

MADAGASCAR FAUNA GROUP

Monthly from MADAGASCAR



July 2005

By Gareth Kett, Ivoloina Forest Manager

Photos by Karen Freeman, Programme Manager

Madagascar celebrated independence day on June 26, marking 45 years of independence since the turbulent French colonial days ended. Central Tamatave came to a standstill for four hours as the town's different associations paraded in front of authorities on the Rue d'Independence. Tamatave provincial ANGAP director Christian Rasolofomanana has left at short notice to work for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and has been replaced by interim Parfait Randriamampianina. We wish them both well in their new positions. On the project front, we welcome back MFG advisors Andrea Katz and Charlie Welch who are visiting the Tamatave area for a few weeks with their daughter Alena.

Betampona Reserve

At any time of day, but particularly in the morning, the forest air at Betampona is pierced by the mesmerizing cry of the indri (*Indri indri*). Inhabiting the eastern rain forests of Madagascar except for the Masoala Peninsula (Petter et al., 1977; Tattersall, 1982), the indri is generally considered to be the largest of the surviving lemurs, averaging about 6-7kg in body weight. This endangered diurnal lemur lives in groups of three to five individuals, usually consisting of a pair of adults and their offspring, and feeds on a diet of leaves, flowers and fruits (Russell, Mittermeier, Tattersall, Konstant, Meyers and Mast 1994). We have no accurate figures for Indris in Betampona, although the general consensus amongst the conservation agents is that there are about 30 individuals in the reserve.



Indris have a distinctive and enchanting call.

New Research Efforts

Despite significant losses, the black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) releases of 1997, 1998, and 2001 were a success in ecological terms. Years of surveillance work by the Betampona team has proven this and provided us with invaluable data. Now, considering Betampona's richness in fauna and flora, the time has come to diversify the team's research efforts and so, guided by Karen, the agents have designed micro-projects focusing on and comparing the fauna of different regions of the reserve.

Celestin is studying the white-fronted brown lemur (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) and in particular trying to address the question of whether or not there are two subspecies at Betampona. Arsene is studying the avian life in the forest and in the 100m buffer zone around the reserve. George is attempting the tough task of exploring the small forest mammal life. Jean-Noel is researching the reserve's amphibian life. And Olivier is evaluating the species abundance and distribution of snails, which are good indicators of rainforest quality.



Pygmy kingfisher (*Ispidina madagascariensis*) – one of many relatively unresearched birds found at Betampona.

Tree Nursery Successes

Of all the species of trees propagated at Rendrirendry for distribution in the villages surrounding Betampona, demand is perhaps highest for species of eucalyptus. These prolific Australian trees grow quickly on poor soils and can be coppiced (cut and regrown from the stump), thus providing a reliable, long-term source of firewood and course construction timber. Once villagers/farmers have prepared

plots of land for the trees and demonstrated a capacity to care for them, they are provided with seedlings propagated in the Rendriendry nursery.

Led by Arsene, the agents regularly conduct follow-up visits to planting sites to ensure that villagers are continuing to care for the trees and to offer advice in sustainable land use. This follow up is crucial. A miscommunication in the village of Analamangahajo between the Womens' Association and labourers led to 100 seedlings remaining unplanted for too long resulting in 90% losses. Apart from this incident, follow-ups on trees planted at the beginning of the year have shown that villagers are looking after their trees, with a satisfying survivorship rate of 89% after 6 months in 274 trees. (All plant species promoted by MFG are classified as non-invasive.)

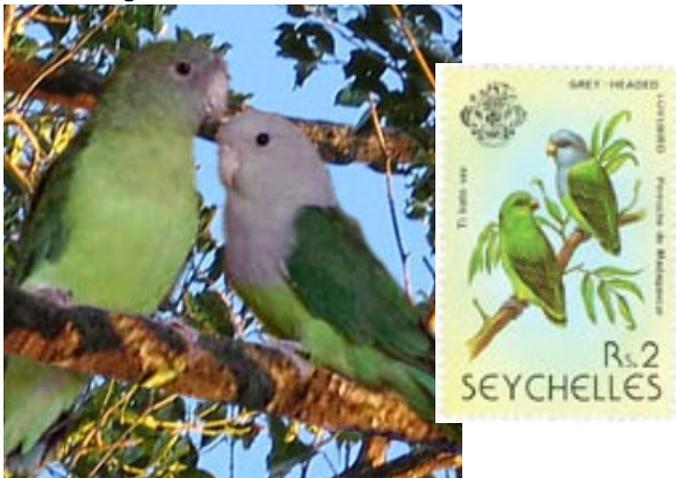
Broadening Language Skills

American student Carl Toborowsky and his Malagasy assistant Tahiana Andriaharimala (see May/June monthly update) have begun short English lessons in the evenings at Rendriendry, effectively supplementing the occasional lessons given by Karen and myself during our visits.

