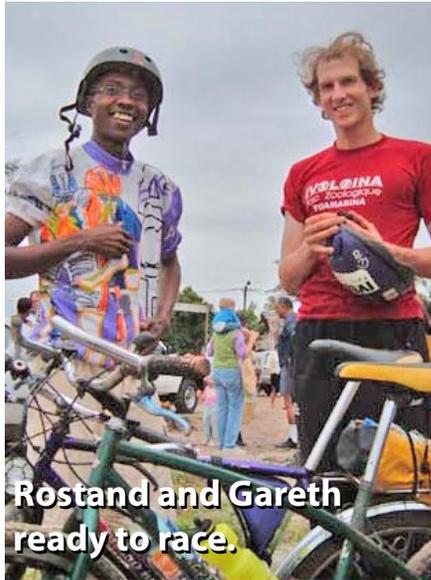




MONTHLY From MADAGASCAR

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Greetings from Karen & Gareth



Rostand and Gareth ready to race.

The 60km bike race from Foulpointe to Tamatave and the pousse-pousse (rickshaw) race in Tamatave, held to raise awareness of sexually transmitted diseases was a resounding success. The event was organised by USAID and Peace Corps, and supported by MFG. Near to 100 cyclists and 40 pousse-pousses took part.

The MFG was represented in the bike race by Rostand and myself while Karen drove the MFG truck as a support vehicle for the riders.



Photos: Dr. Karen Freeman
Programme Manager

Text: Gareth Kett
Ivoloina Forest Manager

Tension is just beginning to build in Madagascar prior to the general election which is due to be held in December. In September, a meeting of the opposition parties in Brickaville was quashed by 600 police sent from Tana. French military police have arrived in Tamatave to work with the local police. Flights in and out of Reunion have been suspended until after the election to prevent the arrival of an opposition candidate in Tamatave.

Betampona Reserve

Elusive Bird Sighted

Last year a team of researchers from Asity (a bird conservation NGO) visited Betampona in search of the rare white-breasted mesite (*Mesitornis variegata*). They found none. In early September of this year Betampona agent Jean-Noel was walking through an area of forest just outside the southwest boundary of Betampona when he spotted one of the elusive birds. He was sure of its identity. The white-breasted mesite is a secretive terrestrial forest species. It is most frequently found in large tracts of closed

deciduous dry forest growing on sandy soil (Landrand 1990), but has recently been found in areas of rainforest. The area in which Jean-Noel saw the mesite is a sacred area and is therefore relatively undisturbed. We have contacted Birdlife International and Asity who are planning to send a team to study the bird.

Hildt: 4 Times & Counting

Amanda Hildt is living proof of the appeal of the MFG projects. In 2001-2002 she worked on a Peace Corps project at Parc Ivoloina, then she returned to the MFG in 2004 to begin her PhD on growth rates of

some of Betampona's precious tree species. She returned to complete the fieldwork stage of her project in 2005.

Not having had enough of Madagascar, Amanda returned again in June of this year with her fiancé, Charlie Armstrong, to develop a detailed GPS map of Betampona. Amanda and Charlie were only here for a couple of weeks, but it was great to work with them again and we look forward to their next visit!

Apologies to Amanda, for not managing to fit her and Charlie into the last update.

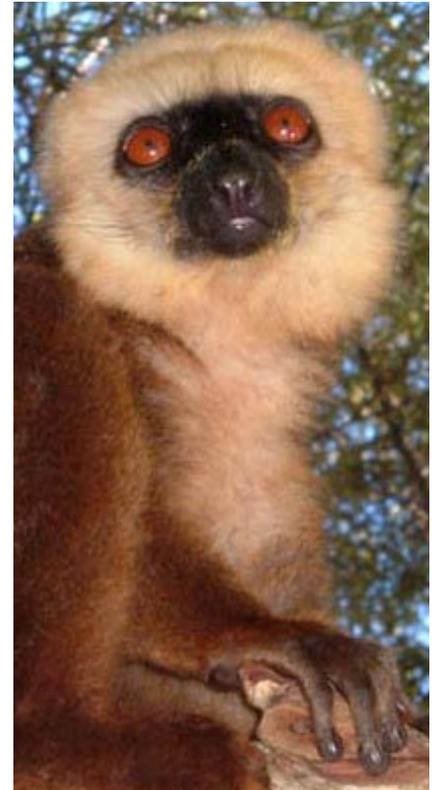
Micro-Projects and Brown Lemurs

The Betampona micro-projects have been running for well over a year now and are producing some interesting results. Arsene, Jean-Noel and Georges are continuing their work on Betampona's birds, amphibians and small mammals respectively, while Olivier is nearing the conclusion of his work on snails.

Celestin has completed his project investigating the possibility that there are two sub-species of white-fronted brown lemur (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) at Betampona. His work has shown that there do indeed seem to be groups of brown lemurs of 2 noticeably different sizes and slightly differing colours. We are

now considering the best ways of conducting a genetic analysis of the different groups to see if there is a genuine difference.

A group of the larger variety of white-fronted brown lemur has started coming into the field station village of Rendrendry to feed from the coffee plants around the village. Their diet seems to consist largely of fruits, young leaves and flowers. They are active both day and night, but come into the village just before dark and have left by first light. At Betampona, groups of white-fronted brown lemur move freely between primary and secondary forest depending upon food availability.



Lemurs Census and Chytrid Fungus



Photo: Carl Toborowsky

We welcome researchers Laura Buck and Matt Shannon who will be working on a census of the black and white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) population at Betampona. Prior to their work in Madagascar, Laura and Matt worked on development projects in Uganda.

