

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR

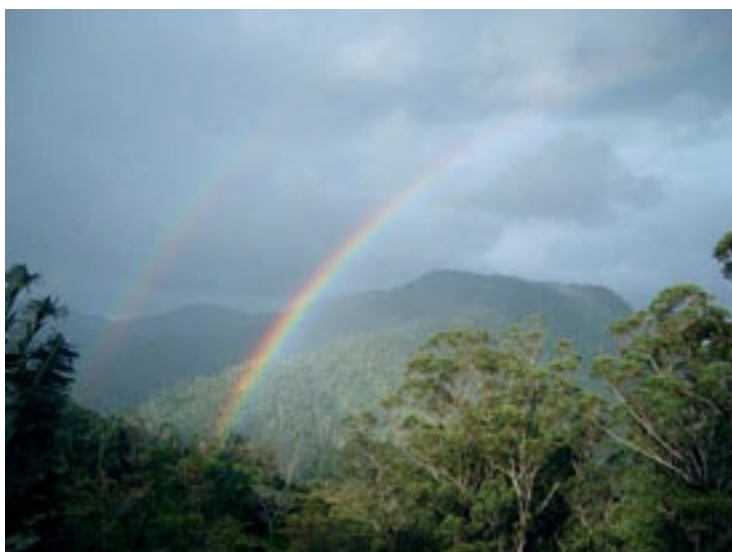


February 2005

by Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager
(Karen has finally permitted acknowledgement of her superb photographic contributions to the monthly updates)

It is the hottest time of the year now and the wet season is in full force. The mosquitoes and leeches are happy! In the south west cyclone Ernest had a go at Toliara and in Tana armed robbers had a go at the French embassy. Tamatave provincial inflation for 2004 has been put at 31% and once again the price of rice is rising, forcing us to buy in bulk for the MFG staff in order to keep the cost for our teams affordable.



The wet season – still sunny sometimes.

Betampona Reserve

Betampona lemur update: Kalo (black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) is doing well with her new infant; Fara (male offspring of Zuben Ubi who was released in November 1997) has moved east and formed a group with another male and a female;

Masoandro (released in January 2001) is thought to have paired with a wild sub-adult female. And worryingly, Tany (released in January 2001) has not been seen since mid-December. It hasn't been a good lemur breeding season, with no sightings of baby indri (*Indri indri*), one diademed sifaka (*Propithecus diadema diadema*) baby and only a few single white-fronted lemur (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) infants, when normally there would be some twins.



Indri - a year off parenting

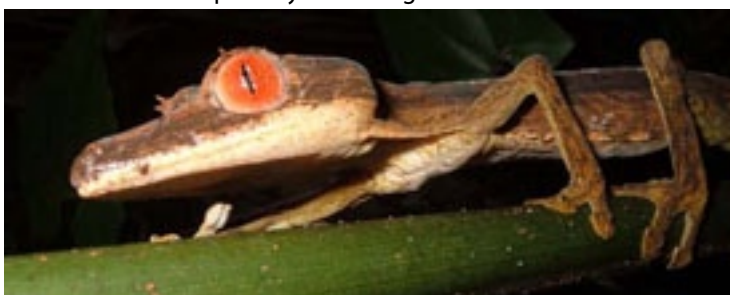
Mongoose Encounter: The main trail into the Betampona forest from Rendrirendry climbs steeply for a couple of kilometres before levelling out on a forested mountain crest. This spot serves as a resting point for the Betampona conservation agents before they continue their day's work. On 30 December the team were taking a short break here when they were joined by a cocky ring-tailed mongoose (*Galidia elegans*). It wandered around on the path in front of them, less than 5 feet away for five minutes before ambling back into the forest. This notoriously bold, diurnal species is the most common and widespread of Madagascar's mongooses (Bradt 1996), but has never before been observed at such close quarters at Betampona.



Cocky mongoose! (photo: internet)

Rare Trees Located: Two small teams of botanists from the Missouri Botanical Gardens and the University of Wisconsin made short expeditions to Betampona late in January in search of three rare tree species: *Humbertianthus cardiostegius* and *Pentachlaena betamponensis*, thought to be endemic only to Betampona, and *Prokiopsis orientalis*, which has so far only been found in Betampona and Mahambo. With the help of Celéstin and guide Tsirindahy (who used to work as a conservation agent), the teams believe they have collected samples from *H. cardiostegius* and *P. betamponensis* but were unable to find *P. orientalis*.

