some of the black and white ruffed lemurs (*Varecia variegata variegata*) under observation by the MFG Betampona team went missing, necessitating more intensive searching.

But the Betampona agents are skilled in locating animals even in the densest part of the forest.

We're happy to report that after a week of hard searching all the missing lemurs were found safe and well.



Ingrid and Karen at Betampona

A Closer Look at the Twins

Black and white ruffed lemur *Hale* was one of the lemurs released in the 2001 release. Unfortunately, she died in 2003. But before that, she raised twins fathered by a wild male, which up to now have proven to be impossible for the MFG agents

to sex and therefore to name. Recently the youngsters became more approachable, and the agents have been able to identify them as one male and one female and have named them named them *Velona* (Malagasy for Moon) and *Tselotra* (Lightning). Both twins are doing well.

Frog Study Yields Promising Discoveries

MFG agent Jean-Noel and Portuguese student Gonçalo Rosa (see March 07 update) have finished their two month study of Betampona frogs.

The two experts worked mostly at night as many of Betampona's frogs are nocturnal. They identified 85 frog species and found what they believe to be a minimum of six new species. We eagerly await confirmation!

Carl Can't Stay Away

We welcomed back St Louis graduate Carl Toborowsky who is spending three months at Betampona conducting a census of the reserve's white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*). We encourage continuity in our projects and this is Carl's fourth visit to Betampona. (Editor: see updates from May/June 05, July 05, Aug 05, Sep 03, June 03 - well, you get the idea!) He is even becoming proficient at speaking the Malagasy language!



White-fronted
Lemur



Gonçalo at work

Forest Belt Taking Root

The MFG Betampona reforestation project (see February 2007 update) is going well. Two thousand *Canarium sp.* hardwoods have been planted in the Ambodirafia nursery.

Canariums are hardy, and able to tolerate poorer soils and moderate exposure to sunlight. They are native trees that are well suited for the first wave of planting in our bid to create a managed forest belt around Betampona that is both beneficial to local communities and wildlife.



Parc Ivoloïna

Bushmeat Survey Underway

GRENE (Tamatave College for the Management of Natural Resources) students Nandrianina Andrianasolonjatovo and Todisoa have been conducting individual but complimentary studies into the local bush-meat trade in the Tamatave and Ivoloïna areas.

Nandrianina has been concentrating her study on the bush-meat trade in frogs (*Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*) in Tamatave city, focusing on markets, while Todisoa has been concentrating his efforts on working amongst villagers in the Ivoloïna area and has incorporated all types of bush meat into his study.

Naturally, there was some reluctance amongst villagers near Ivoloïna to answer Todisoa's questions, especially as he is using Gite Mahatsinjo in Parc Ivoloïna as a base for his study. However, once the villagers became convinced of the confidential nature of the enquiry they were more forthcoming with information.

The findings of the combined studies of Nandrianina and Todisoa will provide information from which MFG hopes to gain a better understanding of the local bush-meat trade and its impact on the local environment.

(Editor's Note: Like many Malagasy, Todisoa does not have a last name.)



Advanced Equipment for Training Centre Arrives

A shipment of agro-forestry practical and scientific equipment, and teaching materials organised by Professor Christof den Biggelaar and MFG Vice-Chair Ingrid Porton has arrived at Ivoloïna Conservation Training Centre (ICTC).

The equipment, which proved to be somewhat difficult in clearing customs, has added immensely to the potential of the ICTC. Unfortunately, the import problems meant that some of Christof's classes at GRENE, which had been planned for demonstrating the use of the equipment have had to be rescheduled, but the classes will be worth the wait. The GRENE students have never before had the chance to use such advanced equipment.

Christof has already led the GRENE students in field classes in the village of Ambonivato near Parc Ivoloïna. Under Christof's direction, the students worked with village farmers discussing current land uses and the pros and cons of alternative land use techniques. The students later came up with management plan proposals. The exercise was part of the work planned as part of the Ambonivato land management agreement collaboration (see October 2006 update).

We would like to thank the U.S. based Association of Zoos and Aquariums whose Conservation Endowment Fund made the purchases possible and will benefit so many local students, teachers and farmers in the future.



Lemur Ups & Downs

It has been a tough season for the black and white ruffed lemurs in the zoo collection. They suffered several as yet unexplained deaths amongst young lemurs. But there has been an undoubted success amongst the zoo's black and white ruffed free-ranging lemurs. The free-ranging twins, born to parents Josephine and Amby are both doing very well and have began spending time around the zoo. Named Esther and Coco, they are proving to be a great hit with the Parc Ivoloïna's visitors!

Jacques Leads Recovery

The recent storms brought down a number of trees around Parc Ivoloïna. Fortunately, agro-forestry model station manager Jacques is nearing the completion of his chainsaw training and was on hand to play a leading role in the clearing up of debris.



Bugwalk to Open Soon!

The Ivoloïna Bugwalk, which was kicked off by Bob Merz during his visit back in November (see December 2006 update) is coming along well. Parc Ivoloïna craftsmen Laurent and Kamisy have put in a stone pathway and some exhibits. It will not be long before the display cages are out and the walk is open to the public!

Staff Members of the Month

Dada Alphonse *Night Guardian*

Parc Ivoloïna is a safe place with few security concerns. We aim to keep it that way so we employ reliable, honest guardians. 48 year-old Dada is the veteran of the Ivoloïna guardians, having worked for MFG since 1989, yet he was a guardian even before then, working for the government agricultural body "Foffifa".

A true character, Dada can sometimes be found at night patrolling the zoo area with an old traditional hunting spear.

Dada was born to a poor family in the village of Vohitradiana, not far from Ivoloïna and began manual work for his parents rather than school, but since then has worked his way up to employment with the MFG. He lives with his wife, three daughters and son on site at Parc Ivoloïna.



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