



August 2004

by Gareth Kett

In Country Staff Update

On 1 July 2004, after a successful two-month transfer period, Dr. Karen Freeman took over the in-country running of the Madagascar Fauna Group from Andrea Katz and Charlie Welch. Dr. Freeman, Programme Manager, is assisted by myself, Gareth Kett, in the position of Logistics Co-ordinator.

While the language remains the same, the accent has changed, as the American English of Andrea and Charlie has been replaced by the English English of Karen and me. We will be writing brief reports each month summarizing some of the goings on at the Reserve of Betampona and the Parc Zoologique d'Ivoloina along with a brief profile of a "Staff member of the month". Firstly, I wish to recognize the great job that Andrea and Charlie did during their 17 years working for MFG in Madagascar. We hope to build on this solid foundation whilst introducing some new ideas of our own.

Betampona Reserve



Following Karen's return from the MFG annual meeting in St. Louis, USA and my return from Best Man wedding duties in England, the 5 strong team of conservation agents at Betampona have been re-supplied with ex-military ponchos, research equipment, binoculars, wildlife and English language books, chainsaw protective clothing, and climbing gear.

Demonstrating rope climbing

I have been teaching the team in tree access techniques, which will allow increased observation of canopy flora and fauna.

Amanda Hilt and Lola Fatoyinbo, of the University of Virginia and Lala Randriatavy, of the University of Antananarivo, recently successfully completed the first stage of Amanda's study of regeneration of native hardwoods.

Potential New Species! During a day out in the reserve with the team, the youngest agent, Olivier found a *Liopholidophis sp.* snake. This species was previously thought to be *Liopholidophis epistibes*, but in a recent visit to

Betampona, the eminent reptile expert Dr. Chris Raxworthy said that he believes it to be a new species, although as of yet it is not described.



Liopholidophis sp. held by Arsene

Karen has introduced the idea of collecting snail-shells to the Betampona team. Snail species diversity is a reliable indicator of rainforest quality. Over 100 shells have already been collected.



A sample of the snail collection at Betampona

The breeding season for birds is beginning, but the lemurs have been quiet due to the relatively cool, damp conditions.

At popular request Karen and I have started giving English lessons to the Betampona staff.

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August 2004 (continued)

Ivoloina Parc Zoologique

Work has begun on the extension to the Environmental Education Centre (EEC) following the generous grant from the US Embassy in Madagascar. It is hoped that the work will be completed by the beginning of the new school year in mid-September. During the school holiday period, Randria, Jacques and Onésime have conducted holiday classes, or CAMPs.



EEC extension foundation work in progress

We've had some sad news at the zoo as Bory the ring-tail lemur died of unknown causes.

The agro-forestry model-station is looking healthy, although we are waiting for the warmer, damp weather before we can expect to see rapid crop growth. The clearing of the new plantation areas and trails is underway.



The nursery, or "pepiniere," at the Model Station

The 500m 'Piste Ravanala', or 'Ravanala Trail', which crosses the lemur peninsula has been fully renovated, incorporating new series of steps and bridges. We are planning to renovate all the trails in the next few months.

Staff Member of the Month Bernard lambana

Bernard has been working as "Chef du Parc" for 2 years. He is responsible for all aspects of the on-ground running of Parc Ivoloina and the Betampona Reserve. Easy going and approachable, Bernard has exceptional staff and animal management skills, combined with a staggering knowledge of east coast rainforest flora and fauna.

Bernard gained a degree in Ecology at the University of Antananarivo in 1997 and completed his Masters "A study of the phenology of plants consumed by *Varecia variegata variegata* in the Integral Reserve of Betampona" in 2003. He worked in Betampona between 1997 and 2002, initially as assistant research co-ordinator to the British scientist Adam Britt, working on the Black and White ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) releases.

On Adam's departure in 2000, he became research co-ordinator. After two successful years in the position, Bernard moved to Ivoloina to become Chef du Parc. He is married with a 4 year old daughter.



Bernard, as at home in the forest as the lemurs themselves