



MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

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Greetings from Karen & Gareth

We're back into "winter" in Madagascar, which here on the east coast means that temperatures are very pleasant – at least for those of us used to temperate climates! Wildlife-wise, the cooler months mean that we see less activity amongst the lemurs, birds, and amphibians while many of the reptiles go into torpor so are seldom seen at all.

Things haven't slowed down for the MFG though where both Betampona and Ivoloina projects continue full-pace.

It was a pleasure to host MFG advisers Andrea Katz and Charlie

Welch along with their daughter Alena for a week back in June. Andrea and Charlie, who used to manage the MFG projects in Madagascar, had just finished an alumni tour of Madagascar for Duke Lemur Center. Their stay proved valuable in discussing the future direction of the MFG projects.

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Reptiles such as *Zonosaurus madagascariensis* semi-hibernate in winter.

Betampona Reserve

Reforestation

The MFG and ANGAP (Malagasy protected areas authority) organised and hosted a reforestation day and party at Antananarina, a village bordering the northwest of the Betampona Reserve, to celebrate World Environmental Day.

Antananarina is one of the villages involved in the MFG project to create a protective, economically viable forest buffer in the 100m Zone of Protection around the periphery of the reserve (see Jan/Feb 2007 update).

Despite the fact that due to the effect of the cyclones earlier in the year seed is hard to find, the people of Antananarina remain very enthusiastic about the reforestation project.

According to the MFG agents this was the most enthusiastically celebrated World Environmental Day event that they had ever witnessed!

Lemurs Laying Low

The cool weather conditions mentioned earlier, combined with prolonged heavy rain,

have hindered the Betampona agents in their black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) survey work.

The lemurs are much less vocal during the tropical winter, which makes them hard to locate under any circumstances, but in rain they also tend to remain still, rather than moving around in the canopy, making them exceptionally difficult to locate, so records in recent months have been scarce.

We hope a change in the weather will soon make monitoring easier.

New Nursery

In addition to the Zone of Protection re-forestation project, nurseries at Antananarina and Ambodirafia, the MFG has also now established a tree nursery in Ambodiriana. Ten kilometers from Betampona, Ambodiriana is too far away to be involved with the Zone of Protection re-forestation project, but MFG is active there in promoting conservation and sustainable agriculture, targeting adults through training events and children, as well as their parents, through the MFG-run Saturday school in Ambodiriana.

MFG always encourages the planting of native trees such as pallisandre and vopaca, but this must be balanced with short-term economic viability so species such as cloves and cola are also propagated. Villagers are sold the trees for a minimal price. It has been found that villagers care for the trees more effectively if they have paid something for them!



Children planting trees at Ambodiriana.



Holding Its Breath

Head conservation agent Celestin made an interesting observation when he came across a Madagascar hog-nosed snake (*Leioheterodon madagascariensis*) on a day off whilst on his way to work in his rice paddies. The snake, on seeing Celestin, moved into an irrigation channel and buried itself in the mud beneath the water.

Intrigued, Celestin sat nearby and waited for half an hour for the snake to emerge. But it did not. The common and robust hog-nosed snake is the largest Malagasy colubrid, reaching more than 1.5m in length (Goodman and Benstead 2003). They are diurnal and terrestrial and while they do occur in primary forest (Glaw and Vences 1994), they are normally seen in secondary forest or agricultural areas.

Around the world some species of snake are known to be able to remain under water for prolonged periods of time, but we have not found records of the Madagascar hog-nosed snake, or "menerana" as they are known locally, doing so.

Parc Ivoloina

MFG Shares Info at South African Prosimian Conference

Parc Ivoloina Zoo manager, Bernard lambana, has just returned from a successful trip to Ithala Game Reserve in South Africa for the 2007 Prosimian Conference, which was attended by 120 prosimian experts from around the world, including sixteen Malagasy.