Bold Gecko: Celéstin and Arsene had an unusual visitor this January. A leaf-tailed gecko (*Uroplatus lineatus*) has taken to searching the two conservation agents' houses for food. Feared by many Malagasy people (they are sometimes regarded as devils), this nocturnal, endemic genus was thought to occur only in primary rainforest, but the intrepid individual at Rendrirendry has proven that it is occasionally possible to find them in inhabited, degraded secondary forest areas. The village/field-station Rendrirendry is about a kilometre from the primary forest edge.



A welcome visitor to Rendrirendry.

Continued...

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Ivoloina Park

Training Centre: The President of the Special Delegation of Tamatave (PDS) came to Ivoloina accompanied by an entourage of local political, educational, military and police representatives to place the ceremonial first shovel of concrete in the foundations of the new environmental training centre. The event, which was covered by national television, was a great success and marks the official start of the construction phase of the project. Once the planned improvements to local infrastructure are in place, the training centre is expected to become a major provincial environmental research and training facility.



The PDS placing the first shovel of concrete.

Lake & Dam Update: Over the past 10 years, problems with the Ivoloina dam have caused MFG repeated headaches. The latest repair has been successful and involved yours truly spending a considerable amount of time in the pipe beneath the dam installing reinforcing pipe sections. The lake, which covers approximately 30 ha is now full. We have also replaced 70 rotten or defective water-retaining planks. As well as the obvious aesthetic benefits, pirogue rides and lakeside trail, the lake also supports an abundance of aquatic and avian life, and provides cooling breezes in the intense heat, for zoo animals, staff and visitors alike. Yet the pipe beneath the dam is old and constantly being eroded. The recent pipe reinforcements will outlast the remainder of the pipe, but it is only a matter of time before the entire pipe will have to be replaced. *Many thanks to British engineer Mark Tyler who offered valuable advice on the dam repairs.*



The problem ...

The repairs ...



The Lake Empty



The Lake Full

Temporary Setbacks: It often happens in Madagascar that you think that you have achieved something, only to find that fate has conspired to undo it. So it was with the Protocol of Collaboration between MFG and the National Association for the Management of Protected Areas (ANGAP). Confused regional and national level responsibilities within ANGAP have meant, frustratingly, that December's signing of the Protocol of Collaboration was not legitimate and that there are still some amendments to be made. We are optimistic that the ultimate agreement will work in MFG's favour.



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Staff Member of the Month **Celéstin Razafy**

Team Leader, Betampona Reserve

Recruited from the Department of Water and Forests where he worked in a nursery at Foulpointe in 1991, Céléstin was initially hired to provide an extra presence in the Betampona reserve to deter poaching and illegal logging. Born locally to Betampona, he grew up caring passionately about the conservation of the area, but over the years has had to watch the destruction of the primary forest surrounding the reserve. A natural leader, Céléstin headed the team of conservation agents involved in the demanding work of the black and white ruffed lemur releases in 1997, 1998 and 2001. Since then, under Céléstin's leadership the team has evolved into the dedicated unit now operating in Betampona.



Celéstin, a quiet, strong leader.

Celéstin was born in 1952 in Andratambe, in the province of Tamatave. He has lived at Rendriendry with his wife since he began working for MFG. They have three sons, the second of which, Olivier, is the youngest Betampona conservation agent.

MFG Member Opens Up New Display about MFG: MFG member Caribbean Gardens in Naples, Florida recently opened Petrof's Primate Pavilion. The educational exhibit under a thatch gazebo is located along the shores of one of the zoo's lakes. Guided boat tours take zoo guests past a variety of islands where monkeys, lesser apes, and several species of lemurs may be seen. An island near the display will soon be home to brown lemurs and ring-tailed lemurs. The display presents the graphics about Madagascar and the conservation and education work of MFG and its members.



Guests also get to touch a lifesize replica of an elephant bird egg, the largest egg ever laid on planet earth. They also have an opportunity to help fund a new roof for the recently expanded education center. And nearby, guests also get a lifesize look at one of the extinct giant lemurs courtesy of an extraordinary illustration by Stephen Nash of Conservation International. (Like to share your MFG related exhibits? E-mail tim@savethelemur.org)