



MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

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Greetings from Karen & Gareth

The New Year began with a cyclone scare, but on this occasion the cyclone preparations prompted by the presence of Cyclone Clovis in the western Indian Ocean turned out only to be a dress rehearsal.

Fortunately for us, Clovis deviated from its predicted course to hit Madagascar far to the south of Tamatave. Our thoughts go to the areas that were hit, although the good news was that the damage was not severe.

The MFG teams welcomed

the New Year in style as the Betampona team joined the Ivoloina team and their families at Parc Ivoloina for the New Year's party at the new Ivoloina Conservation Training Centre (ICTC). A huge cake was brought from Tamatave for the occasion.

This update comes with apologies for its lateness from Karen and Gareth. Our frequent readers will of course sympathize with the precious little amount of time afforded during normal days, let alone when cyclone season comes. This issue covers the events of January and February 2007.



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Betampona Reserve

Belated New Fish News!

Firstly, some amazing news which should have been in the December 2006 update. I apologise for this omission.

Casting our minds back to November 2005, St. Louis University PhD student Nick Lang led an expedition to collect fish from various rivers and streams around Betampona to improve our understanding of Betampona's fish and its fish conservation status (see December 2005 update). Many interesting fish were caught during the expedition, but the most stunning news to come from the subsequent analysis is best described by the following section of one of Nick's e-mails:

"Well it turns out that one of the gobies I collected from Betampona was quite a find. Based on size, color pattern, body shape, and collection locality, I erroneously assumed that they were juveniles of the large *Sicyopterus* that I was collecting. It turns out that they are really fully grown members of the closely related sicydiine genus *Stiphodon*, and represent not only the first record of the genus from Madagascar, but from the entire western Indian Ocean!!!! The geographically closest species in the genus is in

Sri Lanka (off the eastern coast of India!), and most are found in the western Pacific (Japan, Phillipines, Australia, Oceania, etc.). It looks like Karen's dream of a new species was more than fulfilled. I think that Betampona can safely be considered an important reserve for the biodiversity of Malagasy fishes, especially if this turns out to be one of the only places where this species is found." (Nick Lang, 2006).

Brilliant news! Well done Nick and thanks to Paul Loiselle for identifying the fish.



Photo: Nick Lang

Extensive Reforestation Project Begun

The MFG's most ambitious current project is the attempted reforestation of the Zone of Protection around the edge of the Betampona Reserve. The Zone of Protection is a 100m band around the edge of the reserve in which officially no land management practices are allowed. Yet this area has been cultivated unsustainably for generations. Working together with ANGAP (Malagasy protected areas authority) and local villagers, the MFG is developing a plan to make land-use within the Zone of Protection sustainable, with the ultimate objective of establishing a native species based forest which will serve as a natural protective barrier for the reserve.

Obviously these are very long-term objectives. Villages and villagers using environmentally friendly practices are to be rewarded. Where infractions such as illegal logging occurs the entire village's bonus will suffer so it is hoped that it will generate sufficient peer pressure to reduce the logging.



Christof and Jacques lead nursery training at Ambodirafia.

Having sorted out the logistics through a number of meetings, a party consisting of Karen, Bernard, Celestin, Jacques, Arsene, Lala and myself from the MFG, Reserve Officer Fidelis and agent Tom from ANGAP, and agro-forestry expert Professor Christof den Biggelaar from North Carolina set off on a 40km expedition to visit the villages of Ambodirafia and Antananarana on the western side of the reserve to gauge interest and offer training and advice. Despite very heavy rain, bogs and numerous river-crossings, the expedition went very well. The villagers seemed to be keen to be part of the project and we were able to establish a nursery in

in Ambodirafia, furnishing it with tools, rubber boots and a wheelbarrow. The villager employed to manage the nursery was so happy that he presented Karen with a live chicken (who now lives at Rendrendry).

We are very grateful for the generosity shown to us by the villagers of Ambodirafia and Antananarana, who allowed us to sleep in school buildings and provided us with porters and cooks. The challenge for MFG is to keep the project momentum going. Head MFG Betampona agent Celestin will be in charge of overseeing the project.



Fidelis addresses Ambodirafia.



Baby Lemur in 2001 Release Group

More good news! The Betampona agents have spotted a baby black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) in Tany and Masoandro's group. Tany and Masoandro are brothers released with their mother Hale in 2001. They grew up in the forest and joined the group which currently consists of Tany, Masoandro, a wild male, the wild mother and the new baby. The sex of the baby is not yet known. The Betampona agents are monitoring the group closely to try to learn more about the baby.