One of the main themes was how to go about re-introducing prosimians into former ranges. Bernard's experience in the Betampona black and white ruffed lemur releases of 1997, 1998 and 2001 made him an integral part of the discussion.

His participation in this year's Prosimian Conference, the first attended by an MFG Malagasy manager, further strengthens the credibility of the MFG as a conservation organisation in the national and international context.



English Expanding

Recently, the Malagasy president Marc Ravalomanana made English Madagascar's third official language, further increasing the in-country demand for English teachers, especially from abroad.



Brooke at Ivoloina

Fortunately for staff at Ivoloina and students at GRENE (University of Tamatave Natural Resource Management Institute) Duke University pre-med student Brooke Fisher has joined us for a couple of months to teach English. Living at the park, Brooke teaches MFG staff three days per week, whilst herself learning about the work involved in the many aspects of managing Parc Ivoloina. She spends Mondays and Tuesdays in Tamatave teaching English to the GRENE students and the rest teaching MFG staff.

Brown Lemur Research

Also from Duke, post-grad student Meredith Barrett has begun the initial part of a study researching the condition of white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur albifrons*) under differing environments in primary and secondary forest.

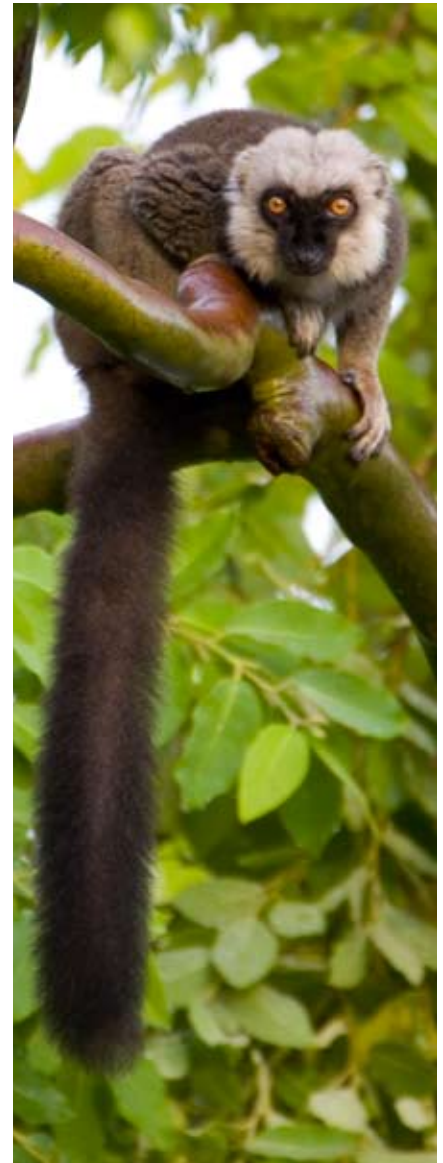


Work for the project prior to Meredith's arrival involved the habituation of the lemurs to hanging cages constructed by Ivoloina craftsmen Laurent and Kamisy, which allow the lemurs to be easily caught for biological sampling. The second part of Meredith's project will be in Betampona. Comparisons between the two sets of data can then be made.

MFG & MBG

The MFG and Missouri Botanical Garden rare plants collaboration continues to go well. Lala and Jean-Francois have just finished planting 40 rare canariums in a section of the park on the far side of Lake Fulgence. The young trees were transported to the planting site by pirogue (dugout canoe).

But for these trees and MFG, this is just the beginning. The trees must be kept free of competitor vegetation until they are tall enough to thrive on their own and will be monitored periodically throughout their initial years of growth.





Christian at work.

More Agro-Progress

Two agro-forestry students from GRENE are now progressing well in projects intended to develop the Parc Ivoloïna agro-forestry programme.

Jean Christian Rambelison is working with the Agro-forestry Model Station team on a project to make the zoo more self-sustaining by planting fruiting trees. Veronique Ravalonarivo is studying the quality of Parc Ivoloïna's soils. Christian and Veronique were employed by Professor Christof den Biggelaar (see May/June 2007 update) as part of the MFG collaboration with GRENE using funding from a Conservation Endowment Fund Grant from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). We are very grateful to AZA for the grant.

