



MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

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Greetings from Karen & Gareth

It's been a period of travelling recently for the MFG management staff in Madagascar. Firstly Karen went back to South Africa for the African Zoo Association (PAAZAB) restructuring workshop and then Bernard, only just back from attending the Prosimian Conference at Ithala Reserve, returned to South Africa, this time accompanied by Claude, Ivoloina Financial manager, to take part in the Animal Keepers Association of Africa meeting at Durban. Bernard and Claude were then generously hosted by Seaworld uShaka where they took part

in a marketing training session. Many thanks, uShaka. Before Bernard and Claude were back Karen and I flew to St. Louis to attend the MFG annual general meeting.

The MFG AGM was a success and was attended by representatives from 15 MFG member institutions. The general progress of the MFG projects, particularly the research aspect over the past year has been very good, but financial constraints continue to limit what can be achieved and so much of the meeting was focused on how to develop the business

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element of the project in order to become more self-sustaining in the future. Many thanks go to the MFG steering committee for their on-going support and advice.

Back in Madagascar at Betampona and Ivoloina things have continued at full pace.

Betampona Reserve

Welcome Back, Emily

Duke University post-grad student Emily Mertz returned to Betampona after an absence of three years. Emily arrived in July with her assistant Paul Sandberg and Malagasy counterpart from the University of Tana, Lovasoa Ramiantarivelo, and spent a couple of months in the forest working on a project to assess the nutrient content of vegetation occurring at different levels of the forest structure.

This information will be linked to the dietary needs of animals feeding on

vegetation within differing levels of the forest structure. Emily was last in Betamona in 2004 when she conducted a study of Diademed sifaka (*Propithecus diadema*) there.

A Plague of Pigs

Betampona's bush pigs (*Potamochoerus larvatus hova*) are causing problems for farmers in the area around the reserve. Bush pigs have started leaving the forest at night to raid fields of manioc and rice around the edge of the reserve causing considerable damage. The destruction of the forest in areas

around Betampona and hunting have driven the bush pigs back into Betampona where, in the relative absence of predators, except for fossa (*Cryptoprocta ferox*) which can take piglets, they have thrived.

Hunting with dogs used to be permitted on a restricted seasonal basis within the Betampona forest, but for the past couple of decades this has been banned allowing the bush pigs to further increase in number.

Randy Returns

We welcomed back St. Louis vet Randy Junge to Betampona where he continued darting and capture training for the MFG Betampona agents (see May-June 2007 update).

Randy was accompanied by University of Tananarive veterinary student Hajanarina Rakotondrainibe (Haja for short), who had recently worked at Betampona with Carl Toborowsky (see May-June 2007 update). Randy, Haja and the Betampona agents were joined by Emily, Paul and Duke post-grad student Meredith Barrett (see below), forming a team which caught and took biological samples from nine indri (*Indri indri*), four black and white ruffed lemurs (*Varecia variegata variegata*), three white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur albifrons*) and three eastern woolly lemurs (*Avahi laniger*).

It is hoped that the DNA from the black and white ruffed lemurs will solve the mystery of the identities of some of Betampona's individuals.

Barrett's Biology

The second part of Meredith's data collection for a study comparing the health of lemurs in different environments, using the free-ranging lemurs at Parc Ivoloïna and the wild lemurs at Betampona, went smoothly. Working with Randy and the Betampona agents she was able to collect biological samples from the wild lemurs.

Meredith has since returned to Duke University to begin writing up the project. We wish her well and look forward to seeing the results of her study.



Meredith, Haja, Randy, Paul, Emily and Lovasoa at Rendrirendry.

Parc Ivoloïna

The Local Buzz

Bee-keeping is one of the easiest ways to generate income sustainably. It needs very little land, is entirely compatible with forest conservation and apart from the initial setting-up stage requires little effort. Yet in the area around Parc Ivoloïna surprisingly few people currently keep bees.

This was the motivation behind Lala's idea to organise a training session on bee-keeping intended

for local villagers and Parc Ivoloïna staff. A national bee expert was recruited and the subsequent training was a great success.

Among those attending were Jacques and Jean-Francois from the agro-forestry model station, who will incorporate bee-keeping into future villager training programmes.

Building bee-hives.



Thanks, Brooke!

After two months of teaching English to the Parc Ivoloïna staff and students at GRENE (Tamatave College of Natural Resources) Brooke Fisher has returned home to North Carolina to begin studying medicine.

The level of spoken English amongst the staff at Ivoloïna has risen dramatically. Brooke was a big hit with Ivoloïna staff and GRENE students alike. We wish her well in her studies.

Building Bridges

The Tamatave climate is warm and humid throughout most of the year. This means that the life expectancy of much of the park infrastructure is relatively short. Maintenance is a constant necessity and periodically major repairs must be carried out.

This has recently been the case with the four major bridges crossing Lake Fulgence on the Piste autour du Lac or Lake Trail. A local contractor spent a couple of weeks repairing the bridges while new wood was ferried to the bridges by pirogue piloted by Mika, Ivoloïna's pirogue guide. A combination of eucalyptus coppiced from the park forest and planks from a local sawmill were used.

The bridge repairs were an example of how the presence of the park contributes to the local economy.

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Local contractors working on one of the bridges.

Technical Training

The use of global information systems (GIS) and global positioning systems (GPS) are integral aspects of park management and ecological monitoring, so MFG organised GIS/GPS training for ANGAP agents, Parc Ivoloïna staff, and the MFG Betampona agents. Training was provided by Tsilavo Raharimahefa, a Malagay post-graduate student studying at the St. Louis University in a trip, funded by the Saint Louis Zoo.

The invitation to ANGAP to participate further strengthened the strong working collaboration between ANGAP and MFG.

The training session went well except for minor battery problems at Betampona caused by a lack of sun to charge the solar battery system! Our thanks go to Tsilavo for his time.



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Tribute to Dieu

We are sad to report the passing of Dieudonné Tadahiarisaona. Dieu worked for the MFG at Rendrirendry as a handyman. He had been a valuable worker for the MFG on a casual basis for

four years. In recognition of his efforts, he was made a permanent member of staff in October 2005.

Dieu died suddenly on the 20th of August. Our thoughts go to his wife and seven children.

