

# EighthCONTINENTQuarterly

Summer 2008

The Newsletter of the Madagascar Fauna Group



United States of America: Dr. Jeffrey Bonner, MFG Chair & Ingrid Porton, MFG Vice-Chair  
Madagascar: Dr. An Bollen, Program Manager United Kingdom: Dr. Karen Freeman, Research Director

## Goodbye from Gareth and “Au revoir” from Karen by Dr. Karen Freeman

Changes are afoot within Madagascar Fauna Group and it is with much sadness that we say goodbye to Gareth Kett who has been the Forestry Manager for MFG over the past 4 years – as well as the author of the monthly updates! Gareth has done a fantastic job developing Parc Ivoloina, putting in new paths and boardwalks, beautiful interpretation panels, encouraging visitors to enjoy their natural surroundings and also, most importantly, improving the habitat for the local wildlife.



As well as his work managing the Ivoloina Forestry Station, Gareth has also been an enormous help to me with the general project management; everything from fixing cars to managing the team, sorting out land contracts with our neighbouring villagers and looking after our many visitors. And all this with his characteristic

good humour, easy competence, modesty and patience. I can honestly say, I could not have done it all without him and he will be sorely missed by MFG. Thank you, Gareth!

Gareth and I have now moved back to our homeland in the UK and are settling in in the Central Highlands of Scotland. (The winter will come as a bit of a shock after so many years in the tropics!) Gareth now has a job as a Countryside Ranger in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park so will be carrying on his great work helping preserve wild places and natural habitats. We wish him much luck in his new endeavours.

As for me, there are some major changes too in my role with MFG. I am delighted to announce that I will now be the Research Director for MFG and will be coordinating the research carried out by our own Conservation Agents at Betampona and also the national and international researchers that come every year to help us learn about the wonderful biodiversity at both Betampona and Ivoloina. I will be based most of the year in the UK trying to make sense of the many years' worth of data that has been collected by the MFG to help guide conservation management decisions for Betampona and also hoping to publish as much as possible to help wider conservation action within Madagascar and perhaps even

further afield. I will be going back to Madagascar for two months each year to oversee the work on the ground.

I am very excited about this new role and delighted to be able to stay involved with MFG whilst also going back to my research roots. I am very grateful to the Wildcare Institute, Saint Louis Zoo who has funded my position and to the MFG management for allowing me such flexibility.

My role as Programme Manager has been filled by Dr. An Bollen who has previously worked for the United Nations and has also already spent a number of years working in Madagascar amongst other things. An has a strong research background and completed her doctorate on fruit dispersal in a Malagasy littoral rainforest. We are extremely lucky to have her and I have the greatest confidence that she is the right person for the job. An is extremely competent and highly motivated and brings a wonderful set of new skills to the MFG.

We wish her the best of luck for her term as Programme Manager and I very much look forward to collaborating closely with her over research issues. So, until the next time, I will say “Au revoir”!

This issue and its new name marks a shift from a monthly to a quarterly publication. *Editor*

*Managing Members: Brookfield Zoo, Duke Primate Center, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, FOTA Wildlife Park, Houston Zoo, Missouri Botanical Gardens, Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens (USA), Philadelphia Zoo, Saint Louis Zoo, San Diego Zoo, San Antonio Zoological Society, Wildlife Conservation Society, Zoological Society of London, Zoo Zürich*



**Saying their farewells to Karen and Gareth!**

# Introduction

by Dr. An Bollen

Dear readers,

It is with great pleasure that I have taken up the job as new in country Program Manager of Madagascar Fauna Group as of March 2008. I was very fortunate to get a full month, around the clock and on the job training from Karen and Gareth, who have made me feel at home directly. Patrick Chaillie and Alex Rubel ensured that I was familiar with the new MFG accounting system from day 1 ;-). They were soon followed by Ingrid Porton, MFG co-chair who gave me a speedy beginners training in zoo management and collection issues and exchanged views based on her long term experience, so I have been very fortunate with this warm welcome.

In a way being here in Toamasina is a bit of a homecoming for me as I am not entirely new to Madagascar; I carried out the field research of my PhD in the littoral forests of Sainte Luce (region of Fort Dauphin, southeastern Madagascar) from the end of 1999 until early 2001 and coordinated the Study Abroad Program in ValBIO Ranomafana (eastern Madagascar) in 2004. It feels good to be back.