Ivoloina Park

This seasons sustainable intensive rice production technique (SRI) harvest has passed successfully. As the yield was a little lower than hoped, fine adjustments may be needed in the composting soil enrichment methods used at the agro-forestry model station.

The sparsely wooded model-station and forest-clearing/cropland of the SRI area provide ideal habitat for the grey-headed lovebird (*Agapornis cana cana*). Despite being uncommon in the east of Madagascar, at Ivoloina these endemic lovebirds are particularly easy to see at this time of year, sometimes in mixed flocks, as they are attracted to loose rice in the threshing areas. Sadly, outside protected areas this attractive small green parrot (the name refers to the males' head) is commonly caught and sold in the pet trade (Langrand 1990).



Madagascar's smallest parrot – the grey-headed lovebird.

New Site and Renovation for Old Cottage

During the site preparation phase of the training centre project a double-roomed gite had to be dismantled to make space for the new building. The gite was used by park volunteers but had become rotten and termite-ridden. Evenso, it was still considered good enough to repair and resite. So now, following a brilliant period of work by Ivoloina craftsmen Lauren and Kamise, the gite is situated in a woody glade overlooking a small twin-lake. It has been named "Gite Mahatsinjo" (Malagasy for "Gite Good View"). Credit goes to Ivoloina gardener Bruno for coming up with the name.



The idyllic Gite Mahatsinjo

The first person to use Gite Mahatsinjo is Hélène Jutras, a keeper from Los Angeles Zoo. Assisted by Ivoloina zoo staff, Helene is recording the dietary behaviour of one of the park's five groups of free-ranging white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) in a mini-project designed to complement Carl Toborowsky's study at Betampona.



Hélène Jutras

Forest Challenges

Despite regular patrolling, the pressure on the forest surrounding the zoo at Ivoloina seems to be mounting. Mid-way through June, Bernard was showing Helene around the forestry station when he discovered the stumps of 14 acacia (*Acacia mangium*) trees. The trunks had been taken from a reforestation stand planted by the Rotary Club. A quick bit of detective work by Jacques (model-station manager) in the neighbouring village of Ambonivato led to the apprehension of three wood thieves who are now awaiting sentence by Eaux et Forêts (the Department of Water and Forests). Great work Jacques and Bernard!

Losses At Ivoloina

There has been some sad news this month with the deaths of Richard, one of Parc Ivoloina's greater bamboo lemurs (*Haplemur simus*) and Josephine, one of the Parc's free-ranging black and white ruffed lemurs.

New Designs at Online Store

Click on the MFG's website to get a look at the latest gear, including "Lemurs. Made in Madagascar" items. New designs are available on many of your favorite items from t-shirts and baseball caps to posters and buttons! Visit the website at www.savethelemur.org and click on the store link.



References:

Mittermeier R. A., Tattersall I., Konstant W. R., Meyers D.M. and Mast R.B., 1994, Lemurs of Madagascar, Conservation International.

Langrand O., 1990. Guide to the Birds of Madagascar. Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York.

Staff members of the month George & Anastasia Totozandry

Zoo Head Keeper & MFG Projects Chef

George and Anastasia, who have been married for 17 years live on the zoo grounds and so it can seldom be said that George is truly 'off duty'. Not that this troubles a man who cares about the animals as much as George does. He began work at the zoo in 1989 and has devoted himself to the animals ever since. Promoted to head-keeper in 2002, George assumed responsibility for the day-to-day running of the zoo and in Bernard's absence is the senior zoo staff member. He also takes responsibility for post-mortems, has a good knowledge of the Ivoloina forest wildlife, and is always willing to assist visitors and volunteers working at Ivoloina.



George and Anastasia.

Lively and enthusiastic, there seem to be few people that Anastasia doesn't know about along the road between Ivoloina and Rendrirendry. Thus, when accompanying us on trips to Betampona, she proves to be a great facilitator in getting field equipment and supplies safely across the river at Nosybe, in and out of the taxi-brusse to Fontsimavo, and carried up to the field-station at Rendrirendry. In addition, she's a great cook and spends much of her time at Betampona cooking for visitors and students. Whilst at Ivoloina, she sometimes heads teams of local women and girls preparing food for visiting parties of VIPs, her buoyant personality enhancing the occasion.