

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



November 2005

By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

Plumes of smoke can regularly be seen drifting over the landscape at the moment, as rural people make use of the hot, dry season to cut and burn areas of land for cultivation. Slash and burn agriculture is forbidden by law, but to the villagers it remains an important agricultural tool. Politically, Emile Tsizaraina, president of the province of Tamatave, was removed from power. We were sorry to hear the news about Mr. Tsizaraina and are very grateful to him for the assistance and support he has given the MFG projects. He will remain on the Ivoloina training centre steering committee.

Betampona Reserve

It was one night back in the middle of September that George and Jean-Noel were returning back to Rendrirendry through the forest having completed the night's nocturnal fauna survey. They were still 1.5km from the village when they heard the sound of axes striking wood not very far away. Returning to the spot early the next morning they found that several pallisandre (*Dalbergia microcarpa*) trees had been felled and much of the wood removed. Basic saw horses had been set up using smaller cut trees and the trunks had been logged using a long-saw. Soon afterwards I was shown the area by Georges and Jean-Noel accompanied by ANGAP agents Tom and Odillon. Photographs and records were taken.



MFG and ANGAP agents inspect the devastation.

Fidelis, the Betampona ANGAP Reserve Manager circulated letters around the local village mayors and contacted the

authorities. At 1 o'clock late one October morning the gendarmes stopped a bamboo raft on the Fontsimavo River, a tributary to the Ivoloina River which meets the sea just north of Tamatave. They recovered sections of pallisandre consistent with that taken from the Betampona rainforest. The men arrested are awaiting trial. Our thanks go to Georges and Jean-Noel, Tom and Odillon, the Gendarmarie and particularly Fidelis for their good work in catching the wood-thieves. This will hopefully bring to an end to a spate of illegal wood cutting at Betampona.

Official Welcome to Inah & Dieu

We officially welcome Inah and Dieu into the Betampona team. For seven and four years respectively the pair of handymen have worked for the MFG project at Betampona - in the nursery, carrying out maintenance work and as porters but have not actually been permanent MFG staff. Now their hard work and dependability have been rewarded by full-time MFG contracts.



Inah and Dieu – hard work rewarded!

Fieldwork Completed

We wish Amanda, Chris and Tahiana all the best for the future. They have completed the fieldwork stage of Amanda's PhD, looking at the growth rates of a number

of precious woods. Before she left, Amanda demonstrated tree growth recording techniques to the Betampona team, which will be used by them in future studies.



View of Forest from Rendrirendry.

Photo: Carl Toborowsky

Phone Foibles Finished

The long struggle to establish a reliable phone link with Betampona from Tamatave seems finally to be over. In the past year a seemingly effective phone company went bust, a mobile phone charger melted, various mobile phones have failed to work, and the attempt to establish an aerial link failed due to poor reception, but at last the purchase of an Orange mobile has solved the problem.



Struggling to sort out past phone problems!

Ivoloina Park

The Saturday School year at the Ivoloina Environmental Education Centre is underway! 160 incredibly enthusiastic children from the Ivoloina area are beginning a year of Saturday supplementary lessons, which we hope will see them into secondary school. The number of pupils attending this year is a record made possible by the education centre extension and its new roof. Thanks again to the American Embassy and Naples Zoo!



A brighter future for these kids.

Avian Expansion

Back in the November 2004 monthly update it was mentioned that Ivoloina Zoo had received its first bird, a lesser vasa parrot (*Coracopsis nigra*). Since then the zoo has been given a pair of greater vasa parrots (*Coracopsis vasa*). The three birds now form the zoo's newest exhibit. Both species are known to frequent degraded and secondary forest as well as their original primary forest habitat. However, there are not known to be any wild in the Ivoloina area. Unfortunately both species are still hunted for food and captured for sale into the illegal pet trade (Langrand, 1990).



Ivoloina's vasa parrot.

Photo: Rostand Rahajasaina

Services and Inflation Increase

Naturally we hope visitors enjoy their time at Ivoloina and recent improvements such as the availability of meals, new exhibits and trail improvements have been aimed at improving the visitor experience.



Buvette on the Lake

Unfortunately, local inflation has been 34% over the past 18 months resulting in the zoo relying more and more heavily on outside funding. So following a decision taken at the MFG annual meeting last May the entrance prices have been doubled.

Fortunately it seems that we were right in our assessment of a fair price, as there have been very few complaints from visitors and by far the majority of visitors are leaving delighted with their experience.

New Betampona Reserve Logo Items

The MFG's online store now features shirts with the new Betampona Reserve logo featuring a view of Mt. Mahasolatra in a stylized illustration within the letters of Betampona. Visit our website to select this and other MFG and Madagascar items.



New logo items in online store now.

Staff member of the month Bruno Augustin Randriamalala Gardener and Buvette Assistant

Bruno is one of the Parc Ivoloina all-rounders. Bruno is quickly mastering English as well as French and provides back-up for the full-time buvette staff (See the MFG October update).

He also assumes joint responsibility for the upkeep and improvement of Ivoloina's gardens, lawns and Collection area. The attractive appearance of the kempt areas bears testament to his good work.



Bruno with his family.

Bruno was born near Brickaville in 1969, studied in Tamatave and has worked at Ivoloina since leaving college in 1993. A calm and pleasant member of the team, Bruno lives near the park at College with his wife and five children – including twin girls born just 3 months ago.

References:

Langrand O., 1990. *Guide to the Birds of Madagascar.* Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York.

