

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



March 2005

By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

The hot, humid days and close nights are beginning to relent, indicating that the unusually dry "wet" season is coming to its end, but nationally things were heating up as strikes by magistrates, lecturers, and teachers over salaries added to Madagascar's political problems. Life continued smoothly at Ivoloina and Betampona, however, as the MFG teams hosted guests from England, Switzerland and Tana, and assisted them with their respective projects.



Betampona Reserve

Old acquaintances were renewed in mid-February when British scientist **Dr. Adam Britt** visited Betampona heading a team of botanists from the Tana branch of Kew Botanical Gardens, England and Parc Tsimbazaza. Adam co-ordinated fieldwork during the black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) releases of 1997, 1998 and 2001. He returned to Betampona to lead the Kew team in a bid to find rare species of orchid and palm.



Betampona is Rich in Orchids



Remains of Stolen Rosewood

Checking the Reserve

In pouring rain one of a hoard of leeches attached itself to the eye of ANGAP agent Didier as Karen, Celestin, Fidelice (ANGAP reserve officer), Inah and Dieu (MFG porters), Didier and I embarked on a 3-day, 40km expedition to check the north & east areas of the reserve for signs of 'slash-and-burn' agriculture (tavy), poaching, and timber extraction.

We found some old patches of tavy, some old lemur traps, a couple of hardwoods felled for timber and honey, and some Traveller's palms cut for palm heart – a practice which always kills the tree. Occasional rice paddies were also found within the 100m zone of protection surrounding the reserve, but fortunately we found no evidence of any recent large-scale land degradation.

Worryingly, however, almost all the old patches of tavy have now been colonised by exotic plants preventing the natural regeneration of forest gaps. MFG plans to look further into the spread of exotic and invasive plants in the



First Night's Camp

reserve. Eventually, I was able to exact the leech from poor Didier's eye with a pair of tweezers.

Donation for Reforestation

600 seedling trees grown in the Betampona nursery have been given to locals in the villages of Ambodrirafia, Andratomby, Fontsimavo, Manamby and Marofatana.

Arsene, who is president of the Ambodrirafia local council, organized the donations. Before receiving trees from MFG, villagers must demonstrate that they have prepared the land for the trees and be considered to be responsible enough to look after the trees.

The trees, which are a mixture of endemic (*Apodytes sp.*, *Faucherea sp.*, *Intsia bijuga* and *Terminalia sp.*) and approved exotic (*Eucalyptus sp.* and *Raphia farinifera*) species are intended to provide the villagers with shade for crops and buildings, and a sustainable wood supply for small-scale construction and firewood. They will also help to prevent erosion by stabilizing soil and provide the villagers with sustainable alternative land-use options to 'slash-and-burn' agriculture.

Ivoloina Park

Masoala Kely is a 11,000m² greenhouse rainforest reconstruction in Zurich Zoo modelled on the Masoala National Park rainforest in northeast Madagascar. This remarkable project is nearing completion, but still lacks a few important animals.

On 16 February, Dr. Robert Zingg, Dr. Sam Furrer and Thomas Zellweger of Zurich Zoo arrived in Madagascar to catch a number of spiders, stick-insects, millipedes, crabs, plated lizards, tenrecs and mouse lemurs for release in Masoala Kely, a project backed by the Malagasy government. Assisted by MFG Ivoloina staff Thomas prepared holding areas and cared for the animals, adhering to international animal welfare standards, while Robert and Sam secured

the animals from non-classified forest 200km southwest of Tamatave. The director of Zurich Zoo, Alex Rubel visited Ivoloina late in the month. It was great having Alex and the Zurich team here. Proceeds from the Masoala Kely project go to conservation programmes in Masoala National Park.



Thomas by one of his animal holding areas.

Dam Repairs Bring Back Ruffed Lemurs

Once again visitors to the zoo are able to see black and white ruffed lemurs (*Varecia variegata variegata*) in a semi-natural environment. Following the successful repairs to the dam, we have been able to re-release four black and white ruffed lemurs onto the peninsula. Zookeepers feed the lemurs daily in enclosures on the peninsula, so that they can easily be caught up again should the need arise.

Burning Coal and Stolen Hearts

Protected areas throughout Madagascar suffer from significant land pressure but it had been hoped that the cutting of the "bornage" – a five-metre wide strip of land marking the Ivoloina Park boundary would have deterred local villagers from entering park land to commit crimes which are small, but with potentially catastrophic results. Yet the problem persists.



Traveller's Palm After Having Heart Removed

At current levels, the theft of exotic *Grevillea bastii* for firewood and the theft of leaves from Traveller's palms (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) for construction does little more than superficial damage, but the theft of Traveller's palm heart kills each tree and charcoal burning poses a serious fire risk. Patrols of the worst affected areas have been increased and the firebreak around the centre of the park and zoo has been enlarged. With 320ha to patrol, however, and most of the problems occurring at night and dawn, plus villagers falling upon ever-harder times, this is a tough problem to solve.



Charcoal Pits Pose Fire Risks

Dronga Make-Over

The interior layout of the buvette has been re-designed. Ivoloina craftsmen Lauren and Kamisy removed the rear wall facing the car park and altered the positions of the cupboard, desk and tables, making the idyllically located "Thirsty Dronga" more open and welcoming to visitors.



The "new-look" Thirsty Dronga.

Staff member of the month **Rostand Rahajasaina** *Assistant Office Manager*



Rostand: patient, persistent, and diplomatic.

The MFG office is situated in Tamatave and is constantly visited by students and work collaborators alike as well as being bombarded with telephone calls. It is Rostand who fields all this and assists Joselyne and Karen in their work. His position requires, patience, persistence and diplomacy – qualities that Rostand possesses in abundance.

Educated in Tamatave, and holding a certificate in Ecology and Journalism, Rostand worked as a radio journalist broadcasting environmental education programmes from the Alliance Francaise in Tamatave between 1998 and 2003 when he moved to MFG. In addition, since 1994 Rostand has worked periodically as a guide at Ivoloina – an activity that he is due to resume when the Ivoloina guided walk programme begins in July.

Born in 1975, Rostand has always lived in Tamatave. He currently lives with his family a short bike-ride from the MFG office.