



# Monthly from Madagascar

**October 2004**

by Gareth Kett

**Welcome back, Charlie!** Charlie Welch, our predecessor, returned to Tamatave on 19 October for another 5 weeks work and to cement the transfer of the management of the MFG projects in Madagascar from Andrea Katz and Charlie to Karen and me. Charlie also plans to push forward the project to construct an environmental training centre at Ivoloina, and of course, to catch up with the teams at Betampona and Ivoloina.

## Betampona Reserve

The team endured a few days of concern when they were unable to find Masoandro – one of the lemurs (*Varecia variegata variegata*) released in 2001, following a period of friction within the lemur group. Members of the team of 5 conservation agents hike out into the forest daily, attempting to locate the released lemurs and their groups, noting observations such as lemur location, social interaction, diet etc. The work is physically demanding, sometimes requiring the agents to hike as far as 10km into the reserve along small, slippery, steeply undulating trails, often in the pouring (though pleasantly warm!) rain, whilst taking their chances with the legions of leeches!

Happily, Masoandro was found by the agents after a 10 day period of absence, but the group friction indicates that a split in this lemur group may be imminent.



**Arsene, Celestin, George and Jean-Noel hike off into the rainforest.**

**Phone dilemmas:** Communication problems due to unreliable phone service came to a head recently when the company operating the Betampona phone dissolved. Rostand, the MFG assistant office manager, saved the day by lending the Betampona team his 'Orange' mobile, as a trial. It was a success! While the phone doesn't always work at Rendriendry (Betampona reserve field-station/village), a short walk into the forest brings you to an area of good reception. A long-term solution is still being sought due to the high cost of using Orange. A technician from 'Telmar', a local phone company recently made the five hour trip to Rendriendry to test a Telmar phone, which he claims also works reliably. But the Telmar phone at Ivoloina hasn't yet proven itself reliable!

## Ivoloina Park



### Parc Ivoloina's First Ever Bird!

**New Animals:** The animal collection at the zoo has expanded with the addition of two black and white ruffed lemurs and our first bird, a lesser vasa parrot (*Coracopsis nigra*). All three were donations to the zoo by people who no longer wished to keep the animals.



**Planting the Future:** A competitive feel was in the air on 23 October when the pupils of the Saturday class planted small rice paddies. The class was divided into three groups with each being given an area to plant. Prizes will go to the group tending the paddy yielding the best crop at harvest. The children are taught the merits of using the sustainable SRI (Systeme Riziculture Intensive) technique, as opposed to the traditional method of rice production which renders the soil virtually infertile within a few years of cultivation. The event was covered by the Tamatave based media station, 'Radio and Television Analamanga' (RTA).



**Jacques demonstrating SRI techniques to the Saturday class**

**Forest Restoration:** Early in the month Celestin and Arsene, conservation agents from the Betampona team, came to Ivoloïna for four days, to develop an inventory of birds species found in the 318ha of park forest surrounding the zoo. They found 35 bird species, of which only the common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), which originates in India, is not native to Madagascar. This abundance of bird species is encouraging, particularly when considering that the forest consists of very little primary vegetation, and highlights the value of Parc Ivoloïna as a conservation area. The forest at Ivoloïna is mostly degraded secondary forest with areas of pine and eucalyptus plantation, but the ongoing forest restoration programme is focused on creating a forest that resembles primary rainforest, using only native species.

**Education Expansion Complete!** The extension to the Environmental Education Centre (EEC) was completed on schedule, providing top class education facilities for an additional 50 children. The new classroom will also be used in the instruction of teachers in environmental education techniques and for courses for villagers in sustainable agriculture, in conjunction with the Agro-forestry Model Station.

**Many, many thanks to the US Embassy, who gave us a grant for USD \$2,500 and to the MFG, who gave USD \$1,500 towards the project.**



**The new Environmental Education Centre extension**

**Staff Member of the Month**

**Claude Tsatsa**

*Ivoloïna Parc Administration and Finance Manager*

Claude has been involved with Betampona and Parc Ivoloïna since 1990, when his career in conservation began as a forestry agent with the Ministry of Water and Forests. He joined the MFG in 1999 as the Ivoloïna Parc Assistant Manager and following rapid progress, became the Parc Administration and Finance Manager a year later. Claude's responsibilities include all zoo merchandising and arranging staff rotas, holidays and salaries. His exemplary work ethic and initiative has greatly assisted the recent development of Ivoloïna.

Claud was born and raised in Sahambala, just outside the Betampona Reserve, and educated at the Tsarahofana College in Tamatave. He lives in Antsampanana, 4km from Parc Ivoloïna, with his wife and 14 year old son.



**Claude, motivated and focused, yet always finds time for a joke.**