

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



December 2004/January 2005

by Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Happy New Year! The rainy season is here, MFG chair and vice chair Jeff Bonner and Ingrid Porton have left after a very successful visit. A disappointingly low yielding litchi season is over, adding to the woes of Madagascar where the price of home produced rice has just rocketed. Yet, apart from some slight damage to crops near the Isle Saint Marie coast, Madagascar was unaffected by the tsunami. Our deepest sympathies go to those Indian Ocean countries hit by the disaster.

Betampona Reserve

The rainy season – not always dull! The Protocol of Collaboration between MFG and the National Association for the Management of Protected Areas (ANGAP) has been signed, securing a 5-year working agreement between MFG and ANGAP for project work at Betampona. This was a very satisfying way to finish the year and congratulations must go to Karen, Joselyne, Andrea and Charlie, whose patience and tenacity was tested to the full in securing terms agreeable to both parties.

Extraordinary Observation! During the course of a normal day's work back at the beginning of the month, agent Jean-Noël made a

rare, significant, but gruesome observation as he witnessed a Henst's goshawk (*Accipter henstii*) kill an eastern woolly lemur (*Avahi laniger*). The Henst's Goshawk is a secretive and usually solitary forest raptor, 52-62cm in length, which usually hunts forest and sometimes farmyard birds (Langrand 1990). The unfortunate, nocturnal woolly lemur, which probably weighed around 1kg, would have been spotted by the goshawk in its daytime sleeping place – usually in a family group in clumps of dense foliage (Mittermeier, 1994). Amazingly, this was the second time that Jean-Noël



A goshawk similar to Henst's goshawk

has witnessed a Henst's Goshawk preying on a woolly lemur. While the belief amongst experts is that small lemurs form part of the goshawk diet, Jean-Noël's observations are probably the first confirmed sightings of a Henst's goshawk taking an eastern woolly lemur.



Eastern woolly lemurs

Births: Kalo, one of the wild black and white ruffed lemurs (*Varecia variegata variegata*) being closely monitored by MFG agents, was discovered with a new infant. She is thought to have given birth towards the end of November. In December, the Betampona team also noted a number of new baby white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) and a new infant diademed sifaka lemur (*Propithecus diadema diadema*).

Agent Back in Action: Happily, the youngest of the Betampona agents, 17 year-old Olivier is back on his feet after a mysterious infection of his leg, which put him out of action for 3 weeks. Local doctors had no real idea of the cause of the problem, which worried us all, but no one more so than Olivier's father, head conservation agent, Celéstin. Things are much better now for Olivier, who has just moved into a home of his own, recently built at Rendrirendry.



Olivier, fighting fit once again.

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Parc Ivoloina

Attendance Increases over 30%: 2004 has been a successful year at Ivoloina as all parts of the project flourished. This was reflected in the numbers of visitors to Ivoloina during the year. Despite Madagascar's deteriorating economy, political stresses and soaring prices, Ivoloina had 11,026 visitors in 2004, an increase of 2,726 on the previous year, marking the continuing recovery of the park visitor numbers following the political crisis year of 2002, when there were just 3,200 visitors.



Bernard & Joselyne with other Earthwatch participants

Thanks, Earthwatch! Congratulations go to Bernard and Joselyne who won places on a two week course, run and financed by Earthwatch at Ranomafana National Park, learning and practicing data collection and analysis techniques for the Milne-Edward's sifaka (***Propithecus diadema edwardsi***). The course participants stayed at the Valbio Research Centre, which is run by Dr. Pat Wright of the Institute for the Conservation of Tropical Environments (ICTE), who has been studying Milne-Edward's sifakas since 1986. The techniques learnt by Bernard and Joselyne are applicable to all lemur species and will prove very useful for field studies at Ivoloina and especially Betampona. Many thanks to Earthwatch for running such a superb course and for covering the Bernard's and Joselyne's expenses.

Thank you, Lockey Family: Back in August, the Lockey family from northern California contacted the MFG through our website offering volunteer services for a several weeks in December. While many requests like this cannot be accommodated, their offer was special. The Lockeyes are experienced travelers with experience doing volunteer work in Madagascar. What's more, Nicola and Pierre Lockey's two children, Pascaline and Edmond, are Malagasy and were adopted in 1993 after being orphaned. The family is bilingual

(French/English) and spent their Christmas season doing a survey of the birds on and around the zoo lake. (The lake was just filled following the latest repairs to the dam.) The Lockey's two-week long survey also allowed the children the opportunity to experience rural life in Madagascar and to learn more about Malagasy wildlife.

And as we have had numerous requests from visitors to Ivoloina for more English interpretive material, Nicola translated the ecological interpretation panels in the visitor centre (currently in French and Malagasy) into English.

Cruise Ship Visits: Early in December the second English cruise liner to visit Tamatave and Ivoloina within eight days brought 328 more visitors in 12 mini buses along the bumpy road to Ivoloina, giving members of the zoo staff a chance to practice the English they have learnt in the Thursday evening English classes. It was a pleasure hosting the voyagers, who gave generously to the park.



Contented British visitors

References:

- Mittermeier R. A., Tattersall I., Konstant W. R., Meyers D.M. and Mast R.B., 1994, Lemurs of Madagascar, Conservation International
- Langrand O., 1990. Guide to the Birds of Madagascar. Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York.

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Staff Member of the Month **Jacques**

Ivoloina Agro-Forestry Model Station Manager



"Green-Fingers" Jacques

Jacques' career in conservation began with the Department of Water and Forests working on the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) "Debt for Nature" initiative. He joined the team at Ivoloina in 1998 where he worked with Charlie Welch and a number of Peace-Corps volunteers in the development of the Agro-Forestry Model Station. Laid-back, confident and well respected in village circles as well as at Ivoloina, Jacques is trained in forest management, forest-law and education, and manages all model-station activities. He also oversees the Ivoloina reforestation programme, runs sustainable agriculture demonstrations, assists in the Ivoloina education programmes and oversees the Kew Palm project, whereby endangered palms are propagated at Ivoloina.

Jacques was born in 1960 at Ambonivato, just outside Ivoloina and was educated in Tamatave. He lives with his three children at Ambonivato.

Website Visitors Increasing: This past December, the MFG website received 36% more visitors than it did in December 2003. The MFG also received several larger donations through the site including a substantial donation from two individuals in Europe.

Lemur Gear: The online store continues to offer new items and has been picking up new customers. Of course, not only does this generate funds, but it also promotes the MFG through purchasers wearing the MFG website logo and other MFG images. And speaking of the store, a Google.com search on "lemur Madagascar" now brings that site up as the number one choice.



French Books: And thanks to all who are ordering books, music, etc. through the Amazon.com link at www.savethelemur.org. We received our first payment and will be selecting French language texts for the MFG library in Madagascar.

Thanks for the Links: Finally, thank you to all who link and promote the MFG site on your own websites. It's making a difference not only in general education about our programs, but funding for them as well! If your webmaster would like info on linking to our site or would like graphics, please e-mail tim@savethelemur.org.

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