New Babies!

No, not lemurs.

Zoo Manager Bernard and both Ivoloïna craftsmen Laurent and Kamisy all had additions to their families in late June – and all were girls, Ranosiniaina Eulalie, Francielette, and Albertina. **Congratulations to all three families!**

Buvette Gets New Roof

Back at the park Laurent and Kamisy have been busy replacing the natural material (ravimpontsy) buvette roof. Ravimpontsy is dried traveller's palm (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) leaves skilfully arranged and secured to make a waterproof roof, but it must be replaced every three to five years.



Laurent working on the buvette roof.

References:

Glaw F. and Vences M., 1994, A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Madagascar. Second edition. Moos Druck, Leverkusen and FARBO, Koln.

Goodman, S.M. and Benstead, J.P., 2003. The Natural History of Madagascar. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

Why a UK 10-Year-Old Bikes for Madagascar!

In His Own Words:

I'm Jake Causley. I'm 10 years old and I'm really into Lemurs. They are like the best animals in the world! I love them! Anyway I've recently done a sponsored bike ride for the Save The Lemur fund. The bike ride was approximately 18 miles long, and I eventually raised exactly £84. I have attached a picture of me about to start my bike ride.

The reason that I wanted to help your group is that there is a wild-life park near my house and when I visited there I walked through their (lemur exhibit). That was 3-4 years ago. Since then I have revisited this park and many other zoos several times. The lemurs are always my favourite animal to visit.

When my mum suggested to her majorettes that they could raise some money by doing a sponsored bike ride I saw my chance to do my bit for helping the lemurs. I often look at the website for your organisation to keep in touch with the health and well being of the Lemurs and their habitat. (I also like to look at the clothes!)

Lemurs Rule!

Jake, you're an inspiration and a testimony of what one person can do - no matter where they live or how old they are. Thank you so much for your support!



Jake's story is also a powerful reminder of how MFG member institutions featuring Madagascar displays or lemur exhibits are making a difference in the lives of visitors. And there are many more.

Have your own story or one from your area? Send it along to tim@savethelémur.org.



Staff Member of the Month

Lalatahiana Davy Randriatavy (Lala for short!) MFG Education Officer

35-year-old Lala joined the MFG in a full-time capacity in October last year as the MFG/Missouri Botanical Gardens project Parc Ivoloina field manager, but following the departure of the previous education officer and subsequent reshuffling, Lala was appointed as the MFG's new Training and Education Officer. He is exceptionally busy at the moment as he is also continuing with his MFG/MBG work.

Lala, the MFG's new Training and Education Manager.

Lala's appointment last year was far from his first involvement with MFG. Back in 2003, he completed his Masters study into the regeneration of some forest plant species used by black and white ruffed lemurs and by man in Betampona. Then in 2004 he carried out a project looking into the native plants eaten by birds at Ivoloina.

Lala grew up in Antananarivo and studied Natural Sciences at the University of Antananarivo. He lives in Tamatave with his wife and baby daughter.



Support More than Skin Deep

Longtime MFG supporter Simon Downs from the UK wanted a lemur tattoo for a while so he thought it would make an unusual 40th present from his wife, Fiona. He says, "Its placed on my right shoulder. Not to bothered that I can't see it, more interested in others seeing it and being reminded. And yes, it was very painful. . . a lot of clenching of the fists!" For anyone else interested in getting needed for lemurs, it took three sessions lasting in total about 4 hours.

What's next for Simon? He's thinking about spraying a lemur image on his SMART car. I'm sure that might sting a bit less. Simon, thanks again for all the ways you support conservation through the Madagascar Fauna Group!

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Questions or comments on these updates or the e-newsletter? Please e-mail tim@savethelemur.org

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