Just by means of introduction, I am a Belgian citizen, zoologist by training, with a PhD in tropical ecology. I have a strong interest in applied research – especially ecology – that is directly relevant for conservation and I am a strong believer in environmental education especially for the youngest generations who I believe can gradually make a change and difference in ways of life and mentality over time. So it is MFG's duty to ensure that they are geared up with the knowledge needed to make well informed decisions.

In addition I hope to be focusing a lot on capacity building on the ground and in the field of both staff as well as key collaborators of the MFG to ensure long term sustainability of our programs



**Dr. An Bollen and Dr. Karen Freeman.  
The current and former MFG Program Managers.**

here in the region. All of the above are key objectives in the MFG program, so it feels like a good fit.

Before moving here, I worked 2.5 years in Bangkok (Thailand) for the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and am undergoing a large metamorphosis by moving from a very policy oriented office-job working with governments at regional and global level to a much more hands on, applied programmatic approach at the grassroot level in the field.

These first 3 months have been very intense and I am still on a steep learning curve grasping the complexity of the multidimensional MFG Program, but I am ready and happy to take on this new challenge and honored to be part of a program in which clearly many people have put lots of energy, hard work and passion during the last 20 years. I will surely give it all I got to try to continue Karen & Gareth's as well

as Andrea & Charlie's work with the same perseverance, rigor and devotion. Luckily the Malagasy team in Ivoloina, Betampona, and Tamatave are here to help me and they already are and undoubtedly will be a strong support during my first year to get me up to speed and work as a team.

I sincerely hope to be able to continue this Newsletter that Gareth has been compiling during the last 4 years and Tim has been editing. These newsletters were my first introduction to MFG and I find them a unique gateway to bring the MFG work on the ground out to the globe! I hope to be able to include contributions from researchers, volunteers and visitors to keep you updated on the activities and daily life here at the Madagascar Fauna Group!

To be continued! Aminy manaraka!

Until the next edition!

An

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## Volunteering in Ivoloina

by Daisy Shepperd  
& Jim Smith-Wright

We became aware of the Madagascar Fauna Group and its work whilst Daisy was conducting some research for a project in 2006 as part of the HND in Animal Management that we were studying for. Unable to volunteer due to work and study commitments, she instead offered her artistic skills to the MFG. They accepted, and asked Daisy to produce a set of ink drawings of ruffed lemurs which ultimately ended up on a range of t-shirts, mugs and other items sold on the MFG website.

We are both very interested in primates, particularly prosimians, and so once we had graduated, jumped at the chance to travel to Ivoloina and lend a hand. Jim works as a National Trust Warden in England so had a lot of practical conservation skills, whilst Daisy had been working at Battersea Zoo, and so was able to bring her experience with animals and interpretation work to the park.

We travelled out at the end of December, spending some time acclimatising ourselves to the country before moving into 'gite peace corps' on the 7th of January following a tremendous introduction to the Ivoloina team at their Christmas/New Years party!

Our main roles at the park were to track and study the free-ranging bamboo lemurs (*Haplemur griseus griseus*), and maintain and repair infrastructure around the site, as well as many smaller tasks over a period of two and a half months, including some new interpretation boards for the zoo, a guide to the sights to be seen from the "Point de Vue", and a traffic sign to alert hasty drivers to crossing chameleons. So we were provided with a varied and challenging work programme, making each day a unique experience and certainly keeping us fit and healthy! The staff were wonderful, universally friendly and generous with

their time and support, and we quickly felt welcome members of the team. Whilst our lemur-tracking was often thwarted by unsympathetic weather or elusive lemurs, we learnt a great deal from it, and hope to be able to present some useful results to the park team soon. These can then hopefully be utilised to improve management for bamboo lemurs within the park.

Whilst we at times found ourselves baffled or beguiled by our work in such a very different culture, climate and ecosystem, this only increased the wealth of experience and self-awareness that we gained. We greatly enjoyed our time at Park Ivoloina and could wholeheartedly recommend the experience to anyone should they have the chance and inclination for such a challenge!

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## Canarium Research in Betampona

by Sarah Federman  
& Tim Trever

One fine October evening I had a spontaneous thought which I shared with my good friend Tim. Four months later after a seeming whirlwind of proposals, last minute packing nightmares, and strange instances of lucidity where the Rablesian nature



of our venture was fully revealed, we found ourselves sitting (rather dazedly) on a plane to Madagascar.