Amphibian Research Continues

Frog expert Dr Franco Andreone from Italy and his student Gonçalo Rosa from Portugal are currently at Betampona conducting a month-long survey of Betampona's frogs. They are being assisted by MFG agent Jean-Noel and Parc Botanique et Zoologique de Tsimbazaza herps curator Jasmin. Gonçalo will remain at Betampona

continuing the fieldwork, which will form part of a Master's project. Franco last visited Betampona back in February 2006 (see March 2006 update) while Gonçalo worked with both the Betampona and Ivoloïna projects during last November and December (see December 2006 update).

Health Care Workers Visit

Madagascar's rapid population growth is a major contributing factor to the poverty of the country and to the pressure on its

wilderness areas. By and large the families of the MFG employees are sensible in size, but nonetheless we welcomed the visit of Americans Jennifer and Troy to Rendrirendry.

Jennifer is a healthworker for SanteNet and Troy is a pediatrician. They held small events and discussions aimed at both Rendrirendry's adults and children on topics ranging from family planning to basic hygiene practises.



Parc Ivoloïna

Welcome, Christof!

We welcome back tropical agro-forestry expert Professor Christof den Biggelaar from Appalachian State University in North Carolina. Christof arrived in early February to begin his six month sabbatical at Parc Ivoloïna.

The agro-forestry model-station is already experiencing a revolution as Christof, working with Jacques, Lala, Jean-Francois, Jacquie and Sostan, has begun putting his knowledge to good use. The Ivoloïna agro-forestry team have always worked hard and diligently,

but have lacked the expertise in leadership that Christof, who has spent many years working on similar projects in mainland Africa, is able to provide. Christof will also be working with farmers from the village of Ambonivato, and in March he will lead an agro-forestry course at GRENE (the Tamatave College for Natural Resource Management). The northern part of Parc Ivoloïna, which was subject to the resolved land-dispute with the border village of Ambonivato (see October 2006 update), will be used for the fieldwork component of the course.

Mayors Attend Training

Nineteen Mayors from the local communes attended the week long environmental training session held at the ICTC in mid-January.

We had planned to hold this training session in December but tensions surrounding the presidential elections prevented us from doing so. Despite this hiccup, the response to the training was good.

A bonus permitted by the delay was that Christof was able to hold a well-received discussion on the local needs for agroforestry.

So Long, Randria

Unfortunately the training session for the Mayors was to be the last given by MFG Education Officer Randria. Randria, who has worked for MFG for four years since the completion of his thesis at Ivoloina in 2003, left MFG to begin work for GTZ, the German development agency in Tana at the beginning of February.

He has contributed a huge amount to the development of the education programme during his time working for MFG. Fortunately he will be continuing work in the environmental education sector. We wish him all the best for the future.



Ranger Update

Since the last update we have said goodbye to voluntary rangers Mike Sweet and Lucie Scriven who have moved on to work in Zimbabwe.

Their replacements, British volunteers Simon Trevenna and Karl Ruijens, continued the



good work in January and February. Simon and Karl came to us having worked for a few months for Association Mitsinjo, a forest based conservation project at Andasibe and are now back relaxing in the UK.



Simon improving Piste autour du Lac.

Many thanks to voluntary rangers Mike, Lucie, Simon and Karl for all their hard work.

Unknown Illness Strikes Baby Lemurs

There has been some very sad news over the last couple of months as three of our baby black and white ruffed lemurs in the zoo have died of the same unknown cause.

Biological samples have been sent away for analysis in the USA and the zoo staff, who are distraught at the losses, have been doing everything within their power to find out what is wrong. A viral illness is suspected.

Happily, all the other baby lemurs at Ivoloina including the greater bamboo lemur (*Prolemur simus*) baby are doing well.

Ivoloina's newest Greater bamboo lemur.



Staff Members of the Month

Laurent and Kamisy *Parc Ivoloïna Handymen*

Taking a look around Parc Ivoloïna you can appreciate the time, effort and skill that goes into the construction and maintenance of the park buildings, trails and trail furniture.

Much of the basic work is carried out by local contract teams, but where skilled work is required Laurent and Kamisy are the men for the job.

Born in the coastal village of Vohidotra and schooled nearby at Andakolosy, brothers Laurent and Kamisy were trained in carpentry and general construction by their father.

42 year old Kamisy, previously a self-employed construction contractor, began work at Parc Ivoloïna in 1989, and 36 year old Laurent joined him six years later, having left a Tamatave based construction company.

Great guys to work with, the brothers live in the village of Ampandroantsisitsy about 7km from Parc Ivoloïna.

Kamisy has two sons and are the smartest in the village!

Laurent and Kamisy – brilliant handymen.



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