

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



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By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

While temperatures in Europe and the USA soar, the Madagascar east coast locals are wrapped up in coats and woolly hats braving the (not so cold) cold season. The MFG projects have had to bid farewell to a number of hard-working visitors this month. MFG advisors Andrea Katz and Charlie Welch have returned to the USA after a short, useful visit with their daughter Alena. American student Carl Toborowsky and his Malagasy assistant Tahiana Andriaharimalala have completed their fieldwork at Betampona. And H el ene Jutras from the Los Angeles Zoo has left Ivoloina having recorded the dietary habits of free-ranging white-fronted brown lemurs in a complementary study to Carl's project. We wish them all well.

Betampona Reserve

Work is beginning to restore one of the houses at Rendrirendry in preparation for two ANGAP (National Association for the Management of Protected Areas) agents who are soon to join the MFG team working in the reserve. The ANGAP agents will work on the MFG programme and receive training from the MFG. It is hoped that the partnership will prove useful to both organisations and that a continuous ANGAP presence at Rendrirendry just outside the reserve's southern border will be a deterrent to locals engaged in illegal wood extraction. The ANGAP agents are part of a team currently based at Fontsimavo about an hour's walk from Rendrirendry.



Mantella laevis (generic photo).

Frogs Discovered in Upper Forest

During the course of his amphibian micro-project research, Jean-Noel has found that the frog species *Mantella laevis*, which at Betampona had previously only been found in the lower areas of the reserve, also lives in the upper reaches of the forest. *Mantella* is considered the most prominent genus of Malagasy frogs with *M. laevis* probably being the most divergent. *M. laevis* is a striking yellowish-green and black frog with an adult size of 24-30mm in length. Adults are found on the forest floor, on tree trunks, and in water-filled holes in trees. They lay a few eggs 1-2cm above the water level in tree cavities and the subsequent tadpoles remain in the water until they reach adult form (Glaw and Vences, 1994).

Army Helps Educate Children



Students Arriving at Ivoloina Park!

Ninety school children from the Ambodriana Saturday School Class and the Rendrirendry field-station had a rare opportunity to spend a day and a night at Ivoloina when the Malagasy army agreed to use one of their troop transporters to ferry the pupils 20km along the bumpy road from the pirogue crossing at Fontsimavo to Ivoloina. Randria, Onesime, and Jacques of the Ivoloina education staff and Ambodriana Saturday School teacher Monsieur Modest showed the children around and discussed the importance of environmental issues with them. Due to the numbers of pupils involved, there were two visits in consecutive weeks. Our whole-hearted thanks goes to the army for their help in bringing the children to Ivoloina.

Unusual Kitchen Visitor

The narrow divide between the relative civilisation of Rendriendry and the forest 100m away once again became starkly apparent when Arsene found that an *Ithycyphus perineti* had taken a liking to his family kitchen! This humid forest, oviparous snake which is characterised by its light head to dark tail colouration was historically believed to transfix zebus (cattle) and men by dropping tail first, like an arrow, from trees (Glaw and Vences, 1994). While this individual held no such concerns for Arsene and left of its own accord, the presence of a largely arboreal snake outside the forest in one of the agents' houses remains intriguing.

Ivoloina Park

Monthly guided walks have begun at Ivoloina Park. The walks, conducted by myself and Rostand on the first Saturday of each month, offer visitors the opportunity to see and learn about some of the park's wildlife and history. Ivoloina's forest is almost all secondary/plantation forest, yet is still rich in wildlife, harbouring at least 46 species of birds, 35 reptile and amphibian species, wild eastern lesser bamboo lemurs (*Hapalemur griseus occidentalis*), brown mouse lemurs (*Microcebus rufus*), a number of small mammals species, and an abundance of insect fauna. Despite the degraded nature of Madagascar's secondary forests and fallow land when compared with primary rainforest areas, their role in the conservation of the country's remaining biodiversity should not be underestimated.



Guided walk in progress

Building with Traveler's Palms

Many of the buildings at Ivoloina are constructed using traditional techniques and materials. 'Ravimpontsy' is the local name for dried traveler's palm (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) fronds layered together and bound onto light wooden supports to make roofs for buildings. The walls are often constructed from 'falafa' - traveler's palm stems compressed together between wooden uprights and held with wooden cross-pieces.



Gite Mahatsinjo, made from ravimpontsy & falafa.

Some of the zookeepers' houses, Gite Mahatsinjo, shower rooms, and toilets are constructed in this fashion while "ravimpontsy arbries" (open shelters) serve as picnic and resting shelters around the park. This roofing has to be replaced every 3-5 years and so a local team of craftsmen have spent the last couple of months at Ivoloina replacing ravimpontsy roofs using traveler's palm fronds from the park forest.

Traveler's palm has earned its name due to the drinking water that can be obtained from the base of the fronds. Local people traditionally use an infusion of palm heart in the treatment of high blood pressure and also eat the heart of the palm. Unfortunately, the cutting out of the palm heart kills the tree.



The traveler's palm is the logo of Air Madagascar.

Other Wooden Upgrades

The constantly humid environment in eastern Madagascar and the presence of termites means that the replacement of wooden structures is also a frequent task. This was again the case when a section of the lemur-proof wood and aluminium sheet barrier across the neck of the peninsula at Ivoloina came down after having been in place for just 5 years. Although a couple of the black and white ruffed lemurs (*Varecia variegata variegata*) on the peninsula took advantage of the situation and ventured across the broken barrier, they later returned for their daily meal. The decision was taken to replace and waterproof all the rotting wooden supports. A team of local contractors have just finished repairing the 350m barrier and so once again we have free-ranging lemurs free secure on the 2ha peninsula!

Indri Population Update

And one last thing – in the July monthly update I wrote “We have no accurate figures for Indris (*Indri indri*) in Betampona”. Since then however, an article by Dr. Adam Britt and Kelly Glasscock has been published in the August 2005 International Journal of Primatology giving Betampona Indri population estimates of somewhere between 77 and 147 individuals, where 77 is the absolute minimum and 147.77 was the figure estimated if there is a uniform distribution throughout the reserve.

More New Items in Online Store

Click on the online store link at www.savethemur.org to see all the latest designs. Best of all, proceeds benefit the MFG and its programs.



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.

Staff Member of the Month Jean-Noel Betampona Conservation Agent and Equipment Officer

Jean-Noel is the second most senior of the conservation agents, having begun work for the MFG at the beginning of 1997 just prior to the first of the three lemur releases. With an incredible general knowledge of Betampona's wildlife, a great sense of humour, and an extroverted approach to working and socializing alike, Jean-Noel brings energy and enthusiasm to the team. His individual responsibilities are the amphibian micro-project and managing the project equipment and medical funds.



Jean-Noel: the Betampona Joker!

Jean-Noel was born in 1972 in Ambodirafia, near the Betampona Reserve. He went through college in Tamatave before joining the army in 1989. In 1993, he left the army to begin an undergraduate study at the University of Tamatave, but was forced to leave after a year due to family financial constraints. He returned home to work on his parents' land until, late in 1996, the MFG advertised for conservation agents. Jean-Noel lives with his fiancée Nana at Rendriendry.