Our journey from Tana to Tamatave was fraught with jet-lag, miscommunications, and queasiness, but we made it.

Eventually, after a disoriented day and night in town, and a grueling hike up The Hill (we'd decided to spare the porters and carry our 16 week supply of literary material--in hindsight, not the smartest decision ever made), we arrived at Rendrirendry and were greeted by a half dozen smiling MFG staff, their adorable kids and the snaggletoothed Puppy.

Now I come to the heart of the matter: the project. What were we doing in lovely Rendrirendry on the edge of the equally lovely Betampona Natural Reserve? Collecting plants. Ramy to be exact. What is Ramy? Taxonomically speaking it is a tree within the family Burseraceae, genus: *Canarium*, species: I'll come back to this part.

Ethnobotanically, Ramy resin is harvested by some of the local people and burned during tromba to facilitate possession of the host. (Tromba is a spirit possession ceremony used in many parts of Madagascar to consult the ancestors on a myriad of subjects.) Lemurologically, Ramy fruit and seeds are an important aspect of some lemur's diets, most notably for us, the Varecia and aye-aye.

Back to species: the official number of Ramy has been in flux since their Western discovery, but the last monograph on the genus named just one *Canarium* in all of Madagascar. After a revision of the genus by Douglass Daly, PhD of the New York Botanical Garden, the number of species rose to thirty three. In lieu of this change, we planned a survey of the density and distribution of Ramy within the reserve and hoped to study phenology



## The Canarium

and lemur predation and dispersal as well. The idea was that we would try and figure out how the species differed in their environmental preferences and ecological needs.

Having never participated in botanical research before, we were a little apprehensive of taking on an independent project on a fairly isolated mountain top. Any misgivings we may have harboured were quickly dissipated though when we fully comprehended the lengths MFG and Agents of Betampona were willing to go to in order to make us feel more comfortable and help us out.

I honestly do not think we would have completed our project (if you can ever really say you've completed a project) half so well without their support.

We were incredibly fortunate; with the dedication of our guide, Sylvain, our collaborator, Johnson, and the entire

village of Rendrendry, we were able to compile a set of data we could be proud of.

Thanks for an amazing three months of research and life-lessons.

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## Staff Member of the Month **NICOLE VALLY** Accounting & Office Assistant

Since 15th June 2007, Nicole VALLY is the new Administrative Assistant at Madagascar Fauna Group office Toamasina, she is highly motivated, hardworking, always wanting to learn. Moreover she has a positive attitude to life and always helping with a smile!

After her baccalaureate she studied business administration in a private Institute in Antananarivo. Prior to joining MFG, Nicole worked with a

sugar exporting company as well as with a shipping company, both based in Toamasina. During these jobs she gained lots of experience with administrative issues and even custom related procedures.

With MFG, Nicole's principal tasks include overall administrations, secretary work, scheduling and coordinating MFG's activities and logistics. The bulk of her work goes up to the smooth running of our new accounting system and this for the office, Ivoloina and RNI Betampona.

In addition, she is the one in our office to receive students, researchers and visitors and help out with their paperwork and getting around. When needed she also represents MFG at official meetings dealing with local authorities and other partners.

MFG is really happy to have Nicole on board



## Madagascar in New York

MFG managing member Wildlife Conservation Society recently unveiled *Madagascar!* at the Bronx Zoo, a spectacular immersion exhibit inside the restored historic Lion House.



**Ring-tailed lemur at Bronx Zoo**

As visitors explore the exhibit, they will see a 13.5-foot, 800-pound Nile crocodile lurking in a limestone cave; acrobatic ring-tailed lemurs leaping in a spiny forest; and more than 100,000 Madagascar hissing cockroaches crawling in a massive baobab tree. Nearly 30 species will be featured in the 20,000-square-foot building that carries the distinction of being the first landmark building in New York City anticipated to receive the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design or green certification.

“The Wildlife Conservation Society’s



**Coquerel's sifaka at Bronx Zoo**

new exhibit featuring Madagascar is a window on our conservation of wildlife in that beautiful island country. The exhibit's placement in the historic Lion House at the center of the Bronx Zoo symbolizes Madagascar's importance to the world of wild nature,” said Dr. Steven E. Sanderson, WCS President and CEO. “Each visitor to Madagascar! will walk through a ‘green’ building that honors our mission in New York and around the world. We hope everyone will be moved to help save wildlife and wild places.”



