



November 2004

by Gareth Kett

It was litchi season in Madagascar, and while a hot, dry November saw us bid farewell to Charlie Welch, after an invaluable but short five weeks' work, the month also saw us welcome MFG's chairman, Jeff Bonner and vice-chair Ingrid Porton, to Madagascar. Their visit schedule was designed to allow them to see the MFG projects on the ground, to meet the MFG collaborators in Tamatave and Tana, and to discuss and plan the next stages of the MFG programme in Madagascar. Fortunately, there was a two-day overlap, prior to Charlie's departure, which allowed planning for the future of the Betampona and Ivoiloina projects to get off to a sound start.

Betampona Reserve

A river (the bridge was swept away by a cyclone in 2002), a steep 300m climb in 4km, all in the baking midday sun was taken in stride as Bernard, Karen and I took the bosses to Betampona. Naturally our small group of porters arrived a good 10 minutes before us, but upon their arrival, Jeff and Ingrid were officially welcomed by Célestin, and treated to a humorous poem from Jean-Noel and a display of traditional dancing by the village children. Jeff's subsequent computerised slide-show of his and Ingrid's reception was watched in awe by the village youngsters.



Jeff, Ingrid and Bernard with agents and their families.



Jeff's awesome slideshow!

A good couple of days hiking in the forest following lemurs, in which we were fortunate enough to see a pair of brown-tailed mongooses (*Salanoia concolor*) at close quarters, ensured that the visitors slept well, and the Malagasy flavour of the visit continued when the pre-arranged taxi for the 11 km trip from Fontsimavo to the pirogue at Nosy-Be failed to turn up and we were forced to walk - again in the midday sun. Fortunately, we had only been walking for an hour when we were able to wave down the only taxi driver not broken down, nor on litchi duty that day, and so Jeff, Ingrid and Karen made it to their afternoon meeting with the Provincial President for the Tamatave region (who has pledged USD 20,000 towards the Ivoiloina training centre over the next two years) with a good few minutes to spare!



Fontsimavo, but where's the taxi?



Ivoloina Park

A welcome from the Ivoloina team, tours of the zoo, agro-forestry model-station, forest and lake, a display of traditional dancing from the Saturday class children and an exchange of gifts awaited Jeff and Ingrid upon their visit to Ivoloina. This was the first time that Jeff had met the team, while Ingrid was able to renew old acquaintances made in previous visits.



Jacques and Charlie explain sustainable rice production techniques.

In the wake of the success of last month's bird inventory, Betampona conservation agents Jean-Noel and Georges came down to Ivoloina for four days to undertake an inventory of the Ivoloina reptiles and amphibians. The survey, which included three night searches, provided incredible results as the guys found 32 species including



A sleeping fledgling.

four species not yet found in the primary rainforest of the Betampona reserve.

The zoo had another success to report when a pair of Malagasy scops-owls (*Otis rutilus*) fledged four chicks. This time, however, protection offered by the zoo was to thank rather than active management. In each of the last four years the scops pair have managed

to fledge between two and four chicks from their nest in a cavity in a Torotoro tree (*Gluta tourtour*) on the edge of the zoo.

Saturday Class Cleans Up

80 children from the Saturday Class gathered at Ivoloina on the 16th and were divided into four teams led by Randria, Honasime, Mica (normally the Ivoloina pirogue tour guide), and myself and taken on a litter sweep of the park. The kids enjoyed themselves whilst learning about biodegradable materials and the value of a litter clearance. By the end of the afternoon they collected a respectable seven bin-liners of litter. Nice one kids!

Trail Completion

The second half of the Cascade trail has been completed, forming an undulating circular trail encompassing steps, bridges and a stunning waterfall and small pool. The trail infrastructure was put in using sustainable timber from *Grevillea banksii* (a prolific coloniser that often re-grows when felled), *Melaleuca quinquenervia* (re-grows when coppiced) and *Eucalyptus robusta* (re-grows when coppiced) from the park forest.



Steps and bridges leading to ... the waterfall.



Staff Member of the Month **Randriambelona**

Ivoloina Education Programme Manager



While working on his major for his Bachelor of Education in "Teaching Natural Sciences" at Ivoloina in 2002, Randria's potential was spotted by MFG technical Advisors Andrea Katz and Charlie Welch. After qualifying, he returned in 2003 to head the Ivoloina education programme at Charlie and Andrea's invitation. Besides his work at Ivoloina, Randria operates education tours of rural schools in the Betampona area and writes a four-monthly journal, the 'Bitsik Ivoloina' ('Ivoloina Whisper'), keeping locals up to date with the MFG conservation programmes and local news. Randria's exemplary work ethic and devotion to the education programme were recently rewarded with an *American Zoo & Aquarium Association* International Conservation Training Award, in which he will receive two weeks conservation education training in Sacramento, California next April. Congratulations, Randria!

Randria was born in Analanandiana, in the province of Tamatave and gained his teaching qualifications at Moromanga and the University of Tana. He lives with his wife and 3 month-old son at Park Ivoloina.

MFG Gear!

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