In September Karen, Jean-Noel and I attended the ACSAM (A Conservation Strategy for the Amphibians of Madagascar) meeting in the capital Tana, in which many of the world's leading authorities on Malagasy frogs gathered to discuss the future of frogs in Madagascar. Particular attention was paid to the threat posed by chytrid fungus (pronounced kit-rid), which has decimated frog populations in

many areas of the world, but does not yet exist in Madagascar, and also to the future role of protected areas in Malagasy frog conservation. The meeting was of special value to Jean-Noel who was able to broaden his knowledge of amphibians whilst getting to know some of the people that he is likely to work with in the future at or concerning Betampona. Jean-Noel was able to demonstrate his outstanding field skills in a post-meeting field trip to Analamazaotra Forest Station at Andasibe, which is run by Association Mitsinjo. Following the meeting, MFG is looking at the role that it can play in the conservation of Malagasy frogs, including the possibility of using Parc Ivoloina as an ex-situ breeding site.



Parc Ivoloïna



Minette and infant.
(Photo: A.Simai)

Baby Lemurs!

It has been a great few weeks for the zoo. We've had 16 baby lemurs born over the past six weeks. While we were sad to lose a couple early on we now have 5 baby black and white ruffed lemurs (*Varecia variegata variegata*) and one baby red-bellied lemur (*Eulemur rubriventer*) outside the wild, and two baby black and white ruffed lemurs, a baby red-bellied lemur and 5 baby white-fronted brown lemurs (*Eulemur fulvus albifrons*) ranging freely around the zoo.

These infants are just beginning to find their feet... so the adults had better watch out!

Veterinary Help

The Ivoloïna team of zookeepers do their very best in caring for the animals in the zoo, but they are not vets and so we are always extremely grateful when qualified veterinarians such as St. Louis Zoo vet Randy Junge offer their services to us at Ivoloïna. So we find ourselves very fortunate to

be joined by Swiss veterinarian Angelica Simai, or Angie.

Angie has been working with the Ivoloïna zoo team in refining the zoo animal husbandry, improving staff veterinary proficiency and organising the zoo veterinary facilities. As luck would have it she has also been on hand to treat a couple of lemurs that have fallen

ill. In the absence of a zoo vet at Ivoloïna, Angie's time at the zoo has been invaluable. And all this for free!

She is now taking a well-earned holiday kayaking around the Masoalapeninsula before returning to Ivoloïna to continue working with us for a few more weeks.



Angie, Bernard and George in action.

Rare Fish Found

Voluntary rangers Zanna and Elijean have caught three fish that we suspect are *Paratilapia typus* in two separate areas of Lake Fulgence. These individuals, in addition to the two *Paratilapia cf typus* caught by Hannah Betts back in February (see March 2006 update) suggest that the lake is capable of supporting a breeding population of the species, which is thought to be critically endangered. Fish expert Paul Loiselle will be working at Ivoloïna next month when we hope to be able to more fully explore the niche of *P.typus* in Lake Fulgence.



Successful Agreement

The contracts concerning the resolution of the disputed land-rights issue in the northernmost 14ha of Parc Ivoloïna have been signed. Villagers from Ambonivato, whose land borders the north of the park had illegally taken the Ivoloïna land to be theirs and had in fact been planting and working on part of the area for around 50 years.

A survey by the Dept. of Topography confirmed that the land belonged to Parc Ivoloïna, but in an agreement reached with MFG the villagers were given the right



A new collaboration with Ambonivato.

to continue managing the land, but under the agricultural guidance of the MFG, with practical feedback from the villagers. GPS produced maps of the area were given to all the families involved.

Since negotiations began with Ambonivato over a year ago pressure on the northern reaches of the park, such as the theft of forest products has been reduced and a good relationship has been fostered between Parc Ivoloïna and Ambonivato. There was general merriment as representatives from Ambonivato joined representatives from the MFG at the buvette for the signing of the contracts and a few drinks.

Effective Use of Training Centre

For educational purposes the Tamatave area is divided into Tamatave I, which comprises of the area in and immediately around

the city of Tamatave, and Tamatave II, which consists of the rural areas around the city.

The first major training session in the new ICTC (Ivoloïna Conservation Training Centre) was held in mid-September for villagers from Tamatave II. It was a great success with many villagers asking to return as soon as possible.

The success of the session is a credit to the hard work of the education team, Randria, Jacques and Onesime.



Staff Member of the Month

Bertrand *Parc Ivoloïna Gardener*

A comment often heard from visitors to Ivoloïna is that the zoo grounds are very attractive and well kept. This is a credit to the two Ivoloïna gardeners Bertrand and Bruno. While Bruno often assists in the Buvette and on shopping trips to Tamatave, Bertrand devotes all his working hours to gardening. A man of very few words Bertrand simply gets the job done to a high standard with no fuss at all.

A local man, Bertrand joined MFG in 1995 having previously worked as a coffee farmer for the Department of Agriculture body "Fofifa". He was born and attended school in the village of Antanevaky, near Ivoloïna and now lives with his wife and son in the village of Ampandrotseriky, also very near Parc Ivoloïna.



Free E-Newsletter

Wondering what's happening on your favorite island beyond the specific updates from Ivoloïna and Betampona? Sign up for the free e-newsletter for info from around Madagascar at www.savethelemur.org.

Questions or comments on these updates or the e-newsletter?

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