**Nile Croc at Bronx Zoo**

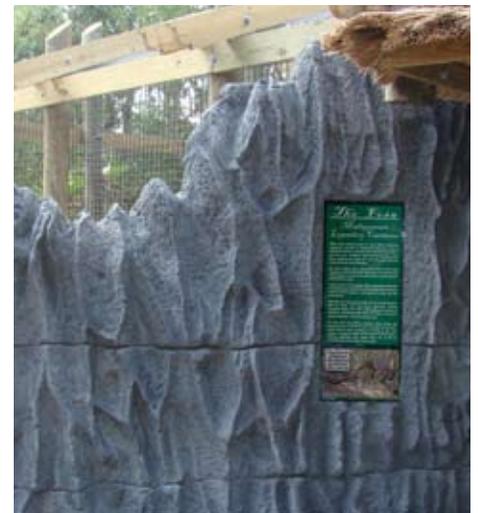
Two of WCS's most notable achievements in Madagascar have been the design, establishment, and management of Masoala National Park and the Makira Forest, which together make up Madagascar's largest, contiguous protected area. WCS and the Government of Madagascar recently announced a landmark agreement, where the government will offer for sale more than nine million tons of carbon offsets to help safeguard Makira Forest and fight climate change.

## Naples Welcomes Fosas

MFG Managing Member Naples Zoo in Florida is premiering *The Fosa: Madagascar's Legendary Carnivore* in July. The fosa is the island's largest mammalian predator and is so agile in the trees that about half of its diet is lemurs. Their common name is undergoing the unusual process of being changed from “fossa” to “fosa.”

Guests will be able to see two fosas through glass viewing windows as the carnivores climb in natural oak trees or run along elevated catwalks. Surrounding the glass is recreated tsingy rockwork replicating the island's natural limestone formations.

Naples Zoo guests will discover the fascinating world of the fosa through fun guess-the-answer flip panels and interpretive graphics. Leading fosa researcher Dr. Luke Dollar provided exhibit ideas and was instrumental in supplying the latest data for the graphic panels as well as photos.



**Above Right: Recreated tsingy and graphic at Naples Zoo**

**Below: Naples Zoo's Fosa Exhibit Under Construction**



## Cyclone Ivan Update

On 17 February 2008, Cyclone Ivan passed over the island of Ile Sainte Marie, 10 km off the east coast of Madagascar just before hitting Tamatave and the region just north of it. With heavy rains and sustained winds of 200 km per hour, lives were lost, many houses destroyed, rice fields and fruit crops devastated.

In the Ivoloina forestry station, Gareth estimated that about 1,000 trees were uprooted. In Betampona several trees fell down or snapped on the crests. MFG got really lucky that the Ivoloina Zoo, Environmental Education Centre and Ivoloina Conservation Training Centre infrastructure were not damaged with the exception of some limited damage to the chameleon enclosure.

A large team of external labourers helped the MFG staff clear all the trails in the forestry station and get the Park running again in no time! Thanks to the generosity and support of many readers – YOU! – and supporters of MFG, we were able to pay for reparations of roofs, fences, and whole houses of MFG staff, repairs in the Betampona research station, and for the cleaning up at both sites. Isle of Wight Zoo also funded repairs to the model station.



**Roof Repairs near Betampona**



**CJ (with lemur) & Party Guests Raise \$400 for the MFG!**



**Funding from Donors**

Due to damage to crops the period after the cyclone was even harder for a lot of families and food prices went up so MFG donated a 50 kilo bag of rice to all employees in April to help them out. Misaoatra betsaka! Many thanks to all of you who supported us!

## CJ Parties for Lemurs

More kids and their parents continue to have a heart for lemurs and Madagascar. This spring, Gretchen Silverman contacted the MFG as her son wanted to have donations made to the MFG in lieu of presents. We sent a certificate for CJ and stickers for the guests to have at the party.

She wrote, “I am happy to report that CJ’s birthday party was a huge success. He had a great time with all of his friends and is proud to have raised \$200 for the Madagascar Fauna Group. My husband’s company, Prudential,

will match his gift. So all together you will be receiving \$400 to help “Save the Lemurs!”

Thanks, CJ and family and party guests! As this donation represents more money than the average Malagasy earns in a year, you’re making a real difference.

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